

# **CHURCH HISTORY & PURITAN THEOLOGY**



## **JEWISH SYNAGOGUE AS MODEL FOR ANCIENT CHURCH**

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## A HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

“The Ancient Jewish Synagogues as the  
Presbyterian and Congregational Model for the Early Church”<sup>1</sup>

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by

Roderick O. Ford, Litt.D., LL.D.

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<sup>1</sup> Roderick O. Ford, *The Apostolate Papers* (unpublished research papers, 2015 to 2022).  
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# **“The Ancient Jewish Synagogues as the Presbyterian and Congregational Model for the Early Church”<sup>2</sup>**

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## Chapter One

### “The Elders of Ancient Israel”

Now when the Jewish synagogue emerged several centuries after the nation-state of Israel had collapsed, it was utilized primarily as an instrument of cultural preservation and survival, as “little sacred republics.”<sup>3</sup> “Since the liturgy has no sacrifice, *no priesthood is required* for public worship [in the synagogue]. Because each synagogue is *autonomous*, its erection, its maintenance, and its rabbi and officials reflect the desires of the *local community*.”<sup>4</sup> And only 10 Jewish laymen were needed to found a local synagogue or *minyan*.<sup>5</sup>

The sacred offices of Prophet and Priest and King— three of the most important functions within the constitution of ancient Israel— were not contained within the ancient Jewish synagogue. Instead, those synagogues were *democratically administered* and led by *common laymen* known as Israel’s ruling elders or presbyters. These were the same genre of men—i.e., men of integrity, honor, and leadership— whom Moses had relied upon when designating the *judges of Israel*<sup>6</sup> and when appointing the *70 elders* of ancient Israel.<sup>7</sup>

#### The Three Crowns of the Constitution of Israel

<b>CROWN</b> <b>The Keter Torah</b>	<b>CROWN</b> <b>The Keter Kehunah</b>	<b>CROWN</b> <b>The Keter Malkhut</b>
The <i>Prophetic function</i> : to interpret the <i>Torah</i> ; “the domain of constitutional interpretation.”	The <i>Priestly function</i> : “the domain of the priesthood”; connecting people to God; the ritual and sacerdotal function.	The <i>Kingly function</i> : “the domain—literally crown—of civil rule.”

<sup>3</sup> William Goodell, *The Democracy of Christianity, or; An Analysis of the Bible and its Doctrines in Their Relation to the Principles of Democracy* (New York, N.Y.: Cady and Burgess, 1852), p. 468.

<sup>4</sup> “Synagogue,” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/synagogue>.

<sup>5</sup> “Minyan,” Wikipedia (online encyclopedia) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minyan>; “Minyan,” <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10865-minyan>.

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 18:25-26.

<sup>7</sup> Numbers 11: 16-30; Deuteronomy 1: 10-18.

Men and Women with a Special call directly from God to speak His Word.	Kohen Gadol (Chief Priest)  Priests  Levites	King (Judah/ Israel)  12 Princes  <b>70 Elders</b> (Future Synagogue Leaders beginning during the 3 <sup>rd</sup> century, B.C.)  <b>Judges/ Officers/ Elders</b> (Future Synagogue Leaders beginning during the 3 <sup>rd</sup> century, B.C.) <sup>8</sup>
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<sup>8</sup> “Jewish Virtual Library: A Project of Aice,” <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/elder>

ELDER (Heb. זָקֵן, zaken). In Israel, as among all other ancient peoples, the elder is not only a person of advanced age, but also a man of distinct social grade (cf. šībūm in Akkadian, senator in Latin, geron in Greek, and sheikh in Arabic). The elders were the consulting body of the city, the nation, or the king respectively, and as such were considered "the wise" (cf. Ezek. 7:26 with Jer. 18:18). As a social institution, various types of elders are named: elders of a people (Israel, Judah, Moab, and Midian, Num. 22:4, 7; Egypt, Gen. 50:7); elders of an area (Gilead, Judg. 11:5–11); elders of a tribe (Deut. 31:28); elders of the Diaspora (Jer. 29:1); elders of the priests (II Kings 19:2; Jer. 19:1); elders of the city (passim); and elders of the house (i.e., palace, Gen. 50:7; II Sam. 12:17). The most prominent are the elders of the people or the country and the elders of the city....

In ancient Israel, as in the Hittite state, the judges were associated or even identical with officers and military commanders (Ex. 18:21; Deut. 1:15). That the officer and the elder had much in common is evident from Isaiah 3:14, Ezra 10:8, et al. In I Kings 21:11, they act together (for the interchange of "noble" with "officer," cf. Jer. 39:6 with 52:10; Jer. 27:20 with II Kings 24:14)....

The emergence of the elders has been explained in the Pentateuch etiologically. According to Exodus 18, it was Jethro who advised Moses to establish a judicial-social organ in order to help him judge the people. (In the desert setting of the narrative there was no distinction between the elders of the town and the elders of the congregation.) In Numbers 11, following Moses' complaint that he cannot manage the people by himself, the Lord draws from some of the spirit of Moses and instills it in the 70 elders who are to assist him. In Deuteronomy 1:9ff., finally, Moses himself proposes that he pick men from the tribes in order to create the judicial body. These three traditions present different outlooks on the quality of the elder-judge in ancient Israel. In Exodus 18, the attributes of the chosen men are fear of God, trustworthiness, and honesty. In Numbers 11, it is the spirit of God, i.e., divine inspiration (cf. the judge in the period of the Judges, Judg. 3:10; 6:34; et al.), which makes a man a member of the elders' council. In Deuteronomy 1, intellectual capacity (wisdom, understanding, and knowledge) makes a man fit to judge. The description in Deuteronomy is apparently the latest, since it reflects the aristocratic approach, which places wisdom at the top of the ladder of values (cf. e.g., Prov. 8:15–16; et al)....

The functions of the elders of the people were (1) to represent the people in the sacral covenant and in the proclamation of the law (Ex. 19:7; 24:1, 9; Deut. 27:1; 29:9; 31:9; Josh. 8:33; 24:1; cf. II Kings 23:1); (2) to appoint a leader or a king (I Sam. 8:4; Judg. 11:5–11); (3) to proclaim war (Josh. 8:10; II Sam. 17:4–15; cf. I Kings 20:7); (4) to conduct political negotiations and make agreements (Ex. 3:16, 18; 4:29; Num. 16:25; II Sam. 3:17; 5:3); (5) to perform sacred ceremonies (Ex. 12:21; 18:12; Lev. 9:1; I Sam. 4:3; I Kings 8:1, 3; I Chron. 16:25); and (6) to act in times of

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These honored men, who were the elders of ancient Israel, were concerned with, among other things, the administration of the “**moral laws**” of the Decalogue, as well as the “**judicial laws**” of ancient Israel. See **Appendix A**, “The Judicial Laws of Ancient Israel.” Judaism thus became deeply concerned with the rule of law.<sup>9</sup> Its religion was lawyerly.<sup>10</sup> Its Rabbis tended to be “lawyers” as well as

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national crisis (Ex. 17:5–6; Josh. 7:6; I Sam. 4:3; I Chron. 21:16). The elders held their meetings near the city gate (Deut. 21:19; 22:15; 25:7; Ruth 4:1ff.; Lam. 5:14), and more precisely in the square located next to the gate (Job 29:7)....

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Jewish and Harvard law professor Alan M. Dershowitz’s *Abraham: The World’s First (But Certainly Not Last) Jewish Lawyer* (New York, N.Y.: Schocken Books, 2015), p. 28 (“God the Divine Teacher for His student and messenger Abraham in order to prepare him to **‘instruct’ his progeny to do justice.**” And, see, *Ibid*, pp. 122-123, stating “Our Torah commands us to pursue justice (**‘Justice, justice shall thou pursue’**) and not stand idly by the blood of our neighbor. Our Talmud is the first religious compendium to preserve a record of legal arguments—with dissenting and concurring opinions. We fought against persecution, discrimination, and victimization for millennia. Our rabbis have served as advocates, judges, and lawmakers, resolving disputes among quarrelling Jews for centuries.”

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “Why are there So Many Jewish Lawyers?” <https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/devarim/why-are-there-so-many-jewish-lawyers/>, stating:

At the beginning of the book of Devarim, Moses reviews the history of the Israelites’ experience in the wilderness, starting with the appointment of leaders throughout the people, heads of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. He continues:

I charged your judges at that time: “Hear the disputes among your people and judge fairly, between one person and another, whether the case is between two Israelites or between an Israelite and a foreigner residing among you. Do not show partiality in judgment: listen equally to the small and the great. Do not be intimidated by any man, for judgment belongs to God. Any case that is too difficult for you, bring to it me and I will hear it.

Deut. 1:16-17

Thus at the outset of the book in which he summarised the entire history of Israel and its destiny as a holy people, he already gave priority to the administration of justice: something he would memorably summarise in a later chapter (Deut. 16:20) in the words, “Justice, justice, shall you pursue.” The words for justice, *tzedeq* and *mishpat*, are repeated, recurring themes of the book. The root *tz-d-k* appears eighteen times in Devarim; the root *sh-f-t*, forty-eight times.

Justice has seemed, throughout the generations, to lie at the beating heart of Jewish faith....

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Three features mark Judaism as a distinctive faith. First is the radical idea that when God reveals Himself to humans He does so in the form of law. In the ancient world, God was power. In Judaism, God is order, and order presupposes law. In the natural world of cause and effect, order takes the form of scientific law. But in the human world, where we have freewill, order takes the form of moral law. Hence the name of the Mosaic books: Torah, which means ‘direction, guidance, teaching,’ but above all ‘law.’ The most basic meaning<sup>[5]</sup> of the most fundamental principle of Judaism, Torah min haShamayim, ‘Torah from Heaven,’ is that God, not humans, is the source of binding law.

Second, we are charged with being interpreters of the law. That is our responsibility as heirs and guardians of the Torah she-be-al peh, the Oral Tradition. The phrase in which Moses describes the voice the people heard at the revelation at Sinai, kol gadol velo yasaf, is understood by the commentators in two seemingly contradictory ways. On the one hand it means ‘the voice that was never heard again’; on the other, it means ‘the voice that did not cease,’ that is, the voice that was ever heard again.<sup>[6]</sup> There is, though, no contradiction. The voice that was never heard again is the one that represents the Written Torah. The voice that is ever heard again is that of the Oral Torah.

