

DID GOD CREATE A THEOCRATIC ORGANIZATION?

Throughout a large part of the history of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, the governing body of Jehovah's Witnesses has claimed that Jehovah's Witnesses are 'God's Organization' i.e. the only channel which God uses to disseminate biblical truth. Also reference was often made to the ancient nation of Israel as being God's organization of the time. However, in the 1980s an even greater emphasis began to be laid on these claims. It appears that at that time there was a certain internal struggle which reduced the power of the President of the Society and with a certain increase in the power held by the rest of the governing body. The main argument put forward by the rest of the governing body for this change was that in the 1st century the body of Christians – apostles and older men - in Jerusalem operated as a governing body for all Christians worldwide and so this should be the pattern in the 20th century and onward.

- However, although recognizing that Jehovah had selected Israel as His people, is it really true that Israel was 'an organization'?
- Furthermore, is it really true that the apostles and older men in Jerusalem operated as a governing body for all Christians worldwide at that time?

THE HOLY ANGELS IN HEAVEN ARE ORGANIZED

Indeed it is obviously good to be organized to accomplish God's will, whether this relates to ancient Israel, the 1st century Christians, or modern-day Christians; and there is certainly the excellent example of God's holy angels in respect of their being highly organized.

FOR PRAISING GOD

- ❖ "...There were a thousand thousands that kept **ministering** to him [*The Ancient of Days*], and ten thousand times ten thousand that **kept standing** right before him. **The court** took its seat, and there were books that were opened" (*Dan. 7:10*).

This particular organizing of these heavenly creatures was at a particular time and for a particular purpose as described in verses 11-14 and with further interpretation given in verses 15-27. It is a judgement at the end times "for a time, times and half a time" (verse 25b) at the end of which the kingdom is set up (verse 27). The description of the holy angels as being *armies* indicates a disciplined and organized system for carrying out God's will:

- ❖ "Bless Jehovah, O you angels of his, mighty in power, **carrying out his word**, by listening to the voice of his word. Bless Jehovah all you **armies** of his, you ministers of his **doing his will**" (*Ps. 103:20, 21*).

God is, many times in the Scriptures, called "Jehovah of armies." However, it would be wrong to imagine that such glorious beings are automatons or are lacking the free-will that the Scriptures indicate is given to humans.

FOR PRAISING JESUS

- ❖ "And I saw, and I heard a voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders, and the number of them was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with aloud voice: '**The Lamb** that was slaughtered is *worthy to receive* the power and riches and wisdom and strength and *honor and glory* and blessing'" (*Rev. 5:11*).

FOR SERVICE TO CHRISTIANS

- ❖ “Are they [*the angels*] not all spirits for public service, sent forth to minister for those who are going to inherit salvation?” (*Heb. 1:14*).

GOD’S PATRIARCHAL GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM

From Abraham onward each patriarch was the father, ruler, priest, judge and provider for the family. There were only very few laws needed in this system. This system worked because of the **love a father has for his family** and the **love the family had for the father**.

ISRAEL’S GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM

THE COUCL OF ELDERS DURING THE CAPTIVITY IN EGYPT

A council of elders [*older men*] was one of Israel’s oldest and most fundamental systems. They were called “*the elders of the people*” (*Ex. 19:7*) and “*elders of the congregation*” (*Judges 21:16*). Moses was sent back to Egypt by Jehovah and was to go to “*the older men of Israel*” (*Ex. 3:16*).

A TEMPORARY AUTOCRATIC SYSTEM

From the time of the exodus from Egypt Moses acted as leader, mediator and prophet to Israel:

- ❖ “He [*Moses*] is being entrusted with all my house” (*Num. 12:7*).

