



# Shepherd's Voice<sup>®</sup>

Winter/Spring 2017

**How God Works— from the Book of Acts**

**The Independent Ministries of Jesus the Christ  
and John the Baptist**

Managing Editor: Jim Patterson  
Editor: Norman Edwards

Contributing Writers: Norman Edwards  
Dave Havir  
Jim Patterson  
Jim B. Petersen  
Richard Traver

Webmaster: Jeremiah Patton  
Circulation: Norman Edwards  
Proofreader: Bill Buckman  
Layout & Design: Marcia Nicol

All contents of Shepherd's Voice Magazine unless otherwise stated are property of the Chicagoland Church of God.

Copyright ©2017

The writers of the articles and photographers of photos in the Shepherd's Voice Magazine may own copyrights to their work.

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the King James Version (public domain) or from the New King James Version®, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Shepherd's Voice Magazine is a production of the Chicagoland Church of God in a cooperative effort with other individuals and church organizations in the Sabbath-keeping community in the United States and Canada. This magazine is distributed and made possible by tithes and offerings of the readership and of those who support this work.

Shepherd's Voice Magazine publishes entries from regular and guest writers from a diverse range of people within the Church of God community, and covering a variety of subjects. While we invite or select our content, it may not necessarily reflect the position of the magazine or of the members of the Chicagoland organization.

#### COPYRIGHT FAIR USE NOTICE:

In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, any copyrighted material contained herein is distributed for nonprofit educational and other fair use purposes including, but not limited to, teaching, scholarship, research, news reporting, criticism, review, or comment.

Photos: [GoodSalt.com](http://GoodSalt.com); [iStockPhoto.com](http://iStockPhoto.com); [BigStockphoto.com](http://BigStockphoto.com)

Editorial mailing address: Shepherd's Voice Magazine  
PO Box 858  
Plainfield, IL 60544-0858

Circulation office: Shepherd's Voice Magazine  
PO Box 474  
Port Austin, Michigan 48467-0474  
[SVM@portaustin.net](mailto:SVM@portaustin.net) (989) 738-7700

Canada Office: Shepherd's Voice Magazine  
PO Box 74  
287 Tache Avenue  
Winnipeg, MB R2H 3B8

Email us at: [info@shepherdsvoicemagazine.org](mailto:info@shepherdsvoicemagazine.org)

Send Ask Norm! questions to:  
[asknorm@shepherdsvoicemagazine.org](mailto:asknorm@shepherdsvoicemagazine.org)

Visit our web site: [www.shepherdsvoicemagazine.org](http://www.shepherdsvoicemagazine.org)

Periodical mailed: 941. Other mail classes: 111. Internationally re-mailed: 170 e-mail: 804. Identification Statement: Shepherd's Voice Magazine is published quarterly (4 times per year). Issues are regularly sent free to people who requested the publication and are genuinely interested in it. Shepherd's Voice Magazine is published by the Chicagoland Church of God, 11308 Highland Dr., Plainfield, IL 60585; circulation office: 8180 Port Dr, Port Austin, Michigan 48467. CCOG reserves the right to refuse service to anyone for any reason. Periodical postage paid at Plainfield, Illinois and other mailing offices (USPS 016-995). Postmaster: send address changes to Shepherd's Voice Magazine, PO Box 474, Port Austin, Michigan 48467-0474.



# Shepherd's Voice.

How God Works  
—from the Book of Acts  
4



The Wine and  
The Covenant  
13



Ask Norm!  
14

The Independent Ministries of  
Jesus the Christ and John the Baptist  
22



Scribe's  
Square  
28

Feast of Unleavened Bread  
Updates  
30

## Greetings!

This editorial is being written at the conclusion of the Days of Unleavened Bread. Near the end of every issue and preparing to write these short editorials I find myself reflecting on current thoughts and recent events. This Feast of Unleavened Bread concluded on a very positive note with our new friends in the faith Richard and Marianne Traver from Grand Junction, Colorado, who were fortunate enough to be here during a period of nice weather in the Chicago area. Norm and Marleen Edwards from Port Austin were also here to celebrate with us. Our guests blessed the brethren here by their visit. Norm gave the message on the Sabbath and Richard gave the message on the last high day of the feast.

It seems often we are tempted to define or envision God for our own purposes—a temptation we need to be careful not to entertain. Many definitions of God that have come out of Church of God, and all of Christendom for that matter, have a lot to do with claims as to whom God is working with and why. Every time I hear someone making even a subtle self-promotional or organizational claim that God is working through them in some exclusive or exceptional capacity, I grimace inside somewhere. So two of the predominant questions being asked today are: How does God work, and whom is He working with today?

Perhaps we can take an approach to answering these questions by looking at the book of Acts and interpret it in such a way that may give us added insight as to its structure and dynamics, such as to who made decisions, who directed others and when people take action on their own. Norm Edwards examines this in a unique way in the article *How God Works*. In the article, Norm goes through and tables virtually all the events that occurred in a manner I find unique amongst all commentaries on the book of Acts I am aware of. This well-researched essay documents an “act” or “event” in a statistical way so that we can perhaps come to terms with the reality that God works in various ways with various people (and angels) in various circumstances.

In the process of his research, Norm points out some interesting observations in regards to the activity of the early Church. There is no record regarding financial

concerns and budgets before embarking on a work, which is a predominant theme today. A number of years ago, I watched church management parade around the room pushing for a 1 million dollar donation drive to get the organization to the next level. Such a thing would be completely foreign to believers in the first century church. A suggestion for a money drive would probably leave first century church elders aghast for the lack of faith and respect for the nature of how God works.

Also, the book of Acts and the New Testament writings in general do not support much of the organizational behavior that is predominant today. Notably, the ideology behind corporate ministries has cultivated sectarian behavior that has been an undermining plague pervading the Church—causing division and contempt.

Therefore in the article *The Independent Ministries of Jesus the Christ and John the Baptist*, we examine the ministries of the Savior and perhaps His greatest prophet in a fashion that will help expose unbiblical models of ministry and church structure. Wrong models of ministry evolve out of secular belief systems and unfaithful acts that are contrary to God’s wisdom. Secular belief systems support the corporate hierarchal and centralized mindset that so often fails to glorify God and creates environments that limit the individual expression of believers to serve Him in a greater capacity. With this said, Jesus Christ will judge His church, not this writer, but by mere observation alone we do not need to wait for the resurrection for the Head to pass judgment—it is already happening. He is judging us now, and we are already witnesses against ourselves when we resort to sectarian behaviors, some of which we identify in the article. “*Let them alone*” our Savior tells us, “*They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch*” (Matthew 15:13-14). This applies to blind leaders and the blind followers. So we will let them and the subject rest after this issue, unless our readers want to contribute via *Ask Norm!*

We hope this issue will be an eye opener for the readers.

In Christ’s Service  
Jim Patterson

# How God Works —from the *Book of Acts*

Norman Edwards

The book of Acts lays out the foundation for the Christian Church. If we want to know how Christ led His Church, we can look there and receive answers. Was it congregational or hierarchical? Was there one church organization or many? Who were its leaders? Who made decisions? Who directed others? Who took action on their own?

The answers are all there if we are willing to look at the book as a whole. God has seen to it that this book has been preserved and that billions of copies have been distributed throughout the world. It has been available. Yet, after 40 years of study, this writer has never seen anyone attempt to analyze this book in this manner. Most church groups create their own form of government, then find the few verses which best support their view and write them into their church constitution, statement of beliefs, etc. The many biblical events that do not correspond to their doctrine are simply lost to them.

To write this article, this author simply read through the entire book of Acts and categorized the way it describes the events being accomplished. This author found 174 events within the 28 chapters of this book—an average of 6.2 events in each chapter. An “event” might be only a part of verses or a group of many verses—a new “event” was recognized whenever a new person began doing something or a significantly new thing was done. While this process is somewhat subjective, this writer does not believe that any other author would find substantially different results.

## No Budget Worries

Before summarizing the book, we will quickly deal with budgets and finances, aspects of modern day church management that are almost completely absent from Acts. No

verse mentions the lack of finances as the reason why any mission trips or preaching of the gospel were not started. There is no hint of a budget being established to spend whatever money they had. There are no public appeals for funds. Yes, other New Testament books discuss these issues slightly, but Acts does not.

Modern day churches and ministries desperately need to learn from this. Most spend far more time and effort seeking money than they do seeking the gifts of the Spirit or taking action to do the work of God.

In Acts 3:6-7, Peter says that he has no silver and gold. Many church leaders today cannot say that. But he does command a lame man to “rise up and walk”. Many church leaders today cannot say that either. There might be a connection. When we rely too much on money to do our ministry, do we receive the spiritual gifts of God?

Acts 4:32-37 explains that many believers lived together and sold their lands, laying the money at the apostles’ feet. This money was used for the needs of the people. It does not say who controlled the money or how. It may be this money needed to be better allocated among the Grecian widows in Acts 6:1-7.

Acts 5:1-11 tells the story of Ananias and Sapphira, who sold their property

to give to the apostles, but kept back part of the money. God struck them dead for their deceit. Peter clearly explained that they had the right to keep all of the money if they wanted to—but it was very wrong to lie about it. It was not important to Luke—or God—to tell us whether the church kept any of their money after they died.

Acts 8:18-22 contains the sad tale of Simon the Sorcerer, who offered money to Peter in exchange for the power to give the Holy Spirit to whoever he wanted. Some churches might take his money, put him in their ministry program and let him baptize people.

*But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God” (Acts 8:20-21).*

In Acts 16:16-24, Paul cast a demon out of a woman who made lots of money for her owners by fortune-telling. When they lost their money-making ability, they had Paul and Silas beaten with rods and put in jail.

Repentant believers burned magic books worth 50,000 pieces of silver—millions of dollars in today’s money. They did not sell them and give the money to the church.

Finally, in Acts 20:33, Paul says that he never coveted anyone's gold or silver.

The lesson of Acts is not to worry about obtaining money for the ministry, but to avoid obtaining money for the wrong reasons! Indeed, more lessons are about not taking money wrongly than about raising money for ministry.

### Kinds of Events

Now, on to our analysis of the book of Acts. There are three basic kinds of leadership events—roughly corresponding to principles of management found in modern day texts. Of interest, long term planning

and organization—vital to many modern church groups—are largely missing from the Book of Acts. Indeed, these functions are certainly reserved for Christ. These are the basic leadership events we do find are of these three kinds:

**Action:** A person or group simply does something significant themselves. This could be preaching a message, taking a trip, praying, singing, etc. In reality, decisions and direction may have been needed to accomplish the actions in the Bible, but the Bible only records the action, so that is the most important. These make up more than half of all events—Christianity is a religion of doing, more than talking or telling.

**Decision:** A person or group deciding which of several possible actions are to be accomplished. The Bible records the decision made—and may or may not record if or how the decision was actually carried out. For example, Matthias was chosen to replace Judas as an apostle, but we do not know what he specifically did (Acts 1:15-26).

**Direction:** A person or group gives direction to another person or group. The Bible records the direction given, but may or may not record whether the direction was carried out.

Sure, there are many other things that happened in the early church that are not written in the book of Acts.

### Summary of Acts

The table on this page summarizes the 174 events in the Book of Acts—events being further divided into Actions, Decision and Directions. It goes from the least common events to the most common. We start with these least common events, because they are the most important. Seven of the first table rows are highlighted in yellow as they represent events caused directly by God. These events are totaled in the last yellow line for your convenience—accounting for 14.9% of all the events. Let us read and give honor to what God does

| Action Events | Decision Events | Direction Events | Total Events | % of Total | Person or Group Responsible for the Event  |
|---------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|------------|--|
| 1             | 1               |                  | 2            | 1.1%       | Act of God   |
| 2             |                 |                  | 2            | 1.1%       | Agabus the Prophet   |
| 2             |                 |                  | 2            | 1.1%       | God  |
|               |                 | 2                | 2            | 1.1%       | Visions  |
| 1             |                 | 1                | 2            | 1.1%       | Women Leaders  |
|               |                 | 6                | 6            | 3.4%       | Jesus  |
| 2             |                 | 4                | 6            | 3.4%       | Angels   |
| 5             | 2               | 3                | 10           | 5.7%       | Holy Spirit  |
| 8             |                 | 2                | 10           | 5.7%       | Outsiders—used by God  |
| 5             | 5               | 3                | 13           | 7.5%       | Apostles (Three of these references also mention “elders” and “the church” with the apostles.) |
| 7             | 2               | 5                | 14           | 8.0%       | Peter  |
| 8             | 7               |                  | 15           | 8.6%       | Roman government leaders   |
| 10            | 5               | 3                | 18           | 10.3%      | Various church leaders; one or many; some named, some not                                      |
| 11            | 13              | 1                | 25           | 14.4%      | Believers, Brethren, Disciples or “the Church”   |
| 31            | 10              | 6                | 47           | 27.0%      | Paul—seven of which are “Paul and Barnabas” and one “Paul and Silas”                           |
| 93            | 45              | 36               | 174          | 100%       | Total  |
| 13            | 3               | 10               | 26           | 14.9%      | From direct divine sources, above (in yellow)  |
| 29            | 10              | 12               | 51           | 29.3%      | Outside leaders used by God plus yellow divine sources   |

Below, we begin each paragraph with the chapter and verse of Acts. There are no book names, because it is all Acts! You can see our original data on the book of Acts in chapter verse order here on our website [www.shepherdsvoicemagazine.org](http://www.shepherdsvoicemagazine.org). We will also explain how we classified “actions”, “decisions” and “directions”.

For example, the Bible records some instances of prayer and fasting before making decisions, and there may have been many other unrecorded instances. Also, there might have been more direction given by the leadership when the Bible only records what the people did. However, the discussion in this article will focus on what the Bible says, not scholarly guesses. It deals with the plentiful explanations that Luke gave describing the real functioning of the early church—the Words that God inspired to be in His Scriptures.

### **Divine Direction**

The sources in yellow on the chart are events of direct Divine origin: God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, angels, prophets and visions. Even though these constitute only 14.9% of the 174 events in Acts, they contain 10 out of the 36 (27.7%) of the “direction” events. God actively directs His church.

