



# THE HOUSE PHONE

NEWSLETTER

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An In-house Informational And Educational Newsletter  
From The Elder To The Members Of The Diakonate Umbrella

## The Jerusalem Church

### ACTS 6 REVISITED

There was a period—it did not last very long—during which the holy Church throughout all the world was confined within the limits of one local Church. That one local Church was the Church of Jerusalem, the first Christian Church. It may be asked whether there were not many disciples of Jesus left in Galilee during the period covered by the first five chapters of Acts, and whether they could not be regarded as constituting a Galilean Church in some sense. That is a separate question, the answer to which is beset by so many gaps in our knowledge that for our present purpose we must leave it on one side.

The first Jerusalem Church lasted for some forty years. It left the city and went into dispersion not long before A.D. 70, and although even in dispersion it continued for long to call itself the Church of Jerusalem, it had no more any direct association with the city. When Jerusalem was re-founded as a Gentile

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city in A.D. 135 a new Church of Jerusalem came into being, but this was a completely Gentile Christian Church and had no continuity with the Church of Jerusalem of apostolic days.

The picture which we have of the early halcyon days of the first Jerusalem Church, practicing community of goods with glad and spontaneous abandon, upraising God and having favor with all the people, is different from the picture which we have of it twenty-five to thirty years later, when its own leaders could describe the bulk of its members as 'zealots for the law' who viewed with grave suspicion the progress of the Gentile mission conducted by Paul and his colleagues. Although it was the mother-Church of the Christian world, its contribution to the gospel throughout the world in its later years was much smaller than its status and origins might have led one to expect. It may be that a survey of its history will suggest one or two practical lessons which Churches of the twentieth century could profitably take to heart.



## HISTORY OF THE JERUSALEM CHURCH

**1. Its foundation.** The birthday of the Jerusalem Church was the birthday of the Christian Church as a whole. The one account of the occasion which we have is the one preserved in Acts 2. When the Holy Spirit came down in power on the apostles on the first Christian Pentecost in accordance with the promise of Christ in Acts 1:8, they—or rather Peter, as their spokesman,—proclaimed the gospel so effectively to the crowds of Jews and proselytes from many lands who were present in Jerusalem for the festival that three thousand hearers were convicted of sin and responded to the call to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Those who thus responded received the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and were incorporated into the same Spirit-baptized fellowship as the apostles themselves. There was an organic continuity between the people of God in New Testament times and the people of God in Old Testament times, but the day of Pentecost marked a new beginning, for then the outpouring of the Spirit, predicted long before as a sign of the end-time, came true in experience. The Church in the New Testament phrase is *is* 'the fellowship of the Spirit'.

**2. Its early character.** The main features which characterized the early Church of Jerusalem have provided an example for Christian Churches ever since. 'All who believed were together' and devoted themselves to (a) the apostolic teaching, (b) the apostolic fellowship, (c) the breaking of bread, (d) the services of prayer, (e) mutual care and (f) gospel witness.

The apostolic teaching was the teaching which the apostles had received from Jesus in order that they might impart it to others—‘teaching them’, as He said, ‘to observe all that I have commanded you’ (Matt. 28:20). To this day the surest criterion of an apostolic Church is its adherence to the apostolic teaching. An unimpeachable pedigree not that any Church can produce one which would satisfy the strictest historical scrutiny is no substitute for adherence to the apostles’ teaching—and fellowship. Much later in the first century John emphasizes that those who abandon the apostolic teaching, or advance beyond it in a direction which the apostles would not have countenanced, cannot claim to belong to the apostles’ fellowship. The apostles’ fellowship carries with it fellowship ‘with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ’ (I John 1:3), and is marked by faithfulness to that teaching which was given and received ‘from the beginning’ 1 John 1:1; 2:7; 2:24; 3:11).

The other features which have been enumerated were all aspects of the apostles’ fellowship. ‘The breaking of bread’ might refer generally to their fellowship meals, but especially to the taking of bread and wine in remembrance of their Lord. This memorial act appears to have been a daily practice, taking place in the course of a fellowship meal, in the houses of various members of the Church. So at least we may gather from Acts 2:46, every part of which describes something that took place ‘day by day’. The ‘prayers’ would be those occasions on which they came together in manageable groups for united prayer. Many of them, like the apostles (Acts 3:1), would continue to attend the services of prayer in the temple, which accompanied the morning and evening sacrifice day by day; but the temple services could not take the place of prayer within their own community.

One has sometimes met people who professed to stand foursquare on Acts 2 in the matter of Church practice, but were a little less sure of their footing when it was pointed out that the community of goods was a prominent feature of the fellowship described in this chapter. There were other religious groups in Israel at this time which practiced community of goods—the Essenes are the best known example—and to many of these new believers this no doubt seemed to be a natural and proper way of expressing their sense of fellowship one with another. Towards the end of the second century Tertullian can still say of Christians:

‘We hold everything in common, except our wives’ this last remark being a refutation of the slanders about Christian behavior that circulated among the pagans). The practice led to abuses, as is shown by the account of Ananias’ and Sapphira’s deceits in contrast to Barnabas’s generosity; but that simply reminds us that no community of human beings, not even such an apostolic Church as this, can be perfect. The attempt to get credit for being a little more generous than one really is can be found in settings where no community of goods is practiced; the story of Ananias and Sapphira is not told in order to suggest that the community of goods was itself a mistaken idea. Luke that it was a nowhere suggests mistake; probably he saw much to commend in it. It had certain practical drawbacks, indeed, and perhaps the chronic poverty which seems to have afflicted the Jerusalem Church in later decades may not be unconnected with the exhaustion of the common pool into which the members placed their property; but the spirit that inspired the practice was wholly admirable.

Their fellowship was manifested in their gospel witness as well as in these other ways. If for certain purposes they enjoyed fellowship in their own homes, they carried on their gospel witness in as public a place as they could find, and a favorite spot for this appears to have been Solomon’s colonnade, at the eastern end of the outer court of the temple (Acts 3:11) 5:12), So their activity advanced and their numbers increased by leaps and bounds. In a few weeks’ time the three thousand had increased to five thousand, not counting women and children. (That only ‘the number of the ‘men’ is given in Acts 4:4 is natural in a Jewish setting; it was not until later that the truth began to dawn that in a *Christian* community a woman counts for as much as a man.)



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**3. Its administration.** In the earliest days of its existence the Church of Jerusalem appears to have been administered by the apostles, who had charge not only of the teaching and preaching ministry but also of the receipt and distribution of the property placed by members in the common pool. Before long, however, this last responsibility threatened to encroach unwarrantably on the primary apostolic duties, and it was accordingly delegated to seven almoners selected for

this purpose by the general membership of the Church. Their appointment was evidently of short duration, for one of them, Stephen, was martyred, and in the campaign of repression which immediately followed his martyrdom the others, with the Hellenistic group in the Church to which they all seem to have belonged, were dispersed.

From the middle forties onwards we can discern a radical change in the pattern of Church administration at Jerusalem. The leadership of the apostles is not set aside, but that leadership is exercised now over the expanding area of Christianity, and the local affairs of the Jerusalem Church are handled by a body of elders. How many elders there were is nowhere stated, but if their institution was modelled on that of the Jewish Sanhedrin, there may well have been seventy of them. Seventy would not be too large a number for the effective administration of a community numbering tens of thousands according to Acts 21:20. The body of elders carried out its responsibilities under the general superintendence of James, the Lord's brother. His position as *primus inter pares* is suggested in Acts 12:17; 15:13 ff.; 21:18 ff.; and it is noteworthy that when Paul in Gal. 2:9 lists him along with Peter and John among the 'pillars' of the Jerusalem Church, it is James who is named first.

No matter in whose hands the administration was, however, and no matter by what name the governing body might be called, regular government was recognized from the first to be requisite for the well-being of the Church. The alternative to government in Church as in state, is anarchy

**4. Its development.** At the beginning of Acts 6 we are introduced to a twofold grouping in the Jerusalem Church for which the preceding chapters have not prepared us. The reason is, perhaps, that from Chapter 6 to Chapter 8, Luke is drawing upon a source of information which was not available to him for the earlier part of his narrative. That

his informant for this section of his history was Philip is a suggestion that has commended itself to many. At any rate, here we are told that the Jerusalem Church comprised both Hebrews and Hellenists. The precise significance of these, two terms has been much disputed. It is probable, however, that the 'Hebrews' were those who belonged to Palestinian families and spoke Hebrew or Aramaic, while the 'Hellenists' 'Grecians' in A.V. were related to the Jewish communities in the lands of



the Greek-speaking dispersion and spoke Greek. (it was exceptional for Jews in the Greek-speaking lands to continue to live as 'Hebrews', as Paul and his parents evidently did, according to 2 Cor. 11:22 and Phil. 3:5; Paul's parents, Roman citizens though they here as well as residents in Tarsus, maintained their Palestinian associations and sent their son to be educated in Jerusalem.)

When tension developed between the two groups because of the impression that the Hebrew widows were receiving a larger slice of the communal cake than those of the Hellenists, it is noteworthy that the seven almoners appointed to take charge of the allocation of the daily dole were all Hellenists, to judge by their names. Their gifts were not purely organizational, for one of them, Stephen, displayed exceptional ability as an Old Testament expositor, while another, Philip, was an effective evangelist. Stephen was put on trial before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem for blasphemy (on charges remarkably similar to these on which the same court, some three years previously, had attempted to procure a conviction against our Lord); his defence was judged to confirm the accusation rather than refute it, and he suffered the capital penalty. In the following persecution and dispersion of Jerusalem Christians it was naturally the Hellenists, the group to which Stephen belonged, that suffered most.

Two things happened as a result of this persecution and dispersion. One was the vigorous propagation of the gospel in the provinces adjoining Judaea, and eventually the launching of a programme of active Gentile evangelization. It was as a direct sequel to the persecution that some Hellenistic believers of Cypriot and Cyrenaean extraction came to Syrian Antioch and began to preach the gospel to Gentiles there. The Church of Antioch was, almost from the outset, a predominantly Gentile Church, and soon became the metropolis of the Gentile mission. For the cause of Christianity in general, the persecution which followed Stephen's death was an excellent thing. For the Church of Jerusalem, it was not so good.

With the dispersion of its Hellenist members, the Jerusalem Church was predominantly 'Hebrew' in its composition. Among those Hebrews were converts from the Pharisees, who unlike Paul took most of their Pharisaic outlook into the Church. 'A great many of the priests were obedient to the faith' (Acts 6:7) and they may have brought another kind of traditionalism with them into the new community. If the Gentile mission was a congenial task for the Hellenists, many of the Hebrews at home in Jerusalem viewed it with deep misgivings.

