

A microscopic view of plant cells, showing a grid-like structure of cell walls and dark, circular nuclei. The image is in shades of blue and green, with a bright light source in the upper center creating a lens flare effect.

# Is God's Church Organized?

Andreas Dura

**Originally published in:**  
The Messenger and News Review  
April 1996 to May 1998

**Fonts used:**  
Garamond ITC Book Condensed  
Linux Biolinum G  
Linux Libertine G



February 2016  
[www.srac.info](http://www.srac.info)  
[www.practicaprophetica.com](http://www.practicaprophetica.com)

# Contents

1. Historical Development of a Reformation Movement.....	1
<i>Different Phases</i> .....	1
<i>The First Phase</i> .....	2
<i>The Second Phase</i> .....	7
<i>The Third Phase</i> .....	12
2. God Gathers His People.....	15
<i>One Body</i> .....	15
<i>World-Wide Extent</i> .....	17
<i>Oneness, Unity, Organization</i> .....	19
<i>Effort Required</i> .....	21
<i>A Progressive Gathering</i> .....	24
3. The Nature of God's Church.....	27
<i>A Body</i> .....	27
<i>An Invisible Body</i> .....	28
<i>A Visible Body</i> .....	30
<i>An Apparent Contradiction</i> .....	35
<i>Two Natures</i> .....	36
4. The Organization of God's People in the Old Testament.....	39
<i>Divine Organization</i> .....	39
<i>Order in Eden</i> .....	43
<i>Order After the Fall</i> .....	44
<i>The Patriarchal Era</i> .....	46
<i>The Nation of Israel</i> .....	46
<i>David and Solomon</i> .....	51
<i>Ezra and Nehemiah</i> .....	53
5. The Organization of God's People in the New Testament.....	55
<i>A False Distinction</i> .....	55
<i>God's Purpose in the Old Testament</i> .....	55
<i>No Change in the New Testament</i> .....	56
<i>Twelve Tribes – Twelve Apostles</i> .....	57
<i>The Deacons</i> .....	58
<i>Further Development of Order</i> .....	61
<i>Paul and Barnabas Establish Order</i> .....	63
<i>One Unified Church</i> .....	64
<i>The Visible and Invisible Church Connected</i> .....	65
<i>More Confirmations</i> .....	66
<i>Helping the Weak and Tempted</i> .....	67
<i>Organization During the Latter Rain</i> .....	68

<b>6. God Gives His People a Name.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<i>All Things are Named.....</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>Name = Character.....</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>Named for Service.....</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Names Given at Creation.....</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Naming the Animals.....</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>The Name of Woman.....</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>The Name of Man.....</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>The Sons of God.....</i>	<i>76</i>
<i>The Name of Israel.....</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>The Name of Christians.....</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>The Church in the Wilderness.....</i>	<i>79</i>
<i>The Name of Protestant.....</i>	<i>80</i>
<i>The Name of Seventh-day Adventist.....</i>	<i>81</i>
<i>Our Church Name.....</i>	<i>86</i>
<b>7. The Question of a Center, Part 1.....</b>	<b>89</b>
<i>What is a Center?.....</i>	<i>89</i>
<i>Leadership and Equality.....</i>	<i>90</i>
<i>The Composition of a Center.....</i>	<i>94</i>
<i>The Relationship of Centers.....</i>	<i>94</i>
<i>The Throne of God.....</i>	<i>96</i>
<i>The Location of a Center.....</i>	<i>97</i>
<i>The Existence of Sub-centers.....</i>	<i>98</i>
<i>The Center on Earth Restored.....</i>	<i>99</i>
<i>The Purpose of Sub-centers.....</i>	<i>102</i>
<i>Neglected and Despised.....</i>	<i>104</i>
<i>Faithfulness Towards the Center and Unity.....</i>	<i>104</i>
<i>Applicable Today.....</i>	<i>105</i>
<b>8. The Question of a Center, Part 2.....</b>	<b>107</b>
<i>The Center at Jerusalem.....</i>	<i>108</i>
<i>Sub-centers in the Apostolic Church.....</i>	<i>110</i>
<i>Spiritual Responsibilities of a Center.....</i>	<i>112</i>
<i>Administrative Responsibilities of a Center.....</i>	<i>113</i>
<i>Cooperation between Church and Center.....</i>	<i>115</i>
<i>Apostate Centers.....</i>	<i>117</i>
<i>The Problems of Centralism.....</i>	<i>119</i>
<b>9. A Church Chronicle.....</b>	<b>123</b>
<i>Heaven is Our Pattern.....</i>	<i>123</i>
<i>The Old Testament Church.....</i>	<i>125</i>
<i>The New Testament Church.....</i>	<i>126</i>
<i>Personal Records.....</i>	<i>127</i>
<i>The Example of the Family.....</i>	<i>128</i>
<i>Why a Church Record Book?.....</i>	<i>128</i>

*Practical Considerations*..... 131

**Appendix: Historical Information**.....133

    1. *The Reluctance to take a Church Name*.....133

    2. *The Name Change to “Sabbath Rest Advent Church”* .....134



# Chapter 1

## Historical Development of a Reformation Movement

### Mark 4

<sup>28</sup> For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head.

Jesus here refers us to the natural world in order to explain the spiritual world for,

**Christ's Object Lessons, p. 65:**

As in nature, so in grace.

In like manner, the historical development of a reformation movement is a spiritual process which can be illustrated by the growth of grain. If we do not understand or acknowledge this process, we will become confused and might even make serious mistakes.

### Different Phases

Consider the growth of a human being. Each person goes through different stages of development. One cannot expect a child to behave like an adult, and conversely, one would not expect a mature person to behave like a child. It is important to be able to recognize the differences in the various stages of development. In fact, parents will make serious mistakes in the education of their children if they do not understand the different phases their children go through.

Similarly, a person, whether he is old or young, will be unhappy if he fails to realize that each phase of his life has a purpose and that he can be perfect in each of these phases.

**Christ's Object Lessons, p. 65:**

At every stage of development our life may be perfect; yet if God's purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be continual advancement.

These principles also apply to the formation and development of a reformation movement when it is formed and led by God. Just as each individual goes through different phases, so a movement also undergoes various stages of development which are both important and necessary. Each of these phases has a certain purpose, and although it does not reach full maturity in these first stages of development, the movement can still be called perfect.

Each phase has its own characteristics and plays an important part in the development of the whole. It is according to the divine will that one stage of development follows another.

We will differentiate between three stages of development:

1. the first phase, in which a movement emerges by the working of the Holy Spirit within an apostate church body;
2. the second phase, in which the movement is separated from this church body under God's leadership; and
3. the third phase, in which the movement matures into an independent church body with a divinely structured organization.

How long each of these phases lasts may differ from case to case. There may also be some overlapping between the phases. However, no matter how much these developments differ in detail from one another, the basic phases are consistently repeated. History confirms this pattern in the following way.

## **The First Phase**

A church through which God once let His light shine powerfully into this world has sunken into formalism with almost no signs of life remaining. Errors have taken the place of vital truth, the gospel has been almost completely lost, and the hierarchy is trying to control the church members and rule over their individual consciences.

But this church is still the only body in the world which



represents present truth, and God loves his church even though it is sick. Furthermore, He wants to heal it. He still has His faithful children in this body who are longing for light and who are suffering under the existing circumstances.

Eventually the Lord calls a messenger who effectively rebukes the corruptions in the church and calls for a reformation. He does not do this by mere criticism or negative remarks, but through the true gospel which the church has lost. Soon other people who have also been roused by the Lord rally around the messenger, and a movement emerges within the old church.

Before, during, and after this genuine revival, many other people arise claiming to be called by God to bring about a true reformation. Whether they are real messengers or not can be seen by the methods they use. A self-appointed messenger may be a good critic of the abuses within the church, but he can offer nothing better himself. These would-be messengers have no power to bring about a reformation.

What are the features of a genuine reformation movement? How can one distinguish them from the many false ones? One feature is the humility of those who begin the movement. Instead of simply attacking existing abuses and trying to tear them down, they preach the truth which they themselves have sought for, found, and experienced. They know that only the truth can set a person free from sin and erroneous customs. They are only concerned with leading people to a living experience with God. Only that inward freedom which the gospel alone can give can lead one to separate outwardly from errors and wrong traditions.

A true messenger of God is filled with love for his fellow man and does not simply criticize the church but presents the gospel in power. He does not disregard the leading officials of the church. In this respect he also reveals true humility. God's chosen instrument never reveals a lack of respect, and has no intention of establishing his own church. In fact, in most cases

he will repudiate any such thoughts.

We find these aspects of a true reformation movement present during the times of Christ, Luther, Wesley, and William Miller.

**The Desire of Ages, p. 232:**

When the Reformers preached the word of God, they had no thought of separating themselves from the established church.

So then, at this stage the reformation movement is still joined to the old church and has no thought of separating from it nor of replacing it with something else.

When God by His providence guides a movement through this first stage, it is all a part of His special plan. Let us take a closer look at this plan in the history of the Methodist movement.

**The Great Controversy, p. 257:**

As members of the Church of England they were strongly attached to her forms of worship, but the Lord had presented before them in His word a higher standard. The Holy Spirit urged them to preach Christ and Him crucified. The power of the Highest attended their labors. Thousands were convicted and truly converted. It was necessary that these sheep be protected from ravening wolves. Wesley had no thought of forming a new denomination, but he organized them under what was called the Methodist Connection.

Mysterious and trying was the opposition which these preachers encountered from the established church; yet God, in His wisdom, had overruled events to cause the reform to begin within the church itself. Had it come wholly from without, it would not have penetrated where it was so much needed. But as the revival preachers were churchmen, and labored within the pale of the church wherever they could find opportunity, the truth had an entrance where the doors would otherwise have remained closed. Some of the clergy were roused from their moral stupor and became zealous preachers in their own parishes. Churches that had been petrified by formalism were quickened into life.

Another example that clearly demonstrates the first phase of a true reformation is that of the Advent movement in the first half of the nineteenth century. William Miller was the messenger called by God to be the first leader of this movement.

**The Spirit of Prophecy, vol. 4, p. 236:**

Those who preached the first message [that is, *the first angel's message*] had no purpose or expectation of causing divisions in the churches, or of forming separate organizations.

**The Great Controversy, p. 375:**

In preaching the doctrine of the second advent, William Miller and his associates had labored with the sole purpose of arousing men to a preparation for the judgment. They had sought to awaken professors of religion to the true hope of the church and to their need of a deeper Christian experience; and they labored also to awaken the unconverted to the duty of immediate repentance and conversion to God. "They made no attempt to convert men to a sect or party in religion. Hence they labored among all parties and sects, without interfering with their organization or discipline."

"In all my labors," said Miller, "I never had the desire or thought to establish any separate interest from that of existing denominations, or to benefit one at the expense of another. I thought to benefit all. Supposing that all Christians would rejoice in the prospect of Christ's coming, and that those who could not see as I did would not love any the less those who should embrace this doctrine, I did not conceive there would ever be any necessity for separate meetings. My whole object was a desire to convert souls to God, to notify the world of a coming judgment, and to induce my fellow men to make that preparation of heart which will enable them to meet their God in peace. The great majority of those who were converted under my labors united with the various existing churches."—Bliss, page 328.

Again we see here very clearly that a reformation movement always begins in the existing church. In the case of the Advent movement this was in the existing Protestant churches.

What is God's purpose in leading his children through the first phase? In the case of the Methodist movement we are given a clear answer.

**The Great Controversy, p. 257:**

...yet God, in His wisdom, had overruled events to cause the reform to begin within the church itself. Had it come wholly from without, it would not have penetrated where it was so much needed. But as the revival preachers were churchmen, and labored within the pale of the church wherever they could find opportunity, the truth had an entrance where the doors would otherwise have remained closed. Some of the clergy were roused from their moral stupor and became zealous preachers in their own parishes. Churches that had been petrified by formalism were quickened into life.

The same answer is given in the case of the Advent movement.

**The Great Controversy, p. 376:**

As his work tended to build up the churches, it was for a time regarded with favor.

God's providence is working out an important purpose in the first phase of a reformation movement. The people in the existing church body are to be reached.

**The Desire of Ages, p. 231-232:**

To them first was given the opportunity to become heralds of the kingdom and grace of God.

So for a time, the call goes to the old church body. Some people find it difficult to see beyond this phase. They think it necessary to remain in at this stage in the hope that the whole church will eventually be reformed. Even the messengers of God often went through a severe struggle before they saw that a second phase followed the first in the development of a reformation movement.

This fact is intimated in the following words.

**The Desire of Ages, p. 232:**

Often those who follow in the steps of the Reformers are

*forced* to turn away from the churches they love...And many times those who are seeking for light are by the same teaching *obliged* to leave the church of their fathers, that they may render obedience.

The same thought is also clearly expressed in regard to the experience of the Advent movement.

**The Great Controversy, p. 376:**

They loved their churches and were loath to separate from them; but as they saw the testimony of God's word suppressed and their right to investigate the prophecies denied they felt that loyalty to God forbade them to submit. Those who sought to shut out the testimony of God's word they could not regard as constituting the church of Christ, "the pillar and ground of the truth." Hence they felt themselves justified in separating from their former connection. In the summer of 1844 about fifty thousand withdrew from the churches.

Initially, even William Miller could not understand this development towards the next phase. It was only after a long struggle that he saw the light of the second angel, and then he joined the next phase of the movement (concerning William Miller's resistance to the second angel's message, see Joseph Bates' *Second Advent Way Marks and High Heaps*, p. 60-61).

## **The Second Phase**

The second phase in the development of a movement is just as necessary as the first—separation from the established church or churches. The timing of this separation lies in God's hands. When the right time comes, no sooner and no later, the message is,

**Revelation 14**

<sup>8</sup> Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city...

**Revelation 18**

<sup>4</sup> Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.

God's true children hear His voice and follow it. Since they have separated themselves inwardly from the errors and

machinations of the established church, which for its part has rejected the call for reformation, the outward separation is unavoidable.

**The Desire of Ages, p. 232:**

As the light and life of men was rejected by the ecclesiastical authorities in the days of Christ, so it has been rejected in every succeeding generation. Again and again the history of Christ's withdrawal from Judea has been repeated. When the Reformers preached the word of God, they had no thought of separating themselves from the established church; but the religious leaders would not tolerate the light, and those that bore it were forced to seek another class, who were longing for the truth.

In our day few of the professed followers of the Reformers are actuated by their spirit. Few are listening for the voice of God, and ready to accept truth in whatever guise it may be presented. Often those who follow in the steps of the Reformers are forced to turn away from the churches they love, in order to declare the plain teaching of the word of God. And many times those who are seeking for light are by the same teaching obliged to leave the church of their fathers, that they may render obedience.

There is a counterfeit second phase of a true reformation movement as well. Not every separation from an apostate church is caused by the gospel. There have been and there always will be self-sent messengers such as Thomas Münzer during Luther's time. With them, no humility can be found, but rather the secret desire to be first. Even if these men know some truths and criticize the abuses in the church, they do not have the divine credentials and so are nothing more than a distraction from the true gospel. If their desire to be first is not granted within the church, then they form their own group in which they can occupy the first place.

After the separation from the old body has taken place, questions concerning the future progress of the movement arise. But there is still no thought of forming a new church body. The experiences that the believers had with the old, es-

tablished church were very bad, and they want to avoid setting up another hierarchy at all costs. There is also the desire not to arouse the prejudices of the souls who are still seeking for truth in their churches, by confronting them with another church or “confession.”

If many believers experience difficulty in seeing the necessity of a development from the first phase of a reformation movement to the second, then we can also expect to find difficulties in the further development to the third phase. The human tendency not to go beyond that which was good in the past is very strong. In addition, there is the fear that one would become “Babylon” in accepting some form of order, or in becoming a separate, distinct body.

This is not to say that in its second phase a movement has no order at all, for the Lord establishes gospel order at the very outset of His work, but there is a general reluctance to accept a further development of this order. However, if a movement refuses to advance, it actually loses the order that God has already given it.

The history of the Advent movement provides us with an example of these difficulties. The following testimony has been given to us by the Lord through His messenger.

**Early Writings, p. 97:**

The Lord has shown that gospel order has been too much feared and neglected.

The Lord revealed this in September, 1852, a time in which the Advent movement had already passed through the first and second phases of its development. The believers were afraid of any kind of order, for, was it not the rigid order of formalism in the fallen churches that had been the cause of their separation?

Another word which is considered dangerous in this connection is organization. Even if order could be accepted, the people tend to associate “organization” with “Babylon”.

**The Review and Herald, October 12, 1905:**

Yet the feeling against organization was very strong among our people. The Adventists generally, who had withdrawn from the churches of the various denominations under the call of the second angel's message to come out of Babylon, opposed organization, and many Seventh-day Adventists were fearful that church organization would bring us under condemnation.

**General Conference Daily Bulletin, Jan. 29, 1893:**

We had a hard struggle in establishing organization. Notwithstanding that the Lord gave testimony after testimony upon this point, the opposition was strong, and it had to be met again and again.

Order and organization are actually one and the same thing according to the definition given by the Spirit of prophecy. Here is just one quotation from many that confirms this.

**Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 653:**

Has God changed from a God of order? No; He is the same in the present dispensation as in the former. Paul says: "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace." He is as particular now as then. And He designs that we should learn lessons of order and organization from the perfect order instituted in the days of Moses for the benefit of the children of Israel.

We too have experienced difficulties in seeing beyond the second phase of the movement. In the past we have concentrated on the first two phases and have identified ourselves with these phases. However, we were reluctant to consider a further development of order and organization. Many of us were under the impression that the second phase is the final development of a reformation movement and that anything that goes beyond it is Babylon.

In order to understand the matter better, let us take a closer look at the condition of a movement in its second phase. The members of the movement are separate from the established churches, and they no longer need to consider its hierarchy and organizational structure. Nobody forbids them to preach



the truth. They can preach it in harmony with their own conscience and convictions. They are even proud of being independent from the churches and of having no form of organization. They believe that their independence will make it easier for them to reach those who are still in the various churches.

From a human standpoint this seems to be an ideal situation for a movement. There is a fear that any kind of organization that has the slightest resemblance to that of the fallen churches would bring a loss of this freedom. But the question of internal order, or organization, and that of a distinct identification for the movement cannot be ignored indefinitely. A third phase of development is absolutely necessary, otherwise the movement would dissolve into nothing and then be unable to fulfill its appointed task.

Those who believe that a movement may not enter into a third phase because this would mean becoming Babylon, often go so far as to say that there cannot even be a visible church. For them the church is nothing more than a mystical body of sincere believers. According to this theory every member is independent of an organized body, and any form of cooperation occurs only through the miraculous working of God's providence.

As pleasant as it may sound, this theory is not in harmony with God's way of working. He wants the members of His church to make an effort to cooperate with one another. He wants them to love and respect an order in which each one is subject to the other. Only in this way can the members of the church be prepared for heaven where the same order exists. Only in this way can the divine order be demonstrated on earth.

God calls His children out of the fallen churches, and He gathers them into a distinct, new church body. He gives them an internal order or organization. This same church also receives a distinct identification, that is, a name which they can

lift up as a banner in this world. The word of God, history, and prophecy clearly confirm this, and we shall investigate these evidences in the next chapters.

### **The Third Phase**

The third phase in the development of a reformation movement involves some dangers. This is not only due to the resistance of many members towards order and organization. There is also the danger of introducing the wrong kind of organization. Which organization will be introduced is now the critical question.

There are two kinds of organization, one that relies on human authority, and one that relies on divine authority. For a movement that has reached the close of the second phase, as well as any point in time following, it is vitally necessary that the difference between these two forms of organization be clearly seen.

Unfortunately, history reveals that very few have seen the difference, and even when the first generation did see it, the children of the pioneers soon lost sight of it. In this way the same human influences that existed in the churches from which the reformers separated soon developed again in the reformation movement.

Let us look at an event that took place in the apostolic church as an example of such a development. Christ Himself founded this church and laid the first steps towards organization. It was then separated from the existing, fallen body, and the organization developed further. It was this established order that saved them from much harm.

But as the members lost the spirit of this divine organization, other elements crept in.

#### **The Acts of the Apostles, p. 400:**

Thus there arose a group of men who were unacquainted personally with the changing circumstances and peculiar needs met by laborers in distant fields, yet who insisted that

they had the authority to direct their brethren in these fields to follow certain specified methods of labor. They felt as if the work of preaching the gospel should be carried forward in harmony with their opinions.

This sad development is not an argument against organization. Neither is it proof that a reformation movement should not enter a third phase of development. There is the very real possibility that the third phase will progress according to God's purpose. In such a case those who have been gathered from the fallen churches receive an internal order and a name—a designation that clearly identifies them as a church.

