

### *The One True Congregation*

Christianity teaches that the 'Church' was born with the advent of Messiah, Who instituted a 'new System', totally different to that of the 'old' Hebrew or 'Jewish' System, which then was annulled and replaced with the Church. Amazing Scriptural evidence reveals that Messiah never authorised a "Church" but in fact initiated the Restoration of the Original True Jewish System as had Divinely been revealed to Moses!

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***WHICH of the multitudes of Congregations on earth today is the True Congregation? WHERE is it to be found?***

In their search for the True religious Congregation, people are normally guided by questions like these: - "What is the Name of the Congregation?" - "Which denomination do they represent?" - "Who are the preachers or leaders?" - "How popular is it?" - "Is it national / international?"

The general conception of a "Congregation" in people's minds, is that of a BUILDING or an ORGANISATION. People like to select on the basis of compliance - they like to hear that which they are accustomed to and which is pleasing to the ear and soothing to their conscience. They prefer to belong to something that is popular with the masses, and which could increase their personal esteem. They like to mix with the right people. These are all perfectly human inclinations to which people have a personal right. It is interesting to note, though, what the Bible states about a "Congregation". In the 'original' Greek translations of the New Testament, the word 'Ekklesia' has been used 108 times. The meaning of 'Ekklesia' is: "that which is called out ..." The English translations, generally, have used the word 'Church' for Ekklesia.

Christianity, generally, assumes and teaches that the 'Church' was born with the advent of Messiah, and that He instituted a 'new System', totally different to that of the 'Old Testament'. This 'old' Hebrew or 'Jewish' System, they teach, has been annulled by Messiah and replaced with the Church. Let us analyse this matter by turning to the Tanach (Old Testament)

About 270 B.C.E, a large body of selected, Hebrew scholars set about translating the Hebrew Scriptures of the Tanach (Old Testament) into Greek - the living language of that day - and they regularly used the same word 'Ekklesia' to translate the Hebrew word 'QAHAL' and 'EDAH', meaning "Assembly, Community or Congregation". Later on in Scripture, it refers to the 'elect' of God. It must be remembered, that this national body of Israel, was in effect the 'elect' of God according to Scripture. These words are intermittently used in the Tanach (some 225 times) in referring to the national body of Israelites under the leadership of Moses and they were translated into the Greek as 'ekkllesia' Ps. 74:2, for instance, then appeared in Greek as follows, when God is requested to: "Remember Your 'ekkllesia' (assembly, community, congregation) which You acquired long ago; the Tribe that You redeemed as Your Inheritance" - obviously referring to Israel. Had the translators of the 'New Testament' been consistent in their translating from Greek to English, they should have used "Church" for this Body of Israelites (the Qahal) in their English translations of the 'Old Testament' - which would make it non-sensical of course, i.e. to call ancient Israel the 'church'! In fact, some translations do exactly this in Acts 7:38, when they refer to Moses as being part of "the church in the wilderness"! Of course, in this way, multitudes of readers have become conditioned to believe that "the Church has become the successor to this solemn 'assembly of Chosen People' in the desert", thereby supplanting the Hebraic 'elect of God'. We will shortly see what the Biblical Truth is in this matter of the Elect of God and what the True Congregation of YHVH really entails.

### *"UPON THIS ROCK"*

The famous foundational Text, to which each and all Christian denominations lay claim, is found in: Matt. 16:18 "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this Rock I will build my Ekklesia (Church? - Assembly or congregation?) - and the powers of Death shall not prevail against it" Which word did Messiah use here? It must be remembered that Messiah did not speak English when uttering these words. He therefore did not use the word 'Church', which until then, had not existed.- or if it did, was never yet used in the Scriptures! Messiah almost certainly spoke Hebrew, or Aramaic, the language medium of that time in Israel. So, He most certainly used a Hebrew or Aramaic word which is descriptive of "a following, assembly, congregation". Why do the New Testament Scriptures, in this case, render 'Church'? - obviously because it was translated from a word like 'ekkllesia' and translators routinely used the word "Church" in such cases.

A poorly understood fact amongst Christians, even amongst Christian ministers and teachers today, is that Messiah was a Jew, born from a Jewish mother in the Jewish country of Israel. He lived amongst the Jewish nation and was taught as a child in the home language of that country, Hebrew. He was Bar-Mitzvah'd in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem where He reasoned with the learned Jewish religious leaders - and they most certainly spoke the language in which their Scriptures were written - Hebrew!

