

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

Vol. 71 No. 6

JUNE, 2004

***"Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us looking
unto Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith"***

BE AN INSPIRATION...

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his hospital bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back. The men talked for hours on end about their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service and where they had been on holiday.

Every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his room-mate all the things he could see outside his window. The man in the other bed began to live for those one-hour periods when his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and colour of the world outside. The window looked over a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Young lovers walked arm in arm amongst flowers of every colour and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance. As the man by the window described all this in vivid detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene. One warm afternoon the man by the window described a parade going by. Although the other man couldn't hear the band – he could see it. In his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words.

Days and weeks passed. One morning, the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths only to find the lifeless body of the man by the window who had died peacefully in his sleep. She was saddened and called the hospital attendants to take the body away. As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable she left him alone. Slowly, painfully, he lifted himself up to rest on one elbow to take his first look for some time at the world outside. He strained to slowly turn to look out of the window beside the bed. It faced a blank wall.

The man asked the nurse what could have compelled his deceased room-mate who had described such wonderful things outside his window. The nurse responded that the man was blind and could not even see the wall. She said, "Perhaps he just wanted to encourage you."

★ ★

Will we encourage someone today? Perhaps we can turn this story around a little and encourage those around us with our description, to those who are spiritually blind, of the beauty of the relationship that we enjoy with God and the vista of heaven that has been opened up to us.

Contents: 1-Be An Inspiration; 2-Renegade, Rescued, Regenerated; 5-D-Day Story; 6-True Gamblers; 8-Editorial; 11-Question Box; 14-Balaam's Way; 15-News & Info.

RENEGADE, RESCUED AND REGENERATE

(Ernest Makin, Wigan)

In Matthew 19:28 Jesus tells His disciples that in 'THE REGENERATION' they will sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. In Acts 3:21, in his second recorded sermon, Peter refers to the 'period of restoration' when all things will be restored as a result of the reappearance of the Christ.

According to Romans 8:19-22, the whole of creation, animate and inanimate, but excluding mankind, was 'subjected to futility'. This is a possible reference to Genesis 3:17-19, and the phrase 'awaits eagerly with anxious longings.' The figure used here is of a crowd waiting in expectancy for a glorious procession, craning its neck and looking down the avenue of time for the glorious restitution of all things. The physical creation will be set free from the slavery of man's corruption. The physical universe is designed for renewal, just as man has the freedom of will to grasp the proffered gift of a regenerated soul and a clean heart by accepting the Son of God as his Lord and Saviour. Things that are alive will not be subject to death and decay. Peter says, **"We are looking for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."**

PERSONAL REGENERATION

In Titus 3:5 Paul writes about personal regeneration. **"But when the kindness of God our Saviour and His love for mankind appeared He saved us not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness but according to His mercy by the WASHING OF REGENERATION AND RENEWING BY THE HOLY SPIRIT."** The conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus illustrates the importance of, and adds to our understanding of, this important passage when Jesus says, **"unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God."** Together with the words of Jesus the reader will obtain further insights into the gift of sanctification and regeneration by reading Ezek 36: 26-30, John 1:12, 2Cor 7:1, Eph 2:1-6, Eph 4:20-24 and 1 John 5:1-4.

The process of our regeneration and continuing sanctification begins with our identification with the life, death and resurrection of the Christ. It would be apposite, at this juncture, to read the sixth chapter of the Roman letter. Later in that same inspiring letter Paul pleads with his readers, **"I urge you brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual (logical) service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good, acceptable and perfect."** (Romans 12:1,2)

Paul entreats the Ephesians to 'put on the new self', the chief characteristics of which are righteousness and holiness of the truth; we learn also from the letter to Colossae that the 'new self' is being renewed constantly by a true and understanding knowledge according to the image of the One who created him. Holiness and righteousness with knowledge are the Godlike qualities of the regenerate soul and a reflection of the Son of God.