Even if we think the Hebrews were wrong, we should try to understand their point of view. They knew the depravity of the pagan world; the description which Paul gives of it in Rom. 10:18-31 was a commonplace in Jewish polemic against paganism; if people from this corrupt environment were to be welcomed into the Christian brotherhood, they believed, the most stringent conditions must be imposed on them. Otherwise the time would speedily come when there would be more Gentile Christians than Jewish Christians, and there would be a steep decline in the ethical standards of Christianity. To welcome Gentiles who confessed Jesus as Lord and received baptism in His Name was not enough; they must be required to keep the Jewish law, and as a token of their sincere undertaking to keep it they must accept circumcision.

We who have learned the principles of Christian liberty from Paul understand at once that this attitude really undermined the foundation of the gospel. But the people who adopted this attitude did not see it that way; they thought they were safeguarding the purity of the gospel. It says much for the wisdom of the leaders of a Church in which this viewpoint had many supporters that, when the Council of Jerusalem was convened to consider the terms of Gentile admission to the Christian fellowship, it was the 'evangelical' view that prevailed. The conditions stipulated in the apostolic decree (Acts 15:28 f.) had to do, not with the basis of the gospel or the terms of Church membership, but with the facilitating of social fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians.





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It is very probable that James's moderating influence carried the verdict of many who tended to take a more legalist position. Indeed, with James's hand on the helm during the next fifteen years or thereby the Jerusalem Church was guided very wisely. But even with James in that position of leadership, there were thorough-going legalists in the Jerusalem Church who tried to undo the spirit of the apostolic decree by going to the Gentile mission-field themselves and imposing their

viewpoint on the Gentile converts. Now much trouble these self-commissioned messengers gave Paul may be gauged from his epistles—'sham apostles', he calls them, 'crooked in all their practices, masquerading as apostles of Christ' (2 Cor 11:13 NEB).

James and Paul, however, maintained relations of mutual respect. James was one of the Jerusalem leaders who recognized Paul's call to evangelize the Gentiles, and when in AD. 57 Paul and the delegates from the Gentile Churches came to Jerusalem with gifts for the mother-Church, they received a cordial welcome from James and his fellow-elders. But in order to conciliate the 'zealots for the law' in the Jerusalem Church who were ready to believe the worst of Paul and all his activities, James and his colleagues made the well-intentioned but probably ill-conceived suggestion that Paul should take part publicly in a temple ceremony—a suggestion which led directly to his arrest and imprisonment, and ultimate dispatch to Rome.

**5. Its disappearance.** It is not recorded that the Jerusalem Church or its leaders exerted themselves in Paul's behalf when he was arrested. They probably thought that his removal from Jerusalem under armed guard was all to the good; there was usually trouble when Paul came to Jerusalem, in his absence they got along tolerably well with the authorities; James enjoyed such respect among the people because of his piety that the authorities dared not take action against him or his followers.

In A.D. 62, however, one high priest, more daring than most, seized the opportunity of an interregnum in the Roman procuratorship of Judaea following on the sudden death of Festus to prosecute a number of people of whom he disapproved. Among these was James, who was stoned to death. This action shocked many of the Jews of the city, who feared that disaster would befall it after the removal of one who had so constantly interceded for its welfare. But if it shocked the populace at large, it demoralized the Church which James had guided so judiciously. They could find no successor of comparable calibre.

When the Jewish revolt against Rome broke out four years later, the Jerusalem Church left the city and went into dispersion. According to the fourth century historian Eusebius, they received an oracle some time before the fighting began charging them to leave the doomed city of Jerusalem and migrate to Pella. Pella beyond the Jordan was one of the cities of the Decapolis it was probably not to the city of Pella itself that the Jerusalem Church migrated, but to the surrounding countryside which belonged to that city, as well as to other parts of Transjordan especially less frequented parts. The flight of the mother Church to the wilderness and her preservation there may be reflected in the language of Rev. 12:14.

In dispersion these believers continued to call themselves the Church of Jerusalem, and their successive leaders were drawn for several decades from relatives of James, members of the holy family. They were disowned as apostates by orthodox Jews, and increasingly disowned as heretics by orthodox Christians, although they thought of themselves as forming a bridge between these two bodies, conserving all that was best in both. They lingered on in Transjordan and Egypt until the seventh century, when those who had not already been absorbed by Jewish or Christian orthodoxy lost their identity in the overflowing tide of Islam.

## LESSONS FROM THE JERUSALEM CHURCH

Why did a Church which started with such unprecedented promise come to such an inglorious and ineffective end? And what lessons does its record contain for Churches today? It is 'always a precarious undertaking to discern and apply the lessons of history, especially when we have to make a mental transference from the conditions of the Near East in the first century to those of the western world in the twentieth. We shall certainly learn nothing from the Jerusalem Christians if we sit in judgment on them from our detached vantage-point, enjoying as we do all the benefits of hindsight. If we try to sympathise with them in their situation we may more easily see how they went wrong and be preserved from the same mistakes ourselves.

**(1) *The danger of cultural uniformity.*** When the Jerusalem Church embraced both Hebrews and Hellenists, as it did in its earliest days, its membership was diversified and it made an impact on the surrounding community. It is plain that Stephen's viewpoint did not coincide exactly with that of those members of the Church who continued to attend the temple services.

But there was room in one local fellowship for Stephen and those who thought like him, on the one hand, and for the stricter and more traditional Jewish Christians, on the other. After the dispersion of the Hellenists the membership of the Jerusalem Church tended to become increasingly uniform in character and outlook. Uniformity is not a healthy thing for any Church, whether it be social or theological uniformity. Within the biblical limits of Christian faith and life there is room for a wide and vigorous diversity, which is good for the fellowship itself and good for its witness.

**(2) *The danger off 'safety first'.*** It was an odd occasion in the history of an adventurous people like the English when a prime minister went to the country on a slogan of 'safety first'. It is even odder when the spirit of this slogan manifests itself among the followers of One who announced that anyone who wished to be His disciple must be prepared to shoulder a cross. Yet it is a spirit that manifested itself in one way in the Jerusalem

An aerial photograph of Jerusalem, showing the Temple Mount and surrounding city walls. The image is overlaid with a large, semi-transparent telephone handset icon in the bottom right corner.

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Church, and has manifested itself in other ways in other Churches, These Jerusalem Christians had a great heritage, and they were resolved to keep it pure. In order to do this, they thought it necessary to set up very strict conditions for admission to their fellowship. They deplored the laxity of a man like Paul—a man who, with his Pharisaic upbringing, ought to have known better—in making it so easy for Gentile sinners to become Church members simply by confessing Jesus as Lord

and accepting baptism in His name. And Paul's own correspondence makes it clear—that they could point to the behavior of some of those Gentile converts of his as awful warnings of the sort of thing they lead in mind. The heritage and the fellowship must at all costs be kept pure—no risks could be allowed in this regard; and so their attitude to the Gentile mission became more and more aloof and suspicious, not to say positively hostile,

Yet Paul himself was a Jew, with a passionate concern for righteousness and purity. All the same he saw that righteousness and purity could not be best conserved by setting a hedge around them, but rather by spreading them abroad in the preaching of the gospel and the inculcating of the law of Christ.

Is there in some places a present day counterpart to the attitude of the first-century Jerusalem Church in the insistence on the necessity of 'preserving our distinctive testimony'? If the testimony is a good one, the best thing to do with it is not to 'preserve' it by hedging it around, but to bear witness to it far and wide.

**(3) The danger of legalism.** By legalism is not necessarily meant the admixture of legal works with the gospel of grace which makes the gospel no gospel at all. There was indeed an element of this sort of thing in the Jerusalem Church, but it was disowned by the responsible leaders. What is meant rather is the tendency to make rules and regulations for people's lives, instead of enjoying the new freedom of the Spirit which is the birthright of all those who have come of age in Christ. Such rules and regulations may be explicit, and that is burdensome enough; but when they are explicit they are available for consideration and criticism.

More often they are unwritten, and all the more oppressive for that. It is easy to understand how many of the Jerusalem Christians, especially those who had associations with the Pharisees, would be inclined to develop a new 'tradition of the elders' to replace the old one.

They did not have the New Testament alongside the Old in those days, but some of their successors in later generations have tended to treat the New Testament in a wooden and unimaginative way, much as the Pharisees treated the Old Testament—that is to say, they have treated it as a book of rules rather than as the living word of God. I am a little disturbed at times when I am invited to supply a straight forward exegesis of say Paul's observations on women's head gear because I suspect that my questioners will try to impose that exegesis as law on a situation vastly different from the cultural setting of the eastern Mediterranean in the first century A.D. It is more difficult to stop and ask a what is the fundamental principle involved in the passage in question, and how that fundamental principle can best be applied to the changed situation of our



day, more difficult, but absolutely necessary. Nor is it a revolutionary thing to say so. The Editors of *Echoes of Service* thirty-five years ago were men of impeccable orthodoxy (I do not mean that their successors today are any less so!) but they recorded their observation that in the twentieth century 'the missionary finds himself in circumstances very different from those disclosed in the New Testament' and drew certain practical conclusions from that undeniable fact. The principles of the New Testament are of abiding validity, but their application to changing situations may vary, and it is the duty of those who, being led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God to discover how best they may be applied in this or that part of the world today.

**(4) *The danger of exclusivism.*** Many years ago I heard E.H. Broadbent speak on the fold and the flock in John 10. He pointed out that the sheep in the fold are kept together by the surrounding walls while the sheep of a flock are kept together by the shepherd. Moreover, the number of sheep that any fold can contain is limited, while there was nothing to hinder the sheep which the good Shepherd led out of the fold having their number increased by the adherence of those 'other sheep' that had never belonged to the original fold. But, he went on, developing the parable, some of the sheep argued that in spite of the care and devotion of their Shepherd, they would feel safer if they had walls around them, and so they started to build some. But, said Mr. Broadbent, 'sheep are not good builders.' Some of the walls they built were built were effective enough in a way, but so restricted that they shut most of the flock out; there were other walls, on the contrary, which were comprehensive enough, but so badly constructed that they let several wolves in too, with predictable consequences. The moral is that the people of Christ need no walls to keep them together. We may learn valuable lessons from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, but Nehemiah's wall is not a model for Churches to follow.

Many members of the Jerusalem Church, however, imbued with the principles laid down by Ezra and Nehemiah, seem as time went on to have become increasingly concerned with ways and means of keeping wrong type out. It was not so in the beginning, then the presence of God's holiness among the believers was so manifest that 'none of the rest dared join them' Acts 5:13. There is a certain plausibility about the affirm that 'separation from evil is God's principle of unity', but it is not really so; God's principle of unity is positive, not negative; it is the principle of unity in Christ; and separation from evil is a corollary of the principle, not the principle itself. If, instead of harboring suspicion of the Gentile mission those Jerusalem Christians had recognized that this was Israel's distinctive contribution to the world, and they themselves into it wholeheartedly, their latter end might have been different from what it was.

Whether the Epistle to the Hebrews was sent to the Jerusalem Church or to some other company of Jewish believers, one of its closing admonitions is very relevant here. 'Therefore let us go forth to Hire outside the camp, bearing abuse for Him' (Heb. 13:13). To remain psychologically insulated within the 'camp', reluctant to sever the last links with the old order, was a natural reaction, but a fatal one. Outside lay the teeming Gentile world with its need; outside was Christ Himself, leading His servants forth into all the world. The future lay with those who left an old order which had outlived its usefulness and went out, not knowing whither they went, except that they knew themselves to be following Christ in His conquering advance.