Messiah's followers, once He had started His preaching and teaching career, were almost (if not totally) exclusively Jews of Israel. His disciples were handpicked by Him from amongst the Jewish citizens of Israel. Messiah and His disciples were communicant members of the "Qahal" (Jewish Community, Assembly, Congregation), a highly organised monotheistic religious Temple-System of Israel. To propose that He would have declared to Peter, a Jew, that He was going to build a "Church", exceeds the ridiculous! If he did not use 'Qahal' or a similar meaning word, then it is not impossible that He may have used the word "synagogue" - which also refers to an "assembly" (of Jewish worshippers) and which word is used commonly in the New Testament when referring to such Jewish congregations (53 times in the Gospels and in Acts).

There will almost certainly be readers who will condemn this reasoning as "speculation" and discard it as such. To be consistent though, these readers will then have to discard the whole theory about the "Church - built on this Rock" also, because on this very concept rests the total foundation of Christianity! This Messianic declaration certainly established the Foundation of His subsequent Following - question is WHICH was He referring to?

If we could find the answer to this question, then we would be able to recognise the True Congregation of God. We would then also notice the great misconceptions amongst religious Organisations and Institutions, all claiming the right to this Foundation Stone.

### *TRACING THE 'QAHAL' THROUGH TIME*

We find this 'Qahal' of Israel first in Egypt, then in the wilderness of Zin, then at Sinai where God gave them their organisation, their Constitution, their Law and Ordinances; their Form of Worship and its altars and appointments; their Priests and elders; their ritual and some of their liturgy; and their financial system. As time moves on through Tanach (O.T.) times, the Qahal of Israel moves farther and further away from the mixed multitude of the Exodus into the established worship in the Promised Land and the Temple in Jerusalem. The original Divine Promise of a QAHAL was, of course, also prophetic of the 'QAHAL' that Messiah would establish. But, would this be a 'New Church', as Christians today imply? Many teachers claim that such a 'New Church' was born on the Jewish Feast of Shavuot (Pentecost), 50 days after the Crucifixion. "God started all over again with Gentile nations, having been 'let down' by His Chosen people," they claim.

It is this esteemed position of 'QAHAL ELECT', which many Christian Churches claim to be filling. But, are they truly doing so? Did the Almighty really start a 'new' Church? The present True Congregation of the Almighty should merely be a continuation of that 'QAHAL' which had been part of God's Eternal Plan. "God is not man that He should change." He protected His 'elect', who may be traced throughout history like a golden thread. The majority of believers, of course, by their own election, have been disqualified from the QAHAL. Surely, the Almighty did not spend 4 000 years in preparing a nation as His instrument, merely to discard it and start afresh? This would imply that the Almighty is unsuccessful in achieving His preordained aims!

Those who claim that "a Gentile Church was born at Pentecost", is blinded to the plain statements of the Bible as to the nationality of those who, in their thousands, accepted the Messiah on the Jewish Festival celebration of Shavuot (Pentecost), and for decades afterwards. All these people were Jews - Let us read it from the Bible. Acts 2:1 "When the day of Shavuot (Pentecost) had come, ...(v. 5) there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven."

Thousands of Jews from far-off countries would normally come to Jerusalem, to celebrate the Jewish Feasts (as commanded by God). Many of them sojourned until after the Feast, in this case the first Shavuot (Pentecost) after the Crucifixion. On this Day, Peter addressed them as, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem" (v. 14) and again (v.22), "Men of Israel". In verse 36 Peter makes a proclamation unto "The House of Israel", and preaches the Sacrifice of Messiah to them. Then, when they were pierced at heart by Peter's Message, verse 41 records that, "there were added that day about 3 000 souls". Added to what? Something must already have been in existence? It cannot be the Church, for if the Church was only born at that time, then it did not yet exist! Some reflection will reveal that the apostles were all circumcised members of the "QAHAL", and it was to this existing "Qahal" of Israel, which had already been in existence for centuries, that these 3000 Jews were added!

