



It Takes a Village

by Tim Kelley

Today is Hoshanna Rabbah – the “Great Salvation”. In Jewish Tradition, it’s also called “the Last Great Day”. We just witnessed a re-enactment of a very special tradition that took place every year on this day during the Feast of Tabernacles in first century Jerusalem. Though I don’t believe the Jews understood the full significance of what they were doing, it seems clear that they believed that God’s Holy Spirit would be poured out during the 1000 year Messianic Kingdom, and that sometime toward the end of that era, there would be a great pouring out of the spirit – much more so than at other time in that era, and probably more so than any time in history. In fact, Joel brings this point out in his prophecy –

NKJ Joel 2:28-32 ²⁸ " And it shall come to pass **afterward** That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh . . . ²⁹ And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

Yeshua reiterated that concept when He made this awesome proclamation during His final Hoshanna Rabbah here on earth -

ESV John 7:37-38 "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

I believe these, and other similar prophecies speak of a time when God’s people, His remnant, will be ready to receive those on whom God is pouring His spirit. But what happens after God pours out His spirit? How does He use his spirit to help others learn of His ways? What causes that “spark” to develop into a true “child of God”?

Our god is truly an AWESOME god. He can do anything, but He chooses to work through human beings. God could have miraculously raised up the ground on which Noah and his family lived, but instead – He had Noah build a boat by which he was able to save not only his own species, but all the species of the world. God could have snapped His fingers and caused His temple to suddenly exist, but that’s not how He chose to do it.

What’s more, God could have sent Messiah Yeshua to the earth during the electronic age where His message could have been broadcast around the world into TV’s and smartphones, but instead – the message of the gospel was preached by human beings who’s voices could only be projected 20 – 30 yards away.

It’s clear – God works through human beings, and on Hoshanna Rabbah, sometime during the Messianic Kingdom, a spark is going to light up the fire of the Holy Spirit in millions and probably billions of people, and they are going to be looking for teachers . . . and we’re going to have to be ready.

The book of Haggai is a book of encouragement for the leaders of Israel to continue with the re - construction of the Temple. It seems that after the Jewish people were allowed to return to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity, they built the walls of Jerusalem, but only began the construction of the Temple. So God prodded them to continue the task, then on the 21st day of the 7th month – Hoshanna Rabbah – God said that –

ESV Haggai 2:6-7 Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. ⁷ And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts.

I believe this passage speaks of the time when God will draw all peoples to His temple where they can learn of His ways and learn how to properly worship Him. There will probably be a steady stream of peoples from all the nations on earth who have suddenly got the desire to serve the God of Israel. They will likely wake up one morning and begin to understand why the people in the “Hebrew” side of town

It Takes a Village

always seem to be happy; why their children are always courteous and kind; and why there's always peace in the "Hebrew" community. And when they do, they will want to be like that.

3500 years ago, as Moses was teaching the younger generation – the ones who would inherit the Promised Land, he said this in regards to God's Torah –

ESV **Deuteronomy 4:6-8** ⁶ Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' ⁷ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? ⁸ And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

This was the mandate for Israel. This IS the mandate for Israel, and this WILL BE Israel's mandate in the future . . . in the Messianic Kingdom. Israel is to be an example of God's way of life, because it's by Israel's – OUR – example, that YHVH is glorified. When on Hoshanna Rabbah, when YHVH pours out His Spirit – there has to be pockets of people walking in God's way that will serve as examples of His Torah – His way of life.

How will this come to pass? How can this come to pass? I believe it will come to pass through human beings raising strong families and building strong Torah fellowships – let's call it "communities" in all nations of the earth.

In 1996, the First Lady of the United States – Hillary Clinton – wrote a book entitled "*It Takes a Village: and Other Lessons Children Teach Us*". The book focused on the impact people outside the family have on children. Because I was an avid listener to Rush Limbaugh, I discounted the book as being nothing more than liberal trash, but as I grew older and remembered how others had an impact on me . . . and seeing how others were having an impact on my own children, I came to see that the "village" concept, or at least the community concept is something to be considered.

