CHURCH IN THE HOME

During this time of transition amidst the Coronavirus, the Lord has shaken many things including the church as we knew it. There are many restrictions on meetings in church buildings that limit the amount of believers that can gather in a church building at one time. At the same time many people do not want to attend large gatherings in fear of getting infected with the virus. Therefore, all over America and in fact all over the world there is a move to smaller gatherings in homes. Some might say that this is just circumstantial reaction to the current situation and that this trend will pass, but I believe that this is actually God's doing. Why do I say this? We need to make a careful search in the New Testament and take a fresh look at what Jesus said about the church, how He Himself ministered, what was His instructions to His disciples and how did they walk these out in the Book of Acts, as well as their further instructions to the churches that were planted through their ministry. Furthermore, in the midst of this shaking, the Lord has prepared a great harvest of souls as we have not seen in a long time. Even in places that seemed hard ground in the past, a fresh openness and receptivity to the Gospel has come. so it is time to be active in the harvest. These new believers that will get saved need to be gathered into homes where they can be discipled.

Right up front I want to make it very clear, that this is not a call to do away completely with church buildings or large gatherings and now only meet in houses. Rather this is a call to a hybrid model of large gatherings together with church in the home. This study is a call to greater focus and importance on the church in the house and we will see from the Scriptures that this was the primary focus and model of the Book of Acts church.

1. A PERSON OF PEACE

Ultimately the Lord Jesus is the Head of His Church and He is building His Church (Matthew 16:18). He is our Master and we are His servants, therefore we should adhere to His instructions on how He desires for us to labor in this abundant harvest.

One of His primary instructions and commissionings concerning labor in the harvest is in Luke 10. Jesus gathered seventy (two) workers/laborers to send them into the harvest. These were the ones who had said "Yes!" to Jesus out of the many who had excuses (Luke 9:57-62). Note that Jesus was always looking for workers/laborers, whereas today in the church we always are looking for leaders (Matthew 9:37-38; 20:1-8; Luke 10:2 & 2 Timothy 2:15).

A. PRAYER FOR LABORERS

As Jesus was sending the seventy out He said to them,

“The harvest is indeed plentiful, but the laborer’s are few. Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest, that He may send out laborer’s into His harvest." Luke 10:2 WEB, read also Matthew 9:37-38.

Jesus is saying, as you go into the harvest, that you should call on Him, the Lord of the Harvest, to cast laborers into the harvest field. That means that some of those whom you will lead to Jesus will become laborers in the harvest. Jesus is already seeing the potential laborers in the sinners that still need to get saved through the preaching of the Gospel. Therefore, Jesus wanted us to have this persistent attitude of prayer and seeking out the lost,

"Keep on asking and it will be given you; keep on seeking and you will find; keep on knocking [reverently] and [the door] will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps on asking receives; and he who keeps on seeking finds; and to him who keeps on knocking, [the door] will be opened." Matthew 7:7-8 AMP

B. LOOK FOR A PERSON & THEIR HOUSE

When you enter a village or neighborhood, knock on doors until you find a person of peace. Jesus said,
"Into whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.' If a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you … Heal the sick who are therein, and tell them, 'The Kingdom of God has come near to you.'" Luke 10:5-6 & 9 WEB
A "son of peace" can either be a man or woman of peace. Therefore, a person of peace is a man or woman who welcomes you and the message of the Gospel into their home. When you go out to evangelize, you are therefore looking for a person and their house. In that house Jesus said that you should heal the sick and proclaim the Gospel.
Furthermore, when Jesus gave this command to proclaim the Kingdom in that house, it was before His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. So, on the day that He was raised from the dead, Jesus gave us the Gospel message that needed to be preached (Luke 24:45-47). We will see later in this study, that it is in this house that the Lord Jesus wants us to plant a small church.

C. THE CLUSTER

It is in the house of the person of peace that their cluster of friends will gather. Not only does that person get saved in that house, but they will gather their friends and family to also come and receive the Lord Jesus. We see in the Book of Acts whole households come to Jesus. Thus we need to evangelize clusters of people that will become a small church in the home of the person of peace.

2. MULTIPLICATION

Through some of the miraculous things that Jesus did and through some of the parables that He told, He was instilling in His disciples the principals of multiplication. These principles are very important to the harvest and planting in house churches.

A. FIVE LOAVES & TWO FISHES

In Matthew 14:14-21 Jesus multiplies the five loaves and two fishes to feed five thousand men, without counting the women and children. I n other words there could easily have been in excess of twenty thousand people. However the picture that I would like to draw our attention too, is these words,

They took up twelve baskets full of that which remained left over. Matthew 14:20 WEB

Once everyone had their fill, Jesus instructed His disciples to pick up the leftovers. Starting with only five loaves and two fish, they picked up twelve baskets full of leftovers. What a great picture of multiplication. In the same way, from the souls (loaves and fishes) that you lead to the Lord it can lead to several churches in homes (baskets) being established.

B. THE NET FULL OF FISH

“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet, that was cast into the sea, and gathered some fish of every kind, which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach. They sat down, and gathered the good into containers, but the bad they threw away." Matthew 13:47-48 WEB

Jesus told this parable to show when there is a great harvest of souls (net full of fish), that they need to be contained or discipled in smaller containers. First, Jesus had Peter and some of the other disciples have a miraculous catch of fish, both early on in His ministry (Luke 5:3-11) and then during the forty days that appeared to His disciples after His resurrection and before His ascension (John 21:2-8). Then on the Day of Pentecost, after the Holy Spirit fell on them and Peter then preached the Gospel, three thousand souls were gathered in for the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:1-41). This great catch of fish was then discipled in homes in Jerusalem (Acts 2:46-47). This lead to more multiplication (Acts 6:1 & 7)!

3. DOOR-TO-DOOR EVANGELISM

Many different models and various types of venues of evangelism are all very important to preach the Gospel and win souls. Wherever possible the aim should be to disciple in homes, those who get saved. That is why door-to-door or House-to-house evangelism is very good, because you know where they live and they can be followed up in their homes. This is also one of the primary methods of evangelism that the church in the Book of Acts followed,

And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. Acts 5:42 ESV

The Temple courts were the place where the Jews gathered and that is why they went to evangelize there.

The word "preach" is translated from the Greek word "euaggelizo" which Strong’s defines as:

to announce good news ("evangelize") especially the gospel:--declare, bring (declare, show) glad (good) tidings, preach (the gospel).

Therefore, the apostles and disciples in Jerusalem evangelized from house-to-house.

In the same way Paul declared that going house-to-house was part of his main ways of operation,

How I didn't shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, teaching you publicly and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus. Acts 20:20-21 WEB

Paul preach the Gospel both publicly and from house-to-house. It is often going house-to-house evangelism, that one finds the person of peace, where one can gather their cluster of unsaved friends and family. Ones they are saved, baptized in water and the Holy Spirit, a house church can be planted in that house.

