

The Cruciality of the Communion of the Saints: as Typologically Reflected in Selected Pentateuchal Passages

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Abstract: The “communion of the saints” is usually considered a New Testament topic. It appears in the Apostles’ Creed as a mandatory commitment for church orthodoxy and orthopraxy. However, the Old Testament Hebrews were also a faith community and committed to beliefs and behaviors (at least “on paper”) that enable and enhance communion and fellowship as well as exclude actions that cause division and dissension, which can lead to discouragement, disengagement, and even destruction. Consequently, the Hebrew Bible can offer, at least typologically, statements and stories that illustrate how crucial communion and community were for God’s OT people, and anticipate the same for the NT churches. This article will make use of selected passages in the Pentateuch that provide mainly data about what would prevent or pervert communion among ancient Hebrew believers in *Yahweh*, which provides principles applicable to modern Gentile believers in Jesus as the *Christos*.

Keywords: communion of the saints, Hebrew Bible, Pentateuch.

Introduction

The topic “communion of the ‘saints’ [meaning ‘believers’]” evokes a New Testament (NT) and post-NT ecclesiastical concern. The Apostles’ Creed includes a statement of belief in the sanctam Ecclesiam catholicam and the sanctorum communionem, “the sanctified *catholic* [‘universal’] Church” and the “communion of the sanctified.” The word “communion” eventually was applied to the formal ordinance and informal practice of celebrating the Lord’s (Last) Supper (or Eucharist/Mass; “Holy Communion” in liturgical churches). The English word is traced back etymologically to “common.” Division between ecclesiastical denominations is sometimes described as “not being in communion” with one another. Yet, since the Old Testament (OT) is also received as Scripture by the NT, how does the OT anticipate or apply to this topic? In the current climate of Covid-19 restrictions on assembly in large groups, we might ask if on-line fellowship and worship can be a legitimate substitute for physical |

meetings.¹ The Torah or Pentateuch alone offers numerous illustrations of the fragility of communion and what factors are the major reasons for breakdowns in fellowship. What follows will investigate how selected OT texts provide a foundation for, and anticipation of, NT policies and practices for communion.

The Pre-patriarchal Period

The importance of community is evident as early as Genesis 1–11. Plants and water and land animals were created and grouped, and then reproduced “according to types [יְמִלֵּךְ]” (Gen. 1:12, 21, 24). Humanity (male and female) was ideally intended, like God, as His representative, to “manage [הִדָּר]” the world through an equal sharing of position and power (1:26–27). Creation culminated and climaxed with a sanctified or “holy [קֹדֶשׁ]” time for re-creation or reflection and rest and revival before work is commenced (Gen. 2:2–3). When later legislation was codified for the Hebrew people, this time (seventh day of the week, Saturday or Sabbath) was prescribed and blessed and consecrated by *Yahweh*-God as a community or communal institution in which this day was set aside nationally for non-work (vocation) related activities (Exod. 20:8–11). Back in Genesis 2, companionship with fellow humans rather than animals was emphasized (2:18–20). The husband and wife, though with different roles, were to function as one, in unity and interdependence (2:21–24).

In Genesis 3–5 the significance of family ties and togetherness is underlined. Temptation to disobey God (Gen. 3:1–5) came in the form of disbelief in the truthfulness of His claims, necessity of His commands, and integrity of His motives. Rebellion and wrong behavior led to a disruption and division in the Divine vertical and human horizontal relationships or community for the first couple (Gen. 3:7–10, 24) and siblings (4:3–14). The struggle for power and control was inevitable (3:16b–17a) and continues. The first “marriage” was damaged through the man’s distraction (3:1–6) and likely miscommunication about God’s instructions (3:2–3; cf. 2:16–17), both being ashamed and hiding from God (3:7–10), and inability to accept personal responsibility for wrongdoing (3:12–13). The solution, as with churches, lies in strong relationships based on honesty and forgiveness (cf. Matt. 18:15–20, where Jesus stressed that credible confrontation and community consensus is accepted and approved by God). If not mended and harmony restored, deception and deceit can leave lasting negative repercussions and conflicts between two parties and their descendants (3:15).

This is understandable between enemies but unacceptable among brothers and sisters. When jealousy and competition and favoritism enter relationships, serious and deadly witness of unresolved conflicts can erupt, even in families (4:3–9). Church fellowships are not immune when they fail to foster conflict resolution in the context of family, faith, and

¹ In the early days of the pandemic, a Franciscan theologian wrote, “It is in this [Covid-19] context, however, that the communion of saints can be especially instructive.” He then noted three implications: 1. Believers are already united in the Holy Spirit. 2. Those who practice social distancing for the sake of the common good are engaged in a form of “communion” solidarity; and 3. the Latin phrase *communio sanctorum* can also mean “communion in holy things” such as the sacraments. Daniel P. Horan (2020), “Communion of saints, an important tenet of our faith, can help during coronavirus times,” *National Catholic Reporter* (18 March 2020), n.p.; <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/faith-seeking-understanding/communion-saints-important-tenet-our-faith-can-help-during> (accessed 19 Aug. 2021).