God works with Israel as a community of people. They are a people of families, clans, and tribes. Though the smallest organized unit was a man, his wife, and their children, i.e. –a family, God often called groups of families – a clan – to perform specific functions. For instance, when it came to carrying the Ark of the Covenant, a group of families were given a specific function. (Numbers 3). Thus groups of families (a clan) worked together to perform the work of God. As Israel grew as a people the clans would grow into communities and villages and would thus be able to perform the work of god. These "Torah Communities" did the work of God throughout the land of Israel.

For the next few minutes, I want to talk about Torah communities and fellowships.

I want to focus on three points:

1. The Need for Community
2. Obstacles to Building Strong Fellowships and Communities
3. How to Begin a Torah Fellowship

Let's start with the Need for Community . . .

I spent the better part of my life as part of a community of people who had a common goal and worked together to bring that goal to fruition. When I was about 10 years old my dad announced on Christmas day that this was going to be our last Christmas. With that announcement, my life and the lives of my brothers and sister changed. The first, and probably the worst (at least in my thinking at the time) was Christmas itself. Being that I was still in grade school, Christmas parties were a big thing, but my mother would come every year and pull me and my brothers out of school and take us home. Thankfully, the Christmas Party was the last day of school before the Christmas break, so my friends had a couple of weeks to forget about our family's "cultish" behavior.

This continued through junior high school and early high school. I would bring notes from my parents to tell my teachers why I couldn't attend this or that party, or why I couldn't go to this or that contest on Saturday.

It Takes a Village

It was really hard when, after moving from Nashville to Cleveland, Tennessee, that as a sophomore, I beat out the juniors and seniors in band competition and became the first-place trumpet player in our high school band. But once the band director found that I couldn't march on Friday night, nor would I be allowed to play some of the songs in the Christmas concert, he added another "first place" player who could take my place.

This all changed when my parents move us to Ardmore, Oklahoma, because it was at Ardmore that I found that our family was not the only "strange" family out there. That's when we began attending the Sabbath-keeping church that my Dad had been reading about for the previous seven years. It was then that I learned that my situation was not unique. But most importantly, it was when I – a teenager - was able to build friendships with others who were having to do the same things in school. It was becoming a part of a church, or better yet – a Torah community that changed everything that made this way of life enjoyable as a teenager.

Instead of being an obstacle and an embarrassment, the Sabbath became something I looked forward to. And after sharing "war stories" with my Sabbath-keeping friends, I was better able to deal with the ridicule and embarrassment I experienced at school.

We need community. Teens need community. In fact, many of you made the decision to join us at SOOJ because you understand that your teens wanted to be with their teen-aged friends who were attending here. There's nothing wrong with that. That's something God has built into us . . . the need and desire to be with those who share the same faith.

A number of years later, I moved to Big Sandy, Texas because I had met this awesome woman whom I married a year later. It was in Big Sandy that I learned about an important tool in helping us maintain the Hebrew walk, and that was "peer pressure".

Big Sandy was like the second headquarters for the Sabbath-keeping church that Angie and I were a part of. Within about a 25 mile radius of Big Sandy there were probably well over 500 Sabbath-keeping families. In the little town where we lived, the school board scheduled their breaks to coincide with the Biblical festivals because there were so many Sabbath-keepers in our school.

In our "church" community, secrets were hard to keep. If you ever mentioned attending a Friday night football game or watching a movie on the Sabbath, it was likely that word would get back to your "church" friends, and once it did – you were sure to get a phone call from someone asking "what's going on?" We might think that's a bad thing, but according to the scripture, that's exactly what's supposed to happen. Notice what God says in Leviticus –

NKJ **Leviticus 19:17** ' You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.

This is spoken of in the context of *loving your neighbor as yourself*¹. Peer pressure helped us maintain the walk.

As a Torah community, you help your brother when he's weak. You help bring him back into the way of God. This also helps the Torah community as a whole. In our area, everyone in town knew if you were part of "that church", and were thus looking for ways to badmouth the church through our actions. That was one of the reasons we tried to stay "above board" in all that we did so as to not reflect negatively on the church.