In this organization Christ alone is the Head of the body—the church. Every member of this body is connected with Him and works together with the other members. If Christ remains the Head, then the church will finish the work through this type of organization.



## Chapter 2

# God Gathers His People

### **Matthew 12**

<sup>30</sup> He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

### **Matthew 23**

<sup>37</sup> O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

## One Body

**W**hen God calls His children out of the fallen churches, which prophecy describes as Babylon or the daughters of Babylon, He gathers them together into one people. It is not His will that His people be made up of different individuals or separate groups which act independently of each other.

### **Selected Messages, vol. 2, p. 79:**

God is leading out a people, not an individual here and there.

Some might object that history reveals otherwise. For example, the Protestant movement was made up of different churches and had different leaders. However, in this instance we should not forget that God was leading His people out of great darkness, and therefore more time was required to finish the work of gathering.

The following quotations, in which God expressly reveals His intentions, show that it is His will to gather His children whom He has called out of Babylon.

### **Deuteronomy 30**

<sup>3</sup> ...that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you.

<sup>4</sup> If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under

heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you.

### **Isaiah 11**

<sup>12</sup> He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

### **Isaiah 40**

<sup>11</sup> He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.

### **Isaiah 56**

<sup>8</sup> The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says, Yet I will gather to him others besides those who are gathered to him.

### **Jeremiah 23**

<sup>3</sup> But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase.

### **Jeremiah 31**

<sup>8</sup> Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the ends of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and the one who labors with child, together; a great throng shall return there.

### **Micah 2**

<sup>12</sup> I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob, I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together like sheep of the fold, like a flock in the midst of their pasture; they shall make a loud noise because of so many people.

### **Zephaniah 3**

<sup>19</sup> Behold, at that time I will deal with all who afflict you; I will save the lame, and gather those who were driven out; I will appoint them for praise and fame in every land where they were put to shame.

<sup>20</sup> At that time I will bring you back, even at the time I gather you; for I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I return your captives before your eyes, says the Lord.

These prophecies were fulfilled when God called His people out of the Babylonian captivity and led them back to the land of their fathers. But this is not the only fulfillment of these prophecies, nor is it the most important, for...

**1 Corinthians 10**

<sup>11</sup> ...all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Whereas the first fulfillment of Israel's gathering applies to a geographical land, the second fulfillment deals with a spiritual home which is the Church.

In the same way, Babylon was also a geographical land in the first instance, but in the second application it represents a spiritual power.

However, in both the first and the second fulfillments God gathers His people, or in other words He forms them into one body.

**Selected Messages, vol. 2, p. 68-69:**

I know that the Lord loves His church. It is not to be disorganized or broken up into independent atoms. There is not the least consistency in this; there is not the least evidence that such a thing will be.

**The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 1146:**

Those who belong to Christ's army must work with concerted action....United action is essential. An army in which every part acts without reference to the other parts, has no real strength. In order to add new territory to Christ's kingdom, His soldiers must act in concert....He calls for a united army, which moves steadily forward, not for a company composed of independent atoms.

## **World-Wide Extent**

The members of the Church wherein the Lord has gathered his people do not limit the extent of their cooperation to a local group or church. They consider themselves to be members of a world-wide body, and they act accordingly.

One example of this was the church in Antioch where Paul and Barnabas ministered. This church did not consider itself to be independent in its relationship to the entire Christian Church. This was demonstrated when a problem arose and the church depended on the authority of the entire church to solve the problem:

**The Acts of the Apostles, p. 95-96:**

The companies of believers, though scattered over a large territory, were all members of one body; all moved in concert and in harmony with one another. When dissension arose in a local church, as later it did arise in Antioch and elsewhere, and the believers were unable to come to an agreement among themselves, such matters were not permitted to create a division in the church, but were referred to a general council of the entire body of believers, made up of appointed delegates from the various local churches, with the apostles and elders in positions of leading responsibility. Thus the efforts of Satan to attack the church in isolated places were met by concerted action on the part of all, and the plans of the enemy to disrupt and destroy were thwarted.

This action of the church in Antioch was in full harmony with gospel order and with God's eternal purpose, as it is written,

**The Acts of the Apostles, p. 164:**

The Lord in His wisdom has arranged that by means of the close relationship that should be maintained by all believers, Christian shall be united to Christian and church to church. Thus the human instrumentality will be enabled to co-operate with the divine. Every agency will be subordinate to the Holy Spirit, and all the believers will be united in an organized and well-directed effort to give to the world the glad tidings of the grace of God.

These quotations contradict the idea that God only leads individuals or scattered groups here and there. Instead, they clearly confirm that the Lord gathers those whom He has called out of Babylon. He gathers them into a spiritual unity, and, as a natural result of this, an organized entity—the



Church.

**Testimonies to Ministers, p. 29-30:**

God is leading a people out from the world upon the exalted platform of eternal truth, the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. He will discipline and fit up His people. They will not be at variance, one believing one thing and another having faith and views entirely opposite, each moving independently of the body. Through the diversity of the gifts and governments that He has placed in the church, they will all come to the unity of the faith.

If one man takes his views of Bible truth without regard to the opinion of his brethren, and justifies his course, alleging that he has a right to his own peculiar views, and then presses them upon others, how can he be fulfilling the prayer of Christ? And if another and still another arises, each asserting his right to believe and talk what he pleases without reference to the faith of the body, where will be that harmony which existed between Christ and His Father, and which Christ prayed might exist among His brethren?

**Manuscript Releases, vol. 14, p. 178:**

With what earnest effort should we seek for unity, for oneness.

## **Oneness, Unity, Organization**

These quotations show that the gathering of God's people means oneness, unity, and the organization of the church. Oneness is when different people are one in character. Unity is when these people are united in thought and feeling. Because our thoughts and feelings are molded by our characters, unity is the result of true oneness. Organization is united action. Divine organization is the fruit of oneness and unity.

It is often difficult for us to understand what oneness and unity really mean according to a Christian definition because our understanding of these terms has been formed by the world. There is only an external oneness in the world which means being of the same nation or belonging to the same club or organization. This oneness finds expression in wearing the

same clothes, speaking the same language, having the same habits, etc. In a crisis this external oneness can break down.

The unity found in the world is not the fruit of oneness of character but rather the result of similar interests. In most cases unity is limited to certain goals. When the goals change, the unity is broken up. For example, certain countries are united when they are combating a common enemy. However, as soon as the enemy is vanquished, the superficial character of this unity is revealed. Unity in the Church is something completely different. It is not limited to any goal but is the natural fruit of character.

In the world, organization is the means used to achieve oneness and unity. It is not the natural result of true oneness and unity springing from the heart.

The first work that Christ effects in His Church is oneness of character. When Christ is formed within the members, the character of each individual becomes like His. Building on this, the Lord brings His Church into unity, that is, unity of thought and feeling.

First of all, the individual believers are united with Christ, their Head, and then they are united with each other. It is a unity that springs from the heart; a unity that is the natural fruit of the nature of the members.

On this oneness and unity Christ builds the organization of His Church. In other words, He leads them to united action. All these workings are included in the expression "God gathers His people."

**The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, p. 1092-1093:**

When as individual members of the church, you love God supremely and your neighbor as yourself, there will be no need of labored efforts to be in unity, for there will be oneness in Christ as a natural result. The ears will no longer be open to reports that will injure your neighbor, and no one will take up a reproach against his neighbor. The members of the church will cherish love and unity, and be as one great

family. Then we shall bear the divine credentials to the world, that will testify that God has sent His Son into the world. Christ has said, "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one for another" (John 13:35). The divinity of Christ is acknowledged in the unity of the children of God.

## **Effort Required**

The fact that God gathers His people should not lead us to presume that the whole matter will take place without the efforts of the members. Oneness, unity, and organization do not come about of themselves. God has ordained that His church shall make an effort to achieve oneness, unity, and order.

### **The Upward Look, p. 157:**

We need to make it plain to the world that God sent His Son into the world to save sinners. How are we to do this? By putting forth every effort for unity.

### **Manuscript Releases, vol. 14, p. 178:**

With what earnest effort should we seek for unity, for oneness.

What is required of us in our efforts to achieve oneness, unity, and order? Not a little. It means to sacrifice self, to respect the counsel of experienced believers, and to surrender one's own interests to the interests of the body. This is a hard thing, and only a few are willing to put it into practice. But it is exactly this attitude which determines whether a person is really a part of the Church or not.

### **The Acts of the Apostles, p. 595:**

In the Scriptures the figure of the erection of a temple is frequently used to illustrate the building of the church.

### **The Acts of the Apostles, p. 597:**

Centuries of fierce persecution followed the establishment of the Christian church, but there were never wanting men who counted the work of building God's temple dearer than life itself.

The world also recognizes that it is sometimes necessary to submit one's own interests to the interests of the body. For ex-

ample, in politics there is such a thing as party discipline. However, this is not a submission of love but simply a duty to vote in accordance with the decisions of the party.

In contrast to this stands the individual's submission to Christ's body. This can only be found where there is love for Christ, which includes correct thinking. We need to understand that we are only hurting ourselves, as well as God's cause, when we do not submit to the Church.

The apostle Paul, who received such elevating revelations from God, taught this principle of submission to the Church as the body of Christ, and he himself practiced it as well.

**The Acts of the Apostles, p. 200:**

Notwithstanding the fact that Paul was personally taught by God, he had no strained ideas of individual responsibility. While looking to God for direct guidance, he was ever ready to recognize the authority vested in the body of believers united in church fellowship.

He felt the need of counsel, and when matters of importance arose, he was glad to lay these before the church and to unite with his brethren in seeking God for wisdom to make right decisions.

Even "the spirits of the prophets," he declared, "are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." 1 Corinthians 14:32, 33. With Peter, he taught that all united in church capacity should be "subject one to another." 1 Peter 5:5.

In our efforts to achieve oneness, unity, and organization, it will be a help to us if we understand that the Lord is always concerned with the welfare of the whole body, even in His personal guidance of individual members. No one lives just for himself, as he might if he were alone on an island, for each person's experience has an influence on those around him.

**Christ's Object Lessons, p. 339:**

By the atmosphere surrounding us, every person with whom we come in contact is consciously or unconsciously affected.

This is a responsibility from which we cannot free our-

selves. Our words, our acts, our dress, our deportment, even the expression of the countenance, has an influence.

This does not mean that we should try to involve ourselves in the personal matters of our fellow believers. Nor does it mean that we should relate all our personal experiences. Some experiences might not have matured, and we cannot rightly assess them. In addition, they might not always be understood by others. However, we should realize that God will never give us an experience independent of and contrary to that of the Church.

Our life not only exerts an influence on the earthly Church, but on the whole universe.

**The Acts of the Apostles, p. 163:**

God has made His church on the earth a channel of light, and through it He communicates His purposes and His will. He does not give to one of His servants an experience independent of and contrary to the experience of the church itself. Neither does He give one man a knowledge of His will for the entire church while the church—Christ’s body—is left in darkness. In His providence He places His servants in close connection with His church in order that they may have less confidence in themselves and greater confidence in others whom He is leading out to advance His work.

**Manuscript Releases, vol. 20, p. 369:**

My brother, God’s people are one body. God has a people whom He is leading, teaching, and guiding, that they may teach and lead and guide others. There will be among the remnant of these last days, as there was with ancient Israel, those who wish to move independently of the body, who are not willing to be subject to the body of the church, who are not willing to submit to advice or counsel, but ever bear in mind that God has a church upon the earth, and to that church God has delegated power.

**Selected Messages, vol. 3, p. 23:**

Men will want to follow their own independent judgment, despising counsel and reproof; but just as surely as they do this they will depart from the faith, and disaster and ruin of souls will follow. Those who rally now to support and build

up the truth of God are ranging themselves on one side, standing united in heart, mind, and voice in defense of the truth.

God does not expect us to blindly submit to the authority of any group. He has given us a conscience, understanding, and a voice so that we can formulate and express our questions, objections, and contributions. Each of these has their place in the effort to establish oneness, unity, and order. Whenever these efforts are undertaken with a sincere heart and in the love of Christ, oneness, unity, and organization will be the result. There is freedom of expression in the Church of God, and the authority exercised there is an authority of love. For this reason that authority should be respected all the more.

## **A Progressive Gathering**

When the Lord has called the honest in heart out of Babylon and gathered them together into one Church, the work of gathering is not yet finished.

### **Isaiah 56**

<sup>8</sup> The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says, Yet I will gather to him others besides those who are gathered to him.

In other words, the work of gathering is progressive. However, this does not only refer to a growth of numbers in the Church. As we have seen, gathering means oneness, unity, and organization. Therefore, an increase in gathering must mean an increase in oneness, unity, and organization. This is only logical because an increase in members will present new challenges to the Church which can only be mastered by the growth and perfecting of oneness, unity, and, consequently, organization.

In fact, the Church must reach a certain level of maturity in this respect before the storm breaks upon it so that it will not stumble under the pressure of the new situation when it

comes. Yet, even though it will be prepared for it, there will still be room for growth.

It is important for us to understand that the Lord will gather new members to the existing Church, for God has not only given His Church authority over the individual members, but also over those who are still seeking and who want to belong to Christ. Christ will always lead these souls to His body, His denomination, His Church.

**The Signs of the Times, October 23, 1879:**

In the ministry of Christ and his apostles, those who were converted to the truth were brought into church relationship; and every stray, lost sheep that was found, was brought to the fold of the church, that under the direction of the Master, through the undershepherds, they might go in and out and find pasture. God has instituted his church and delegated to it his authority and power. He has given it the inspired oracles, provided it with pastors and teachers to carry forward his work on the earth when he should leave it.

**The Acts of the Apostles, p. 122:**

Many have an idea that they are responsible to Christ alone for their light and experience, independent of His recognized followers on earth. Jesus is the friend of sinners, and His heart is touched with their woe. He has all power, both in heaven and on earth; but He respects the means that He has ordained for the enlightenment and salvation of men; He directs sinners to the church, which He has made a channel of light to the world.

An important principle of gospel order is that God uses the means that He Himself has given. He does not pass by His instruments in his work for humanity.

The Lord prepares His instrument—the Church—by gathering the members. A “gathering” does not merely refer to a collection of people. Rather, the Lord unites these people as He and His Father are united.

**John 17**

<sup>21</sup> ...that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may

believe that You sent Me.

This oneness and unity is the basis of divine church organization. It is the foundation for the effectual working of gospel order. We have the privilege of cooperating with Him in this work as we do in all of God's gifts. Oneness and unity bring divine organization. Divine organization fosters more oneness and unity. That is the true gathering of God's people.



## Chapter 3

# The Nature of God's Church

**I**t is now necessary to consider the nature of the church. It is only when we have a better understanding of the nature of God's church that we will be able to grasp the true meaning of organization.

### A Body

#### 1 Corinthians 12

<sup>12</sup> For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

In this verse Paul is speaking about the church, and he explains very clearly that it is to be considered as one body with all its parts connected to one another. Even though the church is made up of individual members, each with his own personality, it is to be considered collectively as one person, one body, one denomination. Nobody can say that what goes on in the church does not affect him. Nobody can say that his experience has nothing to do with the church. Similarly, no member can be excluded from anything that concerns the church.

The Lord has confirmed this concept of one body in the Old and the New Testaments by blessing the entire church through the experiences of single members, and also by permitting the whole church to suffer when individual members have sinned.

Therefore, without any doubt, the church must be considered as a body. But is it a visible or an invisible body? In other words, is the church a visibly organized amalgamation of people, or is it a company of unfallen angels and spiritually born again people whom no one can count? If the church were only an invisible body, as in the latter case, then it cannot be described as a visible organization.

## An Invisible Body

In the word of God, the church is actually referred to as an invisible body. Here are just a few examples.

In *Galatians 4*, Paul describes the true church as opposed to the apostate church. The apostate church is symbolized by the earthly Jerusalem and is in bondage. But concerning the true church he says,

### **Galatians 4**

<sup>26</sup> But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.

The Jerusalem which is above is invisible. If the mother is invisible, then the children must also be invisible. However, we are not saying that this church cannot be recognized. The church is not only made up of angels but also of real, visible people, and their fruits can be seen. But according to this description, taken by itself, it cannot be recognized as a visibly organized body on this earth.

This thought is confirmed in the next verse.

### **Galatians 4**

<sup>27</sup> For it is written: Rejoice, O barren, you who do not bear! Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband.

These kinds of numbers are obviously not visible today and can only be found by adding to the company of believers the army of invisible angels as well as His true children in the fallen churches.

The thought expressed in *Galatians 4* is also found in *Hebrews 12*:

### **Hebrews 12**

<sup>22</sup> But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,

<sup>23</sup> To the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect.

If we today could view the heavenly ledgers, we would be able to name each member of the church of the firstborn, and it would then become a visible body. But as we all know, this is not possible.

Another evidence in favor of the invisible body is the fact that no one can, or even should, count Israel.

**Review and Herald, Jan. 7, 1902:**

Be very careful how you attempt to number Israel. Not to you nor to any other man has God given this work. You make a great mistake when you put your human measurement upon any of your brethren. You cannot read the heart. It is probable that the one with whom you find fault is more righteous in the sight of God than you are.

**Prophets and Kings, p. 189:**

What strange work Elijah would have done in numbering Israel at the time when God's judgments were falling upon the backsliding people! He could count only one on the Lord's side. But when he said, "I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life," the word of the Lord surprised him, "Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal." 1 Kings 19:14, 18.

Then let no man attempt to number Israel today, but let everyone have a heart of flesh, a heart of tender sympathy, a heart that, like the heart of Christ, reaches out for the salvation of a lost world.

If the church was nothing more than a visible denomination, then it would be possible to count its members today. It would be possible to say exactly who belonged to the church and who did not. But if we did know these things, we would fence ourselves off from the world as the Jews did. We would look down on everyone who did not belong to our church.

This is an unfortunate tendency of human nature, and it is good for us to always bear in mind that Israel cannot be numbered. The Lord has many children who have not bowed their knees to Baal, and one day we shall see them.

**The Great Controversy, p. 390:**

Notwithstanding the spiritual darkness, and alienation

from God, that exist in the churches which constitute Babylon, the great body of Christ's true followers are still to be found in their communion. There are many of these who have never seen the special truths for this time. Not a few are dissatisfied with their present condition, and are longing for clearer light. They look in vain for the image of Christ in the churches with which they are connected.

As these bodies depart farther and farther from the truth, and ally themselves more closely with the world, the difference between the two classes will widen, and it will finally result in separation. The time will come when those who love God supremely can no longer remain in connection with such as are "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."

Speaking of God's church, Jesus said,

**Matthew 16**

<sup>18</sup> ...the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Now there is no question that a visible church has been prevailed against time and time again throughout history. But the word of Christ remains. At all times in the past, and today as well, there has been and is a church which has not been prevailed against by the gates of hell. This church cannot be the same thing as a visible denomination, for if it were, which denomination would qualify? In fact, if a visible denomination were to be declared as this invisible church, it would be the same as declaring it infallible.

At this point we will leave the evidences in favor of an invisible body. But we should bear in mind that we have not yet seen the nature of the church in its entirety. The picture needs to be completed. If this invisible body of angels and born again people were the only aspect of the nature of God's church, then we would have a church today in which there would be no more tares. But this is not in keeping with the picture that the Bible gives us of God's church.

**A Visible Body**

Let us consider the parable of the wheat and tares as an ex-

ample.

### **Matthew 13**

<sup>24</sup> Another parable He put forth to them, saying: The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field;

<sup>25</sup> But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.

<sup>26</sup> But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.

<sup>27</sup> So the servants of the owner came and said to him, Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?

<sup>28</sup> He said to them, An enemy has done this. The servants said to him, Do you want us then to go and gather them up?

<sup>29</sup> But he said, No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them.

<sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.

<sup>36</sup> Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.

<sup>37</sup> He answered and said to them: He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.

<sup>38</sup> The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one.

<sup>39</sup> The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels.

<sup>40</sup> Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age.

<sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness,

<sup>42</sup> And will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

<sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

The following quotation reveals that this parable especially concerns the church of God.

**Christ's Object Lessons, p. 70:**

"The field," Christ said, "is the world." But we must understand this as signifying the church of Christ in the world. The parable is a description of that which pertains to the kingdom of God, His work of salvation of men; and this work is accomplished through the church. True, the Holy Spirit has gone out into all the world; everywhere it is moving upon the hearts of men; but it is in the church that we are to grow and ripen for the garner of God.

It is quite clear that the tares are not a part of the invisible body described above, and yet they are a part of the church up to the point where the angels separate the two. However, this only happens at the time of the end.

The parable of the fishing net also confirms the same thought.

**Matthew 13**

<sup>47</sup> Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind,

<sup>48</sup> Which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away.