Jesus sent out His disciples two by two. However, for cultural and practical considerations, we recommend that when you go out door-to-door to go in teams of three people. Either two guys and a girl, or two girls and a guy. Knock on the door and after introducing yourselves, ask what you can pray for, then share the Gospel with them after you have prayed for them. Once they prayed to receive Jesus in their hearts, pray for them to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues. Then share with them about water baptism. If they have a bathtub big enough to baptize in, then baptize them in it, or if not make arrangements to get them baptized as soon as possible. Once these foundations are in place, then arrange with them to start a weekly Bible Study with them in their home. As their friends and family join in, it will lead to a house church being planted. We call these Harvest Houses because they are house churches started in the harvest.

Another type of harvest to consider. When you find believers when you go door-to-door, find out whether they are baptized in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. If not, then teach them about it and lay hands on them to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Encourage them to open their mouth and begin to speak some new sounds. With them baptized in the Holy Spirit, start a house church in their home by first encouraging them to invite their friends who are not baptized in the Holy Spirit to come and be filled. Then you teach them to function in the gifts in their meeting, as well as take them out to evangelize their neighborhood, looking for persons of peace.

4. THE NEW WINESKIN

In Matt 9:16-17; Mark 2:21-22 & Luke 5:36-39 Jesus teaches about new wine and 'new wineskins',

"No one puts new wine into old wine skins, or else the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wine skins, and both are preserved." Luke 5:37-38 WEB

Let us look at what Jesus means when He speaks of 'new wine' and 'new wineskins'? Before we look at this context in which He uses these terms, we need to first look at what is 'new wine' and 'new wineskins'.

5. NEW WINE

When Jesus uses the term 'new wine', He is drawing on the prophetic scriptures from the Old Testament and the understanding that the people had about 'new wine'. The term 'new wine' in the Hebrew means: 'fresh grape juice, as just trodden out in the winepress'. This 'new wine' is the result of a fresh harvest of clusters of grapes:

Thus says the LORD, "As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, 'Don't destroy it, for a blessing is in it:' so will I do for my servants' sake, that I may not destroy them all." Isaiah 65:8 WEB

Jesus speaks of this cluster of grapes in the parable of the Tenants (Matthew 21:33-46), when He sends His servants to collect the harvest from the vineyard. He is saying to us that we should not just pluck one grape, representing one soul, from the cluster, bring it to our church buildings and let the rest of the cluster be destroyed. No, He is looking for the whole cluster of a fresh harvest of souls! We must go and harvest whole clusters of people. Jesus said,

"Hear another parable. There was a man who was a master of a household, who planted a vineyard, set a hedge about it, dug a wine press in it, built a tower, leased it out to farmers, and went into another country. When the season for the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the farmers, to receive his fruit. The farmers took his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they treated them the same way. But afterward he sent to them his son, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But the farmers, when they saw the son, said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and seize his inheritance.' So they took him, and threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. When therefore the lord of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?" They told him, "He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will lease out the vineyard to other farmers, who will give him the fruit in its season." Matthew 21:33-41 WEB

After the lockdown, we have entered into a new season of harvest, therefore we must labor in the harvest to give the Lord Jesus the reward of His sacrifice for the sins of the world. He is looking for a harvest of souls. When the harvest is gathered in, there is great rejoicing,

They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord– the grain, the new wine and the oil, Jeremiah 31:12 NIV84

Stir up the mighty men … Let the weak say, 'I am strong.' … Put in the sickle; for the harvest is ripe … Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! Joel 3:9-10 & 13-14 WEB

It is harvest time! The Lord is pouring out His Spirit on a fresh harvest of souls. He is sending us the former rain of all the outpourings of the Holy Spirit, since He started restoring His church

from the first Reformation with Martin Luther until now. He is pouring out a fresh anointing on His people to multiply in the harvest, as well as a fresh baptism with the Holy Spirit on the new clusters of souls that will be harvested. Joel's prophetic word has been applied to many outpourings of the Holy Spirit in the past and it is certainly the Word of the Lord for our day,

Surely He has done great things. Land, don't be afraid. Be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done great things ... "Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD, your God; for He gives you the former rain in just measure, and He causes the rain to come down for you, the former rain and the latter rain, as before. The threshing floors will be full of wheat, and the vats will overflow with new wine and oil." Joel 2:20-21 & 23-24 WEB

5. MATTHEW'S HOUSE

Matthew, who is also called Levi, was a tax collector and sinner. When Jesus calls him to come and follow Him, he leaves his tax collector's booth, puts his faith in Jesus and follows Him. Matthew, as a 'man of peace', takes Jesus to his house and invites his whole cluster of friends to come to his house to meet Jesus. It is in this context that Jesus said,

"Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick do. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Luke 5:31-32 WEB

Jesus is saying that He did not come for the righteous, the 'old harvest' in the barn, but for the new harvest of souls, that is the 'new wine' that has to be poured into 'new wineskins', not in the traditions of the old religious system. The Lord is restoring the tent for harvesting souls as Amos prophesied,

'In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name, 'declares the LORD, who will do these things. 'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills. Amos 9:11-13 NIV84 . Also look at Acts 15:14-19.

New wine always relates in the Old Testament to the juice of freshly harvested grapes. Therefore, the 'new wine' that Jesus is speaking of is a harvest of new souls, who has received His new life of forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus and being freshly baptized in the Holy Spirit.

WHAT IS A 'NEW WINESKIN'?

A wineskin is made from the skin of an animal. They will take the skin and work it until it is soft and subtle. This is made into a bag with a hole and a cork to seal it. When the grapes of the new harvest have been pressed, the fresh juice, the 'new wine', is poured into the new wineskin and sealed. This juice starts to ferment, so the 'new wine' is unstable and causes pressure on the 'new wineskin'. Because the new wineskin is flexible it expands with the fermenting process of the new wine, so that the wine is contained and does not run out. However, when you pour new wine into an old hard and brittle wineskin, it is not flexible to handle the pressure of the

fermenting of the new wine. The old wineskin cracks and the new wine runs out. Thus, *Matthew's house becomes the new 'wineskin' wherein the new harvest of souls was gathered in.*

Jesus is using this analogy to proclaim what the effect of His ministry and that of His disciples would have on the old religious system and institution. Jesus fulfilled the promise of the Old Covenant through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. Thus, he put an end to the Temple worship with all its sacrifices and rituals, as well as the Aaronical priesthood and Levitical ministry. Through His disciples, Jesus raised up a new priesthood, who would no longer serve at the Temple, but all over the world where His Gospel would be proclaimed

After the Day of Pentecost, His freshly baptized in the Holy Spirit apostles and disciples preached the Gospel with great power and they gathered the new believers in houses, establishing 'new wineskin' churches. We will see as we look further at this, how Jesus does away with the 'old' and establishes the 'new' through His disciples, the Church.

