

**A Biblical theology of community and its relevance to early twenty first century  
Zambia.**

by

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*The opinions expressed in this [thesis/dissertation] do not necessarily reflect the views of the South African Theological Seminary.*

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby acknowledge that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

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25 February 2009

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## SUMMARY

Due to rapid urbanisation, the spread of HIV/AIDS and the growing influence of Western culture, Zambia is undergoing great changes in the early twenty-first century. According to its constitution, as amended by act number 18 of 1996, Zambia is a Christian nation. In order to find out how to run a community in a Biblical way, the theme of community was examined across the entire canon.

Previously, there has only been two works, Hanson (2001) and Dubay (1973) which have sought to write a Biblical theology of community with reference to the entire canon. Neither of these works used the Bible's own structure or genres in their own structure, nor were they written from a conservative, Evangelical perspective.

In writing a Biblical theology of community, this thesis has divided the Bible into seven sections following the original canonical order and the genres of the books. In each of the seven sections there was a strong unity in the teachings of the Bible on community. The themes of solidarity, care for the poor and oppressed within a community, justice and family were found to have importance across the entire canon. The similarities and unity on community between the various sections of the canon far outweighed any diversity or differences.

The issues that were raised and emphasised in the Biblical theology of community are of particularly relevance to early twenty-first century Zambia. Traditional solidarity is being eroded by urbanisation and Western influences. Care for the poor is paramount in the face of the amount of poverty currently seen in Zambia. Justice is relevant given both the plight of the poor and the history of government corruption. The family has traditionally been of great importance in Zambian culture. The importance given by the Bible to the issues of marriage, fidelity and the raising of children both affirms the traditional importance of the family and challenges some traditional practices.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **CHAPTER 1: Introduction and orientation**

1.1	Introduction	8
1.2	Biblical theology	9
1.3	Community	11
1.4	A Biblical theology of community	13
1.5	Hypothesis	14
1.6	Zambia: officially a Christian nation	14
1.7	Division of chapters	15

### **CHAPTER 2: Literature review**

2.1	Introduction	17
2.2	Dubay	17
2.3	Hanson	22
2.4	Conclusion	27

### **CHAPTER 3: A Biblical theology of community**

3.1	Introduction	29
3.2	Torah	30
3.2.1	Community as a reflection of God	30
3.2.2	Marriage	33
3.2.3	Family	35
3.2.4	Bound by a common response	37
3.2.5	Kingship	37
3.2.6	Slavery – an economic safety net	38
3.2.7	Land	40
3.2.8	Visible membership	40
3.2.9	Sabbath – a lived out reminder	41
3.2.10	Magic forbidden	42
3.2.11	Justice	42
3.2.12	Leadership	43
3.2.13	Economics	44
3.3	Former prophets	48

3.3.1	Leadership	48
3.3.2	Obedience	50
3.3.3	Consequences beyond the individual	52
3.3.4	Purity	54
3.3.5	Family	56
3.3.6	Economics	57
3.3.7	Dangers of manipulation and self-confidence	57
3.4	Latter prophets	59
3.4.1	Family	59
3.4.2	The use of marriage or family as a metaphor	62
3.4.3	Justice, the poor and the oppressed	63
3.4.4	Knowledge, teaching and obedience	67
3.4.5	Witchcraft, sorcery and divination	70
3.4.6	Glimpses of the future	71
3.5	Writings	72
3.5.1	Family	72
3.5.2	Justice, the poor and the oppressed	74
3.5.3	Psalms as examples of praise, worship and heartfelt cries	76
3.5.4	Trust in the Lord	77
3.5.5	A spiritual reality and the end of things	77
3.5.6	Faith even when it is hard	79
3.5.7	Confession	80
3.6	Gospels and Acts	81
3.6.1	Family	81
3.6.2	Possession and the poor	82
3.6.3	Humility and contentedness	85
3.6.4	Teaching	86
3.6.5	Forgiveness, rebuke and mercy	88
3.6.6	Solidarity with Christ	89
3.6.7	The centring of community on Christ	89
3.6.8	Prayer	90
3.7	Epistles	91
3.7.1	Sharing possessions and the poor	91
3.7.2	Marriage and family	93

3.7.3	Unity in the body	95
3.7.4	Obedience to the government	97
3.7.5	Conduct unbecoming	99
3.8	Revelation	101
3.9	Synthesis	102
3.9.1	Poverty and care for the oppressed	102
3.9.2	Family	102
3.9.3	Corporate unity	103
3.9.4	Christ centred	103
3.10	Conclusion	104

**CHAPTER 4:       The relevance and application of the Biblical theology of  
community to early twenty first century Zambia**

4.1	Introduction	105
4.2	Solidarity within the community	105
4.3	Poverty	107
4.4	Justice	107
4.5	Family and marriage	108
4.6	A Christian nation	109
4.7	Conclusion	110

**CHAPTER 5:       Conclusion**

5.1	Summary and deductions	111
5.2	Recommendations	112
5.2.1	Greater emphasis on unity and solidarity	112
5.2.2	The teaching of community	113

	BIBLIOGRAPHY	114
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# Chapter one: Introduction and orientation

## 1.1 Introduction

Every culture and nation has its own ideas, whether conscious or sub-conscious, on how community life should be structured and what expectations are placed on individuals within that community. Sometimes Christians think of certain aspects of culture as Biblical and teach them as being “Christian”. The primary goal of this thesis is to investigate and make a submission of a Biblical theology of community. As an Evangelical I believe there needs to be a conservative, Evangelical Biblical theology of community published. It was Gabler who first called for an “inductive approach that would yield a historically accurate description of the religious thought-world of the Biblical authors” (Vanhoozer 2000:53). This has been seen as “a significant milestone in the development of Biblical theology” (Scobie 2000:13). This thesis intends to hear the Bible speak for itself on the issue of community. Kaiser and Silva (2007:68) note that “surprisingly enough, Biblical theology has not been easy to define”. Rosner (2000:3) sees that “there are a number of valid answers to the question of what Biblical theology is”. Martens (quoted in Kaiser and Silva 2007:68) defines Biblical theology as “that approach to Scripture which attempts to see Biblical material holistically and to describe this wholeness or synthesis in Biblical categories”. In its scope, Biblical theology deals with ‘the interpretation of the Bible as a whole, or at least one Testament, as distinct from the interpretation of parts of it’ (Barr 1999:13). A Biblical theology of community differs from providing an overview of the Biblical teaching on community since a Biblical theology attempts to synthesise the materials first within their section of the canon, and then across the entire canon. An overview would provide a synopsis of community without synthesising the theme. Having knowledge of a variety of Scriptural passages is not the same as knowing how a passage fits into the message of the Biblical book in which it is found, how it relates to the section of the Bible in which it is located or how it is a part of the overall message of the Bible. Biblical theology is “the overview that brings out the unity” (Kaiser and Silva 2007:69).

## 1.2 Biblical theology

While Christians of an Evangelical persuasion would insist that any “‘theology’ must be Biblical” (Klein, Blomberg & Hubbard 2004:457), Biblical theology is seen as having “the task of expounding the theology found in the Bible in its own historical setting, and its own terms, categories and thought forms” (Ladd 1990:20). “It seeks to understand the parts in relation to the whole” (Rosner 2000:3) and treats “texts with a due sensitivity to different genres” (Rosner 2000:4). As a result, this thesis will be structured using a combination of the original categories and the genres of the Biblical text. For the purpose of this thesis, the Bible will be divided into seven parts: the Torah, the Former Prophets, the Latter Prophets, the Writings, the Gospels plus Acts, the Epistles and Revelation. In the original Hebrew, the Old Testament was divided into three parts: the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings. The division in this thesis of the Prophets into the two categories of “Former” and “Latter” is helpful in terms of genre. The “Former Prophets” are largely made up of narrative texts, while the “Latter Prophets” are mainly prophetic in genre. While appearing in the historical books in the English Bible, the Former Prophets are “not history as defined by the modern historian ... the religious viewpoint dominates ... it is history from a prophetic point of view” (Lasor, Hubbard & Bush 1996:132-133). By examining the Prophets after the Torah, the “Jewish canonical structure emphasises the prophets as guardians and interpreters of the covenant, and the canon therefore has an ethical orientation” (Dempster 2006:303).

The Book of Acts is included with the Gospels since it is of similar genre. Indeed, Luke and Acts form two parts by the one author. Revelation is treated separately since it is unique in terms of its genre, material and position in the canon. That is not to say that there is not other apocalyptic material in the canon, but that Revelation as a book is categorised as apocalyptic. In short, the Old Testament will be treated as per the Hebrew canon and the New Testament following the order of the Greek text. This naturally follows the original thought forms and categories in keeping with the spirit of Biblical theology. Rosner (2000:6) encourages that Biblical theology be done appreciating the “particular colours and hues ... [of books] ... before going on to see how their perspectives look on the larger canonical canvas”. In addition, Rosner (2000:6) warns that “too often one part of the Bible is given undue and oppressive

priority” over other sections of Scripture. Therefore, this thesis will examine each of the seven designated sections of the canon separately before attempting to synthesise their message. The Old Testament will also be given its due consideration. The Old Testament is the Word of God. Yet, like mission – as Kostenberger and O’Brien (2001:19) acknowledge in their Biblical theology of mission – community has often been the focus of New Testament study at the neglect of the Old Testament. Goldsworthy (1991:52) points out that Jesus “regarded the Old Testament as the authority for truth from God”. In John 10:35, Jesus says that “the Scripture cannot be broken”. In essence, no part of the Bible should be left unturned in examining the theme of community, even if selectivity must be made as to what to include in light of the limitations of the length of this thesis.

For this thesis, the canon is limited to the sixty-six canonical books of the Bible since “the canonical writings are conscious of participating in redemptive history while the noncanonical writings lack this sense of redemptive history” (Ladd 1993:26). This unity found in the books of Scripture is what under-girds Biblical theology. Beckwith (quoted in Waltke 2007:37) states that the Hebrew Bible (or Jewish canon) was closed by Judas Maccabeus (around 165 B.C.) and “was the canon of the New Testament Church”. Carson (quoted in Blomberg 1999:29) sees a “coherent and agreed canon” as a parameter for Biblical theology. In addition, when dealing with the Old Testament, this thesis is being written under the understanding that “modern-day Christians are the covenant people, in the spiritual tradition of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” sharing in the covenants of their spiritual forefathers (Waltke 2007:41). Waltke (2007:42) follows this line of reasoning by stating that “the Old Testament is written to the covenant people; therefore, it is written to the Church today”. Certain aspects of the Old Testament covenants have already been fulfilled in Christ, while other aspects of the Old Testament law no longer apply (e.g. food laws).

Biblical theology is a branch of theology, not of history (Waltke 2007:39). It deals with the centrality in the Bible of the “person and character of God” (Kaiser and Silva 2007:74). “The God to whom the Bible bears witness and who is the subject matter of Biblical theology is an unchanging aseity and transcendent over time and space” (Waltke 2007:40). The Bible is not a “potpourri of disconnected readings” (Kaiser and Silva 2007:74) but is the story of God’s redemptive plan in history. Although He uses different people in set times and places to write the Bible, it is the same ultimate author who is guiding and painting history – God Himself. As with Kostenberger and

O'Brien (2001:20) in their Biblical theology of mission, we can "expect to see an underlying logic and unity in the Biblical message" since Scripture "everywhere assumes that ... God *acts coherently and purposefully in history*" (author's emphasis).

This study traces an important Biblical theme throughout the Biblical canon. Childs (1992:15) warns that "a theme which seems appropriate for one testament can seriously distort the other". It is necessary, therefore, to define what is meant by "community" in this thesis. Community can refer to many levels of social interaction. The family is a community, with relationships and social structures. A village or town is a community. A nation is a community. A Church is a community. For the purposes of this thesis, all levels of social interaction will be examined under the definition of "community": from marriage as the smallest form of community to entire nations. The aim of producing a Biblical theology is to have a synthesis of what the Bible teaches about the running of a community. This would aid in answering the question: "how does one run a community in a Biblical way?" For example, Zambia is officially a "Christian nation" – as declared by President Chiluba in 1991. How would the Church respond if asked by the government: "since we are a Christian nation, how do we run this nation Biblically?" Or, how would a chief seek to run his chiefdom in a Biblical way? The Bible has much to say on the theme of community, which this thesis will attempt to synthesise. However, caution must be made since "the commandments of God were always addressed to particular persons in concrete situations" (Childs 1970:129).

### **1.3 Community**

Biblical theology deals with concepts, not just words. Rosner (2000:6) states that "word studies alone are a shaky foundation upon which to base theology". This thesis will not deal with a specific word for community in either the Hebrew or the Greek. Rather, the concept of community will be dealt with, which encompasses many different words in the original languages.

While a Church is a community, it needs to be stressed that this thesis is not examining the Church alone. There have been many Biblical theologies of the Church produced in the past, such as Couch (1999), Ferguson (1996), and Clowney

(1987), to mention just a few. However, there has been only two works that come close to being a “Biblical theology of community”: Hanson’s “A people called” and Dubay’s “Caring: A Biblical theology of community”.

In 1973, the Catholic scholar Thomas Dubay (1973) wrote “Caring: A Biblical Theology of Community”. This work focuses on the Church as a community and influencing the community around it by being an example. Dubay (1973) wrote with a North American perspective which sees individualism being the norm today. As a Biblical theology, Dubay (1973) neglects much of the Old Testament. With the exception of a two page summary of Old Testament teaching on poverty and wealth, his two hundred and seventy six page work contains only fifteen Biblical references from outside of the New Testament and Psalms. Dubay’s (1973) Biblical theology of community contains no citations from the Hebrew category of the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings) or the English expanded arrangement of the “Historical Books” (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther). While these absences are understandable in a Biblical theology focused on the Church, there remained more work to be done to produce a Biblical theology of community that encompassed the entire canon.

In 1986 Paul Hanson wrote “The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible”. This work traces the theme of community through the Bible. Unlike Dubay (1973), Hanson (1986) makes extensive use of the Old Testament in his work. Hanson (1986) is quite critical in his view on the Biblical canon. As he traces the history of the community he places books like Deuteronomy later in his work. Similarly, Isaiah 40-55 and the Priestly writing (“P”) are discussed in his chapter on the exile, while Isaiah 24-27 is discussed in the post-exilic chapter. A further example of Hanson’s critical position is his view that Ruth has a “fictional premonarchical setting” (1986:314). Ladd (1993:20) states that “Biblical theology is that discipline which sets forth the message of the books of the Bible in their historical setting.” Hanson’s (1986) work puts the historical setting of many books as quite late, which would have influenced his outcomes. As previously stated, Ladd (1993:20) sees Biblical theology as having “the task of expounding the theology found in the Bible in its own historical setting, and its own terms, categories, and thought forms.” By taking a critical approach, Hanson (1986) removes works from their traditional categories. Deuteronomy, for example, is no longer part of the Torah. Kaiser and

Silva (2007:74) state that Biblical theology “must not be made captive to reconstructed or critical histories” of how theology developed in Israel or in early Christianity.

In the light of Dubay’s (1973) and Hanson’s (1986) work, there is room for a conservative, canonical Biblical theology of community to be written, particularly in the area of the Old Testament. In Biblical theology, the Old Testament can not be ignored, seen as redundant or viewed detached from its theological message. Both of these works will be further examined in chapter two.

#### **1.4 A Biblical theology of community**

Biblical theology “views the entire Bible in its wholeness and focuses on themes from the message of the whole Bible” (Kaiser and Silva 2007:68). After working “inductively from the text” (Blomberg 1999:29), this thesis will attempt to synthesise the Biblical theme of community from entire Biblical canon. Blomberg (1999:30) sees that “the interpreter must look for ways in which the principles of the original text can be practiced in changed contexts”. It is hoped that the findings will challenge our culturally filtered views of community and clearly display the way in which God’s people should live their day to day lives. To this end, the relevance of a Biblical theology of community will be discussed specifically in the Zambian context. This is not to say that other contexts can-not learn from examining a Biblical theology of community. However, since Zambia is officially a “Christian nation” it seems an obvious choice in applying what the Bible teaches about the way in which God’s people should live in a community. At present, the early twenty-first century, Zambia is undergoing rapid changes from urbanisation and the influence of foreign cultures – particularly from the “Western”. As Zambian culture goes through a transition from a traditional, communal culture to a more individual, urbanised culture, the issue of how a community should operate is of great importance. These issues extend beyond Zambia and are faced by most of the African continent. Mbiti (1990:219) observed that:

The traditional solidarity in which the individual says “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am”, is constantly being smashed, undermined and in some

respects destroyed. Emphasis is shifting from the “we” of traditional corporate life to the “I” of modern individualism.

The question needs to be asked as to what traditional aspects of community in Africa are Biblical and, therefore, need to be clung on to in the face of these rapid changes. By first working inductively from the Bible, it is hoped that it will be the Bible which sets the agenda for what is important in community rather than contemporary culture or scholarship setting the direction for which a discussion of community should take. Hence, the Biblical theology of community must be done prior to the examination of a specific modern-day context (in this case, Zambia).

In writing a Biblical theology of community it is recognised that this is neither a systematic-theology nor a sociological examination of the issue. While there has been much written on community by Christian authors in both the past and the present, the focus is on an inductive approach to the text followed by a synthesis of the sections of the corpora. It is a deliberate decision not to extensively engage authors who have written on community who have not used the approach of Biblical theology. The main aim is not to provide a definitive work on community (if such a work could be written!) but to fill an existing gap - that of a lack of a Biblical theology of community.

## **1.5 Hypothesis**

My hypothesis is that in studying community using the method of Biblical theology it will be found that the Bible places more emphasis on some aspects of community that we often neglect. Conversely, some aspects that we view as important may be seen as secondary issues. It is expected that forms of government will fall into this second category. Democracy versus autocracy is not expected to be an important issue in the running of community within the Bible. Justice, care for the helpless, and obedience to God and to authority are expected to be aspects of community that the Bible will place greater emphasis on. In addition, the *character* of leadership (as opposed to qualifications) is expected to be of importance in community.

## **1.6 Zambia: officially a Christian nation**

Zambia provides a modern example of a Christian nation. On December 29 1991, Former President Chiluba made the declaration that Zambia was to be a Christian nation. This was not done in consultation with the Church bodies, and “many churches denounced his declaration at the time it was made” (Phiri 2003:401). There has not been any sustained opposition on a political level to the declaration since it was made. In Africa, “Mission-related Bible churches and traditional evangelical churches tend to view the church and state as unique institutions with different functions and roles that should not interfere with each other” (Turaki 2006a:1371). Phiri (2003:402) notes that “the old ‘two kingdoms’ theology of the evangelical mission churches has come to be subverted by an African holism, which makes no effective distinction between the spiritual and material worlds.” The Zambian worldview, just as in Israel in the Old Testament, sees little separation between civil and religious life. In coming to office, Chiluba had cleansing prayers for the State House and anointing ceremony with the three church mother bodies prior to the Christian nation declaration (Phiri 2003:406). The declaration was motivated by a private vow Chiluba had made to dedicate the country to God if he became leader (Phiri 2003:407). The declaration came as a surprise to other members of cabinet. Chiluba used 2 Chronicles 7:14 as part of the declaration, which included a specific dedication of “the government and the entire nation of Zambia to the Lordship of Jesus Christ” (Phiri 2003:407). Despite this, Chiluba’s vision for democracy saw minority groups as protected, with the same rights as the Christian majority (Phiri 2003:403). Curiously, Chiluba, in his book on democracy, does not give much information on the role of the church (Phiri 2003:404). This thesis does not intend to debate as to whether or not Zambia should be a Christian nation, nor does it intend to critique the reign of President Chiluba. It intends to find how the Bible says a Christian community should function – whether the community is a church, a village or even a nation. In 1996, the preamble to the constitution of Zambia was amended to officially call the republic a “Christian nation” (Phiri 2003:410). Hence, for Zambia, it is particularly relevant to examine what the Bible says about running a Christian community.

## **1.7 Division of chapters**

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Following this initial chapter, there will be a literary review on the works of Dubay (1973) and Hanson (1987). Chapter three will be devoted to the Biblical theology of community, subdivided into seven categories as discussed above followed by a brief synthesis. Bock and Fanning (2006:280) state that in Biblical theology “it can be distorting to ask the text to answer our questions or to structure its answers according to our framework.” Hence, the *subheadings* within each of the seven categories of Scripture will differ. Biblical theology looks for “lines of connection and emphasis that are natural to the Biblical material itself rather than imposed on it” (Bock and Fanning 2006:280). Each category will throw up its own subheadings. To attempt to write the same subheadings for each of the seven divisions will not aid us in seeking to work inductively around the concept of community. As well, we could end up with separate Biblical theologies within this Biblical theology. For example, if “family” and “justice” were chosen to be subheadings throughout all the divisions of the Bible, we would end up tracing a full Biblical theology of family and a Biblical theology of justice as part of this Biblical theology of community! Where there are links to be made, they will be made either during the seven categories or in the final, concise synthesis. Chapter four will seek to show, albeit briefly, the relevance and application of the Biblical theology of community from chapter three to the Zambian context. Finally, the conclusions of this thesis will be made in the fifth chapter.

## **Chapter two: Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will review the literature previously written as Biblical theologies of community. While there have been many works written on community and on Christian community (a search of one Bible college library, Moore College, finds 387 titles), there has been a noticeable absence of works that fall under the category of a “Biblical theology of community”. Some authors have written on community from a section of the Biblical corpus (e.g. Banks’ 1994 work on community in the Pauline epistles), but only two authors have written on community from the entire canon: Dubay (1973) and Hanson (1987). Since this thesis is writing on community from the perspective of a Biblical theology, and utilising the entire canon (as opposed to just a specific section of the Bible), it would be appropriate to limit this literature review to these two works.

### **2.2 Caring: a Biblical theology of community by Thomas Dubay**

Thomas Dubay is a Catholic scholar, who writes from the North American perspective. In 1973, he published “Caring: a Biblical theology of community”. To date, this is the only book titled specifically as a “Biblical theology of community”. However, the book does not follow the pattern of most Biblical theologies. The eleven chapters (plus one appendix) are structured topically, rather than following sections of the Biblical corpora, as is the case in most Biblical theologies following a theme. Examples of this can be seen in the works of Blomberg (1991) and Kostenberger and O’Brien (2001). Goldsworthy (1991:32) points out that Biblical theology examine “the several stages of Biblical history and their relationship to one another.” By structuring his work topically, it makes it difficult to examine and relate different Biblical materials together. Another weakness is that it is easy to neglect areas of Scripture as texts are sought in the author’s topical categories, rather than inductively working through the Biblical text.

Dubay (1973:14) wrote his book since he observed that no concept of community in existence today that is comparable with the New Testament *ekklesia*. Within his initial “orientation”, Dubay (1973:8) sees that what he is presenting is “the New Testament vision of community”. He challenges current Christianity, which he sees as falling short of the “morality” of the “New Testament concept of community”, since he observes the ethics of Christians are not much different from the world around them (Dubay 1973:9). Therefore, Christians are “not always proclaiming the Gospel” (Dubay 1973:13). Throughout his work, Dubay (1973) writes from the perspective of the Church. That is, the community he describes and speaks to is restricted to the Christian Church community. Dubay (1973:10) sees that in the area of ethics, the world implicitly accepts, unknowingly, what the Gospel explicitly proclaims. Yet, all fall short of the New Testament ideals. Dubay (1973:15) shows his frustration, stating:

Thoughtful observers, both secular and religious, seem agreed that community has fallen on hard days in this last half of the twentieth century. I have found no one in recent literature claim that we generally have deeper and more meaningful interpersonal relationships than did our fathers, and that despite reams of writing and endless hours of speaking about group dynamics, sensitivity training, mental hygiene, practical psychology.

While seeing that all people are in some form of community, Dubay (1973:14-19) perceives a collapse in community in America stemming from modern life styles and economic drive. For Dubay (1973:16) the “great organizations to which most people give their working day, and the apartments and suburbs to which they return at night, are equally places of loneliness and alienation.” Within this environment of increasing loneliness, the family unit has “been ruthlessly stripped of its functional essentials” (Dubay 1973:16).

In his initial sketch of community, Dubay (1973:20-28) defines Christian community as being: a “communion of shared vision and burning pursuit”, “a people gathered by the word”, a “fraternity of caring brothers and sisters”, “God’s dwelling”, a “free nation”, a “communion of joyous celebration” and “a people absorbed in their God”. Dubay (1973:22) sees that it is by the “word” that the “shared vision” occurs. “Caring” is used synonymously for “loving”. One shows how much one loves by how much one cares (Dubay 1973:22). Community is not merely horizontal but also vertical. God is part of Christian community (Dubay 1973:23-24). While acknowledging that

much has been written on community in “recent decades”, Dubay (1973:29) feels that for the amount of ink spent, little good has been done in the area.

The division of Dubay’s (1973) work roughly follows this initial definition of community. In his second chapter, “shared vision: the root of community”, Dubay (1973:29) argues that without a shared vision, true community cannot be achieved. He sees this as the missing link in many other attempts to deal with the issue of community. Community cannot work by a “live and let live” philosophy, nor can community be made through sheer will power (Dubay 1973:30). To a limited extent, a shared vision in a worldly pursuit may bring some form of community (Dubay 1973:30). However, the Early Church displayed remarkable unity despite its diversity.