forgiveness, where everyone “looks out for their brother” (cf. 4:9b, where “keeper [רמש]” suggests continuous action and is a verb that can be translated “watcher” or “preserver.” When Cain was exiled to *נו* “[land of] wandering,” he was among foreigners, not family, so feared being killed by people with no reasons to befriend or believe him (4:14b). He would be away from the place where people prayed to *Yahweh* and was blessed with His “presence” (4:14a). He thought this unbearable (4:13). People can be “killed” physically or socially. How much worse when people’s own community rejects them due to a crime or lesser mistake, failing to be their “keeper.” The Church is called to correct and care for all its family members, as Cain should have done for Abel.²

As some people (Cainites) drifted further away from God’s will (4:19–24), others realized the need for revival in *Yahweh* devotion (Gen. 4:26). This resulted in a community (Sethites) with long and productive lives (Gen. 5) for the most part (cf. vv. 21–24), leading to Noah (vv. 28–32), who became the most law-abiding person of his generation (Gen. 6:8–9, 22; 7:5). Opposite him morally were those who were idolatrous, polytheistic, lustful sex offenders, and violent (Gen. 6:1–2, 4–5, 11–12). These were all destroyed in a flood (6:3, 7, 13, 17). Those spared were Noah and his family (7:13, wife, three sons, and three daughters-in-law). The new world would begin with a family (Gen. 8:15, 18).

Future success depended not only on strong communal and familial bonds, but also on connection with the Creator. So Noah immediately worshiped through sacrifice, which pleased *Yahweh* (8:20–21a). A covenant or agreement was forged between God and all earthly life (Gen. 9:9–17; cf. 6:18). As would be expected, however, humans, even Noah and his descendants, continued to fall way short of God’s glorious guidance. Naturally, this led to further fractures in human cooperation with fellow humans and family members, and with God. The wicked Cainite lineage had been wiped out by the flood. It would be replaced by some of the descendants of Noah’s son Ham, and Japheth, although Shem’s lineage also would split between those who followed *Yahweh* as God and those who served Canaanite gods.

Noah was a winemaker and one day ended up (for an unknown reason) drunk, asleep and naked and uncovered, in his tent (Gen. 9:20–21). Family division over this was instrumental in leading to rifts and rivalries that continue into the present. At this point, all in Noah’s family were worshipers of *Yahweh* only. We learn that Noah’s son Ham saw him naked in his tent and then “told” his brothers (v. 22; likely meaning he disrespected his father in some way by ridiculing him).³ The other two brothers (Shem and Japheth) covered Noah without looking at him (v. 23). When he awoke, Noah pronounced that Ham’s son Canaan (Noah’s grandson) would be punished by being a servant to Shem and Japheth, his uncles (v. 25; and/or to their sons, his cousins, implied). Noah also proclaimed the importance of *Yahweh* worship, as maintained by Shem and his family especially (v. 26). Why did Noah not punish Ham, the guilty party? Perhaps he figured punishing his son

² Elie Wiesel, the famed Jewish author, Nobel Peace Prize winner, and human rights activist, reflected on the Cain and Abel story and concluded 1. Frustration with God can lead to vengeance on a human. 2. Two brothers may become killer and victim, and 3. All who kill, kill a brother. Cf. Elie Wiesel (1998, 2021), “Supporting Roles: Cain & Abel,” *Bible Review* (February 1998), revised and reprinted as “Cain and Abel in the Bible,” *Bible History Daily*, Biblical Archaeology Society (05 Aug. 2021), n.p. (accessed 19 August 2021).

³ Another phrase (“uncover nakedness”) is used in Leviticus 19 for sexual intercourse; but in Genesis 9 the phrase is “saw nakedness.”

would be a stronger pill to swallow. This is a negative example showing the tragic alienation and antagonistic results when forgiveness is refused and revenge reigns. Even after Jesus' ministry in Palestine, some Hamite and Shemite descendants remain at each other's throats. Ham's gossip (a serious sin also in the NT) was instrumental for the resulting rage. Such "loose lips" continue to disrupt harmony and unity in churches.

The reader then is informed about the lineages of these three sons (Gen. 10:1–11:32). This highlights the spiritual success of those (Shemites) who maintained communion with *Yahweh* and a common world view and religion, and lived at peace among themselves for the most part. Japheth's lineage is covered quickly in passing (10:2–5; migrating north and west from the Mount Ararat region). With each lineage from each of the three sons of Noah, there is a recognition that community was developed and maintained through shared territory, tribal loyalty, and tongues/languages and dialects; vv. 5, 20, 31). The Hamite lineage is uniquely tagged with a sidebar on Nimrod (vv. 8–12), who illustrates those who gloried in war more than worship. The traditional expression "before the LORD [הָיְהוָה יָגִיד]" (v. 9) can be translated "against *Yahweh*" (reading the preposition as adversative). Nimrod is linked with those who built great polytheistic and pugilistic cities and nations (vv. 10–12). Churches that focus on fighting other churches as enemies are opposite the Prince of Peace.

