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The New Covenant Community Begins

2: 42-47

30 AD

About this time, Yeshua was crucified under Pontius Pilate. In addition, the resurrection appearances, Shavu'ot, the initial growth of the Messianic community in and around Yerushalayim are in view.

The new covenant community begins DIG: What do these 3,000 converts end up doing? How is God with them? What were the primary characteristics of this first Messianic community? How do you define the success of a messianic synagogue or church? Compare your definition with the priorities of the Messianic community in Yerushalayim.

REFLECT: How is your church or Messianic synagogue like and unlike the New Covenant community here? How does this make you feel? What could you do to help your place of worship be more like this? How will this example affect how you pray for your church or Messianic synagogue?

This is a summary statement that prepares us for what is to follow. These summary statements in Acts can be seen in four places (here, 4:32-37; 5:12-16 and 8:1b-4). It is important to distinguish between summary statements and transitions statements. Summary statements only occur in the first eight chapters of Acts beginning here, and transitions statements occur in various places throughout the book. The epistles of the New Covenant shape the doctrine for the life of the Church. Acts traces the application of that doctrine in the history of the early Messianic community.

The Messianic community started in Yerushalayim. Their evangelism (to see link click [An - Peter Speaks to the Shavu'ot Crowd](#)) was followed by discipleship which was not merely an emotional response based upon what Peter said. The fact of their real faith was that they continued in the faith. The discipleship continued in four areas:

They were devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles, solid doctrinal

teaching, foundational to the growth and spiritual health of every messianic synagogue or church. To **the Jewish** mind Torah (Hebrew: meaning *teaching* or *instruction*) is not something dead, and fixed in stone, but a living **teaching** to be applied to the **daily** lives of the individual (see the commentary on **Exodus Dj - The Ten Commandments**). At this point **the apostles** were only **teaching** orally. Later **their** inspired words would be written down in **the B'rit Chadashah**.

And to fellowship (Greek: *koinonia* meaning *sharing in common*). **They** were sharing spiritual blessings and material blessings. As **believers** today we share the same **Lord Jesus**; we share the same **Scriptures** (the blueprint for living); we share the same love for **God**; we share the same desire to worship **Him**, we share the same struggles, we share the same victories, we share the same ministry of living for **ADONAI**, and we share the same joy of communicating the gospel to others.⁵⁴

For a **believer** to fail to participate in the life of the local messianic synagogue or church is inexcusable (except for extreme physical limitations). In fact, those who choose to isolate themselves are disobedient to the direct command of Scripture: **Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day of the Lord approaching (Hebrews 10:25)**. The Bible does not envision spiritual “lone-wolves” living apart from other **believers**. All members of the Universal Church made up of both **Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14)**, the body of **Messiah**, are to be actively and intimately involved in **their** local place of worship.⁵⁵ How can you use your spiritual gift(s) if you have no association with other **believers**?

And to breaking bread. Many assume that this refers to “taking communion” and have an image of the way it is celebrated today in most churches. But the context here is first-century Judaism; and for **Jews**, then and now, fellowship was and is celebrated by meals. To say that the early Messianic **Jews broke bread** is merely to say that **they** ate together. The phrase breaking bread stands for the blessing over the basic food staple, the provision of which symbolizes **God’s** sustenance of human life. **The Jewish custom of breaking, in contrast to cutting, bread appears to reflect the respect accorded bread as the “staff of life.” A minimum number of ten people was required before the full blessing could be recited - women, slaves, and minor being excluded from the number required.**

There is something about eating together that makes people more open to each other. A shared meal is a context where conversation happens naturally, needs become known, and

*friends discover how they can serve each other.*⁵⁶

And to prayers (2:42). The three thousand new converts needed instruction in the Word and **fellowship** with **God's people** if **they** were to grow and become effective witnesses. The new covenant community did more than make converts - **they** also made disciples **(Matthew 28:19-20).**⁵⁷

Fear (Greek: *phobos*, meaning *awe*, or *holy terror related to the sense of divine presence*) **lay upon every soul**, at least all **the believers**, but to some degree it probably affected all of **Jerusalem**. This is the afterglow of **Shavu'ot**. **And many signs and wonders were happening through the apostles (2:43).** At this point only **the apostles** performed the **signs and wonders (3:1-10, 5:12 and 15-16, 9:32-35 and 40-42)**. Anyone who is not an **apostle** who performed **signs and wonders** in the book of **Acts** did so because an **apostle** gave them the authority to do it. These were not things done generally by all **believers**. Performing **signs and wonders** were essential in the early days of **the Messianic community** because they had no B'rit Chadashah to quote as authoritative. The Scriptures were written later beyond these events.