The main themes that Dubay (1973) continues to stress through out his work are having a shared vision and caring. For Dubay (1973:81), “caring is so crucial to community that without it we may have a gathering but we can not have a community.” This care, or concern, is to be directed both to the “community as a corporate group and to the individual in his uniqueness” (Dubay 1973:57). Dubay (1973:97) sees that “individual concern is joined to communal concern, for the two cannot be separated.” Despite earlier stating that one cannot form community out of desire, Dubay (1973:57) sees that the fundamental characteristic of the Lukan account is that the disciples were “devoted to community”. Dubay’s (1973:60ff) vision of caring manifests itself through expressing affection, terms of endearment, universality of shown warmth, sincere interest, reverent courtesy, active mercy, never harming, encouragement, appreciation expressed in praise, hospitality, cheerful gentleness, comforting compassion and cordial greetings. It is around these characteristics that Dubay (1973) sees care being shown, and through care being shown community of the highest level is displayed. However, conspicuously absent from Dubay’s list is the area of discipline. One shows care and love towards your children through disciplining them when appropriate (Pr 3:12; Hb 12:6, 10). While Dubay (1973:144ff) does write on the need for guidelines or regulations within a community, he does not mention specifics of *what* they should be (other than Scripture) or *how* they are to be implemented. Even though Dubay (1973) is writing from the perspective of what a Church community should be like, this does not mean that there should not be discipline. There will be times in a community when action must be taken towards sin, both for the good of the offender and for the holiness of

the community. That is not to say that love and mercy are not to be shown to the repentant (cf. 1 Co 5:1ff; 2 Cor 2:5ff).

Dubay (1973:84) sees human community as having its root in Trinitarian community. Since humanity is made in the image and likeness of God, it follows that “our sociality is a reflection” of the sociality of the Godhead.

Dubay (1973:102) calls the Word of God: the “fountain of community”. It was the Word of God that made the New Testament community what it was. God’s Word was a “source of unity in community and the solution to its problems of disintegration” (Dubay 1973:103). The importance of the Word is seen in the appeals to hold on to the teachings passed on to the New Testament community and to be wary of false prophets (Dubay 1973:104-109). Dubay (1973:112) stresses that the Christian is to “come to terms with our world, to appreciate it, to transform it, to be involved in it” but should not love the world. Dubay (1973:115; author’s emphasis) states that:

The community is itself to be the sacrament of the world’s salvation, the sign of the goodness that the Father wants spread into the whole of creation. *The community that has been gathered together by the word of God is itself to be a word to the world of the divine presence, concern, beauty.*

The Church is a community gathered by the Word and defined by the Word. Dubay (1973:117) sees that a community living out Scripture would be radical: a community that treated each other with kindness and is happy to suffer for others. In further examining Christian community, Dubay (1973:135) comments that “Christian community is a community of joy because it is before all else it is a community of prayer.” It is the Spirit that binds each member of the community together (Dubay 1973:127).

Dubay (1973:137ff) deals with the areas of structures and leadership, but is quite vague and brief in his approach to the subject. Leaders should be “lovetull” and leadership should be “fraternal” (Dubay 1973:152-153). He highlights this as a major difference between Church leadership and that of the secular world. Dubay (1973:153) sees the decision making process as being shared within the community (with the exception of theological issues, apparently).

Dubay (1973:165) gives strong views on the issue of the sharing of material goods: “community must be incarnated in material sharing or it is not Christic community.” On the issue of poverty, Dubay (1973:163-164) makes his only detailed treatment of the Old Testament. Dubay (1973:166) calls for giving to the needy but not at the

expense of impoverishing the donor. It is not the ownership of goods but the failure to share them that is condemned (Dubay 1973:168). As a result, Dubay (1973:170ff) calls for “communal simplicity” and for more radical giving to the needy and poor. The Church community should be “an incarnation of sharing” (Dubay 1973:177).

When facing the issue of sin within the community, Dubay (1973:180) proposes that evil is overcome by good: “the Gospel cures illness by prescribing goodness.” Dubay (1973:180-181) goes on to say that Christians should turn the other cheek and never repay evil for evil. He notes that while the “perverse take advantage of the good ... happily most humans are not perverse” (Dubay 1973:180). Dubay (1973:183) argues that even when someone has done something “plainly and objectively wrong, we assume he had good intentions or that he does not realise the error of his ways.” Forgiveness is to be “limitless” (Dubay 1973:192). While much of what Dubay (1973) says in these areas is true, he seems to shun from the issues of discipline and justice. While he does mention approaching a brother for correction, he does not spell out what should happen if this fails (Dubay 1973:190ff).

Dubay (1973:243ff) devotes a large appendix to communication within the community. “Communication is an overflow of love, and because love is another name for caring, we conclude that a caring community is one in which the members share something of their inner lives” (Dubay 1973:275-276). The appendix is what Dubay (1973:243) calls a “practical-specific, a how-to approach” rather than the approach of the rest of his work which he calls “Biblical-theological”.

Despite the work being titled “a Biblical theology of community”, Dubay (1973) largely neglects the Old Testament. There are, for example, no references from the Former Prophets or any of the “historical books”. In light of Dubay’s (1973) work, there is still the need for a Biblical theology to be written on the concept of community, without restricting the concept to the Church or limiting the Biblical material to primarily the New Testament. The “Old Testament text is addressed as much to us as it was addressed to Israel” (Kaiser 2003:43). The canon describes the “unified communicative act of God” (Vanhoozer 2000:62). The concept of community needs to be further explored across the entire Biblical corpus to understand this unified act.

## **2.3 The people called: the growth of community in the Bible by Paul Hanson**

In 1986, Paul Hanson wrote “The people called: the growth of community in the Bible. It has subsequently been republished in 2001 with a new introduction. However, the body of the book remains exactly the same. The book “traces the theme [of community] as it appears in the story of salvation” (Martens 2007:225-226). It is 22 years since Hanson produced his work “The People Called”. To date it remains the only comprehensive Biblical Theology of Community. Throughout his work, Hanson (2001) sees a “triadic notion” as identifying the people of God. The people of God are characterised as “a worshipping, righteous and compassionate community” (Martens 2007:231).

Hanson(2001:x) sees his work as “a historical approach ... to Biblical theology”. Within this approach, he feels that “extra-Biblical writings ... shed light on community development” (Hanson 2001:xi). While this may help to read the Biblical text in its historical setting, caution needs to be taken. There is no need to fill in the gaps between the Testaments if one views the Bible as “ultimately the work of a single author” with a unified message. Biblical theology seeks to read the Bible in its own thought forms and historical settings (Ladd 1993:20), but in Hanson’s historical approach the Bible is not taken at its word as to when those historical settings were. For example, Hanson (2001) starts his work with Genesis 12 (dealing with Genesis 1-11 later under Samuel, Kings and Psalms. In attempting to write on community in a chronological order based upon a critical approach of the historical settings of the Bible books, the canon is torn apart and re-ordered. The canonical sections of Torah, Prophets and Writings are cut up and redistributed in a chronological order of authorship, with the authorship dated to periods that disagree with the claims – explicit or implicit - of Scripture. Deuteronomy is treated with 1 Kings, Amos and Hosea. Both Isaiah and Ezekiel are subdivided with some parts placed exilic and other parts placed post-exilic. The Book of Ruth is not treated with Judges. It is seen as having a “fictional premonarchical setting to its actual period of origin”, which Hanson (2001:314-315) sees as being early fourth century. Since Hanson views Ruth as being from this date, he – following the conventions of Biblical theology of reading the text in its historical setting – must have a different view to that of

someone who treats Ruth as from the era of the Judges. Or someone who treats Leviticus, Numbers or Deuteronomy as part of the Torah for that matter. Hanson (2001:136) view on Deuteronomy is that it was “a rethinking of the earlier confessions within a much larger and more threatening universe.”

In light of the above discussion of Hanson’s (2001) dating of the historical settings of books, and his subsequent divisions of Scripture, it can be seen that there still remains the need for a Biblical theology of community to be written utilising a more canonical approach – accepting the Bible in its own form without cutting it up unnecessarily. While there is a place within Biblical studies for a historical-critical approach, Kaiser and Silva (2007:74-75) state that:

“... Biblical theology must not be made captive to reconstructed or critical histories of how theology emerged in Israel or the Early Church. The lead should always be given to exegetical theology in keeping Biblical theology truly Biblical and uniquely theological in a diachronic way, rather than allowing history, experience, or critical studies to take precedence.... Biblical theology does not look for what was behind the text, as in some historical-critical studies; it is the text itself that is the object of attention here...”

Biblical theology does not have its primary interest in “textual criticism, in matters of philology, or in historical background, but is concerned with the vital central message of the Biblical texts” (Barr 1999:7). The voice of Israel needs to be heard “not in the form of scientifically reconstructed streams of tradition, but in the canonically shaped literature of the Old Testament” (Childs 1993:92).

Hanson (2001:xii) sees “the contemporary Western world” as being concerned with individualistic issues, such as “rights, privacy, wealth accumulation and self-fulfilment.” Hanson (2001:xiii) sees this as a direct contrast to the Bible, where communal values were placed above individual rights. True community requires God at the centre. Hanson (2001:xiii) states that:

“Where God alone is accorded ultimate allegiance, oppressive power structures lose their control over the lives of people and every human reclaims the inalienable worth and dignity rooted in creation in the image of God.”

Hanson (2001:10ff) begins the main section of his work by looking at “the birth of the Yahwistic notion of community” from Genesis 12-39 and Exodus 1-15. This takes root in what Hanson (2001:15) calls the “Yahwistic Document” composed in the tenth century B.C. It was through deliverance from Egypt that this “notion of

community” came about (Hanson 2001:21). Hanson (2001:22) sees the newly formed community as borrowing “laws and practices existing [from] among its neighbours” since it recognised “the need for communal norms and social structures as a matter of survival within a threatening world”. Yet, the attributing of their deliverance to God, “would have a decisive impact on the development of communal values and social structures” (Hanson 2001:22). The people saw themselves as a people called by God. Hanson (2001:24ff) highlights some “qualities of community” that arose from being delivered from slavery: “worship as a response to God’s antecedent grace”, God being “majestic in holiness” and God’s “steadfast love”. They were a worshipping, righteous and compassionate community (Hanson 2001:70).

Hanson (2001:30ff) continues to trace this “triadic notion of community” through Exodus 19-23, Joshua and Judges. In this period he sees worship and torah “emerge as the twin human responses to God’s antecedent gracious initiative” (Hanson 2001:30). Throughout this section, Hanson (2001) continues to be bogged down in trying to examine underlying traditions (e.g. whether Exodus 15 is a hymn of the Gilgal cult and that Joshua “was likely an original figure”). Hanson (2001:38) speaks of the “community-building effect of Yahwehism” and how a God who delivered the oppressed would be inviting to new converts. Hanson (2001:41-42) sees the community “moved to action” by the suffering of the weak and that social and legal practices reflect the interests of community in everyday life. Hanson (2001:42) highlights the closeness between worship and communal structures within the community. In addition, the laws sought to banish the vast gap between the haves and the have-nots. At the heart of this, according to Hanson (2001:49), is compassion. It was the compassion of their deliverer, God, that “implied that this community was present in the world precisely as a home for the enslaved, the poor, the bereaved.” Within this material, the Ten Commandments are seen as “the *epitome* of God’s will for God’s people ... the ‘charter’ of the covenant community” (Hanson 2001:56).

The next section Hanson (2001:87ff) examines is the “Age of Kings and Prophets” where he sees the “Yahwistic notion of community tested and refined”. This section covers the Biblical books of 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings and the Psalms. During this period, Hanson (2001:87) sees Israel as resisting “a romantic picture of its origins” due to a “profound sense of worship and moral responsibility”. Once again, Hanson

(2001) spends much time trying to reconstruct the events and what parts of the text were present at the time. Throughout this period, “kings and nation would be evaluated on the basis of the qualities discerned in Yahweh’s own acts” (Hanson 2001:94). The introduction of kingship is seen as a “threat to Yahwistic faith” (Hanson 2001:94). By the end of this era, “the true Yahwistic notion of community was no longer identifiable with a political entity” (Hanson 2001:135). From this time on, Hanson (2001:135) sees a “spiritual community of those worshipping the one true God and seeking to embody God’s righteousness and compassion.”

Hanson (2001:136ff) moves on to deal with specifically the Northern Kingdom, covering the Biblical books of Deuteronomy, 1 Kings, Amos and Hosea. The treatment of Deuteronomy in this section makes the book separate from the rest of the Torah and viewed from a perspective far removed from the time of the wilderness wanderings. During this period, Hanson (2001:136) sees the “Yahwistic notion of community” continuing on through the prophets and their disciples, rather than through the monarchy. The “Yahwistic notion of community” was meant to offer “an alternative to the social structures of the ancient Near Eastern societies”. However, the kings of Israel eroded these structures until the kingdom was virtually the same as those around it (Hanson 2001:146). Hanson (2001:136ff) continues to use righteousness, compassion and worship as the heart of community, and sees that the prophets are preaching this message. It was to be in remembering what Yahweh had done, that “Israel would respond in grateful obedience to the [Torah], which is to say, in a life of worship, righteousness and compassion” (Hanson 2001:176).

Hanson (2001:177ff) similarly covers the Southern Kingdom (the Biblical books of Kings, Chronicles, parts of Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes), the Exile (parts of Ezekiel, the Priestly writing and part of Isaiah), the return from exile (Chronicles, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, parts of Isaiah and parts of Ezekiel) before looking at the consolidation of community around the Torah (Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah). Throughout all these sections, as already seen in the previous sections, Hanson (2001) deals with worship, righteousness and compassion as the foundations of the community of God’s people. Repeatedly, Hanson’s (2001) historical approach makes it difficult to examine the Biblical books theologically. By dividing up Isaiah or Ezekiel, for example, it is difficult to study the book as a whole. Consequently, the books are not then examined in light of the

other works of their genre or in their canonical position. In examining the “Priestly writing” along side of Ezekiel and Isaiah, as Exilic material, the text is seen as speaking to an entirely different context than that of the Torah. The text is seen as reactionary. This takes away from the unity of Scripture since any diversity within a book is taken as a textual problem rather than theological. Hence, an idea in Exodus that is similar to one in Ezekiel, for example, would be explained by both being written at the same time rather than Scripture displaying a unity in message from one ultimate author, God. In the end, rather than using “Scripture to interpret Scripture”, a historical approach to Biblical theology uses history to explain the diversity within Scripture.

By the time of Ezra, Hanson (2001:292) notes that the Torah became the “constitutional document of the Jewish community. By acceptance or rejection of the Torah, individuals define themselves as either inside of or outside of that community.” It was by the Torah that “God’s righteousness was again established at the centre of Jewish life” in the post-exilic era (Hanson 2001:295). This time also displayed the centrality of worship – particularly during the time of Nehemiah. However, Hanson (2001:296) notes a lack of the third area of his triadic notion of community: compassion. Hanson (2001:296) sees a lack of compassion since the community is not ‘reaching out to draw excluded elements into the healing orbit of its communal life.’ Hanson (2001:296-297) attributes this to the need to maintain the community’s distinctiveness to those around rather than being assimilated. However, if one traces this issue across Scripture, you can see that the distinctiveness of the community is not unique to this era. For example, the Torah and Joshua are clear about the dangers of mixing with other beliefs. Being distinctive does not necessarily mean a lack of compassion. Within the Christian context today, there is still the need to be distinctive from the world around. Yet, one can also be compassionate to those around. Nehemiah 5 shows that the leader of the day could lead by compassionate example and urge those under him to do the same.

Hanson (2001:325-381) deals with the Apocryphal books and Daniel (which he sees as also written in this period) before moving on to the New Testament. By Hanson’s (2001:383) admission, the bulk of his work deals with the “vast range of values, beliefs and visions” shared by both Judaism and Christianity. That is to say, he devotes the bulk of his attention to the Old Testament. It contrasts with Dubay (1973), that Hanson would devote 380 pages to the Old Testament and only 80

pages to the New Testament. Hanson (2001:382ff) devotes two chapters to the New Testament: “community in the teaching of Jesus” (covering Matthew, Mark and Luke), and “the birth of the Church as response to God’s new initiative” (covering Matthew, John, James, 1 and 2 Timothy and Luke-Acts). This approach neglects some New Testament books entirely (such as the Petrine and Johannine epistles).

Hanson (2001:423) sees a reaffirmation in the teachings of Jesus of “the classical triadic communal pattern tracing back to early Yahwism.” Jesus’ life is seen to both exemplify and teach the three values of worship, righteousness and compassion. From this the early Church formed, eventually breaking completely from Judaism and developing “doctrines and structures of authority” to eradicate heresy and foster unity (Hanson 2001:466).

Finally, Hanson (2001:467ff) draws his work together: the community of faith is the “people called”. He sees that “perhaps the single most important source of renewal for contemporary communities of faith lies in the rediscovery of their identity as ‘the people called’” (Hanson 2001:467). Called into a “sense of identity ... [with] the God of righteousness and compassion”, and called to worship (Hanson 2001:467). The contemporary community needs to adapt its “institutional structures to its central confessions and missions” (Hanson 2001:468). In other words, structures will change as they are the application of what is believed to one’s present situation. Hanson (2001:487) sees it as a clear implication from his study that “the Bible is not a ‘reference manual’ supplying direct answers to modern problems.” He anticipates community structures to vary geographically and over time (Hanson 2001:490-493). As to the question of the relationship of civil authorities and the community of faith, Hanson (2001:495) is brief, suggesting that “the community of faith can be devoted ultimately to one authority”.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In the light of Dubay (1973) and Hanson’s (2001) work, it can be seen that there still remains the need for a conservative, Evangelical, Biblical theology of community to be written. For differing reasons, neither Dubay (1973) nor Hanson (2001) utilised the canon’s own structure in writing a Biblical theology of community. In addition, Dubay (1973) largely neglected the Old Testament in his work, while Hanson (2001)

focused mainly on the Old Testament. In light of these two works, this thesis will attempt to write with more balance between the Testaments, following the Bible's own structure.

## **Chapter three: A Biblical theology of community**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will present a Biblical theology of community divided into the Bible's own groupings and genres. The Old Testament will be divided into the Hebrew divisions of Torah, Former Prophets, Latter Prophets and the Writings. The New Testament will be divided into three sections: the Gospels and Acts, the Epistles and Revelation. These three New Testament sections follow both the book order within the canon and the genres of the books. By following this approach, this Biblical theology of community will seek to follow Ladd's (1993:20) definition, that Biblical theology should set "forth the message of the books of the Bible in their historical setting ... [by] its own terms, categories and thought forms." This will differ from the structure of the previous approaches of Hanson (2001) and Dubay (1973). After examining the Biblical material, a synthesis will be made of the findings from each of the seven sections. Ladd (1993:20) states that Biblical theology is "not initially concerned with the final meaning of the teachings of the Bible or their relevance for today." Hence, the relevance of a Biblical theology of community for Zambia will be outlined in the following chapter rather than being incorporated within the Biblical theology.

## 3.2 The Torah

The Hebrew word “Torah” conveys a much broader concept than the usual English translation - “law”. Wenham (2003:4) sees it as more useful to view “Torah” as instruction rather than law. Childs (1970:128) notes that “for Israel the law could never be abstracted into precepts that functioned independently of God Himself”. This is important since, as we examine the Torah, we are examining God’s Word which teaches about God’s character. In looking at the Pentateuch we “must recognise the contrast or discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments ... Jesus specifically cancelled the ceremonial food laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14” (Hill and Walton 2000:60). As well, the book of Hebrews outlines the way in which Jesus is now the great high priest and atoning sacrifice – replacing the need for the Levitical priesthood. However, this does not make the Old Testament cease to be authoritative “for everything that was written in the past was written to teach us” (Ro 15:4).

### ***3.2.1 Community as a reflection of God***

The concept of community in the Bible begins “in the beginning”. God is not a lone individual. Creation is attributed to God alone. However, all of the Trinity was at work in creation. The “Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Gen 1:1). By Christ all things were created (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16). While there is disagreement about the meaning of the “us” in Gen 1:26, it is quite possibly addressing the “angels or heavenly court” (Waltke 2001:64). (An alternative to this interpretation, which was common among earlier Christian commentators, would be that it is referring to the Trinity.) This is not to say that the angels participated in created humanity. However, it shows there was a heavenly community in place with which God shared His plan of creating humanity. It would be natural then to see that humanity being in God’s image (Gn 1:27) would mean that isolation was not part of God’s plan. Humanity is made in the image of a triune God who shares his plans with his already established heavenly court. Grenz (1994:78) states that the “doctrine of the Trinity declares that God is relational”. (It should be noted that the Jewish scholar Philo saw the three visitors in Gn 18 as possibly denoting the Trinity. Despite being three, they are referred to as one.) In addition, humanity comes into an already created world with plants and animals – a community of nature as it were. Neither were humans there

just to do their own agenda. They are given direction by God to be “fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it” and to rule over the animal kingdom (Gn 1:28). Humanity has a purpose that is given by God. They are not an “afterthought”, like in other ancient creation accounts (Hamilton 1990:140). While the Hebrew word for “rule” (*hδ:r*) used here can be translated as meaning “govern, tread [or] have dominion” (Nel 1997:1055), this “dominion” is exercised by “worship and service” in the presence of God (Dumbrell 2002:21)! The community of creation is theologically centred not anthropologically centred. Indeed, humanity was placed in the garden to “work” and to “care” (Gn 2:15) not to exploit or to do as he pleased. Wenham (2003:20) sees that ‘humanity is expected to manage the earth for God in a way that pleases him’. It is a principle that the Torah emphasises: that good things come from God. In Gn 24:35, it is acknowledged that it is the Lord who has blessed and made Abraham wealthy. Similarly, even the minerals in the ground – such as copper - are given to His people by God (e.g. Dt 8:9). Humanity needs to beware, lest they think that their wealth comes from themselves (cf. Dt 9:4, 6).

The phrase “image of God” (Gn 1:27) is also used later in Gn 9:6, where it says that “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.” The implication of this is that to be made in the “image of God” shows the value of all humanity. There is no single human who should be treated as not valuable since all are made in God’s image. Significantly, this statement in Genesis 9:6 comes after the fall. Despite the sin of Adam and Eve, God seeks them out and clothed them (Gn 3:8, 21). The God in whose image humanity is made, still sought to care for and reveal Himself to fallen humanity. This concept continued throughout history for while humans were still sinners – that is, while they were turning their backs on the God who created them – Christ died for humanity (Ro 5:8) and he did this to bring people back to a relationship with God (1 Pt 3:18).

The need of humanity not to be alone is brought out in Gn 2, where God declares that “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” (Gn 2:18). Miller (2004:310-311) sees that it in the “creation of humanity as *man* and *woman* and as woman and man in community that is the climax of the story of God’s creative work ... it is women and men in community to whom the divine blessing and the human task are given.” Not only is humanity the climax of creation, but the need for humanity to be social and the complementary nature of the genders takes

prominent place in the creation account. “It is in community that we manifest the image of God” (Assohoto and Ngewa 2006:13).

It is as a result of humanity being in the image of God, that life is to be valued so highly. This is in contrast to other ancient Near Eastern laws. For example, the Laws of Hammurabi (c. 1750 BC), required a murderer to only make “financial compensation to the victim’s family” (Alexander 2002:184). This would effectively mean that the rich are less affected by their guilt than the poor. Human life is then an economic figure which can be calculated. The Biblical picture, however, is of humanity being in God’s image. To kill a human is to kill someone made in the image of God, performing the role of dominion that God has given to all humanity. Not only can there be no economic evaluation of life, but all humanity shares in the role and purpose of governing the world and being fruitful. It is not limited to the rich to be rich or fruitful. Therefore, the penalty for murder is death (Gn 9:6). Alexander (2002:183) sees that “many modern readers of the biblical laws are likely to be disturbed by the use of capital punishment for a variety of crimes ... nevertheless, it reflects the value which the Israelites placed upon individual human life, the hierarchical structure within the family, and the purity of worship.” It is worth noting that imprisonment is not listed as a punishment within the Torah! Removing a person from society was not given as a solution to, or threat for the prevention of, crime. Economically, the Biblical picture works much better than current legal procedures. In addition, the Biblical use of the death penalty involved stoning by the community. The crime was seen as against the community, and was therefore carried out by the community. This would act as a deterrent to all who witnessed the carrying out of justice and, one would imagine, prevent false accusations since the prosecution witnesses were to throw the first stones (Dt 17:7). The use of the death penalty was “not out of indifference for human life, but rather because each human life is of tremendous value” (Alexander 2002:183). Again it is worthy noting the contrast between the Biblical laws and those of the surrounding nations – which applied “the death penalty to breaking and entering, looting at a fire and theft ... [which] reveal that in other cultures financial loss was sometimes treated more seriously than loss of life” (Alexander 2002:184). It is also worthy noting that the punishment did not exceed the crime. Similarly, the principle of *lex talionis* (Latin, literally translated as “law of retaliation”) portrayed in Lv 24:20 (“an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”) “raised personal injury from a civil tort to a criminal law, increasing the citizen’s social

worthy” (Dumbrell 2002:47). However, “no property offence carried the death penalty in normal Israelite legal procedures” (Wright 2004:292).

The principle of *lex talionis* was not meant to be applied in a literal way. Ex 21:18f gives the punishment for wounded a person as “the cost of the medical expenses and compensation for lost wages” (Alexander 2002:183). It is not a “wound for a wound” per se, but a punishment to fit (and not to exceed) the crime.

The use of the death penalty was “an eloquent testimony to the seriousness attached to the covenant and the importance of protecting it from violation that would endanger the whole community” (Wright 2004:291). It is by the threat of a death penalty that many more lives are spared – not in the sense of the murdered being prevented from further murdering but in the sense that others do not murder for the fear of being punished. The needs of the many truly outweigh the needs of the few.

The Fall attacked the very heart of community. In listening to the Serpent, Eve abandoned her relationship with God and disobeyed God. Humanity was meant to be governing UNDER God, not instead of God. Adam is passive through this, yet he is just as guilty. Inaction is not something that makes one innocent. Within a community it is important to act

### **3.2.2 Marriage**

The social interaction of marriage is both a simple form of community and the building block upon which larger communities are formed. From Gn 2:24, the union of male and female in marriage is to come *before* sexual intercourse (Kidner 1967:66). Marriage is also between a man and a woman, not between the same gender. This is reiterated in later Scriptures (Lv 18:22; 1 Co 6:9). Marriage is designed to be permanent. Such is the significance of the first sexual act that the Law required a man who raped an unbetrothed woman to pay the required bride price, marry her and to never divorce her (Dt 22:28ff). The joining together is not something that is lightly entered into – that can be negated from a change of mind. Proven sexual intercourse prior to marriage is of such a serious nature that guilty Israelite women were stoned (Dt 22:13ff). Adultery is forbidden in the Biblical account (e.g. Dt 5:18) – to the extent that both the man and woman who are found committing adultery are killed (Dt 22:22). Although it should be stressed that a woman who is raped is innocent (Dt 22:26f). While Christ took the command not to commit adultery to a higher level by saying a man should not even look lustfully at a

woman (Mt 5:27f), the command of not coveting begins with “your neighbour’s wife” (Dt 5:21). Clearly, the Bible sees the heart attitude of a person as important.