The list in 10:10–12 includes Babylon and Shinar, which resurface in 11:1–9, about people who migrated to Mesopotamia and were preoccupied with establishing a fearsome reputation through a powerful city able to protect them from all who would attack and try to scatter them (11:4). Their success depended on help from their God (for whom they erected a *ziggurat* [pyramid tower] in the city), and upon maintaining cooperation and good communication. Strong unity is a double-edged sword and can be good or bad, depending on its motive and purpose (vv. 5–6). Concern over its misuse caused *Yahweh* to create some confusion and conflict in their society, which led to the cessation of construction, misunderstanding, and eventual defeat and deportation (vv. 7–8a). This outcome was used to ridicule those who built Babel (and the later Babylonian nation) with a pun based *balal* ("mixed up"; v. 9a). Other Hamites are highlighted as those who settled in or near Canaan and also became enemies of the Hebrew nation (Egypt and Canaanite tribes; 10:13–19). Inter- and intra-church unity (not unanimity) and understanding are indispensable for Christianity's motive and mission of proclaiming the Messiah. Communication is a key to every effective endeavor.

The liability of division was also highlighted among the Shemites (10:21–30; cf. 11:10–26), or more specifically the Eberites (10:25–30; "Eber" [הֶבֶר] being perhaps an etymological link to "Hebrew" [יִבְרֵעַ]). A mysterious "division" (גִּלְפָּ) occurred during the time of Eber's sons, Joktan and Peleg (being named for this split; 10:25). Joktan's descendants (vv. 26–29; also *Shemitic*) ended up in the eastern hills of Canaan (10:30), along with the other Canaanite combatants with the Hebrews. The long debated "split" of Peleg's lifetime was the "ecclesiastical" or communal and theological break with his brother. Joktan's people became idolaters and polytheists and adopted Canaanite culture.

Eber's and Peleg's lineage culminated in the founder of the Hebrew nation (Shem > Arphaxad > Shelah > Eber > Peleg > Reu > Serug > Nahor > Terah > Abram; 11:10–26). These Shemites and their Patriarchs (Abraham to Joseph) maintained loyalty to *Yahweh*. Later descendants shared a common core of commandments, celebrations, and causes

(Moses to Solomon), until such time as they became so idolatrous and immoral and disunified that *Yahweh* gave them over to destruction and deportation at the hands of the Assyrians and then Babylonians (721 then 586 BC). Even Jesus lamented that his mission inevitably (although not ideally or intentionally) due to human nature would “bring a sword” and families would be separated and experience strife over beliefs and behaviors (Matt. 10:34). But churches are supposed to strive to be places of peace and unity (not uniformity) in spite of differences in race or riches. The earliest stories in Genesis include hints about the power, purity, and practicality of partnership and fellowship between people who share a common God and goals. Ever since the first humans and Hebrews the essential nature of communion between brothers in faith has been evident.

The Patriarchal Period

God’s Promise to Abram (Gen. 12:1–3)

Abram (later Abraham) was promised, if obedient, to be the source of a significant nation (Gen. 12:1–2a). Any successful group, large or small, requires working relationships. The consequence of competent community and unity is both internal and external value and influence (v. 2b), that rewards friends and punishes enemies (12:3). Here, as with the Church, it is God who will bless and curse; His people’s obligation is to be faithful to God and to one another. Carrying out Jesus’ commission to spread His Good News depends on dedication to God, reliance on His power, and the ability to cooperate with believers globally.

Abram and Lot (Gen. 13:5–12)

Abram’s relations consisted of his wife Sarai and a nephew, Lot (13:1). Eventually disagreements developed between Abram and Lot over available resources for their herds and herdsmen, complicate by the presence of the local Canaanites (vv. 5–8). Abram wisely decided they should not fight, and the best solution was to split and go separate ways (vv. 8–9). In this case division was positive, because they were heads of competing businesses. A merger would have led to a fractured and eventually failed enterprise. Each party after separating had the opportunity to influence different people and places (vv. 10–13).

The principle of community within an organization for success remains intact. In the Church world today, distinct congregations or denominations are needed to maintain external unity in essentials with diversity on some particulars. Yet each unit has to cooperate for internal progress, and at the same time each individual within each unit has to learn to give and take. When a person or group within a congregation is unable to stay without fighting and making fractures then an amiable parting is needed so the Church universal can give witness to the importance of both teamwork and toleration. Believers can disagree without being disagreeable.

Sarai and Hagar (Gen. 16:1–6; 21:8–10)

Someone once said “If Momma ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy.” Regardless, families function best when union and communion exist. Abram and his wife were troubled

because they were childless (Gen. 16:1a). Although *Yahweh* had promised Abram a natural son (15:4), in desperation he agreed with his wife to impregnate their Egyptian servant girl Hagar (16:1b–2). As might be guessed, when the servant had a child, she began to act superior to her mistress (v. 4). Naturally, Sarai was upset and even blamed Abram (v. 5). Then Sarai mistreated the servant, who ran away (v. 6). The son born to Sarah (formerly Sarai), named Isaac, was later ridiculed by the older son of Hagar (named Ishmael; 21:8–9). The name Isaac (“laughter”) was supposed to elicit enjoyment over his miraculous birth to very old parents (laughing *with* them), rather than derision (laughing *at* them; 21:6–7). Sarah again vented her anger at Hagar and demanded that Abraham (formerly Abram) dismiss her and disinherit the child (21:10).

