

Sid Roth's
**MESSIANIC
VISION**

“Who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” Isaiah 52:7 • Messianic Vision Newsletter, No. 0602 • March 2006

A Visit to the Early Church

by **Robert D. Heidler**



I would like to give you a picture of a church you have never seen. It's a church most of us have never imagined. I want you to see what the early church was before it died.

A lot of Christians assume that, on the day after Pentecost, Peter went out, rented a big building, put a steeple on top, hung up a sign that

read, “First Baptist Church of Jerusalem,” and started holding services the next Sunday. Most of us have not stopped to even grasp what the New Testament church really was.

I would like to take you with me to visit a gathering of the early church. Everything I describe will be based

on historical descriptions of the first century church, either in the New Testament, or in other early Christian literature.

As we prepare to visit this church, I want you to get ready for some surprises because you are not going to see much that looks familiar. Most of the things Christians today associate with church simply did not exist at that time.

No one in the first few centuries had ever seen a church building, a steeple, a stained glass window, a pulpit or pew, a hymnal or church bulletin. No one wore a coat and tie, and there was no written liturgy to follow. Most of those things would not become a part of church tradition until more than a thousand years later! (I am not saying that any of those things are *wrong*. We do need to see that the “essence” of what a church is does not involve these things. The early church lacked all of those things, yet had a power far beyond anything the church today can comprehend.)

What was the worship of the early church like, then? Let's imagine we are walking down a street in the city of Rome. It is A.D. 95 . . . more than 60 years have passed since the day of Pentecost. We are about to “drop in” on a typical church service in that city.

The time is Saturday evening. By

A Visit to the Early Church *continued*

Jewish reckoning, the first day of the week began at sundown on Saturday. The church meets in the evening because most of the people have to work during the day. We arrive at the door of a typical Roman house and are warmly welcomed by the host.

The particular church we are going to visit is a house church. The early church operated on two levels: the house church and the congregation. Even if the church grew to 20 or 30,000 members, its primary unit would still be the house church. From time to time the house churches would also congregate in larger groups, many times outdoors or in a rented auditorium. In Jerusalem they met in the temple courts.

We are going to visit a house church. Let me warn you before you go in to be prepared for a serious case of “culture shock.” What you are about to witness is not church life as you have known it.

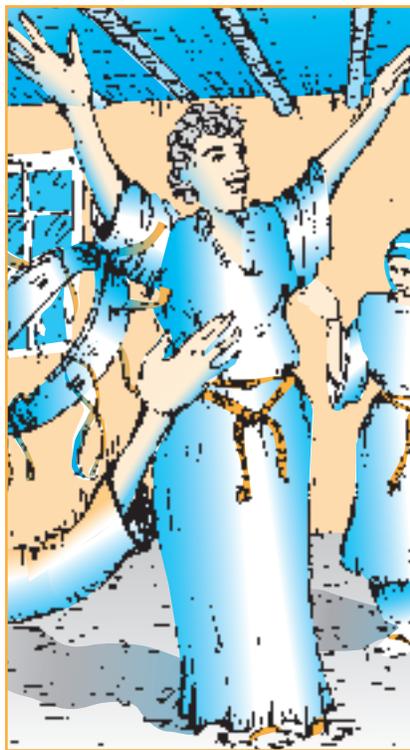
As we walk through the door, you look across the entrance into the large open courtyard of the home. There appears to be some kind of party going on. Some of the people are playing flutes, lyres, and tambourines, while others are singing, dancing, and clapping their hands.

You immediately look around to make sure you came into the right house! As you listen to the words, however, you realize that this is the right place, for the words of the songs are words of praise to Jesus! These people are overflowing with joy because they have come to know the living God.

What you are witnessing is the way the early church praised God. This type of worship is foreign to much

of the church today, but from the biblical and historical records, this is what the worship in the early church was like. It was a free and joyful celebration, with a great deal of singing and dancing.

Most church services would begin with the people getting in a ring (or several concentric rings) and dancing Jewish-style circle dances (like the Hora).