<sup>49</sup> So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just,

<sup>50</sup> And cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

**Christ's Object Lessons, p. 122:**

The casting of the net is the preaching of the gospel. This gathers both good and evil into the church.

Then there is the parable of the wise and foolish virgins found in *Matthew* 25:1-13. Both of these groups are a part of the church.

**Christ's Object Lessons, p. 406:**

As Christ sat looking upon the party that waited for the bridegroom, He told His disciples the story of the ten virgins, by their experience illustrating the experience of the church

that shall live just before His second coming.

**Christ's Object Lessons, p. 408:**

In the parable, all the ten virgins went out to meet the bridegroom....For a time there was seen no difference between them. So with the church that lives just before Christ's second coming.

We need to remember that there are bad in the church as well as good. The church is made up of good and bad people, but the heavenly watchers can distinguish between the two. Sometimes evil reveals itself quite clearly. In such a case the church has a duty towards the guilty party.

**The Desire of Ages, p. 656:**

It is true that open sin excludes the guilty [from the Lord's Supper]. This the Holy Spirit plainly teaches.

**1 Corinthians 5**

<sup>11</sup> But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.

Sometimes evil is not developed enough so as to be seen by all. One example of this is Judas who appeared to be a true follower of Jesus for a time. We cannot read the heart.

So then, in the Bible we find a description of a church in which both good and bad people are found. Such a church can and does exist as a visibly organized body.

**Testimonies for Ministers, p. 45 [see also p. 47]**

Has God no living church? He has a church, but it is the church militant, not the church triumphant. We are sorry that there are defective members, that there are tares amid the wheat.

Here is another quotation which speaks directly of the visible church.

**Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 619-620:**

As members of the visible church, and workers in the vineyard of the Lord, all professed Christians should do their utmost to preserve peace, harmony, and love in the church.

There are many other evidences that the church is a visible, organized church. Some examples are the Israelites, the Apostolic Church, and the Advent Church. Each of these represent a visible denomination which God more than once called His church.

Let us begin with Israel.

**Exodus 12**

<sup>3</sup> Speak to all the congregation of Israel...

**Exodus 16**

<sup>1</sup> And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin...

**Exodus 35**

<sup>1</sup> Then Moses gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together, and said to them, These are the words which the Lord has commanded you to do.

This list of verses could be extended by many others. The extent to which God identifies Himself with His visible church is expressed in this verse:

**Deuteronomy 32**

<sup>9</sup> For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance.

<sup>10</sup> He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye.

This reminds us that in the New Testament the church is called the body of Christ. That means that whoever attacks this church, this visibly organized body, attacks Christ, for it is the apple of His eye, His body.

The apostolic church was a visibly organized body and is called a church in the Scriptures.

**Acts 2**

<sup>47</sup> ...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

The Spirit of Prophecy also repeatedly applies the word



“church” to the visible church of the Seventh-day Adventists (see for example *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 619).

Despite the fact that this denomination has rejected present truth, it was the channel for it in the past. There is no doubt but that this visible denomination was once “the church.”

## **An Apparent Contradiction**

We now have a list of evidences that show the church to be an invisible body, and another list of evidences that show it to be a visible body. So what shall we believe? Evidently we have an apparent contradiction as we have in other places in the word of God. But although it appears to be a contradiction, we know that there are no real contradictions in the word of God.

In order to solve the mystery of this riddle, let us look at another well-known, apparent contradiction. Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, has a divine nature. He is...

### **Hebrews 1**

<sup>3</sup> ...the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person...

It would hardly be possible to express the truth that He has exactly the same nature as God more clearly than this. But there is also evidence which reveals that Jesus is a man. He became a man like us.

### **Hebrews 2**

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Now, is Christ God or man? Taken together, these statements appear as an insoluble contradiction. The solution is that Christ had two natures, each of which did not preclude the existence of the other. Even though it is difficult for us to understand, Jesus, like every other born again person, had,

and still has, two natures united in one person.

## Two Natures

This solution is also the answer to the apparent contradiction concerning the nature of God's church. The church of God is likewise a person which has two natures—a visible and an invisible. The following two diagrams illustrate this truth:

<b>Jesus Christ</b> had two natures on this earth	
An invisible nature	A visible nature
A divine nature	A human nature
An immortal nature	A mortal nature
A nature which could not fall	A nature which could fall
This nature made Him a member of heaven	This nature made Him a part of human society
In this nature He was connected to God and the heavenly powers	In this nature He was subject to His parents and the civil authorities
<b>The Church of God</b> has two natures on this earth	
An invisible body	A visible body
The divine nature of the church	The human nature of the church
The church of the firstborn cannot be eradicated	The visible church can be physically destroyed
The gates of hell cannot prevail against the church	One visible organization after another has fallen from God's ways
With this nature the church is a part of the heavenly kingdom	With this nature the church is a part of human society
With this nature the church is connected to God and submits to Him alone	With this nature the church submits to the civil authorities who act as God's servant

We have already seen that the church has a visible and an invisible body, but to what extent can we assign a divine nature to this invisible body? The church of believers whose names are written in heaven is a church of born again people. In fact, it is the actual miracle of rebirth that is the cause of

their names being recorded in heaven. This is the divine nature of the church. The visible church on the other hand is made up of human beings who identify with God's cause and profess to support it. This is the human nature of the church.

The visible church is mortal, it can be destroyed. For example, the Albigenses were completely wiped out by an apostate church united to the state. Tens of thousands of people were murdered because of their faith until no more Albigenses could be found. But God still had a people. There were still those who had not bent their knees to the papacy. The church of the born again cannot be fully extinguished by any power.

History reveals how easily the visible church can apostatize. But the invisible church has never apostatized and never will, for the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.

The church is connected to God and the angels by its divine nature. It is a part of the heavenly government and is only answerable to God. But in the church's human nature it is a part of human society, has to bear earthly responsibilities, and submits to the civil authorities as far as these do not contradict God's will.



## Chapter 4

# The Organization of God's People in the Old Testament

**W**e now want to look at the Biblical evidences which show that the Lord does in fact organize His church. In our quest we will look at the witness of history and prophecy. We want to see what the Lord has done in the past and what He has promised to do in the future.

In order to classify the evidence correctly, it will be necessary to keep the difference between human and divine organization in mind.

### **Divine Organization**

What is divine organization? Divine organization is true order. It has a particular structure in which God is the Head. It also has different areas of responsibilities as well as different levels of leadership and offices. Although not everyone has a leading position, each person has a certain work to do. Each task pertains to a specific area for which the person concerned is responsible, and this area of responsibility is respected by everyone else.

Divine organization means submission to the will of God. Regardless of which position a person has in the divine organization, complete submission to the will of God is an equal requirement for everyone, because the purpose and aim of this organization is the carrying out of God's will.

For this reason the members are also subject to one another. It is a privilege as well as a duty to submit to those whom God uses as instruments to bless His people. If a person cannot submit to this order, he is actually resisting God.

Of course, complete submission can only come from the heart, and therefore an organization of this kind reflects the

wholehearted consent of the member to the structure of God's kingdom. If a person cannot submit voluntarily, then he cannot be a part of the organization.

### **Hebrews 13**

<sup>17</sup> Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

### **1 Corinthians 16**

<sup>16</sup> That you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us.

There is no better organization than the one found in heaven. This is the great original, the structure of which we are seeking to reproduce on earth. It is also God's will that the heavenly organization be established in His church on earth, as He teaches us in His prayer,

### **Matthew 6**

<sup>10</sup> Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

### **The Desire of Ages, p. 680:**

Christ designs that heaven's order, heaven's plan of government, heaven's divine harmony, shall be represented in His church on earth. Thus in His people He is glorified.

As we know, the angels are "thoroughly organized." (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 649). It therefore follows that God's visible church on earth should also be thoroughly organized. Before continuing with our thoughts on the application of divine order to the visible, earthly church, let us investigate a few more descriptions of the heavenly original.

### **Counsels on Health, p. 101:**

Order is heaven's first law...

### **Maranatha, p. 361:**

I have been shown the order, the perfect order, of heaven, and have been enraptured...

### **Early Writings, p. 145:**

The angels were marshaled in companies, each division with a higher commanding angel at its head.

**Early Writings, p. 168:**

Many companies of holy angels, each with a tall commanding angel at their head, were sent to witness the scene.

Here we see a clear description of an organizational structure. There are companies, and each company has an angel as leader, the commanding angel. He carries this title because he has the authority to command.

At this point one might ask why a commanding angel is necessary when all the angels carry out God's will with all their hearts. One would not expect them to need an express command before doing His will.

**Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 109:**

But in heaven, service is not rendered in the spirit of legality. When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of. In their ministry the angels are not as servants, but as sons. There is perfect unity between them and their Creator.

This statement seems to suggest that the angels carry out God's will so naturally that it would be superfluous to have a commanding angel to express it. It is obviously a false conception which leads us to assume that the angels already know the entire will of God, for this is not the case. The angels learned a lot more about God's will through the incarnation of Christ. Here are some indications of this.

**The Desire of Ages, p. 37:**

With intense interest the unfallen worlds had watched to see Jehovah arise, and sweep away the inhabitants of the earth.

When God sent His Son to this world to save it instead of destroying it, the heavenly observers learned something new about the will of God.

**The Desire of Ages, p. 693:**

The worlds unfallen and the heavenly angels had watched with intense interest as the conflict drew to its close....The powers of good and evil waited to see what answer would

come to Christ's thrice-repeated prayer.

Once again, we see that the angels had to learn the will of God.

**Early Writings, p. 170:**

It was difficult for the angels to endure the sight. They would have delivered Jesus, but the commanding angels forbade them, saying that it was a great ransom which was to be paid for man; but it would be complete and would cause the death of him who had the power of death....

There was commotion among the angels. They would have rescued Him instantly; but their commanding angels restrained them.

Here we see how necessary the commanding angels are in the structure of divine organization.

So, by looking at the order that exists in heaven, we now have some insight into what divine organization actually is. At the same time we also have the first clear evidence that God organizes His church, for what God does in heaven, He also does for the visible church on earth.

**Testimonies to Ministers, p. 28-29:**

Angels work harmoniously. Perfect order characterizes all their movements. The more closely we imitate the harmony and order of the angelic host, the more successful will be the efforts of these heavenly agents in our behalf.

If we see no necessity for harmonious action, and are disorderly, undisciplined, and disorganized in our course of action, angels, who are thoroughly organized and move in perfect order, cannot work for us successfully. They turn away in grief, for they are not authorized to bless confusion, distraction, and disorganization.

All who desire the cooperation of the heavenly messengers must work in unison with them. Those who have the unction from on high will in all their efforts encourage order, discipline, and union of action, and then the angels of God can cooperate with them. But never, never will these heavenly messengers place their endorsement upon irregularity, disorganization, and disorder. All these evils are the result of Satan's efforts to weaken our forces, to destroy our courage,



and prevent successful action.

Satan well knows that success can only attend order and harmonious action. He well knows that everything connected with heaven is in perfect order, that subjection and perfect discipline mark the movements of the angelic host. It is his studied effort to lead professed Christians just as far from heaven's arrangement as he can; therefore he deceives even the professed people of God and makes them believe that order and discipline are enemies to spirituality, that the only safety for them is to let each pursue his own course, and to remain especially distinct from bodies of Christians who are united and are laboring to establish discipline and harmony of action.

All the efforts made to establish order are considered dangerous, a restriction of rightful liberty, and hence are feared as popery. These devoted souls consider it a virtue to boast of their freedom to think and act independently. They will not take any man's say-so. They are amenable to no man. I was shown that it is Satan's special work to lead men to feel that it is God's order for them to strike out for themselves and choose their own course independent of their brethren.

## Order in Eden

After this brief look at the heavenly pattern, we now want to turn to the witness of history on this planet. Before creating man, which was the same as creating a church, God prepared a home for him. This home also had an organizational structure. This structure, from the smallest atom to the largest celestial body, can still be observed today.

### **The Desire of Ages, p. 789:**

In His sight who guides alike the star and the atom, there is nothing unimportant. Order and perfection are seen in all His work.

### **Job 38**

<sup>33</sup> Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you set their dominion over the earth?

### **Jeremiah 33**

<sup>25</sup> Thus says the Lord: If My covenant is not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven

and earth...

Consider the absolute dependability of the planets in their orbits! In this organization we also see bodies which carry a special responsibility, such as the sun, which rules the day, and the moon, which rules the night (see *Genesis* 1:16-19).

### **Psalm 148**

<sup>4</sup> Praise Him, you heavens of heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

<sup>5</sup> Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created.

<sup>6</sup> He also established them forever and ever; He made a decree which shall not pass away.

The church of believers in this world was organized right from the beginning. Man was made “a little lower than the angels.” (*Psalm* 8:5). In other words, man was placed under the authority of the angels in the divine organization. At the same time he was given administrative work to do.

### **Genesis 1**

<sup>28</sup> Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Man not only bore responsibility for the animal world but also for his children, which was his main work. The command given him to fill the earth and subdue it shows the authority that Adam was to have over his descendants. Again, this reveals a clear organizational structure. And here we also see that a faithful adherence to this kind of organization is only possible when there is a true love for it.

## **Order After the Fall**

The tempter was successful in diverting man’s love away from this order. It all began when Eve disregarded the directions of the angels and separated herself from Adam.

### **Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 53:**

The angels had cautioned Eve to beware of separating herself from her husband while occupied in their daily labor in

the garden; with him she would be in less danger from temptation than if she were alone. But absorbed in her pleasing task, she unconsciously wandered from his side. On perceiving that she was alone, she felt an apprehension of danger, but dismissed her fears, deciding that she had sufficient wisdom and strength to discern evil and to withstand it. Unmindful of the angels' caution, she soon found herself gazing with mingled curiosity and admiration upon the forbidden tree.

Despite this and other transgressions the organizational structure of God's kingdom on earth was maintained. Even in a sinful environment it was not to be annulled. In fact, it was actually extended in order to help man in his fallen condition.

### **Genesis 3**

<sup>16</sup> To the woman He said:...Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.

Some people think that this regulation of submission and rulership, which is a part of the organizational structure, will be revoked when sin has finally been overcome. However, such thoughts only serve to show that what God actually did is not fully understood. He did not create a new order. We shall still be subject to one another in a sinless environment.

When the order described by God in *Genesis* 3:16 is truly understood, it will also be seen that this kind of organizational structure has always existed and always will exist. The same regulation has also been expressed in the following words,

### **Ephesians 5**

<sup>21</sup> ...submitting to one another in the fear of God.

<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

<sup>23</sup> For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

<sup>24</sup> Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

## The Patriarchal Era

The next era in the history of God's people was the patriarchal epoch, and this too witnesses to the fact that God's church had a clear, visible, and organized structure.

### **Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 141:**

Abraham's household comprised more than a thousand souls. Those who were led by his teachings to worship the one God, found a home in his encampment; and here, as in a school, they received such instruction as would prepare them to be representatives of the true faith. Thus a great responsibility rested upon him. He was training heads of families, and his methods of government would be carried out in the households over which they should preside.

In early times the father was the ruler and priest of his own family, and he exercised authority over his children, even after they had families of their own. His descendants were taught to look up to him as their head, in both religious and secular matters. This patriarchal system of government Abraham endeavored to perpetuate, as it tended to preserve the knowledge of God.

As is clearly pointed out in this quotation, the visible church on earth at this time was comprised of Abraham's household. The organizational structure of this church is designated as the "patriarchal system," but one can easily see that the same structure existed in heaven and in Eden. In other words, this form of church organization is not limited to the time of the patriarchs.

## The Nation of Israel

We now want to turn to the nation of Israel to see if and how the Lord organized this people. As slaves in Egypt they could hardly have had their own independent identity, but even in this situation they were partly organized, for Moses came into contact with a certain kind of order on his return from Midian. For example, we read of elders through which he and Aaron were able to speak to all the people.

### **Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 257:**

Aaron, being instructed by angels, went forth to meet his brother, from whom he had been so long separated; and they met amid the desert solitudes, near Horeb. Here they communed together, and Moses told Aaron “all the words of the Lord who had sent him, and all the signs which He had commanded him.” Exodus 4:28. Together they journeyed to Egypt; and having reached the land of Goshen, they proceeded to assemble the elders of Israel. Aaron repeated to them all the dealings of God with Moses, and then the signs which God had given Moses were shown before the people. “The people believed: and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that He had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped.” Verse 31.

The exodus from Egypt would have been impossible without thorough organization.

### **Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 281:**

During the plagues, as the manifestation of God’s power had kindled faith in the hearts of the bondmen and had struck terror to their oppressors, the Israelites had gradually assembled themselves in Goshen; and notwithstanding the suddenness of their flight, some provision had already been made for the necessary organization and control of the moving multitudes, they being divided into companies, under appointed leaders.

The number of people who belonged to this visibly organized people of God at this time has also been recorded.

### **Exodus 12**

<sup>37</sup> Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children.

We find a further indication of the organization among this people at the time when Jethro gave his son-in-law some advice.

### **Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 300-301:**

As Jethro remained in the camp, he soon saw how heavy were the burdens that rested upon Moses. To maintain order

and discipline among that vast, ignorant, and untrained multitude was indeed a stupendous task. Moses was their recognized leader and magistrate, and not only the general interests and duties of the people, but the controversies that arose among them, were referred to him. He had permitted this, for it gave him an opportunity to instruct them; as he said, "I do make them know the statutes of God, and His laws."

But Jethro remonstrated against this, saying, "This thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone." "Thou wilt surely wear away," and he counseled Moses to appoint proper persons as rulers of thousands, and others as rulers of hundreds, and others of tens. They should be "able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness."

These were to judge in all matters of minor consequence, while the most difficult and important cases should still be brought before Moses, who was to be to the people, said Jethro, "to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: and thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt show them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do."

This counsel was accepted, and it not only brought relief to Moses, but resulted in establishing more perfect order among the people.

At Mount Sinai Israel's organization was further perfected.

### **Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 374-376:**

The building of the tabernacle was not begun for some time after Israel arrived at Sinai; and the sacred structure was first set up at the opening of the second year from the Exodus. This was followed by the consecration of the priests, the celebration of the Passover, the numbering of the people, and the completion of various arrangements essential to their civil or religious system, so that nearly a year was spent in the encampment at Sinai. Here their worship had taken a more definite form, the laws had been given for the government of the nation, and a more efficient organization had been effected preparatory to their entrance into the land of Canaan.

The government of Israel was characterized by the most thorough organization, wonderful alike for its completeness and its simplicity. The order so strikingly displayed in the perfection and arrangement of all God's created works was manifest in the Hebrew economy. God was the center of authority and government, the sovereign of Israel. Moses stood as their visible leader, by God's appointment, to administer the laws in His name. From the elders of the tribes a council of seventy was afterward chosen to assist Moses in the general affairs of the nation. Next came the priests, who consulted the Lord in the sanctuary. Chiefs, or princes, ruled over the tribes. Under these were 'captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens,' and, lastly, officers who might be employed for special duties. Deuteronomy 1:15.

The Hebrew camp was arranged in exact order. It was separated into three great divisions, each having its appointed position in the encampment. In the center was the tabernacle, the abiding place of the invisible King. Around it were stationed the priests and Levites. Beyond these were encamped all the other tribes.

To the Levites was committed the charge of the tabernacle and all that pertained thereto, both in the camp and on the journey. When the camp set forward they were to strike the sacred tent; when a halting place was reached they were to set it up. No person of another tribe was allowed to come near, on pain of death. The Levites were separated into three divisions, the descendants of the three sons of Levi, and each was assigned its special position and work. In front of the tabernacle, and nearest to it, were the tents of Moses and Aaron. On the south were the Kohathites, whose duty it was to care for the ark and the other furniture; on the north Merarites, who were placed in charge of the pillars, sockets, boards, etc.; in the rear the Gershonites, to whom the care of the curtains and hangings was committed.

The position of each tribe also was specified. Each was to march and to encamp beside its own standard, as the Lord had commanded: 'Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard, with the ensign of their father's house: far off about the tabernacle of the congregation shall

they pitch.’ ‘As they encamp, so shall they set forward, every man in his place by their standards.’ Numbers 2:2, 17. The mixed multitude that had accompanied Israel from Egypt were not permitted to occupy the same quarters with the tribes, but were to abide upon the outskirts of the camp; and their offspring were to be excluded from the community until the third generation. Deuteronomy 23:7, 8.

Scrupulous cleanliness as well as strict order throughout the encampment and its environs was enjoined. Thorough sanitary regulations were enforced. Every person who was unclean from any cause was forbidden to enter the camp. These measures were indispensable to the preservation of health among so vast a multitude; and it was necessary also that perfect order and purity be maintained, that Israel might enjoy the presence of a holy God. Thus He declared: “The Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy.”