Neither Joshua, nor Aaron or his sons acted as mediator or prophet. So Moses was unique and in these respects he foreshadowed Jesus Christ. Additionally, for the unique situation of the trek through the wilderness and in preparation to enter and conquer the Promised Land, Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro made the following suggestion:

- ❖ “You [*Moses*] should select out of all the capable men, fearing God, trustworthy men...you must set these over them as chiefs over thousands, chiefs over hundreds, chiefs over fifties, and chiefs over tens” (*Ex. 18:21*).

After Joshua had completed most of the conquest of Canaan and was approaching his death he gave a farewell speech. In this speech he made no mention of handing over executive power to a single individual:

THE CONTINUING COUNCIL OF ELDERS SYSTEM

- ❖ “Joshua proceeded to call all Israel, its **older men** and its **heads** and its **judges** and its **officers**”

(*Josh. 23:2*).

Joshua gave authority for settling disputes to these older men, heads, judges and officers in their various tribes and locations:

- ❖ “And the people continued to serve Jehovah all the days of Joshua and all the days of **the older men** who extended their days after Joshua” (*Josh. 2:7*).

Centralized control by a single individual was now not needed in Israel. The only organization was the family and the councils of elders.

END OF THE AUTOCRATIC SYSTEM

After they were settled in the land of Canaan, Israel had a **body of elders for each city**, each tribe, and the nation as a whole had a council of older men. These elders were men of wisdom: “*Is not wisdom with the aged*” (*Job 12:12*). They were to know the Law in depth because they were to serve as guides and in a judicial capacity and to be protective of the people (*Deut 19:11, 12; 21:1-8, 18-20; 22:16-19; Josh 20:2-4*). This institution of a council of elders system was still in operation in Jesus’ day (*Luke 7:2-5*).

GOD WAS THEIR GOVERNMENT

This patriarchal and council of elders system meant that God was head of their Government:

- ❖ “In those days there was **no king** in Israel. What was right in his own eyes was what each one was accustomed to do” or “as he saw fit” (*Judges 21:25. NIV*).

Israel operated as one large family with **no centralized government from a single individual**. Relatives of families represented them, but these were not appointed by God. Although the priesthood was highly organized, individuals lived according to personal conscience and were individually responsible to God and the community. This also meant that sanctions would be imposed upon lawbreakers by each local body of elders. However, Israel’s famous judges – Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Barak, Gideon, and Tola - did not operate as a government but were military leaders to fight Israel’s battles. This theocratic arrangement lasted 350 years; yet when reading the Bible passages of the time of the judges one would certainly not conclude that Israel had become an ‘organization.’

ISRAEL NO LONGER THEOCRATIC

In time the Israelites wished to imitate the surrounding nations who were each ruled by a king. So the Israelites instruct Samuel with the words:

- ❖ “Now, do appoint for us **a king** to judge us **like all the nations** ... it is I [*Jehovah*] whom they have **rejected** as being **king** over them” (*1 Sam. 8:5, 7*).

Samuel then proceeded to warn them of the harsh yoke they were putting themselves under by having a king—i.e. **a centralized government**—“like all the nations.”

- ❖ “...the people refused to listen to Samuel and said ‘No, but a king is what will come to be over us’” (*1 Sam. 8:19*).

However, this was not an arrangement that had God’s approval but rather He strongly disapproved of it although allowing it:

GOD NEVER APPROVED OF THIS AUTOCRATIC GOVERNMENT

- ❖ “I proceeded to give you a king **in my anger**, and I shall take him away in my fury” (*Hos. 13:11*).
- ❖ “...we have added to all **our sins** *an evil* in asking for ourselves a king” (*1 Sam. 12:19*).

One result of this *untheocratic* arrangement was that the kingdom was split in two with the ten tribe kingdom setting up an arrangement resulting in false worship under a non-levitical priesthood. Both kingdoms were unfaithful to God; and although they were always classed as God’s people they were not operating along godly lines even during the rare times when they returned to a more pure form of worship. They still had imperfect men as their kings. **Both nations had to have prophets sent to them to correct them or bring them back to Jehovah**. As the writer to the Hebrews states:

- ❖ “God long ago spoke on many occasions and in many ways to our forefathers by means of **the prophets**” (*Heb. 1:1*).