The story illustrates how childish jealousies and resentments and a lack of honest and open confrontation and conflict resolution always ruins relationships and leads to hard feelings and a breakdown even in how a family functions. Similar things happen all too often in churches, and are the reason for Jesus’ admonitions in Matthew 18:15–20. There he requires confrontation and resolution between two people before resorting to more public exposure and excommunication when the private solution fails. Tangible evidence and stubborn denial are required to enact punishment. When proper protocols are in place, Jesus promised his presence and God’s approval of the decisions made.

Ishmael and Isaac (21:8–20; 25:9, 12–18)

As already mentioned, a division between these two began early in life (21:8–9). Both were fated to become leaders of 12 strong tribes (17:20; 21:12–13, 18; 25:13–16; 35:22; 49:28). Ishmael (having been exiled) grew up in the desert as a warrior and obtained an Egyptian wife (21:20–21). *Hostility* or animosity (not intercultural marriage per se) was the reason for continuing conflicts between Ishmael’s and Isaac’s descendants (25:18b); but they did cooperate in burying their father (25:9). Otherwise, these half-brothers and especially their families could have avoided being enemies. The Arabs and Jews still today are at each other’s throats. A fragile communion gave way to contention.

Jacob and Esau

(25:21–34; 26:34–35; 27:1–28:1; 28:6–9; 32:3–28; 33:1–18; 36:2)

Isaac’s wife gave birth to twins (25:24). The firstborn, Esau (“hairy”), came out with his brother, Jacob (“heel grabber”), grasping the heel of one foot (25:24–26). Before she went into labor, she experienced turmoil in her womb and then in prayer (v. 22) received a divine revelation that each child would father a nation, and these two would be at odds (v. 23a). The oldest (Esau the firstborn but weaker) would serve the younger (Jacob second born but stronger; v. 23b), which was an unusual occurrence. At least translations read this way. The Hebrew, however, says more literally that the greater will serve the smaller. Regardless, as the story unfolds, Esau becomes a hunter and outdoorsman while Jacob becomes a homebody (25:27). Contrary to the birth revelation (v. 23), this seems to be the reverse of who is stronger or weaker. In this case also the parents were guilty of favoritism (Isaac favoring the hunter, Esau, and his wife, Rebekah, favoring the homebody, Jacob; v. 28). One day Jacob blackmailed Esau into giving away his birthright (25:29–34). Esau’s distance from his family widened, and he

married Hittite, Canaanite, and Ishmaelite women just to spite his parents (26:34–35; 27:46–28:1; 28:6–9; 36:2). His brother deceived him a second time (27:35–37) by pretending to be Esau and stealing their father’s blessing reserved for the firstborn; but once given could not be taken back (27:1–36, 37b, 38). The only concession was for Isaac to pronounce that Jacob, though undeserving, would now necessarily rule over his relatives (v. 37a) and that Esau was destined to fight to survive in a desert region, serve his brother, yet eventually rebel and remove Jacob’s yoke (vv. 39–40). Esau maintained a grudge and planned to kill his brother (v. 41). Consequently, their mother warned Jacob to flee to Haran to live with his relative Laban until Esau cools off (vv. 42–45). Such animosity between brothers and family members made real communion nearly impossible. They had moved a safe distance from each other, each having too many possessions to share the same land (36:6–37). Esau moved to Seir (= Edom; 36:8) and Jacob in Canaan (37:1). But as they say, “Time heals all wounds,” so with the passage of enough time (a lot of lost time), when the brothers again crossed paths (Jacob expecting a battle), Esau was able to forgive Jacob (whose new name was Israel; 32:3–28; 33:1–15), and who tried to pay back the damage with many costly presents (33:8–11). Esau returned to Edom and Jacob to Canaan (33:16–18). Still, Esau’s descendants (the Edomites) became enemies of the Israelites (cf. Psalm 137:7).

Jacob and Laban (27:46–28:5; 29:1–31:21)

Jacob had been sent to Haran to obtain a wife from Hebrew relatives so as to avoid any foreign wives unlike his brother Esau (28:1–7). While there, Jacob the deceiver was deceived by his uncle (29:10) Laban (29:16–25); and then took revenge and deceived Laban in return (30:27–43; 31:4–13, 26). Laban had agreed that Jacob could marry his younger and more attractive daughter, Rachel, but on the wedding night switched her secretly with her older and less attractive sister, Leah (29:22–25). To get Rachel, Jacob had to work seven more years (29:27). Later, Jacob got revenge and fooled Laban with a business proposition that enriched himself rather than his uncle (30:40–43). Jacob then departed from Haran with his riches and wives and concubines and twelve sons to return to Canaan, leaving Laban bereft of his family (31:43). Jacob again deceived his father-in-law by trying to leave secretly behind Laban’s back (31:20–23). Selfishness and greed and dishonesty are certain roots for division and disunity. Love of money is a cause for all kinds of trouble (cf. 1 Tim. 6:10; 2 Tim. 3:2).