The Written Torah is min ha-shamayim, “from Heaven,” but about the Oral Torah the Talmud insists Lo ba-shamayim hi, “It is not in Heaven.”<sup>[7]</sup> Hence Judaism is a continuing conversation between the Giver of the law in Heaven and the interpreters of the law on Earth. That is part of what the Talmud means when it says that “Every judge who delivers a true judgment becomes a partner with the Holy One, blessed be He, in the work of creation.” (Shabbat 10a)

Third, fundamental to Judaism is education, and fundamental to education is instruction in Torah, that is, the law. That is what Isaiah meant when he said, “Listen to Me, you who know justice, the people in whose heart is My law; do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their insults.” (Is. 51:7)....

This is what Josephus meant when he said, nineteen hundred years ago, “Should any one of our nation be asked about our laws, he will repeat them as readily as his own name.” The result of our thorough education in our laws from the very dawn of intelligence is that they are, as it were, engraved on our souls. To be a Jewish child is to be, in the British phrase, “learned in the law.” We are a nation of constitutional lawyers.

Why? Because Judaism is not just about spirituality. It is not simply a code for the salvation of the soul. It is a set of instructions for the creation of what the late Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein zt”l called “societal beatitude.” It is about bringing God into the shared spaces of our collective life. That needs law: law that represents justice, honouring all humans alike regardless of colour or class; law that judges impartially between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, even in extremis between humanity and God; law that links God, its Giver, to us, its interpreters, the law that alone allows freedom to coexist with order, so that my freedom is not bought at the cost of yours.

Small wonder, then, that there are so many Jewish lawyers....



theologians, and its scholars were “doctors of the law.”<sup>11</sup> There were several scriptural references to the duty of judges to serve nobly, honorably, and justly when discharging their duties and functions, such as:

Exodus 23: 6-9	Judges; Duty to Judge Honestly and Fairly; Equality before the Law; Protect against Oppression of the Poor and Strangers
Leviticus 19:15, 35-37	Judges; Duty to Judge Honestly and Fairly; Equality before the Law; Protect against Oppression of the Poor and Strangers
Deuteronomy 16:18-20	Judges; Duty to Judge Honestly and Fairly; Equality before the Law; Protect against Oppression of the Poor and Strangers

For example, in Exodus, chapter 18, it is reported that:

And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves.<sup>12</sup>

With no modern-day legal or constitutional doctrine of “church-state” separation, the diasporic Jews perpetuated their cultural and religious traditions of living under, and applying, the Torah to their everyday lives. For this reason, both “civil law” and the Torah played a central role in the administration of the synagogue.

As the rabbinic class rose in power, criteria that may be deemed ‘non-religious’ began to fall under the control of the rabbis, and therefore, the “religious” domain. In terms of legal matters, Tannaitic cases may relate to settlements for divorce/widowhood, damages for public shaming, deeds dating on the Sabbath, and so on. Despite the fact that other venues were available for resolving legal matters, the rabbinic

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<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., references to the “doctors of the law” in the New Testament in Luke 5:17; 7:30; 11:45-46, 52; 14:3; Acts 4:5; 1 Tim. 1:7.

<sup>12</sup> Exodus 18:25-26. See, also, Deuteronomy 1: 16-17.

judges served as an alternate, and seemingly popular, venue. Generally, rabbinic legal activity revolved around property and family issues, which occasionally intersected with ritual law such as in Deut. 5-10 and *halîsâ*, a ceremony concerning the obligation of a man to marry his brother's childless widow. Quite simply, aside from the reading and studying of the Torah, the separation of religious and non-religious functions is not as clear as one may assume in terms of the activities performed in the ancient synagogue. Whether separate or not, both religious and non-religious activities attributed to the synagogue originated in response to communal requirements, differing in distribution throughout the ancient world with the exception of the study of the Torah, around which the synagogue's ultimate purpose revolved....<sup>13</sup>

The Jewish rabbis were, among other things, theologians, pastors, administrators, judges, and lawyers. The Jews of Jesus' day were well-versed in Torah, not only as religion but as the constitutional law of the nation-state of ancient Israel. The office of "doctor of law" was very prominent amongst their elders and within the Jewish synagogue.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "The Ancient Synagogues, A.D. 1st Century" <https://factsanddetails.com/world/cat55/sub351/entry-5718.html>.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., references to the "doctors of the law" in the New Testament in Luke 5:17; 7:30; 11:45-46, 52; 14:3; Acts 4:5; 1 Tim. 1:7.

## Chapter Two

### “The Jewish Diaspora and the Synagogue”

The Jewish synagogue arose up in response to, and as a remedy for, the collapse of ancient Israel’s and ancient Judah’s constitutions. Such episodes of collapse were usually preceded by either a moral decline or political subjugation to foreign powers. Thus, the Jewish synagogue functioned as a “mini” civil government—as a “mini” republic. In other words, the Jewish nation-state—which had collapsed or come under the dominance of foreign powers— was folded down and repackaged in the form of the Jewish synagogue, without priest or prophet or king! Priests and prophets joined the synagogues, but the synagogues remained, fundamentally, “lay” Jewish organizations.

And, here, it will not be inappropriate to note that the churches of Jesus Christ— as the *ecclesia*— stepped into the shoes of the ancient Jewish synagogue and assumed the same status of the “mini” republic within ancient Judea, northern Africa, Asia minor, and throughout the Greco-Roman world,<sup>15</sup> following the collapse of the Second Temple in 70 AD. Whereas the Jewish synagogue was primarily Jewish, the Christian church-synagogues were much more multilingual,

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<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., “The Church,” *New Advent* <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm>, stating:

In order to understand the precise force of this word, something must first be said as to its employment by the Septuagint translators of the Old Testament. Although in one or two places (Psalm 25:5; Judith 6:21; etc.) the word is used without religious signification, **merely in the sense of "an assembly"**, this is not usually the case. Ordinarily it is employed as the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew qahal, i.e., **the entire community of the children of Israel viewed in their religious aspect**. Two Hebrew words are employed in the Old Testament to signify the congregation of Israel, viz. qahal 'edah. In the Septuagint these are rendered, respectively, *ekklesia* and *synagoge*. Thus in Proverbs 5:14, where the words occur together, "in the midst of the church and the congregation", the Greek rendering is *en meso ekklesias kai synagoges*. The distinction is indeed not rigidly observed — thus in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, both words are regularly represented by *synagoge* — but it is adhered to in the great majority of cases, and may be regarded as an established rule. In the writings of the New Testament the words are sharply distinguished. With them *ecclesia* denotes the Church of Christ; *synagoga*, the Jews still adhering to the worship of the Old Covenant. Occasionally, it is true, *ecclesia* is employed in its general significance of "assembly" (Acts 19:32; 1 Corinthians 14:19); and *synagoga* occurs once in reference to a gathering of Christians, though apparently of a non-religious character (James 2:2) But *ecclesia* is never used by the Apostles to denote the Jewish Church. The word as a technical expression had been transferred to the community of Christian believers.

multicultural, and cosmopolitan. The Jewish synagogues were inward looking and ethnically provincial, but the Christian church-synagogue was outward looking and invited converts from all nations. Nevertheless, like their Jewish counterparts, the Christian church-synagogue upheld high moral and ethical standards that were, ultimately, an affront to envioning Greco-Roman civilization.

### **Collapse of the United Kingdom of Israel (Judah and Samaria)**

Therefore, to understand how the synagogue emerged as a “mini-civil government,” in order to replicate the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, a brief history on the decline and fall of those kingdoms are appropriate.

King Saul was anointed the first king of a unified Kingdom of Israel in, circa, 1037 B.C. This kingdom remained unified during the reigns of kings David and Solomon. King Solomon built the First Temple at Jerusalem during, circa, 957 B.C.<sup>16</sup>

The Kingdom of Israel later split into two separate kingdoms—the southern Kingdom of Judah and the northern Kingdom of Israel—during the brief reign of Solomon’s son, King Rehoboham, in, circa, 930 B.C.

The northern Kingdom of Israel went into Assyrian captivity during the year 720 B.C. The southern Kingdom of Judah went into Babylonian captivity in, circa, 587 B.C. Following the collapse of the unified Kingdom of Israel and subsequent captivities of the two divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the political, social, economic, and religious conditions of the Jewish people would never return to their pre-captivity state.

The Jewish people would never again attain complete political independence, and their leaders remained as “clients” of greater and envioning political powers, empires, and emperors. They became “messianic,” while hoping and waiting for a God-sent king and prophet in order to lead the Jews to political independence and glory.

The hope of these exiled and post-exilic Jews remained in the words of Moses himself, who had said the Book of Deuteronomy that “[t]he Lord thy God

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<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., “Temple of Jerusalem,” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Temple-of-Jerusalem>.

will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.”<sup>17</sup>

The prophet Daniel (6<sup>th</sup> century, B.C.), who lived during the period of the Babylonian and Persian captivities, spoke of a “Messiah the Prince,”<sup>18</sup> and provided a specific number of years from the year in which he prophesied until the birth and ministry of this Messiah—70 “prophetic” weeks or 490 years.<sup>19</sup> The end of this period coincides approximately with the ministry and crucifixion of Christ in, circa, 29 to 34 A.D.<sup>20</sup>

### A. The Development of Synagogues

Meanwhile, the Persians dominated ancient Judea from between, circa, 583 – 333 B.C.<sup>21</sup> The Jews returned to ancient Judea in, circa, 538 B.C., following the Edict of Cyrus the Great (the Persian emperor). Thus, the Jews lived under the grace and rule of the Persian empire from, circa, 538 to 333 B.C. The “Second Temple” was rebuilt in Jerusalem during the period 520 – 515 B.C. And the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah lead a Reformation during the period, circa, 450 to 400 B.C.

The Hellenistic Greeks dominated ancient Judea from between 333 B.C. to 63 B.C.<sup>22</sup> In the Apocrypha, the *First* and *Second Books of the Maccabees* cover this period.

And the ancient Roman empire, which was first led by Pompey, Julius Caesar, and Caesar Augustus, dominated ancient Judea from 63 B.C. up through

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<sup>17</sup> Deuteronomy 18:15.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel 9:25-27.