These newly added souls did not start "Church" services, but, according to clear N.T. Scripture, they attended the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem daily, and "God added to their number day by day, those destined to be saved" (Acts 2:46). The apostles proclaimed this same Message right in the Temple where only Jews could enter. Many of those "who had listened to their Message, became believers, the total number of whom had now risen to something like 5 000" (Acts 4:4). No mention of Gentiles or a "New Church"! These Messianic believers, all Jews, "used to meet by common consent in the Portico of Solomon (in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem). No one else ever dared to join them ... and the number of men and women who came to believe in Messiah increased steadily" (Acts 5:12) "People even came crowding in from the towns round about Jerusalem." (verse 16) These also were Jews! "The Word continued to spread; the number of disciples in Jerusalem (Jews!) was greatly increased, and a large group of (Temple) Priests made their submission to the Faith (obviously, the Jewish Faith)." (Acts 6:7)

#### WHAT REALLY HAPPENED ON PENTECOST (SHAVUOT)?

Evangelical scholars generally teach that "The Church was founded on the Day of Pentecost" (Acts 2) and that this event was the beginning of a movement by which God instituted a 'New Covenant' which would do away with the 'old Jewish System' and transfer all Promises and Blessings to 'the Christians' in future. It must be remembered, that the group of Messianic believers who accepted the Messiah on this Day, were Jews. They were wondering when God would "restore the Kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6). Messianic Jews in the Book of Acts never departed from the Torah in lifestyle or worship. They simply acknowledged YAHUSHUAH to be the focal point of the community in which the Torah was the basis of life and instruction.

The events of this occasion represent a shift towards a Renewed Covenant - not an annulment of the Old Covenant. The major change lay in the form in which the Temple was now to exist. In the Torah, God commanded that a movable Mishkan (Tent Tabernacle) be built, where He would manifest Himself and where the people would worship Him with their offerings and sacrifices. Later, this movable Mishkan became a permanent Building in Jerusalem, named the Beit haMikdash, (The Temple). Beginning with the events of Acts 2, this permanent Temple would again become a movable Mishkan. According to the Renewed Covenant, the materials for this new Temple would be "living stones" - the lives of all who are part of the Body of Messiah, with Himself being the "Chief Cornerstone".

One must realise, that the meeting of believers recorded in Acts 2, took place in the Temple in Jerusalem. The Scriptures record that the "blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting", leads many to believe that the disciples were meeting in the 'upper room' of a house. It is impossible though, that a vast crowd of three thousand people or more gathered with the disciples (verse 6) if they were in a small upper room of a normal Middle Eastern style house! The Hebrew word for house (bayit) can either mean an everyday house or it can refer to the Temple (Bayit haMikdash). To this day, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is known as 'Har haBayit', which means "Mountain of the House."

One would expect these Torah-observant Jews on the morning of Shavuot, one of the three main annual Jewish Feasts, to be commemorating it at the Temple 'as was their custom', together with the rest of the Qahal of their Torah-observant countrymen.

There is another compelling reason to believe that the events recorded in Acts 2 happened in the Temple Mount and not in the Upper Room of a private house. We are told in Acts 2:41 that after Peter preached a sermon, "So then, those who had received his word were baptised; and there were added that day about three thousand souls." That is a lot of people to believe at one time and to all be baptised! Jerusalem has no lakes, ponds, or even sizable streams in the vicinity which can accommodate such a mass baptism. In order to understand and appreciate how this occurred we need to know something about baptism as a Jewish ritual and about the layout of the late Second

Temple period in Jerusalem. Few Christians are aware that baptism, to this day, is a Jewish religious ritual since ancient times. It was a practice of symbolic cleansing widely used by the Jewish people of the Second Temple period, and even perhaps before then. It was based on the Torah concept of ritual cleansing. When someone was "baptised", it required bodily immersion in a small pool of running water. It symbolised a change of status, such as conversion to Judaism; or going into the ministry of being a Torah teacher (i.e. Messiah's immersion by John the Baptist in the river Jordan). In addition, people also immersed themselves when they repented of their sins and sought to demonstrate the fact that God cleansed them of their sin by symbolically immersing into a pool of fresh water. Going into the water was likened to dying, since one became in a state picturing death (one cannot live under water). Coming up out of the water pictured a new life coming out of a womb - symbolising spiritual re-birth.

These new Messianic believers on Shavuot were not converting to Judaism. God would be cleansing them upon remission and repentance. Thus, it would have been quite natural for them to go to the Mikveh (Ritual Bath). But where could so many believers have been immersed in water simultaneously? In Jewish custom, people simply immersed themselves. A witness stood by making sure that all of their body went into the water, and perhaps listening to their testimony. In recent years, archaeologists have discovered dozens of mikva'ot (ritual immersion pools) carved into the rocks outside the Second Temple wall that surrounded it. These could easily accommodate the large masses of people which normally frequented the Temple grounds and used these mikva'ot before entering. When these Jewish men and women accepted the Messiah as a result of Peter's preaching, they had the ideal opportunity to be baptised in these public pools. No other such facility is available within many miles of Jerusalem - hence the use of the river Jordan some 30 Km away. The true meaning of that defining moment in Acts 2 therefore confirms not the "birth of the Church", but the establishment of the new Covenant Qahal which would be like the movable Mishkan of old, moving with believers wherever they were sent with the Good News of the New Kingdom.