In creation, what God makes is described repeatedly as “good”. When Adam was created and was alone it was “not good” (Gn 2:18). However, God made it good through the provision of Eve. To describe Adam’s situation prior to the creation of Eve as “not good” is more emphatic than the “normal Hebrew way of saying that a situation is less than ideal” (Waltke 2007:237). Waltke (2007:237) notes that it is “instructive to observe that the holiest people in the Old Testament are married”. It can be seen that those who choose to become Nazirites (Nu 6:1ff) separate themselves from earthly pleasures not sexual relationships. Waltke (2007:238) sees that “marriage is part of their consecration, worship, and holiness.” It would be difficult to find a Biblical basis for the elevation of one’s career over being married. While Paul would later elevate “singleness for ‘gifted’ individual” (1 Cor 7), the reasoning for this is to better serve the Lord not to serve one’s self (Waltke 2007:238).

The role of humanity in producing children is of great importance. The command or blessing to “be fruitful” is given to humanity Gn 1:28, Noah in Gn 9:1, 7, Abraham in Gn 17:6, 20 (the later regarding Ishmael) and Jacob in Gn 28:3; 35:11. The Hebrew midwives are rewarded for fearing God by being able to have families of their own (Ex 1:21).

The importance of marriage and the couple being together is shown in the regulation of a newly married man not being sent away for war. Rather, “for one year he is free to stay at home and to bring happiness to the wife he has married” (Dt 24:5). Notice it is “happiness” for his wife that is given as the reason. Being together should be something joyous (cf. Pr 5:18). The newly married couple have time to establish their lifelong relationship. When going into marriage the man is to leave his family (Gn 2:24) – “it is fine for a man to live with his parents as long as he is single” (Soungala 2006:12). However, once married there needs to be a separation – they are one together, not one with the man’s family.

The Torah clearly teaches that the marriage relationship is between a man and a woman (Lv 18:22; 20:13). Homosexuality carries the death penalty (Lv 20:13), which underscores the gravity of the offence. Throughout the Torah the punishment is always in proportion to the weight of the crime. Therefore, homosexuality is truly a “detestable” thing in the sight of the Lord.

While there seems to be provision for divorce (Dt 24:1ff), it is not on a whim but for a reason. This is in line with the later Biblical teaching of unfaithfulness being a valid reason for possible divorce (Mt 5:31f). Metaphorically God speaks of divorcing Israel (Isa 50:1; Jer 3:8) for adultery.

Within the patriarchal narratives, it is often seen that people wish to marry within their clan. An example of this would be Abraham's servant being sent all the way to his original country to find a wife for Isaac from among Abraham's relatives (Gn 24:3f). However, the reasoning of Abraham is to avoid Isaac marrying a Canaanite woman. There are prominent examples of marriage between cultures or races. Joseph married the Egyptian Asenath (Gn 41:45) and Moses married a Cushite (Nu 12:1). The reason given for not intermarrying between races is the risk of being led astray in the worship of God (Ex 34:8; Dt 7:3f). Paul, in 1 Co 7, would later highlight the need for a believer not to divorce an unbeliever but "would have counselled believers not to enter into marriage with unbelievers" (Marshall 2004:258). The racial exclusion for the people of Israel seen in Dt 23:3-6 has specific historical reasons. That the Egyptian, who was of those who enslaved the Israelites, was allowed to "enter the assembly of the LORD" (Dt 23:8) shows that there isn't outright permanent exclusion of all races. Similarly, foreigners living within the land enjoy many rights and are not to be harshly treated or exploited (Ex 22:21). In examining the structure of Dt 4-11, Dorsey (1999:87) sees a chiasmic structure centred on completely destroying the Canaanites (Dt 7:1-26). This shows the importance of not allowing syncretism come into the faith of the people of God rather than the barring of foreigners. This will be further developed in the former prophets.

### **3.2.3 Family**

The Torah emphasises the importance of the family and ties of kinship. By protecting the home as a "basic institution", the state is given "stability" (Waltke 2007:493). A son who is rebellious is put to death (Dt 21:18-21). This rebelliousness is behaviour that goes "far beyond the normal conflicts that sometimes occur between parents and children" (Chianequa and Ngewa 2006:237). It is not just disobedience to the father that this law covers, but also disobedience to the mother. It is clear that both father and mother have authority over their children (cf. Pr 30:17; 31:26). In the context of the Ancient Near East, this status of role for women is quite "revolutionary" (Waltke 2007:239). Similarly, the fifth commandment calls for a person to honour both their father and mother (Dt 5:16). In the case of the rebellious son, the elders of

the people act as a further check “on unreasonable accusations” (Chianeque and Ngewa 2006:237). Honouring your parents is of such importance within the Godly community that it ranks as one of the ten commandments as well as one of the twelve commands to which the people all said “Amen!” in Dt 27. Paul (1970:66) notes that capital punishment for disrespect towards parents is “unparalleled in any other collection of Near Eastern law”. This further highlights that respecting one’s parents is something valued by God and not just an ancient culture.

While being honoured by their children, parents have clear responsibilities for their children. Nu 30:3ff shows that a father who hears an oath of a child can veto the oath. (A similar provision is given for a husband to negate an oath of his wife). Parents are to “impress” upon their children the commands and laws of the Lord (Dt 6:7) and to teach them to both their children and their children’s children (Dt 4:9f).

The relative of someone who was poor and had to sell property is to be redeemed by their nearest relative (Lv 25:25). This shows the clear responsibility of an extended family to care for relatives – a concept foreign to most modern Western cultures but strong in traditional African cultures.

Further examples of the importance of kinship can be seen in Noah’s sons and their wives being included in those rescued from the flood. Gn 6:8f says that “Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD ... Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.” Yet, it is not just Noah who is saved from the destruction. In Nu 14:29-33 we see that children (those under twenty years of age in this example) suffer for their parent’s unfaithfulness. While these children were allowed to enter the Promised Land (unlike their parents), they still had to endure the forty years of wandering in the wilderness as a result of their parent’s actions. The judgement is upon all the community for the actions of some of the community. For Joshua and Caleb did not grumble, but even they still found themselves joining in the wandering in the wilderness. They did get to see the Promised Land, but only after a long wait (Dt 1:35-38).

We are more than mere individuals whose actions affect only ourselves. Dt 5:9 says that God punishes “the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me”. While this may seem harsh, it must be taken in the context of the following verse (Dt 5:10) that God shows “love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.” Our actions go beyond ourselves. We are in a community in the present – linked to Creator, creation

and kin – as well as a community in time. What we do will affect those coming after us. The saying “you reap what you sow” should be “they will reap what you sow”. They are, after all, your “seed”.

#### **3.2.4 Bound by common response**

Mendenhall (quoted in Walton 2006:299) states that the people of Israel were bound together as a community by the covenant not by a legal system. Covenant “creates a community where none existed before, by establishing a common relationship to a common lord”. The lack of legislation in the Pentateuch, compared to elsewhere in the Ancient Near East, indicates for Mendenhall that Israel was guided by a value system rather than a legal system. Walton (2006:301) says that “citizens understood their obligations by means of living in society and being taught customs and traditions in the home”. As Robertson (1980:171) puts it: “It is not law that is pre-eminent, but covenant.” The Exodus event comes before the giving of the Sinai covenant. Grace is the basis upon which the community of God’s people is formed. God chose them. God saved them. It is in response to what God has already done that the community of God acts. God’s people share a common bond – that of God’s grace. Therefore, in light of the way material is portrayed in the Torah, it would be difficult to institute a “Christian nation” upon a people who are largely non-Christian. A Christian nation would act according to the Word of God as a *response* to what God has done for them. In the case of Zambia, President Chiluba’s declaration of a “Christian nation” was made by the leader of a country in which the majority of people profess to be Christian. However, since the declaration was made by one man (albeit the President), there still needs to be a unified response from the people. To date there has not been a unified response from either the Church mother bodies or the people.

#### **3.2.5 Kingship**

In terms of governmental leadership, no king existed for the people other than the Lord Himself. The people of God at this time were a “theocracy”. It is anticipated that once in the land God had promised, the people will want to have a king like the nations around them (Dt 17:14). A human king “would have to wait for more than three hundred years” (Merrill 2006:251). This kingship is clearly anticipated in Gn 49 through the metaphors of the sceptre and staff. The dynasty of Judah will “continue uninterrupted until finally a scion of his line will appear whose claims on sovereignty will be final” (Merrill 2006:252). Gn 49:10 finds partial fulfilment in David, but final

fulfilment in Christ. Even though the motivation of the people in asking for a king would be wrong (cf. 1 Sa 8:7), “such a request ... was fully within the will of God” (Merrill 2006:406).

Even when choosing a king, the king is to be the one that God chooses (Dt 17:15) and not a foreigner (Dt 17:15). As previously with the issue of marriage, it is not *race* that is the issue but *religion*. A foreign king would serve different gods. In essence, God’s people require a God fearing leader – with a capital “G”. Often today we debate whether or not Christians should be in politics (Zambian politics is flooded with Bishops and Reverends) with arguments about Church and state. However, it would seem that the principle instructed in Dt 17 is that we should seek to have a Christian in a leadership position. It is good to have Christians in Caesar’s household (Ph 4:22) but how much better to have Caesar himself. The king for the nation of Israel needed to have a clear grasp of God’s Word – to the point of personally copying it out (Dt 17:18). The act of copying God’s Word evokes an image that is so much more than just a glance or quiet read. It would be “to the extent the king was loyal to the covenant, to that extent the nation would be blessed and prosper” (Merrill 2006:407).

### **3.2.6 Slavery – an economic safety net**

The thought of “slavery” in a community brings up images of slave markets, prisoners of war, dehumanising conditions and exploitation. However, the form that slavery took in ancient Israel – and the slavery spoken of in the Torah – is vastly different from the contemporary slavery images that come to mind. A more helpful translation of the Hebrew word *db, [ &*, would be “bonded worker” (Wright 2004:333). The word is quite common in the Old Testament, occurring over 800 times in the Hebrew (Schultz 1997:1184). The same word is used of the “slave” as the highest office – “servant of the Lord”. Schultz (1997:1184) states that it “is best to understand the *db, [ &*, as one who is dependent on another and accordingly carries out his will or acts for his benefit”. In the context of Israel, being an agricultural society, the slaves were “largely residential, domestic workers” that complemented but did not substitute the “labour of free members of the household” (Wright 2004:333). It was, according to Wright (2004:333), “little different *experientially* from many kinds of paid employment in a cash economy”.

A significant difference between the Torah and the laws of other ancient societies can be seen in the laws on slaves. Wright (2004:292) states that unparalleled “in any

other ancient Near Eastern code is the case of “slaves injured or killed by their own masters” (Ex 21:20f; 21:26f). This is supported by other scholars, such as Paul (1970:69) who notes that these laws are “without precedent in all other ancient Near Eastern collections” and “introduces a new evaluation of the intrinsic value of a slave, i.e., he is considered a human being in his own right”. Schultz (1997:1185) says that the Torah does “not criticize the institution of slavery, but includes numerous laws that protect slaves and accord them many of the rights of a citizen, regardless of the circumstances leading to their enslavement”. The slaves are not excluded from resting on the Sabbath (Ex 20:10) or from participating in the festivals (Ex 12:44; Dt 12:12ff; 16:11ff). The principle of “an eye for an eye” protected slaves as well as other citizens – injuring a slave meant freedom in compensation (Ex 21:23ff). Those slaves who were Hebrews were to be released after six years of service and “amply supplied with material goods, presumably to help them avoid debt slavery in the future” (Schultz 1997:1185). Slavery, or bonded work, was effectively a way of eliminating poverty and getting the poor back into a position from which they could start again. In some ways it isn’t too different from entering into military service in the modern sense. A person enlisting in the Armed services in most countries today signs on for a contracted period. During this period they are given orders which are to be obeyed. However, the orders must be “lawful”. After finishing the period of enlistment, one is given a pay out or pension or assistance in resettling into society.

Dt 23:15f states: “If a slave has taken refuge with you, do not hand him over to his master. Let him live among you wherever he likes and in whatever town he chooses. Do not oppress him.” So startling is this law that some scholars see this as being applied only to foreign slaves (Wright 2004:336). For example, McConville (2002:351) sees this as most likely referring to refugees from other lands. Effectively, this law forbids oppressing refugees who come among you. However, Wright (2004:336) sees this as “one of the most countercultural pieces of Old Testament legislation to be found ... [and] lends further weight to the view that normally slavery in Israel was not oppressively harsh”. For if slavery was harsh, would not the slave run away and seek refuge? It would be in the best interests of the master to treat his slaves well, otherwise he would not have any slaves! As Clines (quoted in Wright 2004:336) notes, it is “the one society in the Ancient Near East that had a law protecting runaway slaves” which was a society “that traced its origin to a group of

runaway slaves". Musekura (2006:321) states that in 2004 "some three and a half million Africans were refugees". These refugees should be welcomed and given refuge, just as the runaway slaves were in Israel. Job (31:13-15) vocalises the Torah's teaching when he says: "If I have denied justice to my menservants and maidservants when they had a grievance against me, what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account? Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?"

### **3.2.7 Land**

In Numbers 26 and 34 (as well as Joshua 13-19), what may seem as tedious lists to the modern reader, is "enshrined a fundamental principle: the land was intended to be equitably shared out, so that every household has its part in the national inheritance" (Wright 2004:89-90). The underlying basis of the economic system was neither a form of communism nor Western capitalism. The underlying basis was each family had land. The work that one's family put in meant direct benefits back to the family (like capitalism). This encouraged hard work. There was no communist style redistribution of the all the produce. However, "property rights ... were not based on natural, commercial deals or sheer force ... Land holdings were the allotments of the divine giver, and therefore were held in trust from God" (Wright 2004:90). As will be seen later in the prophets, much of the abuse of the covenant, and subsequent injustices and oppression, is tied to the issue of land. To deny a family land, meant to deny them the economic means of sustaining themselves. All land was to be returned to the original family ownership in the year of Jubilee. Hence, the next generation did not have to pay for the economic mismanagement of their parents, nor did any one family grow far above their peers in terms of wealth. After all, the issues of wealth and land are intertwined. That it was the family that was allocated the land, not the individual, further increased the ties of family and highlighted the importance of the family and extended family units in the society.

### **3.2.8 Visible membership**

As a community, God's people in the Old Testament were given certain rites to "mark one's membership in a religious community" (Waltke 2007:454). Those rites that marked one as a Jew – circumcision, Passover and the Sabbath were carried on into the Christian community in the form baptism and communion. Baptism "marks entrance into the Christian community; and eating the Lord's Supper shows participation in Christ" (Waltke 2007:454). These rites, according to Waltke

(2007:454), “not only separate the faithful from the unbeliever but also [safeguard] them from assimilation into the world around them”. Christians and Christian communities need to think carefully about not downplaying the role of rites. It is not that baptism saves – salvation is by grace through faith – but it visibly marks entry into the community of God’s people. In addition, it is hardly coincidental that the Lord’s Supper was inaugurated “at the annual observance of the Passover in Jerusalem” (Martens 2007:228). Both the Lord’s Supper and the Passover were reminders of God’s deliverance. Both served (and serve) to mark out God’s people from those around them.

### **3.2.9 Sabbath – a lived out reminder**

The Sabbath was a vital component of the community of Israel in the Torah. They were told to keep it “above all” (Ex 31:13 ESV). According to Waltke (2007:420-425), there were three reasons given for the people keeping the Sabbath rest. In Ex 20:11, we are told to keep the Sabbath rest since God rested on the seventh day, blessed it and made it holy. The second reason, given in Dt 5:15, is to remember that Israel were slaves in Egypt and that God brought them out with His “mighty hand”. Waltke (2007:422) sees the first reason for keeping the Sabbath as being grounded in “creation and had humanitarian concerns”. The second reason was “grounded in the order of redemption and had a theological purpose. Sabbath serves as a lived-out sign, an active reminder”. The third reason is that it is the “sign that the Creator has set Israel apart for a special covenant relationship with Him (Ex 31:12-17)” (Waltke 2007:422). There has been much debate as to whether Christians should keep the Sabbath. Without going into whether the Sabbath is still binding or not, I would suggest that from the Torah we can glean the following. The Sabbath allows a community time to spend with God, time to spend with each other and allows a community to be distinctive from the world around. Greed and selfishness can often be behind people not wanting to take a rest. By taking rest, Christians will have the time to come together – as we are encouraged to do in Hebrews 10:25. If there was no set day for rest, Church attendance would fall dramatically. In addition, it sends a message to the world – this is God’s time and it is my priority – not work nor football nor any other thing should come before my setting aside this time for the Lord. This is holiness. This is being a light to the world, just as Israel was to be a light to the nations.

### **3.2.10 Magic forbidden**

Within the community of God's people there was to be no one "who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead" (Dt 18:10b-11). God detests these practices. It is due to these practices that the Canaanites were to be driven out from before the Israelites. It was imperative, therefore, that the people of God would not do the very things for which the Canaanites were condemned for. At the heart of the matter is the sinful desire by humanity to try to control their own destiny. They want to know the future. They want to control the present. It shows a lack of dependence upon God in daily life and a lack of trust in Him for the things to come. Magic and witchcraft put humanity at the centre, controlling life, rather than God. In addition, "those who practice witchcraft or act as mediums open themselves to manipulation by demonic powers" (Chianeque and Ngewa 2006:235). It is strange how many Christians in the West see no danger in these things, and therefore tolerate them quite openly. Most newspapers have astrology columns in them and Christians would read them "just out of interest". In Africa, however, the problem is in reverse. Many use witchcraft and other forms of magic as a "fall back". If the Church can not fix a problem, then try magic. Kunhiyop (2006:374) says that "while it is easy to understand how nominal Christians can cling to this deep-seated belief, it is disturbing that it is widespread among Christians". Both of these options - of benignly tolerating witchcraft and of secret falling back to witchcraft - are not available to a Christian. There also needs to be care that our Christianity doesn't become a thinly veiled substitute for witchcraft. One only needs to go to any bus station in Zambia to see vehicles bearing stickers of "This bus is covered by the blood of Jesus". The blood of Jesus is not some protective charm that will save a vehicle from harm: it was an atoning sacrifice for sin.

### **3.2.11 Justice**

Justice is a central part of the community of God. The Hebrew word  $\text{fP;v]mi}$  (judgement or legal case) occurs 84 times in the Torah. The judges among God's people are not to show "partiality in judging [and to] hear both small and great alike ... [they should not] be afraid of any man, for judgment belongs to God" (Dt 1:17; cf. 1 Sa 8:3). Enns (1997:1143) states that "failure to maintain high standards of justice brings upon Israel dire punishment", as would be seen later in the message of the prophets. While modern justice seems very secular in nature and far from the

Church community, Schultz (1997a:838) notes that “Israel’s standard of justice is based not on a human law code but on the character, actions, and demands of God”. It therefore follows that there are “relatively few occurrences” of justice that are not “fundamentally theological in nature”. God is just. Those who have been delegated authority by God are expected to deliver justice. This is true at all levels, from the parent disciplining their child to the national leader. Failure to deliver justice is a sin. The laws laid out in the Torah benefit the community over the individual. For example, the laws concerning mildew (Lv 14:33) or skin diseases (Lv 14:1ff) may seem harsh to the individual involved (having their house destroyed!) but they are the benefit and protection of the greater community. Failure to administrate justice in even a minor matter can have consequences for the wider community.

The Torah shows how leadership should act within a Godly community. Leaders should not seek their own glory or fame. It is God who makes a “name” for Abraham in Gn 12:2b. This is in direct contrast to the preceding chapter, where the people want to build the Tower of Babel to make a name for themselves (Gn 11:4). Pharaoh is at fault in Ex 9:17 for “exalting yourself against my people” (ESV). The people and the beasts can suffer from the decision of a ruler (Ex 8 and 9).

### ***3.2.12 Leadership***

An important lesson for leadership within a community is given in Ex 18:14ff. At that point Moses had been working alone in most of the leading in the community of God’s people. However, Moses father-in-law points out that “you and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone” (Ex 18:18). Moses is then advised to teach the people “the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens” (Ex 18:20f). This would lighten the load on Moses and share the responsibility. It is not only Moses who would benefit from this arrangement, but also the people since they would get speedier resolution of their problems. In essence, a leadership structure and a clear chain of command help both the people and the leaders to cope with daily living in a community.

As a leader, Moses made God’s Word known to the people and they responded to it (Ex 24:7; cf. Dt 17:11; 31:11; 2 Kg 23). It is difficult to obey that which you do not know. The law wanted leaders – even kings – to be counter cultural. The king was

not to “consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left” (Dt 17:20). They were not to gain great wealth or have many wives. How much do we need our leaders to read the Word of God (as Israel’s leaders were instructed to do) and to act out the Word (which Israel’s leaders usually failed to do). The number of vehicles in a Presidential motorcade is of the world, not of God’s intended way.

### **3.2.13 Economics**

The Torah teaches us much about the intended economics of the people of Israel. These economics are rooted in theology – how one understands God affects the way in which one lives. What we learn about God in the Bible is not meant to be abstract theories that are unrelated to the nitty-gritty, day to day toil of life. Chingota (2006:160) states that “holiness must manifest itself even in what we think of as the secular areas of human existence”. Building upon the Biblical fact that the earth is the Lord’s (Ex 9:29; Dt 10:14; Ps 24:1), Wright (2004:145-150) sees the following four principles that “seem to emerge to govern our ethics for ecological and economic activity”. First, there is “shared access to natural resources”. The dominion of the Earth was given to all humanity, not just a chosen few. Therefore, all humanity needs access to resources. This is “*not* to say that there can be no legitimate private ownership of material good ... It *is* to say that such individual property rights, even when legitimate, always remain subordinate to the prior right of all people to have access to, and use of, the resources of the earth”. The question really does boil down to loving your neighbour more than yourself (Lv 19:18). The young man who thought he had followed the commandment still needed to give to the poor (Mt 19:21). This wasn’t some arbitrary vow of poverty – it was helping those who were poor and in need. It was showing love to your neighbour – which wasn’t a new teaching at all. As Wesley said: “Those who calmly desire and deliberately seek to attain [possessions], whether they do, in fact, gain the world or no, do infallibly lose their own souls” (quoted in Jennings 1990:33). The principle of all resources ultimately belonging to God – regardless of whether individually or communally owned – radically changes the way one views their possessions and the way one views the environment. Wesley (quoted in Jennings 1990:99) speaks of no longer talking of “*thy* goods, or *thy* fruits, knowing they are not thine, but God’s”. This is the difference between ownership and stewardship – between an individual orientation and a community orientation. As a steward, one wants to take the best care of what

one has been given. It *does* matter what we do with it. As stewards of the Earth, what we do to the environment *is* important. We need to care for it not just for our own sake, but for those to come. We need to rule wisely because that is the task which God has given us. We were not made to rule creation as stewards for God in order to gratify ourselves! This is seen in the laws regarding the land to fallow (e.g. Lv 25:3f). It was not about getting the most you can in your lifetime. The land needed to be cared for so that the next generation could have good yields as well. Similarly, the Sabbath was not just for people but also for animals as well (Ex 20:10). In Gn 8:1, it wasn't just Noah who was remembered by God, it was also the animals. Creation was to be cared for by humanity – not exploited for our own personal gain. Ownership of land and resources, according to Wright (2004:148), “does not entail an absolute right of disposal, but rather responsibility for administration and distribution”.

The second principle that Wright (2004:148) looks at is the “right and responsibility of work”. Humanity is commanded to “fill the Earth and subdue it” (Gn 1:28) and this involves work. In creation, God works for six days then rests. We are made in His image (Gn 1:27). Therefore, work is the norm (just as having a rest after working should be a norm). Wright (2004:148) speaks of work being “our responsibility and right ... voluntary, deliberate idleness is sin”. This is born out in the Torah. If one goes into poverty, the way to get out of poverty was not through a government handout or outside donor aid. One could sell oneself into bonded work for six years (Dt 15:12) – which we have already seen was not the harsh image of slavery we often picture in our minds. In addition, people were to “not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest” (Lv 19:9) nor to go “over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen” (Lv 19:10a). For they were to be left for “the poor and the alien” (Lv 19:10b). So, despite the poor being provided for they still need to go and harvest it. It was not delivered to them, making them idle and lazy. They still needed to go out and harvest it themselves. Wesley famously gave three simple rules for the handling of worldly possession: “Gain all you can; save all you can; give all you can” (Marquardt 1992:35). It is Biblical to work hard – to make the best use of what the Lord has given to us. One doesn't mind working hard when there is a specific goal that you desire. Jacob worked seven years to marry the girl of his dreams, and then another seven because he was tricked (Gn 29). To Jacob, Rachel was worth fourteen years service. How much

more should we be working as Christians for the “prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14) and being told “well done, good and faithful servant” (Mt 25:21)?

It should be noted that within the Torah we see conditions of service for workers (e.g. Ex 21:20ff), payment of workers (Dt 24:14f) and provision for rest (Wright 2004:159). Employers are to treat their workers fairly. Wages are to be paid “each day before sunset” since the workers are poor and counting on it (Dt 24:15a). Failure to do so would make the employer “guilty of sin” (Dt 24:15b). It is ironic that it is often churches and governments which have the poorest track record of paying their workers on time. It is a sin to delay in paying the pastor on time. It is a sin for a government to delay payments for their teachers, police or council workers – particularly when the members of parliament are getting paid and, often, discussing pay rises! In addition, frequently employers do not give provision for their workers to rest. Yet, this principle is enshrined within the Ten Commandments themselves, as well as repeatedly in the text of the Torah.