#### Acts of God (2)

These two events are not attributed to anyone, but it is clear that God performed them to bring about His will for the church. Obviously, no man planned the result.

1:26 **Decision:** The 11 apostles cast lots to choose the new apostle, Matthias, trusting that God controlled the result.

16:26-27 **Action:** An earthquake miraculously opened the prison doors and caused everyone’s chains to come off. The jailor planned to kill himself, thinking the prisoners had escaped, but they had all stayed there.

#### Agabus the Prophet (2)

While prophecy is spoken under inspiration of God, it is not always a command of God. In this case, the prophet told what would happen in the future and believers made decisions based upon it.

11:27 **Action:** The prophet Agabus showed by the Spirit that there would be a famine throughout the world.

21:10-11 **Action:** Agabus prophesied that if Paul went to Jerusalem, the Jews would bind Paul and deliver him to the Romans. The decision was up to Paul.

#### God (2)

Two miraculous things are attributed directly to “God” or “the Lord”—distinct from “Jesus” mentioned elsewhere.:

2:47 **Action:** The Lord added to the church those people who were being saved.

19:11-12 **Action:** God gave Paul unusual miraculous ability, so that even cloth that had touched his body would heal people.

#### Visions (2)

10:9-17 **Direction:** Peter saw a vision of animals and a voice telling him to “kill and eat”—three times. He did not know what it meant to begin with, but later understood.

16:8-12 **Direction:** Paul received a vision to go to Macedonia from Troas. All the disciples concluded it was from the Lord and they went.

#### Jesus (6)

Of great interest, every time Jesus appears to believers, whether in person or by vision, it is always to give direction to the Church. Many Scriptures say he is the head of the Church and when something important needs to be explained, it is He that does it. It is Jesus who appears to have inspired the entire book of Revelation. We have no good reason today to expect that Jesus has stopped guiding His church in this way.

1:4-8 **Direction:** Jesus Christ told the apostles not to be concerned with the time of His return, but to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

9:1-9 **Direction:** Just when Saul was about to bring the biggest persecution ever on the Church, Jesus showed up as a bright light and spoke to Saul, reversing the course of his life. The men with Saul did not see anyone or understand the voice (Acts 22:9). So today, if someone tells us that Jesus spoke to them, but others at the same place and time say they witnessed nothing, are we sure that the person who “heard from Jesus” is wrong?

9:10-16 **Direction:** In a vision, Jesus directed Ananias to go pray for Saul to receive his sight and to give him his commission to preach the Gospel. Ananias reminded Jesus of the danger

that Saul posed, but Jesus was patient with him.

18:9-17 **Direction:** Jesus, in a vision, told Paul to keep teaching in Corinth, that nobody would be able to harm him. Paul taught 18 months. The Jews brought him before the proconsul Gallio, but Gallio refused to adjudicate a religious matter. The Jews beat Sosthenes, the synagogue ruler who became a believer, but not Paul

22:17-21 **Direction:** Jesus appeared to Paul in a trance while he was praying in the temple and told him the Jerusalem church would not accept his testimony now, so he should go teach the Gentiles.

23:11 **Direction:** Jesus stood by Paul and told him that he must bear witness for Him in Rome.

#### Angels (6)

Angels are messengers of God, which carry out his commands. They always seem to deliver their message or perform their action, then disappear. This writer does not know why messages are sometimes delivered by angels or sometimes by Jesus. Both deal with important, life-or-death situations. Usually, there is only one angel, but sometimes two.

1:10-11 **Direction:** Two angels told the disciples to stop gazing into heaven—Christ will come back!

5:17-19 **Action:** An angel let the apostles out of the prison in which they were incarcerated.

5:20-21 **Direction:** An angel told the apostles to go back to the temple and preach—even though they had just been jailed for doing it!

10:1-8 **Direction:** An Angel told Cornelius, the first Roman to be baptized, to send for Peter; who was in Joppa.

12:6-11 **Action:** An angel took the chains off Peter’s hands and escorted him out of prison, opening the gates as he went.

27:21-27 **Direction:** An angel told Paul that he must go to Rome and that all in the ship would be saved alive when they would run aground on an island. Paul conveyed the angel’s message to the people on the ship and encouraged them to eat.

## The Holy Spirit (10)

Ten events are attributed to the Holy Spirit in various ways. In some cases, it seems to be a powerful inner prompting which caused the believers to say or do certain things. At other times, it is an audible voice or a powerful miracle such as speaking in tongues or prophesying.

2:1-14 **Action:** The Holy Spirit came upon the believers gathered on Pentecost and caused them to speak so that people from many nations could hear them speak, each in their own language.

5:1-11 **Action:** The Spirit revealed to Peter that Ananias and Sapphira would die for lying about the proceeds from their real estate sales.

10:18-23 **Direction:** The Spirit told Peter to go with Cornelius' servants, doubting nothing.

10:44-46 **Action:** The Holy Spirit was poured out on Cornelius and his household while Peter was still speaking and they spoke with tongues. The believers watching were shocked—this was not the order taught in Acts 2:38.

13:1-4 **Direction:** The Holy Spirit told five prophets to separate Barnabas and Saul for the work to which they were called.

16:6-7 **Decision:** The Holy Spirit prevented Paul and his companions from preaching in Asia and then Bithynia. They continued to Troas.

18:5 **Direction:** The Spirit compelled Paul to testify to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.

19:21 **Decision:** Paul “purposed in the Spirit” to go to Jerusalem

20:22-23 **Action:** The “Holy Spirit testifies in every city” that chains and tribulations await Paul in Jerusalem.

21:04 **Action:** Disciples told Paul through the Spirit not to go to Jerusalem. Later, Paul went anyway.

From reading the previous three statements it might seem that the Holy Spirit is confused. The truth of the matter is that Christians have free will and God at times accommodates our desires within His plans. The Holy Spirit made clear that Paul's venturing to Jerusalem would result in much persecution for him. But he also realized that it would be

a great chance to be a witness for Christ to the leaders at Jerusalem and eventually Rome. It was his option.

In the last event of the Jesus and Angels sections, above, we see that Jesus and the Holy Spirit confirm that Paul should go to Rome to testify there.

## **Outside Influence**

Major events of Church history were sometimes largely determined by the actions and decisions of others outside of the Church. Some were government officials, others were people crossing paths with the believers. Were these “outsider” events, the direct working of God or simply the free will of the unbelievers? The book of Acts does not answer that question, so we will not do it either. Certainly, God is able to stop any intended action of man—so all of these events are things that God allowed—and some he might have either inspired or forced. It is up to the church to accept what God permits—and to either pray for deliverance from dire events or to work with them by the power of God.

## Various Outsiders (10)

5:34-40 **Action:** When the Jewish council was intent on destroying the Church, Gamaliel, a leading teacher of the rabbinic law, told them not to fight against the apostles: if they were not of God, they would come to nothing; but if they were of God, they would be “fighting against God”.

8:1-4 **Action:** A great persecution arose which caused the believers to be scattered everywhere preaching the gospel.

13:14-15 **Decision:** The rulers of the synagogue asked Paul to speak to the people after the Scripture readings. When we are spiritually ready, evangelism opportunities find us.

13:42-43 **Action:** The Gentiles, Jews and proselytes asked Paul to preach Jesus again on the next Sabbath.

17:18-20 **Action:** Epicurean and Stoic philosophers brought Paul to the Areopagus because they liked hearing new teachings and wanted to hear his.

19:13-17 **Action:** Seven Jewish exorcists tried to cast out a demon “by the Jesus whom Paul preachers,” but they were beaten up by it. Many

people recognized the real power in Jesus from it.

19:23-40 **Action:** Demetrius, a silver smith, created an uproar against Paul and his helpers because their teaching was reducing their trade in statues of the goddess Diana. The people came to the theater and nearly started a riot, but the city clerk sent them all home.

22:22-24 **Action:** The Jewish crowd vehemently demanded the death of Paul when he told them he was sent to teach the Gentiles and the Romans prepared to examine Paul by scourging.

23:12-15 **Decision:** Forty men took an oath that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. They conspired with the Jewish leaders to get Paul out of the barracks for more questioning so they could kill him.

28:01-10 **Action:** The people of Malta provided much help to Paul and those who were shipwrecked with him.

## Roman Government Leaders (15)

The Roman rulers generally had little knowledge of Judaism or Christianity. They were primarily interested in the position and prosperity of themselves and their superiors. They sometimes helped and sometimes caused temporary trouble for the believers. They are not mentioned as a factor in Church operations until chapter 21.

21:31-40 **Action:** The Roman garrison commander heard the commotion of those trying to kill Paul and sent soldiers to take him away. After talking to Paul, he allowed him to speak to the crowd.

22:26-30 **Action:** The Roman commander, upon finding Paul was a Roman citizen, did not scourge Paul, but arranged for him to have a legitimate trial with his accusers brought before him.

23:10 **Action:** The Roman commander again rescued Paul from the Jews who are about to pull him apart.

23:16 **Action:** Paul's nephew told the Roman commander about the plot to kill Paul. The commander foiled the plot by sending a force of hundreds of soldiers to escort Paul to Caesarea where he was kept in Herod's Praetorium.

24:22-23 **Decision:** Felix adjourned Paul's trial and kept him in custody, allowing his friends to come to him.

24:26-27 **Decision:** Felix hoped that Paul would give him a bribe to let him go, so he would hear him from time to time—leaving him in prison for 2 years until he was succeeded by Porcius Festus.

25:1-9 **Decision:** Festus wanted to do the Jews a favor, so he agreed to send Paul back to Jerusalem where the Jews hoped to be able to convict or kill him.

25:13-27 **Decision:** Herod Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea and accepted Festus' invitation to hear Paul. They agreed that he should go to Caesar, but realized they needed to write some kind of charges.

26:28-32 **Decision:** Agrippa understood Paul' teaching and was almost persuaded to be a Christian, but he decided against it. Agrippa and Festus agreed that Paul could have been set free if he did not appeal to Caesar—but they did nothing to try to deliver him.

27:1-8 **Action:** Paul was put on a ship for Italy with Julius, a centurion, who allowed him to go to some believers along the way and receive care.

27:11-20 **Decision:** The Centurion listened to others more than Paul, and they continued sailing, eventually getting caught in a bad wind and had to just let the ship go—eventually giving up hope that they would live.

27:28-32 **Action:** The sailors of Paul's ship were afraid it would crash into rocks too far from the land, so they attempted to escape in the life boat. Paul informed the Centurion and he ordered the soldiers to cut the lifeboat ropes, so the sailors had to stay on the ship and do their best to bring it to land.

27:42-44 **Action:** The Roman soldiers planned to kill all the prisoners when their ship ran aground, but the Centurion wanted to keep Paul alive so he ordered all of the prisoners to swim in or use parts of the ship to float.

28:11-15 **Action:** After three months on Malta, the Centurion found another ship and took him to Rome, allowing him to visit believers along the way.

28:16 **Decision:** Caesar's captain of the guard allowed Paul to dwell in his own house with those who guarded him.

The Church was affected by so many government decisions because the preaching of the gospel was changing the world and that made the secular governments nervous. There was never any attempt to create a separate Christian state or form a Christian military to take power. But since secular leaders usually think about those things, they assumed that the Christian leaders were thinking about the same things and felt they had to prevent them from becoming too popular. Christians today ought to ask themselves if they are doing too little. Are we never involved in anything that our communities know about? Are we so effective in our teaching and so well appreciated for our love that it worries other religious groups and secular civil governments? That was the nature of the first century church!

### **Believers, Brethren, Disciples or "the Church"**

#### Believers, etc. (25)

Twenty-five events are attributed to the believers, brethren, disciples or "the Church". Over half (13 out of 25) of these events are "decisions"—a higher percentage than any other category. How can a group of people make a decision? Does their leader have to decide? For thousands of years, groups have made decisions by meetings, discussions, consensus and voting. The Greek word *cheirotoneo* used in Acts 14:23 and 2 Corinthians 8:19 is frequently defined as "to vote by stretching out the hand" and is translated "appointed by vote" in the Young's Literal Translation.

1:23-25 **Decision:** The disciples proposed two possible replacements and prayed for a good decision.

2:44-47 **Decision:** Believers decided to live together with all things in common, praising God and having favor with all people.

4:23-31 **Action:** Believers prayed together for protection and the ground shook afterward.

4:32-37 **Decision:** Believers decided to sell their property, give the money to the apostles and have all things in common.

6:3-6 **Decision:** Believers chose Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas.

09:24-25 **Decision:** Damascus disciples decided to help Saul escape death by letting him down through the wall in a basket.

9:26 **Decision:** Jerusalem disciples were afraid of Saul and did not believe he was one of them.

9:29-31 **Decision:** When the brethren found that Saul's teaching was provoking the Jews to want to kill him, they took him back to Tarsus, and they had peace.

9:36-39 **Action:** When Dorcas died, the believers implored Peter to come to them quickly.

10:48 **Decision:** Believers asked Peter to stay for a few days.

11:19-21 **Action:** Some believers who had fled from Jerusalem had preached Jesus to the Greeks and God was with them.

11:22-24 **Action:** When the Church at Jerusalem heard of the Greeks coming to God in Antioch, they sent Barnabas to them because he was full of faith and the Holy Spirit.

11:29-30 **Decision:** The disciples in Antioch—each according to their ability—decided to send relief to the brethren in Judea by Barnabas and Saul.

12:4-5 **Action:** The Church prayed for Peter's release from jail.

13:49-52 **Decision:** Even though Paul and Barnabas were ejected for their preaching, the disciples choose to be filled with the Holy Spirit and with joy.

15:1-2 **Decision:** Certain believers from Judea came to Antioch to teach the brethren that they had to be circumcised after the custom of Moses to be saved. When Paul and Barnabas disagreed, they determined that Paul, Barnabas and some others should go to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders to get an answer to the question.

16:1-2 **Decision:** Believers at Derbe and Lystra gave Timothy a good recommendation.

17:10 **Action:** Because of the persecution, the brethren sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea.