Nevertheless, **these prophets did not form an organization for the governing of God’s wayward people** but served simply to deliver his messages to the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. There was, in fact, no official procedure in the Law for appointing a prophet. God spoke through these individuals who could be identified by the following features:

- a) The prophet spoke in God’s name-----**Deut. 18:20-22**.
- b) The prophecy came true----- " "
- c) The prophecy promoted pure worship-----**Deut. 13:1-4**.

Yet, for the most part, the words of these prophets were not heeded and in time the behaviour of both

kingdoms became so bad in God's eyes that he sent, firstly the Assyrian world power against the northern kingdom, and then the Babylonians against the southern kingdom. However, when pronouncing His judgement on the kingdom of Judah He gave a promise of someone who, in having God's spirit, actually would rule on God's behalf for the benefit of the people:

HUMAN AUTOOCRACY IN ISRAEL COMES TO AN END

❖ “A ruin, a ruin, a ruin I shall make it...it will certainly become **no one's until** he comes who has the legal right, and I must give it to him” (*Ezek. 21:27*).

After 586 B.C Israel was either scattered or ruled by other nations and clearly did not resemble any form of organization. Its form of worship was apostate and divided.

THE 400 YEAR GAP FROM MALACHI TO JESUS

The general disarray of the Israelites under the authority of the various empires shows that there was **nothing about them that significantly functioned as an organization** belonging to God.

DID THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS CONSTITUTE 'GOD'S ORGANIZATION'?

In later times, Jesus, during his ministry, condemned much of what the religious leaders were doing; thereby showing that they were **not operating as any organization belonging to God**. The apostles directly disobeyed the High Priest saying: “*We must obey God as ruler rather than men*” (Acts 5:27-29). This shows that they did not view Israel's highest religious authority as being God's organization.

GOD'S FUTURE APPOINTED KING

In the Hebrew Scriptures there are many prophecies concerning Earth's final King - one who would be God's Son. For instance King David of Judah was informed by God that:

❖ “When your days come to the full, and you must lie down with your forefathers, then I shall certainly raise up *your seed* after you...and I shall indeed firmly establish his kingdom ... to time indefinite. **I myself shall become his father and he himself will become my son...**”
(*2 Sam. 7:12-14*).

Although this initially was applied to Solomon, the words in bold are later applied in Hebrews 1:5 to Jesus as *the Son*, he thereby being *the son of David*. The parallel account in 1 Chronicles 17:14 omits the thought of chastisement which was not necessary for the Messiah.

HE WILL NOT RULE BY HUMAN PHILOSOPHY

The only way to rule the earth in justice and righteousness would be for such a ruler to have the power and the same mind set as God i.e. God's spirit. So:

❖ “...there must go forth a twig [*branch*] out of the stump of Jesse [*David's father*]...And upon him the spirit of Jehovah must settle down, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding...” (*Isa. 11:1, 2*).

GOD DID NOT START AN ORGANIZATION AT PENTECOST 33 C.E

The disciples of Jesus were already the Body of Christ as branches in him as *the Vine*, at least from the time he chose the twelve. Many had been baptized during Christ's ministry and, so, were part of the Body. Long before 33 C.E he had given them their mission instructions and most of their code of conduct and they had functioned fully on a number of occasions as preachers (seventy on one occasion). Although, after his resurrection, further instructions followed from Jesus through the spirit this did not mean that they were not the Body of Christ before then. The receiving of the gifts of the spirit at Pentecost was indeed a dramatic event giving impetus to the gathering of new disciples as was

the giving of the spirit to Gentiles some time later. Yet these great events were phases in the movement that Jesus started, but not the beginning of it.