Furthermore, on the subject of workers, Ex 21:33ff has provisions for “Occupational Health and Safety” well before the modern phrase came into practice. Simple things like covering holes, ensuring your animals do not hurt others, personal injury to employees, etc... are all of importance to the community of God’s people. However, the compensation must fit the crime if there has been neglect. There are no multi-million dollar Western style law suits here: only fair compensation.

The third principle that Wright (2004:162) sets out is the “expectation of growth and trade”. This was a crucial area that the Torah addressed. How does one encourage “growth and material productiveness ... in line with God’s creative purpose and explicit desire to grant abundance” (Wright 2004:162) without falling into the sins of greed, exploitation and injustice? For Wright (2004:162) the “guiding ethos of Old Testament economics could be said to be summed up in the tenth commandment: ‘You shall not covet’”. We are to work hard for the Lord and for the benefit of the community, not for individual gain. God blessed Israel when they were obedient, he cursed them when they ignored His ways – when they exploited the poor and allowed injustice. In effect, by God’s people striving to be wealthy and focusing on material gain they will fail God and there will be repercussions.

That “the land must not be sold permanently” (Lv 25:23) prevented the “amassing of huge private estates by permanent land purchase” (Wright 2004:163). In addition,

Wright (2004:164-165) points out that there were limits on debt (Lv 25:39) and limits on accumulation (such as no interest on loans, controls over the use of pledges). Even the king “must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold” (Dt 17:17). It is interesting that there has been so much recent success using micro-financing in the developing world as way to get people back on their feet. This is the same ethos that directed the economic system laid out in the Torah. That is, the poor are given a hand through either loans or bonded work but it is the poor themselves who still need to work to get out of their situation. Micro-financing enables those in poverty to obtain the necessary capital to work their way out of a poverty situation. The Torah is similar. However, it goes further. The secular economist Berliner (1999:424) points out that “few people will regard it as fair that one citizen’s income should be larger than another’s by the sheer accident of having been born to richer parents”. The distribution of land by family clan, and its return in the Jubilee, ensured a system where every one started on a relatively equal footing. Yet, they were still motivated to work hard for themselves and for each other.

The fourth principle that Wright (2004:149) puts forth is the “fair sharing of the product of economic activity”. Just as there were limitations on the “right of private ownership of resources” (e.g. through the year of Jubilee), so too the “right to consume or enjoy the end product of the economic process is limited by the needs of all ... there is no mandate ... for private exclusive use, or for hoarding or consuming at the expense of others” (Wright 2004:149). When God provided manna in the wilderness, He provided enough that each had sufficient for what they needed (Ex 16:18). Those that tried to be greedy and hoard it found that it did not keep (Ex 16:20). It seems to be a part of life that humanity usually spends most or all of what they earn regardless of how little or how large the amount they earn is.

It is ironic, and sad, that browsing the “history of economic thought” and “history of economic systems” section of one of Australia’s top universities, there was no mention of Israel or the Torah. To the Western mind, economics started with Adam Smith, Thomas Mun or, maybe, Aristotle. Hopefully, the above brief examination of the Torah will show not only that God is interested in economics as well as faith, but that the two are more closely intertwined than we usually realise. The theology of the people of God was acted out in the day to day lives that they lived. Hill and Walton (2000:140) see that the “law in Israel emphasised right behaviour in the eyes of

God". We would do well to remember how much of the law dealt with day to day life as we consider our own right behaviour before the eyes of God.

### **3.3 Former prophets**

The section of the Old Testament designated the "former prophets" includes the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. Within the Former Prophets we find "both overt statements of a theological nature as well as in the more subtle accounts of events from which theological deductions can be drawn" (Merrill 2006:414). These books take the form of narrative. Often the actions of the individuals described are wrong. However, all Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching. We can learn much by seeing how the Torah was followed or ignored, and consequences this had. In addition, the former prophets give us vivid examples of how the community of God's people lived and in what areas they struggled. Above all, we need to examine the former prophetic books and see what they teach us about God and what pleases Him.

#### **3.3.1 Leadership**

Perhaps for more than any other area of community life, the former prophets teach us about leadership. Even the title of Judges, "designates this [is] a book about leaders" (Goldingay 2003:540). We are told that a leader should serve the people if you want them to serve you (1 Ki 12:7). Leaders need to be courageous (Jos 1:6f). This is rather ironic considering that two of the leaders of the former prophets hid themselves to get out of leadership – Gideon hid in a winepress (Jdg 6:11) and Saul hid amongst the baggage (1 Sa 10:23)! Although a leader is to be strong and courageous, they should not be exalting themselves. God is the one who exalts a leader. Just as we saw with God making the name of Abraham great, God exalted Joshua and made his name great (Jos 4:14). David, also, did not seek to raise himself up to be son-in-law to the king (1 Sa 18:18). It is God who rose up David from being a shepherd to a prince (2 Sa 7:8); God is the one who makes David's name great (2 Sa 7:9). By picking the seemingly weakest, it shows that it is God who saves rather than the human leader. Gideon was hardly a mighty man hiding the winepress, nor was he from a might clan (Jdg 6:15). It prevents human boasting when we know that it was God who delivered us (Jdg 7:2). Samuel is warned not to look at the outward appearance or the height of an individual (1 Sa 16:7). Abimelech

rose up to power via treachery and had treachery come against himself: “Thus God repaid the wickedness that Abimelech had done to his father by murdering his seventy brothers” (Jdg 9:56). The type of leader that God desires for his people is “a man after [God’s] own heart (1 Sa 13:13f). It was in the steps of David that all other good kings are said to follow. David wanted to win in battle to make all the earth know that there is a God in Israel and that the battle belongs to the Lord (1 Sa 17:46). David was far from perfect – he took advantage of one of his citizens, murdered him and committed adultery with his wife (2 Sa 11). In addition, in this he was a clear example of the rich exploiting the poor, denying them justice. David had everything, yet despised the word of the Lord (2 Sa 12:9). Leaders are not above reproach (2 Sa 12:7ff; cf. 1 Sa 25:17 where Nabal is such a “worthless man that one cannot speak to him”). When confronted by the prophet Nathan, David admitted his guilt (2 Sa 12:13). As a result of his sin, the child died but David still worshipped the Lord and accepted the judgement that was given (2 Sa 12:15ff). In other examples of leaders being confronted, Joab tells David that he should value his people more (2 Sa 19:5) and “a man of God” to Jeroboam (1 Ki 13:1ff).

As a leader, Samuel saw it would be sin to cease praying for the people (1 Sa 12:23). Akanni (2006:346) notes that “Samuel continued to engage in this ministry behind the scenes until his death many years later. Retirement from public ministry should not terminate a leader’s calling.”

Goldingay (2003:540) notes that there is “mutual involvement of divine initiative, human gifting and community commission” in the appointment of leaders. A leader cannot make themselves a leader by sheer personal desire. A leader needs the respect and approval of the people he/she is to lead. In addition, God is a God who acts. He raises up leaders and provides them with their gifts.

In the former prophets, leaders are generally viewed in light of whether they were obedient to God or whether they did what was evil in the Lord’s sight. The phrase “did evil in the sight of the LORD” occurs 31 times in the former prophets. There are 7 occurrences in Judges which all refer to the people. The remaining 24 occurrences all occur in 1 and 2 Kings, and all, except for one, pass judgement on individual kings of Judah and Israel. In effect, the entire reign of each king is assessed in light of whether or not they obeyed God. In 1 Sa 12:14, Samuel tells the people “if you fear the LORD and serve and obey Him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the LORD your God—good!” It is

not just for the people to follow the Lord, but also for the king. It is due to Saul rejecting the “Word of the Lord” that God rejects him as king (1 Sa 15:23). Saul followed popular opinion rather than what God said. In 1 Sa 15:24 he confessed that: “I have sinned. I violated the LORD’S command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them.” If this was the case in a monarchical society, how much more true in modern democracies! It is the view of the public today that “the job of government is to carry out the wishes of the people with sensible policies” (Stott-Despoja quoted in Benson 2008:1). The picture of the former prophets is that it is the job of the leader to lead in according with God’s commands. Democracy does not have a Biblical outcome if the people wish to sin. Now, I am not advocating a Christian coup de etat to enforce Biblical principles in any way. However, I am stressing that Christians in government need to stand in obedience to God. This may mean being voted out of office in a democratic system. Compromise is not an option. It was Nadab’s sin that “made Israel to sin” (1 Ki 15:26 ESV; cf. 16:2). Put simply, “to obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sa 15:22). In light of modern democratic process, it is interesting to see the attitude of Absalom. Absalom stole the hearts of the people by lying about whether the king cared or not about them (2 Sa 15:6). Is this not the very nature of modern party politics? One side telling the people that the other party does not care about certain issues?

It would be an appropriate place here to note that “democracy is a human political creation, just like other political systems” (Turaki 2006:785). Democracy is not *the* Christian way to run a government. In examining the Scripture, we are not prescribed to run our communities only in a democratic way. The closing chapters of the book of Judges show many horrors and “implicitly suggests that kingship did have a restraining effect on disorder” (Goldingay 2003:545). This is not say that the monarchy would not exhibit many faults in the years to come.

### **3.3.2 Obedience**

The importance of obedience is particularly highlighted in Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the temple (1 Ki 8:33ff). Solomon says that the sin of the people can lead to defeat but pleading for forgiveness can restore them (1 Ki 8:33f). Similarly, a lack of rain can be due to sin and the people need to ask for forgiveness (1 Kg 8:35f). The same line of thought is then applied to famine, pestilence, blight, mildew, locusts, caterpillars, enemies, plagues and sicknesses! There is a link between the obedience of the community of the people of God and what befalls them. The book

of Judges shows a cycle of the people sinning, God sending judgement, the people crying out for help and God delivering them. The seriousness of sin is shown clearly in the exile of Israel and Judah. Continual disobedience of God by the leader and the people eventually led to the exile of the people. The Biblical account does not blame the expansionist policies of the Assyrian or Babylonian empires for the fall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. 2 Ki 24:20 states that it “was because of the LORD'S anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end He thrust them from his presence.” The might of Nebuchadnezzar is a mere detail. God is powerful and active. Obedience to Him is more important than bowing to the wishes of the popular vote or compromising out of fear of the surrounding nations. The continuance of the ruling house was dependent not on “outward show” but on “inner spiritual state” (Wiseman 1993:134). Hence the favour of the Lord toward Josiah who had a penitent heart and humbled himself before the Lord. Hence, the Lord gathered him to his fathers in peace (2 Ki 22:19f). He had turned to the Lord with all his heart, soul and strength (2 Ki 23:25). It is interesting to note that Israel's first three kings “all are destroyed by leadership. Saul and David might have lived happy and honourable lives as farmer and shepherd ... the same is true of Solomon” (Goldingay 2003:550). Being in positions of leadership puts great strain and responsibility on an individual. Not everyone can be a leader. While “in each case the people might have had cause to regret” making these three men kings, “there is no indication that any other course was open to God or people.”

From the Former Prophets we can observe that there is not a hard and fast relationship between obedience and prosperity, or between disobedience and suffering. For example, Jeroboam I reigned twenty two years and dies peacefully, “despite his wrong doing”, while Joash and Amaziah “despite the faithfulness of their long reigns ... end up assassinated” (Goldingay 2003:645).

Since obedience is important for the leader and for the community, knowing what to obey is a highly relevant issue, as well as who was being obeyed. “Jehoash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all his days, because Jehoiada the priest instructed him” (2 Ki 12:2 ESV). Joshua is commanded by God to “be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go” (Jos 1:7b). Repeatedly we see the memorials to remind future generations of what God did for his people. After the crossing of the Jordan, 12 stones are gathered to “serve as a sign among you”. When future

generations asked about this sign, they would be told that “the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD ... These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever” (Jos 4:6f). In the presence of “all Israel, aliens and citizens alike, with their elders, officials and judges”, Joshua read out “all the words of the Law” (Jos 8:33f; cf. 2 Ki 23:2). It is stated that “there was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them” (Jos 8:35). The people, therefore, knew what they must do to be obedient to God. They learnt in the context of the community coming together. The blessings and the curses listed in Deuteronomy affect the whole community, so it is important that the whole community isn’t ignorant of the Word of the Lord. Obedience shows that the Lord is with a community (Jos 22:31). Sadly, in Judges 2:10, we learn that the next generation did not know the Lord or the work that he had done in Israel. This actually shows disobedience on the part of the previous generation. The Law states that the commands of the Lord were to be impressed upon their children, talked about when they sat at home and when they walked along the road, lay down or got up. They were to “tie them as symbols” on their hands, “bind them” on their foreheads, and “write them on the doorframes” (Dt 6:7-9). The result of the next generation not knowing the law or what God had done was that they “did evil in the sight of the Lord” (Jdg 2:11). Though they were ignorant, their disobedience still had consequences (Jdg 2:14). Josiah tore his cloths upon hearing the book of the Law since he realised that they and their fathers hadn’t been obeying the Law. The failure to pass on knowledge of the Lord is also shown in the sons of Eli – who “did not know the Lord” (1 Sa 2:12 ESV). Their actions were a reflection on Eli. The Lord told Eli through Samuel, that “I am about to punish [Eli’s] house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them” (1 Sa 3:13). 1 Ki 2:1ff shows David passing on to Solomon the need to follow the Lord’s commands “so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go”.

### ***3.3.3 Consequences beyond the individual***

The former prophets repeatedly highlight and stress that there are consequences for others in whatever we do. The actions of the individual have a direct bearing of their community in the present, and the community in the future. The bonds of community are much stronger than we think. In 2 Ki 10:30 we are told that because Jehu had done what was right in the Lord’s eyes “your descendants will sit on the throne of

Israel to the fourth generation". In Jos 7:1ff, we see the sin of an individual, Achan, affects the whole community. Even though it was only Achan who acted, notice the language God uses in 7:11 "*Israel* has sinned; *they* have violated my covenant, which I commanded *them* to keep. *They* have taken some of the devoted things; *they* have stolen, *they* have lied, *they* have put them with *their* own possessions." Achan had lied, coveted and disobeyed the Lord. Through the death penalty, sin is purged and rooted out of the community for the benefit of the community. Again, in punishment we see that Achan's sin has consequences that extend beyond just the individual since his family and livestock are also killed. A memorial is made to remind later generations of the consequences of disobedience (Jos 7:26; cf. 8:29). When the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh made an altar, the other tribes were fearful that their action would bring down the Lord's wrath on all the tribes (Jos 22:18). The child of David and Bathsheba died because of David's sin (2 Sa 12:14). During David's reign there was a famine in the land because of the actions of Saul, it is the death of seven of Saul's sons and the burial of Saul which breaks the famine (2 Sa 21). Obviously, a famine will affect all the community – so the sin of Saul had affects on the entire kingdom after his death. The children of Saul are held to be accountable for the sins of their father. A similar situation of children bearing punishment for their father is seen in Solomon. Since Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord, he would have the kingdom torn away from him. Yet, because of David, his father, the tearing away would be delayed until the time of Solomon's son. So, in effect, Solomon's son bears the punishment of Solomon, while Solomon is rewarded for having David as a father. However, according to 2 Ki 14:6, humans should not punish children for the sins of their fathers (in accordance with Dt 24:16; cf. Jer 31:30).

In 2 Sa 24:10, David admits that he has sinned to the Lord, but the punishment options that are given by the Lord all affect the whole nation. The character of a leader and their decisions can affect the whole of a community. In 1 Ki 21:25ff, we see that Ahab's repentance meant he did not face death but his sons still bore the judgement. In 2 Ki 5:27, Gehazi's sin meant he and all his descendants *forever* would have leprosy. Josiah tears his robes since "great is the LORD'S anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us" (2 Ki 22:13). Josiah felt the guilt of sin of his forebears. Clearly, the concept of sin and

guilt, obedience and blessing extend beyond the individual for these are not isolated incidents. The sins (or obedience, for that matter) of the kings in the book of kings are described in terms of walking in the ways of their fathers. Those that did what was right put away the sins of their forebears (e.g. Asa in 1 Ki 15:11ff). Goldingay (2003:642) notes that “Kings allows for the way one generation’s wrongdoing affects future generations.” It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully examine the debate of whether or not one can be guilty for the sins of another, but the implications of these examples would be that the actions of an individual can have consequences for the greater community – both the present community and the future community. In addition, as an individual we are affected by the actions of the community. As Mbiti (1990:219) said, “I am because we are.”

### **3.3.4 Purity**

In 1 Ki 11, we are given a description of Solomon’s “personal failure to keep the law forbidding intermarriage with non-believing wives (Wiseman 1993:134). Davis (2002:117) sees that while some writers complain about Solomon’s “affluence, indulgence, excesses, extravagance, exploitation and oppression ... one can be duped into thinking that such items are the principal trouble”. Solomon’s heart “became preoccupied with Solomon, not God” (Hanson 1986:123). It was important that the people of God were distinctive from those around them (Jos 5). In accordance with the commands of the Lord, cities were destroyed in order to eliminate pagan influences (Jos 10:28ff). This was not an issue of race but an issue of purity. In essence, it was adhering to the first commandment. The people of God need to choose “whom you will serve” (Jos 24:14), since not only God’s promises come true but also his threats or curses (Jos 23:14ff). Intermarriage with people who are not God’s people causes God’s people to end up serving other gods (Jdg 3:5f). The people are commanded that they “may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them” (Jos 23:6f ESV). However, the people of God need to serve God alone, and put away all other religions and their idols and trappings (1 Sa 7:3). There was a need to “break down” pagan altars (Jdg 2:2). It should be noted that it was after coming out of pagan Egypt, that the golden calf was made (Ex 32), as well as by Jeroboam who lived in Egypt in exile (1 Ki 12:25ff). History repeats itself. This does not mean a form of xenophobia. Just as the Torah taught that God’s people need to welcome and look after foreigners, we see in the former prophets

Solomon desire God to hear foreigner's prayers so that "all people on Earth may know your name and fear you" (1 Ki 8:43 ESV). In addition, Elisha heals the foreign commander in order for him to know that there is no God in all the world except Israel (2 Ki 5:15).

The sin of Rehoboam, according 1 Ki 14:22-24, was that he built "high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill ... and there were also male cult prostitutes in the land". The reigns of the kings who followed were given report cards based on whether they continued these practices or not. This practice was forbidden in the Law (Ex 23:24; Dt 16:21f). The pagan religions that Israel did not fully eliminate slowly crept back into the land. It would take the exile for God's people to realise the gravity and seriousness of syncretism. What may have started in the seemingly innocent intermarriage of God's people and non-believers, ended up being the pebble that started the avalanche of the exile.

In the post-exilic period, in the areas occupied by Jews, "*not one single cultic figurine* has ever been found despite intensive excavations and archaeological surveys of the area" (Stern 2001:28; author's emphasis). The exile, as a meaning of purification, worked: the people did not mix paganism with their beliefs. The seeming harshness of the original commands to annihilate the Canaanites, must be viewed in the what resulted from the failure to carry out the command: the near annihilation of God's people. Obviously, Christians living in most nations can not go around physically eliminating pagan influences. These instructions were given to the nation of God's people at a set time in history by God Himself. However, we can still learn from what happened to Israel when they failed to carry out the Lord's command. For example, it is spiritually dangerous for a believer to marry a non-believer. During a lifelong partnership there will be unhelpful influence on the believer. Even Solomon, with his wisdom to discern good and evil, was brought down through marriage to women who did not follow the Lord. This was not some sudden attack, which could be easily seen. It was both "subtle" and "gradual" (Davis 2002:112-113) – not unlike many of the controversial issues that plague the church today (e.g. the ordination of homosexual priests in the Anglican Church in America). In a practical sense, nations who profess Christianity, such as Zambia, can take the simple, yet bold step (in modern eyes) of not allowing other religions to teach R.E. (religious education) in schools. While Zambia is pluralistic, "The God of the Bible is not a pluralist" (Davis 2002:115). Just like in the Old Testament, foreigners should be most welcome.

However, influences that can lead the people of God astray are serious. Failure to realise the gravity syncretism led the people of God to lose their homes and land be driven into exile. The seriousness of the punishment taught God's people a lesson they did not forget. Let us not make the same mistake. This does not mean an elimination of all cultural practices. However, there needs to be a careful evaluation of the meaning of traditional ceremonies. Sometimes there might be a Christian equivalent that could replace it, sometimes some elements might need to be removed. In Europe, one of the main pagan festivals was centred on the winter solstice. Christians turned the time into their own festival, remembering the birth of Jesus (Christmas). Lasisi (2006:900) cautions that "Evangelicals must not allow their fear of syncretism to prevent them from contextualising their faith to allow for meaningful local expression of it." Just as it was part of the agreement of the people in choosing to follow God that they were to put away foreign gods from among them (Jos 24:23), so too we must ensure in accepting Christ we put away foreign gods from our own lives. Being God's people comes with conditions of service.

### **3.3.5 Family**

Continuing on from the Torah, in the former prophets we see the importance placed on family relationships and the bearing of children. Rahab wanted her family saved (Jos 2:13). Jephthah's daughter was to lament for two months not because she was to die but because she was to die a virgin (Jdg 11:37ff). Michal having no children until her death is seen as a punishment (2 Sa 6:23). The Lord heard Hannah's prayer to have a child and granted her request (1 Sa 1). In 2 Ki 4:8-17, bearing a son was seen as a way of rewarding the Shunammite woman. Such was David's love for his son that, despite treachery, David was full of sorrow when Absalom died (2 Sa 18:33). Barzillai desire to die near "my own town near the tomb of my father and mother" (2 Sa 19:37). The feelings of kinship extend even to a tribal level. Each tribe saw the other tribes as brothers (Jos 22:4). All of Israel comes together against the tribe of Benjamin, and all the tribe of Benjamin defend their own (Jdg 20). There is solidarity on both sides. In continuation from the Torah, this incident also shows that the death penalty is viewed as a means of purging evil from the community (Jdg 22:13) and possibly that homosexuality was seen as worse than rape (Jdg 19:24ff). Although, we need to be cautious since this is narrative and not didactic material.

Respect for the elderly in the community is shown in the bizarre incident in 2 Ki 2:23ff where two bears killed 42 boys for teasing Elisha about his baldness. How lightly does Western culture take respect for their elders in light of this incident!

### **3.3.6 Economics**

Economically, we see that God changed the way in which he supported the people once they could get their own food for themselves (Jos 5). The manna was only a temporary solution. The allocation of land was done by lot (Jos 14:2; 18:8-10), yet there was still logic applied to the outcome (Jos 19:9). The importance of land to the community can be seen in the length of text devoted to it. When Hannah prays, she acknowledges that it is God who makes people poor or rich (1 Sa 2:7).

### **3.3.7 Dangers of manipulation and self-confidence**

In 1 Sa 4, the people use God's presence as a form of insurance policy for victory. It is humanity using God, not fearing him. While we do not have the Ark of the Covenant, there can be seen many examples today of this form of manipulation of God. The idea of the prosperity gospel – sowing a seed in order to receive back more is a form of attempting to manipulate God. Another example would be the way in which the blood of Jesus is used in some prayers – particularly in Africa. It is not uncommon to see mini-buses in Zambia with a sticker bearing “This bus is protected by the blood of Jesus”. While God can and does protect his people, we should not make the mistake of Israel and take his protection for granted and abuse it. Putting a sticker on a vehicle does not guarantee God's protection. The former prophets are clear that God hears his people when they are in trouble (e.g. 1 Sa 9:16f). The overconfidence of the people of Israel also extended to their leaders. Despite the warnings of the Torah, Mendenhall (2001:132) observes that “as soon as a power structure is established, those who hold power tend to regard themselves as immune from the ethical obligations that apply to those who govern”. The Lord saves the humble but brings low the haughty (1 Sa 22:28). Samuel's sons “did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice” (1 Sa 8:3). Even David needed to be confronted by the prophet Nathan. Leaders, especially leaders of God's people, need to be accountable. Just as being part of God's people does not make one immune from God's discipline, when one is a leader of God's people one is not immune from accountability. “The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness” (1 Sa 26:23). Leaders should only

do what they have authority to do. A secular leader can not replace a religious leader just because they wish (e.g. 1 Sa 13:8ff).

In 1 Sa 28:6ff, Saul sought out a “medium” since he got no reply from the Lord when he inquired. This broke the Torah’s teaching on mediums and witchcraft. Ahaziah, in 2 Ki 1:2ff, went to enquire of Baal-Zebub as to when he would recover from sickness. The angel of the Lord told Elijah to ask him “Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?” Even today, sometimes Christians do the same. If their prayers are not immediately answered in the way they want, they seek out witchcraft or other means to get what they want. However, “it is vital that believers understand that God is sovereign” (Kunhiyop 2006:374). When God placed judgement on David and announced that his newborn son would die, David fasted but did not seek other means out of the situation. He accept the judgement of the Lord and even worshipped God when it was carried out (2 Sa 12:20). While some Africans may need to be encouraged to not seek out witchcraft in the face of suffering, some Westerns need to be reminded that the Bible is clear that there are evil spirits and witches in this world. However, above all, God is sovereign.

### **3.4 Latter Prophets**

Prophecy in the Old Testament can be seen as covenant-centred and a continuation of the Mosaic office. Dumbrell (2002:107) states that “the prophets offered what was given on Sinai and reapplied it to current social, religious and economic questions. They were therefore not innovators.” As a result, one would expect to find similar issues arising within the prophets as there was in the Torah. The designation “Latter Prophets” covers Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the twelve “minor” prophets. Daniel and Lamentations are not part of the Latter Prophets, but are grouped with the “Writings” (VanGemeren 1990:17).