There was also division on the spiritual/theological level. Laban admitted he used divination, and even justified it as a means to hear from *Yahweh* (30:27). He was exposed as an idolater when his daughter Rachel stole some figurines of gods from him, exposing her also of polytheism or henotheism (31:19, 30, 32b). Some god (perhaps *Yahweh*) told him in a dream that he should chose his words carefully before Jacob (31:24, cf. v. 29). Theological conflicts are inevitable but communion and close communion can be compromised when religious beliefs and behaviors are radically different. Yet relationships can be restored through covenant agreements with repentance and forgiveness, as took place between Laban and Jacob (31:44–53), after Laban confronted Jacob and an honest and transparent discussion ensued (31:22–43). The hostile meeting ended with worship and a communal meal (v. 54).

Rachel and Leah (29:16–30:24)

Women as well as men within a family could and can be agents of disunity. Rachel was barren and loved by Jacob, while Leah was fertile but not loved (29:30–31a). God responded to this inequity by allowing Leah and not Rachel to conceive (29:31b–32a). Leah hoped in vain that giving Jacob as son would gain his love (v. 32b; cf. 30:20). After she bore three more sons, Rachel was desperate so gave Jacob her maid to have children in her place (30:1–3). Leah then in revenge gave Jacob her maid (30:9). She even bribed Rachel in order to sleep with Jacob again (30:14–16). When she became pregnant, she even believed that God had rewarded her actions (30:18). Again favoritism and falsehood were seedbeds for separation and suspicion between people sharing a family and community.

Jacob was eventually renamed “Israel” (הרש < לְאָרְשֵׁי) because he learned how to “struggle” (הרש < תִּירָשׁ) successfully with both heavenly and human matters (32:28). After his daughter Dinah was raped by the son of Shechem’s king, the Shechemites agreed to undergo circumcision as reparations (34:1–24). But two of her brothers deceitfully used this as a means to get revenge, and killed every man who was in pain and unable to defend himself, and looted the city (34:25–29). Jacob tried to resolve the moral disaster and his PR problem by sacrificing to [*Yahweh*]-God at Bethel and demanding that the Hebrews disavow any allegiance to a foreign god through a purification ritual and burying all their idols and fetishes in the ground (35:1–4). They all agreed; and they and their God were feared (respected) by the other towns (v. 5). Again confession and repentance are keys to restoring fellowship with those outside and inside a community. Forgiveness and justice, lacking in this story, are also implied as essential to communion.

Reuben and his Father (35:21–26)

Jacob’s/Israel’s firstborn son Reuben seduced (“walked after and lay with”; . . . הִלְכֵנִי . . . בְּכִשְׁנֵי) Bilhah, his father’s concubine (also the maid of his wife Rachel; 35:22a); and then Israel (his father and/or all the nation) found out (v. 22b). When Israel was dying and giving blessings to his sons, he recalled how Reuben had “ascended his couch-bed and defiled it” (הִקְלַע יַעֲוִצִי תִלְלַח נָא רִיבְאָ יִבְכַּשְׁמ תִּלְלַע) (Gen. 49:4b). As a consequence of his “reckless” (נִתְפָּ) behavior, he would not maintain his privileges as firstborn (49:4a). Nothing crushes community relations (especially ecclesiastical cohesion and witness) and personal/institutional potential like carnal transgressions involving family or friends. Leviticus 18:6 prohibited sexual intercourse with relatives (lit. “flesh with his flesh”). In 18:14 an uncle is dishonored if his nephew has sexual relations with his uncle’s wife; and the same for a sister- and brother-in-law (18:16). Leviticus 18:22 uses similar wording as Genesis 49:4, and prohibits “laying down” (בְּכֶשֶׁת) on the “couches of a woman” (הַשָּׁא יִבְכַּשְׁמ) as “with a male” (הַכְּזֹ-תָאֵן). Whatever was the exact original intention of these words, the main thrust if Leviticus 18 has to do with violating the sanctity of committed relationships, which always leads to long lasting divisions among the people involved.

Joseph and his Brothers (37:1–50:21)

Joseph (the first of the only two sons born to Rachel and Jacob, and tenth of Jacob’s twelve total sons) was favored by his father, which made his brothers hate him

(Gen. 37:3–4). Joseph claimed superiority based on his dreams (37:5–9) and ratted on them (37:2), so jealousy and hatred intensified (vv. 8, 10–11) to the point of plotting his death and telling their father a wild animal did it (vv. 18–20). It was only Reuben and Judah who opposed and stopped the plan to kill him (vv. 21–22; 26–27; cf. 29–30). Instead while Reuben was away, they sold Joseph to passing merchants; and still made it look like he had been killed by a wild animal to explain his disappearance to their father (vv. 23–28, 31–33), who experienced inconsolable suffering (vv. 34–35). Again nothing good comes from favoritism, cruel competition, dishonesty, hatred, and jealousy. These always create huge cracks in the cement that binds communities and congregations together. Yet the story ends with the healing power of forgiveness and the perspective that what people do with bad motives can be used by God for greater good (39:1–50:25; especially 39:1–5; 43:29–30; 45:1–15; 46:28–29; 50:15–21), although this in no way justifies crime or disregarding divine commands.