Exhorting the Hebrews the writer pleads with them to 'draw near' to God. There is a list of four conditions for 'drawing near' to God:

- (1) a sincere heart - total commitment in the inner self to a loving heavenly Father;
- (2) full assurance of faith- a belief that a complete trust in Jesus will overcome the difficulties that the world throws at His followers;
- (3) hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience - an understanding that we are totally freed from the guilt of sin and the wrath of God because of the 'once for all sacrifice' of the 'Lamb of God';
- (4) bodies washed with pure water - symbolic of an inner cleansing and, in immersion, an identification with those matters that Paul describes as 'of first importance'.

BEING BORN AGAIN

Those who 'draw near to God' enjoy the regenerate sanctification as described in the New Testament and our faith is the prerequisite of such joy. One might claim that the above four qualities succinctly sum up what it means to be 'born again', 'a new creation in the Christ', 'born of God', and 'children of God'.

The word translated 'regeneration' literally means a 'new birth'. The return of the spring season and the consequent 'reawakening' of flora exemplifies the new birth. In Titus 3:5 the word denotes what John describes as 'the passage from death to life'. The New Testament is a treasure trove of adjectival phrases describing the regenerate being.

- (a) a being quickened, Ephesians 2:1-5
- (b) being born again, John 3:5
- (c) becoming a new creature in the Christ Jesus, 2Corinthians 5:7
- (d) a renewal of the mind, Romans 12:2
- (e) a resurrection from the dead, Ephesians 2:6
- (f) having the Christ formed in the heart, Galatians 4:9
- (g) A partaker of the divine nature, 2 Peter 1:4.

Many more inspiring epithets may be found by the diligent seeker after truth. Paul sharpens the distinction between the unregenerate and the regenerate soul (see his statement in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). The change occasioned by the Holy Spirit, originated with God. Writing to the Ephesians Paul states, **"For by grace have you been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God - not because of works lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship (i.e. His masterpiece), created in the Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."** A most unambiguous statement that everything that is good originates in God. Adding weight to the above claim is John 1:12-13, and John 3:4, 1 John 2:29, 1 John 5:1-6. The change is effected through the instrumentality of the 'Word of Truth'. **"Of His own will He brought us forth by the Word of Truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures"**, and, Peter adds, **"You have been born anew, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God"**.

THE WASHING OF REGENERATION

The word translated 'washing' in Titus 3:5 occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in Ephesians 5:26, **"that He might sanctify and cleanse it (the Church) with the washing of water by the Word"**. The word literally means a 'bath', hence 'the water in the bath' and then the 'act of bathing or washing'. The word can grammatically, linguistically and realistically be understood to refer to 'baptism/immersion', i.e. the symbol of washing away/cleansing of sins. This symbolism is lucidly illustrated, **"We have been buried with Him through immersion into death, so that as the Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."** And, **"All of us who have been immersed into the Christ Jesus have been immersed into His death."**

In Titus 3:5 the washing of regeneration denotes the purifying work of the Spirit in the birth, and, total immersion in water, a symbolic act directly related to the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Once sanctified thus begins the lifelong attempt at faithful obedience by the disciple of Jesus. This is a continuing process of sanctification guided by the 'renewing of the Holy Spirit', buttressing the efforts of the individual to grow in grace and truth and doing the good works that God has designed beforehand for us. From then on the outer man, this temporary tabernacle in an alien land is subject to mortality, decay and corruption; while the inner man is being renewed daily by the blessed presence of the Holy Spirit. This regeneration, which produces a continuing faith, is accompanied both now and in eternity by being 'in the Christ'. Such gracious gifts as justification in the eyes of God, holiness, righteousness, reconciliation and sanctification, plus much more, are ours in the Christ. The 'new babe' in the Christ begins the process here and now, while the developing child will reach in eternity, "the fullness of the stature of the perfect man." I cannot perceive of a greater spiritual tragedy than 'falling' out of the Christ. When tempted, think 'Jesus' and draw on such inspiring verses as this.