#### **3.4.1 Family**

Family is important. The opening verse of Zephaniah shows the importance of family to one’s identity, and even one’s place in history. Marriage is a union by the spirit, from which God desires to see godly offspring (Mal 2:15). Such is the strength and importance of the marriage bond that God warns that he would cover with violence the garments of the man who divorces his wife (Mal 2:16). Passages such as Malachi 2:14 and Jeremiah 6:11 would suggest that “polygamy never was God’s order of things for marriage even though it is present in the society of the Old Testament and New Testament” (Kaiser 1983:190). The breaking down of the family relationships, such as through youth being “insolent” to elders (Is 3:5 ESV), the loss of children and of widowhood (Is 47:9), are used as threats of dire punishment. It is a sin that fathers and mothers are treated with contempt (Eze 22:7). Robertson (2004:154) notes that with regards to the commandment to honour you father and mother, “the breakdown of proper respect for authority brought with it untold calamity within the social structure of Israel” as is shown in Micah 7:5f (cf. Eze 22:7; Rom 1:30; Eph 6:1-3). While such a command may seem of small significance, especially to a modern, Western mind, Robertson (2004:154) sees that the “breaking of the law of respect for God-ordained order invariably devastates an entire society. When the structures of the family are violated, the foundational stability of a community erodes.”

As has already been seen in the Torah and Former Prophets, the bonds of family are strong with the actions of members having consequences beyond their own

individual lives. As the Latter Prophets seek to apply the Torah to their situations, this theme continues but is quantified and clarified.

Isaiah 14:21 shows that the sons of Babylon being “slaughtered” for the “sins of their forefathers”. Harman (2005:128) notes that this punishment to the sons is not a let off for the fathers, since “a man’s children were his memorial”. Similarly, in Isaiah 65:6f God pronounces punishment both for the people’s sins and their fathers’ sins. Harman (2005:419) does not see the idea expressed in Isaiah 65:6f as one generation being punished for the sins of their forebears, “rather that the former sins have been consistently committed by the present generation”. Motyer (1993:145) notes that the “Old Testament forbids human judicial processes to punish children for parental sins (Dt 24:16)” but also that “for good and ill, children are heirs of their parents (Ex 20:5f).” The Book of Jeremiah continues to show the tension between family solidarity and individual responsibility. The LORD will bring charges against a generation but also their “children’s children” (Jer 2:9) as well as “bring the punishment for the fathers’ sins into the laps of their children after them” (Jer 32:18). Yet, Jeremiah 31:29f is clear that “everyone will die for his own sin”. When the people are punished it is for their sins *and* the sins of the fathers. Jer 4:18 says that: “Your actions and conduct has brought this upon you. This is your punishment.” Similarly, Ezekiel 11:21 (ESV) states that “those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, [God] will bring their deeds upon their own heads.” Ezekiel 18:4ff confirms this view of responsibility for one’s own sin: the righteous shall live; the violent son of the righteous will be punished; the son of the unrighteous who does what is right will live; the repentant will live and the unrepentant will die. Brownlee (1986:291) states that “God has declared that humankind is inextricably one with all earlier and all succeeding generations” and that Ezekiel is pointing out that “repentance of traditional and deeply ingrained sin can reverse the slippery trail whereby we slide into oblivion. Our repentance is not only personal, but a reversal of the ways of the fathers”. What is presented in Ezekiel is described by Dumbrell (2002:159) as a “complement to the older doctrine [of corporate responsibility]”. Despite the qualifying of Ezekiel, there are many examples of family liability and responsibility. In Jeremiah 29:32, God says he will punish Shemaiah and his descendents. Ezekiel went into exile with the people, sharing in their punishment. In Hosea, the children are tainted by their mother’s actions (2:4), the children are forgotten by God due to the parent’s disobedience (4:6) and Hosea

prays for a “miscarrying womb” (Hos 9:14 ESV) to which God replies that “even if they bear children I will slay their cherished offspring” (Hos 9:16b). In the later example, the children were being sacrificed by the people. By God slaying them himself it was both a punishment to the people but also a reminder that they belonged to him and not to a foreign god. In Amos 7:17, Amaziah’s wife and children are punished for his sin as well as himself. Of Edom, God says that they will be called “the people with whom the LORD is angry forever” (Mal 1:4 ESV). It is easy to read over such a verse without pausing, since it is about a people far removed from our present situation. Forever is a long time. Every new generation of that line is born into God’s anger.

The spiritual dimension of the issues of sin and guilt cut across the cultural upbringing of many modern societies. Ezekiel (14:12-14, 16, 18, 20) writes:

“And the word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it and break its supply of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast, even if these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, declare the LORD God ... they would deliver neither sons nor daughters. They alone would be delivered ... they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they alone would be delivered ... they would deliver neither sons nor daughters. They would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness.”

Today many countries have written into their laws the concept of “innocent until proven guilty”. While this is a useful clause for a legal system, it does not reflect the spiritual reality. All the children of society bear the punishment along with the rest of the society. A community can not rely upon the obedience of a few to save it. The faithful remnant went into exile. Having a righteous parent would not have saved Noah, Daniel or Job’s children from God’s punishment in this passage. As humans we share in Adam’s sin. It may seem harsh that children suffer unwittingly for their parent’s sins, but that is the spiritual reality for the world. Entire nations stand in judgement as a consequence of both their own disobedience and the disobedience of their forebears. It is imperative, therefore, that Christians seek to take the saving Gospel to the unreached. For such an action can have consequences not just in this generation but in countless generations to come within that people group.

In addition, on a national level, Jeremiah says that if the Lord chooses a nation and it turns from Him, He will “relent of the good [He] had intended to do to it” (Jer 18:10

ESV). Conversely, if a nation turns from its evil, He will “relent and not inflict on it the disaster [He] had planned” (Jer 18:8). An example of this is where the entire city of Nineveh fasted and mourned, from the greatest to the very least, and subsequently God relented of the intended disaster (Jon 3:5-10). In Joel 2:15f (ESV), all the community is involved in repenting and turning back to God:

“Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; gather the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his chamber, and the bride her chamber.”

The solidarity of the family can be positive. Due to the obedience of the family of the Recabites, God said that “Jonadab son of Recab will never fail to have a man to serve me” (Jer 35:19). Similarly, in Isaiah 37:35 God defends the city of Jerusalem for his name sake and “for the sake of David my servant” and Jeremiah is told to pray for the city to which he is taken in exile - since his prosperity is tied to that city (Jer 29:7).

It is perhaps fitting that the smallest of Old Testament books, Obadiah (v. 15), gives a concise statement to summarise the issue of responsibility: “as you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head.” From the evidence of the Latter Prophets there is truth in this verse on all levels – from the individual level to the family level, from the past generations to the present generation, and even from the individual level to the national level. What an individual does will be returned to them. What a generation does will have an affect on the next generation. What a nation does will have consequences. It is possible for the individual to come to repentance despite their family (past and present) or nation, but we mustn’t ignore the solidarity of community both for good and evil.

### ***3.4.2 The use of marriage or family as a metaphor***

Throughout the Latter Prophets, marriage and family are used as metaphors for particular relationships. Community at a macro level mirrors community at a micro level. God’s people, Israel, are depicted both as a child (Is 1:2ff) and as a bride to God (Is 54; Ez 16;). The father-child relationship shows the dependence of God’s people upon God, while the marriage shows the exclusivism of the relationship between God and His people. Perhaps it is more helpful to think of community at a micro level mirroring the macro. Our marriages are to be pure, just as we are to be a pure and holy people set apart for God. We are to love our children, and our children

should depend upon us in reflection of the father-child relationship we enjoy with God both on an individual and corporate level.

### **3.4.3 Justice, the poor and the oppressed**

Perhaps the strongest message of the prophets is justice. It is a recurrent theme throughout the Latter Prophets as they seek to apply the Torah to their times. Davis (2006:22) notes that Biblical authors “did not have the luxury of using bold, italicized, or underlined type as our computer-driven generation does ... Repetition was one means they used as a substitute for underscoring.” Using this analogy, justice must be in 36 point font, underscored and italicised since it is a major theme in most of the Latter Prophetic books. Directly linked with the theme of justice is the cause of those who are in need. The Lord loves justice (Isa 61:9). In Amos 5:23f, God would not listen to the people’s worship but wanted justice instead. Throughout the Latter Prophets, there are calls for the people to act justly. For example, Isaiah 1:17 says to “learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.” The care for the needy revolves around justice. It is not a mere legalism, but concern for those who are helpless not to be exploited. For Isaiah 10:1f warns the lawmakers not to make laws that oppress or exploit those in need. It is not enough to obey the national laws of your land, but the laws should reflect an active care for those who are most vulnerable. The poor have rights in God’s eyes that extended beyond what humanity may legislate (Isa 10:2). It is a characteristic of the Messiah that he will give justice for the needy (Isa 11:4) which reflects the very nature of God Himself, who is a refuge for the needy and oppressed (Isa 25:4). In answer to the question of who can dwell with the consuming fire of God’s judgements, Isaiah 33:15 says: “he who walks righteously and speaks what is right, who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes, who stops his ears against plots of murder and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil”. Jeremiah’s call to reform and repent (7:5-7) revolves around the same theme:

“If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever.”

It can also be noted from this passage that the blood not to be shed is “innocent blood”. Administering justice does not mean a blanket pardon for all crimes

committed. The prophets call for the administering of justice and mercy (e.g. Zech 7:9), not mercy instead of justice. The Torah called for death as the punishment for certain crime for the benefit of the greater community. Additionally from this passage, we see that the following of other gods to “your own harm”. It is for our own benefit that we do not attempt to follow two masters – whether it is in a theological, syncretistic sense, or in the more subtle monetary sense (Mt 6:24).

Acting justly and seeking to administer justice is not a means of salvation but an outworking of God’s love for those in need. In the Torah the command to love your neighbour (Lv 19:18) comes amid numerous practical examples of care for those in need. While most Christians, in quoting Christ, can say what the two most important commands in the Bible are, it is less common that Christians go into the specifics of what loving one’s neighbour means. The prophets continue on from Leviticus 19 in spelling out the practical outworking of loving one’s neighbour. Ezekiel 16:49 gives the chilly words that the sin of Sodom was that she was “arrogant, fat and unconcerned ... [and] did not help the poor and needy.” This goes beyond just doing what is written in the law – it goes to the heart and concern of people. Just as Jesus would later take the law to a new level in the Sermon on the Mount, we see here already in the prophets that it is not enough just to act out the letter of the Law. This is the danger facing the Western Church at the moment, but is one that is beginning to even face the Church in Zambia: are we concerned for the poor and needy. Many young Zambians are taking up jobs in the U.K. and U.S.A. and leaving behind Zambia forever. They are in danger of becoming “unconcerned” to the “poor and needy” that they leave behind. Amos 6:1-7 warns those who live in luxury while not grieving that Joseph lies in ruin. Wealth of itself isn’t sinful. However, wealth and no concern for others is sinful. Failure to treat the poor and needy well angers God and leads to punishment (Am 2:6f; 4:1). In Jeremiah 5:28b-29a, the Lord declares: “Their evil deeds have no limit, they do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it, they do not defend the rights of the poor. Should I not punish them for this?” It is interesting to note that the Lord will leave a people “humble and lowly” (Zeph 3:12) as His people. Zephaniah, according to Robertson (1990:331) saw “the sin of pride as a chief cause of the destruction of Judah.” Robertson (1990:331) emphasises that in Zephaniah saying the remnant would be “humble and lowly” is not so much a declaration of their social status as their “moral attitude”. We are to be humble in our

moral attitude before God and our moral attitude to those around us (cf. Phil 2:3f). It is an easy trap to ignore the needy, but God has a special concern for those in need. Practically, we can see the call for honest weights to be used in the market place. In Micah 6:11, the Lord asks the rhetorical question of whether he will acquit a man with “dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights.” Even such seemingly small things as dishonest scales, concern the Lord. God “will never overlook commercial crimes” (Waltke 2007a:409). It can be noted, too, that unjust scales would also affect the LORD Himself, since many of the offerings had prescribed weights (cf. Eze 45:9ff). There are many examples today of similar commercial practices. For many years petrol companies added varying amounts of ethanol to petrol without disclosing what they were doing. While this has been rectified and openly disclosed in many countries, it is a clear example of not giving the buyer what they think they are paying for. Similarly, advertising often misleads in its desire to sell its product. The number of superlatives used and claims made in advertising becomes so common to our minds, that it even becomes an expectation. Yet, God does not desire people to be manipulated and misled. As is often the case, it is the poor and uneducated that often fall prey to much of the commercial exploitation of the world. A community seeking to follow Biblical principles needs to carefully scrutinise commercial practices. Micah 3:5 speaks of God judging those who “defraud labourers of their wages” (cf. Jer 22:13f). In Isaiah 58:3, the fasting of the people did not work since they were exploiting their workers. The kind of fasting that the Lord desires is to go against injustice, free the oppressed and share with the needy (Isa 58:6f). While we are not saved by our works, social justice is a way of drawing near to God. Our everyday lives are not detached from our religious experience. This is why it is important to examine community beyond the limited range of Church life. In Jeremiah 5:1, the Lord asks Jeremiah to “Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city.” The Lord does not ask Jeremiah to go to the temple and see how many people are praying and worshipping, listen to the quality of the praise team, or get Jeremiah to test their amount of knowledge. Rather, Jeremiah is told to look for “practical examples of covenant living” (Mackay 2004:240). In God’s community, we do not limit ourselves to “theoretical theology”, but need to be applying theology in all aspects of community life. Mackay (2003:149) sees that God uses “outward behaviour as an

index of their covenantal loyalty”. It is not a new thing, therefore, when God calls on His people to administer justice and show kindness and mercy (Zech 7:9) – for this was part of the Torah – but the prophets brought these issues to the attention of the people. As Christians, we need to be active in our community in living out these ideals and advocating them to the leaders of the community. We need to ask the question as to what our own outward behaviour as a community reflects. Are we overfed, arrogant and unconcerned (Eze 16:49)? Are we exploiting foreigners? Or are we acting justly? For Israel, the exterior portrayed the reality of the interior. James 2 would suggest that the same is true of Christians today.

To not warn people of their sin, is in itself a sin (Eze 3:16-21; cf. Eze 33). One cannot read God’s Word and keep quiet. While we can not expect the world to live by the standard of God’s Word, within a Christian community we cannot stand idly by when others are sinning. Just as the prophets spoke out to God’s people when they strayed (knowingly or unknowingly) from God’s commands, so too must there still be gentle, loving correction when today we see people of God straying from the Word of God. God does not ignore sin. He brought the deeds of His people upon their heads (Eze 9:10), so we must ensure that people know that they have strayed from his commands.

Foreigners (or “sojourners” in ESV) are to be given justice and not oppressed or exploited. In Ezekiel 22:7, the people are accused of extorting the foreigners in their midst: an accusation repeated in verse 29. Jeremiah 7:5-7 speaks against oppressing foreigners. Once again, this should be seen in the practical details of the lives of people in the community. One would expect a foreigner to be charged the same as a local at the market. Similarly, the immigration charges a country legislates should not be based on who can be most exploited, nor should foreign workers be paid less (whether legally or illegally) based upon their race or nationality.

Leaders are warned that “according to their way I will do to them, and according to their judgements I will judge them” (Eze 7:27 ESV). Bribery is repeatedly rejected by the prophets (e.g. Isa 1:23; 4:23; Am 5:11f; Mic 3:11). In Amos 5:11, leaders are admonished for over taxing the poor. Leaders are to serve the people, rather than seeking their own gain – doing your duty is more important than whether or not you are compensated for financially (Mic 3:11). This does not mean that we are to withhold wages, and thereby exploit them. However, practically, it does mean that you carry out your governmental job to the best of your ability without seeking

additional financial reward (legally or illegally). For example, a teacher should teach to the best of their ability during the allocated class time and not teach inadequately in order for students to need further private tuition (from the same teacher) in order to pass their exams.

In the area of justice, it is easy today to forget that it is God's justice that we are talking about and not a human set agenda. Isaiah 4:20 states "woe to those who call evil good and good evil". In the era of political correctness, it is unfashionable to speak against certain laws. For example, laws allowing homosexual marriage. It is important if a community wants to be Biblical in its basis, it does not give sway to the latest trends in human opinion but does justice, kindness and walks humbly with God (Mic 6:8).

The motivation for injustice is usually greed. The same verb that is used to describe the coveting of the fields in Micah 2:2, is used in the command "do not covet" (Ex 20:17). According to Talley (1997:168), the "action of coveting is preceded by the premeditation of coveting". As can be seen in Micah 2:1. This coveting followed by the seizing of fields and houses can be seen more recently in the history of Zimbabwe. Initially, the white population saw fertile farming land and allocated it to themselves. Now the reverse is happening. In Micah 2, the result of the coveting of and seizing was disaster for the people of God. Sadly, the situation at present in Zimbabwe can only be described in similar terms – disaster and utter ruin.

In conclusion from our look at justice and social action, we can see that we are to act justly since God is a God who acts justly (Jer 9:24). God loves justice (Isa 61:9) and His Spirit is linked to justice (Isa 42). Through justice, the needy are cared for and not oppressed or exploited. In addition, we should act justly since "if favour is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness" (Isa 26:10 ESV). The failure to carry out justice has dire consequences, hence the repeated call by the prophets to stop injustice and oppression. Zion was to be redeemed by justice (Isa 1:27).

#### ***3.4.4 Knowledge, teaching and obedience***

The Latter Prophets contain much on the importance of knowing God and knowing His commands. In essence, the prophets are not so much introducing something new as they are reminding the people of God what they should already know. They were "supervisors of covenantal performance" (Dumbrell 2002:10). The community of God also has an obligation to make the Lord known to those around.

In Hosea 4:6, God says that “my people destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I have rejected you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.” The result of this lack of knowledge is that there is “no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God” (Hosea 4:1). It is vitally important for God’s people to pass on their knowledge from generation to generation. The people reflect their leaders since they follow what they are taught and see in the leadership (Hos 4:9). It is interesting to note that later in Hosea, God declares that He desires “steadfast love not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hos 6:6 ESV). We often quote this and similar verses focusing on the love, but we often neglect the synonymous parallelism here ties together love and knowledge. The more we know God, the more we love God. It is hard to love someone whom you do not know. Our growing in knowledge of God pleases God. Of course, we do not merely sit idly in our knowledge. Isaiah 12:4f (ESV) says “make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that His name is exalted. Sing praise to the Lord, for He has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth.”

Many people seem to unconsciously think that they know more than God. Isaiah 29:16 says “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘He did not make me’? Can the pot say of the potter, ‘He knows nothing’?” There are a couple of modern day issues that this verse of Isaiah speaks to. Firstly, the issue of evolution. While there are a range of varying opinions within Christian circles as to how to reconcile Genesis and science, we need to exercise more care in the way in which these issues are taught in our schools. Evolution is treated as fact. The Bible is treated as a remote alternative view. In many countries the strong desire to separate Church and state has led to evolution becoming the norm in the schooling system without any challenge. A second issue would be homosexuality. The Bible is very clear on homosexual practice being sinful. Yet, we seem to think that some science has showed that the Bible (and, hence, God) did not realise various factors that contribute to a person being homosexual. In essence, if we say homosexuality is fine we are saying that God knows nothing. In both these issues, we need to take our knowledge from God and His Word. As a community, we need to be passing on the knowledge of God and His ways first and foremost. If a community claims to be Christian – like Zambia as a Christian nation or even the U.S.A. as it proclaims “In God we trust” – it can not be dictating to God the terms of its Christianity. New

Zealand's anthem is titled "God defend New Zealand", yet the clay has told the potter on what terms they want their relationship. New Zealand is one of the most secular societies in the world. Knowledge and the teaching of knowledge are cornerstones of any community. The people of God need to carry out their responsibilities in these areas diligently and guard against a famine of the Word of the Lord (Am 8:11). They are not to be like the other nations (Eze 11:12).

God gives us His commands for our own benefit; obeying them gives us peace (Isa 48:17f). Physical food may satisfy temporarily but in the Lord is found true sustenance (Isa 55:1ff). Obedience to God's commands gives life (Eze 20:11) and lets us know God (Eze 20:19). Obedience leads to knowledge, and knowledge leads to obedience. The people of God need to remember God's saving acts in the past (Mic 6:5) and pass on the works of God from generation to generation (Joel 1:3).

Obedience of the community can lead to blessing and disobedience can lead to punishment. Sometimes God uses punishments to bring people back to Him (Am 4:6f) or to make Himself known (Eze 7:4; cf. Ex 8:22). Sin can even affect the environment (Hos 4:3). Jeremiah 44:23 (ESV) says "It is because you made offerings and because you sinned against the LORD and did not obey the voice of the LORD or walk in his law and in his statutes and in his testimonies that this disaster has happened to you" (cf. Isa 1:19f, 2:1, 2:8, 3:8, 57:21, 59:2; Jer 6:19; 9:13-16; 12:17; Eze 6:11; Hab 2:12). While sometimes it appears that some people prosper following other gods (Jer 44:17), the disaster Jeremiah speaks of is invoked by the people of God disobeying Him. They made offerings yet were disobedient. Attending church and tithing regularly does not please God if one is leading a life of sin.

This does not mean that all suffering is from disobedience. For example, Jeremiah faithfully served the Lord, yet he was not to have a wife (Jer 16:1), had the people fight against him (Jer 15:18ff), was imprisoned (Jer 32:3), was beaten and imprisoned (Jer 37:15), cast into a cistern (Jer 38:6) and had to rewrite the scroll all over again (Jer 36:28, 32). However, his personal obedience did mean that he did not fall by the sword (Jer 39:18). Uriah was not so fortunate. He was put to death for prophesying the same things as Jeremiah (Jer 26:20ff). As well, in Isaiah we see the Suffering Servant who knew sorrow and served the people unto death.

In Hos 10:1 (ESV), "the more [Israel's] fruit increased, the more altars he built". Israel's prosperity led to the community forsaking God. It is good if God blesses a

community materially, but great care must then be taken that they do not forsake God. Prosperity could be a dangerous thing to pray for given this example. Similarly, in Haggai 1:4, the Lord admonishes that the people are living in luxury yet neglecting building the temple. The people “had time and resources to invest in the improvement of their own living conditions” but their wealth did not satisfy since they were focusing on themselves rather than the Lord (Robertson 2004:366-367). Complacency is a sin. Often wealth leads to complacency since it is easier to forget the Lord when things are going well. The people were not so much guilty of doing something, as they were of not doing something (Hag 1:9). A community needs to act. Failure to act is a sin (cf. the parable of the Good Samaritan). Centring on self at the exclusion of others was the sin of which Nineveh was guilty (Zep 2:15).

#### **3.4.5 *Witchcraft, sorcery and divination***

The Latter Prophets give us numerous examples of the people needing to be reminded of the Lord’s prohibition of witchcraft and sorcery (cf. Lev 19:26; Dt 18:10-14). God is a God who acts in the world (Isa 52:10). Sometimes people try to hedge their bets, by calling on Him yet also calling on another source of power (e.g. Isa 8:19; Zep 1:5). “The people who claim to know the one and only God are admonished to turn aside from consulting any source other than the inspired revelation mediated through his servants the prophets” (Robertson 2004:50). Malachi 3:5 warns that God will be “quick to testify” against those who practice sorcery, while Ezekiel 13:18 speaks against women who are using charms. The heart of this issue is trust. Witchcraft and sorcery are means by which humanity tries to control events for themselves, rather than relying upon God’s power and will. The Bible is clear that it is God who gives the rain in its season (Jer 5:24), who can make well-being and calamity (Isa 45:7) and who “brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness” (Isa 40:23 ESV). Disaster does not come to a city unless God allows it (Amos 3:6). God’s people should not trust in its own strength – whether through witchcraft, sorcery or, even, military might (Hos 10:13) – but in the Lord’s strength. We are to wait patiently for the Lord (Ps 40:1) and be willing to echo Job and praise God in all circumstances (Job 1:21).

Witchcraft, sorcery, divination and syncretism are real threats and temptations to the people of God. There is no place for any of these within the community of the people of God. Our worldview should be that of Isaiah 33:22, “the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king: He will save us.”

### **3.4.5 *Glimpses of the future***

Within the Latter Prophets, we get tantalising glimpses of the future of God's community – the ultimate community. Isaiah 65 tells us of the new heavens and new earth, and within in this creation will be a new Jerusalem. The culmination of history will be a new city – a perfect community. Scattered through the prophets are hints at what is to come: every knee shall bow (Isa 45:23) and foreigners will join the ethnic Jews (Isa 56:6f). These images are further developed as the canon continues to be unfolded, but even here in the prophets we can see that community is what we are ultimately made for.

### **3.5 The Writings**

The Writings cover the largest volume and most diverse range of Biblical texts of any of the sections to be used in this thesis. The dates of the books range from possibly the earliest of Old Testament texts (Job) to the latest Old Testament texts (Malachi). Throughout this long chronological time frame, we see a continuation of many of the themes of community. While the Former and Latter Prophets spoke to their own times with regards to, and in the light of, the Torah, the Writings give a different, and often personal, perspective on many of the issues faced by communities.

#### **3.5.1 Family**

The Writings continue to show the strong links of family that have been previously seen in the Torah and Prophets. Within the Book of Ruth, one of the main themes is the role of caring for family. This is seen both in terms of Ruth looking after Naomi and then Boaz marrying Ruth. It is interesting to see that Job uses the family imagery of the Redeemer to express his own hope in desperate circumstances (Job 19:25).

Perhaps the most significant issue for the family in the Writings is the instruction and discipline of children. Parents are to instruct their children, telling them of the great deeds of the Lord – his wonders and might (Ps 78:4). This is in accordance with the Law, and is to make sure that the next generation knows God, keeps His commands and do not become rebellious (Ps 78:5-8). Records of what the Lord has done are to help future generations praise God (Ps 102:18). The early instruction of children, from parent to child, is seen to have life long effects (Pr 22:6; cf. Pr 1:8; 4:3f; 29:15). With instruction comes discipline. Discipline is given out of love (Pr 3:11f), for “whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him” (Pr 13:24 ESV). Such is the importance of discipline that it is seen as saving a child from Sheol (Pr 23:13f). Both the women and those children old enough to understand are included in the communal reading of the Law (Ne 8:3).