Judah and Tamar (38:1–26)

A sidebar in Joseph's story involves his brother Judah, who separated from his larger Hebrew family and became close with a foreigner; and while visiting him met the daughter of a Canaanite acquaintance, whom he married (38:1–2). Their son Er wed Tamar and then he died young (38:6–7a). So per the custom, Judah told his brother Onan to impregnate Tamar so his dead brother would have a lineage (v. 8). But Onan resented this and refused and soon died (vv. 9–10a). Both deaths were interpreted as caused by God due to these men's wickedness (vv. 7b, 10b). Then Tamar was told to live at home until Judah's third son, Shelah was old enough to be her new husband (v. 11). But Judah was not serious and forgot about his promise (v. 14b; cf. 12a). When he was widowed he went to visit his Canaanite friends again (v. 12). Tamar decided to get revenge and trick Judah by being disguised as a prostitute along his route, and as she hoped he propositioned her (vv. 13–16a). As a pledge for his promised payment he gave her his staff and seal (vv. 16b–18a). The encounter led to her being pregnant (v. 18b). Later it was reported that Tamar was pregnant from prostitution and Judah demanded her death by fire (v. 24). When she presented the staff and seal his deed was exposed (v. 25), and he confessed she was justified because he had broken his promise (v. 26). This vignette illustrates the pains and problems produced through deception and insincerity and the intrusion of beliefs and behaviors that violate those of a community held together by shared truths and traditions. Judah would have easily and eagerly executed someone based on hearsay until undeniable evidence prevailed.

The Post-Patriarchal Periods

Passover Principles

When God inflicted death of the firstborn males as a plague on Egypt (11:1–6; 12:29–30), the Hebrew community was isolated in Goshen, separate from Egyptian society (vocationally, linguistically, ethnically, religiously, and geographically; Gen. 45:10; 46:28–29, 34; 47:4, 6, 27; 50:8; Exod. 8:22; 9:26). They were also protected from the “death messenger” by having lamb's blood (from lambs without defect) on their

doorframes as evidence of devotion to *Yahweh* (Exod. 12:7, 12–13). A special meal was to be prepared using roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread (to symbolize their readiness to leave in haste; Exod. 12:8–11, 21–23, 26–27, 33; cf. Exod. 23:15). This “Feast of Unleavened Bread” was to be celebrated regularly by all future Hebrews to commemorate how God protected these Hebrews in Egypt from death based on His previously announced plans and purposes for them and their obedience. This communal ceremony anticipated the institution of the Lord’s Supper (also called informally “Communion”) among those devoted to Jesus as Israel’s Messiah in and since New Testament times. Both ceremonies involve symbols of blood and bread and emphasize fellowship around a common meal among unified and unique “strangers in a strange land” (cp. Exod. 18:3; distinct and distanced from others religiously, spiritually, and theologically; but not nationally, ethnically, geographically, etc.). While Israel was supposed to be physically separated from Canaanites, especially regarding marriages, as a “light to the Gentiles,” (neither *among* or *of* Canaan); the Church also is to avoid “unequal yokes,” yet be “*in* but not *of*” the world as a “light *among* the Gentiles.” Yet both were to be proactive in representing *Yahweh* or His Messianic humanity as the *Christos* or “anointed One.” In both cases, success in mission and ministry outside “God’s house” depends on unity (without uniformity) and community within the fellowship(s).

Living in the Desert

One might suppose that if a community was physically isolated from any religious or political enemy, maintaining unity would be much less of a challenge. Not! The Hebrew experience in the wilderness on the way from Egypt to Canaan was no picnic in terms of interpersonal relationships. Even after a number of amazing miraculous signs and events from their Lord and through their leader Moses, these Hebrews quickly turned to rebellion when faced with the difficulties of finding sufficient food and water (e.g. Exod. 15:23; 16:3; 17:2–3). This kind of complaining was viewed not just as understandable complaints in the midst of hardships but as treason against God (16:8), because their trust was supposed to be in God and his resources, not in human leaders (who have to trust God also, and are not to be blamed unless they drop the ball).

Still the desert experience was not without some external enemies. The Hebrews were attacked by the Amalekites (17:8–15). Joshua’s army was unable to prevail unless Moses’ hands were raised, holding his staff. This was accomplished through teamwork. Aaron and Hur helped Moses keep his hands raised, and victory was achieved. Moses’ staff was instrumental as in previous circumstances in Egypt and during the exodus. This pericope is also chiasmic, which confirms the parallel between Amalek attacking Israel/God (A; v. 8) and God/Israel attacking Amalek (A’; v. 16) with a climax or fulcrum focused on victory via Moses upheld hands/staff supported by a rock and two assistants (v. 12).⁴

⁴ Cf. Thomas B. Dozeman (2009), *Exodus*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans), 392; Bruce K. Waltke (2007), *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 388; Biblical Chiasm Exchange; (accessed 14 Sep. 2021); A Little Perspective; (accessed 14 Sep. 2021); and Charlie Trimm (2019), “God’s staff and Moses’ hand(s): The battle against the Amalekites as a turning point in the role of the divine warrior,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44:1 (2019):198–214; <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0309089218778588> (accessed 14 Sep. 2021).