<sup>19</sup> “Biblical Christianity,” <https://biblical-christianity.com/daniels-seventy-weeks-timeline>; “What Are the 70 Weeks of Daniel? What Does this End Times Prophecy Mean?” <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/end-times/what-are-the-70-weeks-of-daniel-what-does-this-end-times-prophecy-mean.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “Timeline of Judaism after Babylonian Exile (538 B.C. to 70 A.D.)” <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/timeline-of-judaism-after-the-babylonian-exile-538-bce-70-ce>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

the period of Christ's ministry and crucifixion and the founding of the Early Church during the next several centuries.<sup>23</sup>

Under this long period of political domination and suzerainty, Jewish people felt compelled to develop creative, alternative methods of worship and cultural preservation—and the Jewish or Samaritan synagogue system developed. It was originally and primarily designed to provide a holy place for worship for those ordinary Jews (and Samaritans) who could not reach the Second Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>24</sup>

After the Second Temple was rebuilt during the post-exilic eras of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jewish priesthood and the chief priests fell out of favor with many ordinary Jews who more and more viewed the Temple leadership as corrupt.

The Greek king Antíochus Epíphanes in 175 BC replaced the priest of Zádok with his own high priest (Jason), breaking the commanded family line of Aaronic succession. High priests then would no longer serve for life, but were appointed and dismissed at the whims of the ruling power. These priests usually supported the ruling power, instead of having allegiance to God and the Jewish people. Priests controlled the temple. With the temple priesthood viewed as corrupt by many, synagogues started cropping up.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, it is likely that the rise of the Jewish synagogue occurred as a knee-jerk reaction to the political corruption of the Jewish high priests and religious elite who controlled the administration and politics of the Second Temple, particularly during the Greco-Roman period 333 B.C. to 70 A.D.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> “The Ancient Synagogue in Israel and the Diaspora,” <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/828/the-ancient-synagogue-in-israel--the-diaspora/> (“Individuals living within the Diaspora experienced a disconnection from the Temple in a period much earlier than 70 CE. As a result, accommodations and supplementary modes of worship developed for those who were unable to make the pilgrimage to the Temple.”)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Three

### “Synagogue: A Lay Religious Organization”

The synagogue began, not in ancient Judea, but in Egypt (northern Africa or “the land of Ham”)<sup>26</sup> in, circa, 280 B.C.<sup>27</sup> It thus began as a non-priestly, lay organization— i.e., a lay religious society--<sup>28</sup> in the diasporic Jewish community in Africa. Even today, Jewish rabbis are not “priests”<sup>29</sup> but rather they are lay ministers (i.e., scholars and law teachers). “Early synagogues were controlled by the laity.”<sup>30</sup> “Unlike the [Temple] priesthood, the synagogue was mostly an unpaid lay institution, in the hands of elders (zakén h2205, Hebrew).”<sup>31</sup>

In antiquity, there was a variety of terms that represented the structure, although some of these were not exclusive to the synagogue and may refer to something else, such as a temple. These terms include *proseuchē*, meaning "prayer house" or "prayer hall"; *synagoge*, meaning "a gathering place"; *hagios topos*, meaning "holy place"; *qahal*, meaning "assembly"; and *bet kneset* or *bet ha-kneset*,

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<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., Psalm 105: 23, 27.

<sup>27</sup> “**Synagogues** began in 280 BC as a simple group of spiritually minded common Jewish men (Non-Levite) in Egypt devoted to reading the Torah and prayer.”

Source: <https://www.bible.ca/synagogues/Government-organization-Elders-officials-attendants-Synagogue-Independent-overseer-shepherd-first-century-early-Christian-Church-New-Testament-prototype-ancient.htm>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> “Rabbis, Priests, and Other Religious Functionaries,” <https://www.jewfaq.org/rabbi> (“A rabbi is not a priest, neither in the Jewish sense of the term nor in the Christian sense of the term. In the Christian sense of the term, a priest is a person with special authority to perform certain sacred rituals. A rabbi, on the other hand, has no more authority to perform rituals than any other adult male member of the Jewish community.... **A rabbi is simply a teacher, a person sufficiently educated in *halakhah* (Jewish law)** and tradition to instruct the community and to answer questions and resolve disputes regarding *halakhah*.”)

<sup>30</sup> “Synagogue Influence on the Church,” <https://bibletopicexpo.wordpress.com/2014/08/24/synagogue-influence-on-the-church/>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

meaning "the house of gathering". The oldest term, *proseuchē*, originated in 3rd century BCE Hellenistic Egypt and clearly identifies a key characteristic of the structure: prayer.<sup>32</sup>

The synagogue was nothing short of a local civil government for Jewish communities throughout the Jewish diaspora.<sup>33</sup> Now under besiege by the foreign powers (i.e., the Greco-Roman empires), the Jews needed to carry on, and in many respect they utilized the synagogue to carry out the same administrative functions assigned under the Mosaic law.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "The Ancient Synagogue in Israel and the Diaspora," <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/828/the-ancient-synagogue-in-israel--the-diaspora/>. The Black Church of the United States, through necessity, followed a similar pattern. See, e.g., Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church* (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, 1921), p. 282 ("The [Negro] church serves as a moral force, a power acting as a restraint upon the bad and stimulating the good to further moral achievement. Among the Negroes its valuable service is readily apparent...."); W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Souls of Black Folk," *Writings* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1986), p. 496 ("[T]he [Negro] Church often stands as a real conservator of morals, a strengthener of family life, and the final authority on what is Good and Right"); and James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, Vol. One: 1966- 1979 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003), p. 218 ("[T]he Black Church of the nineteenth century... thought of itself as God's judgment upon racism... converted thousands, stabilized the Black family... founded schools and colleges.... And provided the social, cultural, economic, and political base of the entire African American community in the United States.")

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., "The Ancient Synagogue in Israel and the Diaspora," *supra*, stating:

Inscriptural and literary evidence suggests that judicial proceedings, archives, treasuries, prayers, public fasts, communal meals, and lodging for traveling Judeans were all associated with the ancient synagogue. The public reading and teaching of the Torah took precedence over all else by providing the liturgical activity that set the synagogue apart, but the synagogue was much more than a religious institution and must be considered as distinctly different from its predecessor, the Temple.

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., "The Ancient Synagogues, A.D. 1<sup>st</sup> Century" <https://factsanddetails.com/world/cat55/sub351/entry-5718.html>, stating:

The word synagogue is Greek for "place of assembly" or "congregation." It describes a center for social life as well as a place of worship, study and prayer. A typical synagogue has rooms where services and classes take place as well as communal offices, social halls and accommodation for visitors. Many synagogues have schools associated with them. The local synagogue is the most important organizing force in Judaism....

Shaye I.D. Cohen: of Brown University wrote: "The word 'synagogue' is a Greek word, it means a gathering or an assembly, or perhaps a congregation. The synagogue, then, was the point of communal organization of the Jews in the Diaspora. Wherever you have a sufficient number of Jews, you would have a Jewish community. Wherever you would have a Jewish community you would have a Jewish synagogue. The synagogue, then in part, is a community building or a



Ultimately, the synagogue grew in popularity following the destruction of the Temple, allowing prayer and study to replace sacrificial practices as the means of serving God. Unlike the Temple, participation in the synagogue was open to the congregation members who were invited by the synagogue leaders to read scripture and even preach. Although the reading of the Torah became the prominent feature of the synagogue as is reflected through the universal inclusion of the Torah shrine in archaeological remains, the synagogue represented much more than a house of prayer. It was also an institution for teaching, lodging, communal meals, public fasts, judicial proceedings, public floggings, eulogies, nuptial matches, and so on. Essentially, the synagogue represented an ancient community centre, an institution that developed in various Judean communities throughout the ancient world in response to local social needs and preferences. As a result, the synagogue developed in the form of an assembly hall, and although architectural designs may vary, characteristic features such as the Torah shrine assist in identifying them within the archaeological record. Furthermore, the variety of architectural designs revealed that the existence of uniform worship did not require a uniform space.<sup>35</sup>

For this reason, the synagogue was considered to be a community and civic center; there were no prescribed floor plans or designs; there was not specific place that it needed to be constructed; but it only needed to be accessible and beneficial to the common man or woman.

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community place, a place where Jews would gather to discuss matters of communal concern. Sort of like a New England town square, where the citizens would gather regularly to discuss issues of importance. Among the issues that they would discuss, of course, Jews would discuss Judaism. That is to say they would discuss their sacred texts. Many of our sources tell us that Jews would gather in synagogues regularly, perhaps every Saturday on the Sabbath, or perhaps more often than that, in order to read the laws, to read the Torah, the sacred book of Moses and to expound upon it. **And any reader of the New Testament knows that this is what Jesus did in the homeland, in the Galilee, entering the synagogues on the Sabbath and expounding the scriptures. And of course, we also know this from Paul, that in his travels in Asia Minor, Paul routinely went to seek out the local synagogue and therein to teach the scriptures from his peculiar perspective, but teach the scriptures to the Jewish community.”**

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

In addition to the influence of the Greek language upon the Early Church was the influence of the Jewish “synagogue system” of lay teaching and lay worship outside of the priest-led Temple.<sup>36</sup> “The synagogue pattern of service resembled the temple service, but there were no sacrifices. Prayer, blessings, reading from the Torah & Prophets (rarely the Writings), homily teaching (sermon or **deráhsha**) were components of the service.”<sup>37</sup> “Dr. Moseley notes in *The Jewish Background of Christian Baptism* that the church owes to its Jewish beginnings ‘such items as Messiah, Scripture, canon, liturgy, altar, pulpit, church offices, songs, offerings, the Lord’s Supper, as well as baptism.’”<sup>38</sup> Hence, “[s]o much of what is commonly thought of as new for the church in the [New Testament]...wasn’t new!”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> “Synagogue Influence on the Church,” <https://bibletopicexpo.wordpress.com/2014/08/24/synagogue-influence-on-the-church/>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Four

### “Synagogue: A Government of Lay Elders (i.e., Presbyters)”

The ancient Jewish synagogue system which survived and was transferred into the Early Church came from Asia Minor. The New Testament Church was thus built up upon a Greco-Roman foundation in Asia Minor, as the Gentiles, to whom the Apostle Paul was sent, were primarily Greco-Roman.

