

THE SYNAGOGUE: ITS ORIGIN, OPERATION, AND AUTHORITY FOR EXISTENCE

The word synagogue is used only once in the King James Version of the Old Testament (Psalms 74:8) and even then it is translated from the Hebrew word meaning assemblies or congregations (Strong 4150). This same Hebrew word is translated as assembly in Lamentations 2:7 (ASV) and at least forty-eight times as congregation. The synagogue is mentioned numerous times in the gospels and the book of Acts.

During the days of Jesus, He both attended the synagogue and even taught in it (Mark 1:21, Luke 4:16, Matthew 13:54-58). Paul and other disciples did the same (Acts 13:14-16, Acts 17:1-3, Acts 18:4).

It has been suggested by some that the synagogue did not have Divine authority to exist and there was no inspired regulations governing its operation. They surmise that since the synagogue existed without authority and since Jesus blessed it by His presence and even taught in it, then it must have found favor in His sight. They conclude, therefore, that if the synagogue could exist and function without Divine authority and without being condemned by Jesus, then we have the same permission today to operate through agencies unauthorized by God.

Such surmising simply acknowledges no more than that they have no authority for that which they purpose to defend.

But Did the Synagogue Exist by Divine Authority?

It has been noted already that the word synagogue referred to an assembly or congregation. Each city had its elders who would gather for the purpose of settling problems and instructing the people. This was done, for example, concerning a rebellious son (Deuteronomy 21:18-21) and regarding a wife found not to be a virgin (22:20-21).

During the days of Joshua and with God's approval, provision was for "the slayer that killeth and person unawares and unwittingly" to flee unto a city of refuge and dwell in that city "until he stand before the congregation for judgment" (Joshua 20:3, 6).

Writing of Moses and the law which was delivered by God through him, the Jewish historian Josephus in the First Century stated that Moses:

"Permitting the people to leave off their other employment, and to assemble together for the hearing of the law, and learning it exactly, and this not once or twice, or oftener, but every week" (*Flavius Josephus Against Apion*, II, 18, Page 892).

Israel existed as a nation comprised of twelve tribes designed to work in harmony through common adherence to the Law. The Sabbath was a special day appointed by God and in which the people throughout Israel were restricted in their activities. It was on this day that the dedicated in Israel gathered to read and study God's word. This is made vividly evident by James' statement in Acts 15:21, "*For Moses of old time had in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day.*"

This custom was noted in Psalms 22:22, "*I will declare Thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee*" and in Psalms 107:31-32, "*Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of me! Let them exalt Him also in the congregation of the people and praise Him in the assembly of the elders.*" At the return of Israel from their Babylonian captivity, Nehemiah 8:1-8 records a grand gathering of the people to hear the reading of the Law.

This practice is further confirmed by Jesus' own custom. "*And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read*" (Luke 4:16). Referring to the same practice which had for centuries been observed, Paul at the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia said, "*They that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him*" (Acts 13:27). At "Thessalonica where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures" (Acts 17:1-2). At Corinth Paul "*reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks*" (Acts 18:4)

Carolus Sigonius in the Sixteenth Century, Henry H. Halley in the Twentieth Century, and many others have advanced the idea that the synagogue had its origin during the Babylonian

captivity in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. It is evident from Scriptural references given above, however, that the synagogue existed with God's approval and provision from the time of the exodus.

Function of the Synagogue

As a congregation among God's people, the synagogue assembled on every Sabbath day (Acts 15:21) and it provided an arrangement for mutual study and discussion (Luke 6:6, Acts 19:8). To it were presented problems (Deuteronomy 21:18-21, 22:20-21) and through it decisions were finalized (Joshua 20:3, 6). It was at such assemblies that both Jesus and Paul often gained an audience for their teaching.

The Issue

In his weak attempt to respond to Jesus' powerful illustration about being a good neighbor, the lawyer *"willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?"* (Luke 10:29). It remains true in our day as well, that some "willing to justify" themselves advance highly questionable arguments in defense of that for which they have no Scriptural authority. The Lord's church functioned successfully in its early years without humanly devised arrangements and institutions. It sadly fails its mission when today it follows the world of sectarianism in adopting such agencies as schools, orphan's homes, classes, and women teachers to further its influence.

To suggest in absolute error that Jesus condoned an unscriptural arrangement when He visited and taught in the synagogue displays a lack of Biblical understanding and suggests an attempt to sustain practices for which there is admittedly no Scriptural authority.

HARRY COBB
Wedowee, AL

Father's Love Letter

My Child...

You may not know me, but I know everything about you... (Psalm 139:1) I know when you sit down and when you rise up... (Psalm 139:2) I am familiar with all your ways... (Psalm 139:3) Even the