17:14-15 **Action:** The brethren sent Paul away by sea to Athens

18:20 **Action:** Ephesian believers asked Paul to stay with them.

18:27-28 **Direction:** Ephesian brethren encouraged those in Achaia to receive Apollos as a teacher.

19:18-20 **Action:** Believers confessed their sins and burned magic books worth about a million dollars.

19:30 **Action:** The disciples stopped Paul from trying to talk to the riotous assembly in the Ephesian theater.

21:17 **Decision:** The Jerusalem brethren received Paul gladly.

28:30 **Action:** Paul could not leave his house, but all who chose to come to him, he taught.

### Recognized Church Leaders

The final section, Recognized Church Leaders contains 94 events, 54% of the total. It is clear that the Church leadership leads, but not to the exclusion of the previously discussed sources. The events are attributed 2 times to women leaders, 18 times to various male church leaders, 13 times to the twelve apostles, 14 times to Peter and 47 times to Paul (called Saul in earlier chapters). The recognized leaders do not set back and give directions and make decisions. They have a slightly higher percentage of “action” events than do the others.

While this is a long section, it makes for very interesting readings. Read about the Actions, Decisions and Directions of these biblical church leaders and then think about the church leadership you know. What should we pray about? What can we do to be more like the Scriptures?

#### Women Leaders (2)

It is beyond the scope of this article to cover the scriptures about women’s leadership in the Church (1 Corinthians 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:12; etc.). Even so, the vast majority of church leadership in the book of Acts was male. Yet there are two examples of women exercising a certain amount of leadership. We did not consider Philip’s four virgin daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9) as an “event”,

because we know nothing of their prophecies and how they affected the church.

16:14-15 **Action:** Merchant woman Lydia was baptized with her household and she persuaded Paul and his companions to stay there.

18:26 **Direction:** Priscilla and Aquila accepted the good that Apollos did and helped him with his “doctrinal error”.

#### The Twelve Apostles (13)

The twelve Apostles took on a vital, front-line role in the early chapters of Acts, but were apparently dispersed by the middle of the book. “Direction” and “decision” events make up 61.5% of their total events.



This is a higher ratio than most others. It makes sense that more complex decisions and directions would be made with the input of a group of people.

2:42-43 **Direction:** Believers continued in the apostles’ doctrine.

The apostles had power to do miracles.

4:19-20 **Action:** Peter and John said that they must obey God rather than the mainstream religious leaders.

4:33 **Action:** Apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of Jesus.

5:12 **Action:** Signs and wonders were done through the apostles.

5:29-33 **Action:** The apostles said they would obey God rather than the commands of the government of their day—even though that made leaders mad enough to want to kill them.

5:40-42 **Action:** In spite of the beating they received for their preaching, the apostles continued to teach daily in the temple and in many houses.

6:1-4 **Decision:** When the Hellenists said their widows were being neglected, the apostles said they should choose seven men full of the Holy Spirit to do the job so the apostles could continue praying and teaching.

6:6 **Decision:** Apostles laid hands on the men whom the believers had chosen.

8:14-25 **Direction:** Apostles sent Peter and John to Samaria when they heard they had received the word of God. They prayed for the baptized believers to receive the Holy Spirit.

13:5 **Decision:** John Mark was chosen as an assistant to the ministry—which did not work out as well as they had hoped (Acts 15:37-40). The Apostles were not “infallible”.

15:4-6 **Decision:** The Church, Apostles and elders received the men

that came about the circumcision question and considered the matter.

15:22-31 **Decision:** In resolving the circumcision question: “Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.”

16:4-5 **Direction:** The decisions made at Jerusalem by the “apostles elders and church” were passed on to other cities that Paul visited.

#### Various Church Leaders (18)

Several other believers were clearly recognized as leaders and performed various tasks on behalf of the Church. There is little effort by the scripture to give ranks of position to these people or to explain exactly how and when they received authority from God. Of interest, Stephen and Philip were two of seven chosen to help serve widows in Acts 6, but proceed to lecture the nation and go on a ministry trip in Acts 7 & 8. Ananias is chosen to heal Paul, but we hear of nothing else that he did, but dozens of things that Paul did. Indeed, it is impossible to describe with certainty any organization charts, jobs descriptions, training programs, etc. used in the book of Acts.

6:5-8 **Action:** Stephen did great signs and wonders through the Holy Spirit.

6:9-15 **Action:** Stephen was falsely accused, but he answered with great wisdom and his face looked like the face of an angel.

7:1-54 **Action:** Stephen, recently appointed to “serve tables” delivered a long lecture to the national leaders about their ancestors who rejected the leading of God and told them that **they** were rejecting the leading of God by rejecting Jesus. They got angry.

7:55-60 **Action:** Stephen explained that he saw a vision of the Father and the Son of Man in heaven—for which he was stoned to death. Even so, Stephen asked that this sin not be held against them.

8:5-12 **Action:** Philip, recently appointed to “serve tables” preached Christ, baptized and performed many miracles in Samaria.

9:17-18 **Direction:** Ananias followed Jesus’ instructions, healed Saul, baptized him and prayed for the Holy Spirit to fill him.

9:27-28 **Decision:** Barnabas took Saul to the Apostles and explained his conversion, and he became accepted there.

11:25-26 **Direction:** Barnabas found Saul in Tarsus and brought him to Antioch where they taught for a whole year.

13:1-3 **Action:** Five prophets and teachers laid hands on Saul and Barnabas after the Holy Spirit separated them for a ministry.

13:13 **Action:** John Mark decided to leave Saul and Barnabas and return to Jerusalem.

15:13-21 **Decision:** In considering the circumcision question, James said “I judge that we should not trouble those who among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality from things strangled, and from blood.”

15:32-34 **Decision:** When the circumcision decision letter was read in Antioch, Judas and Silas strengthen the brethren. Silas decided to stay in Antioch while others returned to Jerusalem.

18:24-16 **Action:** Apollos skillfully and accurately taught Jesus is the Christ from the Scriptures, but knew only the baptism of John

18:27 **Decision:** Apollos wanted to go to Achaia to teach.

18:28 **Action:** Apollos vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing Jesus was the Christ.

20:4-6 **Action:** Several leaders made various travel plans, traveling in different ways and different times, apparently to help Paul avoid detection.

21:12 **Decision:** Leaders, including Luke, plead with Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

21:21-25 **Direction:** James and the elders of Jerusalem heard rumors that Paul was teaching Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake the law. To counteract the rumor, they told him to take part in the purification rites of four men who had a vow.

#### The Apostle Peter (14)

Peter was the apostle leading the teaching of the Jews and Paul of the other nations (Galatians 2:8). Peter’s 14 events are half “action” and half “direction and decision”. He certainly was a powerful leader of God. But with only 8% of the events of Acts directly attributable to him, he is not the “pope” or church dictator that many people imagine.

1:15-22 **Direction:** Peter stated the need to replace Judas with a new apostle and listed some qualifications.

2:15-41 **Action:** Peter stood up to preach a message explaining the meaning of the miraculous events and the way to salvation: 3000 responded with the decision to be baptized.

3:01-11 **Decision:** When asked for alms, Peter said he had no gold and silver, but gave the lame man healing instead.

3:12-26 **Action:** When people were amazed at the above miracle, Peter decided to give them another message about repentance.

4:7-14 **Action:** The Jewish religious leaders questioned Peter and John about the healed lame man and Peter explained it, telling them they must be saved in the name of Jesus Christ.

5:15-16 **Action:** The Shadow of Peter caused healing in the people who had come to him.

8:18-23 **Action:** When Simon the Sorcerer offered Peter money to be able to give the Holy Spirit, Peter told him he was “poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity”—and said Simon would have no part in Church leadership.

9:32-35 **Action:** Peter healed a paralyzed man and many people turned to Christ.

9:40-42 **Action:** Peter prayed for Dorcas and she came back to life. Many more people believed in Christ.

10:24-43 **Direction:** Peter concluded that God shows no partiality and that all men have access to God through Christ. He realized he must defy the custom of his time which prevented Jews from fellowshiping with other nationalities.

10:46-48 **Direction:** Peter commanded those who received the Holy Spirit to be baptized afterward.

11:1-18 **Direction:** Peter related the events of Acts 10 to Jewish believers who were skeptical of his eating with Gentiles and baptizing them. They heard his message and praised God.

12:12-17 **Direction:** Peter went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. He told them how the angel got him out of prison, asked them to tell James and the other brethren, and went on to some other undisclosed location.

15:07-11 **Decision:** In considering the circumcision question, Peter explained how God gave the Holy Spirit to Gentiles based upon their heart, not their circumcision.

### The Apostle Paul/Saul (47)

Paul is without question the dominant figure of the book of Acts. His work makes up 29.3% of the events in Acts—mostly in the last half of the book. Of his events, 66% are “action”, 21% are “decision” and 13% are “direction”. He performed numerous miraculous signs. He was a “doer” not a “dictator”. While this section is quite long, finishing it will give you a thorough tour of the leadership of God’s church as recorded in the book of Acts. This writer hopes it is a blessing to you.

9:19-23 **Action:** Saul spent time with disciples at Damascus and preached Christ in the synagogues so well that the Jews wanted to kill him.

12:24-25 **Decision:** Saul and Barnabas decided to take John Mark with them on their ministry.

13:6-12 **Action:** Saul, filled with the Holy Spirit, blinded Elymas the sorcerer when he tried to stop him from preaching to Sergius Paulus.

13:16-41 **Action:** Paul preached Jesus to the synagogue from the Old Testament, adding in present day facts.

13:44-48 **Decision:** The Jews were filled with envy at the multitudes that came to hear Paul and Barnabas. So Paul and Barnabas decide to go to the Gentiles.

14:1-6 **Action:** Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel at Iconium until the unbelieving Jews stirred up people to drive them away.

14:7-18 **Action:** Paul and Barnabas healed a man and the Greeks at

Iconium treated them as Greek Gods and wanted to sacrifice to them. Paul and Barnabas taught them to turn from their worthless idols.

14:19-28 **Action:** Even though the Jews from Antioch and Iconium stirred up the multitudes to stone Paul and they nearly killed him, he got back up the next day and continued to travel, preaching the Gospel and encouraging many.

15:12 **Decision:** “When considering the issue of circumcision,” Paul and Barnabas declared the many miracles that God did through them among the Gentiles.

15:3 **Action:** Even though they were on a doctrinal decision mission, Paul, Barnabas and others stop to encourage the brethren.



\*\*

15:35-41 **Decision:** Paul and Barnabas decided to go back and visit the churches where they had previously preached. Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them but Paul did not. So Barnabas took Mark and Paul took Silas. There were now two teams!

16:3 **Decision:** Paul circumcised Timothy and took him on his ministry trip.

16:13 **Action:** Paul found the place where women met for prayer on the Sabbath and went to meet with them.

16:16-24 **Action:** Paul cast the demon out of a fortune-telling woman who had been pestering him, but that caused her owners to make false accusations against Paul. He was beaten and thrown in prison.

16:25 **Decision:** Paul and Silas chose to sing praises to God in prison, which got the attention of the prisoners.

16:28-34 **Decision:** Paul and the other prisoners chose not to escape, but convinced the jailor not to kill himself, preached Jesus Christ to him and baptized his entire household. In return, Paul and his companions received medical attention and a meal.

16:35-40 **Decision:** The town magistrates sent officers with orders to release Paul and his companions, but Paul demanded that the magistrates come themselves to do it as they had been beaten and jailed illegally as Roman citizens. Even so, they went back to Lydia’s house to encourage the brethren.

17:1-9 **Action:** Paul and companions went to Thessalonica and preached Jesus in the synagogues where many believed. The Jews were jealous, so they made false charges against them, causing Jason to be beaten and security to be taken from others.

17:11-13 **Action:** Paul preached Christ at Berea and they did a good job of searching the Scriptures, but persecution from Thessalonica followed.

17:15 **Direction:** Paul commanded Silas and Timothy to come to him when they could.

17:16-17 **Action:** Paul’s “spirit was provoked within him” when he saw the idolatry of Athens, so he taught Jews and Gentiles in the synagogue and the marketplace.

17:21-34 **Action:** Paul used their monument to the “unknown God” and some of their own poetry to explain the true God to these Greeks. Some of them believed.

18:1-4 **Action:** Paul went to Corinth, stayed with Aquila and Priscilla and taught in the synagogue every Sabbath.

18:6-8 **Action:** Paul left the Jews because they blasphemed Jesus and taught in the house next door to the synagogue where some Jews and Gentiles believed and were baptized.

18:18-19 **Action:** Paul went to Syria, Cenchrea and Ephesus. He had his hair cut off because of a vow.

18:20-23 **Action:** Paul refused the Ephesians request, but headed for Jerusalem for Pentecost. He left by way of Caesarea, Galatia and Phrygia.

19:1-8 **Action:** When Paul found 12 men who were not baptized in the name of Jesus and had not received the Holy Spirit, he baptized them and laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. He taught in the synagogue three months.

19:9-10 **Decision:** When some unbelievers spoke evil against Paul he left the synagogue and taught in the school of Tyrannus for two years.

19:21-22 **Direction:** Paul planned

21:1-16 **Action:** Paul travels to Jerusalem, strengthening believers along the way, determined to go in spite of many prophecies of trouble for him.

21:18-20 **Action:** Paul explained to James and the elders of Jerusalem the great things that God had done among the Gentiles.

21:26-31 **Action:** Paul followed James and the elder's instructions to take part in the purification in the temple, but the Jews made false accusations against him, stirred up the people and tried to kill him.

21:39-40 **Action:** Rescued by Romans from a Jewish mob trying to

26:1-32 **Action:** Paul explained his conversion story to King Agrippa and Festus—and how that story enraged the Jews. He was well received and Herod was almost persuaded to become a Christian.

27:9-10 **Direction:** Paul advised the Centurion not to sail after the “fast” (Day of Atonement).

27:33-44 **Action:** Paul encouraged everyone to eat so they would have strength to swim to shore. He ate himself and the others followed, being able to accomplish their purpose. The sailors maneuvered the ship to the island till it ran aground and people could swim in.