New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good uncouth: They mast upward still and onward  
Who would keep abreast of truth.

Prof. F.F. Bruce, "The Church of Jerusalem," *Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Journal* 4  
(April 1964): 5-14.

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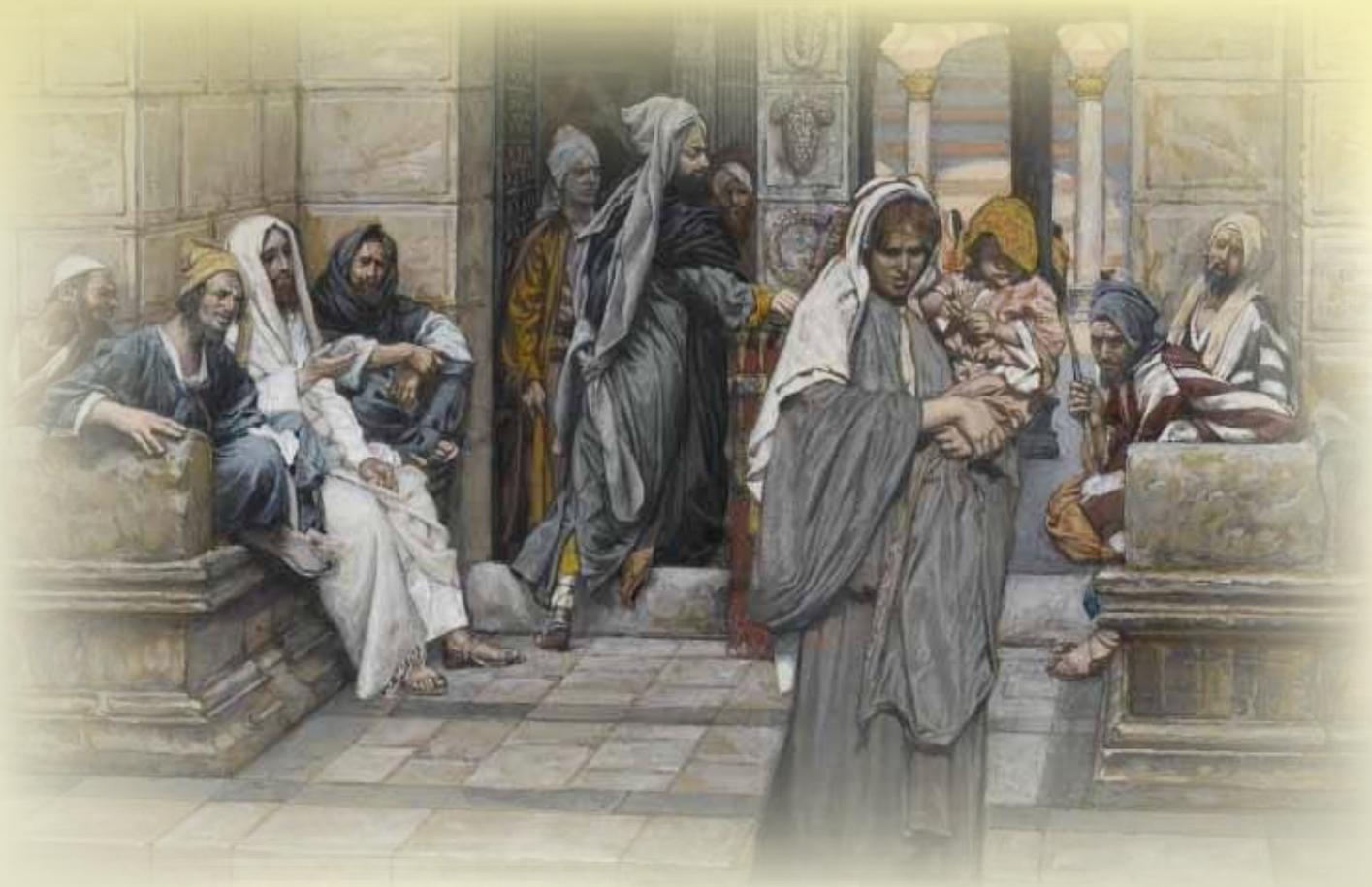


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## "ALMANAH" - THE ORDER OF WIDOWS

Many people occupy the position and office of the Deacon and have no clue as to the significance of what they read in Acts 6:1-6. It begins with understanding Paul's instructions to Timothy about the care of the widow who is a widow indeed. This pericope of Scripture is laden with cultural history and understanding. It reads:

3 [Always] treat with great consideration and give aid to those who are truly widowed (solitary and without support). 4 But if a **widow** has children or grandchildren, see to it that these are first made to understand that it is their religious duty [to defray their natural obligation to those] at home, and make return to their parents or grandparents [for all their care by contributing to their maintenance], for this is acceptable in the sight of God. 5 Now [a **woman**] who is a **real widow** and is left entirely alone and desolate has fixed her hope on God and perseveres in supplications and prayers night and day, 6 Whereas she who lives in pleasure and self-gratification [giving herself up to luxury and self-indulgence] is dead even while she [still] lives. 7 Charge [the people] thus, so that they may be without reproach and blameless. 8 If anyone fails to provide for his relatives, and especially for those of his own family, he has disowned the faith [by failing to accompany it with fruits] and is worse than an unbeliever [who performs his obligation in these matters]. 9 Let no one be put on the **roll of widows** [who are to receive Church support] who is under sixty years of age or who has been the wife of more than one man; 10 And she must have a reputation for good deeds, as one who has brought up children, who has practiced hospitality to strangers [of the brotherhood], washed the feet of the saints, helped to relieve the distressed, [and] devoted herself diligently to doing good in every way. 11 **But refuse** [to enroll on this list the] **younger widows**, for when they become restive and their natural desires grow strong, they withdraw themselves against Christ [and] wish to marry [again]. 12 And so they incur condemnation for having set aside and slighted their previous pledge. 13 Moreover, as they



*go about from house to house, they learn to be idlers, and not only idlers, but gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say and talking of things they should not mention. 14 So I would have younger [widows] marry, bear children, guide the household, [and] not give opponents of the faith occasion for slander or reproach. 15 For already some [widows] have turned aside after Satan. 16 If any believing woman or believing man has [relatives or persons in the household who are] widows, let him relieve them; let the Church not be burdened [with them], so that it may [be free to] assist those who are truly widows (those who are all alone and are dependent). 1 Timothy 5:3-16 Amplified Bible.*

We begin this lesson with an article written by a social scientist who has studied this subject intensively; attempting to be used by God to bring the truth of this demographic population to light in the dense fog of 20th century prejudices, apathy and cultural lenses. [This article was written by Dr. M. Kaveny and it featured the ORDER OF WIDOWS IN THE CHRISTIAN Church.](#) Its location can be found in the following reference - Notre Dame Law School, University of Notre Dame, Box R, Notre Dame, IN 46556, USA. [m.cathleen.kaveny.1@nd.edu](mailto:m.cathleen.kaveny.1@nd.edu).

What is interesting to our conversation is the fact that Dr. Kaveny's article argues that the early Christian "order of widows" provides a fruitful model for Christian ethicists struggling to address the medical and social problems of elderly women today. After outlining the precarious state of the "ALMANAH"--or widow--in biblical times, it describes the emergence of the order of widows in the early Church. Turning to the contemporary situation, it argues that demographics both in the United States and around the globe suggest that meeting the needs of elderly women will become an enormous challenge in the years to come.

From her article and her research, she illustrates how the order of widows illustrates a three-fold conception of solidarity that has immediate implications today, and which form the backbone of understanding the implications and gravity of such a ministry. That conception of solidarity encourages us:

1. To identify the unique medical needs of elderly women (e.g., osteoporosis);
2. To find ways of overcoming their societal isolation, which can increase their risk of medical and psychological problems; and
3. To develop strategies for enabling them to remain contributing members of the community for as long as possible.

This points to the role of the Deacons in Church of today based on the climate, the culture and the contextual direction given to them by the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 6. It also takes us back to the necessity and the gravity and care that a ministry of this type demands. This ministry is not an aside or an auxiliary ministry, but a main focal point in the edification of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Author's Note: [Feel free to look up Dr. Kaveny's article and read that and more information she has done in studying the Biblical connection to the ministry to the "ALMANAH" in the Bible and the same ministry intended for the "ALMANAH" of today. This lets us know that the ministry directives in Acts chapter 6 are not outdated, but rather need to be rekindled and reprioritized as its own major, full-time mission.](#)

But for more than just a cursory look at what it means to be a widow in Jewish New Testament culture, let's take an in-depth look at what it meant to be a "widow" in Biblical times period. There were other specialized groups within the early Church; and others who, being away from home, had special needs. Have you ever wondered why God set them apart first and foremost? The answer is based in History and in God's view of the definition of "widows" according to Jewish tradition.

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After reading this information, now you may understand why God singled out this “specialized” group for care and nurture in a newly forming organism called the Church; and why God commissioned, through the Apostles, that a special set of people take unique care and diligence in providing ministry to them.

## THE STATE AND DEFINITION OF THE “ALMANAH” IN BIBLICAL TIMES

And oppress not the almanah, nor the yetomim, the ger, nor the aniyim; and let none of you imagine ra’ah against his brother in your lev. Zechariah 7:10 Orthodox Jewish Bible (OJB)

And oppress not the almanah, nor the yetomim, the ger, nor the aniyim; and let none of you imagine ra’ah against his brother in your lev. Zechariah 7:10 Amplified Bible (AMP)

The following information has been secured from the Jewish source located at [Encyclopaedia Judaica](#). © 2008 The Gale Group. It gives a comprehensive and in depth study on the position of the “widow” or the **Almanah** in Biblical times, and how the Word of God and Jewish law regarded them and their care. This gives direct information and understanding when it comes to the scenario that we find present in **Acts 6:1-6** and its importance. It also explains why God was directly concerned about and directed that the Church take care of the “**ALMANAH**” in the New Testament Church even at its inception.

The Hebrew substantive “**ALMANAH**,” usually translated “widow,” often does not simply denote a woman whose husband is dead, but rather a once-married woman who has no means of financial support, and is therefore in need of special legal protection. This word is pronounced [**al-maw-naw’**] and it refers to a widow; also a desolate place:--desolate house (palace), widow.

Many widows would fall into such a classification because of their husbands’ death, but others who could rely on the support of a new husband (by levirate marriage or otherwise), an adult son, or a father-in-law, would not. Thus, the **ALMANOT** as a class in Israelite society in biblical times were often considered as comprising not merely women whose husbands had died but, rather, once-married women who no longer had any means of financial support.

