

Hebraic Insight

Learning for Life

BIBLE LESSONS FOR FAMILIES, STUDY GROUPS, AND CONGREGATIONS



GOD AND FAMILY

Treasures, Old and New

(Matthew 13:52)



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Editor & Publisher

God and Family

The family is facing an unrelenting and insidious attack not only in the Western world but also in diverse cultures around the globe as secularists seek to redefine marriage and family in their grandiose vision of an atheistic multiculturalism. Families are disintegrating as moral values, ethics, and even etiquette are jettisoned in favor of a hedonistic worldview that trumpets the dictum, “If it feels good, do it,” accompanied by the strains of “I did it my way!” Adults and children are engaged in all sorts of conduct that would have been unthinkable a generation ago.

More and more Christians are finding that the “bigger-is-better” syndrome and the “ediface complex” have proven to be counterproductive in terms of quality relationships with God and fellow man. Performance-based worship experiences that glorify the existential moment are leaving more and more people empty inside.

The good news is that God is already at work, has already anticipated this dilemma, and has already charted a course out of these doldrums. For those with insight into divine purposes, the answer is clear. It is time for the restoration of all that God has spoken by his prophets since the world began. It is time for the family to be restored as the locus for social, academic, and spiritual growth and development. It is time for renewal of the Hebraic worldview that brings a healthy holism that focuses the family on God and his Word. Get ready, the church is going home!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John D. Garr". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the main text of the article.

Hebraic Insight

In-depth Bible study resources for individuals, families, and congregations focusing on the Hebraic foundations of the Christian faith.

(Unless otherwise noted, Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible.)

Editor & Publisher

John D. Garr

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GOD AS FAMILY

Far from being the solitary individual envisioned by most people, the God of the Bible is actually a family, a community of three in one. God is one being of spirit substance, manifest in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Being coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal, these three dwell together in perfect community by means of mutual encircling and interpenetration. Without the principles of family and community, God does not exist.



KEY TEXT: *“Jesus also was baptized, and while he was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son, in you I am well-pleased’ (Luke 3:21-22).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Luke’s account of Jesus’ baptism is significant in that the three persons of God were manifest simultaneously. Discuss how Jesus was witnessed by the Holy Spirit and by the Father when the Spirit assumed a bodily form and the Father spoke in an audible voice from heaven. This manifestation of God was predicted by Isaiah 48:16-17 where the Messiah is sent by both the Lord *and* his Spirit. How does this event manifest God as community?
2. The Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit were manifest together when in concert, they as One created the universe. Confirm this truth from the language of the creation narratives by evaluating how “in the beginning God created heaven and earth” (Genesis 1:1) by issuing his spoken Word (Genesis 1:3; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16) and by moving with his Spirit (Genesis 1:2).
3. The heavenly Father is eternally unknown and unrevealed according to John (John 1:18) and Paul (1 Timothy 6:16). Discuss the role of the the Word of God (manifest as Jesus in the incarnation according to John 1:1-3, 14, 18) as the revealer of the Father to humanity. Compare John’s description with the Lord’s revealing himself to Samuel by the Word (1 Samuel 3:21). Analyze also the role of the Holy Spirit as the personal manifestation of God who moves upon creation (Genesis 1:2) and indwells believers (John 14:26).
4. The most fundamental instruction in Holy Scripture about God is summed up in the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One” (Deuteronomy 6:4). The Hebrew word which is translated “one” (*echad*) means

utterly unique; however, it also speaks of compound unity. Paul draws upon this truth as he explicates the *Shema* thus: “. . . for us there is but one God, the Father . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ . . .” (1 Corinthians 8:6), showing that the Father is *Elohim* (“God”) and Jesus is *Yahweh* (“LORD”). Consider how both the Father (God) and Jesus (the Lord) are manifest in the *Shema*, the first and most important commandment (Mark 12:29).

5. If Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are *echad*, they must be so in absolute oneness. This necessitates their being coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal. Confirm their coequality from Philippians 2:6. If the three persons are equally God, they must be one in substance. What is God’s substance (John 4:24)? Confirm that Father, Son, and Spirit have always existed and will always exist as you read Micah 5:2 (the Son) and Genesis 1:1-2 (the Spirit).

6. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit manifest plurality of person but oneness of substance by means of their mutual encircling, indwelling, permeating, and interpenetration of one another in a process called perichoresis or circumincession (reciprocal existence in one another). Thus, they are not separate beings but the one God of biblical monotheism. Discuss this profoundly perfect manifestation of absolute uniqueness in the unity of community. Is it any wonder, then, that God created humanity with the capacity of mirroring his oneness by making two-in-one in the first human family?

7. The reason that God is called Father (Jeremiah 31:9; Malachi 1:6) is to underscore two things: 1) God’s personhood and 2) God’s relationality. Confirm the truth that God–Father, Son, and Spirit–manifest both distinct personality and relational mutuality. Analyze for yourself how oneness in the human family and in the community of faith is designed to image the invisible God, the Three in One, in the earth.

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word **אֶחָד** (*echad*) means “to unite, to join together, to be in unity.” While *echad* can also be used as the numeral *one*, it clearly means “the only one; the incomparable.” The *Shema*, therefore, can be translated as “The LORD [is] our God, the LORD alone.” Since *echad* describes Adam and Eve as “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24), it can be translated as “compound unity,” a unity in diversity that makes two (or three) one. *Echad* can be achieved in the church in fulfillment of Jesus’ prayer to the Father “that they all may be one [*echad*] in us” (John 17:21).

God is perfect relationality, a perfect family, a perfect community. The fact that three persons–Father, Son, and Spirit–dwell together in one being of substance with absolute unity is testimony to the fact that communion in the divine family and community and that mutuality of relationship are central to the very being of the One God of the Bible.

GOD AND THE HEAVENLY FAMILY

Not only is the community of faith in the earth looked upon as an extended family, with God as the Father of all the faithful, but the heavenly realm itself is also described in Holy Scripture as functioning within the context of family. As on the earth, so it is in heaven: God himself is both the Father and the Sovereign of the angelic host, and he is worshipped, adored, and served by his heavenly children continually day and night.



KEY TEXT: *“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name” (Ephesians 3:14-15).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In the opening words of ancient Jewish prayer, God is revered as *Avinu, Malkenu* (Our Father, Our King). This form of address accurately describes the God of the Bible: first, he is Father, second, he is King. While he is the sovereign of the universe, first and foremost, he is a God of love whose character is manifest in his fatherhood. What does it mean to you that God is your Father? Do you perceive him as a God who loves you or as your judge?
2. The beings whom God created to populate the heavenly realm are described as sons (children) of God (Job 2:1; 38:7). Before the earth was created, the angels as “sons of God” shouted for joy! Consider the importance of God’s establishing in the pre-terrestrial creation the principle of family relationships in the heavenly dominion. Does this establish a precedent for things to come as God’s will was done on earth as in heaven (Matthew 6:10)?
3. Since the angelic host is comprised entirely of spirit beings, it is inherently genderless (like God himself). Unlike humans, angels were created with immortality; therefore, there is no need for procreation and, therefore, no need for gender. Confirm this truth about the heavenly family from Matthew 22:29-30 and Psalm 8:5; Hebrews 2:7-9. This is why the generic term *sons* is used to describe the angels’ relationship to the heavenly Father (Job 2:1). This also eliminates the possibility that God could have been conferring with the angels when he said, “Let us make humanity in our image” (Genesis 1:26).
4. Not only is there a Father in heaven, but there is also a mother! Paul describes a “Jerusalem which is above” as “the mother of us all” (Galatians 4:26). The heavenly “mother,” however, is not a “goddess,” the consort of

the heavenly Father (as in pagan religions). Indeed, though God is genderless, both masculine and feminine qualities are manifest in Deity (Psalm 68:5; Isaiah 42:13-14), establishing the characteristics that God separated into masculine and feminine genders when he created humanity.