28:17-31 **Action:** Paul called the Jewish leaders together in Rome and taught them about Jesus. Some believed and some did not, causing a great dispute among themselves. Paul taught any who came to him.



\*\*

to go to Rome after staying in Asia, but sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia.

20:1-6 **Direction:** Paul called the disciples to himself and left for Macedonia and eventually Troas, dodging persecutions of the Jews.

20:7-12 **Action:** Paul taught past midnight and brought Eutychus back to life after he was killed by falling out of a third-story window.

20:13-17 **Direction:** Paul gives various orders for disciples to travel in different ways. He called for the Elders in Ephesus.

20:17-40 **Direction:** Paul spoke to the elders of the church, telling them this was the last time he would see them, explaining his ministry and telling them that the Holy Spirit has made them overseers to “shepherd the Church of God”. He also explained that false leaders would arise both from without and within the church—and that he never coveted anyone’s silver or gold, but worked to take care of himself.

kill him, Paul obtained permission to speak to the mob.

22:1-22 **Action:** Paul told his conversion story from Acts 9 to the Jewish crowd that was against him. They listened until he explained a revelation from Jesus that he was to go to the Gentiles.

22:25 **Action:** Paul asserted his legal rights as a Roman citizen and avoided being “examined by scourging”.

23:1-9 **Action:** Paul is called before the Jewish council, but creates division between the Pharisees and Sadducees over the issues of angels and the resurrection of the dead.

24:1-21 **Action:** Paul defends himself against Ananias the high priest and the lawyer Tertullus. His effort to divide the Pharisees and Sadducees did not work.

24:24-25 **Action:** Felix sent for Paul to hear him concerning faith in Christ, but was afraid when Paul talked about judgment to come.

25:10-12 **Decision:** In order to avoid Jerusalem, Paul appealed to Caesar.

## Conclusion

God is sovereign. His work is simply beyond what we are able to comprehend (Ecclesiastes 8:17). We should learn from the Scriptures that He has given us, rather than reason about what we think He should have done or justify the kind of church organization we are most familiar with. He is a God of action, decisions and directives.

We cannot make God direct us through Jesus, angels, prophets, the Holy Spirit, etc. But we can be open to that direction and pray for it. We can repent of the sin of arbitrarily saying “God no longer works that way” simply because he has never worked that way with us or our church group. Too many church groups throughout the world reject certain parts of the Bible just because their group has never obeyed them, and since they “know” that God is with them without following those commands, there must be no need to follow them. A lesson from Jesus is in order:

...“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:4)

\*\*The images used herein were obtained from *The Learning Company's ClickArt Christian Graphics Deluxe product*, © 1999 The Learning Company, Inc. and its subsidiaries, 88 Rowland Way, Novato, CA 94945 USA. All rights reserved.

# The Wine and The Covenant



L. Wade Johnson

In the Ancient Hebrew Wedding Tradition, there were three things required when negotiating for a wife:

- a. A large sum of money (or many expensive items) to pay the price for the Bride.
- b. A betrothal contract which contained the groom's promises to the Bride. This contract, or covenant spells out how he will care for his bride, where they will live, how he will provide for her and protect her and cherish her.
- c. A skin of wine.

If the price is agreeable and the marriage agreement is acceptable by the Father the girl is called. The Bride is given the opportunity to accept or reject the groom and what he is offering her. It is important to understand that the bride has the prerogative to accept or reject the proposal even if her father agrees to it.

If she accepts the proposal the groom would pour a cup of wine and offer it to the bride. If the Bride accepts the groom and the contract she will drink the wine the groom brought with him meaning she accepts the groom's proposal and the marriage agreement and the consequences both good and not so good that come with a

lifetime commitment to one person. Their shared cup of wine at a Jewish betrothal ceremony called Br'it (covenant) symbolizes the sealing of their marriage covenant in blood.

Note a covenant is more than a contract between the bride and the groom. It is a vow, a solemn commitment made before God and witnesses. A covenant has spiritual and moral elements that make it more binding than just an agreement supported by the laws of the land. It is a committed promise supported by the integrity of one making the promise. They put their personal fidelity, good name, and values as a person and their fealty to God as collateral.

In the Hebrew wedding, there is a tradition the groom pays a price for his chosen bride. The price is usually quite high. The Messiah refers to the true followers of Messiah as His bride. Recall the price Yahshua paid for His bride was His own life, His own shed blood. We know that from the beginning of time the Savior was to die on the day of the Passover.

Remember now, the bride can reject the groom or she can accept the groom.

God calls one into His family but those who are called may reject the offer. In effect, rejecting His blood sacrifice. Too many people today reject the groom, our redeemer, because they are not willing to live by the contract. Many do not know what is in the covenant but reject it anyway. Some accept the offer but reject HIS Covenant (commandments).

*"If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:16).*

The night before His death Jesus (Yahshua) poured wine for His disciples. His words described the significance of the cup in representing the bride price for the marriage contract: The disciples drank of the cup, thus accepting the contract.

In Matthew 26:28-29 we read *"Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*

The groom, our savior and master renewed His Covenant with Israel in his own blood, with His remnant Bride—who would be taken from among the whole believing House of spiritual Israel.

*continued on page 21*

# Ask Norm!



[asknorm@shepherdsvoicemagazine.org](mailto:asknorm@shepherdsvoicemagazine.org)

December 1, 2016

Dear Norm:

I have a statement with a follow-up question that maybe you can address in an up-coming "Ask Norm!" in *SVM*. In Isaiah 9:6 where multiple titles are prophetically attributed to Yahusha ha' Mashiyach (Jesus the Christ), one of these titles has been erroneously translated in almost every translation that I've personally read as "...everlasting Father." In the original Hebrew it is אב־יָצֵד Abi-Ad. In Hebrew grammar, whenever you place a "yod" suffix to a known, the word becomes possessive. Consult Strong's #H-21 and Mathew 27:46 for example. In this instance, the Hebrew word for "Father", אב or Ab has a "yod" suffix thus rendering it literally "My father is everlasting". Yet, translators across the board have either completely missed it, or purposely mistranslated it. (Consider Jeremiah 8:8).

I've written several other Sabbath-keeping ministries with this statement/question to no avail. I trust you will look into this and so my questions for you would be:

1. Can you see it?
2. Do you agree with me?
3. If you've answered "yes"

to the first two questions, in what way does this revelation affect your interpretation and theology of this specific passage of scripture?

One again, I personally thank you for your insight, consideration and service in this matter.

In Mashiyach Yahusha,

Mr John Joseph Adkins #235577  
Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility  
1727 W Bluewater Hwy  
Ionia, MI 48846

Dear Mr. John Adkins,

I will cite Isaiah 9:6 for our reader's convenience:

*For unto us a Child is born,  
Unto us a Son is given;  
And the government will be upon His  
shoulder. And His name will be  
called Wonderful, Counselor,  
Mighty God, Everlasting Father,  
Prince of Peace.*

I believe I see why you wanted to research this. All of those titles are easily understood for "God the Son" except "Everlasting Father". How can Jesus be both the "Father" and the "Son"? Well, a short answer is that many middle-aged men are both fathers and sons at the same time. Jesus is the son of God the Father, but in a certain sense, we are His children as He died that we might have eternal

life. Even Paul identifies himself as a spiritual father of those he taught (1 Corinthians 4:15).

We also have to realize that every verse of the Bible cannot explain everything about everything. This verse is the relationship between Christ and humankind, not about the relationship between the Father and Son. To be concerned about some kind of competition for power between the Father and Christ is foolish (John 10:30, 14:9, 28).

Even so, your linguistic study has merit. BibleWorks shows this to be the only place in Scripture where this exact form appears—so we must look at similar words for clues to meaning. Yes, other examples of Abi followed by another word are translated "father is...". Indeed, your translation of "My Father is everlasting" would fit this pattern, though I do not see any word implying "My". Even so, I am not an expert in the ancient Hebrew Language. Languages often follow rules, but there are sometimes that they do not. For example, the English preposition "in" generally means "inside" and "on" means "on top of". Yet we "get in" a car or truck, but we "get on" a bus, train or plane. No rule explains it—one just has to know. Unfortunately, I do not know exactly what Isaiah intended by "Abi Ad".

Other Bible translations help. The new Century Version and the Expanded Bible say "Father Who

Lives Forever”. The Orthodox Jewish Bible has “Avi Ad (Possessor of Eternity)”—which is not exactly what you are saying, but very sensible for this context. The 1599 Geneva Bible says “everlasting Father” in the text, but has a footnote: “the author of eternity”. The English translation of the Greek Septuagint is different enough that the problem doesn’t exist:

*For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us, whose government is upon his shoulder: and his name is called the Messenger of great counsel: for I will bring peace upon the princes, and health to him (Isaiah 9:6, LXE).*

In conclusion, I agree that your translation is possible, but it does not change my theology much. I have been given the task of living by faith by the power of the Holy Spirit on a daily basis. I will be judged and rewarded based upon that. I see no place in Scripture where I will be judged on being able to explain the exact relationship of the Father and Son, or all of their names and titles. I will continue to pray and study daily, strive to love my neighbor as myself, lead my family, write articles and serve in our homeless ministry no matter which translation for this verse is correct.

Certainly, those who are Bible Teachers—and both of us have taken on this role—should do the best they can to understand the truth of the Scriptures and teach them accurately. I appreciate your study here and I now could much better help somebody who was concerned that Jesus was being called a “Father” when he is elsewhere portrayed as the “Son”. Thank you for your letter. Keep on studying and becoming a blessing to others.

Norm:

Who did Peter acknowledge when stating the prohibition to eating with common men or people of another religion? (Rich Traver quoted Acts 10:28 in his article.) My question has always been what Bible or Torah law prohibits Jews from eating with non Jews? My theory is Peter was following the customs of the Rabbinic

thinking which would come to be added and amended to Rabbinic Judaism. Although, I know of no Mishnah or Talmudic Jews today not being allowed to eat with anyone—though there are various requirements for Kosher.

— R. K., Maryland

Dear R.K.,

This verse has been a puzzle to some:

*Then he said to them, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28).*

There is no Scripture that commands Israelites not to eat or drink with people of other nations, and indeed Jesus did it (John 4:7-9). The Scripture the Jewish leaders used to add this regulation was probably this:

*“When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son” (Deuteronomy 7:2-3).*

This verse is not a commandment on how to treat all other nations, but just those nations whom God had appointed for destruction because of their sin (Genesis 15:16; Leviticus 18:25-27; 20:22-23). Nevertheless, the leaders applied it to many other nations. Furthermore, Rabbinic Judaism frequently employs the idea of “building a fence around the law”—enacting more rules in an attempt to prevent people from getting close to breaking God’s law. Since Jews did not want their sons or daughters marrying people of other nations, what better way to prevent that than

to forbid them from even enjoying a meal together? Unfortunately, it is easier to make additional laws than it is to teach people to have a heart for God.

Is there some writing where the Jews have preserved that law against eating with gentiles? The Babylonian Talmud tractate Avodah Zara, Chapter 2, ninth paragraph after Mishna IV states: “Rabh vowed not to drink water at the house of Gentiles, saying: They are not careful to cover the water...” John Gill’s Exposition of the Bible contains six references along these general lines:

#### Bible Study Tools - Gill’s Exposition of the Bible

Even so, these statements are generally a certain Rabbi’s opinion, not a clear citation of a Jewish national law that Peter states. A little thinking will allow us to conclude why there is no written source for the law that Peter was citing. A little brief timeline should help us understand:

400 BC The Old Testament was finished. The Jewish scribes were careful to keep that written law separate from their “oral law”—which was said to be a combination of traditions handed down from Moses and the wise sayings of many other teachers along the way.

60 BC to 60 AD. The Jews were a vassal state under Rome, but had their own farms, their own markets, their own kitchens, etc. They were so independent they boasted: “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone” (John 8:33). Indeed, it is not difficult for them to pass a law against eating with “Gentiles”—Romans, Greeks, Samaritans, Arabs and others in their land. They produced their own food. Their law fed their false religious idea that they were God’s people and everyone else was not.

70 AD. The Romans crushed the Jewish revolt, destroyed Jerusalem and nearly all Jews were driven from their homeland. They were humbled. As refugees, they ate wherever they could, with whomever they could. Sometimes, food would be their payment for labor. It was difficult enough to arrange for biblically clean food. This was not

a good time for a man-made law against eating with people of other nations. They were at the mercy of people in other nations. The law Peter cited was destroyed along with Jerusalem.

200 A.D. The Jewish scholars, seeing the dispersal of their people and the proliferation of the New Testament as the written interpretation of the Old Testament, decided to write down their oral law in a book now known as the Mishnah. It does not contain any clear prohibition against eating with Gentiles—as Jews were still dispersed throughout the Roman Empire and many were still refugees.

500 A.D. to now The Talmud—about 5 times the size of the Bible—was finalized. It is commentary on the Mishnah and numerous other commentaries have been written on both. Many Jews are now comfortable in the lands where they have been dispersed. They again have control over their own food supply. We again see a few commentators suggesting that Jews should not eat or drink with Gentiles.

The biggest lesson we can all learn from this is to avoid adding our own rules and traditions to the Scriptures. None of us obey all of the clear commands of God that we already know. If we need to add rules for ourselves to better obey God, let us do it in faith. But let us not impose them on others. For example, if a person finds that whenever they go to eat with unbelievers that they end up getting drunk, eating way too much or joining in on immoral activities, then it might make sense for them to avoid eating with unbelievers. We need to be like Jesus, who ate with sinners without sinning, and who preached the love and righteousness of God to them. We do not need so many man-made rules.

May God bless all of us to use our freedom in Christ for His glory!

---

Dear SVM

Please explain 1 Corinthians 10:23-33, 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 and Revelation 2:14. Is it wrong to eat Easter eggs, buns or fruitcake that the shops are selling during Easter or Christmas?

— M.B. via e-mail

Dear M.B.,

I can see why you asked the question. You are applying the principles about meat sacrificed to idols to your question about food made for non-biblical religions celebrations. I think it is a valid comparison.