Since many of the first **believers** were visitors from other countries who had not come to **Yerushalayim** prepared to take up permanent residence there, an immediate need arose for those with local property and resources to use them to care for their new brothers and sisters in **Messiah**.⁵⁸ **And all who believed were together, having everything in common. They began selling their property and possessions as was needed and sharing them with all, as any had need (2:44-45).** The evidence of **Acts** suggests that considerable numbers of the early community possessed sufficient property and possessions to ensure that the community as a whole was well provided for. The social composition of the early community probably reflected that of **Jerusalem's** population in general. While perhaps not to be numbered among the wealthy elite, such as the high-priestly Sadducees, the community in **Jerusalem** does appear to have included several well-to-do members.⁵⁹

It is important to note that the sharing of property and possessions was voluntary. According to **verse 46 they broke bread in their homes**. So, evidently many still had **homes**; not all had sold **them**. It is also noteworthy that the tense of both verbs in verse 45 is imperfect, which indicates that the selling and the giving were occasional, in response to particular needs, not once and for all. As **Peter** points out later (see **At - Ananias and Sapphira Lie to the Ruach**), **Ananias** could have done anything **he** wanted to with **his land**, "**Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Ruach ha-Kodesh and keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, it was your**

own, wasn't it? There was no obligation to sell it. **And after it was sold, wasn't it at your disposal? He** could have given it all, or given only a part of it.

As a result, we shouldn't regard this as "early communism," because it was voluntary, temporary, and flawed. Therefore, this practice was very short-lived and did not continue beyond the **fifth chapter** of **Acts**. It ended up not being such a great thing because once what **they** had was sold, **they** became a poverty-stricken community and needed help from other Gentile congregations of **God** to survive later on (**First Corinthians 16:1-4; Second Corinthians 8:1-9:15; Galatians 2:10; Romans 15:25-31**).

Day-by-day they continued with one mind, spending time at the Temple and breaking bread from house to house. They met in the Temple for worship, but did not participate in the Levitical sacrificial system because it was no longer needed as **Messiah** was now **their** perfect sacrifice (see the commentary on **Hebrews [By](#) - The Superiority of Messiah's Sacrifice**). They met **daily (2:46)**, cared **daily (6:1-5)**, won souls **daily (2:47)**, **searched the Scriptures daily (17:11)**, and **increased in number daily (16:5)**. Their newfound faith was a **day-by-day** reality, not a once a week routine. Why? Because the risen **Messiah** was a living reality to them, and **His** resurrection power was at work in **their** lives through **the Spirit of God**.



This was a concept already embedded in **the Jewish** community with the *havurah*, which is a community. **They** initially met in **the Temple** compound, at this time **they** saw no contradiction with meeting there and **their** new faith in **Messiah**. **Their** presence in **the Temple** testified not only to **their** remaining faithful to **their Jewish** roots, but also demonstrated **their** zeal for witnessing to **their** unbelieving **Israelites**. But while **they** met to worship in **the Temple** compound, **they broke bread** at home. This is the communal **meal** with which the *havurah* meal would end. **They were sharing meals with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.** They were not excluded from **the Jewish** community **and they** continued to grow, **every day the Lord was adding to their number those being saved (2:46-47)**. Once again, **Luke** refers to

the process of becoming a **believer** as **being saved**. In this context, **being saved** is different from **being** associated with Pharisaic Judaism, who were under **God's** judgment for **their** rejection of **Messiah** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lq - Jesus Sentenced to Be Crucified**). This is the climax of the picture painted here.

Because of **the believers' Ruach ha-Kodesh**-empowered obedience to the Torah as **taught** by **the apostles**, **God** blessed **the Messianic community** with growth in the numbers of those truly saved. This was a **Jewish** movement, **the first Gentiles** without a prior "**Jewish** connection" do not join **the Messianic community** until **Chapter 10**.⁶⁰

There is no need for us to **wait**, as **the one-hundred-and-twenty** had to **wait**, for **the Spirit** to come. For **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** did come on Shavu'ot, and has never left **His** righteous ones. Our responsibility is to humble ourselves before **His** sovereign authority, to determine not to quench **Him**, but to allow **Him His** freedom in our lives. For then our messianic synagogues and churches will display those marks of **the Spirit's** presence, namely, biblical teaching, loving fellowship, living worship and an ongoing, outgoing evangelism.⁶¹