CHRISTIANS ARE TO OBEY JESUS RATHER THAN ANY CENTRAL ORGANIZATION

It is Jehovah who determined who would be the one that His people must listen to as stated by Moses and quoted by the apostle Peter who said:

- ❖ “God will raise up from among your brothers a prophet like me [*Moses*]. You must **listen to him**”
(*Acts 3:22*).

At the transfiguration God directly commanded the three disciples at that dramatic event:

- ❖ “This is my Son, the One that has been chosen. **Listen to him**” (*Luke 9:35*).
- ❖ *Jesus himself linked “...you are my friends” with “if you do what I am commanding you”*
(*John 15:14*).
- ❖ *And for new converts: “...teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you. I am with you all the days until the conclusion...”* (*Matt. 28:20*).

So it is “*Jesus who gives all authorization as he said: “All authority has been given me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). This is because “...he [Jesus] is the head of the body, the congregation” (Col. 1:18). Furthermore, in both Matthew 10:5 for the 12 apostles, and in Luke 10:1 for the 70 evangelists, it was Jesus who authorized them to preach.*

THE SPIRIT OF JESUS AUTHORIZES CHRISTIAN ACTIVITIES

Because Jesus is currently located in heaven he is able to be empowering and supportive of his disciples by means of his spirit which is really God’s holy spirit, as he promised his first followers:

- ❖ “The Father...will give you another helper to be with you **forever...the spirit**” (*John 14:16*) so that “...the spirit...he will guide you into all truth” (*John 16:13*).
- ❖ “Now in Antioch there were prophets and teachers in the local congregation, Barnabas...and Saul ... the **holy spirit said**: ‘Of all persons set Barnabas and Saul apart for *me* for the work to which *I* have called them ... Accordingly these men sent out by the holy spirit...’” (*Acts 13: 1-4*).

The proof that, in this case, the holy spirit and the spirit of Jesus are synonymous is:

- ❖ “...because they were forbidden by **the holy spirit** to speak the word in the district of Asia...they made efforts to go to Bithynia, but **the spirit of Jesus** did not permit them.” (*Acts 16: 6, 7*).

Proof is also noted by a comparison of Romans 8:26, 27 and Romans 8:33, 34 where the spirit and Jesus are shown to be the intercessor for Christians. Yet there are not two intercessors. Hence, the spirit mentioned in Romans 8:26, 27 is “*the spirit of Jesus.*” Also Galatians 4:6 speaks of “*the spirit of his Son.*”

JESUS RULES THROUGH HIS AND HIS APOSTLES TEACHINGS

It was Jesus himself who explained the meaning and fulfilment of the Scriptures on the road to Emmaus. (*Luke 24:27, Acts 1:3*). Jesus then gave the disciples further explanations and instructions during his almost 6 week seminar before his ascension (*Acts 1:6-8*). This teaching continued by means of the visions that Jesus gave to both Paul and John so that Christians have all the teaching they need since the completion of the Christian Greek Scriptures. So the governing of Christians is only by means of the words of Jesus and the apostles as Jesus said:

- ❖ “Everyone that comes to me and **hears my words and does them**...He is like a man building a house, who dug and went down deep and laid a foundation on the rock-mass...” (Luke 6:47).
- ❖ And Jude admonished to: “...put up a hard fight for the faith that was **once for all time delivered** to the holy ones ... call to mind **the sayings** that have previously been **spoken by the apostles** of our Lord Jesus. Christ.” (Jude 3, 17).

So if the teachings of any leaders within Christianity are at variance with the teachings of Jesus and his apostles then the individual Christian must follow Jesus and ignore that leadership.

CHRISTIANS WHO TAKE THE LEAD

SERVANT LEADERSHIP IS NOT AUTHORITARIAN

- ❖ “But he [Jesus] said to them: ‘The kings of the nations **lord it over them**, and those having **authority over them** are called Benefactors. You, though, **are not to be that way**. But let him that is greatest among You become as the youngest, and the one acting as chief as the one ministering. For which is the greater, one reclining at the table or the one ministering? Is it not the one reclining at the table? But I am in Your midst **as the one ministering**.’” (Luke 22:25-27).