The Early Church was heavily influenced by Greek and Roman law and culture.<sup>40</sup> For instance, the Apostle Paul founded several churches in Greece, including Philippi,<sup>41</sup> Thessalonica,<sup>42</sup> Corinth,<sup>43</sup> and Ephesus.<sup>44</sup> The Apostle John

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<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., Romans 1:14-15 (“I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians.... So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.”).

<sup>41</sup> “Philippi,” *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* (Online): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippi> (“Philippi ... a major Greek city northwest of the nearby island, Thasos. Its original name was Crenides (Greek: Κρηνίδες, Krenides "Fountains") after its establishment by Thasian colonists in 360/359 BC. The city was renamed by Philip II of Macedon in 356 BC....”). See, also, “Epistle to the Philippians,” *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* (Online): [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistle\\_to\\_the\\_Philippians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistle_to_the_Philippians) (“The Epistle to the Philippians is a Pauline epistle of the New Testament of the Christian Bible. The epistle is attributed to Paul the Apostle and Timothy is named with him as co-author or co-sender. The letter is addressed to the Christian church in Philippi. Paul, Timothy, Silas (and perhaps Luke) first visited Philippi in Greece (Macedonia) during Paul's second missionary journey from Antioch, which occurred between approximately 49 and 51 AD. In the account of his visit in the Acts of the Apostles, Paul and Silas are accused of "disturbing the city").

<sup>42</sup> Thessalonica is located in Greece. “Thessalonica,” *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* (Online): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thessaloniki>. See, also, “Epistle to the Thessalonians,” *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* (Online): [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Epistle\\_to\\_the\\_Thessalonians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Epistle_to_the_Thessalonians) (“The First Epistle to the Thessalonians is a Pauline epistle of the New Testament of the Christian Bible. The epistle is attributed to Paul the Apostle, and is addressed to the church in Thessalonica, in modern-day Greece. It is likely among the first of Paul's letters, probably written by the end of AD 52, though some scholars believe the Epistle to Galatians may have been written by AD 48.”).

<sup>43</sup> Corinth is located in south-central Greece. “Corinth,” *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* (Online): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corinth>. See, also, “Epistle to the Corinthians,” *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* (Online): [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Epistle\\_to\\_the\\_Corinthians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Epistle_to_the_Corinthians). (Paul’s Epistle “addresses various issues that had arisen in the Christian community at Corinth, and is composed in a form of Koine Greek.”)

<sup>44</sup> Ephesus was a city in Greece. “Ephesus,” *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* (Online): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ephesus>

spent several months in Greece on the Island of Patmos where he wrote the *Book of Revelation*, where he wrote to “the seven churches which are in Asia.”<sup>45</sup>

As this pamphlet is designed to address the historical and archeological origins of the Christian church, we shall concentrate on the Greek synagogues of Asia minor, where the Early Church was largely established. In those synagogues, there was a system of elders or presbyters.

Elders or presbyters (πρεσβύτεροι) also played an important role in some synagogues. However, the use of the term in inscriptions seems to be concentrated mainly in **Asia Minor** and southern Italy. It is all but absent from Rome and Egypt, and appears only infrequently in North Africa, Syria, and Palestine. The function of this office is unknown: Was it administrative, financial, religious-liturgical, or all three? The definition of this title may have differed from place to place. **It has often been assumed that the council of presbyters was the chief governing board of a community or congregation, from which archons were then selected to run daily affairs.** In any case, the term “πρεσβύτεροι, presbyteroi” means “old men”, i.e. a congregational or family related collective governing group in addition to the single leading figure.<sup>46</sup>

“[M]ost scholars now agree that synagogue practices were under local leadership.”<sup>47</sup> But it is difficult to know precisely, after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D., if the Levitical priesthood slowly receded from spiritual leadership into oblivion.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, prior to 70 A.D., the Levitical

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<sup>45</sup> Revelation 1:4 (referring to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodiceans).

<sup>46</sup> “Ancient Synagogue Coins,” <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue-functions-leadership-and-organization/>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, stating:

The destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 brought a sharp decline to the priestly political and religious hegemony. It has generally been assumed that in the post-70 era, the priesthood became a vestige of its former self, a kind of honorary caste among the Jews, enjoying no real standing or authority. Lately, however, this picture of an eclipsed priestly class has undergone serious reevaluation. Some scholars argue that literary, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence indicates

priesthood clearly occupied a separate and distinct domain that was in the Temple—and not in the synagogue. Since there are various versions and descriptions of the several offices within the ancient Jewish synagogues, and the synagogues slightly differed throughout the Jewish diaspora, I shall briefly describe below the offices of the Jewish synagogue from two different sources:

### **A. Offices of the ancient Jewish Synagogue (First Source)<sup>49</sup>**

In addition to the board or panel of elders or presbyters (πρεσβύτεροι), which is mentioned above, there were several other titles or official positions within the ancient Jewish synagogue:

- Archisynagogue or archisynagogos (ἀρχισυναγωγός)- this was an honorary title that was bestowed on individuals who sponsored the building of a particular synagogue. Likely, a person who held this title might also be an influential elder within the synagogue itself. (Similarly, Pater synagogues or pater synagogos, an honorific title denoting a major patron and benefactor of the community, was also used to describe the same person who was an archisynagogue.)<sup>50</sup>

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that priests continued to be influential after the First Jewish Revolt, retaining much of their status and contributing to Jewish social, religious, and political dynamics in Palestine for centuries after the year 70. Priestly involvement in synagogues could have been expressed in several ways, including priests who might have served as benefactors or synagogue officials, or had a role in synagogue liturgy. The first two categories have little to do with priestly lineage per se, and the role of a priest as benefactor or synagogue leader was probably acquired for other reasons (social standing in the community, personality, family ties, wealth, or wisdom). One of the strongest pieces of evidence in favor of post-70 priestly involvement in synagogue liturgy, however, is the recognition in rabbinic literature that such was the case. Consistent references to priests in synagogue readings, prayers, blessings, and other ritual activities seem to reflect a tacit (and likely reluctant) acknowledgement that priests retained a high profile in public worship in the second century and beyond. Mishnah Megillah may allude to a central role played by priests in the synagogue liturgy: “Whoever reads the prophetic passages also leads in the recitation of the Shema’, leads in the ‘Amidah, and raises his hand [as part of the priestly blessing].” To give the priestly blessing, the priest may have ascended the bema inside the synagogue building, facing the congregation and with his back towards Jerusalem. Nevertheless, besides the involvement of priests during liturgy there is very little evidence connecting priests to other activities that took place in the synagogue. We do, however, possess attestations for other officials alongside rabbis and priests.

<sup>49</sup> First source: “Ancient Synagogue Coins,” <https://www.ancientsynagoguecoins.com/synagogue-functions-leadership-and-organization/>

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

- Patriarch or nasi (נָשִׂיא)- this was the president or presiding elder (i.e., bishops) of the synagogue. “[Roman] decrees place the patriarch in Jewish communities at the same level as bishops in Christian centers.”<sup>51</sup>
- Archon (ἀρχων)- this was the same person as the patriarch or nasi, and was also often an archisynagogue—one and the same person.<sup>52</sup>
- Grammateus or Phrontistes- this title was assigned to a person who held an administrative, legal, and bureaucratic function within the synagogue.<sup>53</sup>
- Hazzan- this title was assigned to a person who collected pledges, read announcements in the synagogue, and blew the trumpet at special events. The title was more common in the synagogues of ancient Palestine.<sup>54</sup>
- Melamed tinokot- this title was assigned to the school teacher, or to the teacher of young children.<sup>55</sup>

### **B. Offices of the ancient Jewish Synagogue (Second Source)<sup>56</sup>**

We now briefly turn to our second source and, notably, we are told that the formation of a synagogue required ten men (or elders). “It required 10 men (a *minyán*) to form a synagogue (cf. Ru.4:2).”<sup>57</sup> The officers were typically as follows:

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Second source: “Jesus in Synagogue,” <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/jesus-in-the-synagogue>

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

## Officers of the Jewish Synagogue

**Nási/Ruler/Elder** – chief administrator of the synagogue.

**Zaken/Elders** – local elders. Each local elder had one vote. Only elders voted in the synagogue (two brothers who were both elders shared one vote).<sup>58</sup>

**Cházan/Elder** – a presbyter and **public minister**, who prayed and spoke behind a wooden pulpit.<sup>59</sup>

**Shaliách/Elder** – was an emissary sent forth (cf. h7971), like an apostle or migratory evangelist.

**Maggid/ Rabbi/Elder** – was a preacher or teacher.

**Tálmidim** – were students or disciples of the maggid/rabbi.

**Párnasin** or **álmoners** – who were knowledgeable in scripture, cared for the poor and distributed alms. This was a common Jewish appointment, and a prototype for **deacons**.

**NOTE: Nicodemus** was Pharisee, a ruler of a Jewish synagogue (i.e., Nasi), and an early convert to the Christian faith.<sup>60</sup>

Here, it is important to note that the official offices of the Jewish synagogue of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, A.D., merged into the official offices of the Christian church of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, A.D.<sup>61</sup> Neither the synagogue nor the church had “high priests” or

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* (“**Zaken** were unpaid elders/overseers/shepherds usually age 40 and over. Ti.1:5-9 Paul instructed Titus to appoint elders in all cities. (See 1Ti.3:1-7 for qualifications of overseers.) It is said these zaken/elders could be paid to teach (e.g. synagogue schools), but not to shepherd.”)

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* (“The chazan customarily assigned Torah readings, etc. Traditionally he selected seven readers each sabbath – one priest, one Levite, five common Israelites (a literate competent woman also may be allowed to read). In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, usually the chazan wasn’t a paid clergyman, whereas the **cántor** today is paid. The **chazan** stood by to oversee the scripture reading (cf. Lk.4:17, 20). Some historians think the common usage of the terms for overseer, minister, messenger/angel (malák) may tie back to the chazan.”)

<sup>60</sup> John 3: 1.