- **"For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world – OUR FAITH."**
- **".....you have heard Him (the Christ) and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."**

On one occasion, the apostle, Paul, manfully defending himself before his accusers, narrated the story of his conversion to the Christ and stated a command to himself which for some two thousand years has been the gateway to spiritual rescue and regeneration. **"AND NOW (PAUL) WHY DO YOU WAIT? RISE AND BE IMMersed AND WASH AWAY YOUR SINS, CALLING ON HIS NAME."**

Reader if you have not yet committed yourself to Jesus – WHY DO YOU WAIT?

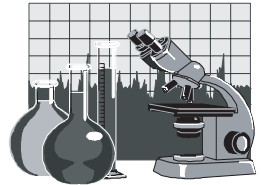
A D-Day Story

(Sis. R M Payne)

O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. (Jer. 10:23.)

In the nineteen-thirties there was a young student who was an atheist. Let us call him Stanley, although that was not his real name. He believed in science. He thought that science was going to improve our lives so much that the best thing he could do to benefit the human race was to become a science teacher and produce more scientists. He imagined that religion was opposed to scientific progress and he would quote the story of how Galileo had been forced by the Catholic Church to recant of the theory that the earth travels around the sun and not the sun around the earth.

Then the Second World War began and in due course Stanley was called up and sent to France. This could well have been at the time of the D-Day landings. Then something exploded close to him and when the debris and dust had settled, Stanley found he could not see. He was taken back to the military hospital at Netley near Southampton with the other casualties. While waiting for treatment he had plenty of time to realise that as a blind man he could not follow his chosen career as a teacher and atheism had no help to offer. Science had led to the manufacture of the weapons now being used on the battlefield. It was not certain whether medical science could help him. He began to pray that God, if He truly existed, would restore his sight and promise Him that he would become a Christian in future.



Eventually the surgeons dealt with his eyes and provided him with special glasses and he found he could see adequately, although not quite as well as before. The time came when he was still at the hospital but was allowed to go out and find his way about. Now he had to keep his promise to become a Christian, but he did not know how best to set about it. He determined to take a bus into Southampton on a Sunday morning and look for a church to attend.

Southampton had been severely bombed and several church buildings were in ruins. Stanley did not know in which direction to go and the city centre was almost deserted, so he stood on a street corner praying for guidance. Then he peered around again and saw just one person coming along the road. It was only an old lady and she was carrying something under her arm. When she got near enough, he was able to make out that the object she was carrying was a large Bible. Taking this as the guidance he needed, Stanley immediately asked her if he could accompany her to her church and, though probably quite surprised, of course she agreed.

Stanley was able to meet with that church just long enough to be baptised for the remission of his sins and to meet a nurse whom he later married. He did eventually teach science in the south of England. Not finding another similar congregation, he was rather a freelance in matters of religion, visiting all denominations and not taking up membership with any, but he was always quite clear that baptism was for the remission of sins.

Any day may be D-Day for Christians – direction day! We do not know when we may meet a seeker who simply needs guidance to come to the Saviour.

And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ. (2 Thess. 3:5).

GAMBLING

I recently visited Las Vegas, Nevada. It is a city dedicated to gambling. In 1996, there were 118,119 slot machines in Las Vegas to meet the demands of the 35 million visitors per year. It is interesting to note that the first Nevada gaming licence was issued in 1931 to the Northern Club in Las Vegas. The city has come a long way since then and now houses eleven of the thirteen largest hotels in the world. The state of Nevada is seeing a huge increase in its population every year. A taxi driver told me that many Californians, for example, are moving into Nevada because it is cheaper to live there and jobs are always available, especially in the Casinos.

Gambling is a social evil. It is as old as the hills. There is evidence of gambling in Egypt as far back as 3500 B.C. W.J.Dawson has written: "Of all the many forms of vice and sin which spring from a misuse of money, gambling is the worst, and is the most destructive of personal manliness and national integrity and honour." Maurice Maeterlinck once commented: "Gambling is the stay-at-home, squalid, imaginary, mechanical, anaemic and unlovely adventure of those who have never been able to encounter or create the real necessary and salutary adventure of life." Other comments I have noted on the subject include the following: "Gambling is an itching disease; gotten between idleness and avarice"; "Gambling is a virtual denial of the true standard of Christian living"; "There are few activities which gain such a grip of a man. It is a common saying of wives that they would rather that their husbands drank than that they gambled. Gambling can become a fever which can leave a man penniless"; "Gambling springs from greed and a perverted sense of adventure".