Marriage is important. An “excellent wife ... is far more precious than jewels” (Pr 31:10). Ecclesiastes 4:9 (ESV) states that “two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!” While the two are not necessarily husband and wife (Garrett 1993:308), it can certainly apply to a

married couple. Spouses can be important emotional support for each other in times of trouble. It is interesting to see the number of compliments given to each other in Song of Songs. Neither person plays down the compliments of the other; it is part of the showing of affection to speak in such terms.

Much attention is given in the Writings to the choice of marriage partner, especially in terms of marriages mixed with those who are not part of God's people. Such is the gravity of the matter that Ezra 9:14 declares "Shall we again break your commands and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices? Would you not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor?" The failure to obey in this area led to the downfall of Solomon (Ne 13:26). It should be noted that this is not a racial exclusion. Ezra 6:21 says that the Israelites ate the Passover meal "together with all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbours in order to seek the LORD, the God of Israel." Ruth the Moabite declared to Naomi "your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ru 1:16; cf. 2 Ch 6:22f), and was hence included not just into God's people but into the royal line! It is marriages with those who do not want to forsake their own ways for the ways of the Lord that are to be avoided. The issue of purity is seen as having repercussions far beyond the individual marriage. Daniel kept himself pure and obedient to God, despite being in a foreign culture with its pressures both explicit (bowing to idols) and implicit (eating healthily). Similarly, the Church, despite being a minority within a larger society, would keep itself pure through discipline (e.g. Ac 5; 1 Co 5). However, when God's people are the majority issues of purity are often neglected. Solomon married foreign women to his own downfall (cf. 1 Ch 14:12 where David orders the burning of the people's gods). The failure to eliminate the high places of pagan worship is the bench mark by which the kings are measured throughout Chronicles (e.g. 2 Ch 14:2-4). The making of Christianity as the official religion for the Roman Empire signalled the opening of the door for syncretism. No longer was the Church a minority which could discipline itself. It is no coincidence that the countries with a Christian background of tolerance, are the areas where Christian doctrine is starting to waver, while where the Church is pure from the fire of persecution, Biblical doctrine is strongly held. Purity in the community of God is important on all levels – from marriage, to Church, to nation. If one is to make the claim of being a Christian nation, the implications of Ezra and Nehemiah on marriage and purity need to be carefully thought out.

The theme of solidarity, shown in the previous sections, continues in the Writings, albeit as a more minor theme. In Ezra 7:35 and 8:35, “the community’s solidarity with former generations of Israel continues to be stressed” (Satterthwaite 1997:636). In Lamentations 5:7, the sins of former generations are seen as being visited upon the people. Nehemiah, upon hearing of the state of Jerusalem, confesses the sin of the nation, his family and himself (Neh 1:6). 2 Chronicles 30:9 says that if one returns to the Lord, your brothers and children will return to the land. Yet, 2 Chronicles 25:4 notes that children can not be punished for the sins of their fathers – as per the Torah. In addition, Job sees that even if he is guilty of sin, “my error remains my concern alone” (Job 19:4). It would seem that the Lord can show blessing or judgement beyond the individual, but it is not in human hands to do so.

### **3.5.2 Justice, the poor and the oppressed**

Justice is part of the character of God and is a cornerstone of His Kingdom and the lives of those who follow Him. God’s throne is established in justice (Ps 9:7; 89:14). The Lord loves justice (Ps 33:5) and will judge the people with equity (Ps 96:10). The Lord is active in justice – He hears the cries of the afflicted (Ps 10:17), is a stronghold for the oppressed (Ps 9:9), a “father to the fatherless, a defender of widows” (Ps 68:5) and a deliverer to the needy (Ps 72:12). The Lord does not approve of the denial of justice (La 3:34-36). Consequently, those who follow Him need to mirror the love of justice that God displays. “God expects all to whom he has delegated authority to execute justice” (Schultz 1997:840). This is especially true of the king. According to Proverbs 29:14, if the king deals justly and fairly with the poor, his throne is secure. He is to defend the cause of the poor and needy (Ps 72:2-4). It is by justice that the land is built up (Pr 29:4). The great reign of David is described in terms of David administering “justice and equity to all people” (1 Ch 18:14 ESV). The Writings affirm the Torah and Prophets in pointing to the “key role of political authorities in taking responsibility for the needs of the poor” (Wright 2004:179). The call to be just extends beyond just the king, to all of God’s people who are instructed to “give justice to the weak and the fatherless” (Ps 82:3 ESV). For, “blessed are those who observe justice” (Ps 106:3 ESV). Justice and judgements are made for the Lord (2 Ch 19:6). Dealing generously and lending generously is linked to justice (Ps 112:5). God’s people are repeatedly called on to remember the poor and to treat them well (Ps 41:1; 112:9; Pr 14:31; 19:17; 29:7; 31:8f). The exacting of interest and the profiting of the rich from the poor is the subject of Nehemiah 5. Nehemiah called

for the abandoning of the charging of interest, the returning of the money made, and led by example in seeking to not burden the people by his leadership. Nehemiah had compassion (Neh 1:4). Turaki (2006b:875) sees that the Church “must be compassionate in order to see and hear the cry of the oppressed”. It should be noted that while the Bible is critical of exacting interest from the poor, “interest was approved for ventures that did not try to circumvent one’s obligation to the poor” (Kaiser 1983:217; cf. Lk 19:23; Mt 25:27). In addition, those that can pay back debts but avoid repayment are condemned (Ps 37:21).

In carrying out justice, Ezra 7:26 (ESV) calls for judgements to be “strictly executed” on those who are disobedient to either God’s law or the king’s law. Nehemiah 13:15, sees Nehemiah acting quickly to tell people not to sell on the Sabbath.

While the Torah and Prophets stress the need to help the poor because of what God has done for His people, the Wisdom writers see a “creational base for social ethics ... the poor should be treated with the dignity that reflects the fact that they too are created by the same God (Wright 2004:178; cf. Pr 14:31; 17:5; 19:17; 22:2, 22f; 29:13; Job 31:13-15).

The attitude God’s people should have towards wealth is one which recognises God’s sovereignty in the area of prosperity. Wealth comes ultimately from God (1 Ch 29:14-16; Job 1:21). The Lord is to be honoured through the using of one’s wealth (Pr 3:9; cf. 2 Ch 31:10). A land might be outwardly prosperous, but if it is evil then it is in reality a wasteland (Ps 107:34). Wealth does not last beyond this life (Ps 49:16f). Prosperity is often linked to obedience (e.g. 1 Ch 22:13), yet both Ecclesiastes and Job’s example show that this is not a hard and fast rule. “Suffering can deepen our knowledge of God” (Lucas 2003:138; cf. Ps 119:71; 2 Ch 33:10-12). In Ezra, according to Satterthwaite (1997:637), “piety may provoke opposition rather than blessing (ch. 4), and confession of sin does not necessarily bring blessing”. Therefore, “a person’s relationship with God cannot be judged either on the extent of their prosperity or the hardness of the difficulties they bear” (Hartley 1997:785). This is not to deny that the Lord is good to those who wait on Him (La 3:25), nor does it deny that disobedience can have consequences (Ps 7:16; 28:5; 1 Ch 22:8; 2 Ch 15:2; 16:9; 24:10; 32:25; 33:10-12). Saul died, according to 1 Chronicles 10:13 (ESV), not because he lost a military battle but because of his “breach of faith”. God will bring every deed into judgement in the end – whether in this life or the next (Ecc 12:14).

### **3.5.3 Psalms as examples of praise, worship and heartfelt cries**

Whether or not it was the original function of the Psalms, Goldingay (2006:22) sees the Psalms as showing modern Christians how to pray, make requests, intercede and give thanks. Just as the Law may give us a paradigm for how we should live, the Psalms give us an indication of ways in which we can approach our God. Worship and community go together. Many of the Psalms were responsive, with the community replying to a leader's exhortation (e.g. Ps 118). Goldingay (2006:59) states:

“It is unthinkable that expressing gratitude to God should be a private transaction between individuals and God. Thanksgiving is an inherently public act whereby one gives glory to God in the presence of the community for some act, and invites the community as a whole to have its faith built up.”

In addition, Goldingay (2006:69) notes that “theologically, the Psalms are the densest material in the entire OT.” As the community gathered together for worship or for prayer, they focused on the character of God. Practically speaking, as we look at public worship today it would be useful to examine the words of the songs we sing in our songs. Are they teaching us more about God? There is an honesty about the emotions and the feelings of the people who wrote the Psalms. They do not hide their raw bitterness in hard situations. For example, Psalm 22 “insists on not losing sight of the facts of abandonment. But it also insists on not losing sight of the facts about God that it also knows are true” (Goldingay 2006:69).

The Psalms call on people to “with trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord!” (Ps 98:6 ESV), to sing to the Lord a new song (Ps 96:1), “declare His glory among the nations” (Ps 96:3; cf. 1 Ch 16:24), and to give thanks “in the company of the upright, in the congregation” (Ps 111:1 ESV). The Psalmist speaks of singing of God's love forever (Ps 89:1). Music has a place in God's community, as does telling others about God and his deeds. Faith is not just about an isolated relationship between God and the individual. Psalm 40:10 states: “I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly.” The individual shares their faith in the community. The individual is not to be quiet and passive about what the Lord has done.

The importance of public worship and music are not restricted to the Psalms. Further examples in the Writings include 1 Chronicles 25, 2 Chronicles 24:10, Nehemiah 8

and Ezra 10:1ff. The public reading of the Law by Ezra in Nehemiah 8/9 forms the “climax” of the combined works of Ezra-Nehemiah: both Ezra and Nehemiah have the common goal of establishing a worshipping community that is obedient to the Law (Satterthwaite 1997:637).

#### **3.5.4 Trust in the Lord**

Within the Writings, God’s people are invited to place their trust and hope in the Lord. “The Lord is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed” (Ps 28:8 ESV; cf. Ps 68:35). Psalm 20:7 says that while “some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.” This theme of the community placing their dependence upon God alone flows through all areas of life – from military matters (Ps 44:1ff; 2 Ch 13:18) to health matters (2 Ch 16:12) to famine (2 Ch 20:9). It is God who gives strength and peace to His people (Ps 29:11). There is good reason to have such trust in the Lord: for He rules over all nations (Ps 47:8; cf. Dan 7:14) and ultimately they will all come to worship Him (Ps 22:27). Nebuchadnezzar was to go mad and dwell with animals until he realised that “the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (Dan 4:32 ESV). The Lord allows a lying spirit to entice King Ahab to his death (2 Ch 18:19-21). David’s power increased because God was with him (1 Ch 11:9). Despite what the external evidence might show us, Job teaches us that God actually does rule the world (Dempster 2003:202).

It is the Lord that sustains life (Ps 3:5), gives joy (Ps 4:7), leads and teaches (Ps 25:9), saves the humble and brings down the haughty (Ps 18:27), blesses (Ps 33:12) and delivers (Ps 34:19). Therefore, a community needs to realise that it depends upon God in all things. The people of God need to look to Him for answers and look to Him for their joy. The seeking the things of this world – such as wealth and power – will not satisfy.

#### **3.5.5 A spiritual reality and the end of things**

The Writings give us glimpses that all which we see on Earth is not all that there is. Satan, having been give permission by God, is behind the calamities that befall Job. This serves “to remind us that what happens in the everyday world around us may reflect far greater conflicts in the spiritual world” (Habtu 2006:572). It is interesting to note that in Job 1:16, fire comes down from heaven to burn up Job’s sheep and servants. Anderson (1976:87) points out that “something unusual would be needed to consume 7000 sheep.” While some commentators see this as no more than a

“hyberbolically folkloristic” bolt of lightning (Clines 1989:32), Habtu (2006:572) sees such an approach as reflecting a “world view fostered by the European Enlightenment, with its insistence on erecting a wall between the empirical world and the spiritual world.” If the conversation between God and Satan is taken seriously, then “there is no question that all these disasters are from a supernatural source” (Habtu 2006:573). They are to be seen as evidence of Satan being allowed “power over both politics and nature” (Waltke 2007:903). The Book of Job is not so much about suffering as it is about the “existence of evil in our world” (Dumbrell 2002:255). Supernatural power is at play in the physical world. God, however, does set clear boundaries in which Satan can operate. The contest in the spiritual realm “is not between equals. There is no equal and opposite force of evil in tension with the goodness of God” (Atkinson 1991:22).

Daniel’s apocalyptic vision sees Michael as a great prince who protects God’s people in their suffering (Dan 12:1). Michael is later identified in Jude 9 as an “archangel”. The spiritual realm is “not a replica of that on earth” since the small nation of Israel is represented by “one of the chief princes” in Michael (Baldwin 1978:181). It is interesting to note that both Persia and Greece have spiritual counterparts, yet only Michael is fighting on God’s side in Dan 10:21. There is a spiritual reality of angels and fallen angels (since the spiritual princes of Persia and Greece resist God’s messenger). Adeyemo (2006:1007) sees this as evidence that “Satan appoints special emissaries to influence governments against the people of God.” While God’s people need to accept that there are spiritual realities that we do not see, we should not be distracted by them. We are not to pray to angels but to God alone. God has never lost a battle to Satan (Adeyemo 2006:1007). As we have seen from the Psalms, God is the one who delivers, saves and sustain us. “Scripture forbids us to worship or put our trust in any other spiritual beings” (Nkansah-Obrempong 2006:1455).

Glimpses are given of the eschatological community. Its monarch will have dominion over “all peoples, nations and languages” (Dan 7:14). Many of the Psalms find partially fulfilment in earthly monarchs, but ultimate fulfilment in Christ (Ps 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132; 144). The image of the city of God with God dwelling in its midst (Ps 46) will find ultimate fulfilment in the New Jerusalem of Revelation. There is hope for the people of God, one day they will live as a community under the

monarch God has chosen and sing His praises forever. The longing for the rule of God in our lives (Ps 119:20) will then find its ultimate fulfilment.

### **3.5.6 Faith even when it is hard**

There are times when doing what is right has a cost, both as an individual and as a community. There are times when the community comes under judgement from God, and there are also times when suffering occurs for no obvious reason. The Writings show that it is important to not just live obediently when times are good, but also when things go wrong. Psalm 15:1 (NLT) asks “Who may worship in your sanctuary, LORD? Who may enter your presence on your holy hill?” To which the reply in verse 4 is those who “keep their promises even when it hurts.” The Book of Proverbs repeatedly makes the connection between the fear of the Lord and life (Pr 10:27; 14:27; 19:23; 22:4). This confirms earlier statements from the Torah, such as Deuteronomy 8:1, that the people are to observe and do the commandments so that they may live (Kaiser 2008:137). Kaiser (2008:137) notes that “such life was not just a materialistic thing, but it had spiritual roots and goals.” However, “God’s commitment to a person does not prevent that one from going through a season of sorrow” (Hartley 1997:789). The theme of remaining faithful in the midst of adversity is evident in the Book of Job. Hartley (1997:781) states:

“A major purpose [of the Book of Job] is stated in the dialogue between God and Satan in the heavenly council. God asserted that it is possible for a human to have faith in him out of a pure heart, as evidenced by his servant Job, but Satan denied God’s position, arguing that Job was a faithful servant of God solely because of the abundance God lavished on him. If his vast wealth vanished, Job would certainly curse God. God disagreed, confident that there are those who serve him for the joy of his presence and not for the blessings that attend his presence. To prove that there is piety not motivated by self-interest, God let Satan test Job by taking away all that he had. Job vindicated the risk God took, coming through his test with his trust in God intact.”

While Proverbs generally emphasises that those who fear the Lord prosper (e.g. Pr 28:25), it is also clear in the Writings that it is better to have a little and live righteously than to be evil and wealthy (Ps 37:16). The conclusion of Ecclesiastes is simply that the whole duty of humanity is to “fear God and keep his commandments” (Ecc 12:13). With regards to staying faithful and obedient to God in all circumstances, Hartley (1997:789) notes that “in light of the NT, a believer who has

had a hard life on earth will be blessed in the life after death.” The meek shall indeed inherit the land (Ps 37:11) – a truth which is confirmed by Christ in Matthew 5:5.

### **3.5.7 Confession**

It is appropriate to follow on from meekness to the theme of confession. The Writings show us examples of both individual and communal confession before God. The Lord is good and forgiving to all who call upon Him (Ps 86:5). Proverbs 28:13 states that “he who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” In response to Solomon’s prayer dedicating the temple, the Lord says “if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Ch 7:14). This verse was used by former Zambian President Frederick Chibula as part of his declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation in 1991 (Phiri 2003:407). There were times when the people did humble themselves in this way, such as Ezra 10:1ff and Nehemiah 9:2. In addition, there were times when individuals made confessions before God. Nehemiah, upon hearing of the state of Jerusalem, confesses the sins of the people, his family and himself (Neh 1:6). Calamity is often a catalyst for personal reflection and subsequent confession. As Psalm 78:34 states: “Whenever God slew them, they would seek Him; they eagerly turned to Him again.” Similarly, Nebuchadnezzar’s period of madness and living in the wilderness led Him to humility before God (Dan 4:28ff).

## 3.6 The Gospel and Acts

### 3.6.1 Family

As we begin to look at the New Testament, many of the issues relating to community are found to continue through from the Old Testament. The bonds of family are shown to be present in the Gospels and Acts. However, Jesus adds a new dimension to the traditional understanding of family by seeing that all who do the will of God are family (Mt 12:46-50; cf. Mk 3:34f; Lk 8:21). Those that receive Jesus are God's children (Jn 1:12). This is later continued on into the Epistles where fellow Christians are often referred to as brothers or sisters (Ro 16:1; 1 Co 7:15 ESV; Phm 2; Ja 2:15). The close bonds of family are therefore extended beyond the physical dimension of life into the spiritual.

Jesus affirms the seriousness of divorce, and sees that sexuality immorality is the only grounds for divorcing one's spouse (Mt 5:32). Ngewa (2006:1150) sees that "the exception mentioned in Matthew underlines the seriousness of marriage rather than granting permission to divorce." Remarrying a divorcee is seen as adultery (Mt 5:32; 19:9; Lk 16:18). Mark 10:11f sees any remarriage as adultery. This is quite radical in light of many modern societies. In marrying another, the person is guilty of breaking one of the Ten Commandments. However, given that God hates divorces (Mal 2:16), if someone is already married to a divorcee they should not then divorce them for fear of committing adultery. In his ministry, John the Baptist was critical of Herod's marriage to his brother's wife (Mk 6:18).

The Gospels and Acts continue to affirm strong solidarity within the family. In Matthew 9:18, we see the faith and actions of the parent affecting the healing of the child. At Jesus' trial the people call for the blood to be on their heads *and* their children's heads (Mt 27:25). Acts 16:15 shows that Lydia and her household were baptised together. Similarly, the jailor is told by Paul that in order to be saved he must "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household" (Ac 16:31). The whole family is exposed to the Gospel. Christianity can be a communal experience, and does not need to be exclusive of the young or the lowly (since household would include servants).

Within the family context, we see that even Jesus was submissive to His earthly parents (Lk 2:51). He reaffirmed the commandment for a person to honour their

father and mother (Mk 10:19). Conversely, causing a “little one” to sin is a most serious offence. This places a high level of responsibility on parents and the community in general to ensure that children are raised in the knowledge of God and removed, as much as possible, from temptations. In the age of television and internet, parents and other adults need to seriously consider what is appropriate for children to see. Jesus took “an unusual interest in children. For the ancient world in general and for great religious teachers in particular, children were of small importance” (Morris 1986:206). It is important that leaders do not follow the way of the world in neglecting children. This can easily become a temptation since children do not vote (for politicians) nor give to the offering (for the pastors).

Kunhiyop (1997:11) sees that in the African context, “the need for children, especially male children, has been the most compelling reason for polygamy. A man who dies childless falls into oblivion.” Within the New Testament, as we saw in the Old, we have examples of couples who were quite old when they received their first child by God’s grace. The shame was similar for Elizabeth in having no children as it would be in many African cultures (Lk 1:25). Christian couples need to wait and trust in the Lord. The hope of eternal life is given to those who call upon the name of the Lord and is not dependant upon having children. Similarly, Jesus said that some people would choose not to marry (and therefore not have children) “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:12 ESV). Examples of such people who had forgone marriage for the kingdom would include Jesus and John the Baptist. Lohfink (1985:88) sees that it was a “characteristic of Jesus that he constantly established community precisely for those who were denied community at that time, or were judged inferior in respect to religion. Jesus made clear through his word and even more through his concrete conduct that he did not recognise religious-social exclusion and discrimination.”

### **3.6.2 Possessions and the poor**

The Gospels and Acts give much practical teaching on the issue of possessions, money and poverty. Matthew 5:42 (cf. Lk 6:29f) gives the hard teaching that we should “give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.” Green (2000:97) sees that there should be “such a generosity of spirit about us that we give and give and give just as God has given to us.” This may appear difficult in an African context where there are many needs and many people asking for help. The image of Jesus’, and early Christian groups’, concern for

the poor “both haunts and inspires us today as we consider what it means to be a Christian community in a world plagued with poverty” (Isaak 2006:1216). Difficulty does not negate us from the teaching of the Gospel. No one receives anything unless it is given from heaven (Jn 3:27). Jesus commanded the rich young man: “if you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven” (Mt 19:21; cf. Mk 10:19-21). He also warned that failure to care for the poor that we encounter in our daily lives is equivalent to failing to receive Him (Mt 25:35; cf. Mk 9:41). For those who are in need who are God’s people, there still needs to be the desire to work and the willingness to try rectify their economic situation – as previously seen in Torah and Prophets. The poor widow still gave as much as she could – and was commended for doing so (Lk 21:3f). Similarly, one should still pay tax (Mt 22:21). “There is need for people to work hard, since without hard work there would be nothing to share” (Mumo Kisau 2000:35). While on the surface it may seem that in the community always giving to the poor would encourage laziness, we see in Paul that the opposite is true. Paul wanted to work hard since it was more blessed to give than to receive (Ac 20:33-35). Mumo Kisau (2000:25) highlights that it is within the Luke-Acts context of “sharing of the material goods with the needy” that the phrase “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Ac 20:35) is made, rather than a pastor to his congregation. It was the willingness to give that “sets the sharing of goods within the community of believers apart from all the other groups in the first century” (Mumo Kisau 2000:26). Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders to follow his example in working hard with their own hands (Ac 20:35). Later in Rome, we see Paul lived at his own expense and showed hospitality to all who came to him (Ac 28:30).

Money is a means for this life only, its accumulation and storage should not be relied upon. Repeatedly we see that in using money wisely (i.e. generously) in this life, eternal treasure is stored in heaven (Lk 6:35f; 12:33; 14:12-14; 16:1ff; Mt 19:21). One cannot serve both God and money (Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13). The deceitfulness of riches is one of the reasons some of the seed, in the Parable of the Sower, fails to grow (Mt 4:18f). The generosity of God’s people is not just limited to material wealth, but also includes their spiritual wealth. Jesus commands his disciples to heal without receiving pay since they received without paying (Mt 10:8). While it is right for a congregation to support their pastor, a lack of financial support should not stop a Christian from telling others of what God has done for them in their lives.

Mark 12:33 says that showing love to your neighbour is more important than sacrifices and burnt offering. It is through loving one another that people will know who Jesus' disciples are (Jn 13:34f). The early Church put this into practice: "all the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need" (Ac 2:44f). The needs of the community are put ahead of your individual needs. It should be noted that it was not that sharing was the only mark of the early Church community. They also devoted themselves to teaching and prayer (Ac 2:42). However, it was a significant demonstration of God's transformation in their lives. This is further emphasised later in Acts 4:32-35 (ESV):

"Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

As radical as it seems, the concept "that any of the things that belonged to him was not his own" (Ac 4:32) was entirely consistent with previous Biblical teaching on possessions and wealth. All things are from God and we are mere stewards. As has been previously discussed in section 3.1.13, there is a difference between ownership and stewardship – between an individual orientation and a community orientation. Paul chose to not be a burden to others and worked for "necessities" of himself and those around him with his own hands (Ac 20:33-35).

Community needs to be about care. Dubay (1973:81) sees caring as so crucial that "without it we may have a gathering but we can not have a community." When asked by the crowds what they should do, Jesus gave the practical instruction that those with two tunics should give away their extra one to the person with none. Similarly, those with more than sufficient food should give to those with not enough food (Lk 3:10f). We can see this teaching carried by the church when upon hearing of a prophecy of a worldwide famine, decided to send relief to the church in Jerusalem (Ac 11:28f). "Community must be incarnated in material sharing or it is not Christic community" (Dubay 1973:165). The poor and oppressed were at the heart of Jesus ministry (Lk 4:17-21; 6:20; 7:22). From encountering Christ, Zacchaeus declared he

would restore to those he defrauded and give half of his possessions to the poor (Lk 19:8). This prompted Jesus to say that salvation had come to Zacchaeus' house (Lk 19:9). "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Lk 12:15). Jesus says that we should sell our possessions and give to the poor (Lk 12:33). Similarly, in organising a banquet the people who could not afford to return the favour are the very people that should be invited (Lk 14:12-14). From Acts 5:4a, we see that the "sharing of goods was voluntary" (Famonure 2006:1308). However, the message of the Gospels and Acts is that we should be deeply concerned for those in need. To those who are given much, much will be expected (Lk 12:48).

The context in which the New Testament was written was one in which the vast majority of people were poor. Most people would have experienced times of "wondering where the next meal would come from" (Esler 1987:176). In this way it is not so different from much of present day Africa. Esler (1987:175) sees the pressing needs of the urban poor of New Testament times as being food and shelter. For food, wheat was needed to bake bread. In addition, olive oil was used for cooking and lighting. The situation faced daily by most Zambians today is the same – shelter (particularly in wet season), mealie meal and cooking oil remain the daily concerns of many. Esler (1987:199) sees Luke's theology (expounded in Luke-Acts) as seeking to strike a "careful balance between physical and spiritual salvation; he offers hope to men and women at all levels of their troubled existence." Biblical Christianity today also needs to strike this balance in the face of the reality of poverty.