All through the ages, this pattern has been repeated as the Holy Spirit would do a new thing in the Church. When the first Reformation with Martin Luther and the other Reformers happened, the 'old wineskin' of the Roman Catholic Church burst, the 'new wine' of the Protestant Reformation ran out and 'new wineskins' of Protestant churches were established. However, they became set in their ways and as Jesus was restoring His Church, He always looked for a 'new' people who would receive the 'new wine' that the Holy Spirit was pouring out. In 1906 at the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, CA and around the world, there was a fresh harvest of souls, who were being freshly baptized with the Holy Spirit as the Pentecostal outpouring of the early 1900's was taking place. The old wineskins of the Protestant churches burst, the 'new wine' ran out and new wineskins of Pentecostal churches were created. In the late 1960's and early 1970's there was, what was known as the 'Jesus People' movement as part of the Charismatic renewal. The Jesus People was a new harvest of freshly saved, baptized with the Holy Spirit and baptized in water young people who were radical and on fire for Jesus and preaching the Gospel of Jesus everywhere. The 'new wine' Jesus People were gathered into new wineskin Charismatic churches. The same thing happened in South Africa with the Charismatic Renewal in the late 1970's and early 1980's. There was a fresh harvest of souls who were born again, baptized with the Holy Spirit and baptized in water. The old wineskin of traditional churches in South Africa burst their skins, the new wine ran out and new wineskin Charismatic churches were started.

Jesus said that we need to continually pour new wine into new wineskins. This means that there has to be a continual crop or fresh harvest of new wine souls that are poured into new wineskin structures. It has to stay simple and organic. The continual reproducing and multiplication keep the new wine flowing and continues to reproduce and multiply new wineskins. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. There came a point in the advance of the church in the 4th century, that the church became institutionalized and a part of the establishment of the Roman Empire, which eventually led to over a thousand years of the Dark or Middle Ages. New life came with the Protestant Reformation, but the new wine was put inside new cathedrals. The people stagnated as the movement became institutional and the fire of the Reformation died. This has happened

with every fresh move of the Holy Spirit up to where we are today, including Pentecostal, Charismatic, Spirit-filled and Revival churches.

In every movement we start out by taking the new message to the people; we minister to them where they are in the marketplace and in their homes. Churches in the home spring up, bursting with the fire and new life of the new wine, but then we feel that we will have a greater impact in the community and have less persecution, if we get more established in a public building that resembles an established 'church'. So for a while the fire continues inside the building and we continue to grow, but then we stop taking the message out. We now have to maintain what is inside the building that we call 'church'. We set up all kinds of programs and ministries inside and we keep the people busy on the inside. This is the scheme of the anti-Christ spirit to keep the Gospel from the lost and stop the advance of the Kingdom into the harvest.

Since the time of the Protestant Reformation, the wineskin of the church has not changed. Though every new move of the Spirit produced 'new wineskins', the basic elements remained the same. We still have the same old wineskin as the churches of the Middle Ages. On the surface our modern church buildings and our worship services look different, but there are basic elements that are the same in every type, style and spiritual stream of churches. The Lord Jesus is pouring out new wine into the new wineskin model that He originally intended for His Church, so that the end time harvest can be gathered in. Jesus commanded us to 'GO!' into the harvest where the lost is and there establish His Kingdom. In the Book of Acts we see how the apostles and disciples were preaching the Gospel everywhere, resulting in new churches planted in homes. The Lord has prepared a fresh harvest of souls through the lockdown because of the Coronavirus. The Holy Spirit is doing a new thing. A fresh wave of the Holy Spirit is beginning to sweep over North America and around the world.

'IT IS HARVEST TIME!' As the Church we need to wake up to the heart of the Father for the multitude of lost souls in the harvest, yield to the Holy Spirit to change us and follow Jesus in obedience and faith into the harvest. Everything has been changed because of the Coronavirus, including the church. We need a reset and rethink of how we move forward. Not only concerning how to sanitize a building or meeting place and how to implement the correct distancing, but we have an opportunity to hear from the Holy Spirit how to disciple and plant in the harvest in a fresh new way.

6. THE HOUSE OF GOD

In the church, we often refer to the church building as the "house of God", but is this the true understanding that we get from the Word of God? Let us look what the Scriptures teach us about the "house of God". The first time that we see any reference to the "house of God" is in Genesis 28 where the Lord speaks to Jacob in a dream when he was fleeing from his brother Esau. In his dream he saw heaven opened and a ladder or stairway that descended all the way down to the earth where he was lying down. The angels were ascending and descending upon it with the Lord standing at the top (Genesis 28:11-18),

And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is no other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. Genesis 28:16-17 UKJV

Jacob calls this encounter of this dream, the "House of God!" There was no building, only a big stone that he had laid his head upon. Now, I know that later on the Tabernacle of Moses and Solomon's Temple were called the house of God, but when we hear of this ladder or staircase, it is the Lord Jesus speaking about it when He called Nathanael,

"You will see greater things than these! Most certainly, I tell you, hereafter you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." John 1:50-51 WEB

The Lord, who was standing at the top of the ladder or staircase, is now standing at the bottom of the ladder. Jesus declared with these words that He was the "House of God" at that time on the earth. Furthermore, when Jesus spoke with the women at the well, in response to the woman, He gives further revelation of the new covenant understanding of worship,

The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour comes, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, will you worship the Father. You worship that which you don't know. We worship that which we know; for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and Truth, for the Father seeks such to be His worshippers. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and Truth." John 4:19-24 WEB

Jesus said with this declaration, that wherever His followers worship Him in the Spirit and in Truth, that the Father is pleased. No longer is worship limited to a centralized place like the Temple in Jerusalem, but now the Lord can be worshiped all over the world.

Therefore, once the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven and poured out His Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, Paul tells us that every believer who are baptized in the Holy Spirit is the temple of the Holy Spirit,

Or don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 WEB, also read 2 Corinthians 6:16.

Paul, also speak of the body of believers in a city that together formed the church in that city or region as a spiritual building and temple,

Don’t you know that you are a temple of God, and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is holy, which you are. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 WEB

Paul speaks of himself as a master builder and that he laid the foundation of this spiritual building, the church of which the Lord Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone (1 Corinthians 3:11-13),

Being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the Chief Cornerstone; in whom the whole building, fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit. Ephesians 2:20-22 WEB

Peter declares the same,

Coming to Him, a Living Stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God, precious. You also, as living stones, are built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Because it is contained in Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion a Chief Cornerstone, chosen, and precious: He who believes in Him will not be disappointed.” 1 Peter 2:4-7 WEB

Peter is referring here to a very large region and saying that every believer is a living stone that is built into the Temple or House of God, that make up the church in this whole region,

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the chosen ones who are living as foreigners in the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia 1 Peter 1:1 WEB

This New Covenant understanding that the church is the people and not a building is further emphasized in Stephen's address to the Jewish Sanhedrin,

"However, the Most High doesn’t dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says, ‘heaven is My throne, and the earth a footstool for My feet. What kind of house will you build Me?’ says the Lord; ‘or what is the place of My rest? Didn’t My hand make all these things?’" Acts 7:48-50 WEB

Paul affirms this in his address at the Areopagus,

"The God who made the world and all things in it, He, being Lord of heaven and earth, doesn’t dwell in temples made with hands. Acts 17:24 WEB

So, if this is the case, should we then not do away with church buildings all together? No, because they do serve a purpose for corporate gatherings. The church in the Book of Acts at times used larger buildings, but the life of the church was in the gathering of the believers in a home.