Such being the case, many famous biblical widows (e.g., Ruth, Orpah, and Naomi (**Ruth chapter 1–4**); Abigail (**I Samuel chapter 25**); Bath-Sheba (**II Samuel chapter 11**), will not be discussed in this article. Since they are never referred to as **ALMANOT**, there is doubt as to whether they were regarded as such. All of them must have had some means of financial support. Only women who are specifically called **ALMANAH** will be dealt with here.

## THE ALMANAH IN EARLY LEGAL CODES

The main evidence for the above definition of the Hebrew word **ALMANOT** comes from several sections of the Middle Assyrian Laws, where the Akkadian etymological equivalent of **ALMANAH**, **ALMATTU**, denotes the woman in question:

[If], while a woman is still living in her father’s house, her husband died and she has sons [she shall live where she chooses in] a house of theirs. [If] she has no [son, her father-in-law shall marry her to the son] of his choice... or if he wishes, he may give her in marriage to her father-in-law. If her husband and her father-in-law

are both dead and she has no son [only then] has she the status of a woman without male support (**almattu**); she may go wherever she pleases (par. 33; in: Pritchard, Texts, 182).

When a woman has been given [in marriage] and the enemy has captured her husband, if she has no father-in-law and no son, she shall remain for two years [at her husband's estate]. During those two years, if she has not sufficient to live on, she shall come forward and [so] declare; she shall become a ward of the palace; ...She will stay for two years [at her husband's estate] and then she may live with the husband she chooses. They [the judges] will draw up a document for her [stating she is] a woman without male support (**ALMATTU**). If in later days, her missing husband has returned home, he may take back his wife who was married to an outsider... (par. 45; in: Pritchard, Texts, 184; cf. also pars. 28, 34, in: Pritchard, Texts, 182, 183) and Hammurapi Law Code, par. 177 (in: Pritchard, Texts, 174)).

In all the Akkadian codes, women whose husbands have died, but who do have some means of support, are not given any particular title and are never called **ALMATTU** (e.g., Middle Assyrian Laws, par. 46). According to G.R. Driver, "these considerations suggest that a woman became an **ALMATTU** only when there is no one with a duty to support her" (in: Driver and Miles, The Assyrian Laws, in bibl., 225). Further evidence for this definition of **ALMATTU** is found in the usage of the Akkadian *almānūtu*, "lack of support by a male householder" (abstract formation of *almattu*): *bēl bīti imātma bītu šū almānūtam illak*, "The owner of the house will die, and that house will have no male to support it" (A. Boissier, Documents assyriens relatifs aux presages (1894–99), 5:2; cf. CAD, vol. 1, pt. 1 (1964), 362).



There are only a few cases in the biblical law codes where **ALMANAH** does not agree with the definition of the Akkadian *almattu*. These are the laws concerning the ineligibility of the **ALMANAH** to become the wife of the high priest (**Leviticus 21:14**) or, unless she is the widow of a priest, to become the wife of any priest (**Ezekiel 44:22**; the rabbis, however, by artificial exegesis, make this verse mean the same thing as **Leviticus 21:14** – ordinary priests are not prohibited from marrying any widow): the right of the priest's daughter to return to her father's house and partake

of **terumah** should she become an **ALMANAH** (**Leviticus 22:13**), and the vow of the **ALMANAH** being legally binding on her (**Numbers 30:10**). In these cases, but only in these, **ALMANAH** must be translated as "widow." Note that in each of these cases the term **ALMANAH** is juxtaposed to terms having to do with marital status – **BETULAH**, "unmarried woman" (Lev. 21:13, Ezekiel 44:22) and **gerushah**, "divorced woman" (**Leviticus 22:13**; **Numbers 30:10**; cf. **Leviticus 22:12**).

Elsewhere, there is a general pronouncement against the mistreatment of the **ALMANAH** (**Exodus 22:21**) and there



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are many other cases, where the humanitarian nature of the author of Deuteronomy (cf. Weinfeld, in bibl.) caused him to prescribe many new laws concerning the protection of the GER, “stranger,” YATOM, “fatherless,” ALMANAH, and levite. In these cases, ALMANOT must refer to “women once-married who no longer have any means of financial support.” One may not keep the garment of the ALMANAH as a pledge (Deuteronomy 24:17), nor turn back and pick up dropped sheaves during

harvest time (Deuteronomy 24:19), dropped fruit from olive trees (Deuteronomy 24:20), or grapes that have fallen off the vine (Deuteronomy 24:21); for these must go to the ALMANAH and the other classes mentioned above. These socially disadvantaged groups must be permitted to partake of the third-year tithes (Deuteronomy 14:29; 26:12, 13), the freewill contributions made on the occasion of Shavu’ot (Deuteronomy 16:11), and to rejoice during Sukkot (Deuteronomy 16:14).

There is also a curse against anyone who would subvert the legal rights of these disadvantaged groups (Deuteronomy 27:19), and God is described as the protector of the rights of these classes (Deuteronomy 10:18). It should also be mentioned that some scholars claim that there is evidence in the Ugaritic texts for the giving of a special dispensation to the almanot during time of war.

### ALMANAH AS THE TITLE OF INDIVIDUALS

The earliest and by far the most famous biblical personage given the title of ALMANAH was Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah (Genesis chapter 38). When Judah’s son Er died, leaving Tamar a childless widow, Judah told Onan, his secondborn, to live with Tamar as husband and wife so as to beget an offspring for his dead brother (see Deuteronomy 25:5–10). Onan, bearing in mind the fact that the offspring, whom he would have to bring up, would not count as his, practiced only coitus interruptus with her (Genesis 38:9). For this, God punished him with death, and the responsibility passed on to the third and youngest of the three sons, Shelah.

However, Judah, fearing that marriage to Tamar was unlucky, claimed that Shelah was too young to fulfill his duty and sent Tamar away to live in the house of her own father “as an almanah” (Genesis 38:11). Given paragraph 33 of the Middle Assyrian Law Code quoted above, it is interesting to note that Tamar was called an ALMANAH only when Judah, her father-in-law, sent her out of his house. It might reasonably be asked whether Tamar would have been called an ALMANAH at all had she remained in the house of her father-in-law.

When Shelah grew up and Judah still did not give him to her as a husband, she resorted to the following ruse. At a time when Judah was likely to be attracted by a sexual opportunity, she removed “her garments of almanah-hood,” i.e., “the clothes of her status as ALMANAH,” and sat down, veiled, in a spot where she knew that Judah was to pass and where a woman sitting alone was likely to be taken for a prostitute. Judah, not recognizing her because of her veil, became her customer. When he later learned that his daughter-in-law was pregnant, Judah at first ordered that she be burned (Genesis 38:24). When Tamar, however, privately proved to him that he was the father of her child, he publicly declared that not she but he was at fault, since her conception through him was justified by his failure to give her to Shelah.

The legal background of the episode is not only Deuteronomy 25:5. (levirate marriage), but also the Middle Assyrian Laws referred to above, for only the latter provides evidence that the father-in-law has the privilege of deciding to which of his surviving sons the widow is to be given or even of taking her for himself. Elsewhere, the woman hired by Joab to play the part of an almanah so as to induce David to take back his son Absalom (II Samuel 14:1) claims (verse 5): “I am an almanah. My husband died.” Both Hiram (I Kings 7:14) and Jeroboam I (I Kings 11:26) are designated as sons of an ALMANAH. With respect to the latter, who was responsible for the

splitting of the United Monarchy, there is a very interesting, somewhat parallel, Akkadian omen, which occurs many times: mār almattim kussi'am isabbat. "The son of an almattum will seize the throne" (A. Goetze, *Old Babylonian Omen Texts*; Yale Oriental Series, 10 (1947), 41:30).

Finally, Elijah is sent by a divine call to the house of an **ALMANAH** whose son he later revives (**I Kings 17**). This woman is described as having no means of livelihood, living in abject poverty, and being on the verge of starvation (**I Kings 17:12**). Clearly, she is not merely a widow, but rather "a woman once married who no longer has the means of financial support."

### THE ALMANAH AS A SOCIALLY DEPRIVED CLASS WHICH MUST BE PROTECTED

From the time of Urukagina of Lagash (c. 2400 B.C.E.), there is recorded evidence concerning the special responsibility of the Mesopotamian king to protect socially disadvantaged groups. In law codes, both in the prologue of Ur-Nammu (c. 2100 B.C.E.) and the epilogue of Hammurapi (c. 1800 B.C.E.), the king claims to have fulfilled this obligation. Hammurapi, for example, states that he wrote his laws:

In order that the mighty shall not wrong the weak,  
In order to provide justice for the homeless girl  
and the once married woman without financial support (Epilogue, XXV b:59–62).

Also the two Ugaritic kings mentioned in the epics are spoken of as either having fulfilled or not fulfilled this responsibility. In the Keret epic, King Keret's son twice accuses him of neglecting his duties:

You do not judge the cause of the almnt,  
Nor adjudicate the case of the wretched (II Keret 6:33–34; cf. 45–48)  
You feed not the fatherless before you, Nor the almant behind your back (II Keret 6:48–50)

The Hebrew prophets often spoke out against the upper-class exploitation of the **ALMANAH** and the other disadvantaged social groups. These protests can be found in the words of First Isaiah (e.g., 1:17, 23; 10:2), Jeremiah (e.g., 7:6, 22:3), Ezekiel (e.g., 22:7), Zechariah (7:10), and Malachi (3:5). Perhaps the clearest parallels to the Ugaritic and Mesopotamian evidence quoted above, however, are those biblical passages which speak of God as the protector of these disadvantaged classes:

Father of the fatherless, and judge of the **almanot** is God in his holy abode.  
Ps. 68:6; 146:9

### THE TERM "ALMANAH" AS A DESCRIPTION OF A CITY

The above definition of **ALMANAH** is indirectly supported by those biblical passages in which cities are called **ALMANAH** (**Isaiah 47:8, 9; 54:4; Jeremiah 51:5; Lamentations 1:1**). In those passages where the city involved is Israel (**Isaiah 54:4; Jeremiah 51:5; Lamentations 1:1**), the traditional interpretation has always been to translate **ALMANAH** as some kind of temporary widow whom God has left for the time being. This image would correspond with the divorce imagery of Hosea concerning God and Israel (**Hosea chapters 1–3**).

However, aside from the problem of understanding what a "temporary widow" is (**Lamentations 1:1**), there is also the much more severe problem of understanding how this imagery could apply to Babylon (**Isaiah 47:8, 9**). However, if **ALMANAH** is understood as referring to a city with no means of independent support, i.e., a vassal or tributary nation, all cases of this metaphor then make sense. In the case of



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Babylon, the nation which was once “mistress of kingdoms” (Isaiah 47:5, 7) will now become like an **ALMANAH**.

Thus, according to this interpretation, “mistress of kingdoms” and **ALMANAH** are exact opposites and Babylon’s punishment becomes much more fitting – she who once subjugated many nations will now become subjugated herself. In the case of Israel becoming an **ALMANAH**, in **Lamentations 1:1** this

interpretation is further corroborated by the parallelism in that verse: “She has become like an **ALMANAH** // She has become like a tributary nation.”