### **3.6.3 Humility and contentedness**

Jesus said "blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Mt 5:5). While at first glance, humility may seem to be an individual trait, it must always take place in the context of a community. Humility (or its lack) is shown in the way a person relates to those around them. According to Searle (2000:568), "humility is to know one's true position before God ... However, Jesus' explicit teaching adds a horizontal dimension to the concept". Counter to the world, whoever humbles themselves like a child will be greatest in the "Kingdom of God" (Mt 18:4) and whoever is a servant is the greatest of all (Mt 23:11). Jesus condemns rulers who make a show of their authority, but desires rulers who serve all (Mk 10:42ff). Ladd (1993:231) sees this as an "unassuming, low key attitude that contrasts with the world's self-importance." We can see that God look to those who appear "important' in the world's eyes in that he chose to share the Good News of the birth of Christ with shepherds (Lk 2:8). Jesus

criticises the Pharisees for wanting to appear great before others (Lk 11:43). When people see good works they are to give glory to God, not to the person doing the works (Mt 5:16).

The attitude of humility and not abusing authority is seen to extend to the soldiers. They are not to threaten people or extort money from them, but are to be “content with their pay” (Lk 3:14). It should be noted that Jesus does not condemn soldiers. He does not tell them to stop being soldiers. When he healed the centurion’s servant (Mt 8:3ff; Lk 7:3ff), he did not make any negative comment about his occupation. The highlight of Mark’s gospel is a Roman centurion declaring Jesus to be the son of God (Mk 15:39). In Acts, the first Gentile family to receive the Gospel was Cornelius – another centurion (Ac 10). In all these instances there is no condemnation of the person for being in the military. Therefore, provided that a person does not abuse their position, there is no reason why a Christian should not be in the military. The principle of Luke 3:14 could also be extended to all government positions, including (but not limited to) teachers, politicians, police and health workers. In Zambia, staff shortages in hospital have reached a critical point as more and more doctors and nurses seek better pay abroad. “In a country with about 9,000 nurses, the Zambian Nursing Council says 3,444 filled out the paperwork needed to work abroad between 1993 and 2005” (Swinburne 2006). Similarly, “in Zambia out of 600 doctors trained in the country’s medical school between 1978 and 1990, 550 are working abroad” (Sattaur 2005). As previously stated (see section 3.2.13), governments need to ensure that they pay their workers on time. In addition, workers need to be content and put the welfare of the community over individual gain. Both governments and workers need to act together to stop this drain on the community.

Even in this life the proud can be punished. It was for a lack of humility that Herod was struck down and killed by an angel (Ac 12:22f). Similarly, the root cause of Ananias and Sapphira lying about the sale of their land was their lack of humility (Ac 5:1ff).

The idea of humility and servanthood is summed up in the words of Paul: “I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me” (Ac 20:24).

#### **3.6.4 Teaching**

A key aspect of the life of a community is the teaching of one another the ways of God. Jesus says that whoever practices and teaches his commands “will be called

great in the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 5:19). This is in line with the English proverb “you should practice what you preach”. The importance of teaching the commandments is highlighted by the statement “if you would enter life, keep the commandments” (Mt 19:17). In order to keep the commandment, it is necessary to first know them. The teaching of the commandments of Jesus is one of the instructions in the great commission (Mt 28:20). There needs to be a clear distinction made between teaching what the Bible says and teaching issues as if the Bible said it. In Mark 7:7 (ESV), Jesus criticises “teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”. Possible examples of this could be the teaching of democracy as Christian (e.g. Carpenter 1996:38) or that no Christian should drink any alcohol. While this is not to say that either of these stances are bad in and of themselves, to say that the Bible commands us to have democracy or that all alcohol should be forbidden is falling into the same trap as the Pharisees.

The ministry of Jesus involved teaching. He taught in the synagogues (Lk 4:15), chose disciples (Lk 6:13) and instructed people to tell others about what God has done for them (Lk 8:39). He instructed his followers to keep His commands (Jn 15:10). The early Church modelled Jesus in that they too “did not cease teaching and preaching” (Ac 5:42 ESV). This included teaching in the synagogues (Ac 13:5). The disciples are told that they would receive the Holy Spirit to teach them “all things and bring to [their] remembrance all that I have said to you” (Jn 14:26 ESV).

Teaching is not done in isolation. It is a communal activity since it always involves multiple people – a teacher and learners. Through teaching a community can share in common knowledge, goals and purpose. The Bible should have a major role in the teaching of a community. “Traditional Africans do not make a dichotomy between spiritual and secular values” (Kapolyo 2007:26), and neither should there necessarily be a dichotomy. It is the “openness to spiritual things” that has contributed to the “phenomenal growth of the church in the developing world” (Kapolyo 2007:28). To remove the Bible was the classroom, as has been done in many parts of the West, would be both unbiblical and go against cultural practices of much of the developing world. This is contrary to Western writers, such as Carpenter (1996), who see that the state can not legislate or interfere in any area affecting religion. It is interesting to note that in Australia, all government schools allow the teaching of Scripture as a set class. The state of Western Australia is the exception to this, having legislated against the teaching of Scripture in school in the 1980’s. Western Australia now has

the highest crime rate in Australia, with 1.7 times as much crime as the least ranked state; despite having the highest proportion of police per population (Graycar 2007). In Acts 17:11, those in Berea examined the Scriptures daily to see if what was being taught was right. The Christian faith flows out of the Law and Prophets (Ac 24:14). Knowledge of the Scriptures (Old Testament and New Testament) is vital for the people of God. "Scripture cannot be broken" (Jn 10:35). Jesus said "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void" (Lk 16:17 ESV). Turaki (2006:785) states that "all human institutions of authority, laws, decrees, constitutions, and statutes, etc., must be in conformity with God's universal laws and orders." Pilate, when he followed the crowd, released Barabbas rather than letting the innocent man go (Mk 15:15). The Bible should be the benchmark by which we judge our lives and mould our community.

There are times when either a leader will be asked to follow the masses over the will of God, or times when a Christian community within a larger community will be asked to go against what God commands. In these situations, we are to obey the commands the Lord has taught us over the desires of humanity (Ac 4:19f).

Discipline can often be used as a teaching tool. Within the early Church, Ananias and Sapphira sought to make a name for themselves by appearing to give all they had to the Apostles. Their deceit was punished by death. Acts 5:11 says that "great fear seized the whole Church" following their deaths. Their punishment would have had an affect far beyond themselves, as others would have seen the seriousness of truth and humility. Fear of punishment can be a powerful deterrent.

Another aspect of teaching is that Jesus "taught women from the first" (Morris 1986:203). Jesus, as seen from the example of Mary and Martha (Lk 10:38-42), "clearly accepted it as the normal thing that women should receive his instruction, a far cry indeed from the attitude of the rabbis" (Morris 1986:203). As the church spread, "commonly women were at the forefront of the advance" (Morris 1986:205).

### ***3.6.5 Forgiveness, rebuke and mercy***

Jesus said "blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy" (Mt 5:7). Forgiveness and mercy are hallmarks of the Kingdom of God. We pray in the Lord's Prayer that we forgive our debtors (Mt 6:12). This "does not only apply to those who owe us money. A debtor is any person who has offended us" (Kapolyo 2006:1122). If we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us (Mt 18:34f). God desires mercy not sacrifice (Mt 9:13). Jesus rebuked the disciples for wanting to call down fire from

heaven in judgement (Lk 9:54f). In Matthew 18:15-20, there are clear guidelines for reconciling offences within a community. The first step is to personally confront the individual. The sin is not ignored, nor does there need to be others involved unless needed. It is in the context of reconciliation that the promise comes that where two or three are gathered together, there is God with them (Mt 18:20). Hiebert (quoted in Kunhiyop 1997:15) states that “we need each other to see our sins, for we more readily see the sins of others than our own. Similarly, we see the ways others misinterpret Scriptures before we see our own misinterpretations.”

It should be noted that there is a tension here for Christians. The individual should not judge others (Lk 6:37). We are to forgive, yet we are to act upon the sin of others - i.e. rebuke them (Lk 17:3f). We are to show mercy, yet we are to uphold justice. The individual is not free to do as they please knowing that they will be forgiven for any wrong doing. Dubay (1973:159) states that “those that sing of freedom but carefully avoid speaking of submission and obedience to others are not speaking of Christian community.”

### **3.6.6 *Solidarity with Christ***

A Christian is not an isolated individual; he or she has solidarity with the one whom they follow – Christ. A Christian is persecuted on account of Christ (Mt 5:11; Mk4:16f). Christians are called to acknowledge Jesus to those around them, and in return Jesus will acknowledge them before His Father (Mt 10:32). It is only through Jesus that a Christian can bear fruit. Apart from Christ they can do nothing. Without Christ, they will be cut off and destroyed (Jn 15:1ff). In persecuting Christians, Saul was persecuting Christ (Ac 9:5).

### **3.6.7 *The centring of community on Christ***

There is a shift between the Old Testament and the New Testament with regards to the people of God. Christ is now the centre of the people of God and He is the one who is drawing them together. He is the one drawing together those scattered abroad (Jn 11:51f), drawing all people to Him (Jn 12:32) – those that the Lord calls to Himself (Ac 2:39). “In every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to [God]” (Ac 10:35). The Kingdom of God is no longer an earthly kingdom, but a spiritual kingdom. Like yeast in bread its effects are felt in this world (Mt 13:33). Like a small mustard seed, the Kingdom has a humble, seemingly insignificant beginning (Mt 13:31). The picture Jesus gives of birds in the branches of the mustard tree would have “been eloquent – if rather ominous – to those reared in

the Old Testament. They found it in Ezekiel 17:23 and Daniel 4:12, 20-22. It is the Gentiles who are in mind” (Green 2000:158). Jesus commanded his followers to go “make disciples of *all* nations” (Mt 28:19). There is to be no ethnical limit to God’s Kingdom.

### **3.6.8 Prayer**

Prayer is seen to have a major part for both the individual and the community. Jesus spent time in prayer before the major events in His life. He prayed at the time of His baptism (Lk 3:21), He prayed prior to calling the Twelve (Lk 6:12f), He prayed prior to His transfiguration (Lk 9:29), He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane prior to his trial (Lk 22:39ff) and He prayed on the cross prior to dying (Lk 23:46). It would follow, therefore, that we too should spend time in pray – particularly prior to major events or decisions. While Peter was in prison, the church prayed for him (Ac 12:5). The elders for Lystra, Iconium and Antioch were committed to the Lord through prayer (Ac 14:23). Pray was part of the decision making process in choosing a replacement for Judas (Ac 1:24). The early church devoted itself to prayer (Ac 1:24; 2:42). The believers prayed together after the release of Peter and John from prison (Ac 4:23ff). The seven deacons were prayed for when presented to the Apostles (Ac 6:6). Saul and Barnabas were prayed for by the Church prior to being sent out (Ac 13:3). Dubay (1973:135) says that “Christian community is a community of joy because it is before all else it is a community of prayer.” Through praying we acknowledge that God is in control of our lives. God gives justice “speedily” to His people when they ask (Lk 18:7f ESV). If we are to be seeking justice in this world, it is best that we start to pray. We are to always pray and not lose heart (Lk 18:1).

## 3.7 The Epistles

### 3.7.1 *Sharing possessions and the poor*

Christianity is communal in nature since it is not just about the individual and their own needs. Care for the poor is a theme across the majority of the Epistles. Paul, the writer of Hebrews, James, Peter and John all make mention of showing hospitality and caring for those in need. It is not an optional extra for Christians, but an imperative that needs to be carried out in practical ways. So strongly does James write on this issue, that he questions the validity of faith when it does not act upon the needs of others (Jas 2:14-16). “A faith that does not transform the believer so that his life is given over to doing good works is not faith as James understands it” (Morris 1986:313). John sees that failure to act upon seeing others in need as being not compatible with the love of God abiding in an individual (1 Jn 3:17). Christians are called to look beyond their own interests to the interests of others (Phil 2:4). Faith is not just vertical in its dimension – that is, between God and the individual – but has horizontal dimensions in the way in which we live with others in this world. Paul urges that we should “share with God’s people who are in need” (Ro 12:13; cf. Gal 6:10). In order to know what the needs of others are, we need to know those people who have needs. Therefore, we are to “be willing to associate with people of low position” (Ro 12:16). Hospitality is given as one of the traits for the leaders of the church (1 Ti 3:2). James, Peter and John especially asked Paul to remember the poor in his ministry to the Gentiles (Gal 2:9f). The writer of the Hebrews calls upon Christians to share what they have, for such a “sacrifice” is pleasing to God (Heb 13:16). This sharing is not just for those who are known to a person, but also extends to complete strangers (Heb 13:2). Cases of “urgent need” are singled out by Paul as something to which Christians should devote themselves (Tit 3:14 ESV). Christians should be “generous and willing to share” (1 Ti 6:18f). If one member of the body of Christ is suffering, then all suffer together (1 Co 12:26). This solidarity makes it logical that we should seek to eliminate suffering from the body of Christ. The willingness to share with those in need arises from an attitude of contentedness among God’s people. Our hope should not be placed in the uncertainty of wealth, but in God who “richly provides us with everything” (1 Ti 6:17). The writer of Hebrews urges his readers to “keep [their] lives free from the love of money and be content

with what [they] have” (Heb 13:5). This contentedness is also spoken of by Paul, who said:

“Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction” (1 Ti 6:6-9 ESV).

It is easier to share with those in need if you are content with only the necessities of life. Greed is a dangerous sin. Those who are greedy will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Co 6:10). Pride in possession is “not from the Father but is from this world” (1 Jn 2:16 ESV). Out of the abundance of some, others can be helped. In the future, the situations may be reversed and the present day rich may be in need (2 Co 8:14). Giving to the poor is to be done cheerfully and without compulsion (2 Co 9:5, 7f; 1 Pt 4:9). Through generosity to those in need, Paul says that we are “enriched in every way” (2 Co 9:11). In addition, there is a flow on effect in that God is given praise and thanks (2 Co 9:12). So the giver is enriched, the receiver has their needs met and God is given praise and glory – all through the action of giving. It should also be noted that poverty does not necessarily rule one out from giving. The churches in Macedonia were commended by Paul for they gave out of extreme poverty (2 Co 8:1). Paul uses the example of Jesus, who became poor so that others might be become rich, as the theological basis for giving (Marshall 2004:287). Marshall (2004:287-288) notes that Paul sees poverty is not “an ascetic ideal to be cultivated for its own sake; rather a condition that is voluntarily endured in order that the lot of other people who are poor may be enriched (2 Co 8:8-15).”

Idleness is to be avoided (1 Th 5:14). Christians are to strive to work and be productive. Through doing so, not only are the individual’s needs met but they also have something with which to share with others (Eph 4:28). Paul, even though he could have sought support from those to whom he was ministering to, “worked night and day” so as to not be a burden to anyone (1 Th 2:9).

There was a blurring of the social distinctions within the Early Church. People of different backgrounds are united through their sharing of “a common salvation that has its roots in certain past events, its reality in the present experience of liberation, and its culmination in a future life a qualitatively new kind. In all these respects no distinctions between Christians can be made” (Banks 1994:110). James is critical of

people making social distinctions and giving different treatment to the rich at the expense of the poor (Ja 2:1-4). This criticism is directed to within the community of believers. In the taking of the Lord's Supper, Paul admonishes the Corinthian church for allowing social distinctions to take away from the unity of the meal (1 Co 11:17ff). In the Kingdom of God, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28 ESV). Fellowship with God and with one another is not limited by "national, gender or social distinctions" (Banks 1994:113). "Spiritual communion ... [is] not dependent upon human position and possessions" (Marshall 2004:297). This blurring of social (or even racial or gender) distinctions makes it easier to see the needs of others within a community. In addition, the worth and value of a person is not bounded up with their status. Everyone has worth. Everyone is called to serve. Everyone is called to look out for others. No exceptions. No excuses.

### **3.7.2 Marriage and family**

Marriage is to be held in honour by all (Heb 13:4). Each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband due to the temptations of sexual immorality (1 Co 7:2). However, if a person can exercise self-control they can stay unmarried (1 Co 7:8). Marriages are to be life long (1 Co 7:39). A person should not remarry while their original spouse is still alive (Ro 7:2f). However, if one partner dies the other is no longer bound by marriage and is free to remarry (Ro 7:1f; 1 Co 7:39). Paul recommends young widows to remarry (1 Ti 5:14). A woman should stay married to her husband. However, if a married woman does separate from her husband, she is not to remarry. She is to remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband (1 Co 7:10f). A man is not to divorce his wife (1 Co 7:11). There is interdependence in marriage (1 Co 11:11). Wives are called upon to submit to, respect and honour their husbands (Eph 5:22, 33; Col 3:18; 1 Pt 3:7). Turaki (2006c:1436) states that for a wife:

"Her submission signals her acceptance of God's institutional order in the family and in the church. God has made the husband the head of a family, just as Christ is the Head of the church ([Eph] 5:23). She is to follow the example set by the church ([Eph] 5:24). The church's submission to Christ is total, and wives must imitate this as they submit to their husbands in everything."

Wives are to love both their husband and their children (Tit 2:4). In this they are to be instructed by older women – who should provide positive role models for them to

follow (Tit 2:3-5). As was seen in the previous section (3.7.1), idleness is to be avoided. Young wives are called “to be busy at home” (Tit 2:5), while older women are to train up the younger women (Tit 2:3f-5). The respect and pure conduct of a wife can draw people to God, even an unbelieving husband (1 Pt 3:1ff). It should be noted that the command to not be yoked with unbelievers in 2 Corinthians 6:14 is more likely to be referring to “the more general notion of partnership in pagan practices” than marriage (Kruse 1987:136). While there is support elsewhere in Scripture against believers marrying non-believers, the often quoted 2 Corinthians 6:14 does not address this issue. God values a spirit of quietness and gentleness (1 Pt 3:4).

Husbands are to love their wives, as Christ loved the Church (Eph 5:25) and also as they love themselves (Eph 5:33). A husband should not be harsh to his wife (Col 3:19) and should treat her in an understanding way (1 Pt 3:7). 1 Peter 3:7 refers to women as “the weaker partner” so as “not to denigrate women but to foster respect” from their Christian husbands (Michaels 2002:169). Women are not to be “treated as an underclass” (Muriithi 2006:1521) since they are also heirs with their husbands in the “gracious gift of life” (1 Pt 3:7). “The husband must dwell with his wife as one who knows her needs [and] who recognizes the delicacy of her nature and feelings” (Clowney 1988:134). Those in leadership within the Church should be exemplary in their conduct as a husband and a father (1 Ti 3:2ff). They should have only one wife (1 Ti 3:2).

1 Timothy 5:8 (ESV) states that anyone “does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Earlier in the letter, Paul says that widows who have children or grandchildren should be cared for by their own household and that this pleases God (1 Ti 5:4, 16). Those widows who have no one to look after them are to be honoured (1 Ti 5:3) and looked after by the church (1 Ti 5:16; cf. Jas 1:27).

Children are to be obedient to their parents (Eph 6:1-3; Col 3:20). Being disobedient to parents is listed as a sin deserving death in Romans 1:30 and a sign of the last days in 2 Timothy 3:2.

Older men, in general, are to be “encouraged” rather than “rebuked”, as one would treat their father (1 Ti 5:1 ESV). The “sex and age of people” should determine the attitude shown to them (Stott 1996:125). Hence, older women are to be treated like mothers, younger women like sisters and younger men like brothers (1 Ti 5:1f). This

is reflected in the language used within the Epistles. Christian men are often referred to as “brother” (e.g. Ro 16:14; Col 4:7, 9, 15) and women as “sister” (Ro 16:1). Some are referred to a “son” or “child” (2 Ti 1:2; Phm 10; 1 Pt 5:13; 3 Jn 4). The word used for “brother” (adelphos) was originally used in Greek to denote those of the same womb. It later came to signify all close relatives but was also used metaphorically to denote friends or companions. It was used by some Hellenistic cults (Gunther 1971:255). Therefore, the use of “brother” or “sister” is not uniquely Christian. However, the call to treat one another in the faith as relatives does go beyond the norms of many cultures. Christian community is to have a solidarity and unity that transcends barriers of race and social status (Col 3:11). We are not strangers to each other, but “fellow citizens” (Eph 2:19). Through Christ, all of God’s people – whether Jew or Gentile – are Abraham’s offspring (Rom 4:16; Gal 3:29). Christians are heirs of God with Christ (Ro 8:16f). In all these things, we see the use of communal language. One cannot be a brother or a sister without siblings. One cannot be an offspring without ancestors (physically or spiritually). One cannot be a fellow citizen without other citizens. The individual is part of a broader fabric of community. Christians are called to suffer “with” Christ. It is a joint action. This is the condition upon which Romans 8:16f says we are to be heirs of God. We participate in the sufferings of Christ (1 Pt 4:13). Our sufferings are not isolated but linked to our relationship to Christ. Just as in other parts of Scripture (see sections 3.2.3; 3.3.3; 3.4.1; 3.5.1; 3.6.6) we saw that the solidarity of the family meant that all could be affected by the actions (whether good or bad) of one, the actions of Christ affect all those who are in spiritual relationship to him. The world does not know Christ’s followers, since they do not know Him (1 Jn 3:1). God has taken those who were in rebellion to Him, and made them His family. Christians are “God’s chosen ones” (Col 3:12 ESV). On 1 John 3:1f, Jackman (1988:81) states that “not only does he give us His name (*called children of God*) but He gives us His status (*now we are children of God*)”. It follows that our true home is with God in Heaven.

### **3.7.3 Unity in the body**

The metaphor of a body is used by Paul to describe the unity (and diversity) within the people of God (Ro 7:4; 12:4ff; 1 Co 10:16f; 12:12ff; Eph 1:22f; 3:6; 4:12, 16, 25; 5:23, 30; Col 1:18, 24; 3:15). The Church is the body with Christ as the head (Eph 4:15). Within the body there are many parts, and each has its own function (Ro 12:4). Each member of the body belongs to, and works with, the others (Ro 12:5).

Each member of the body has different gifts given to them by God (Ro 12:6). Some of the spiritual gifts mentioned include apostleship, prophecy, service, teaching, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, leadership, mercy, healing, faith, wisdom, knowledge, spiritual discernment, tongues, the interpretation of tongues and evangelism (Ro 12:4; 1 Co 12:4ff; Eph 4:11ff). There is no part of the body that is of greater worth or value. Every part has its own role to play within the body. While some parts seem to be more vital from an external point of view, Paul writes that “the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable” (1 Co 12:22). There is a solidarity within the body so that when one part suffers, all suffer; if one part is honoured then all “rejoice together” (1 Co 12:26). People are to bear each others burdens (Gal 6:1). It should be noted that all the gifts benefit the other members of the body – there is no self-centred gift. The only possible exception to this is the gift of tongues IF there is no interpretation given. It is under the direction of Christ that “the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (Eph 4:16 NLT).

There is fellowship between the members of the body of Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit (2 Co 13:14). Some, such as Marshall (2004:290), see this as meaning “participation in the Holy Spirit and not a fellowship brought about by the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit is “the object in which Christian people share (objective genitive construction)” (Kruse 1987:224). However, the Spirit can only be shared if the Spirit “makes that participation possible” (Kruse 1987:224). So we have both a participation in and a fellowship brought about by the Holy Spirit. This is confirmed in Ephesians 4:3, where we see that the unity of the body is through the Spirit. Stott (1980:150) notes that it is “our common possession of the one Holy Spirit that integrates us into one body.” Within the body people are to live in harmony (Rom 15:5), seeking to build each other up (Ro 14:19). They should meet together regularly to encourage one another (Heb 10:24f). There should be no divisions with people being united and of the same mind (1 Co 1:10; Phil 2:2). Such is the importance of unity within the body that Paul writes that “for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned” (Tit 3:10f ESV).

There is sensitivity shown towards other members of the body. If an issue causes a fellow member of the body to stumble, then individuals should adapt to prevent that brother or sister from stumbling (1 Co 8:13). An example of this within the Zambian Church would be the issue of alcohol. If a brother or sister feels that alcohol is sinful and seeing a Christian drinking makes them struggle, then other Christians should be sensitive to this issue. This would be particularly relevant with regards to missionaries who come from Europeans backgrounds where alcohol is prevalent (in moderation).

2 Corinthians 6:14 commands believers to “not be yoked together with unbelievers.” This refers to “specific and technical association with [pagan] temple worship” (Barnett 1988:130). There is no “harmony” with other gods or religions. The unity of the body of Christ is unity *within* the body. There is no room for syncretism. Barnett (1988:130) states, therefore, that “it is doubtful that Paul would agree with Christians today attending inter-faith services with Muslims or Hindus, for example, since that would mean being mismated [sic] with unbelievers.”

Two outward symbols of the unity of God’s people are baptism and the Lord’s Supper. “Baptism was the outward rite of initiation into the believing community” (Marshall 2004:455). That there is one baptism is a reflection of the unity of the faith (Eph 4:5). With regards to this, Stott (1980:147) speaks of a “kind of oneness which God intends His new society to enjoy” arising from the unity of God. Ephesians 4:4-6 lists baptism as one of seven “marks of unity” arising from the “unity of God” (Green 1987:12). Baptism symbolise our union with Christ in His death and resurrection (Green 1987:49). The Lord’s Supper, similarly, is a visible symbol of the unity of God’s people. One of the areas of which Paul is critical of the Corinthian Church is for the divisions there are when taking the Lord’s Supper (Green 1982:45). The partaking of the Lord’s Supper encourages people to examine their own relationship with God, with others and look forward to Heaven. For “each Communion service is a foretaste of Heaven” (Green 1982:48).

#### **3.7.4 Obedience to the government**

Within the Old Testament, the people of God were generally ruling themselves. In the New Testament period, God’s people were a minority within a larger society. This is still true of the Church today. While there are many countries with Christian majorities, there are no nations with governments that are *solely* Christian, with the exception of the Vatican state. While Zambia is officially a Christian nation, there is

no limitation upon who can be elected to office. God's people live either under secular governments or, more rarely, governments of other religions.