<sup>61</sup> “Synagogue Organization and Government Synagogue officials (Elders), Attendants (Deacons) Independent Autonomous First Century Synagogues and churches”

“priests” who performed the duties of sacrificing animals. Although the synagogue was officially connected to the Second Temple and to the Levitical priesthood, the new Christian church had substituted Jesus Christ, as High Priest<sup>62</sup> and the final Supreme Sacrifice,<sup>63</sup> for the Second Temple priesthood.

In addition, the Early Christians believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the same “Prophet” whom Moses spoke about, and the “Messiah the Prince” whom Daniel also spoke about; as the Apostle Peter is reported to have stated in the Book of Acts:

The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go....

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.

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<https://www.bible.ca/synagogues/Government-organization-Elders-officials-attendants-Synagogue-Independent-overseer-shepherd-first-century-early-Christian-Church-New-Testament-prototype-ancient.htm>

<sup>62</sup> Hebrews 5:1-10.

<sup>63</sup> Hebrews 9:11-15, stating:

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.



And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, not all Christians agree about the biblical sources for the present-day offices of the Christian clergy. The churches of Jesus Christ have therefore had to contend with an “identity crisis” that stem from the doctrine on the “priesthood of all believers.”

Are Christian clergymen descendants of the Levitical priesthood?

Are Christian clergymen descendants of the Princes, Elders, and Judges of ancient Israel?

The Book of Revelation says that Christ “**hath made us kings and priests** unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen”<sup>65</sup> Peter’s First Epistle say that Christians are a “**chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.**”<sup>66</sup>

It seems clear that Christian clergymen are no different than, and hold no sacerdotal status that is separate and apart from, Christian laymen— because all Christians are a “chosen, priestly, and holy” people.

But the established churches of the West and East have retained a tendency to separate the “clergy” from the “laity” and to give each group a separate social or ecclesiastical standing and status. The senior church positions—with titles of “honor” such as very reverend, right reverend, and most reverend, etc.—including those of pope, cardinal, archbishop, patriarch, bishop, archdeacon, priest, etc., have

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<sup>64</sup> Acts 3: 13, 22-26.

<sup>65</sup> Revelation 1:6.

<sup>66</sup> 1 Peter 2:9.

had the tendency to subordinate and even deprecate the laity of the churches. For this and other reasons, the leaders of the Protestant Reformation revolted against the Roman Catholic Church and also the Church of England.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, after many abuses within the Roman Catholic Church were readily apparent, the Protestant reformers, who were led by Martin Luther (1483 – 1546), searched the Sacred Scriptures of answers to those church abuses, many of which were systematic and structural:

Among the early church fathers, it was noted that **the offices of elder and bishop were identical**, and were not differentiated until later, and that **plurality of elders was the norm for church government**.

St. Jerome (347–420) ‘In Epistle Titus,’ vol. iv, said, ‘Elder is identical with bishop; and before the urging of the devil gave rise to factionalism in religion, so much that it was being said among the people, ‘I am of Paul, I of Apollos, I of Cephas’, the churches were governed by a joint council of elders. After it was... decreed throughout the world that one chosen from among the presbyters should be placed over the others.’

This observation was also made by Chrysostom (349–407) in ‘Homilia i, in Phil. i, 1’ and Theodoret (393–457) in ‘Interpret ad. Phil. Iii,’ 445.

Aerius of Sebaste also attacked the episcopal polity in the 4th century.

Presbyterianism was first described in detail by Martin Bucer of Strasbourg, who believed that the early Christian church implemented presbyterian polity.

The first modern implementation was by the Geneva church under the leadership of John Calvin in 1541.<sup>67</sup>

Similarly, the Rev. William Goodell (1792 – 1878) has pointed out in his masterpiece *The Democracy of Christianity*<sup>68</sup> that the hierarchical structures of the Western church usurped the original collegiate authority of the ruling elders that

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<sup>67</sup> “Presbyterian Polity,” Wikipedia (online encyclopedia): [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presbyterian\\_polity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presbyterian_polity).

<sup>68</sup> William Goodell, *The Democracy of Christianity, or; An Analysis of the Bible and its Doctrines in Their Relation to the Principles of Democracy* (New York, N.Y.: Cady and Burgess, 1852).

had been present within the Jewish synagogues and the Early Church. Thus paraphrasing “Dr. Miller, of Princeton, Essay on Ruling Elders, p. 71,” Rev. Goodell writes:

‘[T]hose who both ruled and taught, bore the name of bishops, inspectors or overseers, during the apostolic age, and for a long time afterwards....

‘We find, moreover, the same chiefest of the apostles (Paul) giving the title of bishop and elder, without discrimination, to all the church rulers directed to be ordained in Ephesus and Crete, as the Epistles to Timothy and Titus plainly evince. In those pure and simple times no difficulty arose from this general application of a plain and expensive title. For more than one hundred years after the apostolic age, this title continued to be frequently applied in the same manner, as the writings of Clemons Romanus, Hermes, Irenaeus, and others, amply testify. We find them not only speaking of the elder, as bearing rule in the church, but also calling the same men, alternatively, bishops and elders, as was evidently done in apostolic times. In process of time, however, this title, which was originally considered expressive of duty and labor, rather than of honor, became gradually appropriated to the principle elder, who usually presided in preaching, and ordering public service. Not only so, but as a worldly and ambitious spirit gained ground, he who bore this title began to advance certain peculiar claims, **FIRST**, those of *stated Chairman, President, or Moderator*, and **FINALLY**, those of *a new ORDER or GRADE of office.*’<sup>69</sup>

Thus, the Protestant Reformers argued that the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and other similar hierarchical episcopal churches had wrongfully concluded that the model of the Levitical priesthood was the same model for the Early Church, to wit:

**EPISCOPAL GOVERNANCE**  
**Levitical Priesthood as Model for the Christian Church**  
**(i.e., an Episcopal Priesthood)**

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 438.

High Priest	Popes, Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops, or Presiding Elders
Priest	Presbyters or Elders
Levites	Deacons

But the Lutheran and Reformed Protestants (Note: but not the Anglicans or Methodists) revolted against this ecclesiastical or “episcopal” system of church governance, because, as they contended, this system produced spiritual despotism and abuse of ecclesiastical authority, to wit:

[T]he principle of autocracy and the usages of hierarchal and priestly domination have been an element of corruption in the church, a mildew upon her good fruits, an incubus upon her bosom, a cancer upon her vitals, from the second century to the present hour....

The synodical system gave rise to the metropolitan, the patriarchal; and the Papacy was only one step beyond, a mere incident in the workings of the previously existing clerical power....<sup>70</sup>

For a time, the spiritual despotisms of the bishop may have been counterpoised or held in check by the imperial authority, as the imperial tyranny may, at times, have been restrained by the power of the bishops. But in the long run the spiritual and the secular despotisms strengthened each other, and united their forces against freedom, as in all Church and State unions since. The Papacy, too, as a convenient court of final appeal, may have extended relief to many who were oppressed by the bishops. It could hardly fail to be otherwise. And this would reconcile thousands to the Papacy. But, in the long run, the liberties of the church and of the world were the losers. Thus it is ever in the accumulations of autocratic power,

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<sup>70</sup> William Goodell, *The Democracy of Christianity, or; An Analysis of the Bible and its Doctrines in Their Relation to the Principles of Democracy* (New York, N.Y.: Cady and Burgess, 1852), p. 468.

however plausibly counterbalanced or combined. The Papacy, as a court of appeal from the episcopacy, may have been as wise a provision as was the stated synod, considered as a court of appeal from the local bishops. The mischief lay in the assumption of the functions of the common brotherhood by a clerical caste, of which the Papacy as well as episcopacy was but an incidental form....<sup>71</sup>

[I]t remains also true that each additional departure from apostolic simplicity renders a return to it more difficult, and hedges up the avenues of successful assault upon the aggressor.

‘When the ministers of the churches had become their governors, and the ambitious desire of enlarging their dominions and multiplying their subjects had induced those governors to dispense with the apostolic pre-requisites for church membership, and admit whole towns and cities, yea, and entire nations, within the pale of the Christian Church, upon a profession of their wish to become Christians and receive baptism—when, I say, these things became history, as they did in the third and fourth centuries, it is obvious that the churches could be no longer little sacred republics. It was no longer possible to manage ecclesiastical matters after the manner of the first century. The world had now overspread the church, and the church, if governed at all, must be governed by worldly policy. And so it was, from about the close of the third century to the sixteenth.’ (Punchard, p. 25).<sup>72</sup>

When Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) led the Protestant Reformation, which began in about 1517, many of the abuses within the Roman Catholic Church stemmed from episcopal abuses of power and authority. Many of Luther’s complaints had revolved around uncovering the deceptions and false teachings of Roman Catholic superstitions, such as the sale of indulgences, the myth of purgatory, and the false doctrines of the separate status of priests and bishops as being apart from the laity. Luther stressed the doctrine of the “priesthood of all

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 471.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 472.

believers,” which is stated in both the New Testament<sup>73</sup> and in the foundational writings of Augustine of Hippo.<sup>74</sup> Martin Bucer (1491 – 1551), John Calvin (1509 – 1564), and many other Protestant Reformers concluded that the Elders or Presbyters and the Deacons of the Early Church were modelled—not after the ancient Levitical priesthood—but after the lay offices within the ancient Jewish synagogue, as mentioned above, to wit:

<b>Lay Jewish Elders or Rulers (i.e., Synagogue) as Model for the Protestant Reformed, Presbyterian, and Congregational Church Elders or Presbyters (i.e., Church)</b>	
Nási/Ruler/Patriach/ Archon (Elder)	Presiding Elder, Moderator, or Bishop
Zaken/ Cházan/ Shaliách/ Maggid/ Rabbi (Elders)	Presbyters or Elders
Grammateus or Phrontistes;	Deacons

<sup>73</sup> 1 Peter 2: 9; Revelation 1:6.

<sup>74</sup> Saint Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1950), pp. 582, 746 stating:

“I desire to be a member, no matter what, or how small, of Thy priesthood. By the PRIESTHOOD he here means the PEOPLE ITSELF, of which He is the Priest who is the Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. This people the Apostle Peter calls 'a holy people, a royal priesthood.'”

“Put me in a part of Thy priesthood, to eat bread,' is ... the Word of God who dwells in the HEART of ONE WHO BELEIVES.”