The first Scripture citation, above, seems to say it is sometimes all right to eat meat sacrificed to idols and the other two seem to say it is wrong. The only way an answer is possible is for us to look at the reasons why one should or should not eat these things associated with non-biblical religion. Most of the keys are in the first passage, discussed here, a few verses at a time:

*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness" (1 Corinthians 10:23-26).*

Everything belongs to God. There are no pagan animals, plants or recipes. That includes eggs, fruitcake, evergreen trees, holly berries and rabbits. If a person eats meat offered to an idol, or a baked item that was part of an Easter or Christmas special, but does not even know it—asking no questions—no harm is done. However, if someone knows a believer is eating something that is part of a non-Biblical religious practice, and if it is offensive or causes them to want to join that non-Biblical practice, that is a problem worth avoiding.

*If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness" "Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks?*

*Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved (1 Corinthians 10:27-29).*

Here we have cases where a person is an unbeliever, and would think that a believer's eating things associated with non-biblical practices means he approves of the practice. We also have the case of someone going out of their way to inform the other of the religious association. Then, a believer should sacrifice his liberty to help the other man's conscience. The Christian life is about bringing salvation to others, not about exercising our own liberty.

The last part of your second Scripture quotation:

*What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He? (1 Corinthians 10:19-22).*

Wood and stone idols are nothing. Meat is still meat and fruitcake is still cake with fruit in it—it can be tasty! But demons are real! If a person is pulled into fellowship with demons through eating meat sacrificed to idols, or through modern day Christmas or Easter practices, then they need to get out. Sometimes, religious practices involve the cursing or demonic "blessing" of people who participate in their religious practices. Sometimes, that curse is extended to those who eat the products from that worship. If eating the products of false worship brings us into the demonic contact, then we want to stay away from it. This is exactly what your Scripture in revelation is talking about.

*But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality (Revelation 2:14).*

The problem with ancient Israelites was not their occasional eating “idol-burgers” from Gentile vendors on their way to work. They were eating the things sacrificed to idols and participating so much in the practices that they were forsaking their good marriages and committing sexual immorality with the women of those nations (Number 31:15-17). Also notice:

*“Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood” (Acts 15:19-20).*

In this case, we are dealing with Gentiles who are just turning to God. If they go back to eating things sacrificed to idols, they are likely to go back to the sexual immorality associated with their former religions. It was better to avoid those sacrifices so they would not get started in the false practice.

So, to answer your question, if one normally orders hard-boiled eggs at a restaurant and if at Easter, the egg shell came dyed in some color, I would not refuse to eat it unless I knew it would offend somebody with me. Similarly, sometimes our homeless ministry receives fruit cake or Christmas cookies. I may eat them if I don’t offend anyone since they were made by the same commercial equipment that makes other cake and cookies—they are not involved in any religious ceremony at all. But I would probably not eat food made by some occult religious group for their ceremonies, especially if it was cursed or “blessed” by some demonic power.

Someone might go to a Christmas meal to see family, but if eating the food there causes one to start kissing under mistletoe, getting drunk or

other sinful practices, then one should stay completely away from that.

January 22, 2016

Greetings to Norman Edwards and associates:

I send love, joy, peace, kindness and hope for what we do not see (Romans 8:25): The future World of Tomorrow under the rulership of Jesus Christ our King and Savior.

Norman and friends, I want to share some really wonderful news with you all. Great things in harmony with Bible Prophecy are indeed taking place.

“The Church of God” is in action to declare the Good News of God’s Kingdom to the ends of the earth in over 750+ languages at this time. This is to fulfill Matthew 24:14 and Daniel 7:14.

Currently some 8,000,000 trained ministers, missionaries and Bible educators are working in full unity to accomplish fulfilling Bible Prophecy.

Norman and friends, all of you are being invited to come participate in this global campaign! (Revelation 22:17). We welcome your assistance! As each day passes, 5 to 6 new congregations form each day and there is a need for men to be trained to take the lead in implementing theocratic order: global instructions that

Jesus Christ directs through his very elect. And this unifies us all as one to do God’s will, for he desires that all sorts of peoples be saved by applying accurate knowledge of Bible Truth in their daily lives (1 Timothy 2:3,4 John 17:3).

Nisan 14 / Abib 14 is fast approaching and globally, some 20 million Bible lovers, Christ-like lovers of truth will assemble to observe Christ as their passover lamb (Luke 22:19). This commanded observance will take place at tens of thousands of locations worldwide. Will you be there? We invite all to come!

Yes, Norman, do you know this Church of God? It is the one that is fulfilling Matthew 10:17-18; Mark 13:9-11; Luke 21:15-12. Yes, the one that has won over 260 High Court Victories throughout the world for religious freedom and to legally establish the Good News of God’s Kingdom (Philippians 1:7). The Church of God has a successful track record of fulfilling Matthew 24:14. Here is a glance at their success.

This is all public witnessing work and home Bible Studies that are conducted by trained Bible Educators. They are the military force that is prophesied in Psalm 110:3.

We invite you to come and be

| Year | Number of Lands Reached | Christians who Shared in Preaching (Monthly Average) | Hours Spent in Preaching & Teaching (Annual Total) | Bible Studies Conducted (Monthly Average) |
|------|-------------------------|--|--|---|
| 1918 | 14                      | 3,868  | 19,116   | (not recorded)                            |
| 1928 | 32                      | 23,988   | 2,866,164  | (not recorded)                            |
| 1938 | 52                      | 47,143   | 10,572,066   | (not recorded)                            |
| 1948 | 96                      | 230,532  | 49,832,205   | 130,281                                   |
| 1958 | 175                     | 717,088  | 110,390,944  | 508,320                                   |
| 1968 | 200                     | 1,155,826  | 208,666,762  | 977,503                                   |
| 1978 | 205                     | 2,086,698  | 307,272,262  | 1,257,084                                 |
| 1988 | 212                     | 3,430,926  | 785,521,697  | 3,237,160                                 |
| 1998 | 233                     | 5,544,059  | 1,186,666,708                                      | 4,302,852                                 |
| 2008 | 236                     | 6,829,455  | 1,488,658,249                                      | 7,133,760                                 |
| 2014 | 239                     | 7,867,958  | 1,945,487,604                                      | 9,499,933                                 |

part of this global campaign that will soon be taught in over 1000 languages. Travel the world if you desire. Every Sabbath (Saturdays) the 118,000 congregations meet to engage in door to door witnessing activity to declare the Good News of God's Kingdom in order to seek out deserving ones that want to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Yes, we are Jehovah's Witnesses and we call out to you to come assist us in this fine work in the sight of God as we prepare ourselves for the New Heavens and New Earth that wait us (jw.org / tv.jw.org). Bible education is a must and so is tuning in to Jehovah's Very Elect by means of His global organization. Apostle John wrote "one flock" at John 10:16. Micah describes it as a sheep pen (Mica 2:12).

Yes, the very elect are here in these last days and the Kingdom of God is in your midst with a mighty nation of peoples globally organized to do Jehovah's Will (Isaiah 60:22; Ezekiel 37:22; Matthew 21:43). The New Nation, the New Nation, the New Nation is here! Come Norman and friends! We are waiting for you all! Stay Awake for Armageddon is Near! It will not be late! We send our love to you all.

[Sheet music with words for a song, *Preparing to Preach*, was also included.]

J. R. Bandy #1469796  
Wayne Scott Unit  
6999 Retrieve Rd  
Angleton, Texas 77515

Dear J. R. Bandy,

This is quite a letter! I want to acknowledge eight good things in it.

1. You began by proclaiming love, joy, peace, kindness and hope to us. I proclaim love, joy, peace, grace, kindness and hope to you as well. The New Testament writers usually did this—even though they sometimes had a corrective message with it. I was once a part of a big "Church of God" group that frequently confronted other groups about their "false doctrines" and regarded them as

unbelievers. I have since learned that Christ determines who is and who is not a believer—not organizations of men. Fortunately, there are believers who do attempt to recognize all that God is doing.

2. The Jehovah's Witnesses have done much to teach certain Christian principles to nearly every country of the world. They have done far more than most other denominations have. I see obvious errors in some of their teachings, such as Jesus Christ being the same as Michael the Archangel, a created being. However, through denominations such as the Jehovah's Witnesses people have learned scriptures, and perhaps they too may learn of the Truth of God someday. Through God's calling, the Holy Spirit can then lead believers to all truth, in spite of what people teach (John 16:13). The big church I worked for at one time had a magazine circulation of 8,000,000—going to virtually every country on Earth. Yes, billions of people have been reached with the gospel—with a certain amount of error—from big and small Christian groups everywhere.

3. The JW's New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures is generally a good translation. I have had one for years. Its major problems are verses mistranslated to support a false JW doctrine that Jesus Christ was a created being. For example, it ends John 1:1 with "the Word was a god" where most translations simply say "the Word was God". There is no article ("a", "an" or "the") associated with "God" in any significant ancient Greek manuscript of John 1:1. Other scriptures appear to have been forcibly modified to suit the belief that Jesus Christ was a created being, such as John 1:18, John 10:33, Colossians 1:15-17, Hebrews 1:6,8 to name a few.

The New World Translation does very well in translating the Greek diakonos as "service of the ministry", and never uses the word "deacon" at all. Because churches in the 1600s had "deacons" to look after physical things and "ministers" to look after spiritual things, the KJV and most other translations variously rendered diakonos sometimes as "servant", sometimes as "minister" and sometimes as "deacon"—not because of what the Greek means,

but so their translation would match existing church doctrines. However, the true Bible teaching is that there is no difference—a person who is faithful in material things is also faithful in spiritual things (Luke 16:10-13). And indeed, the Jehovah's Witnesses have followed the biblical model of encouraging faithful men from all walks of life to become Bible teachers—8,000,000 of them as you state—not limiting teaching to men with a 4-year college degree. Wikipedia says the JW's have published 217 million copies of the Bible in 140 languages. This is a good work—especially when it is taken to those who would otherwise have no Bible at all!! But also realize that Wycliffe Associates have Bible translations in 550 languages, have started 2300 more languages, and hope to have a Bible in all of the World's 7000 languages by 2050! ([www.wycliffe.org](http://www.wycliffe.org)). Estimates of total worldwide Bible printing are around six billion, plus untold digital copies!

4. The envelope you used had only 2 cents of postage and the words "Non-Domestic Mail" on it—without any "postage due". Thank you—or somebody—for the careful research. For years, I have read about the difference between the USA's constitutional office of Postmaster versus the United States Postal Service, a corporation which began on July 1, 1971. I have heard claims that Postmasters still have many of their constitutional responsibilities, but that many do not know them or refuse to do them. Even so, yours is one of the few letters I have seen with 2 cents of postage on it, rather than the currently "mandated" 49 cents.

5. Wikipedia and many legal info-sources document the numerous religious freedom cases won by the Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide. These have been a great blessing to people who want to preach the gospel, avoid certain medical procedures or avoid military service in ungodly wars. Many Christians benefit from these efforts and probably do not give enough credit to the work the JWs have done. Even so, we must ask the question, who started the constitutions and court systems that allow the JWs and other Christians to bring religious freedom cases and receive favorable decisions?

Other Bible-believing Christians living hundreds of years ago did this—before there were Jehovah’s Witnesses or “Church of God” groups. God has been using all these people all along.

6. Thank you for inviting me to observe the Passover with 20 million Jehovah’s Witnesses. Nobody has salvation without the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I have observed the Passover since 1974 with a variety of groups. Indeed hundreds of religious groups observe these days. Let me encourage you to observe the Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles and the Eighth Day as well!

7. The Sabbath is a great day for teaching God’s word. God made the Sabbath as a day of rest from our work and a time to come to Him. I have spoken with several JW teachers who came to my house on that day. We agreed on many things, but most of them stopped coming when I asked them Bible questions they were not used to hearing. We discussed the regular meeting of believers by Jesus and the apostles on the Sabbath day—I would hope that you could begin to practice and teach this yourself. Even with certain mistakes, many people have been challenged to study and begin obeying the Bible through contact with the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

8. Both of us are looking forward to the Kingdom of God and the New Heavens and New Earth. That is what this life is all about—preparing us for eternity! It is good to know that God is in charge of it.

Beyond these eight points, I would like to share two points of correction that I believe will be a great blessing to you:

1. For almost twenty years I thought I was a part of the one true Church organization that God was using. As I had the same excitement that you had. We even used very similar words to those in your letter. I thought I was following the very chain of global instructions from the Father to Christ to our church leaders to me. Unfortunately, I had accepted my church group’s teaching on the

“Government of God” and never studied the Bible on that subject. Let me encourage you to read the article in this issue: How God Works—from the Book of Acts. Its content was produced by reading through the book of Acts and noting how the church received direction, made decisions and took action. They never formed a Church organization with a hierarchy of leaders, but relied on the Holy Spirit, the direct working of God, and the actions taken by many people—both believers and not.

2. You frequently mentioned Bible prophecy and how your church group is fulfilling it. You speak as though you know what will happen next in world events. I believed that about the big church group I attended for 20 years. The ministry frequently gave sermons explaining how they were the group that God was using—and how their prophetic interpretation had been correct. It was not until I got a digital copy of all that churches writings—and went through it myself—that I realized how many places they were in error. It is interesting that both of our groups taught 1975 would be the beginning of Christ’s return—and both quoted William and Paul Paddock’s book, *Famine 1975*. We were both wrong. I would encourage you to get old copies of Jehovah’s Witness publications and see how accurate they have been. For now, please look at the following six quotations from past literature.