One more point here. When the Jews returned from the exile in Babylon to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, Haggai gave this prophetic word,

‘Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. Work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not. For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts. The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, declares the LORD of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts.’” Haggai 2:3-9 ESV

Haggai refers first to the splendor of the Temple of Solomon that was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. We read in Ezra how the second Temple was built. Haggai declared that the Lord will fill that Temple with His glory. But then he gives a powerful prophetic word about the future,

"The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. Haggai 2:9 ESV

The question would be, is he prophesying about the spectacular enlargement of the Temple mount, that could be seen from afar, or is this prophecy about something else? Concerning this magnificent Temple of Herod we read in the Gospels,

Jesus went out from the temple, and was going on his way. His disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. But He answered them, “You see all of these things, don’t you? Most certainly I tell you, there will not be left here one stone on another, that will not be thrown down.” Matthew 24:1-2 WEB

The disciples were greatly impressed at the spectacular Temple complex, so they pointed this out to Jesus. However, Jesus were not impressed with the magnificence of the Temple. Instead, He tells them that not one stone will be left on top of another. He was prophesying about the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem as well in70AD. Thus, Haggai's prophetic word could not have been about Herod's Temple. John wrote,

The Word became flesh, and lived among us. We saw his Glory, such Glory as of the One and only Son of the Father, full of grace and Truth. John 1:14 WEB

This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and revealed His Glory; and His disciples believed in Him. John 2:11 WEB

Father, I desire that they also whom You have given Me be with Me where I am, that they may see My Glory, which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. John 17:24 WEB

Therefore, the glory of the latter house that will be greater is the glory of Jesus and His Ministry in the Gospels. He continues to make His glory known through His church. Yes, it is possible to encounter His glory during a meeting in a church building, but the church building, no matter how spectacular it is, cannot be representing His Glory. Actually, the glory of Jesus manifests the greatest when we do His work in preaching the Gospel to the lost outside in the harvest.

7. THE PRIEST THAT ESCAPED FROM THE TEMPLE

John the Baptist was the son of Zechariah, who was a priest and his mother was also in the priestly line of Aaron (Luke 1:5). So, if his parents came from priestly families and with his father being a priest, surely then John the Baptist was a priest. It was customary for a priest to take up his duties as a priest in the Temple in Jerusalem. However, John did not take up his ministry at the Temple, but He went across the River Jordan and on that side he preached a message of repentance and baptized the people who came to him in the River Jordan, in preparation for the coming Messiah, who is Jesus (Matthew 3:17; 11:7-12; 21:23-27 & 31-32; Mark 1:4-11; 11:28-33; Luke 1:5-25, 40-45 & 57-80; 3:1-22; 7:24-31; 20:1-9; John 1:6-9, 15 & 19-36; 3:23-30: 4:1 & 5:33). John did not wear priestly clothes, nor did he eat from the portions that were allotted to the priests, but he ate locusts and honey, and he was dressed in camel skins, full of camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist. Thus, he took the priestly ministry out of the Temple and started to deal with the sin of the people in a new way. He baptized them in water for repentance of sins and he pointed them to the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who would take away their sins!

Then the Lord Jesus raised up a new priesthood, the priesthood of all believers, to perform the priestly duties of,

- Preaching the Gospel and winning souls;
- Baptism in water;
- Baptism in the Holy Spirit;
- Healing the sick in the name of Jesus;
- Driving out demons and setting people free in the name of Jesus;
- Teaching the new disciples the Word of God.

Paul wrote this about the priesthood of ALL believers,

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God, so that the

Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:14-16 NIV84

Therefore, every born again, baptized in the Holy Spirit and baptized in water believer is called by the Lord Jesus to perform all of these priestly duties and the environment of a house church lends itself well to this happening.

8. THE CHURCH

Therefore let us then look further at the New Testament understanding of the church. When you hear the word 'church' in our culture today, what do people in general understand this word to mean? Let us look at what Jesus said about the Church,

"Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Matthew 16:15-18 ESV

Jesus said, "I will build My Church!" The 'rock' that Jesus said that He will build His church, is the confession that He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God! Jesus is the One who is building His church. We co-labor with Him as we go out and preach the Gospel. Once people are saved, baptized in water and the Holy Spirit, we need to begin to disciple them in homes. As we will keep ourselves busy doing these works, He is building His church.

The Lord Jesus gave us His definition of church,

"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst." Matthew 18:20 WEB

And Paul wrote to the church in Corinth,

When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 1 Corinthians 5:4 ESV

So, according to what the Lord Jesus and Paul said, when two, three or more believers come together in the name of our Lord Jesus, He is present amongst them and He is there in power. I do realize that many would say that is too simple of a definition and that there is more too it. However, this is the basic definition that is given to us in the Word of God. It is true that there are other elements that are added in the Scriptures and certainly throughout church history more has been added. It is therefore important to go back and look at what the word church means and how it is used in the New Testament.

The word church is translated from "ekklesia" which means: "a calling out, an assembly". Church is therefore the assembling together of those who were called out unto the Lord Jesus through the preaching of the Gospel. In other words "church" is the gathering together of people who believe in Jesus and thus not a specific meeting place. The word ëkklesia" is therefore people. However, our English word "Church" is derived from the Greek "Kryiakon" meaning "The Lords House". The Greek word "Kryiakon" does not appear in the Bible, but was brought in by the church in the Middle Ages to replace the meaning of "ekklesia", because they wanted to emphasize the building as the "church", instead of the people. This practice was enforced by the king of England when the King James Version was translated from the original language into English. Thus they translated ëkklesia" into the word "church", instead of assembly". In many people's thinking the church is a building where believers gather to worship and pastors do their ministry. That is why we all often say that we are going to church, meaning the building. Even though this is our general understanding of church, let us be open to include the understanding that church is the people who are assembling and not necessarily in a specific building called church, but it can also be in a home.

9. JESUS THE ROVING SHEPHERD

Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied about the kind of shepherds that the Pharisees were,

Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, against the shepherds who feed my people: You have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them; Jeremiah 23:2 WEB

You have not strengthened the weak
or healed the sick
or bound up the injured.
You have not brought back the strays
or searched for the lost.
You have ruled them harshly and brutally.
So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. Ezekiel 34:4-5 NIV84

Jesus said of Himself,

"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. … I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own, and I'm known by My own; even as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father. I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice. They will become one flock with One Shepherd." John 10:11 & 14-16 WEB

Jesus calls Himself, the Good Shepherd. When we therefore look at His ministry in the four Gospels, we see the Good Shepherd in action, everywhere where He taught and ministered. He

calls the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law, who came before Him, thieves and robbers (See John 10:7-9). It is with this understanding that Jesus then declares,

"The thief only comes to steal, kill, and destroy. I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." John 10:10 WEB

We see Jesus giving His life through forgiving sins, healing the sick and driving demons, in abundance, as He ministers from town to town and house to house in the Gospels. He was a roving Shepherd Who went all over Galilee, Samaria and Judea seeking and saving lost sheep.