“NOT MASTERS OVER YOUR FAITH”

- ❖ “Not that we [Paul and his associates] are masters over your faith, but we are fellow workers for your joy, for it is by your faith that you are standing.” (2 Cor. 1:24).

So when Hebrews 13:17 later states: “*Be obedient to those taking the lead among you and be submissive...*” this must be within the context of such leaders as not being “*masters over your faith*” so that no one would “*lord it over*” another Christian. So **Hebrews 13:17** is better translated as: “Continue to follow the advice of {or: be persuaded by} those leading YOU and defer to them...” Paul, in humility, showed remarkable restraint in his use of authority.

MISUSE OF HEBREWS 13: 17

- ❖ “**Be obedient to** those who are taking the lead among you and **be submissive** (“do what they say” NLT), for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will render an account...”

Almost all translations render the Greek words *peithoo* as **obey** and *hupeiko* as **submit**. This can be misconstrued as referring to leaders having a demanding authority over individual Christians. However, Thayer’s Gk/Eng. Lexicon shows the semantic range of *peithoo* in Hebrews 13:17 as “**to listen to**, obey, yield to, or comply with.” The *Word Biblical Commentary* shows that there is also **an element of persuasion** in the meaning. Further, F.F. Bruce shows that the subject matter is *doctrines*. So when the context is taken into account this appears to be in the sense of the Christian’s co-operation after having been persuaded by the Christian teaching. The KIT renders *hupeiko* as “*be you yielding under*” which does not mean to be submissive **to someone’s authority**, but to **submitively listen to and co-operate with their guides**. This is, in context, in the sense of *not putting obstacles in the way of the teacher trying to teach*. So that paraphrased *Hebrews 13: 17* means:

- ❖ “Listen (*being persuaded concerning Christian teaching*) to your guides and do not hinder or obstruct them in doing their work, because they are watching over you and have to answer to the Lord (*for what they have taught you*). So don’t make them sad as they do their work, but happy. Otherwise, it won’t be for your benefit.”

This harmonizes with Jesus’ words in Luke 22:25 and 26 that Christians “*are not to be that way*” by exercising *lordly authority* over others. Even Paul, who was granted authority from Jesus, most often uses the phrase: “I appeal (Gk *parakalein*) to you...” throughout his writings. When he does use terms of command such as “I charge you...” they are not used in any strongly legislative way, but by way of

commissioning someone. Essentially the main time for a leader to use strength of authority would be in dealing with those who promote provable false teachings.

PAUL'S AUTHORITY

THE EXALTED JESUS APPOINTS SAUL [PAUL]

- ❖ “The Lord said to him [Ananias]: ‘Be on your way, because this man [Saul] is a **chosen** vessel to me to bear my name to the nations...’” (Acts 9:15).
- ❖ “Paul, an apostle, **neither from men** nor through a man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father ... For neither did I receive it [*the good news*] from man, nor was I taught it, except through revelation by Jesus Christ.” (Gal. 1:1, 12).

Clearly, no earthly organization authorized the choosing of Paul. He was directly chosen by Jesus as had the original twelve.

PAUL DID NOT GET HIS AUTHORITY FROM THE JERUSALEM ELDERS

- ❖ “...they [Paul and Barnabas] sailed off for Antioch, where they had been entrusted to the undeserved kindness of God for the work they had fully performed” (Acts 14:26).

They were never required to report to the Jerusalem congregation which, in any case, had its own separate body of elders. Furthermore, it was **Paul who corrected Peter – a representative of the Jerusalem congregation because:**

- ❖ “...before the arrival [*at Antioch*] of certain men from **James**, he [*Peter*] used to eat with the peoples of the nations ... When I [*Paul*] saw they were not walking straight according to the truth...**I said to Peter before them all...how is it you are** compelling people of the nations to live according to Jewish practice.” (Gal. 2:12, 14).