**1966:** “According to this trustworthy Bible chronology six thousand years from man’s creation will end in 1975, and the seventh period of a thousand years of human history will begin in the fall of 1975 C.E Six thousand years of man’s existence on earth will soon be up, yea within this generation. The rein of Christ...to run parallel with the 7th millennium ...” (*Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God*, 1966, p. 29-30)

**1968:** “The immediate future is certain to be filled with climactic events, for this old system is nearing its complete end. Within a few years at most the final parts of Bible prophecy relative to these last days will undergo fulfilment resulting in the liberation of surviving mankind into Christ’s glorious 1000 year reign!” (Watchtower, 1/5/1968)

**1968:** “More recently, the book entitled “*Famine-1975!*” [by W. & P. Paddock, 1967, pp. 52,55,61.] said concerning today’s food shortages: “Hunger is rampant throughout country after country, continent after continent around the undeveloped belt of the tropics and subtropics. Today’s crisis can move in only one direction -toward catastrophe. Today hungry nations; tomorrow starving nations.” ... “By 1975 civil disorder, anarchy, military dictatorships, runaway inflation, transportation breakdowns and chaotic unrest will be the order of the day in many of the hungry nations.” (*The Truth That Leads To Eternal Life*, p 88-89, 1968)

**1968:** “Just think, brothers, there are only about ninety months left before 6,000 years of mans existence on earth is completed... The majority of people living today will probably be alive when Armageddon breaks out, and there are no resurrection hopes for those who are destroyed then. So, now more than ever, it is vital not to ignore that spirit of wanting to do more.” (*Kingdom Ministry*, March 1968, p. 4 [note: 1968 + 90 months = 1975])

**1968:** “True, there have been those in times past who predicted an “end” to the world, even announcing a specific date. Yet nothing happened. The ‘end’ did not come. They were guilty of false prophesying. Why? What was missing? Missing from such people were God’s truths and the evidence that He was using and guiding them.” (*Awake*, Oct. 8, 1968)

**1992:** “Today, a small percentage of mankind can still recall the dramatic events of 1914. Will that elderly generation pass away before God saves the earth from ruin? Not according to Bible prophecy. ‘When you see all these things,’ Jesus PROMISED, ‘know that he is near at the doors. Truly I say to you that THIS generation will by no means pass away until all these things occur.’ - Matthew 24:33, 34.” (Watchtower May 1, 1992 page 3: *The Year That Shocked The World*)

Has the generation alive in 1914 passed away? According to the Gerontology Research Group, the oldest now-living person is Emma Morano, age 117, in Italy. She would have been only 14 years old in 1914. For a person to be an adult—18 years old—in 1914, they would need to be born in 1896 or before. By scanning GRG’s table of longest lived people, Besse Cooper, living in the USA, died December 4, 2012, and was the last person to die who was at least 18 years old in 1914. Indeed that generation is gone. There is nothing wrong with Bible prophecy or the promises of Jesus. The problem is our interpretation—often made from what seems “sensible” to us, but not by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

*“However, the prophet who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded him to speak or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet must die. And in case you should say in your heart: ‘How shall we know the word that Jehovah has not spoken?’ when the prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and the word does not occur or come true, that is the word that Jehovah did not speak. With presumptuousness the prophet spoke it. You must not get frightened at him’ (Deuteronomy 18:20-22, NWT).*

The church groups I had attended had many similar prophecies which did not come to pass. It took me a while to recognize that God had not spoken these prophecies through them. Today, we have no civil laws mandating the execution of false prophets, but we can personally choose not to heed “dead” prophetic interpretation. If someone got it wrong in the past, we cannot trust what he claims for the future.

It took me many years to sort this out, so I expect that it will also take a while for you. I knew that I had learned much from my church group and its college. But I also realized that I had learned much from the Bible, the Holy Spirit and other believers. I also realized that even those who are serving God in some ways can be very deficient in others. Judas was with Jesus for His entire ministry, but the other disciples never figured out that he would betray Christ. Paul mentions those who served God

for a while, then later departed the faith. Most of Paul’s letters contain significant correction of those whom he still considered “in the church”. It should not be surprising that we can learn much sound Bible teaching from those who also adhere to some error.

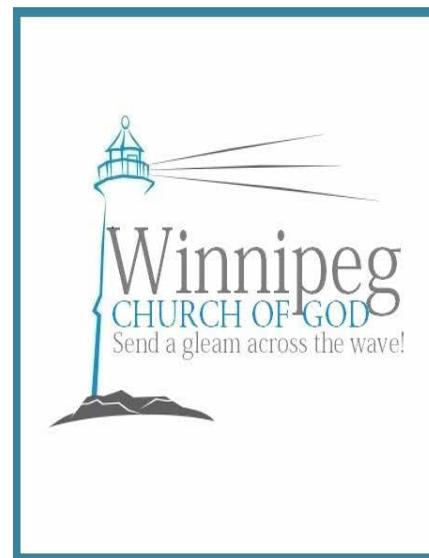
Understanding biblical prophecy is not a matter of “figuring it out”, but of being directly inspired by God. That is how Old Testament prophecy is understood in the New Testament. Even though we can show amazing and improbable correlations between historical facts and the Bible, that does not mean we understand prophecy. I want to give you an example I think you will agree with.

In your table of numbers, above, there are 63 places where three digit numbers occur—either separated by spaces or commas. This exercise is ignoring all of the one- and two-digit groups of numbers. Since there are 1000 possible combinations of three-digit numbers, the chance that any specific three-digit number would occur in the table is 1 out of 1000/63—or 1 out of 16.9. The chance that a 3-digit number would occur twice in the table is 1 out of 1000/63 \* 1000/62 (since one chance has already been used up to pick the first number). This is 1 out of 256. In the table above, the only three digit number to occur twice is “666”—a rather unlikely occurrence. Might some prophetic interpreters claim there is a relationship between these two improbably 666 numbers and the 666 in Revelation 13:18? Maybe so. But did God tell them that? Probably not. An unlikely occurrence does not automatically mean inspiration of God.

I look forward to working with you some day. I have read about many Jehovah’s Witnesses who suffered great difficulties or died for their beliefs. There was a time when I think I would have suffered great difficulties or died for my church organization, but I have since learned that it was never the same thing as God. Church organizations do serve at times—a new believer may be better off there than without a congregation at all. But those who are mature, full of the Holy Spirit and full of biblical knowledge can be led directly by Christ through the spiritual gifts that

He provides. Church groups claiming to be “The only Church” or exclusive in His service cut people off from all that God is doing.

May God bless you in your studies!



Visit our website at <http://www.cogwinnipeg.com>

or visit our youtube channel <https://www.youtube.com/WinnipegChurch>



Visit our website at [www.chicagolandcog.org](http://www.chicagolandcog.org)

and listen to sermons by Jim Patterson, Duane Nicol and others!

*continued from page 13*

Many who say they are Christians, while being very serious about taking communion (bread and wine) are not usually cognizant about the significance of the ceremony and of the time it should be taken. It is through the blood of Christ that sin is forgiven and a person is eligible for eternal life and protected from eternal death if we keep the covenant.

*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace (Ephesians (1:7).*

*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13-14).*

*But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).*

To accept the wine is to accept the consequences that come with the commitment it signifies. There are good consequences and there are dangerous consequences.

Paul explained the awesome decision to the Corinthians regarding the drinking of the wine:

*Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink [this] cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body (1 Corinthians 11:27-30).*

The key here is "let a man examine himself". God holds us accountable for what we know, and what we do with what we know (John 9:41; James 4:17). As we go through our Christian life, we learn more (John 16:13; 2 Peter 3:18). But for now, we examine ourselves with what we know—confessing our sins then receiving forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:8-9). Then we should eat the bread and drink the cup.

But this examination is not automatic. We have to really do it. It is not a matter of pushing a "worthy" button.

Unworthily, to this author, means taking the vow and not intending to keep the requirements of the vow. The Savior was saying by drinking this cup you accept the covenant contract to be a faithful follower of Messiah, a bride who holds oneself only to the groom.

*For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep (v 30).*

Too many who think they were serious about taking communion do not realize they are agreeing to accept this contract and to live by it but they do not fully understand the meaning or the obligation they have undertaken.

If you are not willing to abide by the covenant do not take the wine!



Many sleep in that they do not possess sufficient oil in their lamps like the five foolish bride's maids. They lack the Holy Spirit in their lives. They do not even realize *it, and will not until it is too late.*

To sleep is to lack faith in His word to keep His part of the covenant. Regardless of the circumstances, we must remember that we made a commitment to be faithful to His to trust His. We must allow His to be faithful to us by exercising faith.

To lose faith, or not exercise faith in Him who made the covenant with you is to not trust His to keep the promises he made in that covenant. He has agreed to be your provider and protector but if you do not believe that you have violated the covenant you made with His. He signed it and sealed it with His own blood.

Those, who are not committed to the agreement eats and drinks damnation to themselves, and will miss out on receiving the benefit of the agreement.

What is the benefit of the agreement? Messiah is quoted in Luke 12:32 as saying; *"Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."*

The groom expects the bride to be faithful and abide by the contract. Once one accepts the covenant and agrees to be a worthy bride of Christ one must keep the covenant. He makes that clear in Luke 9:62 "And Yahshua said to him, no man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

*"You shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right had or to the left" (Deuteronomy 5:32).*

Do you understand the commitment that is being made when you accept the wine? Will you be faithful to the covenant you made with your Savior? Do you trust Him to take care of you, provide for you and protect you regardless of your circumstances?

When things look gloomy and the circumstances of life are threatening, remember, you accepted the covenant He made with you and He has agreed to keep His end of the contract/covenant. Do not lose faith. Sometimes His deliverance is not according to your time frame, but He will deliver you. He does not forget and, to those people who are faithful to the Covenant He does not change His mind about the needs. Recall Malachi 3:6: "I AM, I change not." Sometimes He delivers us and we do not realize it until later. We stop worrying, put it in His hands, and later find the problem has dissipated.



# The Independent Ministries of Jesus the Christ and John the Baptist

Jim Patterson

This article is about encouraging the continued and growing practice of independent ministries throughout the Church of God and exposing the error of the corporate church model. This we will do by examining the independent ministries of Jesus Christ and John the Baptist. It is an interesting investigation to look at what they did not do to avoid compromising their ministries, and what lessons we should learn and apply to our own present day experience.

In our examination we will find that independent ministries by their nature are best structured to cultivate the kind of ministry model Jesus Christ practiced and advocated through His apostles. This article would not have been even necessary if it were not for the secularization, and institutional behavior of corporate churches. Jesus Christ came to show us the way, and the corporate way is not what He had in mind.

We need to learn our lessons. Despite evident failures with the corporate model that have occurred and continue to occur, the solutions have been continued repackaging and rebranding with more centralization. We need to look to scripture for the reasons behind failure and what we should learn through them. Failures do not necessarily mean complete dissolution, but repeated false starts, large break-offs, lawsuits, leadership corruption, apostasy, defamation of ex-members, permanent member disaffection and more.

Of course those who advocate the corporate church model would blame these issues and problems on disloyal members, false brethren and those who did not get their vision of growth. When a system is flawed, it is hard for those benefiting by it to admit its error. That is, those who benefit the most out of a system will always favor and defend such a system. Regardless of our personal leanings, we suggest those who oppose what we present here due to their current loyalties and dependencies may at least be sober enough to see the realities that His revealed word gives us. We all need to work out our own salvation with Jesus Christ as the Author of it, and we want to do this by taking advantage of as many opportunities as we can when reality checks are presented to us. I suggest at the very least those who advocate corporate church structure consider what we have to say here, as even the most despised among us independent ministers can have something meaningful to offer.

## First Some Definitions

We have already started using some of these following terms but now we are going to define them in terms of what will be expressed in this article. The term “Independent” is perhaps a faulty word that is currently being used to classify churches and ministries that are not operating under a larger corporate structure. In fact, a negative connotation has been applied to the word independent as it relates to ministries, some having called them out as “selfish” with accusations that independents are

those who cannot work with others in a structured environment with a proper mutual submission to their peers. It is commonly assumed that corporate churches can more effectively spread the gospel as a collective work of people, but we will also dispel this assumption later. These biased views of independent ministries are not new and go back centuries, as we will also expose in this article.

Therefore for the purpose of this article we will submit to the inferior term “independent”, but with the soft caveat that an independent ministry is not independent of anything except human hierarchies and rules imposed to sustain a corporation. They are ministries who are not under oversight by a central authority (such as a head office) in neither their corporate life nor their spiritual life.

Corporate Churches are those who are governed by a central authority with oversight of various congregations. They are usually comprised of a ministerial council and corporately structured to comply with the state and federal (and otherwise provincial laws etc.). Some of these corporate churches have a more defined hierarchal model than others depending on a leader’s self-proclaimed anointing or loyalty among inner circles. These organizations offer a broader range of teaching materials, a sense of community, and are generally more financially and resource equipped to carry out various church initiatives. They are an attractive option for individuals looking for something that is perceived to be more secure and

established. Through community and structure corporate churches strive for a broad sense of unity, but it is a spirit of uniformity that is really in play.

No exact governing method or structure has been presented in the New Testament, and for good reason. Congregations have local dynamics and needs that cannot be pre-determinable by remote head offices or regional overseers. The corporate church model has been presumptuous in the past to believe that it can meet local needs. Experience has shown that smaller congregations suffer neglect by corporate church directors while larger congregations receive more attention.

It would seem the more evident that concern is placed on the behaviors of both local overseers and those they oversee. An intimate awareness of each other seems to best be cultivated locally so they can serve God only as their Head to be truly effective to those who they serve.

Ministry, even when it is being practiced correctly, is a difficult task to maintain. We need to look at scripture closely to find the best model that will get the results God is looking for and at the same time recognize the type of model that will not set ourselves up to stumble. Our manner of function and behavior is a serious matter we should carefully consider. Jesus Christ has already set the standard for us.

### **The Seriousness of the Matter**

*... I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15).*

Paul wrote this to Timothy to impress on him the importance of what he had just been communicating in light of the leadership qualifications he just presented. The church is the base of operation for God on earth, and church must express itself so that it reflects the truth not only in teaching but also in behavior. I do not see support in scripture that the structure of the Church should be an expression of a secular government or kingdom.

In the context that this scripture is given, a congregation must conduct its functional life on more intimate and localized terms rather than like a business, a social club, an entertainment center, or some other organizational format. When we start to gravitate to any of these worldly models for their perceived benefits, we are disrespecting and devaluing the Truth.