5. The writer of Hebrews speaks of a correlation between the “heavenly Jerusalem,” the “innumerable company of angels,” and the “church of the firstborn ones” (Hebrews 12:23). Is it possible that the heavenly host of angels in some way assume a motherly role in relationship to humans and in particular to believers? Is this what Paul was describing in Galatians 4:26?

6. Jesus himself helped us understand the motherly image of heavenly Jerusalem when he declared, “See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you, that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 18:10). Consider how the angels nurture and protect those who are the children of God as you analyze Psalm 91:11. Was this prophecy solely messianic (Matthew 4:6), or does it apply to anyone who makes the Lord his “refuge and fortress” (Psalm 91:2)?

7. The primary role of God as Father is to bless and to keep the creation. This truth is manifest in the first of the three blessings contained in the Aaronic Benediction, the Father’s blessing: “The LORD bless you and keep you” (Numbers 6:24). Since God’s essence is love, it is his nature not only to create but also to sustain. Establish the universal truth that God is inherently love in action, not a static concept (1 John 4:7-8). Confirm that God is both creator and sustainer of the universe by the power of his Word (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:3). Analyze the concept that because of love, God created and he sustains, blesses, and keeps both the heavenly and earthly creation as the Eternal Father of the family in heaven and on earth.

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word בן (*ben*) literally means “son,” but it can also mean “children” as in Genesis 3:16, where Eve is told that she will bring forth בנים (literally “sons”), obviously “children” of both genders. Likewise, when the Israelites were called *B’nei Yisrael* (Sons of Israel), both genders were included. In Hebrew, masculine terms are often gender inclusive. Likewise, the Greek word τέκνον (*teknon*) literally means “son” but also means “children.” The word *son*, therefore, is inclusive of all God’s “children” both in heaven (the angels) and on earth (male and female).

God is love, and his love is manifest in the fatherly relationship that he maintains with the entire creation, both the heavenly angelic host and the earthly human family of male and female. This is the foundational divine truth that is echoed in the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.”

GOD AND THE EARTHLY FAMILY

When God formed the human entity, his intention was to establish a celestial-terrestrial relationship of continual communion. God maintains the same family relationship with the inhabitants of the earth that he has with the heavenly family. Every human being is in a very real sense God's offspring. Those who have faith in God have found their prime sense of identity in the joy of loving relationship with God as his covenant children.



KEY TEXT: *“See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God . . . Beloved, now we are children of God and we know that, when he appears, we will be like him” (1 John 3:1-2).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Because the “earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Psalm 24:1, NIV), in a very real sense, all human beings are children of God. This is what Paul notes when he quotes from the *Thais* of the Greek poet Menander: “We are [God’s] offspring.” Analyze Paul’s Mars Hill discourse in Acts 17:22-31 to confirm the universality of God’s family relationship with humanity. Luke 3:38 describes Adam, the corporate head of the human race, as “the son of God.” Confirm from Malachi 2:10 the universal fatherhood of God and establish from Romans 2:15 the divine basis for the human conscience. Does this expand your view of God’s dominion?
2. In Exodus 4:22, God described Israel as “my son, my firstborn.” In selecting Israel to be his chosen nation, God confirmed the principle of his fatherhood and the Israelites’ being his children. How does God’s family nature ensure his irrevocable relationship with the Jewish people (Romans 11:29)?
3. Paul was overwhelmed with God’s love by which he made provision through Christ for adopting humanity into his family even when they were yet sinners (Romans 5:8). John made the same exclamation in 1 John 3:1. Listen to God’s declaration: “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18, NKJV). Can a human being experience anything more important than being part of God’s family?
4. In Romans 9:4 Paul spoke of the extraordinary blessings that God had bestowed upon the people of Israel: “the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the prom-

ises.” How significant is it that in this litany of divine gifts, “the adoption as sons,” is at the top of the list? Discuss how we can be so consumed with glory, covenants, Torah, worship, and promises that we forget the most fundamental thing of all: being the children of God.

5. In Romans 11, Paul uses an extended metaphor to describe the relationship between God and both Israel and the Gentiles who come to faith in Jesus as Messiah and Lord. We might describe the olive tree as “God’s Family Tree of Salvation.” Analyze the ongoing inclusion of Israel in the tree despite some branches being pruned off because of unbelief. Is this based on Israel’s merit or on God’s covenantal faithfulness (Isaiah 48:9)? Demonstrate how the root system of the tree is comprised of the prophets and sages with Jesus as Messiah being the tap root. How were Gentiles added to God’s family tree? Are all the children in the family tree equal before God (Galatians 3:28)?

6. Believers throughout the centuries have been brought into God’s family through adoption as children. The provision that allowed this inclusion was the offering of God’s Son for the redemption of the world (John 3:16). Confirm this truth as you study 1 Peter 1:3-4, 23; Romans 8:15; and Galatians 4:6.

7. The spiritual rebirth (being “born again” or “from above”) causes one to enter the “kingdom of God” (John 3:3). It establishes one’s citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20), with one’s name recorded on the “Lamb’s Book of Life” (Revelation 21:27). It also confirms one’s citizenship in the Israel of God, for even Gentiles become naturalized citizens of God’s earthly dominion through the Messiah (Ephesians 2:19). When one belongs to the Messiah, one is fully Abraham’s children and an heir of all God’s promises to the patriarch and his subsequent progeny (Galatians 3:29). Discuss the broad dimensions of inclusion in God’s family and in his dominion for all believers.

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word מִשְׁפָּחָה (*mishpachah*) means “family”; however, it can also mean “clan,” “people,” or “nation.” This extension of meaning stresses the fact that among the Jewish people, family extends beyond the traditional nuclear family to include the extended family and even the whole nation of Israel. No one and no family is an island that is not affected by others. This Hebraic truth forms the basis for the recognition of believers in the Messiah as members of a family confirmed by use of the terms *brother* and *sister* as greetings in the earliest church.

From the beginning of creation, God has established himself as the Father of all, and to one degree or another all created beings are God’s children. Those who are believers in the Messiah are heirs of God and “joint heirs” with Christ as spiritual children of God in a dimension that parallels the “only begotten Son’s” relationship with God.

HUMANITY: GOD'S IMAGE AND LIKENESS

One of the most striking and comforting words of Holy Scripture is that humanity was created by God in the image and likeness of the Divine. This alone gives us confidence that the human family is more than a random accident of chemistry and electrical energy. God purposely imaged himself in humanity by placing a spark of the divine in humankind and by forming a community that was designed to be one in flesh and in spirit.