THE SHEPHERD GOES TO FIND THE LOST SHEEP

In Luke 15 Jesus tells three parables to emphasize the critical importance of seeking out the lost and the great joy in Heaven over every soul that comes to Jesus. The first parable again reveals His nature and mission as the Good Shepherd and what He requires from us His under shepherds. He said,

“Which of you men, if you had one hundred sheep, and lost one of them, wouldn’t leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one that was lost, until he found it? When he has found it, he carries it on his shoulders, rejoicing. When he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ Luke 15:4-6 WEB

Matthew also records this parable when he writes,

"For the Son of Man came to save that which was lost. “What do you think? If a man has one hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine, go to the mountains, and seek that which has gone astray? If he finds it, most certainly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." Matthew 18:11-14 WEB

Jesus makes it very clear that one of the main functions of a shepherd is to go and find lost sheep and bring them into the fold of the Good Shepherd. He says that there are lost sheep and then there are also those sheep who have gone astray. It brings the shepherd great delight in seeking out and finding these lost sheep.

THE SHEEP ARE HARASSED AND SCATTERED LIKE SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD

Matthew writes this about Jesus as the Good Shepherd,

But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were harassed and scattered, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest indeed is plentiful, but the laborer’s are few. Pray therefore that the Lord of the

harvest will send out laborer's into his harvest." Matthew 9:36-38 WEB

In His compassion as the Good Shepherd Jesus saw how the people had been harassed and scattered both by the religious leaders, who came before Him and whom He called "thieves and robbers", as well as the enemy, who "kills, steels and destroys". So He mobilizes His disciples as under shepherds and He sends them into the harvest to go and work of the Good Shepherd. He sent them to go and preach the Gospel, heal the sick and drive out demons, going from village to village and ministering in the homes of those who welcomed them in, with this command,

"GO to the lost sheep!" Matthew 10:7

Just as He came to seek and save the lost sheep, He send them and He is sending all of us to GO to the lost sheep.

LAY DOWN YOUR LIFE FOR THE LOST SHEEP

In John 10 we read that Jesus laid down His life for all of us who were lost sheep at one time. Now, as He sends His disciples to go and labor as shepherds in the harvest, He requires of them to lay down their lives for the lost sheep. He said to them,

"He who doesn't take his cross and follow after Me, isn't worthy of Me. He who seeks his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for My sake will find it." Matthew 10:38-39 WEB

We are surrounded by lost sheep in the towns and cities that we live in. Jesus is calling all of us, including pastors to leave the comfort of the four walls where we gather as the church, and lay down our lives on behalf of the lost sheep.

BECOME ROVING SHEPHERDS, GO HOUSE TO HOUSE!

This is the joy of going house to house, praying for the needs of the people and preaching the Gospel. You find not only those who are lost and have never received Jesus as their Lord and Savior, but you also find the sheep who have gone astray. You truly encounter this reality that the people are harassed and scattered, like sheep without a shepherd. The lost will not come to our churches and many sheep have been scattered and have not been in a church for years. We can condemn them by saying that they know that they need to come to church to get right with God. We put all the responsibility on them, but Jesus puts it squarely on our shoulders. He requires us to go to them and shepherd them in their homes where they are. Jesus laid down His life for us. And paid such a price for our salvation. Out of love for Him and gratitude for what He has done for us, it is a joy to obey Him and go after the lost sheep.

When you go door to door, you encounter those who receive Jesus for the first time into their hearts after hearing the Gospel, you find believers who are saved, but not filled with the Spirit and they get baptized in the Holy Spirit speaking in tongues. You are able to minister healing, as well as bring the prodigals back to Jesus. Through the Bible Studies and discipleship that

follows, you are able to minister deeply to the needs of people and establish them in Christ. This is very fruitful and brings great satisfaction, even though this requires perseverance and hard work.

The harvest is truly plentiful, but the laborers are few. We need to see many leaders, who will mobilize the body of Christ and go with them to labor in the harvest, doing the work of the Good Shepherd. Will you as a pastor, say yes to Jesus and lead them into the harvest to find the lost sheep and minister to them where they are?

10. JESUS WENT HOUSE-TO-HOUSE

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus ministered healing and deliverance, as well as teaching many of His parables, to large crowds of people, even as much as twenty thousand people at a time, during His three and a half years of ministry, . Then He also taught on the Sabbath in many of the synagogues in Galilee. However, much of His ministry was done in homes.

Jesus had a house in Capernaum where He and His disciples lived and He used this house as the home base for His ministry. He often taught His disciples here (Matthew 4:13-16; 9:1-8; 9; 27-31; 13:1 & 36; 17:26; Mark 2:1-12; 3:19; 7:17; 9:28; 9:33-50; 10:11; Luke 5:17-26). Let us look at some of the times where Jesus ministers in His own house in Capernaum and also where He does ministry in other houses. As we look at this you will see a pattern of Jesus ministering from house-to-house.

- At Peter's house, Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law and that evening after the Sabbath, many gathered outside that house. Jesus healed their sick and drove out many evil spirits with a word (Matthew 8:14-17; Mark 1:29-34 & Luke 4:38-41).
- Jesus was teaching religious leaders in His house. The power of the Lord was present to heal. Four men lower a crippled man through a hole in the roof and Jesus both forgives his sins and heals him. He declares that we have authority to forgive sins (Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12 & Luke 5:17-26)
- Jesus then left His house and as He was walking next to the lake, He found Matthew/Levi. As we saw above, after Jesus calls him, he invites Jesus to his house and his whole cluster of friends get saved in his house (Matthew 9:9-17; Mark 2:14-22 & Luke 5:27-39).
- After Jesus left the house of Matthew/Levi, Jiarus begs Him to come and heal his little girl. Jesus agrees to go to his house, but He is interrupted by the woman with the issue of blood and she is powerfully healed. By now the little girl is already dead, but Jesus still goes to the home of Jiarus, the synagogue ruler and raises his daughter from the dead (Matthew 9:18-19 & 23-26; Mark 5:22-24 & 35-43 & Luke 8:51-55).

- Then Jesus returns home, where two blind men came to Him and He healed them in His own house (Matthew 9:27-31).

- Jesus explained many of His parables to His disciples inside His house and taught them the secrets of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:36; Mark 7:17-23; 9:28-50 & 10:10-13).