## PERSONAL STATUS OF THE ALMANAH

A widow is generally free to marry any man except a high priest (**Leviticus 21:14**); if she marries the latter she becomes a **ḥalalah**. For the prohibitions imposed upon her in consequence of her previous marriage, see **Prohibited \*Marriages**, and for the law prohibiting the widow of a childless brother to marry without prior \*levirate marriage or **ḥalīzah**.

## A NECESSARY BRIDGE TO UNDERSTAND THE RIGHTS OF THE ALMANAH

Before we go on, we need to stop and share clarifying information. In order to understand the next section of our text, we need to define a few terms for you. The first is the word, **KETUBBAH**.

A **ketubah** (Hebrew: הַכְּתוּבָה; “written thing”; pl. ketubot) is a special type of Jewish prenuptial agreement. It is considered an integral part of a traditional Jewish marriage, and outlines the rights and responsibilities of the groom, in relation to the bride. Nevertheless, there is no agreement in modern times as to the monetary worth of the **ketubah**, and its enforceability even in Jewish courts is in question even in theory; in practice it is never enforced.

## HISTORY

The rabbis in ancient times insisted on the marriage couple entering into the **ketubah** as a protection for the wife. It acted as a replacement of the biblical mohar—the price paid by the groom to the bride, or her parents, for the marriage (i.e., the bride price). The **ketubah** became a mechanism whereby the amount due to the wife (the bride-price) came to be paid in the event of the cessation of marriage, either by the death of the husband or divorce. It may be noted that the biblical mohar created a major social problem: many young prospective husbands could not raise the mohar at the time when they would normally be expected to marry. So, to enable these young men to marry, the rabbis, in effect, delayed the time that the amount would be payable, when they would be more likely to have the sum.

The mechanism adopted was to provide for the mohar to be a part of the **ketubah**. It may also be noted that both the mohar and the **ketubah** amounts served the



same purpose: the protection for the wife should her support (either by death or divorce) cease. The only difference between the two systems was the timing of the payment. A modern secular equivalent would be the entitlement to maintenance in the event of divorce. Another function performed by the **ketubah** amount was to provide a disincentive for the husband contemplating divorcing his wife: he would need to have the amount to be able to pay to the wife.

## CONTENT

The content of the **ketubah** is in essence a one-way contract that formalizes the various requirements by Halakha (Jewish law) of a Jewish husband vis à vis his wife. The Jewish husband takes upon himself in the **ketubah** the obligation that he will provide to his wife three major things: clothing, food and conjugal relations,[7] and also that he will pay her a pre-specified amount of cash in the case of a divorce. Thus the content of the **ketubah** essentially dictates security and protection for the woman, and her rights in the marriage. (Conservative Jews often include an additional paragraph, called the Lieberman clause, which stipulates that divorce will be adjudicated by a modern rabbinical court (a beth din) in order to prevent the creation of a chained wife).

## USAGE AND ROLE IN WEDDING CEREMONY

In a traditional Jewish wedding ceremony, the **ketubah** is signed by two witnesses and traditionally read out loud under the chuppah. Close family, friends or distant relatives are invited to witness the **ketubah**, which is considered an honour. The witnesses must be halakhically competent witnesses, and so cannot be a blood relative of the couple. In Orthodox Judaism, women are also not considered to be valid witnesses. The **ketubah** is handed to the bride for safekeeping.

The second term that you need to know is **TAKKANAH**. A **takkanah** (plural takkanot) is a major legislative enactment within halakha (Jewish law), the normative system of Judaism's laws. A takkanah is an enactment which (1) revises an ordinance that no longer satisfies the requirements of the times or circumstances, or which (2), being deduced from a Biblical passage, may be regarded as new. Takkanot were framed even in the time of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, those of unknown origin being ascribed to earlier leaders, and they have been promulgated at all subsequent periods of Jewish history. The term is applied also to the institution provided for in the enactment.

With that, now we can move on to the Rights and Obligations of the Almanah.

## THE RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE ALAMANAH

The widow is entitled to the return of all her property of whatever kind, since her ownership of it is not affected by marriage (see \*Husband and Wife; for the difference in this respect between the different kinds of her property, see \*Dowry). In Jewish law a widow does not inherit her husband (see \*Succession), but she is entitled to her **ketubbah** and the rights due to her by virtue of its provisions, which the husband's heirs must satisfy out of the estate; the most important of these provisions relate to her maintenance. She is entitled to the said rights by virtue of her being the widow, and it is therefore unimportant whether and to what extent she possessed property during the marriage.

Her said rights arise upon marriage by virtue of law: "a man, upon marrying a woman, becomes bound to her in respect of the statutory **ketubbah** ... and her right to be maintained out of his property and to live in his house after his death throughout her widowhood" (Maim. Yad, Ishut 12:1; Sh. Ar., EH 59:1-2); but

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they become due only upon her husband's death, since the ketubbah is "like a debt payable at some future date and will be recoverable only after the husband's death..." (Maim. Yad, Ishut, 16:3; Sh. Ar., EH 93:1). Since the said rights accrue to the widow by virtue of her ketubbah, they do not exist if she has lost her right to the ketubbah.

Inasmuch as the rights of the widow arise upon her marriage and not upon the husband's death, he cannot prejudice them by his will, and any testamentary disposition to the effect that the widow shall not be entitled to her ketubbah or maintenance out of his estate is void (Ket. 68b; Sh. Ar., EH 69:2; 93:3). No express reference need be made to these rights in the ketubbah deed since they arise upon the marriage as a condition laid down by the bet din (tenai bet din), i.e., by virtue of law, although they are based upon her being entitled to a ketubbah (Ket. 52b; Sh. Ar., loc. cit).

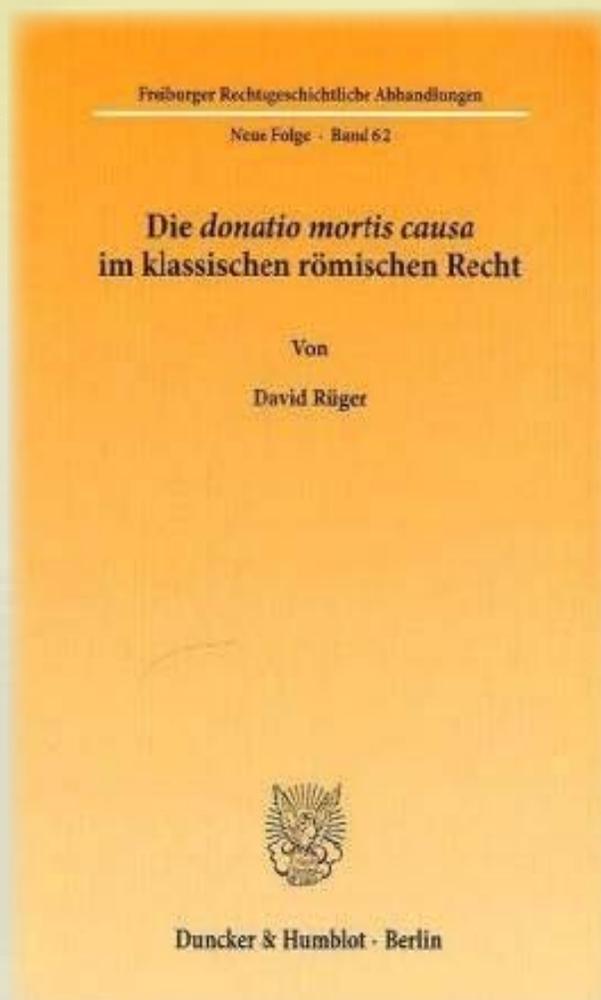
### SATISFACTION OF THE WIDOW'S RIGHTS OUT OF THE ESTATE

According to talmudic law, a widow can enforce her ketubbah and its provisions, including maintenance, only against the immovable property which forms part of the estate (Ket. 81b; Sh. Ar., EH 100:1). However, since the development of trade and the decrease of landholding among Jews led creditors to rely also upon the movables of debtors for repayment of their debts, the geonim ordained that the movable property of the estate should also be attachable for the widow's rights (Tos. Ket. 51a; Rosh to Ket. ch. 6:5; Sh. Ar., EH 100:1). Since the time of Maimonides, it has become customary to include in every ketubbah deed a provision rendering the husband's movable property so attachable, whether acquired at the date of the marriage or to be acquired by him thereafter (Maim. Yad, Ishut, 16:8; see \*Lien).

### SATISFACTION OF THE WIDOW'S RIGHTS AGAINST PURCHASERS

The husband's property being subject to the ketubbah, the widow may, in the event of the estate being insufficient to cover it, follow the property in the hands of the purchasers, i.e., recover the amount of the ketubbah out of immovable property which the husband or his heirs have transferred to others. This remedy, however, is not available with regard to movables so transferred, since, contrary to the case of immovable property, where the purchaser can be required first to find out whether the vendor can indeed transfer it free from all encumbrances, in the case of movables, owing to regulations of furthering commerce (takkanot ha-shuk), that cannot be required lest commercial stability would thereby be impaired (Ket. 51a; Sh. Ar., EH 100:1).

On the other hand, if the husband has transferred his property by way of *donatio mortis causa* the widow is entitled to be satisfied for her ketubbah out of the movable property also, inasmuch as in such a case the property has passed upon death, subject to her rights which accrued to her already in his lifetime (Sh. Ar., ḤM 252:1, EH 100:1, and Rema ad loc.). The rabbis, however, also prescribed that for her maintenance the widow cannot proceed against purchasers (see above) even in respect of immovable property, since the amount to be recovered is not a determinate sum but may vary periodically with her requirements, and a



purchaser cannot know the precise debt for which the property is charged (Git. 48b, 50b and Rashi ad loc.; Sh. Ar., EH 93:20).

On the other hand, as in the case of the ketubbah, the widow here may also recover from property transferred by way of *donatio mortis causa* (Sh. Ar., HM 252:1, EH loc. cit.). The said limitations upon the right of the widow to receive her ketubbah and maintenance from the husband's property which has been transferred to others do not apply if it was transferred fraudulently in order to deprive the widow of it, as "the sages of the Talmud set themselves against anyone who intends to defraud and negate his act" (Resp. Rosh, 78:1 and 3). Accordingly, upon proof that the heirs intend as a means of evasion to dispose of the immovable property of the estate and that her maintenance rights will be prejudiced thereby, she may apply to the court for a prohibitory injunction against them; but she cannot do so in regard to movable property of the estate, since the above-mentioned GEONIC regulation does not extend to such property (Yad, Ishut, 18:11–13 and Maggid Mishneh thereto; Sh. Ar., EH 93:21).

## THE WIDOW'S MAINTENANCE

The widow is generally entitled to receive the same maintenance as she was entitled to receive during the husband's lifetime. The same rules therefore apply, e.g., maintenance will include clothing, residence, medical expenses, use of household articles, and the like. Similarly, the principle also applies that "she rises with him but does not descend with him," i.e., that she is entitled to the same standard of maintenance she was entitled to during her late husband's lifetime (Ket. 48a and 103a; Sh. Ar., EH 94:1 and 5).