KEY TEXT: *“Then God said, Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness . . . In the day when God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and he blessed them and called their name Adam in the day when they were created ” (Genesis 1:26; 5:1-2, NASB, KJV).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Paul establishes a foundational principle for understanding truths about God when he declares that God’s “invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made” (Romans 1:20). Is it not reasonable the Creator left his imprint on the creation? How does this truth help you understand more about God?
2. After creating the universe and populating the earth with plant and animal life, God formed humanity from the dust of the earth on the final day of his explosion of creative energy. Two important things were different in humans from everything else that God had made. First, God created humanity in his own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). Second, God directly breathed into man’s nostrils the breath of life so that man became a “living soul” (Genesis 2:7). Discuss the implications of being a living soul in God’s image.
3. Much speculation has been made as to what constituted man’s being made in God’s “image and likeness.” Since God is Spirit (John 4:24), he has no physical form; therefore, the anthropomorphisms (humanlike characteristics) and theriomorphisms (animal-like characteristics) that are ascribed to God are for human understanding only, not as depictions of God. Is this why God forbids idol images of humans or animals (Deuteronomy 4:16-27)?
4. Some, including sages of Israel, have suggested that man’s being in the image and likeness of God is constituted by his possessing the power of reason and by his having a conscience. Human conscience, however, is based

on the Torah (law) written on the hearts of humanity (Romans 2:15). Evaluate whether reason and rational thought are God's gifts to humanity or are a part or the totality of the image of God in humankind.

5. In reality, the core issue of the very being of God that is imaged in the human creation is the communal, relational nature of God. God is three in one, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dwelling in perfect community of mutuality and unity. God's creation of humanity to be a community of two in one is the reflection of the image of God. Analyze how God created humanity in his image by creating male and female and then declaring that the two of them were one flesh (Genesis 2:24). The same Hebrew word for "one" is *echad*, which is used to describe the oneness of God in the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4). Discuss the Oneness of God reflected in the oneness of Adam and Eve.

6. In order for humanity to reflect the image of God, Adam and Eve had to be created coequal, consubstantial, and comortal (with the opportunity to partake of the Tree of Life and gain immortality). Like Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Adam and Eve were completely equal in every respect with no inferiority or subordination of either to the other. They were equally given "dominion over the earth" (Genesis 1:26). Likewise, Adam and Eve were of the same substance as Adam confessed when he first saw Eve: "This at last is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23). Both Adam and Eve were mortal, and both chose death by eating of the forbidden fruit. Consider how these qualities of the Divine are mirrored in the human creation.

7. In Genesis 5:1-2, we are told that "In the day when God created humanity, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and he blessed them and called their name Adam." Discuss how the common name further confirms the oneness and absolute equality of Adam and Eve.

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew phrase **אָדָם** (*ha-Adam*) means "the Adam." Because this is the only place in the Hebrew Scriptures where the definite article ("the") is used before a name, it confirms that God created "humanity," not just a human male. Everything central to gender-specific existence was present in the one lump of dust which God formed into "the human," later to be given gender when the feminine was removed from inside *the Adam* to form Eve. This further confirms the absolute oneness and equality of the human family as a reflection of the oneness of God.

From the moment that God considered creating the human race, he determined that this creation would be unique in that it would reflect his own image and likeness. Since God is a family or community of three in one, it was only natural that what would image him on the earth would be a family or community of two in one, Adam and Eve.

HEBRAIC MANHOOD: GOD'S DESIGN

The masculinity of the first human male was revealed only when God removed the feminine element that had been in his side and used it as a basis for forming the first female. Because the man was formed first, then, the male was thrust into a role of leadership through service, a role that has continued unabated through millennia. Even though it has been grossly abused because of sin, God's design is for men to lead, to bless, and to keep.



KEY TEXT: “The LORD God formed man of dust from the ground. . . . [and] put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it” (Genesis 2:7, 15).

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Humankind was not formed in the Garden of Eden but was placed there after being formed from the dust of the earth outside the garden (Genesis 2:15; 3:23). The text actually says, “God formed humanity [*ha-Adam*], dust from the ground [*ha-adamah*].” Notice the intrinsic connection between the human and the humus, between the earthling and the earth. How does humanity’s creation from the earth tie human destiny to the earth (Psalm 37:29; 2 Peter 3:13)? Discuss reasons why humanity was formed from the earth with the destiny of returning to the earth (Romans 8:20; Genesis 3:19; Ecclesiastes 12:7)? Was this part of God’s plan of love to bring humans into full relationship with himself and to give them eternal life (John 3:16)?
2. From the moment of creation, humanity was designed by God to function in a role of servanthood. Genesis 2:5 notes that the flora of the earth were not complete because there was “no man to cultivate the ground.” The Hebrew word translated “cultivate” is *abad*, from the same root as the word *ebed*, meaning “servant.” Discuss the divine principle that from its formation the Adamic race was designed to “serve” the very earth from which it came.
3. God observed that it was “not good” for humanity to be alone. Consider the inherent human (male and female) need for relationship. Was not God’s original design for men to be husbands and fathers? How is this manifest in the very genetic and hormonal elements of the masculine creation?
4. Genesis 1:26 confirms that God designed humankind, male and female, to have “dominion” over the earth (“. . . let *them* have dominion”). When God defined the dominion, however, it was in terms of service. Adam and Eve

had dominion over the earth only as they served (“cultivated”) the earth. Evaluate dominion and service in the light of Jesus’ words in Matthew 23:11.

5. After the formation of the woman, the man recognized their inherent oneness and exclaimed, “This is now [at last] bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man” (Genesis 2:23). In this act of naming and claiming the feminine creation, the [now] male assumed the role of leadership in the community of two; however, that role of leadership was one of service, for his destiny could be fulfilled only through blessing and keeping. Analyze the balance between humanity’s coregency (dominion) over the earth and the assumption of servant leadership by the human male (Ephesians 5:25; Colossians 3:18-19).

6. Man was designed by God to be a provider, a role that became more burdensome after the sin in Eden (Genesis 3:19). This is the reason that apart from his personal identity in God, men are defined by their work (whereas women, by reason of their design for nurture, define themselves by their relationships). Evaluate these very real differences in gender distinctives and how they mutually reinforce and complement each other.

7. There is a difference! Despite humanist efforts to promote a “unisex” society, the truth is that in the human genome, there are physiological, psychological, and hormonal distinctives in male and female that go beyond the obvious physiological differences. If men and women were the same, one would be superfluous. The truth is that both are necessary to complete the human equation, with both contributing their individual distinctives in complementary mutuality of family and community relationship. Discuss the importance of differences without deficiencies. What are some of the roles that males are designed and best suited to fulfill?

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word עָבַד (*abad*) means “to work, to serve” (translated “till” or “cultivate” in Genesis 2:5). It is the same as עָבַד (*ebed*), which means “servant” or “slave” (“We were slaves [עֲבָדִים (*ebadim*)] in Egypt” (Deuteronomy 6:21). The unique role of men was to “serve” the earth (Genesis 3:23) and to “guard” it. This loving service of blessing and keeping must first be manifest in man’s relationship with women. If a man is an abuser of women, he will also be an abuser of the earth. True maleness is established by loving service to wife, family, and community.

While women are designed physiologically and psychologically to nurture, men are likewise designed to work, serve, and, in the process, lead. Hebraic manhood is one of blessing and keeping by leading the family in social interaction, study (both spiritual and secular), and in prayer and worship, never allowing the family to forget its divine source.

HEBRAIC WOMANHOOD: GOD'S DESIGN

Woman was not a divine afterthought concocted when God realized that he had made a mistake and left man alone. The first woman was also not a composition derived from superfluous male body parts. Woman was the completion of God's determination to create humanity in his own image and likeness. Divine surgery provided the substance to form the feminine and to complete the process of manifesting God's image in the earth.



KEY TEXT: “The LORD God fashioned into woman the rib which he had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh’ (Genesis 2:22-23).