Up to this point, it had been the norm for the nations to come up to Jerusalem. Now the Temple would go out from Jerusalem unto the uttermost parts of the earth. In the millennial age, the Temple will once again stand in the midst of Jerusalem and again, the nations will come up to worship the King in Jerusalem (Isa. 66:22,23).

There is Biblical continuity between Israel, the people of God in the times of the Tanach, and this present age. Whatever characterised the believing Messianic community before Pentecost, is that which would also characterise them afterwards. Non-Jews together with the remnant of Israel, are God's called-out people, designed to function most consistently as new spiritual rejuvenated creations and as a holy community living out the Torah in their midst. The Torah should still be the basis for further instruction in this present age. The New Covenant merely expounds on the same Law principles, but in a more spiritual sense, now "written on the tables of the hearts of believers, rather than on Tables of Stone" (Jer. 31:31-35; Ezek. 11:17-21)

There is a long history of perceived differences between those called out before and after the events of Acts 2. The Church and Israel are seen as two distinct spiritual entities, two opposing flows of the stream of God's covenanted people. This is neither necessary nor true and destroys the very purpose of Messiah's Mission to "restore the fallen Tabernacle of David" and break down the "Wall of partition between Jew and non-Jew" to make the two into One Body (Eph. 2 : 12-16 and 3:6). If this Body is the Church, as Christians like to believe, then Messiah has failed miserably in His Task, for there are no Jews in Christianity - only an unbridgeable void. Only when Messianic believers join the Qahal of Israel with its Torah principles, does the positive achievement of Messiah's Restorative Action become evident.

#### *THE ESSENCE OF SHAVUOT ('PENTECOST')*

We see therefore, direct from Scripture, a Jewish Message accepted by Jews initially - not a Christian Gospel totally contrary to Judaism, as the world has for so long believed! In fact, the Gospel was NOT preached unto Gentiles until long after these staggering events in Israel! This is proven by the fact that years later, Peter had to be specially persuaded by the Most High, in a vision, that the Good News was meant for Gentiles also! Peter, at first, protested and so did the Messianic Congregation, on hearing of the baptising of Gentiles by Peter at Caesarea, in Israel ( Acts 10 and 11). The teaching that the Church is 'a new thing' born at Pentecost and that it is a Gentile Congregation, has NO Scriptural foundation whatsoever! Many readers, at this stage, may well feel done in and left out of what now sounds to be a "Jewish Conspiracy", or gross favoritism on the part of the Almighty. Let us immediately put these minds at rest, by unfolding the beauty in God's Eternal Plan for all mankind. Once again, the wider concept of God's "Qahal" reveals this great Mystery:

This wider 'Qahal', including many other nations, was eluded to by Isaac, the ancient Patriarch of Israel, some three centuries before the Exodus, when bestowing his blessing on his son Jacob, he said: Gen. 28:3 "And God Almighty bless thee. ... and multiply thee that thou may be a multitude ('QAHAL' - community) of nations". Again, in Gen. 35:11, God promises Jacob that "a QAHAL (community) of nations shall descend from him", In this way, God's Qahal (Congregation, Assembly, Community) is open to all out there - but, in order to become part of it, one would have to become part of His 'Jewish' System, as handed down, through Moses, from God to His elected (for this very Purpose) nation! Evil forces, aware of this eternal Solution of Peace and Blessing for mankind, has therefore gone out of its way to confuse and hide the real issue to would-be followers of the True God.

Those who believe that the 'Old Testament' Jewish System of God has been done away with and replaced by a "Church" system, the doctrines and teachings of which are totally contrary to His 'Jewish' System, fail to see our ever-faithful Creator unfailingly fulfill His vast and changeless Purpose of raising a 'QAHAL' of people, according to His Covenant with Israel of old!

Those believers who make it into the Kingdom of God, will become part of His 'Jewish' System of Rule, from Jerusalem over the earth. It would not be strange at this time of history, that many professing followers of Messiah, would rebel at the thought of having to accept the Jewish Faith, Customs and Laws. However, over the last few years of this Countdown to the establishment of His Kingdom, there has been a fast growing movement in the world amongst dedicated, searching believers, to discover their "Hebrew Roots". The pace of this evolutionary development is fast increasing, as the Spirit of God is moving to lead souls to His Original True Faith in His Process of "Restoring the fallen Tabernacle of David"