DEFINITION

The best definition I have read on *Gambling* is from the pen of Herbert Spencer. He wrote: "Gambling is a kind of action by which pleasure is obtained at the cost of pain to another. It affords no equivalent to the general good: the happiness of the winner implies the misery of the loser". The desire to possess money is not a pernicious thing in itself. But the Bible teaches that money has to be obtained by honourable means. Gambling certainly does not come under the heading of "honourable means". Basically, gambling is an effort to gain money without working. "It is an attempt to become wealthy with no contribution whatever to the common good. The gambler produces nothing and hopes to gain much. Gambling is a deliberate attempt to bypass the essential social principle that reward should go to productive labour. Gambling literally attempts to get money for nothing." (William Barclay, *Ethics in a Permissive Society*).

LOTTERIES

Lotteries are nothing new. For example, the Roman emperors Nero and Augustus used lotteries to give away property and slaves. The first public lottery to have paid money as prizes is believed to be *La Lotto de Firenze* in Florence in 1530. In 1566 Queen Elizabeth 1 authorised the first national lottery in England to raise money to renovate English ports and to support the continuing war between France and

England. I understand that lotteries were held in England until 1826. They were used for all sorts of projects, including the construction of the British Museum, bridge repairs and various enterprises in the American colonies. (It was lottery money that helped build Harvard and Yale universities.) Lotteries in America and parts of Europe generally began to decline in popularity during the 1800's. The Supreme Court in the States once declared that lotteries had a demoralising influence upon the people. However, as we all know, lotteries have now been reintroduced in America and Britain. It was in 1993 that the Queen gave permission to run a national lottery once again in the U.K. Many see it as a tax on the poor.

THE BIBLE

As far as I can see, none of the denunciations of the prophets against the vices of the Israelites included references to games of chance. Nor is there evidence that the Jews gambled before they came under the influence of Greek and Roman civilisations after the 4th century B.C. The Romans, for example, had a goddess of chance or lot known as *Fortuna*. The soldiers who cast lots for Jesus' garment (Matthew 27: 35; John 19: 23-24) might well have invoked her name at the time. Dice games were popular with the Romans. The apostle Paul speaks of the sleight or clever trickery of men (Ephesians 4:14). The word he uses (*kubia*) denotes dice-playing (from *kubos*, a cube, a die as used in gaming).

There is no direct condemnation of gambling in the New Testament scriptures. However, as has been pointed out, Christian life and gambling are totally incompatible. And yet, some of the early Christians came to be known as the *parabolani*, the gamblers. They were the ones who were willing to gamble their lives for those affected by dangerous and infectious diseases. The work of Cyprian and his congregation in plague-ridden Carthage in A.D.252 is a good example of saints showing an almost reckless courage to help others in the service of the Master. But there is another good example in the Scriptures themselves. It is found in the person of Epaphroditus, a loving companion of the apostle Paul. We read of him in Paul's Philippian letter (2:25-30; 4:18). The record says: **"Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service towards me."** (2:29-30). "Not regarding his life" translates the Greek verb *paraboleuesthai* – the gambler's word, which literally means to stake everything on a turn of the dice. So Paul is saying that Epaphroditus, for the sake of Jesus, gambled his life. What a man! What an unsung hero! "Well might we honour such a man; and well might we wish to be like him." (Alec Motyer). "Such a word (*paraboleuesthai*) brings its own challenge and rebuke to an easy-going Christianity which makes no stern demands, and calls for no limits of self-denying, self-effacing sacrifice." (Ralph R. Martin)

I worshipped with a congregation in North Las Vegas while I was there. I told them that they were the true gamblers in a city plagued by gambling for gain. I encouraged them to continue to serve the Master and men no matter the cost. They, and all of us, have a wonderful example in Epaphroditus.