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In the final act of divine creation, God formed humanity from the dust of the earth and vivified that body with his own breath, producing a “living soul” in the image and likeness of God. God did not form *Adam*, a human male, later to form *Chava* (Eve), a human female. Literally God formed *ha-Adam* from *ha-Adamah* (the *earthling* from the *earth*, the *human* from the *humus*). *Ha-Adam* should have been translated “the human” or “humanity,” not “man.” Discuss how God created both genders in one *ha-Adam*.
2. Because humanity is corporeally en fleshed, it was not possible for two in one to image the communion of the Three in One without their separation into two distinct beings and then their being rejoined to become one. Analyze what God meant when he observed that “it was not good for *ha-Adam* to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). Why was communion necessary for humanity?
3. When God moved to complete his creation of humanity, he separated a part of *ha-Adam* and used it as a basis to form the person who became known as “woman.” What God surgically removed from *ha-Adam* was called as *tzela*, which is generally translated “rib,” but is more accurately rendered “side,” as evidenced by the most ancient translation from the Hebrew, the Septuagint, with the Greek word *pleuran* (“side”). Is it possible that God removed from *ha-Adam* the parts that are uniquely feminine and formed *Chava* around them?
4. Whether a “rib” or something else, what God removed was the substance around which he formed the being who would bring communion to the human creation, the feminine. Whatever the case, it was an essential part that

was internal to *ha-Adam*. Discuss the consubstantiality of male and female that makes them equal in substance. Is there any hint of inferiority or of subordination of the female creation to the male creation?

5. What God proposed to form as a companion to *ha-Adam* was called in Hebrew *ezer k'negdo*, which is generally translated “help meet” or “suitable helper.” The word *ezer*, however, means “help,” but not in the sense of an assistant of inferior rank. As a matter of fact in virtually all other instances in Scripture, it means one of superior rank, including references to God as Israel’s “help” (Psalm 33:20; 115:9-11). Confirm the truth that woman was never intended to be an assistant, an inferior person in both rank and ability.

6. The Hebrew phrase *k'negdo* qualifies the noun *ezer*. It means “comparable to, equal to, suitable, or qualified.” Literally, it means “over against or in front of.” This term confirms that the woman as “help” was neither superior to nor inferior to man. She was “in front of” (on the same level as) and “over against” (a counterbalance to) the male. She was, as one translation indicates, “a power equal to” the man. Discuss the wisdom of God in forming two equal beings with masculine and feminine qualities that counterbalance, complement, and complete one another.

7. While male and female have clear distinctives, neither is deficient or defective. The two genders differ not only physiologically but also in other ways because God intended that neither would be superfluous by being identical to the other and that both would require the other for complementary mutuality, the essence of the divine *echad* (oneness or unity) that was imaged in humanity. Just as husband and wife fit together anatomically, they also fit together emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, and socially. How important is it to you to have an accurate understanding of God’s design for male and female?

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew term עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ (*ezer k'negdo*) means a “qualified help” (translated “help meet” in the King James Version, giving rise to the term *helpmate*). The term does not imply an inferior assistant, however, for *ezer* elsewhere in Scripture refers to a superior who helps an inferior (as with God being a help to man). The qualifying phrase *k'negdo* makes clear the meaning of *ezer*: “suitable, equal to, over against, in front of.” This means that women are neither inferior nor superior to men but that both are coequal—intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and socially.

God’s design for woman has always been consistent: she is the crowning glory of God’s creation, ontologically coequal and consubstantial with man. Both represent the perfect complement to one another when the divine design is unimpeded by the dysfunctionality produced by the uncontrolled greed and selfishness that sin produces.

MARRIAGE: GOD'S DESIGN

The institution of marriage is not a civil construct. It was designed by God himself and implemented first in the Edenic paradise as a means of mirroring his own image in the earth by bringing two distinct individuals into one superentity. The complementary mutuality that God engineered into the human entity brought together the divided halves of humanity, making possible the perfect communion of safe and healthy existence.



KEY TEXT: *“Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24, TNK).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Marriage is founded on covenantal relationship which is much more than a mere contractual agreement. God is God because he maintains the immutability of his covenantal faithfulness. Marriage is designed to manifest the same quality of constancy in relationship that God himself demonstrates continually in his love for humanity. Analyze the importance of covenant as a God-designed dynamic that is central to the institution of marriage (Malachi 2:14).
2. God's design for marriage was for an inviolable covenant between one man and one woman. Though he made allowances for hardness of heart and though various arrangements became socially accepted, God's will remained the same. Consider the words of Jesus: “From the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:8-9). Notice Jesus' reference to Genesis 2:24 in Mark 10:4-8. God's plan provided for a monogamous marriage covenant that ruled out polygyny, polyandry, serial polygamy (limitless divorce), and homosexuality. Consider the ways in which men and women have polluted God's design for marriage.
3. One of the reasons why the covenant of marriage must be honored and protected is that there are actually three persons involved in marriage: God, man, and woman. The sages of Israel have contended that God is involved in every aspect of a legally contracted marriage, even in the very act of conjugation that makes two “one flesh.” Discuss the extent to which God participates in the divine covenant that makes two one.
4. The covenant of marriage is ineffable, inexplicably producing one superentity without destroying the individuality of two covenant partners. From the moment that God presented the newly formed Eve to Adam, he declared that

the two would be one. Jesus explicated this truth further: “And the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh” (Mark 10:8). The conjugal physical union is only a material demonstration of the greater spiritual union. In marriage, the oneness and unity of God (Three in One) is imaged by two who become intertwined into one, a love process that mirrors the perichoresis of the three persons in God: an encircling and interpenetrating, a reciprocal existence of mutuality in one another. Discuss the *echad* (oneness) of God and the *echad* (oneness) of marriage. How does this understanding transform your understanding of the sacredness of marriage?

5. Another important aspect of Hebraic marriage is God’s declaration that a “man will leave father and mother and be joined to his wife.” The language of the King James Version is picturesque: “Leave and cleave.” Despite the fact that even in earliest biblical history, it has been the woman who, ironically, has had to leave her family and join her husband, God said that the man would leave and then cleave. The wife was never intended to be a mere acquisition of chattel for the man. Indeed, the man was expected by God to leave his family and social life to be joined to his wife. Discuss ways in which adhering to God’s original design could have avoided much of history’s abuse of women.

6. Marriage is a love institution. It rests on a foundation of covenantal love that grows and matures (not on infatuation, and hormonal selfishness). Consider the fact that Isaac *married* Rebecca and then he *loved* her (Genesis 24:67).

7. In Ephesians 5:23-28, Paul compares the relationship between Christ and the church and that of human marriage as a “great mystery.” Discuss ways in which marriages would be enriched if all husbands loved their wives as Christ loves the church and if all wives were as devoted to their husbands as the church is (or should be) to Christ? Would this not be paradise restored?

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word בְּרִית (beriyth) means a “covenant.” A covenant is a divine instrument that joins God to humans (as in the Abrahamic Covenant or in the Covenant of Grace) and humans to humans (as in the covenant of marriage). The Hebrew word דָּבַק (dabak), used in Genesis 2:24 to describe the joining together of husband and wife, is profoundly graphic: it literally means “to be glued together.” Marriage cements two covenant partners into one superentity, thereby producing the *echad* of “one flesh,” a unity in oneness that is parallel with the *echad* of God.

God recognized that the lack of human communion was “not good”; therefore, he formed two beings with the intention of making them one through the divine covenant of marriage. When God is at the center of a marriage, he brings the *echad* of unity and cohesion that can manifest heaven on earth in the form of a healthy, happy family.

HEBRAIC CHILDREN

In an ancient world that had a largely utilitarian view of children, the Hebraic position on children was very unique. It was based on a conviction of the sanctity of all human life and on the belief that children are gifts from God to propel the values of the present and the understanding of God into the future. This fundamental Hebraic understanding has produced a Jewish community that blesses its children with God's benediction.