“For we see that priests and Levites are now chosen, not from a certain family and blood, as was originally the rule in the priesthood according to the order of Aaron, but as befits the new testament, under which Christ is the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, in consideration of the merit which is bestowed upon each man by divine grace. And these priests are not to be judged by their mere title, which is often borne by unworthy men, but by that HOLINESS which is not common to good men and bad.”

Párnasin or álmoners; Hazzans (Deacons)	
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Today, one of the distinguishing marks of Protestant reform (especially Calvinism and amongst the Independent denominations) have been the fundamental change in the source and foundation of the Christian clergy’s offices and authority. This is the plain heritage of the Protestant Reformation and the doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers.” This doctrine stems from the belief that the Christian church emerged from, and took its form, structure, and administration from, the Jewish synagogue.

**New Testament Synagogue**  
Weekly Assemblies  
**Five Identifying Features**

**Name**  
Temple  
Synagogue  
Church  
House


**Work**  
Teach Bible  
Benevolence for  
active members only

**Organization**  
Independent  
Autonomous

**Government**  
Presbytery + Deacons: Plurality  
of older, equal, qualified men  
No women preachers, leaders

**Weekly Worship: 5 Actions**  
(Women not segregated from men)

1. Read Bible, preach and teach
2. Acapella Singing, non-instrumental
3. Prayer
4. Sacred meals (No common meals)
5. Weekly freewill offerings



Herodium

[www.bible.ca/synagogues](http://www.bible.ca/synagogues)

**New Testament Church**  
Weekly Assemblies  
**Five Identifying Features**

**Name**  
Temple  
Synagogue  
Church  
House


**Work**  
Teach Bible  
Benevolence for  
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[www.bible.ca/synagogues](http://www.bible.ca/synagogues)

Much has been said about the fact that Jesus never founded a “new religion” but merely fulfilled the promises of the Old Covenant. He intentionally adopted the Jewish modes of worship and practice. He taught in the Second Temple and the synagogues of ancient Judea. And, as we shall briefly review below, he adopted much of the symbolism of the ancient state of Israel (e.g., the “12 princes” (i.e., apostles) and “70 elders” (i.e., 70 disciples). Therefore, the Jewish synagogue appears to be the natural model for Christ’s new ecclesia or church.

## Chapter Five

### “Jesus of Nazareth, as a Rabbi for the 12 Apostles and the 70 Disciples”

Was Jesus of Nazareth the founder of an informal “lay” organization known as the synagogue? Under Jewish law, only 10 Jewish males over the age of 13 were necessary in order to found a synagogue or minyan. Such informal groups could meet in either the Temple or the synagogues for more formal religious worship and prayer.

Jesus of Nazareth was from the lineage and tribe of Judah (i.e., the House of David),<sup>75</sup> but was he eligible for the Levitical priesthood? Jesus was not a “priest” within the meaning of the Aaronic priesthood. He was not a part of the established Temple elite. Remarkably, the 12 apostles apparently represented each of the twelve tribes of ancient Israel,<sup>76</sup> to wit:

#### The Twelve Apostles- Tribes They Represented

1. **Simon (Peter)** – from the tribe of Reuben
2. **Andrew** – from the tribe of Naphtali
3. **James** – from the tribe of Zebulun
4. **John** – from the tribe of Issachar
5. **Philip** – from the tribe of Asher
6. **Bartholomew** – from the tribe of Gad
7. **Matthew** – from the tribe of Ephraim
8. **Thomas** – from the tribe of Manasseh
9. **James the son of Alphaeus** – from the tribe of Benjamin
10. **Jude** – from the tribe of Simeon
11. **Simon the Zealot** – from the tribe of Levi
12. **Judas Iscariot** – from the tribe of Judah

<sup>75</sup> <http://www.usefulbible.com/hebrews/jesus-from-tribe-of-judah.htm> (“Jesus belonged to the tribe of Judah.”)

<sup>76</sup> “Saint Boniface Catholic Church,” <https://stboniface-lunenburg.org/twelve-tribes-and-the-twelve-apostles> (“Jesus chose Twelve Apostles because they represent the Twelve Tribes of Israel, thus showing a link between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.”)



There was only one Levite amongst the 12 apostles, and so clearly this bunch of fellows were not pretending to be Levitical priests.

Within Israel's constitution, there were 12 princes who were the head of twelve tribes—they were not Levitical priests or members of the priesthood. When Christ appointed his 12 apostles, he compares them to these same 12 princes of ancient Israel, stating in Matthew 19:28,

Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And in the Book of Revelation, there is a connection between the 12 Apostles and the “twelve foundations”<sup>77</sup> of “that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.”<sup>78</sup>

In addition, in the Gospel of St. Luke, Jesus also appointed 70 additional disciples. (Luke 10: 1-13). These disciples may have included several men who are later mentioned in the Book of Acts—but we cannot be certain. For example, it is surmised the St. Luke, St. Mark, and “Zenas the Lawyer” were among the original 70 (or 72) disciples.

The point, though, is that Jesus symbolically modelled his church after the “lay” organizations within Jewish society: the 12 princes of ancient Israel (i.e., the 12 Apostles) and the 70 elders of ancient Israel (i.e., the 70 disciples).

But Jesus was also PRIEST, PROPHET, and KING. As “priest,” Jesus followed in the footsteps of his paternal lineage, King David, who described himself as a priest in the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7:17). (For it is clear that Jesus intended to end, and to replace, the Levitical, Aaronic, and Second Temple priesthood.) As “prophet,” Jesus simply carried on the tradition of the great Hebrew prophets who came before him, but upon an immeasurably greater platform. And, finally, as “king,” Jesus inherited the eternal throne of King David. Jesus demonstrated his authority as PRIEST, PROPHET, and KING in his role as a Jewish “rabbi.”

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<sup>77</sup> Revelation 21:14.

<sup>78</sup> Revelation 21:10.

In other words, Jesus acted as the “head” (or the “rabbi”) of a new clique of learners (i.e., the 12 apostles, the 70 disciples, and many others). Christ and these many men (and women) were forming a religious society that fell well within the prevailing Jewish custom of the period in which Jesus preached. For example:

Jesus lived in a deeply religious culture that highly valued biblical understanding. Rabbis were greatly respected, and to be a disciple of a famous rabbi was an honor. Rabbis were expected not only to have a vast knowledge about the Bible, but to show through their exemplary lives how to live by the Scriptures. A disciple’s goal was to gain the rabbi’s knowledge, but even more importantly, to become like him in character. It was expected that when the disciple became mature, he would take his rabbi’s teaching to the community, add his own understanding, and raise up disciples of his own.<sup>79</sup>

These rabbis, or sages, were not “priests,” but they were, in essence, teachers of the Jewish law, through parable, poetry, psalm, literature, and, of course, the Sacred Scriptures. Some rabbis were “doctors of the law.”<sup>80</sup>

As previously mentioned, the constitutional offices of Prophet, Priest, and King were not contained within the Jewish Synagogue. When the Kingdom of Judah finally collapsed, the Christian church-synagogues held that Jesus of Nazareth was its PRIEST, PROPHET, and KING.

During his earthly ministry as a Jewish rabbi, Christ would fulfill, or lay the foundations for, these three roles. Indeed, Jesus has been described several times in the Sacred Scriptures as a “rabbi.” “Jesus was sometimes called ‘rabbi’ in the Gospels (Matthew 26:25, 49; Mark 9:5, 11:21, 14:45; John 1:38, 49, 2:2, 4:31, 6:25, 9:2, 11:8). The word ‘rabbi’ as John informs us, is translated ‘teacher’ (John 1:38). The title ‘teacher’ is more common. Nevertheless, both Jesus and John the Baptist were called ‘rabbi.’”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Lois Tverberg, “Listening to the Language of the Bible: Hearing It Through Jesus’ Ears” (Holland: Engedi Resources Center, 2004), p. 125.

<sup>80</sup> See, e.g., references to the “doctors of the law” in the New Testament in Luke 5:17; 7:30; 11:45-46, 52; 14:3; Acts 4:5; 1 Tim. 1:7.

<sup>81</sup> “Was Jesus a Rabi?” [https://www.detroitcatholic.com/voices/was-jesus-a-rabbi#:~:text=First%2C%20Jesus%20was%20sometimes%20called,\(John%201%3A38\).](https://www.detroitcatholic.com/voices/was-jesus-a-rabbi#:~:text=First%2C%20Jesus%20was%20sometimes%20called,(John%201%3A38).)

For, indeed, it is clear that Jesus was, as a rabbi,<sup>82</sup> was the leader of his own “lay” organization of “lay” learners or disciples, within the Jewish synagogue tradition. The rabbis of Jesus’ day—as did Jesus and the Apostle Paul—often taught in the synagogues.

The church-synagogues, which eventually emerged, were filled with “priests-kings,”<sup>83</sup> as every man and woman—regardless of their social standing—were members of a “royal priesthood.”<sup>84</sup> This idea levelled the playing field and raised the level of the dignity of all men— even slaves, such as, for instance, the slave Onesimus, whom the Apostle defended, and who later became an elder (i.e., bishop) in the church.<sup>85</sup> The primary motive force behind the ending of slavery and the slave trade in ancient Rome, Europe, and North America was at the core of the Christian doctrine.<sup>86</sup> The Christian church, as it was organized around the model of

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<sup>82</sup> “Rabbis, Priests, and Other Religious Functionaries,” <https://www.jewfaq.org/rabbi> (“A rabbi is not a priest, neither in the Jewish sense of the term nor in the Christian sense of the term. In the Christian sense of the term, a priest is a person with special authority to perform certain sacred rituals. A rabbi, on the other hand, has no more authority to perform rituals than any other adult male member of the Jewish community.... **A rabbi is simply a teacher, a person sufficiently educated in halakhah (Jewish law)** and tradition to instruct the community and to answer questions and resolve disputes regarding halakhah.”)

<sup>83</sup> Revelation 1:6.

<sup>84</sup> 1 Peter 2:9

<sup>85</sup> “Onesimus” Wikipedia (online encyclopedia) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Onesimus>.