Later Moses' father-in-law, Jethro a priest, warned him about the need for more assistants in regard to his huge judicial burden, to preserve his emotional and mental health (18:13–23). Again an ageless principle is provided about the indispensability of shared leadership, and the essentiality of incorporating the gifts and talents of all the members (or as many as possible) of a community for maximum effect and efficiency. Behind trust in any leader is confidence in his or her theological insights and personal experience with God (19:9).

The episode involving the worship of a golden calf idol (Exod. 32:19–35), on the eve of the introduction of God's Ten Commands, underlines how people of faith quickly turn to other gods with singing and joy when they feel disconnected from and disappointed by their leader(s) when in desperation. People will often cling to any god or theology and the human representative(s) who/which appear to offer community connected to hope for escape from a desert. Real relationship is desired more than a set of rules. Soon after, Moses told God that unless His presence was guaranteed, he was not interested in continuing (Exod. 33:15). *Yahweh* again cautioned against (not contact) but *covenants* with Canaanites, whom He would remove, otherwise the Hebrews would be trapped by polytheism and profane actions (Exod. 34:11–17).

Rules Regarding Relationships

Next in the narrative comes the dispensation of the so-called Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:3–17; cf. Deut. 5:7–21). That these sections contain “ten” commands is not stated until Exodus 34:28 (cf. Deut. 4:13; 10:4). We can agree on this number, but the exegetical debate is over how to specify the ten. Scholars over time have offered different lists, mainly differing over the opening and closing sections about other gods and coveting.⁵ Regardless, within these commands is an assumed emphasis on essential unity among this community on (1) exactly who is the true God (vv. 3–6); (2) their collective duty to “carry” God's reputation properly (v. 7);⁶ (3) their counter-intuitive and counter-cultural collective resolve (apart from a theocracy) to worship every seventh day (vv. 8–11); and (4) their community building and affirming support for parental respect (v. 12) and prohibitions of murder, adultery, theft, dishonesty, and lust or greed (vv. 13–17), which prohibits all those kinds of sins that had destroyed community and communion since the earliest humans and Hebrews. All the other biblical

⁵ Cf., e.g., Jason S. DeRouchie (2013), “Counting the Ten,” 93–126, in *For Our Good Always*, eds. Jason S. DeRouchie, et al., festschrift for Daniel I. Block (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns); Philo, *Delineation of the Mosaic Legislation for non-Jews*; “Early Jewish Writings,” citing J. H. A. Hart (2020), *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 17: 726–31, <http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book26.html> (accessed 15 March 2020); David Stern, “The Ten Commandments,” *Reconstructing Judaism*, (accessed 14 Sep. 2021); “The Ten Commandments of God,” <https://biblescripture.net/Commandments.html> and (<https://catechism.cph.org/en/10-commandments.html> (accessed 14 Sep. 2021); David Noel Freedman (2001), “The Nine Commandments,” *Proceedings of the 36th Annual Convention of the Association of Jewish Libraries* (La Jolla, CA; June 24–27, 2001), 5; Daniel I. Block (2012), “The Decalogue in the Hebrew Scriptures,” 1–27 in *The Decalogue Through the Centuries: From the Hebrew Scriptures to Benedict XVI*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and Timothy Larsen (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox); Thomas Watson (1692; 1995), *The Ten Commandments*, reprint and revised ed. 1890 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust); Peter Leithart (2019), “Don't Do, Don't Desire,” *Patheos, Evangelical*. Jan. 7, 2019. (accessed 15 March 2020).

⁶ Cf. Carmen Joy Imes (2019), *Bearing God's Name: Why Sinai Still Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic).

laws align with and in more detailed situations extend and support these basic principles for unity and community. For example the command to execute a child that “curses” (לִלְקַמּוֹ) a parent (Exod. 21:17) is not about “cursing” as we use that word today in relation to profanity. A better translation for this root קלל would be something like “mistreat; ridicule” or “treat as insignificant; belittle” (also for Gen. 12:3). The absolute need for capital punishment is not transferrable to the Church in all future cultures, but the principle of respect for parents can be maintained and monitored. Rules regarding servants or slaves (e.g. Exod. 21:20–21) reflect how servitude was an economic mainstay of the ancient world. Servitude is not prescribed for others but is a reality for the Hebrews so needed regulations and safeguards. The “eye for eye” (Exod. 21:23–25) legislation was not a cruelty at that time, in fact the opposite, because it sought to restrict payback to an equal measure, keeping people from exacting an extreme amount of revenge, as was often done. Even within a community, sexual intimacy with the wrong partners will create irreparable damage (Lev. 18:1–30).