So, here we are in a large courtyard. There is a great deal of singing, dancing, and rejoicing in the Lord. As the songs slow down a little, many people get down on their knees before the Lord. Most are lifting up hands to Him. A tremendous sense of the Lord's presence fills the courtyard.

During the church's praise and worship, there are spontaneous shouts of praise. Some shout, “Amen!” to voice their agreement

with what others have said. As we enter into the worship, we are overwhelmed by the love and acceptance of the people.

After much singing and dancing, food is brought out. People find their seats and prepare for the meal. We are surprised to see people eating a meal in the middle of a church service, but this is described by Paul in 1 Corinthians, as well as by Jude, and Peter. This shared weekly meal is called the “love feast” or *Agape*.

To begin the meal one of the leaders stands with a cup, blesses the Lord, and passes it around so each one can drink from it. He then picks up a loaf of bread and offers thanks. It also is passed from person to person. This is the Lord's Supper in its original context.

The meal is a joyful time centered on devotion to the Lord. As they eat, the believers talk about the things of God, share testimonies, recite and discuss Scripture, and sing praises to the Lord. You are impressed that, while very few have personal copies of any biblical books, *most* of those present appear to have large portions of the Bible memorized.

After the meal ends, worship continues until, at some point, a change begins to take place. There is a subtle shift in the atmosphere. The air seems to thicken. A tangible sense of the presence of God comes and rests in the place. First Corinthians chapter five describes it this way, “When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus . . . and the *power* of our Lord Jesus is present . . .”

Those who have studied revival literature recall that a *tangible sense of God's presence* has frequently accompanied the great revivals of history. The manifest presence of God is, in fact, the *hallmark* of true revival. In

the *presence* of a holy God, sinners find salvation, backsliders find repentance, and the miraculous becomes commonplace.

In the early church this was a weekly occurrence. When the members of the body assembled, they came as “living stones” forming the temple of God. As the presence of the Lord had once filled Moses’ tabernacle (Ex. 40:34) and the temple of Solomon (2 Chr. 7:1-2), so the presence of God filled His *new* temple, the church. This is what Jesus

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promised, “Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Mt. 18:20).

As those assembled sense the presence of God, some fall to the ground in worship. Others stop and are silent; welcoming the presence of the Lord.

As the presence of God rests in their midst, ministry begins to take place. First Corinthians 14 describes the Holy Spirit sovereignly manifesting His gifts as His people assemble. A woman on the far side of the courtyard stands and gives a word of knowledge for healing. A man raises his hand and people cluster around to pray for him. He is instantly healed.

Somebody else stands up and reads a passage of Scripture. Another man, a teacher, gives an explanation

Continued on page 4

Dear Mishpochah,



Last month we had another One New Man Shabbat service. The chairs were arranged in concentric circles. There was no worship team. Many brought guitars, tambourines, shofars, and banners. There was no platform for leadership.

Our first One New Man service emphasized miracles. I thought this would happen at every service. My job was to yield to the Holy Spirit and act as His facilitator. His job was to minister to us through multiple members of the Body.

I was looking all night for an outbreak of miracles. But God had other plans. God knows the needs of everyone and was orchestrating the service to meet those needs. After 30 plus years of following traditional patterns, I found it difficult to yield and not lead, but I am learning.

At one point a man I did not know got up and started sharing. He had a very unhappy expression on his face as he talked about his problems. He really was rambling and I wondered if I should ask him to stop. As I was pondering what to do, a young woman stood up and said, “The Holy Spirit had me focus on you all night. Can I pray for you?” He agreed and she and others laid hands on him and prayed. Then he fell down under the power of God and began speaking in unknown tongues. He was delivered and filled up with God’s Spirit. People began dancing and worshipping the Lord as supernatural joy flooded the room.

One woman said she had felt separated from God for several years but that night she got her first love back. There was such freedom one

man said, “I feel like I have been let out of prison!”