To some extent her said right to maintenance is affected by the very fact of her widowhood, since the personal relationship upon which her rights were based during her husband's lifetime is now absent, and she is now alone, so that her requirements are reduced. For this reason, although entitled to reside in the same apartment in which she lived with her husband, she is no longer entitled to occupy the whole of it if she, being alone, is not in need of it even in order to maintain her social status (Sh. Ar., EH 94:1; Rema ad loc. and commentaries PD 19, pt. 2 (1965), 338).

Similarly, she is not entitled to transfer ownership of the apartment to others nor to let the whole or part of it, since the right of residence is conferred upon her in order to enable her to maintain her social status but not to make a profit (Sh. Ar., loc. cit.). The right of the widow with regard to the apartment is merely to have the use of it; therefore, upon her death, it returns to the heirs of the husband only, and does not form part of her estate (Beit Shemu'el 94, n. 4).

This right of residence is not affected by sale of the apartment by the heirs, and the new owner cannot evict the widow from it (Sh. Ar., EH 94:4). Where the widow is unable to live in the apartment, for instance, if it is destroyed, she is entitled to receive out of the estate an amount necessary for renting another suitable apartment (Heklat Meḥokek 94, nos. 6, 7). If the widow survives with small children of the husband, both boys and girls, and the estate is insufficient to maintain all of them, her right prevails; if, however, the young children surviving with her are either all boys or all girls, they all take equally (Ket. 43a and Tos. ad loc.; note the alternative opinion in Sh. Ar., EH 93:4; see also EH 113:6 regarding the priority of the widow's maintenance to the right of the daughters to their dowry out of the estate, and for the reason for the aforesaid distinction, see Beit Shemu'el and Heklat Meḥokek to EH 93:8–9).



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## THE WIDOW'S CLAIM FOR PAST MAINTENANCE

A widow is entitled to maintenance, also for the time prior to her claim, since there is no reason to assume that she has waived her right to it. This contrasts with the right to maintenance of a wife who is entitled to it only as from the date of claim onward. If the widow has not claimed for a long period – such as when, being a wealthy woman, she delays for

three years or, being poor, she delays for two years – she is presumed to have waived the past maintenance unless the presumption is rebutted by the facts, such as by the fact of her right having been secured by a pledge or mortgage.

## LOOKING AT ACTS 6 THROUGH INFORMED EYES

Information concerning the care of widows in the Church at Jerusalem comes from the account of the first Church problem in the congregation there. Luke's indicates the nature of the difficulty, how the members of the body solved it, and what the effects of the solution were.

### EARLY CONFLICT IN CHRISTIANITY REGARDING WIDOWS

In Acts 6 we get the first sign of internal trouble. The Hebrew widows were being cared for while the Grecian widows were neglected. As we mentioned above, Jews from all over the empire had made pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the great festival of Pentecost and had witnessed the strange, yet supernatural events described by Luke. Many had trusted in Jesus as the promised Messiah and made the decision to stay in Judea rather than make the trek back home (it is possible that these early believers were waiting for the apocalyptic return of Jesus).

#### - HELLENIZED JEWS

Large numbers of Jews lived outside Palestine in the first century. These are the Jews of the Diaspora, the "scattering," or "exile" of the Jews throughout the Greek world - first in 722 BC when the Assyrians declared war and conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, then in 588 BC the Chaldeans conquered the southern kingdom of Judah. The victors in both instances forced the Jews to be relocated, thus diluting their national and cultural strength. Over the next few centuries the Hebrew language was neglected and forgotten by these exiled Jews.



Most diaspora Jews of the first century spoke Greek. In fact, sometime in the third century BC the Jewish Scriptures (Old Testament, OT) were translated from Hebrew into Greek so that these Greek-speaking Jews could hear and understand the Law of Moses. This famous translation is known as the Septuagint (or LXX), a reference to the legendary story that 72 scribes translated the various texts in a 72 day period with a divinely inspired perfection of agreement.

These Jews of the diaspora were referred to as “Hellenized” (“Greek influenced”) by the politically important, Hebrew-speaking Jews of Palestine. Palestinian Jews despised this Hellenization and these Hellenized Jews, believing they had compromised their religion. They could not speak Hebrew, God’s language, nor could they understand the Law of Moses when read in Hebrew. When Hellenized Jews came to Jerusalem they were urged to attend Greek speaking synagogues so they could hear and understand Moses being read. They were not wanted in the Temple. We know that the Jews hated Samaritans, and were not fond of Gentiles. Luke tells us this prejudice found its way into the primitive Church - Hellenized widows were being neglected.

I have had someone ask me a question regarding my use of “Palestinian” Jew, suggesting that the use of “Palestine” was not biblical. This person had found the following information online:

*It is clear, then, that the Bible never uses the term Palestine to refer to the Holy Land as a whole, and that Bible maps that refer to Palestine in the Old or New Testament are, at best, inaccurate, and, at worst, are a conscious denial of the biblical name of Israel.*

“Palestine” is not a biblical term, but was a Greek term used by Aristotle, Plutarch, Herodotus, and Philo to refer to the region that included Judea.

According to Luke, the apostles solve this problem by appointing seven men to new leadership positions. If you look closely you will find that these men are all Hellenized Jews. The apostles apparently realized that the minority class needed representation in the leadership of the Church. In the next chapter we find Stephen (one of the seven Deacons) preaching aggressively against the Jewish leadership and, more importantly, against Temple worship.

Hellenized Jews living outside Judea were forced to find a more spiritualized way for obeying the Law of Moses since they did not have access to the Temple nor to the sacrificial system. This spiritualized Judaism is attested to in the writings of Philo of Alexandria and in the writings of the Qumran community (**The Dead Sea Scrolls**). In the next few chapters of Acts we see these Hellenized Jews taking the gospel to Samaritans, Ethiopians, and other non-Palestinian Jews.

The Great Commission is being extended, but it should be noted that non-Jews continue to be excluded by these Hellenized evangelists (Acts 11:19). It takes a special person to push the infant Church outside the Jewish boundaries - Saul of Tarsus is that person.

In the next few chapters of the book of the Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles we see these Hellenized Jews taking the gospel to Samaritans, Ethiopians, and other non-Palestinian Jews. The Great Commission is being extended, but it should be noted that non-Jews continue to be excluded by these Hellenized evangelists (Acts 11:19). It takes a special person to push the infant Church outside the Jewish boundaries – and that was Saul of Tarsus who we commonly refer to today as Paul.

**Church Growth:** Rapid growth in the size of the congregation in the Church at Jerusalem contributed to the development of the problem recorded in Acts 6. Such is sometimes the case now as then. Luke explains, “In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food” (Acts 6:1). Before he has reported people were added to the Church; now he says the number was multiplied!

**Ethnic Friction:** However, ethnic friction also played a part in the development of the problem in the Church at Jerusalem.



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Again, that is no less true in congregations all over the world today. Jealousies, ill feelings between the “Hebrews” and the “Hellenists” lurked in the background. The Hebraic Jewish believers considered themselves somewhat superior to others. Their place of birth was Palestine. Still today native born Israelis call themselves Sabrah and consider more recent immigrants to the country almost as second-class citizens.

They had continued to speak the mother tongue of Hebrew or Aramiac. Besides, they had remained in the Promised Land while others had migrated elsewhere before returning to the homeland. They likely constituted the majority in the congregation.

On the other hand, the Grecian Jewish converts had likely been born in some country far away where their parents had fled during the great Dispersions of history. They had naturally absorbed the culture of their adopted land and spoke Greek more than Hebrew. Unsanctified human nature considered these people to be inferior to the Sabrah. Being in the minority in the Church at Jerusalem and experiencing a language barrier likely disposed them to be extra-sensitive regarding possible neglect of their widows by the welfare program of the congregation.

**Financial Inequities:** Yet the record does not suggest any paranoia on the part of the Grecian Jews. It appears that financial inequity in distributing such funds caused their complaint. Church leaders offer no denial of their charges of neglect in the proceedings. They could have responded by declaring that, at least, the Church had been following Scripture which shows God’s special concern for widows, orphans, and the poor, as discussed above. They had attended to a genuine need in the congregation. There was no State assistance for widows and they could get no jobs. It is not surprising that Luke took note of this whole affair. After all, in his gospel he mentions widows nine times compared to only three in the other gospels combined.



**Administrative Weakness:** In moving toward a solution to the problem the apostles readily admit another cause. It was that of administrative weaknesses. To their credit they make no attempt to justify themselves nor do they do brand the critics as “troublemakers.” Rather, somewhat apologetically they explain to the congregation that the ministers of the Church had their hands full in attending to prayer and preaching. They said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables” (Acts 6:2b). For them ministerial priorities must remain in the giving of themselves to prayer and teaching the Word.

## THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM

With what was no doubt wisdom from the Lord, the apostles suggested that the best solution to the problem was in refining the organizational structure of the Church. The proposed change would allow others to assist them in the administration of the congregation’s welfare program for widows. Their plan called for the members of the congregation to select seven of the most godly laymen from among themselves. The apostles, then, would assign the daily detailed operation of that ministry to them. The pattern of the work of the Levites who assisted the priests in routine duties at the Tabernacle served as a precedent for the plan.

## THE RESULTS OF THEIR ACTION

Among the results of the solution to the problem was the obvious fact that the widows were more adequately taken care of. Another was that the Word of God grew, continued to spread. Evangelism increased as the number of believers multiplied. For the first time the book of Acts records that even some priests were converted (Acts 6:7b)!

Clarke observes:

“This was one of the greatest miracles wrought by the grace of Christ: that persons so intent on the destruction of Christ, his apostles, and his doctrine, should at last espouse that doctrine is astonishing; and that they who had withstood the evidence of the miracles of Christ should have yielded to the doctrine of his death and resurrection, is worthy of note. And from this we may learn that it is not by miracles (alone) that sinners are to be converted unto God, but by the preaching of Christ dying for their offences, and rising again for their justification” (Adam Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary*, Vol. V [Nashville: Abingdon Press, n. d.], p. 725).

**Paul’s Guidelines on the Responsibilities of Relatives:** The apostle makes clear that the first responsibility for the care of a widow belongs to her family relatives. He writes, “But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God” (1 Timothy 5:4). By doing so they repay their parents for the care they received during infancy, childhood, and youth. There will be more on this later in this presentation.

Further, God is well pleased with what they do. Yet Paul has a word for those who neglect the widow in their family. He says, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (verse 8). Christian standards in caring for widowed relatives must not be lower than those of unbelievers.

Another reason for the family to care for its own widows is so that the Church may better use its funds in helping those who have no family to assist them. The apostle writes, “If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the Church be burdened with them, so that the Church can help those widows who are really in need” (verse 16).