In all the journeyings of Israel, “the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them,...to search out a resting place for them.” Numbers 10:33. Borne by the sons of Kohath, the sacred chest containing God’s holy law was to lead the van. Before it went Moses and Aaron; and the priests, bearing silver trumpets, were stationed near. These priests received directions from Moses, which they communicated to the people by the trumpets. It was the duty of the leaders of each company to give definite directions concerning all the movements to be made, as indicated by the trumpets. Whoever neglected to comply with the directions given was punished with death.

The following statement clearly reveals that this organization in Israel is to serve as a pattern for our time.

**Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 376:**

God is a God of order. Everything connected with heaven is in perfect order; subjection and thorough discipline mark the movements of the angelic host. Success can only attend order and harmonious action. God requires order and system in His work now no less than in the days of Israel. All who are working for Him are to labor intelligently, not in a careless, haphazard manner. He would have his work done with



faith and exactness, that He may place the seal of His approval upon it.

The blessing that accompanied this wonderful organization was still apparent forty years later.

**Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 447:**

Balaam confessed that he came with the purpose of cursing Israel, but the words he uttered were directly contrary to the sentiments of his heart. He was constrained to pronounce blessings, while his soul was filled with curses.

Although it was the Spirit of God that caused Balaam to pronounce a blessing instead of a curse, He used the means available to do it, namely the order and organization in His people, which made a deep impression on the prophet.

As Balaam looked upon the encampment of Israel he beheld with astonishment the evidence of their prosperity. They had been represented to him as a rude, disorganized multitude, infesting the country in roving bands that were a pest and terror to the surrounding nations; but their appearance was the reverse of all this. He saw the vast extent and perfect arrangement of their camp, everything bearing the marks of thorough discipline and order.

## **David and Solomon**

The next period we shall briefly review is the time of King David and King Solomon. Towards the end of David's reign everything had been prepared for the building of the temple. And here again we see how God organizes His people. The report of this organization is given in *1 Chronicles 22-27*. It is hardly possible to study these chapters without being deeply impressed with the thoroughness of the organization of the temple service.

**The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 3, p. 1128:**

The four thousand musicians, divided into twenty-four courses, were each lead by twelve men especially instructed and skillful in the use of musical instruments. The work of the porters was also definitely arranged.

The priests were divided into twenty-four courses, and a

full and accurate record was made regarding this division. Each course was thoroughly organized under its chief, and each was to come to Jerusalem twice a year, to attend for one week to the ministry of the sanctuary.

The Levites, whose duty it was to assist in the sanctuary service, were organized and allotted their part with similar precision...

In planning for the administration of the affairs of the kingdom, after David abdicated in favor of Solomon, the aged king and his son and their counselors regarded it as essential that everything be done with regularity, propriety, fidelity, and dispatch. So far as possible, they followed the system of organization given Israel soon after the deliverance from Egypt. The Levites were assigned the work connected with the temple service, including the ministry of song and instrumental music, and the keeping of the treasures. The men capable of bearing arms and of serving the king were divided into twelve courses of twenty-four thousand each. Over every course was a captain. "The general of the king's army was Joab." "The courses...came in and went out month by month throughout all the months of the year." Thus every group of twenty-four thousand served the king one month during each year.

David appointed Jonathan, his uncle, as "a counselor, a wise man, and a scribe"; Ahithophel also was "the king's counselor...And after Ahithophel was Jehoiada...and Abiathar." Hushai was "the king's friend." By his prudent example, the aged king taught Solomon that "in the multitude of counselors there is safety."

The thoroughness and completeness of the organization perfected at the beginning of Solomon's reign; the comprehensiveness of the plans for bringing the largest number possible of all the people into active service; the wide distribution of responsibility, so that the service of God and of the king should not be unduly burdensome to any individual or class,—these are lessons which all may study with profit, and which the leaders of the Christian church should understand and follow.

## **Ezra and Nehemiah**

The next great era for God's people came when Israel rebuilt the temple and Jerusalem after their deliverance from the Babylonian captivity. Under Ezra's and Nehemiah's leadership God organized His people anew.

Ezra himself was a man of order and organization as the Spirit of Prophecy clearly indicates.

### **Prophets and Kings, p. 617:**

The care exercised by Ezra in providing for the transportation and safety of the Lord's treasure, teaches a lesson worthy of thoughtful study. Only those whose trustworthiness had been proved were chosen, and they were instructed plainly regarding the responsibility resting on them. In the appointment of faithful officers to act as treasurers of the Lord's goods, Ezra recognized the necessity and value of order and organization in connection with the work of God.

Nehemiah too was a man who recognized the need for organization among God's people and acted accordingly. The people became very zealous because of his influence.

### **Prophets and Kings, p. 639:**

Men of ability and influence organized the various classes of citizens into companies, each leader making himself responsible for the erection of a certain part of the wall. And of some it is written that they builded "everyone over against his house."

Nor did Nehemiah's energy abate, now that the work was actually begun. With tireless vigilance he superintended the building, directing the workmen, noting the hindrances, and providing for emergencies.

The following quotation also makes it clear that these efforts towards organization by God's people carried the full consensus of heaven.

### **Christian Service, p. 175:**

It was a sight well pleasing to God and angels to see the busy companies working harmoniously upon the broken-down walls of Jerusalem, and it was a joyous sound to hear the noise of instruments of labor from the earliest dawn "till

the stars appeared.”

Whenever the Lord established His church in the past, we find the same elements of careful order and organization. In the next article we will take a look at what the Lord did during New Testament times and what provisions He has made for the time of the end.

## Chapter 5

# The Organization of God's People in the New Testament

The evidences gathered from the Old Testament show conclusively that the Lord organized His people in that era, but is this also true for the New Testament period?

### A False Distinction

On the surface, there are some differences between the churches of the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament the visible church was, for a time, united in one nation and not scattered throughout the whole world. This fact leads some to conclude that organization must be something to do with the Old Testament and that it is limited to that time. Such a conclusion leads its adherents to consider the Old Testament period as a kind of “dark ages” while the New Testament age is considered to have a better order—one without any organization.

But this idea is not in harmony with the Scriptures. God's purpose for the church in the Old and New Testament periods is the same. And in both instances thorough organization was and is the means used to achieve that purpose.

### God's Purpose in the Old Testament

Let us now see just what God's purpose for the Old Testament church was.

#### **Prophets and Kings, p. 19:**

The children of Israel were to occupy all the territory which God appointed them. Those nations that rejected the worship and service of the true God were to be dispossessed.

But it was God's purpose that by the revelation of His character through Israel men should be drawn unto Him. To all the world the gospel invitation was to be given. Through

the teaching of the sacrificial service, Christ was to be uplifted before the nations, and all who would look unto Him should live. All who, like Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabitess, turned from idolatry to the worship of the true God were to unite themselves with His chosen people. As the numbers of Israel increased, they were to enlarge their borders until their kingdom should embrace the world.

## **No Change in the New Testament**

When the New Testament period began, God's purpose for His church did not change. And the means used to achieve this purpose did not change either.

### **The Acts of the Apostles, p. 9:**

The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world.

From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to "the principalities and powers in heavenly places," the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10.

This statement clearly shows that God uses organization to achieve His purpose for the church. And even though the nation of Israel failed to fulfill God's purposes, His goal has still remained the same.

In the New Testament era the church has not been established as a nation but is scattered throughout all the nations. However, it is still a unified body and is organized just as the church of the Old Testament was.

### **Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 653:**

Has God changed from a God of order? No; He is the same in the present dispensation as in the former. Paul says: "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace." He is as particular now as then. And He designs that we should learn lessons

of order and organization from the perfect order instituted in the days of Moses for the benefit of the children of Israel.

The argument that there can only be organization where God's people are a nation is also untenable because the organization of God's church stretches back to the time before Israel became a nation. As we have seen, organization has its origin in heaven, and God organized His church on earth from creation onwards.

## **Twelve Tribes – Twelve Apostles**

So then, the church of the New Testament was organized in the same way as the church in the Old Testament. And it was no less a personage than Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who led the New Testament church in its first steps towards organization.

### **Mark 3**

<sup>13</sup> And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him.

<sup>14</sup> Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach.

### **The Desire of Ages, p. 291:**

The first step was now to be taken in the organization of the church that after Christ's departure was to be His representative on earth.

Just as there were the twelve heads of the tribes in the Old Testament, there were twelve apostles who served as His instruments in the guidance of the church in the New Testament. The call and ordination of the apostles was one of the first steps towards organization. The church was not yet separated from the old Jewish body and so the organization could not be completed at this point in time. As we have already seen, the work of perfecting organization belongs to the third phase of a reformation movement.

After the resurrection of Christ the New Testament church suffered a great persecution from the Jews which resulted in their separating more and more from that body. At the same

time the work of organization continued, leading the young church to become a more independent body. For example, we read that the money donated to the church was laid at the apostles feet.

#### **Acts 4**

<sup>32</sup> Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own,...

<sup>34</sup> ...for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold,

<sup>35</sup> And laid them at the apostles feet;...

<sup>36</sup> And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus,

<sup>37</sup> Having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

### **The Deacons**

Problems within the church itself provided the next occasion for further steps in its organization. It is regrettable that a dispute arose within the church. But although the next steps in organization were initiated immediately after this unhappy event, the necessity of taking such steps would have become apparent even without the dissension. It was plain that the twelve apostles were no longer able to care for all the duties that arose in the church. It is God's will, and it is in harmony with His order, that church duties be distributed among several people. All the inspired reports concerning this event confirm this fact.

Here is the biblical report of that event.

#### **Acts 6**

<sup>1</sup> Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

<sup>2</sup> Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, It is not desirable that we should leave the word of



God and serve tables.

<sup>3</sup> Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;

<sup>4</sup> But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

<sup>5</sup> And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch,

<sup>6</sup> Whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

This report makes it clear that the reason for spreading the responsibility was not the dispute but the need for a more effective service. The problem only directed their attention to this need. Through this incident the apostles clearly saw that a careful organization would help to maintain unity. The fact that the work now went ahead more effectively proved that the right step had been taken.

Here is the detailed report of this important event.

#### **The Acts of the Apostles, p. 89-90:**

Summoning a meeting of the believers, the apostles were led by the Holy Spirit to outline a plan for the better organization of all the working forces of the church. The time had come, the apostles stated, when the spiritual leaders having the oversight of the church should be relieved from the task of distributing to the poor and from similar burdens, so that they might be free to carry forward the work of preaching the gospel.

“Wherefore, brethren,” they said, “look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” This advice was followed, and by prayer and the laying on of hands, seven chosen men were solemnly set apart for their duties as deacons.

The appointment of the seven to take the oversight of special lines of work, proved a great blessing to the church.

These officers gave careful consideration to individual needs as well as to the general financial interests of the church, and by their prudent management and their godly example they were an important aid to their fellow officers in binding together the various interests of the church into a united whole.

That this step was in the order of God, is revealed in the immediate results for good that were seen. "The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." This ingathering of souls was due both to the greater freedom secured by the apostles and to the zeal and power shown by the seven deacons.

The fact that these brethren had been ordained for the special work of looking after the needs of the poor, did not exclude them from teaching the faith. On the contrary, they were fully qualified to instruct others in the truth, and they engaged in the work with great earnestness and success.

To the early church had been entrusted a constantly enlarging work—that of establishing centers of light and blessing wherever there were honest souls willing to give themselves to the service of Christ. The proclamation of the gospel was to be world-wide in its extent, and the messengers of the cross could not hope to fulfill their important mission unless they should remain united in the bonds of Christian unity, and thus reveal to the world that they were one with Christ in God.

Had not their divine Leader prayed to the Father, "Keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We are"? And had He not declared of His disciples, "The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world"? Had He not pleaded with the Father that they might be "made perfect in one," "that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me"? John 17:11, 14, 23, 21. Their spiritual life and power was dependent on a close connection with the One by whom they had been commissioned to preach the gospel.

This step towards organization in the church was not an isolated event. It served as a pattern for all the local churches.

### **The Acts of the Apostles, p. 91-92:**

The organization of the church at Jerusalem was to serve as a model for the organization of churches in every other place where messengers of truth should win converts to the gospel. Those to whom was given the responsibility of the general oversight of the church were not to lord it over God's heritage, but, as wise shepherds, were to "feed the flock of God,...being ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2, 3); and the deacons were to be "men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom." These men were to take their position unitedly on the side of right and to maintain it with firmness and decision. Thus they would have a uniting influence upon the entire flock.

Later in the history of the early church, when in various parts of the world many groups of believers had been formed into churches, the organization of the church was further perfected, so that order and harmonious action might be maintained. Every member was exhorted to act well his part. Each was to make a wise use of the talents entrusted to him.

Some were endowed by the Holy Spirit with special gifts —"first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." 1 Corinthians 12:28. But all these classes of workers were to labor in harmony.

Shortly after the church had taken this important step in the further development of its organization by confirming the appointment of the seven deacons, Stephen was stoned to death. This event effectively ended the second phase in the development of the apostolic church and it then became a separate body in which the Lord continued to develop the organization of the church.

### **Further Development of Order**

Jesus had consecrated the twelve apostles for their particular work. Now that the church had enlarged, He established more offices and also decided who would occupy those positions. In doing this He chose a method which on the one hand confirmed the church's authority, and on the other hand re-

vealed the kind of organization He had established in it. Let us first read the report as it is written:

### **Acts 13**

<sup>1</sup> Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Nigger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

<sup>2</sup> As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

<sup>3</sup> Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

In this text certain individuals and the offices they held are first described. These individuals saw a need (see *Luke 10:2*) so they fasted and asked the Lord to reveal His will. The Lord then made known His will and gave the church the task of confirming His choice.

### **The Acts of the Apostles, p. 161:**

...He instructed the church by revelation to set them apart publicly to the work of the ministry. Their ordination was a public recognition of their divine appointment to bear to the Gentiles the glad tidings of the gospel.

This visible sign was obviously given by God in order to stress the fact that Paul and Barnabas were elected by His choice and not by any human election.

### **Early Writings, p. 100-101:**

I saw that this door at which the enemy comes in to perplex and trouble the flock can be shut. I inquired of the angel how it could be closed. He said, "The church must flee to God's Word and become established upon gospel order, which has been overlooked and neglected." This is indispensably necessary in order to bring the church into the unity of the faith.

I saw that in the apostles' day the church was in danger of being deceived and imposed upon by false teachers. Therefore the brethren chose men who had given good evidence that they were capable of ruling well their own house and

preserving order in their own families, and who could enlighten those who were in darkness.

Inquiry was made of God concerning these, and then, according to the mind of the church and the Holy Ghost, they were set apart by the laying on of hands. Having received their commission from God and having the approbation of the church, they went forth baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and administering the ordinances of the Lord's house, often waiting upon the saints by presenting them the emblems of the broken body and spilt blood of the crucified Saviour, to keep fresh in the memory of God's beloved children His sufferings and death.

## **Paul and Barnabas Establish Order**

In their work, Paul and Barnabas established the same order in the churches that they had experienced at the commencement of their own ministry in Antioch as it is written,

### **Acts 14**

<sup>23</sup> So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

### **Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 62-63:**

They were determined to securely bind off the work which they had done, that it might not ravel out. Churches were organized in the places mentioned, elders appointed in each church, and the proper order established there.

Paul also required his co-workers to introduce the same order.

### **Titus 1**

<sup>5</sup> For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.

This love of order is also expressed in Paul's letter to the Colossians:

### **Colossians 2**

<sup>5</sup> For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

## One Unified Church

But it was not only within the local churches that organization continued to develop. The different groups of believers considered themselves as a part of one unified church. Consequently, the organized Christians of the apostolic church had no difficulty in submitting to the entire body of believers as well as to the leading brethren in Jerusalem. This was demonstrated when a dispute broke out in Antioch and the believers not only referred the matter to the council in Jerusalem but also showed themselves willing to accept the solution that God would give them through this channel. Here is the report of this event.

### **Acts 15**

<sup>1</sup> And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

<sup>2</sup> Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

### **The Acts of the Apostles, p. 190:**

In the church at Antioch the consideration of the question of circumcision resulted in much discussion and contention. Finally, the members of the church, fearing that a division among them would be the outcome of continued discussion, decided to send Paul and Barnabas, with some responsible men from the church, to Jerusalem to lay the matter before the apostles and elders. There they were to meet delegates from the different churches and those who had come to Jerusalem to attend the approaching festivals. Meanwhile all controversy was to cease until a final decision should be given in general council. This decision was then to be universally accepted by the different churches throughout the country.

Here we see the great trust the believers had in the organizational structure that the Lord had given His church. The decision of the council in Jerusalem was to be accepted by the

believers everywhere. The believers knew that God would solve the problem in this way, and He did.

**The Acts of the Apostles, p. 196:**

The council which decided this case was composed of apostles and teachers who had been prominent in raising up the Jewish and Gentile Christian churches, with chosen delegates from various places. Elders from Jerusalem and deputies from Antioch were present, and the most influential churches were represented.

The council moved in accordance with the dictates of enlightened judgment, and with the dignity of a church established by the divine will. As a result of their deliberations they all saw that God Himself had answered the question at issue by bestowing upon the Gentiles the Holy Ghost; and they realized that it was their part to follow the guidance of the Spirit.

But at that time, as in all ages, there was some resistance to the divine organization. It is often difficult for man, in his fallen nature, to learn to submit.

**The Acts of the Apostles, p. 196-197:**

The entire body of Christians was not called to vote upon the question. The “apostles and elders,” men of influence and judgment, framed and issued the decree, which was thereupon generally accepted by the Christian churches.

Not all, however, were pleased with the decision; there was a faction of ambitious and self-confident brethren who disagreed with it. These men assumed to engage in the work on their own responsibility. They indulged in much murmuring and faultfinding, proposing new plans and seeking to pull down the work of the men whom God had ordained to teach the gospel message. From the first the church has had such obstacles to meet and ever will have till the close of time.

## **The Visible and Invisible Church Connected**

The organizational structure of the New Testament church is also described in *Revelation* 1:1-4, and here we see the connection between the visible and the invisible church.

## **Revelation 1**

<sup>1</sup> The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place.

<sup>2</sup> And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

<sup>3</sup> Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

<sup>4</sup> John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,...

The book of *Revelation* begins with God who is the Source and Head of every gift in the church. From Him these gifts pass to Christ, who in turn passes them on to the angel. The organization functions wonderfully in this invisible part of God's church because of the perfect submission that exists in heaven.

The angel gives the *Revelation* to John, the representative of the visible church on earth. And John passes it on to the various representatives of the churches, as it is written,

## **Revelation 2**

<sup>1</sup> To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,...

The Greek word for angel (*angelos*) is literally “messenger.” John was not to give the message to heavenly angels or messengers, for he had received it from their representative. His task was to impart it to earthly messengers, the representatives of the different churches.

### **The Desire of Ages, p. 296:**

As His representatives among men, Christ does not choose angels who have never fallen, but human beings, men of like passions with those they seek to save.

## **More Confirmations**

Here are some further confirmations from the word of God



that clearly show that the Lord organized the New Testament church in the same way as in the Old Testament.

### **1 Corinthians 12**

<sup>28</sup> And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

### **1 Corinthians 14**

<sup>33</sup> For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

### **Hebrews 13**

<sup>17</sup> Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

### **1 Thessalonians 5**

<sup>12</sup> And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,

<sup>13</sup> And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

## **Helping the Weak and Tempted**

An organized church not only bears a certain responsibility for its teachers and workers, it also has a duty towards its individual members. It must help the weak and, if somebody clings to sin, it must take a clear stand in showing that sin will separate these individuals from the body.

### **Galatians 6**

<sup>1</sup> Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

<sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

### **Matthew 18**

<sup>15</sup> Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

<sup>16</sup> But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be

established.

<sup>17</sup> And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

<sup>18</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

## Organization During the Latter Rain

In this brief historical survey we have seen how God organized His church in the past. With our knowledge of what God has done in the past, we now want to ask what His plans for the future are. Will the church of the last days be organized?

At a time when the church will be persecuted as never before, it is hard to imagine that organization will even be possible. In our imagination we picture the future battle as a time in which every soldier will have to fight for himself, since every means of communication with his fellow believers will be cut off. But although individual believers have suffered such fates in the past, and certainly will again in the future, the sure word of prophecy reveals a different picture as far as the church as a whole is concerned.

In *Revelation* the church is often represented by the symbol of a horse, as for example:

### **Revelation 6**

<sup>2</sup> And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

This is not a description of scattered individuals but of a divinely organized church at the time of the apostles, led by its heavenly Head. The same picture is given us in connection with the final church:

### **Revelation 19**

<sup>11</sup> Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in

righteousness He judges and makes war.

Christ is the rider in this picture, which means that he is the Head—the Leader—of his church. Then we read:

<sup>14</sup> And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.