- Another time, Jesus went to the region of Tyre and Sidon to have a private retreat with His disciples. While He was with His disciples in the house where they were staying, a Greek, a Syrophoenician woman came to beg of Him to heal her little girl, who was demon possessed and Jesus did, even though she was a Gentile, because He declared that she had great faith. When she got home, she found her little girl completely set free and healed (Mark 7:24-30).
- Jesus anointed by a woman with expensive perfume while He was eating at the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany, who was a Pharisee (Matthew 23:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:36-50).
- Another time that Jesus came to Bethany with His disciples and Martha welcomed Him into her house. She was a woman of peace. Her sister, Mary and her brother, Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead lived with her and because of this powerful miracle, many came to believe in Jesus. It was also here in this house that Mary anointed Jesus for His burial (Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1-45 & 12:1-11).
- On one Sabbath Jesus went to have dinner at the home of a prominent Pharisee. Jesus healed a man with dropsy and then taught those at the dinner about self-exaltation and humility (Luke 14:1-24).

- Zacchaeus had climbed into a tree to see Jesus. When Jesus came to the tree, He said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down! Today I am coming to your house!" Jesus was very intentional and persistent to enter the home of Zacchaeus. Not only does Zacchaeus get saved, but his whole cluster of sinner friends came to his house and they all got saved. Here, Jesus tells the parable of the minas (Luke 19:1-27). It is here that Jesus told these powerful words,

“Today, salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.” Luke 19:9-10 WEB

So we see that Jesus often ministered in homes. Those of us, who are leaders in the body of Christ, should learn from the example of Jesus. The apostles, including Peter and Paul, followed the example of Jesus and often ministered in homes in every city they went to. Just like Jesus, they had large public gatherings, but they did not limit their ministry to these public meetings, but they ministered amongst the people, fellowshipped with them and ate with them in their homes, just as Jesus had set the example. We need to get out from hiding in our offices and only ministering from the stage in public meetings. We are not above the people, rather we should realize that we are the servants of God, whom He has called to serve the people wherever they are, especially by getting into the homes of the unsaved and their heal the sick and bring the Gospel to their house, the way Jesus showed us in the Gospels and how the apostle Paul walked it out in the Book of Acts.

11. HOUSE-TO-HOUSE IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

There are many different places where the believers met in the Book of Acts. They did have large gatherings and most of these were open air meetings like a modern-day evangelistic crusade or festival. There were not many large buildings to gather in any case and they did not have buildings solely dedicated only for church gatherings. In fact the only building that is linked to the word ‘church’ in the New Testament is the gathering of believers in someone's

house. The answer to discipling a large harvest of new believers effectively is ‘man of peace' house churches, networked together with apostolic leadership. The Father desires to use an army of ordinary believers, both men and women, to be laborers in this harvest.

Therefore let us look at the Book of Acts and also the ministry of Paul and see what this looks like:

A. THE UPPER ROOM

Suddenly there came from the sky a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. Acts 2:2 WEB

At the time of the New Testament, the houses had a flat rooftop. Some of these rooftops were enclosed and formed a large upper room and in some parts in the Middle East it is still like this. An upper room of those days would be the same as a big open finished basement that you find in many houses in parts of the US. There would not have been a hundred and twenty chairs in that room, rather they all sat on the floor, which is still customary in some parts of the Middle East and Asia. This Upper Room in Acts 2, was the same place where Jesus ate with His disciples the Lord's Supper and taught them the principles of the New Covenant, including His teaching on the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-31; Luke 22:7-38 & John 13:1-18:1). For the three nights that Jesus was in the grave, the disciples were huddled together in fear of the Jews in this same Upper Room and it is here that He appears to them on the day that He was raised from the dead (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:33-49; John 20:19-23 & Acts 1:4-5). When the Temple of Solomon was dedicated, the glory of the Lord filled the Temple and fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifices, but on the Day of Pentecost the fire of the Holy Spirit did not fall at the Temple, but on a hundred and twenty small temples in the Upper Room, which was part of a residential house (Acts 1:13-14 & 2:1-4). This Upper Room most probably became the nerve center where the apostles gathered as well as those who became leaders in the church in Jerusalem. From here a multitude of house churches were planted in Jerusalem. This is most probably also the same place that Peter and John returned too after their release from prison in Acts 4 and where they prayed Psalms 2 with the believers. Luke wrote,

When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were gathered together. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. Acts 4:31 WEB

B. HOUSE-TO-HOUSE IN JERUSALEM

They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and prayer … Day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. The Lord added to the assembly day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2:42 & 46-47 WEB

Those who remained in Jerusalem and did not return back to where they came from of the three thousand that were saved on the Day of Pentecost on account of Peter's preaching, where

discipled in houses. The new believers met from house-to-house, devoting themselves to the teachings of the apostles, breaking bread together, eating together and having fellowship. At Solomon's Colonnade or Porch the apostles would daily teach and preach, as well as perform signs and wonders. Now the Temple courts were not their mega church building as some suppose, because they had no authority there and in fact they were arrested there for preaching the Gospel in the name of Jesus. The reason that they gathered there as because it was the place where the Jews would come from all over Palestine and the whole Roman Empire. The apostles and disciples therefore would gather daily to evangelize these Jews,

And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. Acts 5:42 ESV

In the Greek text the meaning of this verse is that they evangelized every day from house-to-house, as we saw earlier. Not only were people being saved, baptized in water and the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues every day, but this brought forth a rapid multiplication movement about,

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, … Acts 6:1 KJV

At this stage the church numbered more than ten thousand, meeting regularly in a multitude of house churches. As you know, after Stephen was martyred, great persecution broke out under Saul,

But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, Acts 8:3 NIV84

So, the church was meeting in houses when Saul went from house church to house church destroying the church and scattering the disciples. However, this was only a temporary destruction. Eventually the church in Jerusalem would multiply in homes again. We see the evidence of this growth in house churches in Jerusalem when Herod had killed James and arrested Peter. When Peter was supernaturally delivered out of prison by an angel of the Lord,

Thinking about that, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. Acts 12:12 WEB, read also Acts 12:13-17. The rest of the apostles were not at this gathering, so they most probably were meeting in other houses. Not only did the church in Jerusalem rebound, but those who were scattered spread the Gospel far and wide,

Therefore those who were scattered abroad went around preaching the word. Acts 8:4 WEB

The ‘ordinary believers’, who were scattered by Saul's persecution, preached the Gospel everywhere and planted churches as they kept on multiplying.

C. ANANIAS IN DAMASCUS

Three days after the Lord Jesus arrested Saul on the road to Damascus, the Lord Jesus sent Ananias to go and lay hands on Saul to be baptized in the Holy Spirit,

And the Lord said unto him, "Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prays," … And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto you in the way as you came, has sent me, that you might receive your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Acts 9:11 & 17 UKJV

After Saul was baptized in the Holy Spirit, Ananias then also baptized Saul in water. This all happened in the house of Judas and not in a large meeting.