KEY TEXT: *Behold, children are a gift of the LORD; the fruit of the womb is a reward” (Psalm 127:3).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Because the Hebraic worldview has always held that God created the universe and humanity and considers all human beings his children, the Hebraic family has also understood that children are God's gift, not an accident of biology. This understanding is, no doubt, based on the earliest Genesis narrative. When first human infant was born, his mother declared, “I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord” (Genesis 4:1). How important is it that Eve recognized her son as God's gift and not just a biological accident?
2. Consider the implications of Psalm 127:3 and its simple, straightforward declaration of the source and, therefore, the value of children. How are children God's “reward” to the righteous? When believers recognize children as God's gift, they understand the priceless treasure that God has entrusted to their care. Evaluate the great trust that God places in the hands of parents.
3. Much of the ancient world engaged in infanticide as a means of controlling population and maintaining the “quality of life” of the state. This was particularly true in Greece, where parents had up to seven days after the birth of a child to determine whether the child should live or be “exposed” to the elements. In Sparta, every newborn was examined by the elders of the city to determine whether it met the state's goals of eugenics to advance its warrior class. Compare this Greek perspective on children with that of the Bible.
4. Many nations in the ancient world also included in the worship of their pagan deities the practice of immolation of infants, particularly the firstborn of a household. In the worship of Molech in the valley of Hinnom on the south side of Jerusalem, priests smashed the heads of infants on the knees of

the stone deity and cast their remains into a fire in the god's belly. Discuss God's judgment upon those who worshipped Molech (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5). Confirm God's fundamental reason for taking Solomon's kingdom from him (1 Kings 11:7-11). How seriously does God take the abuse of children?

5. The reason for the generation of children is the biological fact that human beings are mortal creatures. The only way in which humanity can survive is through procreation. This is why God's first commandment in all of Scripture was "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28). The only way in which the righteous can propel their values into the future is through children. Evaluate the metaphor of Psalm 127:4-5.

6. Jesus did not invent a new position on children: he simply reinforced the attitude that was a part of the biblical culture when he took the children into his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them (Mark 10:16). This was but a simple fulfillment of God's command to Moses that the benediction which he had dictated to the prophet be pronounced upon the children of Israel forever (Numbers 6:23-27). Does this explain Jesus' frustration with those who tried to insulate him from the "little children" (Luke 18:16)? Discuss his declaration that no one can enter the kingdom without becoming like a little child (Matthew 18:3).

7. Paul gives sound instruction regarding parental responsibilities toward their children: they are not to be provoked to anger but are to be reared in the "discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4; Proverbs 22:15; 23:14). In Hebraic culture, a child was taught by the mother until weaning, by the father until puberty, and then by the elders until maturity. Consider the importance of instruction and discipline to the fundamental role of parenting in blessing and keeping their children by providing a home of *shalom*!

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word נַחֲלָה (*nachalah*) means a "inheritance or heritage." It can also mean "portion or share." The word טָקַר (*sakar*) means "hire, wages, reward." It can also mean "fare or passage-money." These two words are specifically used by the Hebrew Scriptures to describe the believer's perspective on children: they are God's inheritance to parents, and they are God's wages. Could it be that children are also a "ticket to the future" by which God allows parents to ensure that not only their DNA but also their values of justice and mercy survive their own deaths?

Something divine is at work in the generation of human progeny. Children are precious gifts that God entrusts to parents with strong instructions that they are to bless and guard them through the vulnerable years of their transition from infancy to childhood to puberty and beyond so that each generation may be survived by a godly seed.

MEN IN THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

The greatest example for every man in fulfilling the role of husband and father is God himself, the husband of Israel and the father of humanity. Just as God was unwaveringly and uncompromisingly committed to Israel and to his children, so men of God must manifest loving faithfulness to their families, blessing and keeping both wife and children through the same loving service that God through Christ manifest the human family.



KEY TEXT: *“For I have chosen [Abraham], in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice” (Genesis 18:19).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Abraham is the prototypical man in that he was the one human being in the world that God chose to initiate a covenant that would bring his blessing to all humanity (Genesis 12:3). God’s choice was based upon Abraham’s faith and faithfulness to transmit the instructions and faith of God to his descendants after him (Genesis 18:19). Discuss these and other qualities about Abraham that caused God to choose him as the father of faith. What is meant by “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3, NIV)? How important to Hebraic manhood is faithfulness to God?
2. The Aaronic Benediction in Numbers 6:24-26 is a tripartite benediction, one each from the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father’s blessing is this: “The Lord bless you and keep you.” It is uniquely the role of fatherhood, then, to bless and keep. This is the reason that men have their highest degree of personal fulfillment when they are blessing and guarding their families. Consider the way in which God’s fatherhood is mirrored in human fathers.
3. While women are designed anatomically and emotionally to give life and to nurture, men are designed to provide by work: “In the sweat of your face you will eat bread” (Genesis 3:19). Notice the commandment for work that is reinforced in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12. Why is it that men who do not work have low self esteem and often experience neurasthenia and substance abuse?
4. Society has assigned value to men on the basis of the perceived value of their work. The church has also dichotomized work into “secular” and “spiritual,” which has resulted in the demeaning of the “secular” and the glamoriz-

ing of the “spiritual. The truth is that all work has dignity because it is the fulfillment of a divine command and in that sense, work is worship. This is proven by the fact that one of the Hebrew words for “worship,” *abodah*, also is one of the words for “work.” Analyze work done by both men and women. How is a man’s work God’s work regardless as to its nature?

5. Though it is not an absolute demand, men have generally been designed to lead in the family, in society, and in the church. This does not eliminate or restrict women from leading, however. It merely defines roles in which men and women are generally more comfortable. Occasion, circumstance, and preference may make it more desirable for women to lead; however, more often than not, men are more comfortable with taking the lead. Is this tendency merely culturally conditioned, or is it part of God’s design for complementary mutuality in male and female roles?

6. Hebraic manhood takes the lead in three areas of family and community life: social interaction, study, and prayer/worship. Leading in each of these areas must be done only by example. Discuss ways in which each home can be a mini-temple when husband, wife, and children interact in these three synagogal functions. What were the results of this kind of activity in Acts 2:42?

7. Paul summarizes Hebraic manhood in 1 Corinthians 16:13-14: “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.” It is possible to “act like men” by being both strong and manifesting love at the same time? How important is it to be alert and on guard against the devices of Satan in fulfilling the role of protecting the family? If a man stands firm in the faith, will his family generally follow his lead? Does a father ever cease to be a father, or should he continue to teach and lead both his children and grandchildren in the ways of the Lord?

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word אֱמוּנָה (*emunah*) means a “faith”; however, the implication is faithfulness rather than intellectual assent. *Emunah* comes from אֱמֶת (*emet*), which means “truth.” Every believer gains acceptance before God in the same way as Abraham did, solely by faith (Ephesians 2:8), and this faith (*emunah*) comes by hearing the truth (*emet*) of God’s Word (Romans 10:17). Hebraic manhood, then, involves imitating the first Hebrew, Abraham, in believing God and following his Word that has been definitively and fully manifest in the person of Jesus Christ.

Manhood has been variously misunderstood, fostering androcentric abuse that has been as debilitating to the male as to the female. When men function from a perspective of strength that is manifest in love, they are able to fulfill the quality of servant leadership that God designed and that Jesus demonstrated and required of his disciples.