Every person is to be subject to the governing authorities (Ro 13:1; Tit 3:1). There are reasons for this submission. Firstly, in doing so God's people show themselves to be "good" people (1 Pt 2:15; cf. 1 Th 4:12). Their conduct is thus beyond reproach – non-Christians have less chance of finding fault with them. They are contributing to the community as a whole, not just to themselves. Secondly, governments and authorities have the power to punish disobedience. This is a positive aspect of government. They are sent by God to punish evil and praise good (1 Pt 2:13f). Those in authority are placed there by God (Ro 13:1). Hence, resisting those in authority is resisting those whom God has appointed (Rom 13:1f). The power to punish evil is a powerful deterrent, from which those who do good have no fear (Ro 13:3f). It is important to note that there is an expectation of those in power to punish evil (1 Pt 4:15). While as individuals, Christians are to show mercy and forgive others – there is still an expectation for the judicial system to carry out justice. There is no criticism of the death penalty; rather Christians should expect the appropriate punishment for their crime (Ro 13:4). While Romans 12:19 calls for Christians to not take vengeance into their own hands since vengeance is the Lord's, the quote used by Paul is from Deuteronomy 32:35 which was in the context of a covenant with clear punishments for crimes. People were not to take vengeance into their own hands (Lv 19:19), but following the appropriate procedures justice was still to be carried out. Even Christians are called to punish disobedience when appropriate (2 Co 10:6). Thirdly, for a Christian community only, leaders should be obeyed since they are watching over the "souls" of those who believe and will have to give an account for way in which they lead (Heb 13:17). As a result they should be obeyed and submitted to. All three of these reasons for submission are valid within a Christian community; the first two reasons are valid for Christians in *all* communities. This does not mean a Christian should do what is against God's Word. The Book of Acts gives clear examples of the Apostles following God's will over the will of humans (Ac 4:19; 5:17ff). This is in accord with other passages across Scripture, such as Daniel's praying only to the Lord (Dn 6), Shadrach, Meshach and Abenego's refusal to bow to the idol (Dn 3) and Obadiah hiding God's prophets from Ahab (1 Ki 18:4). In addition, the prohibition by Paul of Christians participating in pagan rituals would mean that

certain traditional ceremonies would be either avoided by Christians or modified (1 Co 10:20f). An example of a modified pagan ceremony is Christmas itself.

Christians are to give the respect and honour that is due to those in power (Rom 13:7). 1 Peter 2:17 specifically says for its readers to honour the emperor. 1 Timothy 2:1f calls for us to prayer for the emperor and those in positions of authority. This is despite the fact that the emperor at the time claimed to be divine. In calling Christians to submit to even pagan authorities, it further emphasises that Jesus did not come to establish a political Kingdom of God on Earth. We are not to attempt to overthrow governments that are not Christian. This does not mean that Christians should not stand up when they see injustice and speak out. However, in normal day to day life we are to live within society – paying tax when due and recognising those in authority. This becomes admittedly grey in matters of democracy where elections are rigged, or where the military seizes power through a coup. Yet even in these circumstances, the principle by which we should be living is that by doing good we should silence those who would criticise us (1 Pt 2:15). For “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head” (Ro 12:20). Traditional Anglican Church services pray regularly for the Queen (in Commonwealth countries) and for those in government in accordance with 1 Timothy 2:1f. This should be a regular practice for Christians.

### **3.7.5 Conduct unbecoming**

Within legal system of the Australian Defence Force (and most of the world’s militaries) there is a charge of “conduct unbecoming an officer”. While Christians are called to walk in manner that is worthy of the Lord (Col 1:10), the Epistles lay out clearly many areas of conduct that are not just “unbecoming” but are unacceptable for Christians. 1 Corinthians 6:9f (ESV) states that “neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” Ephesians 5:15 (ESV) says that “everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ”. This is further confirmed in Galatians 5:19ff (ESV) where it states that:

“the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn

you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

In addition, the wages of workers should not be withheld (Jas 5:4f) nor should we be drunk with wine (Eph 5:18). Whoever claims to know Christ but does not obey his commands is a liar and the truth is not in him (1 Jn 2:4). Obedience is an important part of the conduct of those who claim to be Christians. Hence, Paul’s call upon Timothy to preach, reprove and rebuke (2 Ti 4:2). God takes disciplining His people seriously, just as a good parent takes disciplining their children seriously (Heb 12:6-10). Paul rebukes the Corinthian Church for its disobedience to produce the grief that led them to repentance (2 Co 7:8-10). If we have sinned and confess our sins to God, “He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9). As well, we are to forgive each other, just as Christ forgave us (Eph 4:32).

It would follow that in order for God’s people to know what conduct is unacceptable, they need to be familiar with the Word of God. “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is the word of Christ” (Ro 10:17). The Word of God teaches, rebukes and instructs (2 Ti 3:16). The Old Testament was written down as examples for our instruction (1 Co 10:11; cf. Heb 6:12; 13:7). We are to “let the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom” (Col 3:16a). Paul calls upon Timothy to live his life as an example for others, as well as teaching them and publicly reading Scripture (1 Ti 4:12f).

If people are struggling with sin, the community should be praying for them (1 Jn 5:16). Jackman (1988:165-166) states that:

“[When] a Christian becomes enmeshed in some sin which becomes obvious to his fellow Christian. That Christian’s privilege and responsibility is to pray for his erring brother or sister, with confidence and faith that he or she will be given life, and restored to that full fellowship with God which is eternal life and which any and every sin spoils and mars ... so the sinning Christian, whose life in Christ is declining, though he is not dead nor sinning unto death, will be restored by the grace of God, through the prayers of the Christian church family.”

The community has a responsibility to seek to help restore their fellow Christian. We are not alone in our journey, but are part of a wider body which should be seeking to help one another onward.

### 3.8 Revelation

Within the Book of Revelation we see a continuation of great solidarity within God's people. Each of the seven Churches in Asia is said to have an angel (Rev 1:20). This is reminiscent of Daniel 10:13 and 12:1 (see previous section 3.5.5). Each of the Churches are dealt with as Churches. There are no individuals signalled out (Rev 1:4ff). In the letters to the Churches we see that pagan worship is equated to the worship of Satan (Rev 2:13). We also see children being struck for the sins of their parents (Rev 2:23). External riches can hide a poor interior (Rev 3:17). God reiterates his desire to discipline those whom He loves (Rev 3:19).

The majority of usages of the verb to "worship" (*proskyneo*) in the New Testament, occur in Revelation (Kaiser 2008:384). The community in Heaven, to which God's people on Earth are looking forward to, is a community of worship. God is the centre and focus. Christ is reigning on His throne receiving the worship of the angels (Rev 5:11-13), and the worship of people from every tribe and nation (Rev 7:9).

The final, perfect community has God dwelling in the midst of humanity in the New Heave and New Earth. "He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Rev 21:3). There is no question about whether or not this will happen: whether or not God might triumph. Through out Revelation we see that "evil may be strong, but God is stronger, and He will finally triumph gloriously" (Kaiser 2008:384).

## **3.9 Synthesis**

Having examined community through Scripture, this subsection will briefly look what unity there has been seen. Carson (2000:100-101) states that:

“Biblical theology ... seeks to uncover and articulate the unity of *all* the Biblical texts taken together, resorting primarily to the categories of those texts themselves ... On the one hand, Biblical theology will try to preserve the glorious diversity of the Biblical documents; on the other hand, it will try to uncover all that holds them together, sacrificing neither historical perspective nor the unifying sweep of redemptive history.”

Bock and Fanning (2006:280) agree, saying that we “can expect the range of ideas in different periods and through different writers to have an underlying coherence.” While most of the issues relating to community discussed in chapter three have seen much unity throughout Scripture, there has been three areas of particular importance in terms of unity and one area of importance of disunity.

### ***3.9.1 Poverty and care for the oppressed***

Throughout Scripture, we have seen that communities are to care for the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised within society. This has taken different forms and emphasises throughout Scripture. For example, the Torah focused more on the macro and microeconomic structures within the community to help prevent and alleviate poverty. The New Testament writings place a greater emphasis on the sharing of possessions. This is mainly due to the difference in audience between the various sections of Scripture. The Old Testament was written with God’s people being the majority in their society – where they can legislate and form the structures upon which the society would operate. The New Testament is written to God’s people living within a greater society. Both are unified in their care for the poor and oppressed. Both are concerned to see justice done. There is an active approach to eradicating poverty from both those who are rich (by sharing and paying wages on time) and those who are poor (by working hard) in both the Old and New Testaments. Care for the poor is not an optional extra for the community of God’s people. Christian community is a community of care and concern to be shown in practical ways.

### ***3.9.2 Family***

We have seen that the smallest unit of community, the family, has an important place in Scripture. The family unit is part of God’s plan for His community. Marriage is to be

honoured and divorce avoided. Parents have a vital role in the raising and teaching of their children. Children are to honour, respect and obey their parents. Family bonds are strong. The actions of individuals within the family affect others – which leads us to the next unifying issue of community within Scripture.

### ***3.9.3 Corporate unity***

The New Testament metaphor of the body summarises the Biblical teaching of corporate unity. It is not just the actions of family members that affect others, but any individual within a community has the potential to affect others either positively or negatively. This can carry even across generations. If one person suffers; all suffer. We are to bear one another's burdens. Christians all share in the suffering of Christ. They are bound together by common purpose. Each has different tasks which complement each other. It is little wonder, therefore, that we are to have the aforementioned concern for the poor. A Christian community is a unified community.

### ***3.9.4 Christ centred***

While there is much unity between the two Testaments, there is one distinct shift in emphasis. While both the people of Israel and the Christian communities could be said to be centred on God, from New Testament times this centring is specifically on Christ. Christian community is Christ centred community. This subtle but significant shift is tantalisingly hinted at in the Old Testament, but fully revealed in the New Testament. This will also be the eternal reality, as God's people gather around Christ in the age to come. Race, gender and social barriers are broken down as all focus their attention on serving Christ.

Having Christ at the centre of the community provides a living example of how we should live our lives. He gives purpose to the community since the community is both worship Him and to imitate Him. While the worship of God had an important role in the Old Testament, the Christ centred community has a visible, tangible leader to follow, emulate and serve. It is not so much a discontinuity between the Testaments but the Old Testament foreshadowing and pointing forward to the reality of Christ. Reality in the sense that all before was a reflection paving the way for His perfection.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

The Bible has a lot to say about community. In examining community throughout the Bible, it has been seen that there are many facets of community that are consistently stressed and emphasised. These facets include the care for the poor and oppressed, the importance of family, and the unity and solidarity of community. The Bible displays great unity, both within each of its own sections and also across the entire canon, when describing community. Our own emphasises on community should reflect the Bible's emphasises. Hence, as Christians we should seek to mould our own communities on these key facets of Biblical community.

Of particular note is the emphasis on unity and solidarity within community. This has far reaching implications in today's world. To those from Western culture, it speaks out against extreme individualism. The actions of a person can, and will, affect other people. We do not live in isolation within a community! As Western culture and urbanisation rapidly change traditional cultures where solidarity receives greater recognition, such as in Africa, there needs to be an affirmation of this aspect of traditional culture.

Ladd (1993:21) sees Biblical theology as "primarily a story about God and his concern for human beings." Community is at the heart of this concern. Humanity is made to live in community and not in isolation. Care for one another in community is a reflection of God's care for us. The care for the poor is a reflection of God's concern for the poor. The importance of family is demonstrated by our incorporation into God's own family. The Biblical emphasis on unity and solidarity within the community is a reflection of the unity of God Himself. The Biblical picture of community we have seen in this chapter is a picture of the characteristics of God. If our own communities differ in their values, then we need to reassess our own behaviour.

# **Chapter four: the relevance and application of the Biblical theology of community to early twenty first century Zambia**

## **4.1 Introduction**

Having completed the Biblical theology of community, this chapter will highlight its relevance and application to early twenty first century Zambia. Key themes or issues from the Biblical theology of community will be discussed in the light of the situation in early twenty first century Zambia. These themes are: solidarity within the community, poverty, justice, family and marriage, and Zambia as a Christian nation. By limiting the discussion to these main themes, it is not to say that the other issues found in chapter three are not relevant to Zambia. Rather, these areas are of particular relevance and importance to the Zambian context. It is hoped that by identifying key areas to which the Bible speaks to the Zambian context, in the future further discussion can be generated within the community on these issues.

## **4.2 Solidarity within the community**

Throughout Scripture it was seen that the actions of the individual had effects upon their family and community. There was a close solidarity in both positive and negative aspects of life. Simfukwe (2008:1) sees the communal orientation of Zambian society as being one of its strengths. Mbiti (1990:219) saw a close solidarity within traditional African society, but that this solidarity in recent years is under siege and is being worn down. Within Zambia, Crehan (1997:221) observes that even the Church has had a role in the promotion of “general individualist ethos” since the various denominations in Zambia “were the products of market based societies”. If Crehan (1997) is right in her link between individualism and the Church, then the Biblical theology of community explored in chapter three would show that the Church should not be necessarily individualistic. Rather, the Church should be highlighting that the traditional solidarity within the community is something to hold on to and cherish. There has been a tremendous show of solidarity by Zambia as a nation in the wake of the death of President Levy Mwanawasa on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August, 2008.

The nation mourned for twenty one days the passing of a great leader. Similarly, Zambia's reputation as one of the most peaceful countries in Africa can be in part contributed to its first president's policy of "one Zambia, one nation". By adopting this slogan, people saw themselves as Zambian first and belonging to their tribe second. The adoption of "one Zambia, one nation" by Zambia's first president, Kenneth Kaunda, is attributed as "the main reason why Zambia has remained a peaceful nation while its neighbours such as Angola and Congo have been ripped apart by civil war and tribal fighting" (Baldwin 2004). Solidarity is an essential component of a Biblical community. From solidarity flow such aspects as care for the poor, the needy and the sick. Communal needs are put before individual needs. Yet, all can rejoice and share in the blessings that God then provides to the community. Solidarity with others within a community can help people to remain in the community. As previously seen in section 3.6.3, Zambia has been experiencing a drain of trained personnel leaving the country. While some may be doing so to help support family that remains behind, the bonds of solidarity with the wider community (whether village, town or nation) slowly fade over time. In the end the community suffers for the lack of its doctors or nurses. Solidarity can help prevent this.

The relevance of solidarity to Zambia can be further seen in the recent rise in street kids and begging. Simfukwe (2008:1) states that:

"In the traditional context, there were no orphans or widows. Everyone was connected to the community somehow. Any child had many mothers and many fathers. The widow had others who could inherit her (ukupyanika). Street begging is a new phenomenon."

As the traditional solidarity fades away in the urban areas, Zambia is becoming increasingly faced with issues it did not have to deal with in past times of greater communal solidarity. As many Western based NGO's come in to try to help orphans through institutionalised orphanages, the root of the issue is not being addressed. The underlying problem is a combination of reduced communal (and family) solidarity and poverty. A family that is barely feeding its own children has difficulty taking on another set of nephews or nieces. The issue of street children can be properly addressed through communal ownership of the problem and the alleviation of poverty within society.

### **4.3 Poverty**

Throughout the Bible, care for the poor and needy within the community is given a high priority. The community should act in such a way as to prevent and alleviate poverty. According to the UN, 63.8% of Zambians live on less than \$1 per day (UN Development Programme 2007). This makes Zambia one of the poorest nations in the world and makes the issue of poverty both real and large. The issue has not gone unnoticed by the Church. Temfwe (2007) states that in Zambia:

“Christian leaders heading churches in the middle class income areas (suburbs) face the big task of equipping their members of how to embrace the poor and seek positive change with them ... People living in poverty need to hear about God’s passion and plan for justice and his concern for all those who suffer injustices and lack basic needs.”

Solidarity is the key. It is not enough for a middle class Church to seek to address the needy just within its own congregational boundaries. Each community level (whether Church, village, town or nation) needs to identify the needy, take steps to alleviate their immediate needs and act in such a way as to help prevent future poverty. Simfukwe (2008:1) sees that “there is a lot of wealth concentrated in the hands of a few Zambians.” Hence, there is need for those who have the wealth to share with those in need.

### **4.4 Justice**

Just as solidarity flows into the issue of poverty, the issue of poverty flows into the issue of justice. The Biblical theology of community showed that justice should be of deep concern for the community. This stress on justice goes beyond a mere desire to punish evil. Justice is concerned with seeing those in need having their needs met, and having structures in place to act as deterrents to evil. Justice helps prevent exploitation – one of the root causes of poverty. Doing what is right is more important than monetary gain. In Zambia there are many areas where justice needs to be done. For example, Zambia’s mineral resources are being mined largely by foreign companies who are paying little for this privilege. Many foreign investors are exempt from paying mineral revenue, yet they mine millions of dollars of copper per year. Recently, the government increased the mineral revenue tax from 0.6% to 3%

(Kapembwa 2008). In 2007 Zambia “only collected \$142 million in mineral royalty and company tax from earnings of \$4.7 billion in copper and cobalt exports by foreign owners of its vast copper and cobalt mines” (Shacinda 2008). Whether through corruption or mismanagement, Zambia as a nation in the area of mining is being exploited. If it is through mismanagement, then it is exploitation from other countries. If it is through corruption, then it is exploitation from its own leaders. In either case, the pleas for justice for the people still need to be heard and acted upon. It was the late President Mwanawasa who introduced the fivefold increase to the mineral revenue tax. Temfwe (2008) states that Mwanawasa “was respected for his reputation for honesty and for his commitment to good governance. He was one of the few rare African presidents’ voices that spoke out against the oppression of the Zimbabweans by Mugabe.” In the wake of the death of President Mwanawasa, Zambians still need to speak out against injustice in their own communities, in their nation and in the world.

#### **4.5 Family and marriage**

According to UNICEF (2008), in 2005 there were an estimated 1.1 million Zambians who were HIV positive, with around 17% of the adult population aged 15 to 49 HIV positive. While there are many and varied reasons for people contracting HIV, a society following the Biblical practices of abstinence and faithfulness would greatly reduce the spread of HIV. Uganda has successfully reduced the number of people who are HIV positive through a campaign of abstinence, fidelity and condom use. However, the slowing down of the rate of success in recent years has come with a marked increase in the use of condoms (AVERT 2008). Despite many critics of the “abstinence only” approach, it seems that this method is the best for achieving lasting results. The promotion of condoms in countries such as Botswana and Zimbabwe has not achieved much success in curbing the rate of HIV infections (Trafford 2002). The Biblical model of marriage has great importance and relevance in such a climate as is seen in present day Africa.

An example of a traditional Zambian cultural practice that is challenged by the Biblical model of marriage is the sexual cleansing practices following the death of a spouse. These are catastrophic in the light of HIV/AIDS and contribute to the spread

of the disease to innocent people (Chondoka 2004:34). Within these practices, is it required that the widower or widow have sexual intercourse with a relative of the deceased in order to prevent the spirit of the deceased spouse returning to “seek sexual union, which is believed to be both possible and dangerous”. The protection of the widow or widower is the purpose of this ritual and also to release them for safely entering into a new relationship in the future (Simfukwe 2006:1462). Therefore, if someone died of an AIDS related disease their spouse – who would probably also be infected – would have sexual intercourse with this relative. This would spread the virus to someone who would not have (necessarily) caught it. In the reverse, possibly the relative might be infected and the spouse of the deceased is infected unwittingly as they follow tradition.

Another factor of Zambian culture that both contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS and goes against Biblical teaching on marriage is the context that a man’s infidelity does not break a marriage. That is, a man can have sexual relations outside of marriage without affecting the marriage. For this the Bemba say “ubuchende bwa mwaume tabuonaula ing’anda” (a man’s unfaithfulness does not break a marriage). Similarly, the Kaonde would say “bukende bwa mwana mulume kechi bupwisha masongolane” (a man’s unfaithfulness does not break a marriage). This attitude within the culture means that not only might a husband get infected through his adultery but his faithful wife will also be infected unknowingly. However, it can be noted that statistics show that these traditional attitudes are slowly changing. In 1996, 27.2% of men between the ages of 15 and 49 had sexual relationship with more than one woman in the past 12 months. In 2007, the rate for men had fallen to 14.4% (UNAIDS 2008:14).

#### **4.6 A Christian nation**

Perhaps the most obvious reason for a Biblical theology of community being relevant to Zambia is that it is officially a “Christian nation”. As amended by act number 18 of 1996, the preamble of Zambia’s constitution states “we declare the Republic to be a Christian nation”. Having stated that the nation is a Christian nation, the relevance of examining the Bible for direction on how a community should work is obvious. By identifying itself with Christ, the nation should reflect the character of Christ in

everyday life. Unless the “Christian nation” amendment is changed, Zambian community is in name “Christian”. Chapter three gave insight into what the Bible speaks about community. In order to be a Christian community in not just by name, these are the areas in which both the leaders and the people will need to work on. Whether or not it is right to be a Christian nation is a separate debate. It may be the case that in the future Zambians decide to amend the constitution to remove the “Christian nation” declaration. Until that day, a Biblical theology of community is explicitly relevant. After that day, the other issues of poverty, family and justice will still be implicitly relevant.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

A Biblical theology of community is particularly relevant to early twenty first century Zambia. Explicitly, Zambia claims to be a Christian nation. Therefore, any community within Zambia – whether at Church, village or nation level – should see the Bible’s teaching on community as relevant to their situation. Until the constitution is amended otherwise, for a community to be Zambian it is to be a Christian community. Implicitly, the issues arising from the Biblical theology of community have been demonstrated as being of particular importance to the context of early twenty first century Zambia. Solidarity within the community, poverty, justice, family and marriage are all spoken to and emphasised by the Bible’s teaching. Whether or not Former President Chiluba was right in declaring Zambia to be a Christian nation, it is clear that the Bible speaks on the issues that are of importance to Zambia.

## **Chapter five: Conclusion**

### **5.1 Summary and deductions**

Previously, there had only been two Biblical theologies of community that had not focused purely on a section of the canon: Hanson (2001) and Dubay (1973). Neither of these authors used the Bible's own structures and genres to organise their Biblical theologies. The current research on the Biblical theology of community has been written following the structure of the original Hebrew and Greek canon. In doing this, it has been seen that there are great similarities across genres on the Bible's teachings and emphasises on community. Similarly, there is much unity between the two Testaments on the various facets of community that the Bible sees as important. In writing a Biblical theology of community, certain facets of community have been found to have great emphasis across the canon. These aspects are care for the poor and oppressed, justice, family and marriage and solidarity. All these aspects were found throughout the canon. The canon displayed great unity with regards to its teaching on each of these aspects. In addition, there are many links between each of these aspects of community. Justice and care for the poor go hand in hand. A realisation of the solidarity within a community leads to justice and care for the poor and the oppressed.

Each of the main facets of community that were emphasised in the Biblical theology of community were found to be of particular relevance to early twenty-first century Zambia. As an explicitly Christian nation, Zambia is challenged to take the Bible's teaching and emphasises seriously. The issues to which the Bible speaks can be seen within communities in Zambia at all levels. As traditional society undergoes rapid changes through urbanisation and Western influences, Zambians can be challenged by the relevance of the Bible on the issues they face.

In the hypothesis in chapter one, it was proposed that by undertaking a Biblical theology of community it would be found that the Bible places more emphasis on some aspects of community that we often neglect. In addition, it was proposed that some aspects that we view as important would be seen as secondary issues. This hypothesis has been proven true. The theme of solidarity within a community is one aspect that probably does not receive the attention that the Bible places on it. The

bonds of community and corporate responsibility run deep throughout the canon. This is not just in negative aspects, but also in positive aspects too.

As was proposed in the hypothesis, forms of government are not seen as critical in the running of community. There is relatively little said within the canon on the leadership structures of community compared to the main facets of community – care for the poor and oppressed, justice, family and marriage and solidarity within the community. The Bible does not clearly teach one system of government over another for the day to day running of a community.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Having seen the unity of the Bible's teaching on the aforementioned aspects of community and their relevance for early twenty-first century Zambia, the following is recommended:

### ***5.2.1 Greater emphasis on unity and solidarity***

Until Grenz (1994), many systematic theologies neglected the theme of community. While much is taught and written on the Church, less is said on the day to day aspects of life that we face in society. The importance of solidarity and corporate unity needs to have a much greater appreciation. Perhaps as Christian textbooks are increasingly written by non-Western authors this neglect of solidarity will be corrected over time. This change of emphasis also needs to permeate from academic discussion to the pulpit. As congregations see themselves as sharing stronger bonds than they previously realised, there will be an increased concern for the poor and neglected within communities at all levels. Even globally, as Christians see themselves as being strongly linked, there will be greater concern and compassion. For example, the rapid secularisation of a country in Europe should pain an African Christian as he or she shares in the plight of Christians of that nation. Similarly, the poverty and injustice toward Christians in Asia should stir the hearts of Christians in North America as they share in the pain that strong bonds of unity bring. A greater emphasis on the bonds of unity should encourage Christians at all levels of community to be active. The actions of an individual can have great consequences beyond themselves. As Christians we need to live our lives as part of the greater body of Christ, rather than in isolation.

### ***5.2.2 The teaching of community***

A Biblical theology of community should be incorporated into Bible college curricula in Zambia. Within Bible colleges in Zambia, there are already existing subjects such as “Biblical theology of missions”. Given the relevance of a Biblical theology of community to the many issues faced within Zambian society, it would be useful for a Biblical theology of community to be studied at Bible colleges. A Biblical theology of community course would help students see the unity within the Biblical canon in its emphasis on certain aspects of community. While the issue of poverty is often covered within Community Development, this approach fails to link with aspects that the Bible emphasises on community. In examining poverty in the Bible, it has been seen that the issues of solidarity, unity and justice are interrelated with the care for the poor.

Community is an important topic. It covers our day to day lives - touching the way we relate to people. Given the relevance of a Biblical theology of community for early twenty-first century Zambia, we should not be silent on what the Bible teaches on community, nor should we use our own emphases when examining the issue of community. Like the Prophets speaking to the situations of their own day calling people back to the following the Law, we need to speak to the issues facing our societies today by bringing them back to the Word of God. Hence, a Biblical theology of community should be taught as a subject within the Bible colleges in Zambia.

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