I’m so glad I yielded to the Holy Spirit. I’m so glad I did not cut off the depressed man. I’m so glad I didn’t have to have the solution to his problem but yielded to the young woman that God chose to minister through. I’m so glad to see a glimpse of how the first church operated. I’m so glad to see the emergence of the One New Man.

Where do I go from here? I intend to hold One New Man Shabbat services in various cities. It is my desire that many house churches get started.

Where do *you* go from here? There are three books that will give you all the information you need: *Megashift*, *The Messianic Church*, and *The Race to Save the World*. Let me be your mentor as you walk into the next and perhaps the greatest move of God’s Spirit on planet earth.

And please pray for the big changes in our ministry. God is preparing us to capture a giant harvest of Jewish people that will trigger the greatest Gentile revival in history (Amos 9:11-12). We are changing our computer system, looking for new offices, and preparing for a new live television format that will require our own studio. We also have no Russian evangelistic books left in our warehouse in the former Soviet Union. But God has raised you up to share in the greatest harvest of Jewish souls in history. We need each other. We are Mishpochah (family).

Shalom and Love,

Sid

Continued from page 3

of the passage. A woman stands and gives a beautiful prophetic song. Many are so touched by its beauty and anointing they begin to weep.

Prophetic words are given. There are tongues and interpretation. Through it all they continue to move in and out of worship. This scenario is clearly described in 1 Corinthians 14:23-32.

This is how the early church met and ministered. At one point a man



introduces a family who have been sitting quietly near the back of the crowd. They are his neighbors. You can tell by the look on their faces this is their first time here, and they are not sure they are in the right place.

The man says they have come tonight because their 12-year-old daughter has contracted an illness that has left her totally blind. They have come for the church to pray for her. Those with the gift of healing

come and stand with the elders as they anoint the little girl with oil and pray. Suddenly the little girl begins to cry. With tears running down her cheeks, she cries out, "I can see! I can see!"

The mother crouches down and hugs her daughter and within 4 or 5 minutes the entire family is saved, giving their hearts to Jesus.

A prophetic word is given revealing the secrets of someone's heart. That person comes forward and says, "I don't know Jesus but I know God is here. I want to know Him."

Ministry continues. This is where much of the evangelism in the church took place... through the miraculous power of God working in the midst of His people. Most of us don't even have a concept of that happening, but it was the norm in the early church.

Our meeting of the church has now run late into the night, but no one seems to notice. Finally the meeting begins to break up. The sense of the Spirit's presence begins to lift, but there are still several small groups gathered in prayer.

As people prepare to leave, there is a great deal of hugging and kissing. It seems like a family reunion, and it is. It is the weekly reunion of the family of God.

How would you like to be part of a church like that? That's what the

early church was. It was a temple where the glory of God dwelt. On any given Saturday evening there would have been hundreds of such meetings all over the city of Rome.

That's also the kind of church they had at Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, Colossae, and Jerusalem. That's the kind of church that took the known world in one generation.

Paul would go into a city, start a church... and the presence of God would come. Within a few years *tens of thousands* of people would be saved and the entire region affected. By the end of the first century, the church had spread *everywhere* because the pagans didn't have anything that could stand against the power of God and His church.

For 300 years that's what the church looked like... then around 325 the church began to change. By the year 500 the early church was gone.

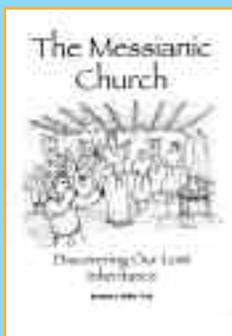
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THE BEST NEWS SINCE YEAR ONE!

Enjoy two tools that will help you experience the joy, miracles and presence of God from the first church. I urge you to get the unpublished manuscript of Robert Heidler. The lead article of this newsletter comes from this book. The title of the manuscript is **The Messianic Church**, and it is available for a donation of \$15 (Code: DBTMC). The second tool is **Megashift** by Jim Rutz, the classic book on how a house church functions. **Megashift** is available for a donation of \$20 (Code: DBMGS).