WOMEN IN THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Because the biblical Hebrews derived their understanding of womanhood from God's original design in creation, women were highly respected and honored in Hebrew society. Though women were severely restricted and abused in virtually all of the other cultures of the ancient world, biblical women enjoyed the mutual respect of freedom and equality with men that allowed them to fulfill a wide range of roles and responsibilities.



KEY TEXT: *“A woman of noble character . . . is worth far more than rubies. . . . a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (Proverbs 31:10, 30, NIV).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Some have suggested that the predominant role that women assumed in Hebrew culture—that of wife, mother, and homemaker—was a subordinate and demeaning one. It is also suggested that the Hebrew culture was androcentric and abusive of women. Unfortunately, this teaching assumes that ancient women did not choose roles that were uniquely connected to their physiology. The truth is that in a nomadic and agrarian society both men and women fulfilled roles for which they were more naturally suited physically and emotionally. Which was more essential to human survival, protecting and providing or birthing and nurturing?
2. Unlike Greek poets, playwrights, and philosophers who believed that woman was an evil creation designed by Zeus to torment men, the Hebrews understood that woman was the final element in the creation that God pronounced “good” and “very good.” Women were, therefore, held in high regard and treated as equals by men in biblical society. Confirm this truth as you analyze God’s command to Abraham to honor his wife Sarah (Genesis 21:12).
3. Because women in Hebrew culture were highly regarded, it was not unusual for them to assume roles that in other cultures were held exclusively by men. Consider the fact that Miriam was honored equally with Moses as a prophet, leader, and teacher in Israel (Exodus 15:20-21). Discuss Deborah, the “mother in Israel” who was prophet, judge, and military leader (Judges 4).
4. Evaluate the high respect that King Josiah and his ministers had for Huldah, the prophet, who was consulted by the king and the high priest and asked to make a judgment on the dependability of the long-lost scroll of the Torah

that had been discovered in the temple (2 Chronicles 34:14, 21-23). Discuss the fact that Huldah's validation of the scroll as the "Word of God" was accepted by the king and high priest and by all of Israel.

5. Huldah was not an unusual woman in Israel, for "wise women" frequently taught kings and advised the Israelites. Consider the case of Abigail who taught King David (1 Samuel 25). Observe the "wise woman" of Tekoah who also taught David (2 Samuel 14:2) and the "wise woman" of Abel Beth Maacah who taught Joab (2 Samuel 20:16-22), as well as other wise women mentioned in Judges 5:28-30. How prominent were wise women in biblical culture?

6. Some of the roles that women can rightly assume are clearly revealed in the discussion of the Woman of Valor in Proverbs 31. Far from being chained to hearth and home as a dominated wife, this woman was a homemaker, a manufacturer, a merchant, a manager, a real estate developer, a vintner, a philanthropist, and a woman of wisdom. Discuss the varied roles that the Scriptures assign women alongside men in family, home, society, and church.

7. Though the women whom God used as prophets, teachers, and leaders of his people in the Hebrew and Israelite cultures are considered by many to be aberrations or exceptions to the rule of male leadership, the truth is that there is no evidence in the Hebrew Scriptures that the behavior of any of these women was considered to be "out of order" because of the roles that they fulfilled. God never approves anything of which he disapproves! If women were ever considered to be equal with men and were equally used in various capacities, they still have right to those same roles. God never changes; therefore, we can be confident of what he approves now by observing what he approved in Holy Scripture. Is there any evidence that the men who feared the Lord and kept his commandments had anything but respect for women?

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew term **אִשָּׁת חַיִּיל** (*esbet chayil*) is translated "virtuous woman" (KJV), "excellent wife" (NASV), or "capable wife" (TNK). In reality, the word *chayil* is a military term that means "strength, might, efficiency, wealth, army, or force." It is used in Proverbs 31 to underscore the fact that the biblical woman is not physically, emotionally, and intellectually inferior to men as envisioned in other cultures. She is fully capable of and free to assume virtually any role, but she is most honored because of her fear of the Lord and her faithfulness to her family.

Biblical women were never cloistered, restricted, and abused as were their counterparts in other world societies. Both men and women were honored together as God's good creation. While their primary role has been that of procreation and nurture, women have always been free to choose many other roles in family, society, and the community of faith.

JESUS RESTORES HEBRAIC WOMANHOOD

As perfect humanity epitomized, Jesus summed up God's perspective toward women both by his teachings and by his actions during his life as a man on earth. All evidence points to Jesus' great love and respect for women of every ethnicity and socio-economic grouping. By his words and actions, he established the foundation for the Magna Carta of biblical faith that affirms that race, nationality, and gender are all one in the Messiah.



KEY TEXT: *“And many women were looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to him” (Matthew 27:55).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. By the time of Jesus, the great honor and respect accorded to women in the Hebrew Scriptures was being eroded by a Hellenization of Judaism. Accordingly, women were increasingly viewed as subordinate and inferior to men. All the Judaisms of that day needed reform to be restored to the spirit of the Torah. Discuss the role of Jesus as a reformer of Judaism (Hebrews 9:10).
2. The Greeks had a very dim view of women, including the Pandora myth that declared woman to be the curse of Zeus on men. Plato said that if a man were sufficiently evil during his lifetime, he would be reincarnated as a woman. Aristotle considered a woman to be a deformed man which made men superior to women physically, emotionally, intellectually, and morally. Poets like Euripides called women the “specious curse to man” Research further and discuss the view of womanhood in Greek poetry, philosophy, and history.
3. In the years between Malachi and the time of Jesus, the high praise of women began to be eroded by writers and teachers who were apparently influenced by Greek views on womanhood. The first instance of woman's being blamed for sin (which implied that all women are inherently evil) appeared in the second century B.C. in the writings of Ben Sira: “From a woman sin had its beginning and because of her we all die” (Ecclesiasticus 25:24). Discuss the male blame game that began in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:12).
4. While most of the sages of Israel remained highly supportive of women, many began to embrace Greek concepts and to make such startlingly derogative declarations. A generation before Jesus, Philo declared, “female sex is irrational and akin to bestial passions.” While in the early first century A.D.

Hillel the Great had taught his daughter the Torah, by the later half of the century, Rabbi Eliezer, apparently following the Greek idea that women should not be taught philosophy, said that teaching one's daughter Torah was equivalent to teaching her "lechery." By that time Josephus boldly declared that "the woman, says the Law, is in all things inferior to the man." Evaluate the influence of Hellenism on Second-Temple Jewish perspectives on women.

5. Jesus sought to restore God's religion to its inherent ideal. Nothing could be more demonstrative of this truth than the way in which Jesus treated the women around him. The Samaritan woman is particularly powerful. Jesus violated all etiquette and even ethical norms for first century teachers when he even talked with this woman. Discuss the woman's shock and the dynamic results of Jesus' defying social convention to minister to her (John 4:7-30).

6. Jesus defied another rabbinic convention when he made women his disciples and taught them the Word of God. While most of the rabbis refused to teach women (or in many cases even to speak with them), Jesus made them his disciples and included them in his entourage. Consider the example of Mary who "sat at the feet of Jesus" (normal posture for disciples of the sages). Demonstrate the fact that Jesus restored women to rightful places of knowledge and of ministry in the community of faith (Luke 10:39). Compare Martha's confession (John 11:27) with Peter's (Matthew 16:16).

7. Jesus reversed suggestions that women were the cause of sin and placed the blame squarely where it belonged: on male lust (Matthew 5:28). Consider Jesus' denunciation of divorce and remarriage for any cause (Matthew 19:9) and his posture toward the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-4). Evaluate Jesus' elevation of women's self-identity from sexual reproduction to disciples (Luke 11:27-28). How does Jesus influence your view of womanhood?