Peer pressure also helped our children. All the "church kids" were pretty much lumped together. They were the ones who couldn't march in band on Friday night, even though they were the ones who knew the marches better than most of the other kids. They were the ones who were the leaders though they never attended the Saturday competitions. My sons played varsity basketball along with other "church kids", but just a few minutes before sundown on Friday night, the coach would call "time out" and my sons along with their church friends would exit the court and head for the locker room. This would have been very difficult for most young men, but because three or four other boys left the court with them, it was

¹ Leviticus 19:18

It Takes a Village

much easier to do. In fact, it would have been harder for one of the boys to stay on the court than it would have been for him to leave.

Having a close Torah community does make it easier for everyone to stay in tune with God and the Hebraic walk.

The idea of building Torah fellowships is not my own. I've talked with many of you about your desire to be a part of a Torah fellowship or community, but you bring up the obstacles that keep you from being a part of one.

There are a number of things that get in the way of building a strong, viable fellowship. Here's just a few:

- Distance
- Differences in Biblical understanding
- Lack of Male Leadership

Though I've listed these in this order, which if I had taken a poll is the order in which they would probably be placed, I submit that the real reasons we're not starting viable fellowships is the reverse order. So I'm going to begin at the bottom of the list.

I believe the underlying reason we don't get together as much as we should is due to the lack of male leadership . . . the husbands and the fathers are not interested in pursuing it, and they're not willing to lead it. I know of people who leave a fellowship because they say it's lead by a woman, and my question to them is "then why don't you lead it?"

As I mentioned in my earlier talk, men have been made to look lame and foolish for the past 50 years, but that's no excuse. Men need to be willing to step forward and take the lead in regards to spirituality in their homes and in their communities . . . including the "church" community. Face it fellows, when you left the traditional church behind, you left the opportunity to just show up, sit in a pew, then go home. If you and your family want the opportunity to have fellowship, you have to make it happen. That's not to say that you have to be a teacher or a preacher, but you can help with the facilities, can visit the sick and elderly, can be a part in planning outings or service projects. There are always ways for men to contribute and keep the fellowship viable.

And this leads to the next point – "Differences in Biblical Understanding". A couple of days ago, Mark Roth mentioned some of the problems that congregations face, some of which include differences in understanding of certain Biblical topics. I learned very early in this movement that there are topics that are not going to be resolved until Elijah comes and "restores all things". These topics include "the calendar, the nature of God, the pronunciation of the sacred name, and to a lesser extent – whether or not we must follow the rabbinical standards regarding Kosher foods. My thought on those matters is simply this – if, through His prophet Malachi, He said that it's Elijah's job to restore all things, then why can't we trust that he will indeed restore them, and that we should simply do the best we can until he does?

Do you think God is happy with us when we refuse to have fellowship with, or worse yet, break fellowship with a group because of things that can't be proven, such as the calendar, something that normally only affects us a few days a year? Isn't fellowship on the 52 Sabbaths each year more important than getting together on the annual festivals? Isn't it more important to provide fellowship for our teens and youngsters than it is to agree on everything?

Before I leave this topic, I want to mention that there are also "inappropriate" topics for a Torah fellowship. I talked with a fellow earlier this year who mentioned that he's afraid to bring anyone new to their fellowship out of fear of what others in the fellowship might say. Things like polygamy should not be discussed around children, or around wives. In fact, that topic probably shouldn't be discussed at all except to show the Biblical examples of how wrong it is. Never-the-less, it seems that every young fellowship seems to spend a season discussing it anyway.

The most common excuse I hear as to why we don't fellowship together is that of Distance, but I submit that this is the easiest to fix. How far are you willing to drive in order to have fellowship? How far are you

It Takes a Village

willing to drive so that your children – especially your teen-agers – can build relationships with children of the same faith?

Most of us are used to having a church on every corner, but when we left the church behind, we left that convenience behind as well. When Angie and I were moved to start a fellowship 8 ½ years ago, we decided to do it in a location that was somewhat central to those we thought might come. Even then, most of us had to drive 20 – 30 miles to get there, and today one couple drives nearly an hour each Sabbath.

Though some may be unwilling to drive 45 minutes to fellowship on the Sabbath, they are probably willing to drive that far to go out to eat, or to go to the mall. It's all a matter of priorities. One thing I've learned in life is that "a person will do what's important to him", and if fellowship with other believers is important, he will make it happen.