The “armies in heaven” is a description of the church triumphant. It is comprised of the redeemed who are already in heaven, and who are busy there, for they have a work to do for the militant church on earth. Every person who has been redeemed—Enoch, Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and many other martyrs who were resurrected with Christ—leads a division of the militant church on this earth. That is why they are depicted as riding on white horses.

Since the same picture is used for both the Apostolic church and the church of the last days we can only conclude that the last church is a unified, divinely organized church and that it is not made up of individual soldiers who are cut off from all other believers. And it certainly does not consist of believers who are independent of one another.

The Spirit of Prophecy confirms such an understanding. In *Early Writings*, the final church is described in the following way,

**Early Writings, p. 271:**

The company of guardian angels around them had been doubled, and they were clothed with an armor from their head to their feet. They moved in exact order, like a company of soldiers.

The idea that there will only be independent soldiers in God’s last work is not new. Sister White had to meet this idea, and she did so with the following words,

**Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 258:**

Some have advanced the thought that, as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there is no such thing as every man’s being

independent. The stars of heaven are all under law, each influencing the other to do the will of God, yielding their common obedience to the law that controls their action. And, in order that the Lord's work may advance healthfully and solidly, His people must draw together.

There is an even greater need for order than ever before in God's last work. In fact, the final battle is centered on this question, "order or chaos?"

**Early Writings, p. 97:**

There was order in the church when Christ was upon the earth, and after His departure order was strictly observed among His apostles. And now in these last days, while God is bringing His children into the unity of the faith, there is more real need of order than ever before; for, as God unites His children, Satan and his evil angels are very busy to prevent this unity and to destroy it.

The subject of divine organization will play a central role in the last message, and every believer should be well aware of this fact.

## Chapter 6

# God Gives His People a Name

In the third chapter we saw that God's church has two natures, a visible and an invisible. As a visible body on this earth it is organized by God so that the members can work together efficiently.

But even though God Himself is the author of its organization, all the members of the body need to work together in order to build up the church. They have to want the organization and work to establish it in harmony with God's will so that the body can function correctly and...

### **Ephesians 4**

<sup>15</sup> ...grow up in all things into Him who is the head, even Christ:

<sup>16</sup> From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

### **All Things are Named**

An important part of an organized body is its name. Everything on this earth has a name, and that is a good arrangement. Imagine what chaos would exist if this were not the case. Everybody would talk in terms of "things" or "people" or "groups" but nobody would know exactly what or who is meant. Therefore, names are important in order to identify things. Everything we know, whether it be a group, a person, or an object, is called by a name.

In our daily lives we often come across things or people which have the same name. For example, many people have the surname "Smith." As a result, the name "Mr. Smith" is often not precise enough to know who is meant. For this reason the first name, the occupation, or even the address is often added in order to clearly identify the person concerned. Groups

of people or objects do not simply have just any name but are named in such a way as to clearly identify them.

## **Name = Character**

Everything bears a name in God's kingdom as well, but here it is not simply a matter of giving things a distinguishing designation. When the Lord gives a name to one of His creations, it is not a meaningless formula with a nice sound but a description of the character of that body. In God's kingdom individuals as well as objects have their own characteristics, and these are expressed in the name given it.

As we can see in nature, no two characters are exactly alike. Consider, for example, the crystal form of a snowflake. No two snowflakes are identical. In the same way, all the leaves of a tree differ from each other, even though the difference may only be slight. The same is true of all the creatures on this planet, and particularly so of man.

### **Mind, Character, and Personality, vol. 2, p. 424:**

The Lord does not desire that our individuality shall be destroyed; it is not His purpose that any two persons shall be exactly alike in tastes and dispositions. All have characteristics peculiar to themselves, and these are not to be destroyed, but to be trained, molded, fashioned, after the similitude of Christ. The Lord turns the natural aptitudes and capabilities into profitable channels. In the improvement of the faculties God has given, talent and ability are developed if the human agent will recognize the fact that all his powers are an endowment from God, to be used, not for selfish purposes...but for the glory of God and the good of our fellowmen.

If all our characters are different, then it follows that each person must have a different name. And the Bible confirms that whenever God gives a name then it does indeed have an important meaning. Thus a person or object is given their own particular identity.

## **Named for Service**

There is another important reason why everything in God's kingdom has a name. Apart from clearly identifying the character, it also expresses the purpose of the named object. In God's kingdom everything is designed for service. Every object, individual, or group exists for the purpose of service. It hardly needs to be mentioned that there is nothing superfluous in God's kingdom. Every thing, person, and church has its given task.

The description of this purpose, as it is expressed in the name itself, also gives us a clear understanding of God's handiwork. By its designation, character, and particular task we are enabled to differentiate an object from all the other elements of creation. All these attributes are implied in the name that God gives.

So that we can better understand the meaning of a God-given name, we want to stress that it is not the name that imparts a certain character or purpose to an object, a person, or a church. Rather, it is the character and purpose of the object, person, or church that gives the name its meaning.

In this fallen world we are often confronted with names which designate things but in no way describe their character or work. In such a case names lose their holy meaning, or in other words, they lose their power. But when a name really fits the character and work of something, it does not just designate the thing concerned but actually conveys a message about it.

## **Names Given at Creation**

We now want to see how the Lord gave names to everything right from the beginning. In this study our interest will be focused particularly on the naming of God's church in the different epochs of this world.

As soon as God creates anything, He gives it a name. This is clearly revealed in the history of creation as recorded in

*Genesis:*

### **Genesis 1**

<sup>5</sup> ...[God] called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night.

<sup>8</sup> And God called the firmament Heaven.

<sup>10</sup> And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas.

### **Genesis 5**

<sup>2</sup> ...[God] created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created.

### **Psalms 147**

<sup>4</sup> He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name.

## **Naming the Animals**

It is also interesting to see that God allowed man to take part in the work of giving names. This is in harmony with the principle that the Lord wants us to cooperate with Him in His work.

### **Genesis 2**

<sup>19</sup> Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them.

<sup>20</sup> And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field.

At this stage we would like to repeat that the designation of God's created works was not simply the giving of nice sounding words. Every animal received, in the name that Adam gave it, its particular identity, as God Himself confirmed,

“And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name.”

Something that does not exist can not be given a name, and as Adam was fulfilling his task of giving names to the animals, he realized that something else should exist in God's



creation.

### **Genesis 2**

<sup>20</sup> But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

The mention of this fact shows that the giving of names was really a scientific work, for Adam was led to certain conclusions as he observed the harmony that existed throughout creation. He was permitted to grasp the thoughts of the Creator and so delve into new areas of understanding. What Adam recognized as being needful was actually supplied by the Creator.

## **The Name of Woman**

### **Genesis 2**

<sup>21</sup> And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.

<sup>22</sup> Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

Now someone new had been created, and so she had to be given a name. And once again we see that with the giving of the name, the particular character of this new creation was described.

### **Genesis 2**

<sup>23</sup> And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

## **The Name of Man**

Before sin began on this earth, the church of God comprised the entire human family and there was no need to give it a name different from the one given to the human race. Therefore, it was simply called “man.” The meaning of this name is indicated:

### **Genesis 1**

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image.

The Hebrew word here translated “man” is pronounced “Ah-dahm” which literally means “earthy” or “taken out of red earth” (see *Crudens Concordance*). The translators use the name “Adam” for this word when the first created man is referred to, but in all other instances it is translated “man.” Accordingly, this name describes a being that has been made out of the earth in the image of God.

## The Sons of God

This situation changed once sin had entered this world and had led the majority of mankind away from God. There were some people however who remained true to God. These were the ones who represented God’s church on earth. As soon as this church existed as a visible, separate body, it received a name—“the sons of God”:

### Genesis 6

<sup>1</sup> Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them,

<sup>2</sup> That the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful;...

<sup>4</sup> There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them.

### The Story of Redemption, p. 62:

The descendants of Seth were called the sons of God; the descendants of Cain, the sons of men.

### Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 81:

For some time the two classes remained separate. The race of Cain, spreading from the place of their first settlement, dispersed over the plains and valleys where the children of Seth had dwelt; and the latter, in order to escape from their contaminating influence, withdrew to the mountains, and there made their home. So long as this separation continued, they maintained the worship of God in its purity.

Although the name “man” or “Adam” was originally given by God, it was no longer suitable for this new body of God’s children, for it was no longer a specific description of the true

church of God due to the apostasy that had taken place and because the human race continued to apply this name to themselves in their apostate condition.

While they had no justification for applying the name, “man”, to themselves since they no longer possessed the pure characters that this name represented, the Lord does not force anybody to give up their name. That is why Satan is still called Lucifer, even though his character has long since been out of harmony with that name. In such cases however, the name has only traditional value. It merely indicates what once was but not what now is.

In order to differentiate between the now visible, separate church and the old body from which it came, it had to be given a new name. Also, the change of circumstances and the increased knowledge that accompanied the establishment of the new church had led to new character ideals as well as a new task. Consequently, the name of this new body, “sons of God”, also represented its new identity. Thus the designation, character, and purpose of the church of God were defined anew.

Unfortunately, this church also fell away from God’s ways as is clearly revealed in *Genesis* 6:1-4. The church lost its peculiar character because of this, and the “sons of God” was no longer a faithful description of their present condition.

There was still the invisible body of the church whose character was accurately described by this name, but it could no longer be truthfully applied to the visible, apostate body. Nevertheless, the visible, apostate body continued to use its old name and so brought it into dishonor, robbing it of its power.

At the time of the flood the Lord saved the faithful remnant people spiritually and physically from an apostate world. Now the work began anew, but once again man departed from God’s ways, which in turn necessitated the separation of a

new body from the mass of humanity.

## **The Name of Israel**

This development began with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The name that God gave this new body could not be the same that the former church had borne, for that would not have been a specific description of the special character and purpose of this new body. God now gave them the name of “Israel,” which means “prince with God.”

### **Genesis 32**

<sup>28</sup> And He said, Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.

### **Isaiah 43**

<sup>1</sup> But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine.

This visible body also apostatized from God’s ways. The various phases of a reformation movement, as we described it in the first article of this series, were repeated, and a new, visible body was formed out of the old, apostatizing body. This new body became increasingly different from the old body which continued to call itself “Israel.” As it took on its own, distinct form more and more, the time came for it to be denominated—to be given a new name.

In order for us to see the necessity of this new body being given a new name, one need only realize to what extent the old name had lost its meaning and power in this world. Consider, for example, how Israel was despised by many of the heathen because of their false representation of God’s character!

## **The Name of Christians**

Therefore, the special characteristics of the new, visible body that was now God’s church could not be described by that name any more. The record of how they received their

specific identity is as follows.

### **Acts 11**

<sup>26</sup> And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

#### **The Acts of the Apostles, p. 157:**

The name was given them because Christ was the main theme of their preaching, their teaching, and their conversation. Continually they were recounting the incidents that had occurred during the days of His earthly ministry, when His disciples were blessed with His personal presence.

Untiringly they dwelt upon His teachings and His miracles of healing. With quivering lips and tearful eyes they spoke of His agony in the garden, His betrayal, trial, and execution, the forbearance and humility with which He had endured the contumely and torture imposed upon Him by His enemies, and the Godlike pity with which He had prayed for those who persecuted Him.

His resurrection and ascension, and His work in heaven as the Mediator for fallen man, were topics on which they rejoiced to dwell. Well might the heathen call them Christians, since they preached Christ and addressed their prayers to God through Him.

It was God who gave to them the name of Christian.

“Christian,” as well as the “sons of God” and “Israel,” are obviously suitable names for the invisible church of God in all ages. But as far as the visible church of God at this time is concerned, this name served as a visible sign to differentiate them from all the other churches that claimed to be God’s people. And, as we have seen from the quotation above, this name was a specific description of its character.

### **The Church in the Wilderness**

When this visible church apostatized, it became necessary for God to create a new body once again. But it took a long time before this happened. This time period has been described as the “Dark Ages.” During this time there were always sincere believers, and here and there were even groups of believers whom we must consider as being the true church

of that time.

But, for the most part, it was a time in which the church only existed in its invisible form. For this reason it is described as the church in the wilderness in *Revelation 12*.

## **The Name of Protestant**

When the Reformation movement of the sixteenth century began, the times of the church in the wilderness were cut short. Once again, a visible church was formed.

It was God Himself who created this church. As we have already seen in an earlier article, neither Luther nor any of the other Reformers had any intention of establishing a new church initially. That took place contrary to their expectations and without any of their own works. The formation of this new body was God's work, and the Reformers were simply God's workmen. This new church was also soon given a name which corresponded with its particular character.

### **The Great Controversy, p. 197:**

One of the noblest testimonies ever uttered for the Reformation was the Protest offered by the Christian princes of Germany at the Diet of Spires in 1529. The courage, faith, and firmness of those men of God gained for succeeding ages liberty of thought and of conscience. Their Protest gave to the reformed church the name of Protestant; its principles are "the very essence of Protestantism."—D'Aubigné, b. 13, ch. 6.

From a spiritual point of view these Protestants were true "sons of God," true "Israelites," and true "Christians." But their special characteristics, as well as the special task of that visible church, required an appropriate name.

However, it was not possible to restore all that had been lost in the intervening ages at once because of the long and deep darkness to which mankind had fallen victim. The Reformers themselves came out of this darkness and so it is not surprising that, despite their sincere efforts, they made some mistakes. Among other things, this led to the church of that

time not being as united as at other times. Consequently, there were several, visible bodies in existence at the same time. These were, however, all in agreement about the important fundamentals of the present truth.

But soon apostasy began its gradual decline in these bodies. Therefore, God called other reformers, and under His guidance and providence other bodies developed. Nevertheless, the church was still not as united as in earlier times, and this is the reason why, when speaking of the church in these times, it is referred to as the Protestant churches and not the Protestant church. When the Protestant churches rejected the first angel's message, they suffered a further fall, and God had to call a new body out of them.

### **The Name of Seventh-day Adventist**

The Advent movement, like the Protestant movement before it, began simultaneously in different parts of the world. But the mainstream and the clearest presentation of the message was without doubt to be found in the United States of America. It was here that God created that body which was later given the name of "Seventh-day Adventist," and it was God's intention to unite His children throughout the world in this body.

As we have already seen, the Advent movement was, in its initial stages, not an independent body but a movement within the existing churches. The reformers of that time had no intention of forming a new body. In fact, William Miller expressly refused to form or denominate an independent body; and since it did not exist as such, it obviously could not be given a name.

However, when the third phase of this reformation movement began and the question of a name for the visible body of Adventists arose, William Miller was no longer alive. Those who held fast to the letter of his presentations, but who did not share his spirit, were not willing to keep pace with God's

progressive revelations nor go beyond that which God had given through His former servant.

It is not surprising that there was some opposition among God's people when the question of giving themselves a name arose, for, as we know, the whole question of church organization was a sensitive issue.

**Early Writings, p. 97:**

The Lord has shown me that gospel order has been too much feared and neglected.

The Lord unmistakably revealed through the Spirit of Prophecy just what His purpose was. In the same way that He had given His people a name in the past, He now gave His visible church of that time a specific name that described its particular character and work.

**Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 223-224:**

I was shown in regard to the remnant people of God taking a name. Two classes were presented before me. One class embraced the great bodies of professed Christians. They were trampling upon God's law and bowing to a papal institution. They were keeping the first day of the week as the Sabbath of the Lord. The other class, who were but few in number, were bowing to the great Lawgiver. They were keeping the fourth commandment. The peculiar and prominent features of their faith were the observance of the seventh day, and waiting for the appearing of our Lord from heaven....

No name which we can take will be appropriate but that which accords with our profession and expresses our faith and marks us a peculiar people. The name Seventh-day Adventist is a standing rebuke to the Protestant world. Here is the line of distinction between the worshipers of God and those who worship the beast and receive his mark....

The name Seventh-day Adventist carries the true features of our faith in front, and will convict the inquiring mind. Like an arrow from the Lord's quiver, it will wound the transgressors of God's law, and will lead to repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.



This quotation reveals the reason for, and the purpose of, every divinely given name. A name is given to describe the special characteristics and work of the thing denominated. That name is much more than just dead letters. It possesses power, it proclaims a message. But the promise given in the last paragraph of the above quotation is not automatically fulfilled, for every promise of God is bound by conditions. In this particular case the condition is that the body called the Seventh-day Advent Church actually maintains the character of its name. If it should lose that character, then its name also loses all of its power in this world.

Before continuing with the history of God's church, we want to demonstrate that the name of this visible church was specifically given by God.

**Selected Messages, vol. 2, p. 384:**

We are Seventh-day Adventists. Are we ashamed of our name? We answer, "No, no! We are not. It is the name the Lord has given us. It points out the truth that is to be the test of the churches."

**Manuscript Releases, vol. 11, p. 14:**

On Sunday, I had freedom in showing our colors on which were inscribed the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. I told them that we were Seventh-day Adventists, and the reason of the name which distinguished us from other denominations. All listened with deepest interest. In the evening the tent was full and the grounds around the tent were full of people....The camp meeting is a success. It is a marvel of wonders to Wellington.

At this point we would also like to repeat the thought that a body must actually exist before it can be given a name and that every body which does exist also has a name. However, if a person cannot see the existence of a visible church body, then he will neither agree to give that church a name nor recognize it as a denomination. But the Spirit of Prophecy has clearly shown that God's church is in fact a denomination. It is God's special, chosen people whom He Himself has named.

**Manuscript Releases, vol. 19, p. 40:**

We are Seventh-day Adventists. This is a fitting name, for we keep the seventh-day Sabbath, and look for the second advent of our Lord in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. Even with respect to the name indicating some of the peculiar points of faith distinguishing us from other Christians, we are denominational. In keeping the Sabbath that God declares should be kept holy as a sign between Himself and His people, we show to the world that we are His peculiar, chosen people; a people whom He has denominated.

Towards the end of the last century there were efforts among God's people to declare certain institutions of the church non-denominational. In other words, they wanted them to be separate, independent establishments. Statements that were permeated with Kellogg's pantheistic teachings intimated that the church was only a spiritual body. For this reason it was thought necessary for the institutions to be non-denominational.

Naturally, the entire project was presented as having only the best intentions. It was suggested that an institution which would not be brought in connection with an unpopular church would be more attractive to the public. Furthermore, it was thought that such independence would also bring them more freedom.

The Spirit of prophecy however, plainly contradicted all such thoughts. Consider the following words very carefully.

**Battle Creek Letters, p. 52:**

We have come to a time when God has been greatly dishonored. Those who have long known our belief, and what we teach, have been surprised by the statement that the Battle Creek Sanitarium is not denominational. No one has the right to make this statement. It does not bear the witness that God wishes His people to bear before men and angels. In the name of the Lord we are to identify ourselves as Seventh-day Adventists. If any one among us is ashamed of our colors, and wishes to stand under another banner, let

him do so as a private individual, not as a representative of Seventh-day Adventist medical missionary work.

**Testimonies for the Church, vol. 7, p. 109:**

We are to invite everyone: the high and the low, the rich and the poor, all sects and classes to share the benefits of our medical institutions. We receive into our institutions people of all denominations. But as for ourselves we are strictly denominational; we are sacredly denominated by God and are under His theocracy. But we are not unwisely to press upon anyone the peculiar points of our faith.

**Spalding and Magan Collection, p. 243:**

Some may inquire, "If we are to remain a distinct people, why do we have sanitariums to which we invite every one?" I answer, In bringing men and women of other denominations into our institutions, do we tell them that we are undenominational? If we do, we deny God's law. We are denominational; but we open the doors wide and seek to have all come in who possibly can come. "Let your light so shine before men"...

So we see that the church has no reason to be ashamed of its name because the Lord has denominated it to describe its special character as well as its special work. It is a visible name given to a visible church.

At the same time, we should not lose sight of the fact that a church name in no way means that we are saved. Once again, let the point be stressed that it is not the name that gives power to a body but vice-versa. It is the character of the body that gives the name power. He who thinks that he has salvation by belonging to a certain church or by being called by a certain name is building on sand.

**Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, Feb. 10, 1891:**

We are not saved as a sect; no denominational name has any virtue to bring us into favor with God. We are saved individually as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. And "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." We may have our names recorded on the books of the most spiritual of the churches, and yet we may not belong to Christ, and our names may not be written on

the Lamb's book of life. Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

## Our Church Name

In closing this article we would like to repeat how God denominated us as a church.<sup>1</sup>

As with every other reformation movement of the past, we have at times found it difficult to see that the Lord wanted to organize us as a separate, visible body. We much preferred to consider ourselves merely as a movement and not as an organized church.

But the Lord led us step by step and showed us the necessity of establishing divine organization as well as revealing how such an organization functions. In the course of this development the Lord also gave us a name. This happened in the following way.