We would never presume to think we would make such a mistake, but it happens all the time. In different places below we will give examples.

A former president of a corporate/centralized church admitted to this writer during the time of his service within that organization that, though they outwardly presented the church as a spiritual organism to the brethren, they really were operating as a business. He made the same admission to others—as this writer found out years later. In retrospect, he was being honest, but only privately. His realization is not unique however.



***Churches must not become as businesses— which is an offense to the Truth***

This writer has had a past history being in upper management of a multinational company. From this experience I can tell you that it makes for a more reassuring presentation of the corporation being familial and open in nature than it being strictly a business. Many corporations try to appear as family oriented and caring. This message is more reassuring to its dependent and supportive

employees, and encourages employee retention. The reality is much different—they are simply and strictly businesses. They make decisions based on what is good for the corporation. The same reality is behind the curtain of corporate churches in that they are in fact businesses differing little with their secular counterparts. Corporate churches are businesses with a high priority on growth (market share) and income to sustain the real stakeholders for their security, that is, those who are truly vested in its success and viability. Often the real stakeholders are those who are financially compensated and/or have authority within the church ranks. The real stakeholders drive most of the agenda.

We say this not to take away the sincerity and efforts of the people behind these organizations to deliver the gospel authentically and produce materials (some have called them products) in serving the brethren. Some are passionate in the work they do to support the church, but all the sincerity in the world is not a biblical justification to promote a corporate church model that has cloaked business ideals.

Businesses must promote themselves as viable operations to sustain market share and confidence with employees and investors. Promotional material and events are necessary and are initiated by management and human relations. Pay attention and you will see that corporate churches are also spending their energies authenticating and promoting their organization. “The most Baptisms”, “First in class ministry” and other promotional rhetoric is very common at the lecterns and embedded in the literature of these groups.

From simple experience and by our human nature, the easy path for us has been uniformity. We institutionalize easy, and we interpret that as unity. We may begin to serve the institution, which over time may lead to disillusionment. The message will begin to serve the organization, not the Head or the needs of the congregants. Fear and dependency begin to dominate the decision-making processes of those in charge.

## Perceived Benefits of Corporate Organizations

Without question there is strength in numbers. Nations, corporations and armies will all certainly attest to that. The more cohesive any organization becomes, the more it can accomplish and protect itself. Naturally, we should expect that this should apply to God's Church and His operations on earth, however we should not so quickly make this assumption.

As parallel reading to this article and further theological background, the reader is suggested to consider the articles *Kingdom Misconceptions* (SVM Spring 2012) and *To the Angel of the Scattered Churches* (SVM Winter 2010) in past issues of SVM. These articles will help dispel common erroneous assumptions that come about with man's idea of God's Church and the Kingdom of God and hopefully give a broader view of both.

We include this excerpt from *Kingdom Misconceptions*:

We have all heard of strength is in numbers, and so it is. Jesus Christ, however, takes us beyond such thinking and teaches that the greatest strength is the sum of all our weaknesses.

When Paul was struggling with his thorn in the flesh, he must have considered it a dampener on his efforts even to do God's will. He notes three particular efforts to convince God to remove whatever it was that was holding him back. After the third effort he received his answer:

*My Grace is sufficient for you, My strength is made perfect in weakness* (2 Corinthians 12:9).

As it was for Paul, so it is in general for us. As Paul also defaulted in his thinking, i.e., that his own strengths would elevate his ministry, we tend to believe that numbers, money, charisma, and even hard work are the answers to growth and unity in a church. On the contrary, our scattered state and ultra-dependency on God for sufficiency will enlarge our capacity to serve God. Paul realized it too:

*Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For When I am weak, then I am strong* (verse 10).

Can we not understand this too and come to see where the real capacity is for growth beyond our own abilities—even when we are at our best - and to be excited as Paul was when we get it? I believe we can if we forget our contemporary experience that elevates numbers and charisma higher than it should and look instead to the early church for inspiration.

God will not allow another to glory in His presence. In doing so we find He does take measures to ensure that this does not take place:

*For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence* (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

*Yes, God will put to shame a mighty church that exalts itself above its calling; do not assume this has to do only with mainstream institutions. He is not a respecter of persons, nor must He honor anyone's great works* (Acts 10:34, Luke 17:7-10).

We will now look at the independent Ministries of Jesus Christ and John the Baptist. An understanding of their ministries gives us the model for how we should be conducting our ministries today.

### Conditions in First Century Palestine

We should briefly review the societal and religious conditions that John and Jesus encountered when they began their ministries. In doing so we can better identify their independent attributes.

In first century Palestine there was no separation between church and state. The priests at the temple in Jerusalem not only officiated over the religious life of the Jews, they were also rulers and judges. There were multiple layers of authority that had been instituted—a religious political bureaucracy.

Herod, who was himself a pawn of Rome, had his own pawns installed in the Jewish priesthood. By the first century the election of the High Priest was more political than religious. The Romans wanted the priesthood to support their occupation, and the Herod made sure their desire was carried out. However, it would be unfair to assume that all of the priesthood was as sympathetic to Rome. Some did support rebellion against Rome, but those at the highest levels and in the corporate inner circles were undoubtedly in Rome's back pocket.

We see evidence in the Gospels of this loyalty to Rome, along with a fear of Rome:

*Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation"* (John 11:45-48).

*But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!" Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away* (John 19:15,16).

It would seem utterly foreign for us to even contemplate that the chief priests, the keepers of the Temple, would exclaim such an allegiance to Caesar, but we should never underestimate the power that money and position can have over our lives. Sources of money give security and safety, but are used to control us. So

it should be known by the reader that the priesthood lived very well on the temple tax system. This tax was in addition to the national tax imposed by Herod and Rome. The average Jewish citizen was under a severe tax burden, and the weight of taxation brought tensions in Palestine very high.

There were other members of the religious elite that fared well off the common Jew. The Pharisees were very zealous for the Law of Moses, but they also considered themselves the guardians of the oral traditions that had developed over generations. The oral traditions interpreted the Law of Moses. The Pharisees had great zeal for God. The average Pharisee fasted two days a week and paid his tithes to the penny. Yet, the Pharisees stood in the presence of the perfect revelation of God, and they did not know Him. In fact, they wanted to kill Him. Had they not institutionalized, they could have been better able to recognize Jesus as the Savior, as institutionalized group think has a perpetual way of self vindication, leading to blindness from real truth and the real needs of people.

The religious ruling class had authority, but they feared the independent ministry of Jesus as a threat to their authority and influence. They were a corporate structure that was held together by loyalties and mutual financial security. When structures such as these are threatened, fear and preservation of the institution becomes the dominant motivating factor. This same motivating factor exists today as it did then, as this writer has witnessed repeatedly.

When fear is present, certain behaviors, even irrational, can start to occur and take a self-justifiable life of their own. Although self-preservation can cause one to flee that which is feared, a common approach is to attack. In the first century laws did exist to permit the ruling classes to execute undesirables, but in modern times character assassination is the preferred legal means. A modern example of this is related later in this article.

Almost 2000 years later we can

certainly judge how Jesus Christ and John the Baptist would not have any cooperative association with the religious ruling class at the time. Congratulations to us right? We know so much better than to make that mistake. But wait a minute ...

Let us suppose for example we change history and we find Jesus and John announcing to the establishment as to who they were to the religious elite so that they could work together to introduce the gospel message. I propose this would have had some significant advantages. They would be part of a ready-made system that is to a degree organized, clearly having financial resources, with authority and influence over the synagogues. Saul, for example, was part of that system at the time and he could have turned out to be a great asset to the work (as he later would be). The religious elite had a lot of knowledge of the Torah and the prophets, and with some further instruction by Jesus and a few miracles they could have recognized how to apply their knowledge to further the gospel. Everybody would be on God's side and things would have been awesome!

The above scenario may seem ludicrous, but that is because we have our modern biased filters engaged. The above actually describes an attractive corporate church scenario that today many in organized religion would envy and are tempted to employ.

Now, back to reality.

The reality is that Jesus Christ and John the Baptist would have expended way too much energy and time trying to get their message across to "fix" the system and it would have been a waste of their limited time. They came to fix people, to be acceptable before God, not their institutions. Jesus Christ is still not in the business of fixing our corporate church institutions—nor is He starting any new ones. Jesus Christ is going to deal with us locally and personally to get His will done without regard to what larger corporate denomination or association we may think He should respect and acknowledge.

### **John the Baptist's Ministry**

John the Baptist and Jesus Christ

started their own independent ministries when their time had come. Their anointing came directly from God and did not need or seek permission out of respect for the establishment to take their message to the hearers. They did not even send them a memo. This of course created challenges for the religious ruling class and authorities. Let us first look at John the Baptist.

Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews (Pharisees v 24) sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" (John 1:19-22) He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the LORD,"" as the prophet Isaiah said." (John 1:23)

*And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" (John 1:25)*

What is implied by this exchange is that the establishment had issues with John not having the corporate credentials to proceed with his ministry. John's answer had little to do with who he was or what his credentials were, but all to do with what he was doing. Our real callings come from God.

John the Baptist was not interested in making friends, particularly political friendship with any aspect of the establishment. This is always certainly a temptation, but this would take away from his independent ministry and make it dependent. (Matthew 3:7, Mark 6:18).

His style had rough edges, I would think his disciples were also a tough lot, but he was not willing to compromise ministry or concern himself with image or anyone's perceptions of him. He was independent of worldly influences to complete his calling.

Neither Jesus Christ nor John the

Baptist declared an affiliation with any group or organization. Nether did they combine and team up together. Due to their difference in approach and different callings this was a wise move. There is no record of Jesus asking John to step down either.

John the Baptist's calling was to make straight the pathway of the Lord, and this he did. This also should not be lost on us either, that we should never stand in God's way with wrong motivations in service, and wrong motivations in service come from serving our own needs for money and influence, and not the will of God.

### Jesus' Independent Nature

Jesus independent nature came about because of a singular motivation to serve His Father. Even from an early age it would appear evident that Jesus had this singular motivation without any consideration for permission

*His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it; but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.*

*Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all*

*these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:41-52).*

One could imagine the distress of Mary and Joseph to find their missing boy, particularly after three whole days, but this was not of any real significant consequence to the young Jesus. What we see here is a precursor as to what was to come in Jesus' ministry. It was of little consequence to Him when it came to offending and upsetting people when His works were of service to His Father.

Jesus paid little attention to the acceptance to His ministry on the terms of anyone else. In fact Jesus took opportunities to antagonize the religious establishment every opportunity He had.

*Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing (John 9:1-7).*

Jesus instructions and actions were deliberate, as He willfully violated the Pharisees' oral traditions that they had imposed on people, and He did so in three ways. To the Pharisees, it was unlawful to heal on the Sabbath (See also Matthew 12:10, Mark 3:2, Luke 6:7, 13:14). Secondly, believe it or not, it was considered work to make clay out of saliva. This may seem silly, but it was a violation of the Pharisees dictates. Consider it would have taken time of repeated spitting to make sufficient clay. Lastly we see that Jesus was in the vicinity of the temple when he performed this miracle. A quick look at a map shows

that the journey to the pool and back was well over 2000 cubits, longer than the Pharisee prescribed Sabbath day's journey.

Jesus' independent nature repeatedly had the desired effect of introducing controversy. Controversy can be a healthy thing when introduced into an ineffective or otherwise lifeless group. Healing the blind man caused division among the Pharisees (verse 16), it encouraged the healed man to challenge the elite (verses 30-34). Ultimately, it convicted those of sin who were not recognizing the light of the world, and is part of the work today of the Holy Spirit in a believer (John 15:24, 16:8,9). Often times God uses people today to challenge our current assumptions about ourselves, and to stir us up. A failure to respond convicts such people of sin. Jesus had to have an independent ministry in order to do this, and this is an example for us today. This should challenge the belief that true believers only bring peace to groups. Jesus said Himself He did not come to bring peace, but a sword (Matthew 10:34). He will tear things down to build it up again, or He will just tear it down for good.

We should be reminded that the Gospel is a disturbing thing. It will offend and disrupt society. The message of the gospel can bring peace to a body of people that practice many of its tenets but if they are not doing His will or compromising, He is within His sovereign right to do what He deems necessary to find out who will follow Him and to get the results He wants.

I would like to submit here that we should consider the possibility if a ministry is not offending anyone during the course of time, it suggests that it is not doing the work. The questions should always be: "Are we offending others in service to our Lord?" "Are we in service to ourselves and are our loyalties to an institution?" Some get confused between the two as history shows. If we look to the example of Jesus Christ and John the Baptist, independent ministries are less vulnerable to confused loyalties.

## Rebuking The Spirit of Sectarianism

We use sectarianism for this section as it is does conjure up a range of opinions, emotions and perspectives. Nobody I know would use the term "sect" to identify their own corporate or even independent association or membership, but sectarianism is a reality that has been especially cultured by the corporate ideologies in the Church of God.

It may be of interest to the reader to consider the book *A Fragmentation of a Sect: Schism in the Worldwide Church of God*. Author David Barrett demonstrates how the structure of the World Wide Church of God is a textbook case of sectarian and cult like behavior that lead to its fragmentation and other problematic fallout. There is nothing unique about the Worldwide Church of God in this manner.

Former members of that corporate organization have a tendency to point to a hijacking of a God ordained organization by a new leader, but the fact of the matter is it was an un-biblical model and the culture led to its fragmentation and the subsequent disillusionment of many. Today, all corporate churches that had formed out of the World Wide Church believe they have revised the hierarchy and structure to prevent a repeat of such an experience, but they are just minor variations of the same thing. Some are sectarian light. Some are sectarian heavy. Some are hierarchy light. Some are hierarchy heavy.

Unique to his gospel, Mark recorded an account that carries some lessons we will do well to consider.

After the dispute over who would be greatest, Jesus took a child and sat him in the midst of them:

*"Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me,*

*receives not Me but Him who sent Me" (Mark 9:37).*

Having heard this, John started to wonder if they had done correctly when they earlier had attempted to forbid another individual from doing a work in Jesus name:

*Now John answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us." But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me" (Mark 9:38-39).*

What we should recognize here is that there is no indication that the disciples had any issue with the works that this man was doing. However, what they did mind is that Jesus (as far as they knew) did not commission this man as He had commissioned them earlier (Mark 3:13-15). Perhaps they wanted also to protect Jesus' honor much like a few who were compelled to protect Moses' honor (Numbers 11:27-29).