Editorial

Of rights and responsibilities

One of the great threats to sustainability, and to an even greater extent progress, in any area of life is the reluctance of people to accept responsibility. Responsibility is not the preserve of leaders; all individuals have a duty, even if it is only exercised at a personal level, to exercise responsibility in the management of their affairs. One of the 'news' stories over recent weeks has been the reports that an increasing proportion of

people, particularly in affluent countries, are medically obese and the all too familiar question has been raised, "What is the Government going to do about it?"

IT'S MY LIFE

Let me record something here before going any further. I know that some people, through no fault of their own and perhaps due to some clinical condition do have a genuine weight problem and I have no wish or intention at all to cause any offence by referring to this matter. This article anyway is about personal responsibility not diets or over-eating and reference is only made to this issue as a means of drawing attention to the fact that for the significant majority of people, 'clinical obesity' will be as a direct result of personal choices, lifestyles and habits rather than a prevailing medical condition or other cause. It is probably the case too that unscrupulous food manufacturers are quite prepared to have ingredients and additives in our food that does the consumer no favours in terms of 'healthy eating'. But lets face it, for the majority of people the most likely causes of the problem that has been identified are too much food and too little exercise – both of which are in our control and are ultimately our responsibility.

There are many other potential examples of people wanting to act in a way that suits them for the time being and then expecting someone else to deal with the consequences of those actions. And as Christians we will readily point to the classic examples of excessive drinking, drugs misuse and sexual immorality as irresponsible activities that have potentially serious and damaging consequences and which will often lead to those involved needing, and in many cases demanding, that some kind of agency such as the National Health Service, Government agency, support network, family and friends will sort them out if and when things go wrong. Someone has said, an American I presume, "We've gotten to the point where everybody's got a right and nobody's got a responsibility". One of the often-repeated statements that pro-abortionists make when the abortion question is discussed is that 'women have a right to exercise control over their own body'. The great sadness of that kind of statement is that it implies no sense of responsibility towards the foetus. (But before we get too pious, let's remember that we too, as individuals in society, and more importantly in our personal dealings with one another in Christ, have many responsibilities that we do well to acknowledge).

Some of our major cities have been brought to a halt at various times recently by representatives of a fathers group protesting, with various stunts, about the lack of access to children after relationships have broken down (these days it isn't just marriages of course). Some of these problems will be genuine and distressing. Others will be the result of relationships casually entered into and just as casually terminated. Children are born into those relationships and then of course access (usually for the father) often becomes a divisive issue and then 'someone has to sort the problem out'. It's a fact of life of course that relationships do break down, sometimes unavoidably, but it is equally true that if more responsibility were taken in building long-term, committed relationships (as opposed to casual ones) and working harder at maintaining them, then the scale of the problem would be severely reduced and maybe more manageable for the genuine cases that exist.

The acceptance of responsibility is one of the signs of increasing maturity. It is the immature person who will argue that "it's my life and I am going to live it the way that suits me". That kind of statement evidences that the individual has not worked out that in society, or in a community, far more often than not the actions of one individual will have a direct bearing on the life, or quality of life, of a number of other people. In fact one of the least appealing features of a lack of responsibility is the inherent selfishness that it implies. The following quotation from a Joan Didion is interesting because of the link that it makes between responsibility and self-respect. "*Character – the willingness to accept responsibility for one's own life – is the source from which self-respect springs.*" There is a strong element of truth in that. There is no personal growth, no empowerment of the inner self if we are constantly trying to shift the blame for our actions onto something or someone else.

APOSTOLIC EXAMPLE

When Paul responded to one of the questions he had been asked by the Church in Corinth, in this case about food offered to idols, he used the opportunity to teach the readers of the letter that with the freedom that comes from knowledge, there also comes a deep responsibility to use that freedom wisely and with consideration for others. **"Only take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling-block to the weak."** (1 Cor: 8,9) Don't act selfishly and without due regard for others. Behave responsibly giving due regard to the effect of your behaviour on others. Paul states what the consequences of self-indulgence might be:

- The weak may use example to act against their own conscience;
- The brother for whom Christ died may be destroyed;
- We sin against our brethren
- We sin against Christ.