Major causes of cracks in community and communion are injustice, slander or gossip, hate, and revenge (Lev. 19:15–18). When asked about the most important laws, Jesus chose two, the second being “love neighbor as self” (Matt. 22:39, citing Lev. 19:18aⁱⁱ). In the Leviticus passage the context defines this as refusing to hold a grudge and seek personal revenge against a fellow Hebrew (v. 18aⁱ–ii). Most important is guarding against what will create catastrophic divisions within a community or congregation. Bottled up anger and resentment are fuel for this fire (Lev. 19:17a). Open and honest confrontation is required (v. 17b). Other causes of communal rifts and obstacles to resolution are injustice (unfair or false accusations) and favoritism (Lev. 19:15) and especially gossip and slander or rumor mongering (v. 16a). These and any actions or attitudes are to be avoided that in some way diminish the life of someone in your religious community (v. 16b). A person can be “killed/murdered” psychologically or emotionally as much as physically. Church communions are often shattered for these reason. Strict yet reasonable and consistent laws in theory and practice (and enforcement) were and are still necessary (as appropriately contextualized) to maintain a moral and civil order.

Relationships can be powerful and formative for the parties involved, in both positive and negative ways (shaping people closer to or farther from their current beliefs and behaviors). The popular idea that God called the Hebrews to march into Canaan as a mighty army and kill all the Canaanites as God’s hand of judgment is not all in line with the related OT texts. In Exodus 23, *Yahweh* explains that He, through His messenger, would remove those tribes that were enemies (vv. 20–23). The Hebrews were to refuse (1) to worship their gods (vv. 24–25a) and (2) to live among them, since such a relationship would lead them into idolatry (vv. 32–33). God would make these tribes flee gradually over a period of years (vv. 28–30). Sharing a land with people of a different faith and with different food and other habits is normal. A key to personal or national theological and ecclesiastical success is a focus on communion with like-minded people and a refusal of constant communion or fellowship (not friendship) with those who can “turn you to the dark [opposite] side.”

Conclusions

In the OT we do not find ancient Israel engaging with foreigners in a manner that leads to foreign conversions to *Yahweh*; rather mostly we find Israelites converting to other gods and moral systems. In the NT we find an emphasis on the Church's calling to engage Gentiles and Jews everywhere with an expectation many unbelievers will come to faith and Christians will seldom apostatize. In practice relationships remain powerful portals for religious deconstruction, and today Christians seem to lose faith more than others. These biblical data suggest that the reasons are related to excessive connections and mixing (communion) with other religions and non-religious people, rather than maintaining a serious and certain social separations between friendship with the world and brotherhood/sisterhood (communion) only with fellow believers. It would seem the Jews should have had it easier to allude theological and ethical contamination living in a theocracy; but that did not happen. Christians today who fall away from their faith do not do so just because they live in pluralistic, secular nations rather than in an isolated Christian community; but because the Church has failed to equip them intellectually and spiritually in a sophisticated and substantial manner. The solution is not total isolation or integration but a middle ground that wisely balances how believers are molded by their religious community yet also can minister to their secular surroundings.

Followers of a religious faith who live in echo chambers often do maintain a commitment to a strict set of theological "truths" and social practices, but ironically and predictably these groups usually make and have little or no impact or impression as a witness to the outside world. James said to believers in ancient Jerusalem that friendship with the world is hatred or enmity towards God (James 4:4aⁱⁱ–b). Proverbs 12:26 observes that those wanting to do right need to be careful in choosing friends or companions because going down a path towards wickedness will lead to error. James in context was speaking to people in the local church who were "adulterers" (v. 4aⁱ). The "friendship" he mentions, then, appears to mean the actual appropriation of ungodly behaviors, sexual and otherwise. Merely being a "good neighbor" and friendly and being sociable with those who follow no or another religion is not what he was prohibiting. An interesting and nagging question, however, is why OT Israel so easily fell into idolatry, and modern, western Christians so easily fall, into disbelief. Close contact with other faiths is a factor in both the ancient theocratic and modern democratic situation. The internal failures of community and communion appear to be the problem much more than the external influences from foreigners.

Надважливість спілкування святих типологічно зображена у вибраних уривках П'ятикнижжя

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Анотація: “Спільноту святих” прийнято вважати темою Нового Завіту. В Апостольському Символі віри “спільнота святих” фігурує як обов'язкове зобов'язання для церковної ортодоксії та ортопраксії. Однак, старозавітні євреї також були віруючою спільнотою, вірною вченню (принаймні “на папері”), що уможлиблює і зміцнює спільноту, а також виключають дії, які спричиняють її поділ, що може призвести до байдужості, відсторонення, і навіть руйнування. Відтак, Єврейська Біблія може запропонувати, принаймні типологічно, твердження та історії, які ілюструють, якою мірою спільнотність була вирішальною для Божого старозавітного народу, і натякають, що те саме відбувається і у новозавітних церквах. У цій статті будуть використані окремі уривки з П'ятикнижжя, які головне говорять про те, що могло б перешкодити або спотворити спілкування між старозавітними єврейськими віруючими в *Yahweh*, а також забезпечують принципами, які можна застосувати до сучасних віруючих-язичників в Ісуса як *Christos*.

Ключові слова: спільнота святих, Єврейська Біблія, П'ятикнижжя.

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