The reality is that this man had already begun his independent ministry, and Jesus honored it. No ministry is above criticism and correction, and we can get better with criticism if we properly internalize, however if Jesus honors a ministry, we should never make any move to thwart or demonize it.

*But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward" (Mark 9:39-41).*

Corporate churches would certainly argue that they are not forbidding

others to do works in Jesus name, but history and the facts have shown otherwise. Perhaps this can be best understood in modern terminology such as Turf Wars.

Over five years ago, a corporate church took exception to a new independent feast site being formed by former ministers of their organization in Western Canada where this writer also participated. In order to discourage attendance by those on their corporate mailing list, council members of the organization employed the tactic of attacking the credibility of the feast organizers and its participants. Under the corporate letterhead, its council members signed a letter containing inflammatory accusations and signed their document in Christ's service, blaspheming His Name. This is a prime example of those who were motivated by fear and market share, rather than leaving matters to God to judge. This feast God has blessed year after year.

Sectarianism is simply the gravitational pull of self-preservation and territorialism; such as in the example above. Self-preservation is very typical of religious organizations. Even as small independent groups must put an effort to resist having an exclusive attitude, it is even more difficult with corporate churches. It has been evident from simple experience that corporate churches have a greater tendency to develop a spirit of sectarianism despite all conscious mitigating efforts that are made to avoid such a culture.

If we learn from the ministry of Jesus Christ, independent ministries are best equipped to serve God in a more exclusive capacity and have less potential to be compromised in their calling as has been found in corporate ministries. Jesus Christ made it clear by His example of ministry and by His very words that an exclusive service to God is necessary to be most effective. The sectarian mentality  
*continued on page 31*

The Shepherd's Voice is a free offering.  
It is made possible by the tithes and offerings of the Chicagoland Church of God members,  
participating churches, and individual contributors. Donations are welcome and may be tax deductible.



*Scribe's Square*

# What about the Apocrypha?

Edward Malone

You may have read a book, commentary or Facebook posting in which the writer quotes from the book of “Esdras” or “Ecclesiasticus” and wondered if the writer had misspelled “Ezra” or “Ecclesiastes”. No, the writer did not misspell those two books of the Bible of which you are probably familiar. Rather the writer was quoting from two books in a collection of writings known as the Apocrypha. The Apocrypha (from the Greek word *apokryphos*, meaning hidden or concealed) is a group of writings between the third and first centuries B.C.E. in the period between the Old and New Testaments, not regarded by Jews and Protestants as scripture, but eventually canonized by the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches and included in their Bible.

The Apocryphal writings for the most part are historical accounts of the Jewish struggle for political independence and freedom of religion against the Greeks during the second century B.C.E. The books generally recognized as constituting

the Apocrypha are: I and II Maccabees; Prayer of Manasses; I and II Esdras; Tobit; Judith; Wisdom; Ecclesiasticus (a.k.a. Sirach); Baruch and Epistle of Jeremy; supplements to Esther and three additions to Daniel include: The Song of the Three Children, Susanna and the Elders, the Destruction of Bel and the Dragon; and the Letters of Jeremiah.

What about the Apocrypha? Should followers of Christ regard these writings as inspired of God? Should these writings be attached to the end of the Old Testament?

The answer comes from history as well as the scriptures themselves.

## **Jews rejected the Apocrypha**

An important source of authority on whether the Apocrypha is inspired are the 1st century Jews. Although the Jewish people at this time were divided into various factions, they nearly all recognized one set of scriptures, the collection

of books that we call the Old Testament. Originally written in Hebrew, these scriptures, known to them as the *Tanakh*, were copied and preserved by Jewish scribes who adhered to strict rules for copying and preserving scriptures. It was under the authority of this Jewish politico-religious system with its collection of scriptures that God’s Son Yeshua was born.

The Apostle Paul even acknowledged the role of the Jews in preserving the scriptures. While assuring Gentile Christians that being a spiritual Jew is more important than being a physical Jew, Paul admits that the Jewish nation was still important because they were entrusted preserving God’s Word.

“*Then what advantage has the Jew? . . .*”, wrote Paul. “*To begin with, the Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God.*” (Romans 2:1-2).

By oracles Paul meant the actual utterances of Yahweh, given to Moses and the prophets (See Acts 7:38).

As an adult, Jesus had many differences

with Herod, the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes, but not once did he challenge their fixed canon of scriptures. There were differences in groupings and arrangements of the Old Testament; and there were even various versions, including some Greek translations. However, there was near unanimity as to which books were inspired. With the exception of the Samaritans who only accepted the Five Books of Moses, the Jewish people were all reading “the same Bible”.

If God’s Holy Spirit had influenced the composition of the Apocrypha as it did the other Old Testament writings, then God would have mostly certainly seen fit for the Jews to incorporate it into the very “Bible” that Jesus read. Yet, in their many years of copying and preserving scriptures, the Jews have never recognized the Apocrypha as inspired scripture, and there is no evidence that any of the various versions of the Old Testament at the time of Jesus contained the Apocrypha.

### **Jesus did not recognize the Apocrypha**

Proponents of the Apocrypha might argue that Jesus grew up reading the official Hebrew Scriptures but later incorporated the suppressed Apocryphal writings into the Christian canon. However, there is no evidence supporting this theory.

To the contrary, there is evidence that Jesus — by implication — did not recognize the Apocrypha as inspired by God.

When recalling those killed for the cause of righteousness during the pre-Messianic era, Jesus said, “[F]rom the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it shall be required of this generation” (Luke 11:49-51).

Thus Jesus recognizes Abel as the first martyr recorded in the Old Testament and Zechariah as the last (Genesis 4:8; 2 Chronicles 24:20).

It is important to note that Jesus did not mention the subsequent martyrdom of the woman and her seven sons as told in the Apocryphal

Book of 2 Maccabees. Evidently, Jesus did not regard the Apocrypha as inspired scripture.

### **400-years of prophetic lull**

Another piece of evidence against the idea that the Apocrypha is inspired is the apparent 400 years of prophetic inactivity between the time of Malachi and the first coming of Jesus Christ.

This apparent 400-year lull began with the warning in the Book of Malachi that closed the Old Testament and it ended with the coming of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ.

*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse (Malachi 4:5-6).*

*And the disciples asked him, “Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” He replied, “Elijah does come, and he is to restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of man will suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist (Matthew 17:10-13).*

Even the writers of the apocryphal books acknowledge that there were no prophets in Israel at their time.

*So there was great distress in Israel, such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them (1 Maccabees 9:27).*

*The Jews and their priests have resolved that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise (1 Maccabees 14:41).*

### **Miscellaneous**

In addition to the above grounds for rejection of the Apocrypha as inspired, please also note that the Apocrypha -- unlike the Old

Testament -- is nowhere quoted in the New Testament. The Apocrypha is also tainted with errors in fact and time and contains fabulous statements which not only contradict the “canonical” scriptures but also itself. For example, Seleucid Greek King Antiochus Epiphanes, the dreaded enemy of the Jews, dies three different deaths in three different locations (1 Maccabees 6:8-16, 2 Maccabees 1:13-16; 2 Maccabees 9:19-29).

And finally, the Apocrypha promotes doctrines inconsistent with scripture, such as offering money for the sins of the dead, (2 Maccabees 12:43-45); the pre-existence of the soul (Wisdom of Solomon 8:19-20), almsgiving as an atonement for sin (Ecclesiasticus 3:30); and the command to use magic (Tobit 6:5-8).

### **Conclusion**

If God wanted an extra set of writings included in His scriptures, He would have seen fit for the scribes, the early church, or Jesus Christ himself to incorporate them. If God wants his people to hear something, he has no problem delivering the message. “The law of the Yahweh is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Yahweh is sure, making wise the simple.”

Although the Apocryphal writings should not be used as a source for moral truth, they could be profitable for historical purposes like the writings of Homer, Josephus, Shakespeare, and Mark Twain. Indeed, I, your modern-day scribe quoted from the Apocrypha to prove that the Apocrypha is not inspired.

Let us continue to live by every word of God; shun any attempts to supplement His Word; and be satisfied that He has given us “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (1 Peter 1:3). 

The Apocrypha (from the Greek word apokryphos, meaning hidden or concealed) is a group of writings between the third and first centuries B.C.E. in the period between the Old and New Testaments.

# Brethren Celebrate The Feast of Unleavened Bread

Brethren from Church of God Imus, and Manila (COGSV) held its combined Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread celebration in a hotel located in Pasay City, Metro Manila on April 11, 2017.

Four elders/speakers were slotted to speak for the whole-day assembly. The morning service started with a music prelude followed by an opening prayer by Max Noble. Mr. Raul Hipe spoke on the importance of “bringing offerings” both in its historical and future fulfillment as exemplified by the Lord Jesus Christ and magnified in New Testament writings and Mr. Dave Garalde expounded on the importance of “unity in the body” as given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11. Mr. Robert Torda and Mr. Cesar Lumbuan spoke in the afternoon, both expressed the importance of our calling in relation to our “de-leavening” and our future destiny and glorification in the kingdom of God.

The services were also graced with a special music offering by the children and teenagers entitled “Highly Exalted”. In the afternoon, a choir of men and women accentuated the service by singing “The Servant’s King”. Ms. Gina Constantino directed both music offerings. Overall, 45 brethren and families coming from as far as Nueva Ecijah, Zambales, Indang Cavite, and one came from Melbourne, Australia attended the combined services. Truly, this is one of those feast days where the psalmist King David described as “good and pleasant”:

*Submitted by Raul De Asis Hipe*

Members and Guests of the Chicagoland Church of God gathered together for Sabbath during the Feast and the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. For the Sabbath and the Last Day, the brethren gathered at the Patterson home after service for fellowship.

Guests included Norman and Marleen Edwards, Richard and Marianne Traver from Colorado, Tom Baca from Michigan, and Karen Greenwood and her husband from Indiana. On the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, Richard Traver gave two self-split sermons including one entitled “We are NOT under the law”. Special music, *You are Holy (Prince of Peace)* by Michael W. Smith, was performed by Norm and Marleen.

Richard Traver has his own website [www.goldensheaves.org](http://www.goldensheaves.org) (See ad this issue) and is a regular contributor to *Shepherds Voice Magazine*. He has made a long-time effort to produce a lot of basic Bible teaching literature as well as more in depth studies. Those looking for help on subjects are encouraged to visit his site. The group was blessed and appreciative of those who travelled to visit with us. God presence was there and conversation on future cooperation between the Colorado



brethren here with us looks very promising. Tom Baca is an experienced producer, videographer and editor. Interestingly, Norm and I have been discussing Christian books and film for sometime now. The three of us had several valuable discussions about future projects.

There is common thread between *Shepherd’s Voice Magazine*, *Golden Sheaves*, and future books and movies. They are all teaching tools that may be used by independent congregations, seeking and trusting God for guidance. Each project stands



or falls on its own. If God is behind it, He will provide the necessary people and funds. If God is not behind it, we do not want to do it. This is the lesson of *How God Works—from the Book of Acts* in action. The apostles never collected money from the brethren then tried to decide how to spend it. They did the work God gave them to do, and God provided for their needs as they went.

May God bless His Feasts and those who serve Him everywhere!

*Jim Patterson*

# Golden Sheaves

P.O. Box 1411, Clifton, CO 81520

Study Resources/  
Audio Sermons and  
In-depth Articles  
Request our 16-page  
article/booklet  
listing

[www.goldensheaves.org](http://www.goldensheaves.org)

continued from page 27

that has infiltrated corporate churches is a leading cause of division amongst the Churches of God. The operation of a church as business and the need for self-preservation under fear is an offense to the Truth.

Ultimately, Jesus Christ is the head of His Church, which we may all attest to, but we often fail to fear the reality that comes with this. Jesus Christ will certainly judge the motivations behind all individuals and groups, but we should take serious note: He is already judging it, and we should take heed on how He is doing it:

*“Every plant which My Heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch” (Matthew 15:13-14).*

This statement follows the exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees regarding their incorporation of specific sectarian traditions into worship and His disciples concern of having offended them, but Christ’s judgment here applies to every tree that has not been planted by His Father being uprooted. This included persons, groups of persons, their doctrines and traditions as well. Every

one of us should consider our own potential blindness to what manmade traditions we are supporting. As this article demonstrated, the Father has not ordained corporate church models with hierarchical, sectarian and business like attributes. We have already seen that, when left alone, many of the leaders and the followers of such institutions have fallen into the ditch. There seems to be no intervention necessary by the Church Head.

Whether they are independent or operating under a corporate banner, ministry leaders should fear the One who sits on the throne and not the opinion of men they serve, regardless of the cost. We hope this article inspires you, the reader, to be sober in your ministry service to God, assuming of course that head office permits your reading of it. 

The screenshot shows the website interface for Shepherd's Voice Magazine. It includes a navigation bar with links for Home, Articles, Digital Magazines, Order Magazine, and About Us. The main content area features several article cards: 'THE JOY IN OVERCOMING' with a hand icon, 'STONES FOR AND UNSEEN BUILDING - SVM SPRING-SUMMER 2011' with a dove icon, and 'SCRIBE'S SQUARE' with a person icon. There are also buttons for 'Read More' and 'ASK NORM'.

Visit Shepherd's Voice Magazine on the Web  
[www.shepherdsvoicemagazine.org](http://www.shepherdsvoicemagazine.org)  
and interact with the site to read articles on your  
computer, tablet or phone!  
Download past issues and send your questions to  
Ask Norm!

Shepherd's Voice Magazine®  
Winter Spring 2017

Shepherd's Voice Magazine®  
PO Box 474  
Port Austin, MI 48467-0474  
USA

Looking for previous issues of Shepherd's Voice?



Please request using the  
email or mailing addresses listed on the inside cover