First of all, we became aware that quite a bit of confusion was caused by our movement having a different official name in almost every country where we were established. This was especially the case where a name was used that other religious bodies employed as well.

In a letter dated December 15, 1988, Brother Wright wrote to the English speaking believers mentioning this situation. He described how he had come to recognize this as a problem and had given it to God, and how he had been clearly impressed with the name "Sabbath Rest Advent Church." But he wanted to see how the Lord would lead the church in this matter, therefore he asked the believers to pray about it and then inform him of their thoughts on this name.

In the January, 1989 issue of *The Messenger and News Review* some comments from various believers were published. In the February edition the name of our church was confirmed. Believers throughout the world had seen light in the giving of this name.

---

<sup>1</sup> See the [Appendix](#) for the articles referred to in this Section.

The Lord has blessed us with increasing unity throughout the world since then. We have also received much light about the organization of God's church. In this we see the Lord's confirmation of His work. We have no doubt that He has given us this name through His instrument just as He has given His church a special name in the past.

The "Sabbath Rest Advent Church" is the description of our particular work. We are a people of Sabbath rest, those who strive to walk in God's ways. We look forward to the blessed hope of Christ's return, and through the acceptance of the message, we play our part in ensuring that this event can soon take place.

The Lord has given us this name and in this way revealed the great trust He has in us. Let us respond to this trust and bring honor to our name in this world!



## Chapter 7

# The Question of a Center, Part 1

**N**ow that we have established that God's church is organized on earth as it is in heaven, the following chapters will investigate the nature of this organization. We want to become acquainted with its structure and its character.

Part of the structure of an organization is its center. It is an essential part, and therefore we will be dealing with the following questions in the course of this study. What is a center? Does the church of God have a center on this earth? What is the purpose of such a center?

### **What is a Center?**

First of all, let us consider the question, What is a center? As the word itself indicates, it is a nucleus at the heart of an organization, in which various interests and functions are centered and from which larger and smaller branches extend. Nature provides us with a good example of this in a tree. It has roots, a trunk, boughs, branches, twigs, leaves and, in some cases, flowers or fruit. If there were no roots there would be no sap, and without a trunk there would be no distribution of that sap which is so necessary for growth and fruit production. The center of the tree is its trunk. The food passes through the trunk and from there it is distributed to the branches. This center enables the tree to perform its real service.

Human organizations also have centers. Let us take a nation as an example. In order for a country to function, which involves providing for each citizen to carry out his duties and exercise his privileges, there have to be centers which are responsible for the various departments. In such a system it is necessary for the various centers to be either subordinate or superior to each other. A center is the head office consisting

of leading personnel and material facilities, such as a building for example. It performs an essential function in the smooth operation of an organization. The work and service of an organization is possible only where such a center exists.

In the question of a center for the church, we can see that the church also needs a nucleus which can combine the various interests and responsibilities of the body, and from which main and smaller branches can extend.

The first, largest and most superior center of the entire universe is God Himself, the only source of life and light. Everything that exists comes from Him, and to Him all things return. But although God could take care of everything Himself, whether it be a small or a great task, He works instead through intelligent agencies such as angels and men. To them He gives the use of resources.

On this earth these may be meeting rooms or publishing houses, for example. These instruments, which God uses to carry out His work, are subordinate centers.

## **Leadership and Equality**

On the one hand such a center is a receiver, and on the other it is a distributor. It receives spiritual life, instructions and power, and it distributes these goods to others. Each of these sub-centers is itself a head office, composed of leading personnel and material resources.

Unfortunately the term “leader” has acquired a rather negative association. It has become associated with self-exaltation and arbitrary ruling over others because men have often misused their leadership role. Most people do not want others to rule over them, they would like to have the highest place for themselves. That is why Jesus warned,

### **Luke 14**

<sup>8</sup> When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him;



<sup>9</sup> And he who invited you and him come and say to you, Give place to this man, and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place.

<sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, Friend, go up higher. Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.

<sup>11</sup> For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

In the church it is also more pleasant, humanly speaking, to stress the equality of all and not to speak of leaders. Jesus Himself confirms the thought that all the members of the church are equal when He said,

**Matthew 23**

<sup>8</sup> But you, do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.

<sup>9</sup> Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

<sup>10</sup> And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.

<sup>11</sup> But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.

<sup>12</sup> And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

What do these words mean? Do they mean that there can be no leadership, instruction or guidance through men in the church? That would mean that each member could only be guided and taught directly by Christ, without the aid of fellow believers. It would mean that the church could have neither messengers and teachers, nor administrators and organizational centers on this earth. And this concept is in fact found throughout history:

**Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 127:**

In the apostles' day, one party claimed to believe in Christ, yet refused to give due respect to his ambassadors. They claimed to follow no human teacher, but to be taught directly from Christ, without the aid of ministers of the gospel. They were independent in spirit, and unwilling to submit to

the voice of the church.

When compared with other statements in the Spirit of Prophecy, it becomes immediately obvious that this is an extreme position which is not in harmony with the biblical meaning.

The word of God points us unmistakably to the fact that Christ not only teaches and guides His children directly, but also that He does so through His chosen instruments.

### **1 Corinthians 12**

<sup>28</sup> And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

Although Jesus says that none should be called master, father or teacher, that does not mean that there will be no leaders, fathers or teachers. Naturally, none should assume an authority to which he is not entitled, or attempt to be a leader, father or teacher in the place of God. Any leaders, fathers or teachers in the church occupy their position in submission to God.

In the context of our study this means that any and every center on this earth can only be subordinate and can never take the place of the great center of the universe.

The following statements confirm that Christ leads His church through instruments who thus become leaders:

### **Hebrews 13**

<sup>7</sup> Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.

<sup>17</sup> Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

<sup>24</sup> Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

### **Sketches from the Life of Paul, p. 115-116:**

The Thessalonians were greatly annoyed by persons coming among them with fanatical ideas and doctrines. The church had been properly organized, and officers had been appointed to act as ministers and deacons.

But some would not be subordinate to those who held authoritative positions in the church. Ardent, self-willed persons claimed not only the right of private judgment, but to be heard publicly in urging their views upon the church.

Paul, therefore, earnestly called the attention of his brethren to the respect and deference due those who had authority in the church, and who had been entrusted with the responsibilities connected with it.

It is difficult for the human mind to harmonize the thought of leadership with the principles of equality. But we need to learn that in God's kingdom the one does not exclude the other.

When we look at history we repeatedly see apostasy not only in the church as a whole, but also in its leadership. And the more responsible a position the person has, the more terrible are the results if he apostatizes from God's ways. A leader who becomes unfaithful to God's ways, soon becomes an instrument to deceive others. In addition, he quickly assumes special rights and powers which results in a large cleft developing between the leadership and the people. In this way the system of unwilling subjection to tyrannical rulership soon becomes widespread.

People automatically separate the thought of leadership from the principle of equality as a result of such negative experiences. But in God's kingdom these two concepts are not separated. One cannot compare biblical leadership with the leadership of an apostatized church, because leadership in the church according to God's will means service—service to others no matter what the cost to self.

## The Composition of a Center

God does not lead His church merely through individual persons. According to God's will, the highest religious authority on this earth is the church meeting, when it stands on the foundation of God's word and is under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

### **Matthew 18**

<sup>18</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

In His guidance of the church, the Holy Spirit uses leading members as well as the church as a whole. The leaders also have resources, such as a publishing house, a print shop or a meeting room, at their disposal so that the church can fulfill its purpose. These resources are means that God entrusts to His church, and are to be used and maintained by the people responsible.

Wherever God has established responsible leaders and material resources, the church has a center. This implies that every local church has a center at its disposal because it has one or more elders, who wisely bind the church together by God's grace; a regular meeting of the entire local church based on the word of God and under the influence of the Holy Spirit; and a meeting room—a place which is consecrated to God for the time and purpose of the service—as a resource.

## The Relationship of Centers

Now comes the important question as to what relationship the local centers have with one another. Are they independent of each other or do they have mutual duties? Do some centers stand above others? Is there a worldwide center of God's church on this earth?

If one considers the structure of an organization and puts aside the fear of authority being misused, then it is only logical to conclude that the entire church of God has a common

center on this earth. For how can it be right to have leadership in the local churches, if there is no leadership of the entire church of God on earth?

In other words, if independence and lack of leadership were a “right” of the worldwide church, then the same “privilege” must be accorded to the local churches and to their individual members.

But, just as the individual members of a local church are held together by wise leadership, making order and service possible, so the individual churches are unified into one church by a wise and God-ordained leadership.

God’s will for us is often revealed by our looking at what God has done in the past. And the question concerning a common center on this earth for the entire body of believers can also be clearly answered in this way.

In our investigation of this subject it will be necessary for us to start in heaven, because the center in heaven is a pattern for all the sub-centers on earth, as Jesus said,

**Matthew 6**

<sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

**The Desire of Ages, p. 680:**

Christ designs that heaven’s order, heaven’s plan of government, heaven’s divine harmony, shall be represented in His church on earth. Thus in His people He is glorified.

Nothing is plainer than that there is a center in this universe. God is the Creator of all things. Wherever He is, there the center of the universe is found.

**Steps to Christ, p. 77:**

God is the source of life and light and joy to the universe.

**Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 236:**

“None of us liveth to himself.” Romans 14:7. This is a law of God in heaven and on earth. God is the great center. From Him all life proceeds. To Him all service, homage, and allegiance belong. For all created beings there is the one great

principle of life—dependence upon and cooperation with God.

## The Throne of God

The Bible describes this center as the throne of God.

### **Psalm 103**

<sup>19</sup> The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.

The Bible gives a closer insight into this center and its relevance for the whole universe in many places, but especially in *Daniel*, *Ezekiel* and *Revelation*.

### **Daniel 7**

<sup>9</sup> I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire.

<sup>10</sup> A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.

The center of the universe is surrounded by hundreds of millions of ministering angels (see also *Revelation* 5:11). They are all gathered around the throne to receive gifts before being sent in different directions to impart them.

### **Hebrews 1**

<sup>14</sup> Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

A fiery stream issues from this center, which reveals to us that here is the source of power that supplies the entire universe with life.

### **Psalm 36**

<sup>9</sup> For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light.

This center is described in more detail in *Revelation* 4 and 5, but the study of these chapters will be left to the reader.

## The Location of a Center

The next important thing to understand is that a center is not always restricted to a geographical location. It is not a specific place that makes a center such, but the presence of the leading members or a church meeting.

We can understand this principle by looking at the great center of the universe, because the throne of God is in no way restricted to a certain location. In fact, it moves at an incredible speed:

### **Ezekiel 1**

<sup>4</sup> Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire.

<sup>5</sup> Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures....

<sup>14</sup> And the living creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightning.

The throne of God, which appeared as a glorious manifestation just above the four living creatures, moved with the same speed as the creatures themselves.

### **Ezekiel 1**

<sup>22</sup> The likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living creatures was like the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads.

<sup>26</sup> And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it.

The tenth chapter of *Ezekiel* confirms that the throne, together with its ruler, is movable. The creatures described in the first chapter are here referred to as cherubim.

### **Ezekiel 10**

<sup>1</sup> And I looked, and there in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubim, there appeared something like a sapphire stone, having the appearance of the likeness of a

throne.

<sup>15</sup> And the cherubim were lifted up. This was the living creature I saw by the River Chebar.

<sup>16</sup> When the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them; and when the cherubim lifted their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also did not turn from beside them.

<sup>17</sup> When the cherubim stood still, the wheels stood still, and when one was lifted up, the other lifted itself up, for the spirit of the living creature was in them.

<sup>18</sup> Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim.

## **The Existence of Sub-centers**

Now that we have established that the kingdom of heaven has an organizational center, we want to take a closer look at the subordinate centers. In other words, are there sub-centers, or is there no need for them?

We have already seen in the fourth chapter that the angels are arranged in companies, and that each company has a specific work to do. We also saw that each company has a leader, namely the commanding angel.

### **Early Writings, p. 145:**

The angels were marshaled in companies, each division with a higher commanding angel at its head.

So we can certainly consider these companies as sub-centers, each of them having their own areas of responsibility. Is this earth with its inhabitants is also a sub-center—a division with a specific task and area of responsibility?

When God created this world and our first parents, He clearly expressed His will for them.

### **Genesis 1**

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in His own image; in the image of God



He created him; male and female He created them.

<sup>28</sup> Then God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

The dominion mentioned here clearly refers to the animal world, but this is not its only application. Man was to bring the whole earth into subjection, and this included his descendants. It was God's will to form a center—a sub-center in its relationship to the universe—on this earth with Adam as the leader. His task was to fill the earth and to represent the government and character of God.

**Testimonies for the Church, p. 236:**

God is the great center. From Him all life proceeds....The relationship existing in the pure family of God in heaven was to exist in the family of God on earth. Under God, Adam was to stand at the head of the earthly family to maintain the principles of the heavenly family. This would have brought peace and happiness.

## **The Center on Earth Restored**

God's plan could not be carried out in its original form because man sinned.

**Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 236:**

When Adam sinned, man broke away from the heaven-ordained center.

He was now bound in rebellion to God, and that made him incapable of leading the sub-center of this world. But God was not surprised by this turn of events. His purpose was still carried out by the plan of redemption, which made the restoration of the sinner possible.

Under Christ, the One through whom all are made righteous (see *Romans* 5:18), the Head of all the redeemed, the earthly church was again to become the center of God's kingdom on this earth. Adam was the first representative of this center, as we read:

**Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 82:**

For nearly a thousand years Adam lived among men, a witness to the results of sin. Faithfully he sought to stem the tide of evil. He had been commanded to instruct his posterity in the way of the Lord; and he carefully treasured what God had revealed to him, and repeated it to succeeding generations.

To his children and children's children, to the ninth generation, he described man's holy and happy estate in Paradise, and repeated the history of his fall, telling them of the sufferings by which God had taught him the necessity of strict adherence to His law, and explaining to them the merciful provisions for their salvation.

Right up till his death, Adam occupied a leading position in the growing church and thus fulfilled the task that God had given him.

The entire patriarchal period was a time in which the believers always had a center. For example, we read of Abraham:

**Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 141:**

In early times the father was the ruler and priest of his own family, and he exercised authority over his children, even after they had families of their own. His descendants were taught to look up to him as their head, in both religious and secular matters.

This patriarchal system of government Abraham endeavored to perpetuate, as it tended to preserve the knowledge of God. It was necessary to bind the members of the household together, in order to build up a barrier against the idolatry that had become so widespread and so deep-seated.

This church center was, at the same time, a missionary center.

**Education, p. 187:**

And Abraham's influence extended beyond his own household. Wherever he pitched his tent, he set up beside it the altar for sacrifice and worship. When the tent was removed, the altar remained; and many a roving Canaanite, whose knowledge of God had been gained from the life of Abraham His servant, tarried at that altar to offer sacrifice to Jehovah.

The church of Israel also had a center which was the center for the whole church on earth. In its relationship to the church of the universe, this center was still a sub-center, and it was ever to see itself as such.

**Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 314:**

As the symbol of God's authority and the embodiment of His will, there was delivered to Moses a copy of the Decalogue engraved by the finger of God Himself upon two tables of stone (Deuteronomy 9:10; Exodus 32:15, 16), to be sacredly enshrined in the sanctuary, which, when made, was to be the visible center of the nation's worship.

The sanctuary was later re-located in Jerusalem which then became the center for the church.

**Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 537:**

There were three annual assemblies of all Israel for worship at the sanctuary. Exodus 23:14-16. Shiloh was for a time the place of these gatherings; but Jerusalem afterward became the center of the nation's worship, and here the tribes convened for the solemn feasts.

David was the main instrument in the erection of this center.

**Patriarchs and Prophets p. 711:**

The tabernacle built by Moses, with all that appertained to the sanctuary service, except the ark, was still at Gibeah. It was David's purpose to make Jerusalem the religious center of the nation. He had erected a palace for himself, and he felt that it was not fitting for the ark of God to rest within a tent. He determined to build for it a temple of such magnificence as should express Israel's appreciation of the honor granted the nation in the abiding presence of Jehovah their King.

Communicating his purpose to the prophet Nathan, he received the encouraging response, "Do all that is in thine heart; for the Lord is with thee."

Apart from this center of the entire church, there were to be sub-centers, which were not permitted to be places of sacrifice since this service was limited to the sanctuary, but

which were to be religious centers especially for missionary work. The lessons of the true sacrificial service were to be taught at these places.

**Prophets and Kings, p. 19:**

The children of Israel were to occupy all the territory which God appointed them....But it was God's purpose that by the revelation of His character through Israel men should be drawn unto Him. To all the world the gospel invitation was to be given. Through the teaching of the sacrificial service, Christ was to be uplifted before the nations, and all who would look unto Him should live.

All who, like Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabitess, turned from idolatry to the worship of the true God were to unite themselves with His chosen people. As the numbers of Israel increased, they were to enlarge their borders until their kingdom should embrace the world.

## **The Purpose of Sub-centers**

This statement shows very clearly that it was never God's intention to limit all the activities of the church to one single center.

First of all, the Israelites were to spread out in the land that God had given them. But this was not the final goal. Ultimately they were to spread out over the whole world.

Unfortunately, they did not understand this plan. Instead of establishing new religious centers, some of them began to fight over the available land right at the start of the partitioning of the country.

**Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 513:**

Another claim concerning the division of the land revealed a spirit widely different from that of Caleb. It was presented by the children of Joseph, the tribe of Ephraim with the half tribe of Manasseh. In consideration of their superior numbers, these tribes demanded a double portion of territory.

The lot designated for them was the richest in the land, including the fertile plain of Sharon; but many of the principal towns in the valley were still in possession of the Canaanites,

and the tribes shrank from the toil and danger of conquering their possessions, and desired an additional portion in territory already subdued.

This spirit indicated what would soon happen.

**Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 543:**

After the settlement in Canaan the tribes made no vigorous effort to complete the conquest of the land. Satisfied with the territory already gained, their zeal soon flagged, and the war was discontinued.

Even though the formation of new centers was of primary importance in God's plan, they were still to be subject to an earthly center to which all Israelites were to be faithful. When Jeroboam tried to direct the loyalty of the people away from the center which the Lord had established, God reacted unmistakably. As in many similar cases, jealousy was the root motive of Jeroboam's actions.

**Prophets and Kings, p. 99-100:**

Jeroboam's greatest fear was that at some future time the hearts of his subjects might be won over by the ruler occupying the throne of David....Taking counsel with His advisers, Jeroboam determined by one bold stroke to lessen, so far as possible, the probability of a revolt from his rule. He would bring this about by creating within the borders of his newly formed kingdom two centers of worship, one at Bethel and the other at Dan. In these places the ten tribes should be invited to assemble, instead of at Jerusalem, to worship God.

This showed a plain lack of respect for the order which the Lord had given in establishing a common, religious center which was to be the center of all other sub-centers.

**Prophets and Kings, p. 101:**

The king's bold defiance of God in thus setting aside divinely appointed institutions was not allowed to pass unbuked.

The reader may follow the continuation of this story for himself. As foretold by a prophet from Judah, the disastrous results of this evil course of action did in fact come to pass.

## **Neglected and Despised**

There have always been times when the common center of the church of God on this earth (which the Lord Himself had specified) was neglected or even despised. This was occasionally the fault of the ministers who neglected to fulfill their duty faithfully, as in the case of Hophni and Phinehas.

### **Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 576-577:**

These unfaithful priests also transgressed God's law and dishonored their sacred office by their vile and degrading practices;...Many of the people, filled with indignation at the corrupt course of Hophni and Phinehas, ceased to come up to the appointed place of worship. Thus the service which God had ordained was despised and neglected because associated with the sins of wicked men, while those whose hearts were inclined to evil were emboldened in sin.

But even when the professed servants of God proved to be untrue to their calling, the center of religious services still remained the same. By the contempt shown to this center, the damage was only made worse. Despite the sins of Eli's sons, there was no real justification for such a show of contempt, because the Lord had the whole matter in His hands. Samuel had already been chosen as a conscientious servant.

## **Faithfulness Towards the Center and Unity**

The faithfulness of the Israelites towards their religious center and its importance for the unity of the church were demonstrated in the yearly meetings that took place there.

### **Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 537:**

There were three annual assemblies of all Israel for worship at the sanctuary. Exodus 23:14-16. Shiloh was for a time the place of these gatherings; but Jerusalem afterward became the center of the nation's worship, and here the tribes convened for the solemn feasts....

### **Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 541:**

With those who lived at a distance from the tabernacle, more than a month of every year must have been occupied in attendance upon the annual feasts.