D. PETER IN JOPPA

After Dorcas was raised from the dead, Peter stayed and ministered in the house of Simon the Tanner (Acts 9:36-43). Thus, there must have been a house church in Simon's house in Joppa.

E. THE HOUSE OF CORNELIUS

Cornelius was a Roman Centurion of the Italian Brigade in the coastal city of Caesarea. Even though he had come from a background of idol worship, he had been greatly impacted by the Jews and had become a God fearer, but not yet born again. An angel of the Lord appeared to him and told him to send men to Joppa and bring Peter back to his house, because he would bring them a message by which he and his whole household would be saved. Cornelius did exactly what the angel commanded and Peter came with some Jewish brothers into this Gentile home,

As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him … Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. Acts 10:25 & 27 NIV84

Cornelius had invited his whole cluster of friends and family into his house. As Peter preached the Gospel, they believed in Jesus and then the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them and they all began to speak in tongues. On account of the fact these Gentiles had turned to Jesus and were now also baptized in the Holy Spirit, they were also baptized in water. After staying a few days with them, when Peter left for Jerusalem a church had been planted in that house (Acts 10:1-11:18). When Peter returns back to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, he had to give a careful account of why he went into the house of a Gentile. He declared to them,

The Spirit told me to go with them, without discriminating. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered into the man’s house. Acts 11:12 WEB

Cornelius was a man of peace, that had welcome Peter and the brothers with the Gospel message into his house.

F. LYDIA IN PHILIPPI

In Troas Paul had the vision of the man from Macedonia, so Paul and his team traveled to Philippi. There was no Jewish synagogue, so they went down to the river where there was a place of prayer. There they preached the Gospel to Lydia, a merchant in purple cloth. She and her whole household believed in the Lord Jesus,

When she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and stay.” So she persuaded us. Acts 16:15 WEB, read also Acts 16:13-15 & 40.

Lydia was a woman of peace and the church in Philippi was planted in her house.

G. THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER

Paul and Silas ended up in jail because Paul casted the spirit of divination out of a servant girl and she could no longer earn money for her master. At midnight, as Paul and Silas sang praises unto the Lord, the Lord caused an earthquake. The prison doors swung open and the chains fell of them supernaturally,

They spoke the Word of the Lord to him, and to all who were in his house. He took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was immediately baptized, he and all his household. He brought them up into his house, and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his household, having believed in God. Acts 16:32-34 WEB

This jailer, who was also the one who had flogged them and he would also have been the executioner, was radically transformed by the sign and wonder of the earthquake and especially the preaching of the Gospel into a man of peace. After welcoming them into his home, his whole household believed and were baptized in water. His house would have become the second house church in Philippi. Together with the house church in Lydia's house, they became the church in Philippi (Acts 16:22-40).

H. JASON IN THESSALONICA

From Philippi Paul and his team traveled to Thessalonica, where for three Sabbaths he preached the Gospel in the Jewish synagogue. A certain man named Jason had welcomed Paul and his team into his house and it must have been in his house that the church in Thessalonica was planted. Obviously, there must have been some kind of gathering taking place at the home of Jason, because when opposition arose against Paul and the Gospel the troublemakers when to his house in search of Paul. They dragged Jason out in front of the local officials and this was their accusation,
“These who have turned the world upside down have come here also, whom Jason has received." Acts 17:6-7 WEB, read also Acts 17:1-10.

Jason was the man of peace that welcomed Paul and the Gospel into his house in Thessalonica.

I. CORINTH

After his time in Macedonia, Paul spent a short time in Athens before he went to Corinth. When Paul arrived there, he found a Jew named Aquila and his wife Priscila, who had come from Rome, because Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome. They were tentmakers and because Paul was also a tent maker, he went to stay with them (Acts 18:1-3). In several of his letters, Paul refers to the church that is meeting in their house, so it could be very possible that the first house church in Corinth were planted in their house (Romans 16:3-5 & 1 Corinthians 16:19).

As usual he first went and preach in the synagogue. During the time that he was preaching the Gospel in the synagogue on the Sabbath, he found the first man of peace in Corinth named Stephanas. Later in his letter to the church in Corinth he wrote about him to the church,

I did baptize also the household of Stephanas … Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints; be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer. 1 Corinthians 1:16 & 16:15-16 ESV

It is clear that Stephanas became one of the main leaders of the church in Corinth, if not the senior leader. Most probably also the first house church in the home of a Corinthian was planted in his house and he is therefore a man of peace. Paul preached in the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews for a period of time (Acts 18:4-6), but when the Jews in the synagogue rejected the Gospel,

He departed there, and went into the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshipped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Acts 18:7 WEB

Titius Justus is another man of peace in Corinth that opens his home to Paul and the Gospel. A house church was planted in his house. This lead to further multiplication in the harvest and more houses were opening up in Corinth,

Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house. Many of the Corinthians, when they heard, believed and were baptized. Acts 18:8 WEB

Yet another house church would have been planted in his house. The new believers also started preaching the Gospel and they were now also baptizing those in Corinth who were turning to the Lord. This continued for more than eighteen months while Paul was preaching in Corinth and many more houses must have opened up during this time. Towards the end of his third apostolic mission, Paul visited Corinth again. From here he wrote the letter to the Romans and he writes about yet another house church,

Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Romans 16:23 ESV

Thus, there was also a house church in the house of Gaius.

J. EPHESUS & THE PROVINCE OF ASIA

After visiting the churches in Galatia for the third time, Paul spent most of his time on his third apostolic mission in Ephesus. After making sure that twelve disciples, that had been lead to the Lord by Apollo's, were properly baptized in water and the Holy Spirit, he again first preached the Gospel in the Jewish synagogue. But they also rejected the Gospel, therefore,

he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks ... how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 19:9-10 & 20:20-21 ESV

This was a very powerful signs and wonders revival and harvest movement (Acts 19:1-20:1). What happened here in Ephesus is probably the clearest representation of the model of church planting that Jesus taught His disciples and what Paul walked out. This move of the Holy Spirit happened both in public meetings and from house-to-house. For three years (Acts 20:31)Paul had public meetings in the hall of Tyrannus, but at the same time Paul evangelized from house to house in Ephesus. Many house churches were planted in Ephesus and throughout the Roman province of Asia Minor. He wrote his first letter to the church in Corinth, mentioning about the church planting movement that was happening in Asia,

The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. 1 Corinthians 16:19 UKJV

Aquila and Priscilla were part of Paul's apostolic team and they planted many house churches. The house churches that Paul is writing about in the province of Asia was planted here in Ephesus, as well as in Colossae, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Troas (Acts 19:9-10; 20:6-12 & 20-21; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:13; Revelations 1:4-5 & 11 & 2:1-3:22). In his letter to the church in Colossae he writes about one of these house churches in the city next to them, Laodicea,

Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. Colossians 4:16 ESV

And in his letter to Philemon he writes about another house church in Colossae,
To Philemon our beloved fellow worker ... and the church in your house: Philemon 1:1-2 ESV

Paul himself did not travel through the province of Asia, but it was the new believers who went out and planted these churches. Later, after his release from house arrest, Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus to oversee the church there (1 Timothy 1:3). Then, close to the end of his life when he again had been imprisoned in Rome, he wrote his second letter to Timothy, who was still overseeing the church in Ephesus,

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the Gospel by the power of God, … and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also … do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 2 Timothy 1:8, 2:2 & 4:5 ESV

Through this letter, Paul stirs up Timothy to continue the work of evangelizing and multiplying disciples and house churches, through training those under him who are reliable men, who again can teach others. He had learned much from Paul and now he must give what he had learned to many others, who again needs to do the same, so that these things that Paul taught from the Lord could continue to spread to many more.