very hairs on your head are numbered... (Matthew 10: 29-31) For you were made in my image... (Genesis 1:27) In me you live and move and have your being... (Acts 17:28) For you are my offspring... (Acts 17:28) I knew you even before you were conceived... (Jeremiah 1:4-5) I chose you when I planned creation... (Ephesians 1:11-12) You were not a mistake... (Psalm 139:15-16) For all your days are written in my book... (Psalm 139:15-16) I determined the exact time of your birth and where you would live... (Acts 17:26) You are fearfully and wonderfully made... (Psalm 139:14) I knit you together in your mother's womb... (Psalm 139:13) And brought you forth on the day you were born... (Psalm 71:6) I have been misrepresented by those who don't know me... (John 8:41-44) I am not distant and angry, but am the complete expression of love ... (1 John 4:16) And it is my desire to lavish my love on you... (1 John 3:1) Simply because you are my child and I am your Father... (1 John 3:1) I offer you more than your earthly father ever could... (Matthew 7:11) For I am the perfect Father... (Matthew 5:48) Every good gift that you receive comes from my hand... (James 1:17) For I am your provider and I meet all your needs... (Matthew 6:31-33) My plan for your future has always been filled with hope... (Jeremiah 29:11) Because I love you with an everlasting love... (Jeremiah 31:3) My thoughts toward you are countless as the sand on the seashore... (Psalm 139: 17-18) And I rejoice over you with singing... (Zephaniah 3:17) I will never stop doing good to you... (Jeremiah 32:40) For you are my treasured possession ... (Exodus 19:5) I desire to establish you with all my heart and all my soul... (Jeremiah 32:41) And I want to show you great and marvelous things... (Jeremiah 33:3) If you seek me with all your heart, you will find me... (Deuteronomy 4:29) Delight in me and I will give you the desires of your heart ... (Psalm 37:4) For it is I who gave you those desires... (Philippians 2:13) I am able to do more for you than you could possibly imagine... (Ephesians 3:20) For I am your greatest encourager... (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17) I am also the Father who comforts you in all your troubles ... (2 Corinthians 1:3-4) When you are brokenhearted, I am close to you... (Psalm 34:18) As a shepherd carries a lamb, I have carried you close to my heart... (Isaiah 40:11) One day I will wipe away every tear from your eyes... (Revelation 21:3-4) And I'll take away all the pain you have suffered on this earth... (Revelation 21:4) I am your Father and I love you even as I love my son, Jesus... (John 17:23) For in Jesus my love for you is revealed ... (John 17:26) He is the exact representation of my being... (Hebrews 1:3) And He came to demonstrate that I am for you, not against you... (Romans 8:31) And to tell you that I am not counting your sins... (2 Corinthians 5:18-19) Jesus died so that you and I could be reconciled... (2 Corinthians 5:18-19) His death was the ultimate expression of my

love for you... (1 John 4:10) I gave up everything I loved that I might gain your love... (Romans 8:32) If you receive the gift of my son Jesus, you receive me... (1 John 2:23) And nothing will ever separate you from my love again... (Romans 8:38-39) Come home and I'll throw the biggest party heaven has ever seen... (Luke 15:7) I have always been Father and will always be Father... (Ephesians 3:14-15) My question is... Will you be my child?... (John 1:12-13) I am waiting for you... (Luke 15:11-32)

Love,

Your Dad, Almighty God

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Submitted by Tony Blankenship

THE CHURCH THAT IS IN.....

(A Series about Congregations of the Lord's Church)

Taylor's Cross Roads Church of Christ is located on County Road 59 about four miles north of Roanoke, Alabama. The annual Decoration Day for the cemetery is the third Sunday in May. A gospel meeting is held the first week of June. Sunday morning service is 10:00 A.M. Wednesday evening service is 6:30 P.M.

The congregation at Taylor's Cross Roads Church of Christ began in April 1897 when J. A. Grant, Jim D. Taylor, J. H. Barsh, Jim Waldrep and Jeb Stowell left the congregation at Lebanon because of a movement to install a piano for use in public worship. These men felt that the use of musical instruments in the worship service was a departure from the Biblical mandate against such things. Citing passages such as Revelation 22:18-19, which places a curse on those that add to or take away from God's word, as the basis for their dissent, they noted that the piano was an addition to God's word and was therefore, unacceptable. Today, Taylor's Cross Roads congregation is thought to be the oldest congregation of this persuasion in the area.

Current Sunday speakers include Bill Prince, Sr. (first Sunday), Bill Prince, Jr. (second Sunday), Gregg Moore (third Sunday), Edward Herren (fourth Sunday) and Otis Bowen, Jr. (fifth Sunday). Visitors are always welcome.

GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>DATES</u>	<u>PLACE & TIME</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>
May 1 - 6	Van Lear Church Van Lear, KY	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
May 6 - 8 7:30 P.M. CST on Fri. & Sat. 9:30 A.M. & 4:00 P.M. CST on Sunday	Antioch Church of Christ Union Center Road Greenup, IL	Ronnie Scott (Bloomington, IN)
May 16 - 20	Hopkinsville Church Hopkinsville, OH	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
May 20 - 21 Topic: Angels	Mount Carmel Road Church	Harry Cobb (Wedowee, AL)
May 22 Topic: The Holy Spirit	Mount Carmel Road Church	Harry Cobb (Wedowee, AL)
May 23 - 27	Chestnut Grove Church Parksville, KY	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN) & Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
May 27 - 29	Verona Church Verona, KY	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
May 29 – June 3	Freefield Church State /line, MS	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. What did Moses do to camouflage his face when it shined after meeting with the Lord?
2. How far should you go when someone wants you to go one mile?
3. How must one worship God according to John 4?
4. Andrew and Philip were from what city?
5. In the test of unfaithfulness with bitter water, what happened to the woman if she had been found unfaithful?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. Who was Jezebel's husband? KING AHAB (1 Kings 16:31)
2. How many mighty men did David have in all? 37 (2 Sam. 23:39)
3. Because Christ rose again, what do believers have according to 1 Peter 1? FAITH AND HOPE (1 Pet. 1:2)
4. According to Psalm 68, what dropped at the presence of God? RAIN (Psa. 68:8)
5. Which hand did Ehud use to fight? LEFT (Judg. 3:15)