This example of devotion to God should emphasize the importance of religious worship and the necessity of subordinating our selfish, worldly interests to those that are spiritual and eternal. We sustain a loss when we neglect the privilege of associating together to strengthen and encourage one another in the service of God. The truths of His word lose their vividness and importance in our minds. Our hearts cease to be enlightened and aroused by the sanctifying influence, and we decline in spirituality.

In our intercourse as Christians we lose much by lack of sympathy with one another. He who shuts himself up to himself is not filling the position that God designed he should. We are all children of one Father, dependent upon one another for happiness. The claims of God and of humanity are upon us. It is the proper cultivation of the social elements of our nature that brings us into sympathy with our brethren and affords us happiness in our efforts to bless others.

### **Applicable Today**

The examples given, clearly reveal that the Lord intended to have a center for His church on earth, and that there should be sub-centers which, however, were not to take the place of the common center.

In exactly the same way, the center of the church on this earth, which represents a sub-center in God's kingdom, should not, and indeed cannot, take the place of the heavenly.

But although this order of superior and subordinate centers was clearly intended by God, it is questioned today on the grounds that Israel lived in a time of symbols and shadows that pointed to Christ and His heavenly ministry.

We should be careful not to confuse the symbols, which God appointed until their fulfillment, with His order that exists forever. A center belongs to an order that existed before there was a people of Israel, and even before sin began in heaven. As far as this eternal order is concerned then, the people of Israel are truly a pattern for our time. God...

**Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 653:**

...designs that we should learn lessons of order and organization from the perfect order instituted in the days of Moses for the benefit of the children of Israel.



## The Question of a Center, Part 2

So far we have considered the order in heaven as well as that of the patriarchs and Israel. We have seen that the Lord always worked through a common center as well as several sub-centers. From this, three principles have become clear.

1. A center is a nucleus which is established for leadership. It consists of leaders and material resources. This does not mean that a center is always restricted to a certain geographical location. The main purpose of a center on this earth is to preach God's message, and this ministry can be done from different places at different times.
2. The common center of the church on earth cannot and must not take the place of the heavenly, universal center. In its relationship to the center in heaven, it is only a sub-center.
3. In relation to the local sub-centers, the common center of the church has a main function—that of binding the interests of the church together. Its ministry for the sub-centers and for the world is to spread light. Fed by the divine Source, it is to be itself a source of light and life for men.

### **John 4**

<sup>14</sup> But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.

To rob the center of this function and draw the attention of believers away from it, is to fight against God.

In this article we want to look at the times of the New Testament to see if the church also has a common center with local sub-centers in this dispensation. Apart from this, we will also examine the various tasks of a center and consider the need of cooperation between the church and its center.

Let us begin with the story of the apostolic church—a church which serves as a special model for us today for three reasons:

1. This church was founded and organized by Jesus Himself;
2. According to the word of God it was a pure church; and
3. It had the characteristics of a church through which God could have finished the work.

## **The Center at Jerusalem**

The center of the church of Israel had been transferred to Jerusalem when the temple was built there in the times of the Old Testament. But, by the time of Jesus' first advent, Jerusalem was no longer the kind of center that God intended it to be because of the prevailing apostasy there. Instead of spreading the precious light they had received from God in selfless ministry, the Jews held it back from other nations.

Although Israel was suffering under Roman oppression, it still depended wholly on its own worldly power and expected to receive support from God for its ambitious, political aims. Religious oppression and deadly darkness emanated from Jerusalem.

In the opinion of the Pharisees, only the Jews from Jerusalem and the nearby vicinity were considered to be real Jews, while all the rest were Hellenists, or in other words half-heathen. Thus the Jewish leaders erected a hierarchy of higher and lower classes within their own nation which made ministry within Israel, as well as for the rest of the world, impossible.

Even though it was the power of an apostate religion that was centered in Jerusalem, it was still a center which many people looked up to and which had a decisive influence on the religious world around it. Jesus, who had come to save His people from their sins, made a special effort to save this city. In fact, He wanted to make it a center of light again, as it is

written,

**Matthew 23**

<sup>37</sup> O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

Two groups arose as a result of Jesus' ministry—one which accepted the light and another which rejected it. This division was especially striking in Jerusalem where, on the one hand, Jesus was crucified, and, on the other hand, the apostolic church had its first mission field.

**The Review and Herald, July 28, 1903:**

In the days of the apostles, Jerusalem was a great center of influence, and in this place light from heaven was to shine in its most powerful rays upon the Lord's witnesses who were to bear the gospel message.

After Christ's death, Jerusalem was to be the common center of God's church—that small group of believers who had received deliverance by the light of the gospel.

**The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 2, p. 995:**

"Begin at Jerusalem," (see Luke 24:47) had been Christ's command to His faithful servants. "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem,..." Acts 1:8. According to God's principles, faith is to plant "its banner in the heart of the enemy's camp."

Many of God's faithful instruments bore witness in Jerusalem at the cost of their lives. But the persecution which was instigated by those who rejected the light, only advanced the work of the apostolic church. The light grew and spread in proportion to the growth of persecution.

Through the Holy Spirit, Christ strengthened His church with new truths, He gave them His special protection and He led His faithful servants to others who were seeking the truth. In this way, the persecution actually led to the spreading of the gospel throughout the then known world.

## Sub-centers in the Apostolic Church

The first sub-center that was formed was in Antioch.

### **The Acts of the Apostles, p. 188:**

The church at Antioch was a large and growing one. A center of missionary activity, it was one of the most important of the groups of Christian believers. Its membership was made up of many classes of people from among both Jews and Gentiles.

Other churches were established and organized from the base at Antioch. Paul was one of the main instruments in this work. It is of particular interest to note the relationship of those local church centers to Jerusalem. Was the church of Christ in Jerusalem, with the apostles as leaders, the recognized, common center of all Christendom?

Since the preaching of the message went out from Jerusalem, as Christ had commanded, it was natural for the church there to be respected as the mother church. Jerusalem was considered the model church, although it in no way took the place of the heavenly center.

There are at least two examples which show that the apostolic church understood the structure which God Himself had established: the appointment of the deacons, and the question of circumcision.

When problems arose in the apostolic church concerning the distribution of goods, God solved the conflict by using the apostles to point out the necessity of carefully spreading the workload. This led to the appointment of the deacons in Jerusalem. In this context we read:

### **The Acts of the Apostles, p. 91:**

The organization of the church at Jerusalem was to serve as a model for the organization of churches in every other place where messengers of truth should win converts to the gospel.

By respecting Jerusalem as a model, the local churches showed their recognition of the center that God had given them.

The second event started in Antioch where, because of the influence of some Judaizing brethren, a dispute had arisen over the question of circumcision. When it became apparent that this problem could not be solved within the sub-center, the church, represented by delegates, appealed to the common center in Jerusalem where the apostles and elders of the Christian church resided.

The delegates from Antioch met together with the leaders of the Jerusalem church and the delegates from other local churches to submit the important question of circumcision to the assembly. Obviously, Jerusalem was recognized throughout the entire Christian church as the highest body of authority.

### **Acts 15**

<sup>2</sup> Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

### **The Acts of the Apostles, p. 190:**

In the church at Antioch the consideration of the question of circumcision resulted in much discussion and contention. Finally, the members of the church, fearing that a division among them would be the outcome of continued discussion, decided to send Paul and Barnabas, with some responsible men from the church, to Jerusalem to lay the matter before the apostles and elders. There they were to meet delegates from the different churches and those who had come to Jerusalem to attend the approaching festivals.

Meanwhile all controversy was to cease until a final decision should be given in general council. This decision was then to be universally accepted by the different churches throughout the country.

There was obviously no doubt about the believers in Antioch, as well as those from other areas, submitting to the decision reached by the common center. At the same time, the believers were aware that the center in Jerusalem was only a sub-center in relation to their heavenly center. It was, there-

fore, primarily God to whom they presented their request, but they obviously recognized that He guided them through the instrument of a council. They trusted God to make His will known.

Those present at the council were also well aware that it was not simply a question of human opinion, but that they needed a revelation of God's will through the Holy Spirit, in order to fulfill their responsibility towards the sub-centers.

## **Spiritual Responsibilities of a Center**

What responsibilities does such a center bear? What is its ministry?

The responsibilities of a center can be divided into two main areas—spiritual responsibilities and administrative responsibilities. Let us turn, first of all, to the spiritual responsibilities.

As we have already mentioned, God intends a church center to be a source of life and light. The preaching of the message is to emanate from it. A center is to be a receiver as well as a channel for the spiritual goods with which our loving Father wants to bless His church and the world.

In its relationship to the church, the center assumes the role of a model or pattern. We have seen this especially in the case of the apostolic church, of which it is written,

### **The Acts of the Apostles, p. 91:**

The organization of the church at Jerusalem was to serve as a model for the organization of churches in every other place where messengers of truth should win converts to the gospel.

As a model, a God-given center will always strive to encourage the forming of sub-centers and then to support them. This will result in spreading the workload and extending the gospel field. Just as parents rejoice to see their children developing and becoming more capable of taking on responsibility, so spiritual leaders also rejoice to see the growth of new centers or nuclei of leadership.

In those cases where difficulties or questions arise which the sub-center cannot take care of itself, it is the task of the main center to offer help and explanation. The leaders have to look into these problems and, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, make decisions concerning them. That is how it was at the council of Jerusalem, as we have already seen.

**The Acts of the Apostles, p. 196:**

The four servants of God were sent to Antioch with the epistle and message that was to put an end to all controversy; for it was the voice of the highest authority upon the earth.

The center represented the highest authority of judgment within the church. Paul also speaks of the believers presenting their differences and questions to the elders and leaders, and not to the world:

**1 Corinthians 6**

<sup>1</sup> Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?

<sup>2</sup> Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?

As far as ministry to the world is concerned, it is God's will for every center to be primarily a missionary center. The picture that a church center presents to onlookers has a decisive influence on them. If they see love, unity and order, they come to positive conclusions about the whole church, and God's name is honored. The faithfulness with which a center serves its church, and the loyalty of the believers to their center, will also be an attractive feature for interested souls.

**Administrative Responsibilities of a Center**

The practical work of a center can vary. There is much to be done, both for the church and for the world. Ellen White writes of literature work, help for the needy, the poor, the sick, the aged, the intemperate, the unemployed, and so on. A center can form a practical branch in any of these areas, al-

though it would hardly be practical or possible to fulfill all these tasks from one place. For this purpose sub-centers are formed under God's guidance and providence.

The more fields and workers there are, the more coordination is needed. However, it is not the task of a center to take all the work upon itself, nor would that be wise. Instead, it should develop the existing, perhaps still slumbering, powers within the church.

At the same time, it is necessary to harness all the powers together so that unity will prevail and so that the efforts made will not lead to a scattering of interests. This principle is particularly mentioned in the context of the religious centers at the time of the patriarchs.

**Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 141:**

It was necessary to bind the members of the household together, in order to build up a barrier against the idolatry that had become so widespread and so deep-seated.

Coordination is an administrative task which often includes practical steps. We can see what good coordination means in the example of Nehemiah. When organizing the building of the wall around Jerusalem, he first obtained an overall view of the situation for himself. He then presented his carefully formed plan to the elders, and after he had gained their cooperation, he watched over the execution of the work.

**Prophets and Kings, p. 639:**

Nor did Nehemiah's energy abate, now that the work was actually begun. With tireless vigilance he superintended the building, directing the workmen, noting the hindrances, and providing for emergencies. Along the whole extent of that three miles of wall his influence was constantly felt.

Administrative duties can also cover other matters. Judicial and financial questions, for example, must also be dealt with. The church, with its various branches and sub-centers, is accountable to the state. This aspect is also demonstrated in the



case of Nehemiah when he asked permission for his enterprise from the nation's king.

As we consider these principles, it becomes obvious that intelligent cooperation between center, sub-centers and church members is essential. Cooperation of this kind is not a slavish dependence, for that would be to replace God's personal guidance. Everyone has their own task and area of responsibility, and each one must know God's will for himself, so that the common goal can be reached.

It is God's will that all the powers within the church shall cooperate harmoniously together. For this reason it is necessary for information to flow continually from the center to the individual parts of the work and vice-versa. To give information is to share, and this is the will of God for us, as we read,

**Hebrews 13**

<sup>16</sup> But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

**Cooperation between Church and Center**

In the case of Paul, we see how great an effort he made to inform the leading brethren in Jerusalem of what the Lord had done in his field of labor. Even though the leaders in Jerusalem did not always fully appreciate his reports—which were necessary for effective cooperation—Paul continued to pass on information to them. In this way he did everything possible on his side to fulfill the necessary requirements for mutual agreement and common success.

It is often the case that, despite good intentions, some important things are not shared. There may be different reasons for this: one might be too busy with other matters and so cannot find the time; the information may not be considered so important; it might be that one simply forgets to pass on some important information, or thinks that the other person already knows it. Whatever the reason, it is never out of place for the party who expects to be informed, to ask and obtain

the information necessary for successful coworking.

But under no circumstances should discord be allowed to arise. One should not surmise that the other party has evil intentions, nor be too proud to appear as a petitioner. If we permit hearts to become divided, so that cooperation is no longer possible, we give the enemy a great advantage.

**Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 519:**

How often serious difficulties arise from a simple misunderstanding, even among those who are actuated by the worthiest motives; and without the exercise of courtesy and forbearance, what serious and even fatal results may follow.

The ten tribes remembered how, in Achan's case, God had rebuked the lack of vigilance to discover the sins existing among them. Now they resolved to act promptly and earnestly; but in seeking to shun their first error, they had gone to the opposite extreme. Instead of making courteous inquiry to learn the facts in the case, they had met their brethren with censure and condemnation. Had the men of Gad and Reuben retorted in the same spirit, war would have been the result.

While it is important on the one hand that laxness in dealing with sin be avoided, it is equally important on the other to shun harsh judgment and groundless suspicion.

True cooperation is founded on love and selflessness. In God's order there is no questioning of power, position or who has the right to decide. Envy and jealousy are completely out of place, as we see in the case of Lucifer who questioned the divine order.

The center is at the heart of the work not because certain individuals desire to satisfy their selfishness, but because certain tasks have to be done so that the church as a whole can fulfill its gospel commission.

A true center does not want to control everything—an inclination that sometimes comes from the wish to see everything run smoothly, but which actually hinders the work. Instead, it will encourage the exchange of thoughts and experi-

ences, sharing of the workload, and coworking in mutual respect and trust in all parts of the work.

The coworking of the various church sub-centers can only function correctly when Christ is and remains the first and highest center. Only He can be worshiped, only He can be the Head of each believer. When John wanted to worship the angel who had brought him God's message and led him through the vision, the angel said,

### **Revelation 19**

<sup>10</sup> See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

No matter how responsible the position of a faithful instrument on this earth may be, he will never accept the worship that belongs to God alone, and he will never try to do the work that only God can do.

Unfortunately, history reveals that there has ever been apostasy and the abuse of authority within the church of God. Because of these sad examples, there is a general fear of centers. For this reason we want to investigate some of these examples, to see where these centers separated from God's will. The contrast between true and false centers should then become obvious to all.

## **Apostate Centers**

When men begin selfishly to draw all power and means to one location; to assume the ascendancy and work independently, the system of centralism ensues from this centralization, bringing terrible results. One example of this is the tower of Babel that was constructed shortly after the flood. Men...

### **Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 118-119:**

...decided to build a city, and in it a tower of such stupendous height as should render it the wonder of the world. These enterprises were designed to prevent the people from scattering abroad in colonies. God had directed men to disperse throughout the earth, to replenish and subdue it; but

these Babel builders determined to keep their community united in one body, and to found a monarchy that should eventually embrace the whole earth.

As history has clearly shown, the consequences of this selfish enterprise—which sprang from love of ease—were pride, self-exaltation, neglect of the poor, and preference of the rich.

The next example is the entire history of Israel up to the time of the apostolic church. It could not finish the work because of the widespread apostasy.

The spirit of centralism was prevalent even at the time of the division of Canaan. It was part of God's plan for the tribes to be separated to conquer new areas, which would result in winning souls to the gospel by a demonstration of God's love. However, the Israelites found it was much more comfortable to relax in the areas of the land that had already been conquered. This selfish indolence hindered the formation of new religious centers, and the pride of Israel was concentrated instead on its existing center.

The request for a king who would make the center of the nation strong and glorious, finally arose from this deplorable condition. It was in keeping with their spirit of pride and self-exaltation to have a center where all the power and the means would be centralized.

However, centralism led to the neglect of the poor and the preference of the rich, especially in regard to spiritual goods. This development took place at the cost of spreading the gospel, and the national, religious pride continued in the form of Pharisaism.

Then the apostolic church was established, with the structure of the heavenly order, by the life and death of Jesus and by the working of the Holy Spirit. We have already looked at the first Jerusalem council where it was clearly demonstrated how a true center can faithfully fulfill its duties. At this meeting, the converted Gentiles were freed from arbitrary burdens,

and Paul and Barnabas were recommended as workers. All this served to encourage the building of new centers.

Soon, however, the mystery of iniquity began and the spirit of centralism began to spread. Instead of allowing the sub-centers and the workers their own areas of responsibility and trusting them unequivocally,

**The Acts of the Apostles, p. 400-401:**

...there arose a group of men who were unacquainted personally with the changing circumstances and peculiar needs met by laborers in distant fields, yet who insisted that they had the authority to direct their brethren in these fields to follow certain specified methods of labor. They felt as if the work of preaching the gospel should be carried forward in harmony with their opinions....

These men had lost sight of the fact that God is the teacher of His people; that every worker in His cause is to obtain an individual experience in following the divine Leader, not looking to man for direct guidance; that His workers are to be molded and fashioned, not after man's ideas, but after the similitude of the divine.

## **The Problems of Centralism**

So then, centralism is not only the selfish consolidation of power and means in one place, but it is also manifested where people think that the work is dependent on them and on their wisdom alone.

A further problem of centralism is the growth of institutions that take the place of personal effort.

**The Ministry of Healing, p. 147:**

Everywhere there is a tendency to substitute the work of organizations for individual effort. Human wisdom tends to consolidation, to centralization, to the building up of great churches and institutions. Multitudes leave to institutions and organizations the work of benevolence; they excuse themselves from contact with the world, and their hearts grow cold. They become self-absorbed and unimpressible. Love for God and man dies out of the soul.

The last negative example we want to consider is found in the history of Battle Creek, an Adventist center at the time of Ellen White.

A center with various branches such as a printing house and a sanitarium had developed in Battle Creek, and it grew larger and larger. Instead of separating and forming several smaller sub-centers, to be used as missionary centers for the world, more and more Adventists settled in Battle Creek. They did so because they did not expect to suffer any disadvantages there on account of their faith. But loss of missionary activity was not the only evil that this led to.

The leaders of the Adventist center in Battle Creek began to want to control other Adventist centers according to human ways.

**Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, p. 216-217:**

Notwithstanding frequent counsels to the contrary, men continued to plan for centralization of power, for the binding of many interests under one control. This work was first started in the Review and Herald office. Things were swayed first one way and then another. It was the enemy of our work who prompted the call for the consolidation of the publishing work under one controlling power in Battle Creek.

Then the idea gained favor that the medical missionary work would be greatly advanced if all our medical institutions and other medical missionary interests were bound up under the control of the medical missionary association at Battle Creek.

The fire, which burned down the publishing house as well as the sanitarium, spoke in no uncertain terms. The centralism that had become so widespread was not acceptable to God, and it separated the work on earth from the heavenly center. This led in turn to a loss of the protection that God wanted to bestow upon His people.

**Testimonies for the Church, p. 133:**

There was danger that Battle Creek would become as Jerusalem of old—a powerful center. If we do not heed these

warnings, the evils that ruined Jerusalem will come upon us.

Pride, self-exaltation, neglect of the poor, and partiality to the wealthy—these were the sins of Jerusalem. Today when large interests are built up in one place, the workers are tempted to become lifted up in selfishness and pride.

Pride, self-exaltation, the neglect of the poor and preference for the rich are not only the results of centralism, but are also a cause of it.

In contrast to this is the selfless ministry of a true center of God's church for the benefit of the sub-centers, the church members and the world.

In place of pride, there is the true joy of seeing new centers being formed, and the spreading of the gospel throughout the world.

In the place of self-exaltation there is the exaltation of God's name, whose character and order will be manifested.

Neither the needy nor the spiritually poor are neglected, for true ministry extends to reach all humankind, as we have seen in the example of the apostolic church. The rich give freely of their wealth so that the work can go forward everywhere, and by doing this they gather up treasure which neither moths nor rust will corrupt.





## Chapter 9

# A Church Chronicle

A few months ago I received a report of a local church meeting for the first time from believers in western America. They had the idea of writing down the minutes of their service so that other local churches could benefit from their meeting as well.