**Congregational Responsibility:** When families take the first responsibility to care for their widows, the Church, then, is more able to care for those who have no such relatives to help them. It can devote its attention to widows who are genuinely destitute, desolate, left entirely alone (verse 5). The congregation must “honor,” give proper recognition to those who are really in need. In this case such “honor” centers on providing financial support. Jesus taught that honoring father and mother includes giving them monetary assistance in old age (Mark 7:10-13).

Paul’s guidelines limit the responsibility of the Church to the care of “believing” widows (1 Timothy 5:5-10). Though a congregation will at times offer some assistance to the needy regardless of their spiritual standing, it can hardly fully support financially all of the widows in its community. Accordingly, the apostle lists requirements for being placed on the permanent welfare role of a Church.

First, to qualify, in addition to being at least sixty years of age (verse 9), a widow must be a believer. She needs to be one

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who “puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help” (verse 5). Unbelieving women were excluded. Of them Paul explains, “The widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives” (verse 6). Instead, widows included on the list need to be living holy lives, above reproach, not subject to just criticism for improper conduct (verse 7). Her reputation must be that of one who has followed good works (verse 10). These include having devotedly brought her children up in the Christian way.

During her productive years she must have herself been given to hospitality by lodging traveling believers. In her world hotels were few and, doubling as houses of prostitution, generally unsuitable for Christians to stay in. In doing so she would have provided the common courtesy of washing their feet.

Further, her personal married life must have been exemplary. She must have been the wife of only one husband (verse 9). Other Scripture makes clear that re-marriage after the loss of a husband in death does not exclude a widow from being placed on the Church welfare roll for widows. Indeed, Paul advocates re-marriage for younger widows later in this passage. Nor is the apostle aiming to curb polyandry, the practice of one woman marrying several husbands, here. The practice was not a part of the Greek, Roman, or Jewish world at the time. Rather, the apostle focuses on the marital history of the widow. She must not have been divorced and have married again while her former husband still lived.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DO NOT PERFORM YOUR VOWS?

### A PASTORAL WARNING AGAINST NOT PERFORMING THE VOW THAT YOU MADE TO GOD

[The following is drafted from the forthcoming publication, “Ain’t No Half-Steppin’”]

While discussing the work of the Christian in the body of Christ, it may be a more serious matter than you once believed. Let’s take a closer look at Christian accountability you will be held to regarding your performance of this task. The word “Accountable” here is an adjective defined in the following way by the Random House Collegiate Dictionary:

**ACCOUNTABLE:** SUBJECT TO THE OBLIGATION TO REPORT, EXPLAIN OR JUSTIFY SOMETHING: RESPONSIBLE; ANSWERABLE.

Keep that definition in mind as we look at God’s view of accountability for His Children. Let’s look again at that parable of the Master giving his servants talents a little more closely, shall we? The points that purpose our conversation are all found right here.

## The Parable of the Talents



*“For it is like a man who was about to take a long journey, and he called his servants together and entrusted them with his property. To one he gave five talents [probably about \$5,000], to another two, to another one—to each in proportion to his own personal ability. Then he departed and left the country. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he gained five talents more. And likewise he who had received the two talents—he also gained two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.”*

When the Master came to His first two servants, He found that while He was away, they had invested and dealt

wisely with the property they had been given. They did not waste time not being concerned and involved with what had been given to them. They worked diligently to produce based on what they had been given, and they worked diligently and consistently to actually try to double what had been given to them. Their industriousness, their eagerness, their zeal and their enthusiasm were demonstrated by what they produced based on what had been given to them. Every effort was made to demonstrate appreciation to the Master for entrusting to them His property. It was not just a matter of industrious labor, but the labor came from a grateful, humble and submissive attitude.

However, when the master came to the third servant, He found this servant had done absolutely nothing with his money. This servant had done nothing with what was entrusted to him and with what the Master had given to him. This servant, instead, was not grateful, not industrious, not enthused and not profitable to the Master. He made excuses, but the master would accept no excuses. So this third servant found himself under the severe judgment of his master. Do you remember what happened to him?

*“He who had received one talent also came forward, saying, Master, I knew you to be a harsh and hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you had not winnowed [the grain]. So I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is your own. **But his master answered him, You wicked and lazy and idle servant!** Did you indeed know that I reap where I have not sowed and gather [grain] where I have not winnowed? Then you should have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received what was my own with interest. **So take the talent away from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.** For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will be furnished richly so that he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have will be taken away. **And throw the good-for-nothing servant into the outer darkness; there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.**”*

Let's look at what Jesus called him. Jesus called this servant *“wicked and slothful.”* These two words come from the Greek word, **Okneros**, (Matthew 25:26) meaning lazy or idle. This word carries the idea of a person who has a “do-nothing, lackadaisical, indifferent and apathetic, lukewarm attitude toward life.” The Holy Spirit chose this word specifically to show how strongly Jesus felt toward people who are lazy and do not accept their responsibilities in life.

Next, we find in that same passage where Jesus called the non-productive servant something even more serious: **“Unprofitable.”** This is bad, because this is saying “you are of no use to me. You are a waste of time and effort.” The word “unprofitable” here is from the Greek Word, **achreios**, (Matthew 25:30). This is a term that literally means “useless.” In plain English, this means “a ‘good-for-nothing’ servant.”

When you look at this, this statement is quite deep. Jesus is here describing a lazy person whose very existence is absolutely pointless and useless. Jesus is describing someone who is a “waste of space.” More importantly, Jesus is describing a servant He has no use for. Jesus describes a servant who is a waste of time and space. This is an important lesson that Jesus is teaching us right here. It reminds me of what Jesus told the disciples in this following passage regarding people who Jesus finds “useless.”

I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Vinedresser. **Any branch in Me that does not bear fruit [that stops bearing] He cuts away (trims off, takes away);** and He cleanses and repeatedly prunes every branch that continues to bear fruit, to make it bear more and richer and more excellent fruit. You are cleansed and pruned already, because of the word which I have given you [the teachings I have discussed with you]. Dwell in Me, and I will dwell in you. [Live in Me, and I will live in you.] Just as no branch can bear fruit of itself without abiding in (being vitally united to) the vine,

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neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in Me. I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever lives in Me and I in him bears much (abundant) fruit. However, apart from Me [cut off from vital union with Me] you can do nothing. **If a person does not dwell in Me, he is thrown out like a [broken-off] branch, and withers; such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, and they are burned.** John 15:1-6 Amplified Bible (AMP)

What Jesus is plainly telling us here is that if He sees you as a waste of time, He will get rid of you. You can guess what He means when He says that those servants are to be gathered up and thrown in the fire.

This servant is a pathetic person who contributes nothing to life and certainly not to the Kingdom. This servant does nothing but occupy valuable space in the Church or in ministry. Are you hearing me? He or she is “dead weight.” He or she is flat out “useless!”

Because this servant is “good-for-nothing,” Jesus throws him/her into His *eternal trash heap*. It’s just like what you would do with a wad of paper or a piece of gum that has outlived its taste and enjoyment. The presence of the gum in your mouth becomes a nuisance where once it was a source of happiness and a burst of flavor. Good-for-nothing servants are like stale gum.

Jesus pronounces *eternal damnation* upon the lazy servant. Do you see the penalty that Jesus condemns that person to? This should tell you more about how serious Jesus is about you using what He has given you. Jesus then tells the servant what he could have done, but by that time, it was too late. Jesus said, “*You should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned, I would have received it back with interest. Take the money from him and give it to the one with much money. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. **And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***”

## NEW DIAKONATE HOUSES PROGRESS REPORTS

The following are progress reports that I receive shared with you from our most recent Diakonate Houses to let the entire Diakonate know how they are coming in their development toward their mission and their purposes.

### **EKKLESIA**

There are currently 16 saints on our roster. However, as you are aware that number can fluctuate from month to month; as well as category status. Parishioner status is reviewed during our monthly meetings. However, should an emergency situation arise a parishioner’s status can be revised immediately. Such a determination is at the discretion of the Chair & Vice-Chair.

Parishioners are being contacted at least twice a month. As of this date the feedback that Deaconess Edmonds, Deacon Smith and I have received has been very positive. Parishioners and their caregivers have stated that they are very appreciative of the fact that members of the Diakonate take the time to check on them and are truly concerned about their well-being.

Members of Ekklesia appear also to be communicating with each other on a regular basis. Observations indicate that they are doing so not only professionally but out of a true commitment to the purpose to which they have been called and a real concern for each other; there is a high sense of camaraderie. Our team stills appears to be excited and enthused about their service to this congregation.

In the coming year we are striving to improve our communication skills so that we may interact with our parishioners on an even more personal level.

Suggestions have been made regarding workshops. The purpose of such a workshop would be to assist in recognizing certain things during our contact with our parishioners that may possibly be stress indicators. Such workshops will also assist in further defining our protocol in the event an issue arises that causes us a real concern.

Minister Bobbie Wilson - Vice Chair  
Deaconess Elizabeth Edmonds - Chair

## **PENTECOST**

- **Population Focus:** Senior Adults 65 & Older
- **2013 Accomplishments:** Pentecost Ministry
- **Senior Saints of God "Rock of Ages"**
  1. PENTECOST NEWSLETTER - A Quarterly Newsletter for the Senior Saints of God.
  2. Newsletter - January (Deaconess Jessie Travis - Highlighted Senior) ~ Psalm 92:1
  3. Meet & Greet (Sharing Food for the Body & Spiritual Fellowship for the Soul) - March 16, 2013
  4. Theme: Expressions ~ Revelation 6:7. Participants: Sister Yvonne Tate, Sister Elizabeth Walker, Sister Marianne Wagner, Deaconess Wanieda Kent.
  5. Parish List (Revised) - March
  6. Newsletter - April (Deacon Ransom Hill - Highlighted Senior) ~ Psalm 92:14
  7. Health and Wellness Fair - May 18, 2013
  8. Empowering and Educating Individuals and Families
  9. Organizations: People's Health Centers, VOYCE (The Ombudsman Program),
  10. Heartland Hospice, Shepherd's Center (Webster/Kirkwood), Heart of St. Louis Adult Day Health Center.
  11. Senior Summer Workout - Stay Fit, Stay Inspired - June 29, 2013 ~ Romans 12:1
  12. Exercise your mind & body for better living and spiritual growth.
  13. Newsletter - July (Brother Melvin McCall, Sr.) ~ Psalm 92:14
  14. Summer Ice Cream Social - Sharing Memorable Events (Forget Me Not!) - August 24,
  15. 2013- Seniors made homemade desserts.
  16. Facilitator Communion Training (Sabbath Service) - August & November  
Completed Training -
    - Vedia Brackens
    - Loretta Brown
    - Louella Bryant
    - Deborah Jones
    - Wanieda Kent
    - Valerie Lawrence
    - Vickie McCall
    - Janet Miles
  17. On 2014 Communion Schedule - Sabbath Communion Facilitators
  18. Newsletter - October (Sister Mable Moore - Highlighted Senior) ~ Psalm 92:14
  19. Senior Holiday Gathering - December 7, 2013, Revelation 2:10 ~ Theme: "To HIM Who Sits On The Throne"



# THE HOUSE PHONE

## THE Deacon'S MINISTRY HOUSE: REFOCUSED AND RENEWED

The following is an excerpt from a letter introducing the newly reorganized **Deacon's Ministry** that has been implemented here at **The Ministry of Jesus Christ at the First Baptist Church of Webster Groves**. This reorganization of the Deacon's

Ministry was the product of an assignment asked of me by Deacon James Allen to help bring direction and clarity back to the Deacon Ministry's mission and direction.