<sup>86</sup> Thus commenting on this subject, the great French social theorist Alex De Tocqueville opined that “[a]ntiquity could only have a very imperfect understanding of this effect of slavery on the production of wealth. Then **slavery existed throughout the whole civilized world**, only some barbarian peoples being without it. **Christianity destroyed slavery by insisting on the slave’s rights**; nowadays it can be attacked from the master’s point of view; in this respect interest and morality are in harmony.” Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York, N.Y.: Harper Perennial, 1988), p. 348. Indeed, long before there was a sect in England called Puritans, the orthodox Christian doctrine was decisively anti-slavery and anti-slave trade. This assertion is based largely upon the historical assessment of the Church of England as presented in the work *Africa and America: Addresses and Discourses* (Springfield, MA: Wiley & Co., 1891), pp. 218-219, by Rev. Alexander Crummell, an 1854 graduate of Cambridge University, an ordained Anglican Priest, and Pan-Africanist who later influenced W.E.B. DuBois and many others. In his “Eulogium on the Life and Character of Thomas Clarkson, Esq. of England,” Rev. Crummell, states: “[a]t the commencement of the sixteenth century, after the slavery of Africans had been allowed in the Spanish settlements, we find one Cardinal Ximenes, then holding the reigns of government, (previous to the accession of Charles the Fifth,) refusing his permission for the establishment of a regular system of commerce, in the persons of Native Africans. When Charles [V] came to power, he acted contrary to the course of the Cardinal. But by a good Providence he was afterward brought to see his error and to repent of it. In the year 1542, he made a code of laws, prohibiting the slave trade and emancipating all slaves in his dominions. About the same time, Leo 10th, the Pope of Rome, denounced

the synagogue, dignified the common man—as Christ had taught in the Beatitudes.<sup>87</sup> This is why, and how, the Christian religion is considered the foundation of democratic government in the West.<sup>88</sup>

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the whole system, declaring, ‘That not only the Christian religion, but that nature herself cried out against a state of slavery.’ In England, in 1562, we find Queen Elizabeth anxious, lest the evils of the slave trade should be entailed upon Africa by any of her subjects, declaring that if any of them were carried off without her consent, ‘It would be detestable, and call down the vengeance of Heaven upon the undertakers.’ From this time, we find a continual testimony, ever and anon, borne against the system of slavery, by men of every profession and of every rank:-- MILTON; Bishop SANDERSON; Rev. MORGAN GODWYN, an episcopal clergyman, who wrote the first work ever undertaken expressly for this cause; RICHARD BAXTER, the celebrated divine published upon it; STELLE; the Poet THOMPSON; Rev. GRIFFITH HUGHES, another Episcopal clergyman; SHENSTONE, the Essayist and Poet; Dr. HUYTER, Bishop of Norwich; STERNE; Bishop WARBURTON, author of the Divine Legation, who preached a sermon before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, in 1766, in which he scouts the idea of man holding property in rational creatures. The DISSENTERS of all names, especially the FRIENDS, distinguished themselves beyond all others, in their early interest in the cause, and their clear, earnest, and explicit disapprobation of it. Latterly, GRANVILLE SHARP, the Father of the more modern Abolitionists, appeared upon the stage. And to him belongs the distinguished honor of having brought about the glorious decision in the case of Somerset, which COWPER has rendered immortal in the noble lines:-- ‘Slaves cannot breathe in England: if their lungs receive our air, that moment they are free; they touch our country and their shackles fall.’”

<sup>87</sup> Matthew 5:1-12.

<sup>88</sup> William Goodell, *The Democracy of Christianity, or; An Analysis of the Bible and its Doctrines in Their Relation to the Principles of Democracy* (New York, N.Y.: Cady and Burgess, 1852).

## Chapter Six

### “Jewish Synagogue as Model for the Protestant Reformation”

The Protestant Reformation was heavily influenced by the ancient Hebrew polity of the Jewish synagogue. Indeed, the very nature of the Jewish synagogue was that it would formulate a microcosm of the Jewish state and temple that had come under siege by Greco-Roman powers. The rabbis, pharisees, scribes, and lawyers who governed the Jewish Synagogue were the elders and rulers— not Levites and priests— of ancient Judea.

Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) upheld the doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers” and concluded that every believing Christian had a right to hold the position of presbyter is so called and elected by a local congregation. John Calvin (1509 – 1564) upheld a similar viewpoint. Calvin’s revolutionary interpretation of Scriptures allowed him to theologially loosen the chains of “apostolic succession” in order to open up the Christian ministry to lay persons (i.e. to a “priesthood of all believers”) otherwise called to preach, to teach, and to govern the church body. In this sense, the doctrine that all Christians, including laymen, were “kings and priests,”<sup>89</sup> became the foundation of the Lutheran and Reformed doctrines (i.e., the Protestant Reformation). Thomas Helwys (1575 - 1616), a leader of the General Baptists, adopted an Arminian view but agreed in principle with both Lutheranism and Calvinism on the doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers,” which included the right to found independent church denominations. The Mennonites, the Anabaptists, the Quakers, and many other “Independents” held the same or similar theological views.

When we now analyze the name “Calvinism” more closely, we find that it is heavily Hebrew or Jewish in its essential character.<sup>90</sup> The Calvinists of Geneva

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<sup>89</sup> Revelation 1:6.

<sup>90</sup> “The Ancient Hebrew Polity,” *The Presbyterian Quarterly*, supra, comparing the United States Constitution to the constitution of ancient Israel, stating:

“We do not here speak of the People’s acceptance of this Constitution, which will be better exhibited in another connexion; but press the simple fact that Israel was from the beginning under a Constitutional government, in which the relations and duties of all parties under its protection were accurately defined.

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Such an instrument becomes not only a regulative code, but also a charter of rights. After centuries of conflict to obtain it, modern sagacity has discovered no greater safeguard of political and civil freedom....

It would be pleasant just here, to show the parallelism between the Hebrew Commonwealth and our own: which is so striking that in reciting the history of the one, we seem to be drawing the picture of the other.

The twelve Tribes of Israel almost re-appear in the States of this Republic; and the weakness in the government from tribal independence was reproduced with us, compelling as in their case a closer Federal union. All this must, however, be pretermitted to make room for the statement that, in the changes of time, so much has the danger shifted from disintegration to centralism, as to lodge the only hope of preserving our American system in the autonomy of the States, and in the maintenance of their right to local self-government. Can a stronger encomium be pronounced upon that feature of the Hebrew Constitution, which so early established a bulwark against Imperialism ? ...

God, though unseen, was the acknowledged King. Whatever the outward form of the government— whether democratic, as till the close of Samuel’s regency—or Monarchical, as under the kings—or Oligarchic, as after the Captivity—through all it was Theocratic. Did ever a nation possess such a bond of union before? Did ever Majesty like this sit upon an earthly throne? Can we conceive extremes brought together, between which all friction shall be so completely removed? How could such a King encroach upon the liberty of the subject? How could the subject find occasion to be jealous of the prerogatives of such a Monarch? This is not all.

The Hebrew religion was thus bound up in the Hebrew nationality. The two were so welded into one by the pressure of fifteen centuries and under the discipline of an extraordinary providence, that eighteen centuries of dispersion have not separated the embrace. So thoroughly was the Theocratic principle wrought into the texture of Hebrew thought that, without a country and without a government, their religion alone makes them a nation still. The Hebrew State is gone; but the nationality which should have perished with it, survives unbroken in the Hebrew Church. When was such a crystal as this ever produced in the historic outworking of any other political Constitution?” ...

The Hebrew government rested upon the consent of the people, formally and constitutionally expressed. This is recognized in modern times as the corner-stone of civil liberty, which claims for the subject not only the right to determine the character and form of the government, but also a voice in shaping the legislation.

The American Revolution, for example, which dissolved the bands of British allegiance, turned upon the principle that taxation without the right of representation was only the exaction of tribute. We find the same principle further back as the pivot upon which English history turns—from the wresting of Magna Charta by the Barons from the feeble John, to the issue of the long struggle between privilege and prerogative in the expulsion of the treacherous Stuarts from the throne. If then this vital principle shall be found incorporated in the Hebrew polity, it will justify the assertion that it was designed by the Supreme Lawgiver to confront the old despotisms, as the working model of a free government.

tried to developed a city-state based on their interpretation of ancient Israel’s civil polity.<sup>91</sup> Likewise, the Puritans of colonial New England tried to develop a civil polity on the basis of their interpretation of ancient Israel’s civil polity.<sup>92</sup> Hence, the Puritan’s fundamental approach to the Old Testament was treat it as the “fundamental law” (i.e., the written constitution) of colonial New England.<sup>93</sup> Hence, the Sacred Scriptures was deemed to be constitutional law in colonial New England—the foundation of its “social contract” or its “civil compact”; and these constitutional ideals were expressly codified within the founding documents of New England, such as the Mayflower Compact (1620), the Fundamental Orders of Government (Connecticut)(1639), Massachusetts Body of Liberties (1641), etc.<sup>94</sup> Hence, many reflective and authoritative historians, constitutional scholars, and theologians have reached the conclusion that the United States was founded upon Puritan or Calvinist ideology and principles.<sup>95</sup>

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There is room for but a few specifications, and these in the briefest synopsis: (a) The Constitution itself given by Jehovah was submitted, in all its details, to the ratification of the people; and He, by public acclamation, was accepted as their Sovereign. When Joshua represented the difficulties of this service, the response was, “Nay, but we will serve the Lord: and Joshua said unto the people, ye are witnesses unto yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord to serve Him : and they said, we are witnesses.” (b) We find some of the Judges, as Jephtha, chosen by the people (Judges 11:5, 10, 11); although this extraordinary office especially reflected the Theocratic principle. (c) The great change wrought in the administration of government by the institution of hereditary Monarchy, was effected by the demand of the people, and against the remonstrances of Samuel: “Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay, but we will have a king over us.” (1 Sam. 8:19.) (d) Both Saul and David, after being designated by God and anointed by Samuel, did not assume the functions of royalty until they were confirmed by the popular choice. (1 Sam. 11:14, 15. 2 Sam. 2:4.) (e) David was seven years king over Judah alone, before his authority was recognised by the other Tribes; who were nevertheless absolved from the charge of rebellion.”)