THERE WAS NO 1ST CENTURY GOVERNING BODY IN JERUSALEM

Alexander Strauch in *Biblical Eldership* states:

I emphasize these historical facts because Acts 15 is often misused to justify the authority of church councils and permanent church courts...It is a historical fact that no formal interchurch federation, denominational union, or fixed organizational framework linked churches together for the first two hundred years of the Christian era. p. 128

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL—ACTS 15

- ❖ “Certain men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers: **Unless you get circumcised** according to the custom of Moses, you cannot get saved ... it was arranged for Paul and Barnabas to go up to **the apostles and older men in Jerusalem** regarding this dispute” (Acts 15:1).

So did this council of “*apostles and older men in Jerusalem*” act like the modern day **governing bodies** of religious groups? Did it decide on matters of importance for other congregations? The issue in Acts 15 was: Should Gentile Christians keep the Law of Moses and get circumcised? So Paul says: “*I again went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas...as a result of a revelation*” (Gal. 2:1). The result of Paul’s revelation and his discussion with those “*who seemed to be pillars in the congregation*” was as follows:

- ❖ “For **the holy spirit** (*again meaning the spirit of the exalted Jesus*) and we have favoured adding no further burden to you except these necessary things” (Acts 15:28).

So the Jerusalem congregation did not act as *a governing body* in making this decision for Christians.

This decision came **from Jesus' use of holy spirit** and **given as a revelation to Paul**, who was associated with the Antioch congregation. This revelation he—Paul—then conveyed to these Jerusalem brothers by way of correcting them. All of these points show that the Jerusalem congregation never served as a model for any modern-day governing body of Christians. This directly contradicts the teaching of the governing body of Jehovah's Witnesses that God deals with people only through a single authority structure. According to Alexander Strauch in *Biblical Eldership*: "There is no biblical evidence to suggest that there was an established, supreme court in Jerusalem to which all Christian churches were answerable...Antioch, not Jerusalem, initiated the conference." p. 126

THE CONGREGATIONS WERE AUTONOMOUS

Jesus would be in constant contact with his disciples through the holy spirit. In this way he helps and guides all Christians individually without the help of a **centralised governing bureaucracy**. For any organization to say that it handles all kingdom affairs on earth is a usurpation of the authority of Christ. **For anyone to mentally elevate an organization to this position becomes idolatry**. The WT magazine of 1st March 1979 promotes idolatry of the organization when it asks:

is there any cause for us to lose **faith in** Jehovah's visible organization...? Absolutely not...our unwavering **faith** will be rewarded with victory and the crown of life.

Therefore, the papal system and any Episcopal system with a **governing** body would be diametrically opposed to Jesus' teaching on Christian autonomy. It would be insubordination to set up such systems. The only governing arrangement was to be that of a body of elders and a body of ministerial servants (Gk *diakonos*) in each congregation as well as for all congregations to work and co-operate together for the common purpose.

THE THEOCRATIC ARRANGEMENT IS WITH GOD'S SON AS OUR PERSONAL KING AND LORD

NO ORGANIZATION IS REFERRED TO FOR SALVATION

Serving any organization – however loyally – is not the way to gain one's salvation. Everything for salvation comes through Jesus. As he said:

- ❖ "I am *the door*; whoever enters *through me* will be **saved**" (John 10:9). Also "**I am *the way*** and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through **me**." (John 14:6). *And the writer to the Hebrews called "[Jesus] the chief agent of **their salvation**" (Heb. 2:10). So:*
- ❖ "There is **no salvation in anyone else**, for there is not another name [*referring to Jesus*] under heaven which has been given among men by which we must **get saved**." (Acts 4:12).

Salvation cannot, therefore, come through any organization or church or individual. It will come only through Jesus. This is because he is the "***one mediator between God and men, a man, Christ Jesus***" (1Tim. 2:5).