After being presented with information concerning the need for help in the direction of the ministry, and both Deacon Allen and Deacon Smith presenting their frustrations at a meeting of Diakonate Chairs, I was then moved to address this issue by the Holy Spirit in providing a revised protocol for the ministry.

I am so excited that immediately upon prayer and waiting on the Holy Spirit, God sent a template that, if followed, will definitely allow the Deacon in the Deacon Ministry at The Ministry of Jesus Christ at First Baptist Church of Webster Groves to fulfill the function of the requirements found in the original mission of "**THE SEVEN**," and to do it well. All glory, honor and praises to God our Father and Jesus Christ our Savior, Lord and King.

*For those who perform well as Deacons acquire a good standing for themselves and also gain much confidence and freedom and boldness in the faith which is [founded on and centers] in Christ Jesus.*

*1 Timothy 3:13 Amplified Bible (AMP)*

To this point in the life of this congregation in the last 20 years, the Deacon's Ministry has served to meet the temporal, practical support and emotional support to those within the congregation who have been assigned to them. While the Deacon's Ministry is still in the business of continuing these tasks, they have also now been assigned a new directive and reclarification of their duties.

In addition to providing support to those who are, the Deacon's Ministry is now putting a special emphasis on the **widows and widowers** of our congregation. In the eyes of the Lord, this is a very special segment of the Church's population and the Holy Spirit has moved us to place the same emphasis on them as was placed upon them in the early days of the New Testament Church.

### **A NEW NAME FOR A NEW VISION**

Therefore, the name of the Deacon's Ministry has been appended and is now "**Almanah-The Deacon's Widows/Widowers Ministry**" to designate their primary focus and contact. "**Almanah**" [pronounced **al-ma-naw'**] is the Hebrew word for "**widow**."

If a widow or widower is currently in a Deacon's parish, they may still expect to the same care from them that you have always received. Nothing will change regarding their being their to assist and to help their parishioners if needed. However, if a member is a widow and widower, they have now been assigned a Deacon who will give special attention to them and whatever needs they may have being a widow or widower.

The Deacon's Ministry is going back to the basics of the Bible and getting back to the original mission of the office as found in **Acts 6:1-7**. With that in mind, now the members of this ministry will make the widows and widowers their first priority in service. Their well-being is important to us. Our job will be to make sure that we can provide ministry to them in the best, most efficient and most effective way possible.

I have been working with the Deacons Ministry since the later part of 2013 so that this ministerial directive may now be put into place. Planning has gone into its implementation, and while serving the congregation as a whole has and is also our focus, now we have gone back to the Bible to truly gain more clarity on what God intends for this office to do in His Church.

**WIDOWS AND WIDOWERS** in the congregation have been reassigned to Deacons according to the Ministry's goals and objectives. The newly assigned Deacon will be contacting his newly assigned charges to introduce himself and share his intent on serving them in ministry. This may include him asking some questions so that we may know best what the needs of his parishioners and how best to be of service to them. The information that is shared with the Deacon will be kept confidential between that Deacon, the Deacon Ministry Chair and the Pastor. No one else will be given the personal or family information that is shared. The Deacon is then charged to be in contact with the widows and widowers assigned to them monthly to see if there is anything they need from us as a Church family.

This ministry is different from the **Ministry of Ruth** led by Minister Bobbie Wilson. While the Ministry of Ruth is a support ministry regarding shared experiences in losing spouses, the Deacon's Ministry will more active in contacting widows and widowers and seeing if there is anything we can do, as their Christian brothers, to assist them in practical ways as they grow in Christ.

There are many Scriptures that reveal God's special concern for widows among His people, but the one that truly drives home our mission is the following one:

*External religious worship [religion as it is expressed in outward acts] that is pure and unblemished in the sight of God the Father is this: to visit and help and care for the orphans and widows in their affliction and need, and to keep oneself unspotted and uncontaminated from the world.*  
*James 1:27 Amplified Bible*

We are not really instituting anything new. We are simply going "**back to the Book.**"

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### A SPECIAL THANK YOU

We want to give a special "thank you" to Deacon Carl B. Jones for his many years of dedicated and faithful service to this

congregation as one of its Deacons. Deacon Jones has decided to resign his position as a member of the Deacon Ministry here at the House of Living Stone citing that he believes it is time for the younger men to step up and take the mantle of leadership. Deacon Jones has served this congregation tirelessly for many years in many different capacities.

We will miss Deacon Jones serving the congregation on Sundays as a Deacon and also in his service for Wednesday night prayer service. We thank God for Deacon Jones and his model of dedication to this office. We will also miss the many additional things that Deacon Jones provided for this congregation in his role as a Deacon. We wish Deacon Jones all of God's goodness as he enjoys the next chapter of his Christian walk.



Thank You

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# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## FORMULATION OF A NEW DIAKONATE HOUSE

We are pleased to announce that there will be the development of a new House of the Diakonate in 2014-2015. More details about the House, its Dean, its new members and its mission will be forthcoming as the time approaches and we have heard from the invitees.

## MINISTRY OF DIAKONATE DEVELOPMENT

The formulation of the Ministry of Diakonate Development is planned for 2014. If you remember, I had to postpone its inception for Fall of 2013 because of other issues that arose that I had to address. However, we hope to get back to our original time-table this year [barring any other unforeseen emergencies]. The mission of this ministry and its members will be forthcoming. Pastor Bonner will be the overseer of this ministry and Deaconess Janet Davis and Deacon Sheldon Smith will serve as the ministry's directors.

## THE BIENNIAL DIAKONATE SUMMIT

The Diakonate Summit is a meeting and luncheon of and for all members of the Diakonate of the House of Living Stone [members of all 4 Houses] with Elder Bonner; and it is scheduled for [April 12, 2014](#) at 10:30 am if it's the Lord's will and we live. If you are a member of one of the four Diakonate Houses, please make plans to attend. The location of the meeting is scheduled to be in Fellowship Hall.

## LEADERSHIP CHANGES IN THE DIAKONATE UMBRELLA

We want to thank the Lord for all of those who have served in positions of leadership in the Diakonate Houses as we have grown from one degree of grace to another, and one level of faith to another.

It is wonderful to now be able to welcome new leaders into these roles; as well as to continue working with existing leaders. This shows signs of group development, maturity, and a wonderful courageous step of responsibility and accountability as the people in ministry grow. It is also a sure sign that growth and development are taking place among the members of these ministries.

First of all, we thank God for the service of Deaconess Elizabeth Edmonds and Deaconess Marie Hill as they faithfully and diligently served in the positions of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Deaconess Ministry. They stepped down from their positions to give others a chance to grow and to assume responsibility in the stewardship of this ministry. We now welcome Deaconess Sharon Taylor as the new Chair and Deaconess Janet Davis as the new Vice-Chair. We look forward to God continuing His work through them as He moves this ministry forward.

We thank God for Deaconess Dana Grant who faithfully and selflessly served as the Chair of the Pentecost Diakonate House. While serving as its first Chair, she continued to train and prepare Deaconess Deborah Jones and Deaconess Valerie Lawrence to step into these positions. Deaconess' Jones and Lawrence served with

Deaconess Grant as the ministry's Vice-Chairs. It is with great pride [and a "Hallelujah" or two] that Deaconess Grant felt it time to step down from her position and to now hand it over to Deaconess Deborah Jones to serve as Chair and Deaconess Valerie Lawrence to serve as Vice-Chair. Deaconess Pamela Hubbard-Lambkins will serve as the ministry's Secretary.

Now we come to the Deacon's Ministry. This ministry has been renamed; "*Almanah-The Deacon's Widows/Widowers Ministry.*" We are also thankful that Deacon James Allen and Deacon Sheldon Smith will continue to serve as Chair and Vice-Chair of the Deacons Ministry. This is an important time in the continued development of this ministry because it is undergoing a structural and philosophical transition. The stability of leadership during this transition will be very helpful to that process.

*Ekklesia* is not at the point of having a transition in leadership as it is still continuing to become comfortable with its protocol and to also develop its programming after needed familiarity with the work assigned. Deaconess Elizabeth Edmonds continues to serve as its Chair while it is still in its infancy stage, and Minister Bobbie Wilson is still in place as its Vice-Chair. Deacon Sheldon Smith continues to serve as its Supervising Coordinator as we look for the program to expand now that it is in its 2<sup>nd</sup> years.

### **DIAKONATE MEMBERS REQUESTED FOR INTERCESSORY PRAYER LEADERS**

Deaconess Colleen Johnson has served faithfully and wonderfully as the Coordinator of the Liturgical Intercessory Prayer Ministry. This is the ministry of corporate Intercessory Prayer held before both of our Sunday morning worship services. Deaconess Johnson will not be able to continue serving as its coordinator because of health reasons. We will miss her leadership dearly but we thank God for all that she contributed and gave to help make this ministry a staple in our worship experience.

We are looking for more faces and more people to become involved in leading intercessory prayer. While we have extended this opportunity to the general population of the congregation, we are especially extending it to members of the Diakonate. It is special when ordained leaders of the congregation step forward to help lead the congregation in any form of worship. This is a position you will be educated in performing and it is not difficult at all. If this is something you think that you would enjoy doing, feel free to call Pastor Bonner at 314-961-3246. We are sure that you would enjoy the experience. There are enough people facilitating this service so that "burn-out" will not be a problem. Thank you in advance for your help.

### **COMMUNION FACILITATORS INVITATION**

We are extending the invitation for more Diakonate members to become Communion facilitators. These are the people who lead our communion experience at any time of worship. You will be trained in the performance of this wonderful opportunity and will be given the opportunity to grow into the position of Communion facilitator under the leadership of those appointed over you to help you in this position.

As the community of faith grows, people always need to see "growth and development" in the saints. This means that more and more ordained saints need to be seen stepping up to lead in worship, and in other aspects of ministry. I think you would truly benefit from the experience and enjoy leading the saints as we come the Lord's table and partake of the supper He and He alone has invited us to.

If you feel compelled to participate and take on this next phase of your own development, then call Pastor Bonner at 314-961-3246 and we will make sure that you get all of the needful information. Thank you in advance for stepping forward in His Name.

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NEWSLETTER

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**An In-house Informational And Educational Newsletter  
From The Elder To The Members Of The Diakonate Umbrella**



**The Ministry of Jesus Christ at  
First Baptist Church of Webster Groves**

***"The House of Living Stone"***

**3251 S. Brentwood Blvd.**

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