Principally I thought that it was a good idea and I wanted to encourage and participate in the exchange of information between local churches. By and by the Lord led me to the conviction that this is really an important instrument which can greatly improve the organization and spirituality of the church. The following is a detailed presentation of the thoughts that led me to this conclusion.

### Heaven is Our Pattern

Books of record are kept in heaven.

#### **Daniel 7**

<sup>10</sup> The court was seated, and the books were opened.

#### **Revelation 20**

<sup>12</sup> ...and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

#### **Hebrews 12**

<sup>22</sup> But you have come...

<sup>23</sup> To the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven...

One might ask why books are necessary in heaven. To start with, let us consider why we use the written form to express ourselves and communicate with others on this earth.

Firstly, we write things down because we cannot remember everything. It is a way of preserving our knowledge. This is important for ourselves and also for others—especially later

generations. It is because of this preservation that knowledge increases from generation to generation.

Secondly, a written work is, to a certain extent, independent of the writer who wishes to communicate something to others.

There are several advantages in this:

- We can read the written word at a speed in which we can take it in (that is, faster or slower than the spoken word).
- We can also read it wherever we are—it is not limited to the presence of the author.
- It can be read at any time, even after the writer's death, which is very important in the case of certain documents such as wills.
- It can be read as many times as is desired, which can be important in helping us to fully understand the contents.
- A written communication is also free from emotional expressions such as screaming, crying or laughing. Neither the author nor the recipient can confront each other with spontaneous, emotional reactions of this kind.
- Furthermore the thought of the writer is indisputably fixed. A person may change his mind later, but he cannot deny what he has once expressed in written form.

Thirdly, one needs more time for a written communication, and so more thought is put into it. In this way, the written word carries more weight than a spoken word.

Of course, the spoken word also has its advantages over the written word. One could say that each has its place.

The reasons why we communicate some matters in the written form here on earth are not identical with the reasons why there are chronicles in heaven, but there are similarities.

Heaven, of course, is not limited by human weakness. Nevertheless, the laws are the same, since it is the same God that

rules both the heavens and the earth.

### **Matthew 6**

<sup>10</sup> Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

This should be reason enough for us to see that a church chronicle does have its place in God's church on this earth.

## **The Old Testament Church**

The Old Testament church was very familiar with church chronicles. We find the first description of such a book in Genesis:

### **Genesis 5**

<sup>1</sup> This is the book of the genealogy of Adam.

And the church in the wilderness was expressly commanded to keep a church record book.

### **Exodus 17**

<sup>14</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua...

*Numbers* and *Deuteronomy* are very definitely church record books. Anyone who reads these books cannot doubt this fact.

The first and second books of *Chronicles* are also typical church records. Some people may find the reading of some chapters quite tedious. But we have neither the right nor the wisdom to question why God has put these things in His word. He has given us these records for the benefit of our eternal destiny, and we should put in effort to try and understand why they have been put there.

The Old Testament church is a positive example of the value of church records, because we can learn from their experiences. Likewise, others will also benefit from our church records when we have learned to conscientiously keep them in an orderly way.

## **The New Testament Church**

Luke was a very meticulous writer. Much of the lives of Je-

sus and the apostles has been preserved for us through his records. In fact, the circulation of these reports played an important role in the life of the Apostolic church. Here are just a few examples:

### **Colossians 1**

<sup>7</sup> ...as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf,

<sup>8</sup> Who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.

This report was very important for Paul and his fellow workers.

<sup>9</sup> For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

Likewise, Paul was also very concerned that the churches received his reports.

### **Colossians 4 [NIV]**

<sup>7</sup> Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.

<sup>8</sup> I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.

<sup>9</sup> He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

### **Ephesians 6**

<sup>21</sup> But that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you.

The following statement shows how important a church report can be:

### **1 Thessalonians 1**

<sup>9</sup> For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

<sup>10</sup> And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised

from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

And again we read of how Paul was gladdened and strengthened by good reports,

### **1 Thessalonians 3**

<sup>6</sup> But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you:

<sup>7</sup> Therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.

These examples from the New Testament church reveal to us just how the life of a church can be enhanced by such reports.

## **Personal Records**

We can better understand the blessing of church records when we consider the value of a personal record of our own experiences. The Spirit of Prophecy expressly recommends us to keep such a record. At the same time we are also told what a blessing this will bring to us.

### **The Desire of Ages, p. 348:**

It is for our own benefit to keep every gift of God fresh in our memory. Thus faith is strengthened to claim and to receive more and more. There is greater encouragement for us in the least blessing we ourselves receive from God than in all the accounts we can read of the faith and experience of others.

The soul that responds to the grace of God shall be like a watered garden. His health shall spring forth speedily; his light shall rise in obscurity, and the glory of the Lord shall be seen upon him. Let us then remember the loving-kindness of the Lord, and the multitude of His tender mercies.

Like the people of Israel, let us set up our stones of witness, and inscribe upon them the precious story of what God has wrought for us. And as we review His dealings with us in our pilgrimage, let us, out of hearts melted with gratitude, declare, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits

toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people.” Ps. 116:12-14.

Ellen White also kept a diary that proved to be a great treasure to herself and to the world after her. Perhaps we cannot find the time to write everything down each day, but we should make it a habit to write down our experiences at regular intervals.

## **The Example of the Family**

The family is a small unit of the church. This is where we can begin to learn how to keep reports for a group. The Spirit of Prophecy gives us the following interesting counsel on this subject.

### **Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, June 23, 1903:**

After the children have learned to write, encourage them to keep a record of the occurrences of the day, noting the points on which they have overcome through the grace of Christ, and also the points on which they have failed. During the evening hour of prayer have a blessed season of confession, and of praise and rejoicing. I am sorry that we do not have more praise services in our homes, sorry that we are so slow to learn to praise Him from whom all blessings flow.

## **Why a Church Record Book?**

The above examples should be sufficient to explain the benefit of keeping church records. But let us repeat the thoughts in other words so that we can come to a good understanding of the subject.

To begin with we should consider who will benefit from a church record book. In the first case, the church itself; secondly, the messenger; and thirdly, other local churches.

**Firstly:** The church itself benefits. The record book should be kept in a place where all the members can have access to it so that each individual can be blessed by the reading of these records. If we write something down it makes a greater im-

pression on our minds. And what we experience and learn as a church should be impressed on our minds. It is often the case that our experiences provide an illustration of the principles of the message and through them we gain a deeper understanding of the truth. In order to write these things down we need to think about them, and this gives us a clearer understanding of them as well as fixing them more firmly in our minds. And finally, such a record is an expression of gratitude and of praise to God.

If somebody new joins the church they can then read the reports and be very blessed by them. Let us consider the example of a church that has been praying for years that a certain person may experience salvation. The moment finally arrives and the person concerned becomes a member of the body of Christ by the power of the gospel. Then he reads the church records and finds the records of all the prayers that have been sent to heaven on his behalf. What an encouragement this will be for him—not only for his own experience but also for his work and prayers for others so that they too may be saved!

When a local church keeps a record of its prayer requests, God's providence can be recognized much more easily. Some prayer requests that we present to the church might be soon forgotten. Sometimes we do not even realize that the Lord has heard our prayer, and we do not offer Him special thanks. But when a record book is kept and carefully maintained and used, then it will always be possible to look back and see how the Lord has answered particular prayers.

**Secondly:** The church can encourage the messenger or elder who cannot always be present. A short report can be made from the local church records for the benefit of those who carry a special responsibility for the entire church, but who are seldom able to be present.

The messenger, or whoever else may have established a church, is naturally interested in the prosperity of that church

and greatly desires to know how it is progressing. Such a report will not only encourage and strengthen him, it will also enable him to quickly recognize any wrong developments and then give the necessary help to the church.

When records are kept throughout the year, then communication between the various churches is not limited to camp time. This means that not everything has to be packed into one week of the year and we can make better preparation for this special, precious event as well as utilizing the time better.

**Thirdly:** The local church can strengthen the other churches around the world by its record of experiences. To this end we could publish any special reports in the *Messenger* and so strengthen the local churches throughout the world. In this way members from the entire church can take part in the experience of a local church with their hearts, minds and prayers. This would enable the church as a whole to become more united.

At this point some may say that they never have anything particular to report about and so they find it difficult to see any point in keeping a church record book. It really may not seem to be worth the effort to keep a record book for the few experiences that occur. But is it not the case that talents multiply by use? Skills grow through practice, and none of us should despise the day of small beginnings.

#### **Ecclesiastes 11**

<sup>6</sup> In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

Once we have begun methodically to write down our reports in faith we will soon see what value they have.

#### **Hebrews 13**

<sup>16</sup> But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.



## Practical Considerations

At this point we should consider the practical steps involved. What form should a church record book take? What shall it contain?

Although the precise format of the records can obviously be different from church to church, it should be clearly arranged so that everyone can easily follow the reports. For example, the report of a Sabbath service should contain the following information:

1. The name of the local church,
2. The date, and perhaps the place, of the meeting,
3. A short description of the experiences or testimonies that are given,
4. A list of the prayer requests and of thanks for answered prayers,
5. The most important thoughts and quotations from the study period,
6. Possibly the name of the person who leads the assembly and of the person who wrote the report.

(If anyone is interested in receiving an example of such a record form please let us know.)

While I do not wish to stipulate when or how often each local church should send us such a report, I would be happy to know that you can see the usefulness and blessing of keeping such a record book. I am most interested in encouraging the contact and communication between the churches so that we can grow together.

So that everything can be done in an orderly fashion, I would like to suggest that the smaller local churches send their reports to a person responsible for their country or area who can then send a summary with the most important points to Dickendorf.

I trust that you will make this a matter of prayer and that we can grow in spirituality and in order as a church,...

## **Ephesians 4**

<sup>12</sup> ...for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry,  
for the edifying of the body of Christ,

<sup>13</sup> Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowl-  
edge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of  
the stature of the fullness of Christ.

# Appendix:

## Historical Information

Some notes added by Frank Zimmerman.

Here is a collection of some interesting historical information regarding the struggle towards better organization, as recorded in the church paper: *The Messenger and News Review*.

### 1. The Reluctance to take a Church Name

1. In the October 1980 edition of *The Messenger and News Review*, there was a small news article entitled, "Service Faithfully Rendered". It covered the change of treasurers in the United States.

"...in view of the fact that quite a number of folk did not care for the long name we have been using, and with a desire to identify the group as being in harmony with the original third angel's message, the name has been changed to the Fundamental Seventh-day Adventist Church...."

"We regret that an official name has to be adopted. But the fact that bank accounts must be opened and taxation forms returned, requires that an identification be assumed. It is for this reason that the name has been adopted which best describes our position. Without question we are Seventh day Adventists in the true sense of the word in that we uphold the original message which made the Adventist church.

"Those who have deviated from this message are the ones who can no longer rightly claim to be Seventh-day Adventists."

This is an interesting article because it shows the reluctance of the people in the church at that time to adopt a name, ie. "We regret that an official name has to be adopted." This shows that we were very much in the second phase of the reformation at that time, as described in the first chapter of this book.

The article also mentions that “a number of folk did not care for the long name we have been using”. I believe this “long name” was the one that was also used in New Zealand: *The Non-conformist Independent Seventh-day Adventist Church*.

## **2. The Name Change to “Sabbath Rest Advent Church”**

One of the things which gave some impetus to having a unified name, was the fact that the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists had trademarked the name “Seventh-day Adventist.” They then pursued litigation against a smaller group that were using the name, presumably to protect their members from being deceived into paying tithe and offerings to groups that were not really part of the SDA body.

We were most likely too small to come into that danger, and only some countries used the name “Seventh-day Adventist” in their church names. Furthermore, we had no desire to confuse people, and were always forthright in declaring ourselves to be a separate body. Nevertheless, this was another small matter where we wished to not unnecessarily offend others.

In the January 1989 *Messenger and News Review*, Fred Wright wrote about the proposed name change. This was a month or two after a letter had been sent to the believers. The article is titled, “The Proposed Name Change” and reads as follows:

With the News Review last month there was circulated a letter stating that the time had come for a change to be made in our Church name quite apart from the “Trademark” action by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Let it be stressed that we are not acting from any fear of what the General Conference might do. In reality, their behavior is a blessing to us in that it has brought to our attention a dormant subject that needed our consideration. We are concerned with what is the will of God in the matter with special reference to how the Lord has related to identical situations in the past.

In addition, we asked the Lord to give us a new name only if that is His will. Thus it was, I believe, that the name, "Sabbath Rest Advent Church", was communicated to me. Believers were invited to ask the Lord for a confirmation or rejection of this name.

Many have made it a matter of prayer and have responded positively. Only one person has written to say with emphasis that the name should not be changed under any circumstances till the end of time. In fairness to you all, I will reproduce his letter here so that you can consider the arguments against the change.

He writes:

“Concerning your letter and the proposed name change of God's church, we are most concerned that it appears to be decided even though you do say you might be wrong. A study of Testimonies for the Church 1:223, 224, and Selected Messages 2:383-386; 367, show very clearly that the name, ‘Seventh-day Adventist’, not a variation of it—‘this distinctive banner is to be borne through the world to the close of probation.’ Selected Messages 2:385. Why?

“Because The name Seventh-day Adventist is a standing rebuke to the Protestant world. Here is the line of distinction between the worshipers of God and those who worship the beast and receive his mark.” Testimonies for the Church 1:223.

“The name you propose, ‘The Sabbath Rest Advent Church’, does not do this at all. Although there is some merit in the name in that we believe in what it says, it does not clearly and distinctly say that we are ‘Seventh-day Adventists’. Many Protestants especially in the UK still refer to Sunday as the Sabbath even though we know it is not the seventh day. Also, all Jews are Sabbath keepers in name, and we would inevitably be mistaken as an offshoot of Jewish origin.

“We have no authority for changing our distinctive name—God has given it to us as the last church in this world's history. You are quite wrong to say that we need a new name and your logic used to suggest this is not sound nor Scriptural. The General Conference does not

have the moral authority to make their name a trademark. It is akin to making a law enforcing Sunday observance. Even if they had the authority, our variation, 'Independent Seventh-day Adventist Church', should be quite sufficient not to be considered a breaking of the trademark law.

"In conclusion I quote Testimonies for the Church 1:223 which makes it quite clear to us all that we cannot change and we need only to leave the problem in God's hand and have no fear of any consequences—Let us not use our own ideas to solve an apparent difficulty which appears to our eyes to need a solution.

"No name which we can take will be appropriate, but that which accords with our profession and expresses our faith and marks us a peculiar people. The name Seventh-day Adventist is a standing rebuke to the Protestant world.'

"We pray that God's Word will be sufficient to settle the matter."

Fred added:

Without entering into controversy, I will make some observations on this letter.

The time has come when the name, Seventh-day Adventist, is no longer a distinctive banner before the world or a standing rebuke to Protestants. It is no longer the line of distinction between true and false worshipers.

As the great issue between us and the final attack on God's people will be over whether God or man is the Problem-solver, the name which includes "Sabbath Rest", is most appropriate.

So great is the Adventist apostasy that it is now a distinct advantage for the Lord's work not to be associated with their name.

Adventists have always been called Jews so there will be nothing new in that.

God never gave us the name, Seventh-day Adventists. He gave it to the church which preceded ours. They were supposed to hold it aloft till the close of probation, but they

failed to do so.

Certainly, the General Conference has no moral right to trademark the name, any more than the churches have the moral right to enforce Sunday, but they have the legal right where might prevails.

It is not the fear of consequences which has motivated us to change, but the recognition that the new movement needs a fresh name to identify its special mission.

Carefully consider the arguments presented in the letter from this brother, and after earnest prayer, come to your decision.

Right after this article, in the same January 1989 paper, Fred printed an article from another member that was positive in support of the new name. This article was titled “On the Other Side” and was written by Elliott Vest from America. He wrote:

**A comparison and contrast of the significance of two names for God's remnant church--  
“The Seventh-day Adventist Church”  
and “The Sabbath Rest Advent Church”.**

Both church names identify, at different historical periods, the true people of God, the remnant church of God to which all of the honest at heart are called.

Both church names are truly representative of the message and mission of the church at the time when the particular name became associated with the church.

Both church names point to the wonderful return of our Lord Jesus Christ in glory and majesty to put an end to the long era of sin and suffering on this earth.

Both church names point to the much-maligned or much-ignored institution of the seventh-day Sabbath as the hallmark of that special relationship between God and His people wherein God faithfully blesses the believer with unspeakable blessings while the believer gives his full trust and obedience to God without reservation even unto ridicule or death.

Both church names come into use at a time in history when the name formerly associated with God's church has come to be quite tainted as a result of apostasy.

<p><b>Seventh-day Adventist</b> replaces the name <i>Protestant</i> when it becomes clear in the 1840's that the main thing the "Protestant" churches are protesting is the gospel of Jesus Christ and the prophetic present-day truths of progressive revelation.</p>	<p><b>Sabbath Rest Advent</b> replaces the appellation <i>Seventh-day Adventist</i> when, in the latter half of the 20th century, it becomes clear that the SDA Church has now also fallen and become an enemy of the gospel and "will not come" to complete its original spiritual mission to the world.</p>
<p><b>Seventh-day Adventist</b> becomes an obsolete spiritual reference when the name, or term, becomes encrusted with formalism, legalism, and institutionalism.</p>	<p><b>Sabbath Rest Advent</b> is a spiritual reference which should never become obsolete because the true entering into Sabbath Rest by believers should soon result in the prayed-for Advent of Jesus Christ.</p>
<p><b>Seventh-day</b>—The emphasis is now merely on the day and on the outward observance of it apart from one's spirituality.</p>	<p><b>Sabbath meaning Rest</b>—The emphasis is again on the inward spiritual condition associated with true worship, whether on the seventh day or any other.</p>
<p><b>Adventist</b>—Once a very spiritual description, now cheapened to refer to just another church institution or to a particular member of that institutional body.</p>	<p><b>Advent</b>—A slight shift in form for a big shift in emphasis back to "the blessed hope" of God's true church in Christ's second advent as she studies about the Latter Rain and prays for it to fall.</p>
<p>(The <b>SDA</b> Church was, sadly, soon diverted away from God's glorious purpose for it.)</p>	<p>(The <b>SRA</b> Church has surely returned again to that purpose and will soon realize all God's goals for His church.)</p>

Then Fred commented:

It is important that no one misunderstands what I am doing when I lay the matter of the name before you, and ask you to pray to see what the Holy Spirit says about it to the members of the body. Some might feel that this is asking for



a majority vote, but this is not so. We are not a democracy.

It might also be felt that, if the Lord has communicated the name to me as I believe He has, that there is no point in taking any further steps. Would it not be a lack of faith to do anything else now other than to communicate the information to the church!

There is a principle here which must be understood and it is this. The same Holy Spirit who communicates the information to me, enables the believers in the movement to recognize what He is doing for them.

Elder A. T. Jones has stated this truth in these words:

“It should be repeated, that it may not be forgotten, that every responsibility in The Church is the direct gift of God by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

“And the membership of The Church, by the Spirit are to be able to recognize the gift upon the individual and accordingly to recognize that individual in the place and work in the Church for which the gift has prepared him.” *Lesson from the Reformation*, 109.

It works like this: The Lord opens my mind to see a truth such as the truth about God's character. I present this as directed, but watch to see the response of the members to this new light. If I see that the believers recognize the message as being from the Lord, then I am confirmed in that teaching. But, if I find that the believers see no light in the new teaching, I discontinue preaching it, for I know that I have mistaken the voice of the Holy Spirit.

For this reason, I present to you what I believe is light from God concerning the renaming of our Church, and I await your response, if you feel you should express one, but not your vote.

Then, in the February 1989 *Messenger and News Review*, under “Notices”, was the following:

The time has come to confirm that the name, Sabbath Rest Advent Church, is now the official church name for the movement. A number have written to confirm that when they had prayed about the matter, they were well satisfied

that the will of the Head was being expressed in the adoption of the name.

Please note that, at least for the time being, the business names will continue to be used. Those business names are, Destiny Press for Australia, Gospel Layworkers for Canada, and Botschaft für Unsere Zeit (The Message for our Time) for Germany.

Until notified to the contrary, New Zealand believers who wish to will continue to make their tithe and offering payments to the Non-Conformist Independent S.D.A. Church, ANZ Bank, Cnr. Queen & Victoria Streets, Auckland, New Zealand, account number 0 227 767-00. I will aim to have the account changed to the new name by April 1.

United States believers will now send their checks to The Sabbath Rest Advent Church, 7313 Greenleaf Ave., Parma, Ohio, 44130-5002.

I ask that the various leaders in Africa inform the believers there of whatever changes this will involve for them, and, at the same time, write to us here describing their procedures so we can know what is happening and so that the world work will advance in harmony. There are certain to be questions which we will be glad to answer.

And so the new name was adopted worldwide in February 1989.