Paul then states a life-principle using the context of the question asked of him. **"If food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my**

brother to fall.” Now that is responsibility. He also goes on to make some pointed comments about his rights as a preacher of the Gospel insisting that it would be entirely appropriate for him to be supported materially by the Church as he ministers with them. Yet he states emphatically that he will not allow any problem in that regard prevent him from fulfilling his obligations. **“Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.”** (9:12) There we have rights and responsibilities in the correct balance. John D Rockefeller, Jr. said, “I believe that every right implies a responsibility, every opportunity an obligation, every possession a duty.” So accepting responsibility, not just for our own actions on ourselves, but for the effect of those actions on other people, is a sign of spiritual maturity and an important principle in our Christian lives.

ETERNITY IS IN OUR OWN HANDS

There is an eternal dimension to all of this. I have long felt that we often mis-place the emphasis in some of our gospel preaching. Too often we leave people with a kind of get-out from their responsibilities in terms of the gospel. They are allowed to get away with the notion that God condemns them to eternal death. In other words it won't be their fault that they are condemned it will be God's fault – he's the ogre. And yet this could hardly be further from the truth. In fact God has taken it upon himself to have the ultimate responsibility for our salvation. He had every right to leave mankind to wallow in the state of condemnation that disobedience had brought. But a loving God could not leave his creation in a state of condemnation without putting in place all of the conditions for mankind to release himself from that state. There is a world of difference between God condemning people to an eternal death, which is how the gospel is often portrayed, and God taking the responsibility for putting in place, in love, a 'means of escape', so that every individual has the opportunity to **choose** for him or herself whether to accept release from the condemnation that sin had bound us to. **“For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the only Son of God.”** (John 3:17,18)

Now that God has made the ultimate provision for us, eternity is in our own hands. We control our own eternal destiny. It's part of the majesty of God's plan of salvation that after all of the cosmic battles have been done, when the omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent God of creation has completed his work, after the Son in obedience has brought God's saving grace to mankind, our eternal destiny comes down not to any 'rights' that we may have, but to one person, one choice, one inescapable responsibility that in the final analysis we will not be able to shirk or pass off to anyone else.



“What does Jude v.9 mean?”

I think that all Bible students will understand me when I say that I have come to appreciate that some questions are important because they relate to great spiritual truths on which our salvation depends, but there are others which, whilst being essentially unimportant, arouse our curiosity, mainly because they relate to events that are extra-ordinary or strange or mysterious.

It is to the latter group that the question prompted by Jude verse 9 belongs. It reads, **“But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you.’”**

Is not this a strange picture? Could you imagine a more unlikely trio than that brought together in this verse? Here we have mention of the archangel Michael, the devil and Moses, the greatest leader in Israel’s history. What is more, we learn from Jude that the occasion was a confrontation between Michael and the devil concerning the body of Moses.

When did this remarkable event occur?

Well, obviously, it must have occurred some time *after* the death of Moses which is reported in Deut. 34:5-6. In versions such as the A.V., the Revised Version, the Revised Standard Version, and certain other translations, Deut. 34:6 reads as though God *personally* buried Moses, but the verse ceases to be a problem if we understand that an action *performed at the command* of a person, is sometimes described as having been *performed by* that person. God *caused* Moses to die and to be buried, therefore He *‘buried’* Moses.

In fact, later translations, such as the New Revised Standard Version, clarify the verse by giving us, *‘and he was buried in a valley...’*, without revealing who was responsible for the burial.

But, of course, we are tempted to speculate! Was Moses buried by Joshua, his divinely appointed successor? Or was he, as a Jewish tradition claims, buried, by Michael the archangel himself? The fact is that we *do not* know; we are *not meant* to know; nor is it important that we *should* know. **“No man knows the place of his burial...”**, says Deut.34:6.

The probable reason for keeping the location hidden is that, if it had become known, it may well have become a shrine and a place of pilgrimage for the Israelites. Remember that the ‘serpent of bronze’, which Moses erected in the wilderness, centuries later had actually become an object of worship that had to be destroyed by Nehemiah, the reformer (2nd Kings 18:4). What *is* important, is that we understand that the death and burial of this great servant of God was at God’s command, and the only truly sad aspect of the event is that, after a wearisome journey lasting for almost forty years, Moses died within sight of the Promised Land, not allowed to enter because of an act of disobedience.