The last thing I want to discuss is "How Can I Start a Torah Fellowship"? Do you need a preacher, a teacher, a band? No – not at all.

How can you begin a Torah Fellowship in your area? There's no real formula; there's no set way, but I do know this – it won't happen if you do nothing.

Before starting our fellowship – the Ami Yisrael Fellowship – a asked a number of people how they did it. In many cases, those fellowships started as a result of many home-school families coming together. In other cases, it came about as a result of a pastor's eyes being opened to the Torah walk and leading his congregation that way.

For us, we thought we were in a Torah rich environment, and indeed we are. We had hosted a number of Hebraic events in the area (Chanukah, Feast of Trumpets, various speaker) for the previous 5 or 6 years, so we sent emails out to about 60 families who had come to those events. Our email stated that we were wanting to start a weekly Torah Study. We secured a "neutral" location in a housing authority office building, and held our first meeting. That first week there were about 20 people and we had an interactive Torah study, but the next week there was only Angie, myself, and an older lady who had been part of our home fellowship. For the next 1-2 years, there was often only Angie and I and about three other people, but it eventually grew to where we have grown out of our original location.

Here are some things you might want to consider when you start a fellowship in your area:

1. Be structured – have a schedule and follow it. Everyone likes to know what comes next, and most importantly, when it will all be over.
2. Be on time – not "Messianic Time". If you all agree to start at 2:30 PM, don't wait until 2:45 to start. Don't let the ones who won't follow the plan dictate when the meeting will actually start.
3. Encourage Traditions that make your fellowship unique
4. Use everyone – try to involve everyone in the service
 - o Pass around a sign-up list, and make every role available to all
5. Encourage and honor the elderly
 - o Encourage them to speak. In our fellowship, the most elderly person has the honor of beginning the reading of the Torah section for the week.
6. Avoid controversial topics, at least in the discussion portion of you service
 - o We deal with those topics in teaching sessions which are followed by Q & A
 - o Be cognizant of those who may be visiting that day. It's not very comforting when a new person attends your study and the discussion centers around whether God would have had Tamar burned alive or not.
 - o Learn the difference between Doctrine and Halacha. Doctrine is what your "elders" have agreed that everyone should believe. Halacha is the behavior you've all agreed to while you're together as a group.
7. Encourage additional fellowship throughout the week. Take every opportunity to come together as a group so that you can discuss topics outside of the normal Sabbath format, and so you're children can come together and play.
 - o New Moons, extended Oneg.

It Takes a Village

- Special events (guest speakers, traditional festivals such as Chanukkah, Purim, 4th of July picnic) where you can invite others outside your fellowship to visit.

Just as ancient Israel was divided into families, clans, and tribes, I believe that Israel today will also need to form into small communities. With small Hebraic communities led by Torah pursuant men, we could begin to make an impact in our cities and towns.

This past Monday, one of our teens made the statement that “this world is a hungry world”. Hoshanna Rabbah is about feeding the world. It’s about feeding them the true Bread of Life. It’s about bringing Living Water to the countless billions of people who have never been given the light of Messiah, have never been called into His way, His walk. This will take place in the Messianic Kingdom, a Kingdom that is yet to come. Until that Kingdom is established here on earth, our job is to restore what we can with the means Yah has provide, and I believe one of those means is to become a part of a strong Torah community.

We need to be set aside our differences and join together so as to be a light to the world.

The theme of this year’s festival is “Days of Elijah – Building Strong Families in Troubling Times”. I believe these are the Days of Elijah. It’s Elijah’s job to begin a restoration. He’s supposed to begin restoring the hearts of the fathers to the children. I believe that means that we will begin to love God and see Him as our deliverer just as did our fathers – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And when we do, I believe our children will turn their hearts to us.

God calls Israel his congregation, his bride, and His children. This past week we’ve had numerous messages, both in this room as well as in the Break Out sessions, on how to build strong marriages, strong families, and strong congregations. As we close the Feast of Tabernacles this evening and begin a whole new festival – Shemini Atzoreth, I hope we will put what we’ve learned into effect and follow the admonition of the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews –

ESV Hebrews 10:23-25 ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together . . . but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Shalom Alecheim