The Lord Jesus was very serious about this continual labor in the harvest, winning more and more souls and planting more and more house churches. A few decades later He rebukes this church because they had stagnated and were now only protecting what they had, just like we find in many of our churches today,

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Revelations 2:4-5 ESV

The works that you did at first, was preaching the Gospel, making disciples and planting house churches. Jesus is calling us back to our first love and passion for souls!

K. ROME

Paul sent Priscilla and Aquila with a team from Ephesus to go and plant a church in Rome. It is to them and the church that they planted that Paul wrote the letter of Romans,

Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Romans 16:3-5 UKJV

As they have been doing in other cities, Pricilla and Aquila planted a church in their home in Rome. The rest of the team that Paul sent to Rome must have also planted house churches. Therefore, from the three yearlong revival in Ephesus, house churches were planted in eleven cities, including Ephesus.

L. TYRE

On his way to Jerusalem, Paul stopped over in Tyre, where he stayed for seven days (Acts 21:3-6). He most probably also has ministered in the home that he was staying in.

M. PHILIP IN CAESAREA

From Tyre, Paul and his companions sailed to Caesarea and they stayed over for a number of days at the home of Philip, the evangelist. He had four daughters who prophesied and Agabus also came down from Jerusalem to give Paul a prophetic word (Acts 21:8-14). We do not know what other ministry took place in the house of Philip while Paul and his team stayed with him, but it is clear that there were strong prophetic words given to Paul concerning the trouble that awaited him in Jerusalem.

From all these accounts in the Book of Acts and the letters of Paul, it is clear that there was a lot of ministry done in homes and that the church gathered in homes during the first century throughout the Roman Empire. This model is again being implemented on a very large scale all over the world in many nations where the church is greatly advancing and multiplying.

12. WHEN YOU COME TOGETHER

We also know what the meetings in these churches were like, because in the letter to the church in Corinth, Paul instructs them how to conduct their gatherings,

What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. 1 Corinthians 14:26 ESV

Here are a few guidelines for when you come together in a house church:

- If someone has a guitar, you can start out with a few songs of worship. However, in many house churches, there is not anyone who can play an instrument, so you can make a selection of worship songs from YouTube and worship with the songs.
- It is often also good to start by praying in tongues together, because when you pray in tongues as a group, you lift the whole meeting to a higher spiritual level. It is also good for the new believers to practice praying in tongues.
- Give opportunity for testimonies of what the Lord did for them that week. This is a great time to rejoice and give thanks unto the Lord Jesus for ALL the awesome things that He is doing in and through everyone in the house church.
- The Word of God must have a very strong focus in a house church. Most of the time, you will do a Bible Study together, starting with the Gospel of John. Verse by verse study of the Word of God is very valuable. At times, you can also have someone bring a teaching from the Word. Many times, when you start a Bible Study in the house of a person of peace, you will find that they have many issues and the moment that you walk into their home, they immediately want to tell you all their troubles. If you respond by first trying to sort out what is happening in their

lives, then you will be busy with that till late every time that you come together. That is why it is good to tell them that you will at the end of the Bible Study give time to listen to what is troubling them and that you will then pray with them. But, start by first praying in tongues and then doing the Bible Study. Once you have studied the Word together, the Word has washed over them and now their trouble isn't so pressing anymore or they even found the solution to their problem in the Word of God and they do not need any further counsel. However, if there problem persist, then make special time for laying hands on them and praying for them.
- Pray together about what you read from the Word of God. Many times there is a response needed in accordance of what you studied together.
- Minister to the group and to each other through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Again, it would be good to start by praying in tongues together. Then the leader should give opportunity to everyone to flow in the gifts. Ask if the Lord spoke something to someone or gave them a picture or a vision. Encourage the believers to step out in faith. As they are praying in tongues by themselves, they will feel a strong pressure inside them to trumpet out in tongues. This will be a message in tongues to the body. Once this has happened, everyone should be quiet and wait for the interpretation. Then whoever gets the message from the Holy Spirit must speak it out. It could be the same person who spoke in tongues or someone else. The same kind of strong pressure builds up inside a person when the Holy Spirit wants to release a prophetic word to the body and in the same way they should speak it out in the first person, as if it is the Lord Himself speaking. When the Lord has spoken in these ways, or a word of knowledge was given, to then respond to the Lord in prayer, or by laying on of hands and ministering to those to whom these words apply. Furthermore, if there are any who need physical healing, let a few of the believers lay hands on that person and command whatever is wrong, to go in the name of Jesus.

Some house churches might also have a meal together. This time of fellowship is often very rich and needed.

Furthermore, to ensure the health of a house church, it is important to actively go and evangelize together, so that there is an outflow of ministry. Do not break up the initial cluster that develops around the person of peace. If twenty people cram into a living room and they are excited to serve the Lord together like that, then do not split them up to start another house church. Rather, as they evangelize and they find another person of peace, then start to build that house church around the cluster of friends and family of that person of peace. In this way these house churches can be networked together, so that every two or three months you gather all of these house churches together in a large gathering to celebrate what the Lord is doing. During these corporate gatherings you can a special teaching or get a speaker in to minister to them all.

13. FINAL REMARKS

This is simple organic church in action!

This is what the ‘new wineskin’ looks like. Ordinary believers equipped, full of the power of the Holy Spirit, enabled, released, sent by Jesus, the Lord of the harvest, to GO and multiply and reproduce new house churches.

This does not negate large corporate outpouring revival meetings and large healing evangelistic crusades, as well as corporate celebration meetings in church buildings or regular church services as we know today, but these must lead to multiplying house church planting movements. These kinds of house churches must be the life blood of every movement. We must decentralize and let the Head of the Church build His church as we focus on obeying His command to advance His Kingdom and make disciples of all nations. Just as the apostles and believers in the Book of Acts, we need to in faith fully trust the Holy Spirit in His people and be led by Him and not our fears and traditions.

Let us boldly run into the harvest as Jesus is transforming us in this next reformation. Let us be changed by the Father's love and embrace His family. We are not competing with one another, but rather we have a huge task in front of us, to see more than a billion souls come into the Kingdom. This might sound like an impossible task, but if we all will start in our neighborhood and in the marketplace where we have influence, to bring the lost into the Kingdom, we believe that it can be done.