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word **אִשָּׁה** (*'ishshah*) means "woman." It is merely the feminine form of **אִישׁ** (*'ish*), which means "man." It was first used when Adam said of his newly formed counterpart, "She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man" (Genesis 2:23). The difference between man and woman, then, was gender. Jesus restored women to the status of equality with men by providing the remedy for sin that had led to the suffering of both through the codependency of domination and submission. In Christ, there are no distinctions: all are one (*echad*).

Jesus demonstrated perfect humanity and perfect maleness through his ongoing relationships with and treatment of the women. He welcomed women as his disciples and taught them the God's Word. He had compassion upon women who were suffering from sin, oppression, and disease, and transcended social convention to minister to them.

PAUL'S HEBRAIC PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN

Paul has been characterized as a misogynist by some and as an egalitarian by others. Rarely, however, have his writings been rightly divided by placing the wide range of ideas that he expressed into textual and historical context. Consequently, Paul has been a source for proof texts to support wide ranging ideas about women themselves and about women's rights and roles. It is time that Paul be interpreted in his own Hebraic context.



KEY TEXT: *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. When it came to understanding the roles of women, the earliest disciples of Jesus continued in the context of their own Hebraic history and culture and relied on their understanding of the words of the prophet Joel whom Peter quoted on the Day of Pentecost: “This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: and it shall be in the last days, God says, that I will pour forth of my spirit upon all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (Acts 2:16-17). The book of Acts (as well as the gospels) reveals the very active presence of women in the life and ministry of the church. Evaluate the examples of women's activities in the earliest church.
2. Paul summed up the Hebraic ideal that included all human beings regardless as to race, ethnicity, or gender in the purposes of God with what some have called the church's Magna Carta in Galatians 3:28. Discuss the comprehensive nature of this text and the extent to which it should be applied.
3. The Apostolic Scriptures describe many women in the ministry and service of the church. Significant among them was Priscilla, who formed a teaching team with her husband Aquila (Acts 18:1-28). How significant is it that Priscilla and Aquila are said to have explained the Word of God more perfectly to the eloquent Apollos? Why is Priscilla usually mentioned before her husband?
4. In Romans 16:7, Paul salutes what may have been another husband and wife teaching team and extends the accolades by observing that Andronicus and Junia (NKJ) were “outstanding among the apostles” (NIV). For centuries the church believed and taught that Junia was a woman who was an apostle. It

was not until the Middle Ages that efforts were made to expunge this reference by changing her name to a masculine form (Junias). How does the earliest church compare to the later church in its attitude toward women?

5. In Romans 16, Paul commends Phoebe as a *diakonos* and a *prostatis* of the church in Cenchrea (translated “servant” and “helper” respectively. Everywhere else in Scripture *diakonos* is translated “minister” or “deacon” while *prostatis* is used to describe “leaders” or “patrons” (e.g., Caesar is called the “*prostatis* of the universe”). It is obvious from the terms that Paul applied to Phoebe that she was a minister and a leader. Why do you think the church later obscured this fact with inconsistent translations of the text?

6. Paul’s writings about women have been variously misunderstood because texts have been lifted from their contexts to become pretexts and proof texts. This began when Greek philosophers became leaders of Christianity, causing the church, like Judaism before it, to become increasingly Hellenized. 1 Timothy 2:11-12 seems to be highly restrictive of all women when taken out of context. First Paul commands something that was forbidden in both Judaism and Hellenism: “Let woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness.” Then he employs another rabbinic concept that the only reason for one to *learn* the Word of God was so that he (or she) could then *teach* it. Discuss how the illiteracy and ignorance of most Greek women would have necessitated their being taught before they could speak or teach publicly.

7. Paul then says, “I am not [now] permitting a woman to teach or to usurp authority over a man,” making the prohibition temporal and local, first, an acknowledgment of the ignorance of the Greek women and second, a reaction to the temples of goddesses wherein men were emasculated. Consider the significant difference of putting this text in context.

WORD STUDY

The Greek word *διάκονος* (*diakonos*) means “minister.” It is used to refer to Jesus, Paul, the other apostles, and many others as “ministers.” It translated as “servant” only when it refers to Phoebe (Romans 16:1). It is also translated “deacon” in 1 Timothy 3:10, 13 as support for a male lay service class. The Greek word *προστάτις* (*prostatis*) is a feminine form of the masculine noun that means “leader, patron, one who stands in front of.” It is translated as “helper” only when it refers to the Phoebe. Elsewhere, it refers to social and political leaders, such as Caesar.

Paul commended the ministry of both men and women who were his coworkers in the gospel. He honored women who prophesied, taught, and led fellowships just as he honored men. Paul fully understood that Jesus had opened the faith of the Bible to all people with no restrictions based on race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or gender.

SIN AND DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY

Sin is disobedience to God's instructions, rebellion against what God has commanded. It is particularly insidious because it corrupts everything that is good, polluting and promoting dysfunctionality. Such was the case with the first human sin in the Garden of Eden. The perfect human interpersonal relationship of complementary mutuality was perverted into an ever-increasing codependency of abusive domination and submission.



KEY TEXT: *“Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception . . . thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said . . . in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground” (Genesis 3:16-17, 19, KJV).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Primordial humanity was given one simple instruction: Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; however, through the subtlety of Satan, both the man and the woman disobeyed God's command and became sinners. So that they would not become immortal in their sinful state, God removed them from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:22) and began the unfolding of his plan of salvation. Discuss the entrance of humanity into sin.
2. God did not curse the humans (male or female) whom he had blessed (Genesis 1:22). He did, however, curse the serpent and the ground (Genesis 3:14-17). Then, he noted that thereafter the woman's desire would be toward her husband and that the man would rule over her. Confirm the fact that this was not God's judgment upon the woman but was rather his prediction of what would occur since they had allowed sin to dominate their lives.
3. Once the human couple had submitted themselves to the authority of the serpent, the dominion that they had been given over the earth was usurped by the evil one, who became the ruler of “this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4). The coregency that God designed was then perverted into male domination over the female and female submission to the male. Discuss how dysfunctionality replaced servant leadership and brought hardship to both male and female.
4. The immediate product of sin was the initiation of a blame game. In particular the male blamed the female for his actions (though Eve confessed her deception and assumed responsibility). How ironic is it that men through the

centuries have continued to blame women for their own lust and sin when the Scriptures clearly indicate that Eve was deceived while Adam sinned willfully?

5. Sin corrupted and polluted God's original design for both man and woman and for their mutual interaction one with the other. Sin replaced mutual submission and self-sacrifice with greed and an insatiable lust for self-fulfillment. The floodgates opened wide, extrapolating human greed and selfishness into all forms of violence and abuse (James 3:16). The family that was designed to be a safe environment became a place where the very first murder was committed (Genesis 4:8). Discuss how spousal abuse can promote sibling rivalry and violence by setting an indelible example in the minds of children and perpetuating the scenario of abuse and submission.

6. Sin also took the most intimate and honorable of all human interpersonal relationships that God had declared to be good and perverted it into a lust for sexual self-gratification (rather than a focus on spousal satisfaction). This also opened a floodgate into an unending array of sexual perversion and depravity. Analyze the ways in which lust has masqueraded as love throughout human history. Consider scriptural injunctions designed to restore this biological urge to its rightful place (1 Corinthians 7:2-5; Ephesians 5:25).