EVERLASTING LIFE COMES ONLY THROUGH JESUS

- ❖ "And yet you do not want to **come to me** that you may have **life**" (John 5:40).
- ❖ "Lord **whom** shall we go away to. **You** have sayings of everlasting life" (John 6:68).
- ❖ "The gift God gives is **everlasting life through Christ** our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

So if a Christian wants everlasting life he/she must come to Jesus in a personal relationship because only he has "sayings of everlasting life."

THE ORGANIC UNION WITH CHRIST AND ONE ANOTHER

Very little is said in the Scriptures concerning ‘organization,’ even the word is not used in them. In contrast various illustrations of an organic nature were used by Jesus, Paul, and Peter. For instance Jesus said of himself:

- ❖ “I am **the vine**, you are the branches. He that remains in union with **me** bears much fruit.”

(John 15:5).

Similarly Paul’s use of the Body/Head illustration shows that there is no intermediary between Christ and each Christian:

- ❖ “...so we, although many, are **one body**...but members belonging **individually** to one another”

(Rom. 12:5).

- ❖ *So Christians are:* “...members of the **household of God**, and you have been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, while Christ Jesus himself is the chief corner stone” *(Eph. 2:19) and* “**He** is the head of the body, the congregation” *(Col.1:18).*

- ❖ *Peter used a family based term in speaking of:* “...judgment to start with the **house of God**. Now if it starts with **us**” *(1 Peter. 4:17).*

Note: The “*household of God*” is similar to a family or local council of elders in Israel in pre-king theocratic times.

THE FRAMEWORK FOR CHRISTIAN SOCIETY

Similar to the local councils of elders in Israel’s earlier history, each Christian congregation in each city would have its body of elders. It would also have a body of ministering servants as detailed in Acts and by Paul. The writer to the Hebrews showed how this arrangement was supposed to work out, so that individual Christians should:

- ❖ “Continue to follow the advice of (or: “be persuaded by”) those leading YOU and defer to them; for **they are tireless in their care for YOU**, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to YOU.” *(Heb. 13: 17 RRV).*

APPLYING THE LAW OF THE CHRIST

The law of the Christ is based on “love” as “the fulfilment of the law” *(Rom. 13:10) and* “the law of faith” *(Rom. 3:27). This is because Christians are* “...a letter of Christ...written...*not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts*” *(2 Cor. 3:3). This leads them to* “Go on carrying the burdens of one another, and thus fulfil **the law of the Christ**” *(Gal. 6:2). In such a beautiful arrangement* “the kingdom of God is *not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*”

(Rom. 14:17).

SUMMARY OF SCRIPTURAL POINTS

GOD NEVER APPROVED OF ISRAEL’S AUTOCRATIC GOVERNMENT.

- ❖ “I proceeded to give you a king **in my anger**, and I shall take him away in my fury” *(Hos. 13:11).*

The prophets did not form an organization for the governing of God’s wayward people but served simply to deliver his messages to them.

HUMAN AUTOCRACY IN ISRAEL COMES TO AN END

- ❖ “A ruin, a ruin, a ruin I shall make it...it will certainly become **no one’s until** he comes who has the legal right, and I must give it to him” *(Ezek. 21:27).*

THE FUTURE APPOINTED KING RULES BY THE SPIRIT OF JEHOVAH

- ❖ "...there must go forth a twig [*branch*] out of the stump of Jesse [*David's father*]...And **upon him the spirit of Jehovah** must settle down..." (*Isa. 11:1*).

GOD DID NOT START AN ORGANIZATION AT PENTECOST 33 C.E

The disciples were already the Body of Christ as branches in him as *the Vine*, at least from the time he chose the twelve. The receiving of the gifts of the spirit at Pentecost was a major phase in the movement that Jesus started, but not the beginning of it.