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> See, generally, *The Works of John Witherspoon*, Vol 8 (Edinburgh, Scotland: Ogles, Duncan & Cochran, 1815); Reinhold Niebuhr, “Happiness, Prosperity and Virtue,” *Major Works on Religion and Politics* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 2015), pp. 496-510; David Yount, “How Quaker Values Infused the Constitution,” *How the Quakers Invented America* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Pub., Inc., 2007), pp. 14-17; William Goodell, *The Democracy of Christianity* (New York, N.Y.: Cady and Burgess, 1852), p. 484 (“[T]he people of Great Britain are indebted to the Puritans. What

Thus, Calvinism—through insisting upon the model of the ancient Jewish synagogue—undeniably brought democracy and a republican church structure (i.e., Presbyterianism) to the Roman Catholic Church, which changed Western civilization and civil polity in the West for the better.<sup>96</sup>

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is wanting, both in England and America, to the completeness and the security of human freedom, is an undeviating fidelity to those principles of Christian democracy which the Puritans in some measure restored.”); and Algernon Sidney Crapsey, *Religion and Politics* (New York, N.Y.: Thomas Whittaker, 1905), p. 244 (“It was the belief of the Puritan that was the motive power of the American Revolution. It was the stern conviction of the Puritan that not King George, but God, was the rightful sovereign in America, not Parliament of England, but the people of the united Colonies, were the sole keepers of the purse and the only source of political power; and it was this conviction of the Puritan that sustained the people of the country through the long years of the Revolutionary War.”)

<sup>96</sup> See, e.g., William Goodell, *The Democracy of Christianity* (New York, N.Y.: Cady and Burgess, 1852), p. 484 (“[T]he people of Great Britain are indebted to the Puritans. What is wanting, both in England and America, to the completeness and the security of human freedom, is an undeviating fidelity to those principles of Christian democracy which the Puritans in some measure restored.”); and Algernon Sidney Crapsey, *Religion and Politics* (New York, N.Y.: Thomas Whittaker, 1905), p. 244 (“It was the belief of the Puritan that was the motive power of the American Revolution. It was the stern conviction of the Puritan that not King George, but God, was the rightful sovereign in America, not Parliament of England, but the people of the united Colonies, were the sole keepers of the purse and the only source of political power; and it was this conviction of the Puritan that sustained the people of the country through the long years of the Revolutionary War.”)



## CONCLUSION

The presbyterian and congregational ecclesiastical polities are rooted in the heritage, practices, and structures of the ancient Jewish synagogue, as well as the examples set by the first Apostles and the Early Church. In the history of the Western Church, when episcopal abuses and worldly ambitions stemming from church hierarchies emerged, the Protestant Reformation was the result. Even today, however, not all Protestant churches are made equal. Some Protestant churches, such as the Church of England, the Episcopal Church of the United States, some Methodist churches with episcopal structures, have succumbed to autocratic episcopal abuses that are eerily similar to what has occurred within ecclesiastical hierarchy of Roman Catholicism.

Nevertheless, it is hard to state that all priests and bishops within episcopal churches are corrupt or abusive—that would be an incorrect judgment. At the same time, it would also be incorrect to state that all clergymen within autonomous, congregational, or presbyterian churches are honest and holy—that also would be an incorrect judgment. The point, however, is to acknowledge the “false dichotomy” that is set between “clergy” and “laity” within all churches, but especially within hierarchical churches that have episcopal structures—such distinctions fly in the face of the both the clear examples set by the ancient Jewish synagogue and the Early Church, and the doctrine on the “priesthood of all believers.”

I believe that, ultimately, the Christian Church must recapture its spirit of egalitarian, Christian brotherhood, without such great and grave distinctions between “clergy” and “laity” – distinctions that were clearly not prevalent during the 1<sup>st</sup> century, A.D. Churches. Churches that have single ordained pastors- who lead without the assistance of a plurality of capable ordained Elders— should be phased into extinction, and rapidly fade away into *desuetude*. Ruling elders (i.e., a presbytery) should brought back into all of our local churches (regardless of denomination), so that those churches (i.e., the *ecclesia* of Christ) can truly begin to function properly, and to carry out the Great Commission.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Matthew 28: 19-20.

## Appendix A

### **“The Judicial Laws of Ancient Israel”**

In Chapter 18 of Exodus, Moses established a system of federated courts, with Moses himself as the final arbiter, that were commissioned to judge the ancient Israelites. These ancient judges functioned the same as modern-day judges today—they heard disputes between their fellow citizens and they rendered judgments.

This judicial system was perhaps Israel’s first formal institution. It arose out of sheer necessity, since the ancient Israelites, though they were wanderers in the desert, needed an institution that would enable them to co-exist with each other, within a civilized manner. This judicial system, which predated the institution of the Levitical priesthood, was authorized to address and to resolve all types of legal issues that arose between the people of ancient Israel. Hence, in ancient Israel, the “moral law” of God (i.e., the Decalogue) was applied through ancient Israel’s “secular” civil and criminal laws.

Exodus 21:1-2	Slavery; Bondservants; Sabbath Year (7 <sup>th</sup> year)
Exodus 21:1-11, 20, 27	Master and Servant relations
Exodus 21:10-15	Murder and Homicide
Exodus 21:16	Men-stealing and Slavery
Exodus 21: 18-27	Assault and Battery
Exodus 21: 29-36	Oxen, Cows; Negligent Supervision
Exodus 22: 1	Property Damage; Fire; Restitution
Exodus 22: 2-4; 7-8	Thieves, Theft; Restitution
Exodus 22: 5-6	Property Damage; Fire; Restitution
Exodus 22: 9	Trespass, Theft; Restitution
Exodus 22: 10-15	Bailment, Safekeeping, Loss; Restitution
Exodus 22: 16-17	Fornication, Unwed Sexual Relations
Exodus 22: 18	Witches
Exodus 22: 19	Bestiality
Exodus 22: 21-24	Foreigners; Widows; and Orphans

Exodus 22: 25	Usury, Lending
Exodus 23: 1	Perjury, False Oaths
Exodus 23: 6-9	Judging Cases; Equality before the Law; Protection against Oppression of the Poor and Strangers
Leviticus 11:1-47	Dietary Laws; Healthy, Unhealthy Meats or Foods
Leviticus 12: 1-8	Health and Sanitation: childbirth
Leviticus 13: 1-59	Health and Sanitation: leprosy
Leviticus 14: 1-32	Health and Sanitation: leprosy
Leviticus 14: 33-57	Health and Sanitation: buildings and houses
Leviticus 15:1-33	Health and Sanitation: sexual relations, bodily fluids, and cleanliness
Leviticus 18:1-30	Consanguinity, marriage regulations; restrictions on sexual relations
Leviticus 19:9-10;	Harvest, Farms; Charitable Assistance for the Poor (Gleaners)
Leviticus 19:15, 35-37	Judges; Duty to Honestly and Fairly Judging Cases; Equality before the Law; Protect against Oppression of the Poor, Strangers
Leviticus 23:22	Harvest, Farms; Charitable Assistance for the Poor (Gleaners)
Leviticus 25: 1-40	Sabbath Year (7 <sup>th</sup> Year) of the land; Jubilee Year (50 <sup>th</sup> Year); Release from Debt, Bondage
Leviticus 25:36-37	Usury, Lending.
Leviticus 19:11, 13	Business; Contracts; Duty of Good Faith and Fair Dealing
Leviticus 25:44-55	Slavery; Bondservants; Hired servants

Deuteronomy 15:11	Charitable Assistance for the Poor
Deuteronomy 5:16-21	Second Table of the Decalogue; Prohibition Against Murder; Adultery; Theft; Perjury or Bearing False Witness; Covetousness.
Deuteronomy 15:12-15	Slavery; Bondservants; Sabbath Year (7 <sup>th</sup> Year)
Deuteronomy 16:18-20	Judges; Duty to Honestly and Fairly Judging Cases; Equality before the Law; Protect against Oppression of the Poor, Strangers
Deuteronomy 19:15	Two Witnesses Required to Convict for “any iniquity, or for any sin”
Deuteronomy 21:15	Polygamy authorized
Deuteronomy 21:18-21	Juvenile Justice
Deuteronomy 22:1-4	Civility; Good Samaritan Rule
Deuteronomy 22:5	Anti-Transvestite Rule
Deuteronomy 22:8-12	Houses; Vineyards; Plowing; Garments
Deuteronomy 22:13-30	Marriage; Divorce; Adultery; Fornication
Deuteronomy 23:17	Prostitution; Homosexuality; Sodomy
Deuteronomy 23:19	Usury
Deuteronomy 24:1-5	Marriage; Divorce; Re-marriage; Duty of Honeymoon in First Year of Marriage
Deuteronomy 24:10-13	Pledges
Deuteronomy 24:14-15	Labor and Employment
Deuteronomy 24:17-18	Judges; Duty to Honestly and Fairly Judging Cases; Equality before the Law; Protect against Oppression of the Poor, Strangers
Deuteronomy 24:20-24	Harvest, Farms; Charitable Assistance for the Poor (Gleaners)
Deuteronomy 25:1-3	Judges; Duty to Honestly and Fairly

	Judging Cases; Corporal Punishment
Deuteronomy 25:4	Oxen; Negligent Supervision
Deuteronomy 25:5-10	Death of Husband; Husband's Brother's Duty to Impregnate the Widow so that His Brother will have an Heir
Deuteronomy 25:13-19	Fraud; Oppression; Unjust Weights and Measurements
Deuteronomy 27:19	Judges; Duty to Honestly and Fairly Judging Cases
Deuteronomy 27:20-23	Consanguinity, marriage regulations; restrictions on sexual relations
Deuteronomy 27:24-25	Murder; Conspiracy to commit murder

From the example of ancient Israel, the moral laws of God are arguably designed to implement every aspect of the human endeavor. Within the Kingdom of England, the English Common Law was developed under the auspices of the Church of England, its priests, lawyers, and judges, with the expectation that the Sacred Scriptures would be thoroughly woven into, and govern, English law.<sup>98</sup>

**THE END**

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<sup>98</sup> John Marshall Guest, "The Influence of Biblical Texts Upon English Law" (An address delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi Societies of the University of Pennsylvania on June 14, 1910)(pages 15-34)

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