7. When individuals are delivered from the bondage of sin through faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior, a transformation of their lives takes place that is designed to affect all of their behavior. This should be particularly true of familial relationships, where worldly quests for self-gratification and domination should be replaced by godly desire for loving support and mutuality. Is it safe to say that the degree of one's spiritual maturity and relationship with God can be measured first by the social, spiritual, and physical well being manifest in the family?

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word עִצְבֹּן (*itstabon*) means "labor, hardship, sorrow, toil" and is central to God's judgment on both Adam and Eve as a result of their sin; however, it is translated inconsistently in most English versions: "pain" for Eve, "sorrow or toil" for Adam, giving rise to the misconception that painful childbirth is God's curse on women. The truth is that God declared both Adam and Eve would experience added labor, hardship, sorrow, and toil in their lives because of sin. The judgment was the same for both male and female: *itstabon*, sorrowful labor.

The dysfunctional state of the human family is not the product of God's design or intent. It is the result of sin. The degree to which societies, communities, families, and individuals have overcome sin can be measured by the degree to which dysfunctionality has been replaced by holistic, mature relationships of mutual respect and honor.

HEBRAIC UNDERSTANDING OF FAMILY

In Hebraic thought, each home is designed by God to be a temple in miniature, a sanctuary of blessing and peace in which godly parents can nurture godly children by bringing them to faith in and obedience to God and his Word. The family is the locus for spiritual, social, and physical growth and development. It is the fundamental building block of both society and the community of faith. This is why family is so important to the church.



KEY TEXT: *“I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Family, not the individual, is the most basic unit of both society and church. In a world of increasing rugged individualism where the quest for self-actualization is at the pinnacle of human goals, there is a great need for restoration of the primacy of the family and home as the center for physical, social, mental, and spiritual well being. This truth is confirmed by the fact that in human creation, God formed not individuals but a superentity that came to be called family. Discuss the perils of individualism to the security of family.
2. While many theologians have posited salvation as an individualistic exercise, God has spoken of it in terms of a corporate exercise. Consider the case of Noah who found grace in God’s eyes but was instructed to provide for the salvation of his entire family (Genesis 6:9, 17-18). Compare Acts 16:15 and Acts 16:30-31. Is this evidence that salvation is broader than individual faith?
3. Abraham understood that his family was a center for instruction in the ways of the Lord so that his children and grandchildren would do justice in the earth after his demise (Genesis 18:19). After Abraham, the Israelites were commanded by God to teach God’s Word to their children “when you sit in your house” (Deuteronomy 6:7). Consider ways in which every home can become a “house of study” where the family learns interactively with the daily unfolding of life situations and circumstances.
4. Very often Christians become so caught up in the exercises of corporate worship that they come to think that the church can fulfill all the functions of training and maturing each member of the family individually with its well-designed programs and liturgical exercises. They then neglect the function of

the home. A great lesson can be learned from King David who led Israel in one of the most significant acts of public worship in which he danced before the Lord with all his might in a spectacular liturgical exercise. The key to this story, however, took place immediately after the corporate action: “David returned to bless his household” (2 Samuel 6:20). Discuss the dangers of surrendering responsibilities for family study and worship to the church.

5. In Jewish thought, each home is a *mikdash me’at*, a temple in miniature. While ancient Israel was arranged around the wilderness tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple and gave great honor to the exercises which God prescribed for those facilities, they never lost sight of the fact that the first congregation met in a Garden and the pattern for the sanctuaries was Sarah and Abraham’s tent. Each home even has its own altar, the table, the term which Malachi 1:7 used to describe the altar in the Jerusalem temple. Evaluate the degree to which your community focuses on the family sanctuary.

6. It is no accident that when the earliest Christian church emerged from the matrix of Second-Temple Judaism, it began and continued (for three centuries) in homes. All the congregations were house churches. In this domestic environment, it was easy for believers to view one another as family (brothers and sisters). Even in Greek culture, women exercised influence in the confines of the home. When the church “went public,” societal rules restricting women restricted women. Consider the fact that as long as the church maintained its domestic locus, women were prominent in worship and teaching.

7. When families operate in a Hebraic model, each head of household assumes responsibility for meeting, study, and worship. When families come together in congregations, they simply take what they have been doing in the home to another level. How would this model strengthen the modern church?

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word מִקְדָּשׁ (mikdash) means “sanctuary” or “sacred place.” It was applied to both the tabernacle (*mishkan*) and the temple (*heykal*). After the Jerusalem temple was destroyed, the people understood that the survival of their faith was predicated on their fulfilling God’s instructions to teach his ways in their homes. Because of the sacred training and worship that took place there, the home came to be recognized as a *mikdash me’at* (a miniature temple). This understanding elevates every home to the status God designed for it in the beginning.

Family is not a mere social convention that civil societies can define in any way that they choose. It is God’s design for maintaining a continuing sanctuary for instruction and blessing that the sands of time cannot erode and that corrupt civil powers cannot corrupt and overthrow. As the family goes, so goes the church and the nation.



HEBRAIC CHRISTIAN

GLOBAL COMMUNITY™

Sharing, Equipping, Serving

Hebraic Christian Global Community's mission is to facilitate the move of God to restore the Hebraic foundations of the Christian faith to all believers without any distinction as to race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or denominational affiliation. We seek to extend the dominion of God through the interconnectivity of individuals, ministers, ministries, congregations, organizations, and denominations, demonstrating the practical unity of the body of Messiah by standing unequivocally for biblical truth, speaking with a community voice, and serving both the Hebraic heritage community and the church at large by means of corporate action, collaborative ministry, and strategic planning.

An untapped dynamic force exists around the world in the Christian believers who have been impelled by the Holy Spirit to return to the faith of Jesus and the apostles by restoring the church's Hebraic foundations. This latent force is an unvoiced multitude made up of scattered and isolated individuals and small communities that need, even yearn, to join together in a more consolidated witness—in this case, to the truth about Christianity's long-obscured biblical roots.

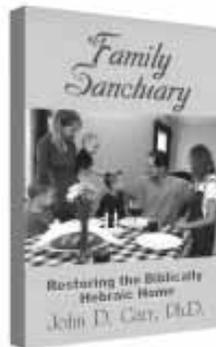
Many—if not most—of those who have begun to investigate the roots of their faith and to find practical ways to implement those truths in their lives and in the lives of their communities have found themselves experiencing the “Elijah Syndrome.” They think they are all alone in a cave in an isolated desert, with the howling winds of insanity racking their spirits. They also tend to wonder if a Jezebel is not in hot pursuit, seeking to destroy them. Someone needs to speak God's Word to this situation: “Thousands have not bowed their knee to Baal!”

Hebraic Christian Global Community proposes to be such a comforting and challenging voice, and we propose to do it as a still, small voice of confirmation, not a thundering tempest of condemnation and judgmentalism. We propose to help all the believers in the world understand that their faith in inherently Jewish because it is faith in the Jewish Messiah, anchored in the Jewish Scriptures, established in the God of the Jews, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As Jesus said, we understand that “salvation is from the Jews.” We understand that every authentic expression of Christian faith that is being experienced by believers everywhere has a Jewish root. All we have to do is to help our fellow Christians discover these truths for themselves. As we perceive the need of God's people and the timing of God's move to meet that need, we find that we are aligning ourselves with God's purposes in the earth. We do so in awe of the responsibility that this calling entails, and we do so with great humility, recognizing that in biblical terms, we have been called as stewards of the mysteries of God and as servants of all of God's people. Meeting the human need for spiritual renewal is the highest calling in the service of God and humanity.

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