CHRISTIANS ARE TO OBEY JESUS RATHER THAN ANY CENTRAL ORGANIZATION

- ❖ "This is my Son, the One that has been chosen. **Listen to him**" (*Luke 9:35*).
- ❖ "All authority has been given me in heaven and on earth ... teaching them to observe **all the things I have commanded you. I am with you** all the days until the conclusion..." (*Matt. 28:18, 20*).

THE SPIRIT OF JESUS AUTHORIZES CHRISTIAN ACTIVITIES

- ❖ "...the spirit...he will guide you into all truth" (*John 16:13*).
- ❖ "...because they were forbidden by **the holy spirit** to speak the word in the district of Asia...they made efforts to go to Bithynia, but **the spirit of Jesus** did not permit them." (*Acts 16: 6, 7*).

JESUS RULES THROUGH HIS AND HIS APOSTLES TEACHINGS

- ❖ "...put up a hard fight for the faith that was **once for all time delivered** to the holy ones ... call to mind **the sayings** that have previously been **spoken by the apostles** of our Lord Jesus. Christ." (*Jude 3, 17*).

SERVANT LEADERSHIP IS NOT AUTHORITARIAN

- ❖ "Not that we are masters over your faith" (*2 Cor. 1:24*).
- ❖ "But he [*Jesus*] said to them: 'The kings...**lord it over them**, and those having **authority over them** are called Benefactors. You, though, **are not to be that way**' (*Luke 22:25-26*).

MISUSE OF **HEBREWS 13: 17**

- ❖ "**Be obedient to** those who are taking the lead among YOU and **be submissive**" *is better translated as* "Continue to follow the advice of {Or: be persuaded by} those leading YOU and defer to them;..."

PAUL GOT HIS AUTHORITY FROM THE EXALTED JESUS NOT THE JERUSALEM ELDERS

- ❖ "Paul, an apostle, **neither from men** nor through a man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father ... For neither did I receive it [*the good news*] from man, nor was I taught it, except through revelation by Jesus Christ." (*Gal. 1:1, 12*).

THERE WAS NO 1ST CENTURY GOVERNING BODY IN JERUSALEM

- ❖ "it was arranged for Paul and Barnabas to go up to **the apostles** and **older men in Jerusalem** regarding this dispute" (*Acts 15:1*).
- ❖ So Paul says: "I again went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas...as a result of **a revelation**" (*Gal. 2:1*).
- ❖ "For **the holy spirit** (*again meaning the spirit of the exalted Jesus*) and we have favoured adding no further burden to you except these necessary things" (*Acts 15:28*).

According to Alexander Strauch in *Biblical Eldership* p. 126:

There is no biblical evidence to suggest that there was an established, supreme court in Jerusalem to which all Christian churches were answerable...Antioch, not Jerusalem, initiated the conference.

THE THEOCRATIC ARRANGEMENT IS WITH GOD'S SON

- ❖ "There is **no salvation in anyone else**" (*Acts 4:12*).
- ❖ "**one mediator** between God and men, a man, Christ Jesus" (*1Tim. 2:5*).
- ❖ "Lord **whom** shall we go away to. **You** have sayings of everlasting life" (*John 6:68*).

THE ORGANIC UNION IS WITH CHRIST AND ONE ANOTHER

- ❖ “**He** [*Jesus*] is the head of the body, the congregation” (*Col. 1:18*).
- ❖ “I am **the vine**, you are the branches. He that remains in union with **me** bears much fruit.”
(*John 15:5*).

CONCLUSION

Therefore, the truly theocratic organization is that of individual body members under the personal direction of God and Christ as head of the body through holy spirit. Christians also come together in *an organization*, that is, in individual congregations, each with their own body of elders and body of ministering servants. This formation would be for the purpose of accomplishing theocratic goals and in co-operation with other congregations.

“This is my Son, the one that has been chosen. **Listen to him**” (*Luke 9:35*).

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