Why does Jude mention the dispute about the body of Moses?

This is explained in chapter 1, verse 3. Jude had intended to write a letter concerning basic Christian doctrine, but, as the result of information that had reached him, he felt it necessary, instead, to deal with problems created by false teachers who had succeeded in entering the fellowship by stealth, and who were undermining the faith of others.

He describes the character of these interlopers and exposes their motives and methods in very vivid and uncompromising language. They are arrogant, rebellious, disrespectful and thoroughly ungodly people, whose conduct, he declares, stands in stark contrast with that of Michael the archangel in his confrontation with the devil.

Jude says that, out of respect for the position of honour once occupied by the now-fallen Satan – (or to give him his original name, Lucifer) –, Michael refrained from pronouncing a reproachful judgment on him, but simply said, "*The Lord rebuke you!*" The form of this reproach is significant, because the word '*rebuke*' is a verb in the '*optative mode*', that is, in the form used to express a *wish*, and, as used here, it means, "*May the Lord rebuke you!*"

In these words Michael leaves the passing of judgment, to God Himself. This is a lesson we all may learn from Jude verse 6.

But, is there evidence that a dispute about the body of Moses actually occurred?

The Bible itself does not contain anything that corroborates the story. A single verse, here in Jude's letter, is the only place in the scriptures that mentions it. So, where did the story originate?

It is found in one of the '*apocryphal*' books. These are books that were written mainly during the Inter-testamental Period; that is, in the four hundred years between the Old and New Testaments. This was the period during which prophetic witness was silent and when as a result, literature appeared claiming to be inspired, often under the name of some genuinely inspired and well-known servant of God.

This particular book is known as "*The Assumption of Moses*", and, in common with all the other '*apocryphal*' writings, it has never been regarded as inspired or authoritative by either Jews or Christians, and was never accepted as the Word of God, and never included in the '*canon*' of either Old or New Testament scriptures. Indeed, the word '*apocryphal*' itself, means '*of questionable or doubtful authenticity*'.

The document was probably produced in the early Inter-testamental Period by an unidentified Jewish writer. Among his '*revelations*' is the claim that, like Elijah, Moses was translated directly into heaven and it is this assertion that gives the book its name, "*The Assumption of Moses*". The word '*assumption*' in the title means '*ascension*'.

You probably know already that the Church of Rome makes the same claim for Mary, the Lord's mother and speaks of '*The Assumption of Mary*'. This doctrine states that, when she died, '*her body was preserved from corruption and shortly afterwards it*

was assumed'. The Latin word 'assumere' means 'to take to' - in this case, to Heaven. The odd thing is that, according to Catholic teaching, to believe that Mary was taken bodily to Heaven is 'not an article of faith', but it is said to be 'impious and blasphemous' to deny it!

Of course, we know from Matt.17:3 that more than 1500 years later, Moses appeared with Elijah when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain. The difference between the two - Moses and Elijah - is that the scriptures tell us plainly that Moses 'died and was buried', whilst Elijah, like Enoch before him, was 'translated that he should not see death'. However, considering what we read in Heb.11:23-27, where Moses is honoured as a man of faith, if at the end of his life he had indeed been taken up into heaven, we might have expected such an important fact to have been mentioned in those verses.

Probably because Dan.12:1 seems to suggest that the archangel Michael was appointed by God to be the 'Guardian of Israel', the writer of 'The Assumption of Moses', also states that Michael was also commissioned to bury the body of Moses, and to be the guardian of his grave. But, the book declares that Satan opposed the burial of the patriarch, and claimed that the body belonged to him, on the grounds that he is the 'lord of matter'.

To this Michael is said to have replied, "The Lord rebuke thee, for it was God's Spirit that created the world and all mankind".

A Familiar Story

There is no doubt that this piece of 'primitive Jewish tradition', as Dean Alford, the very highly respected theological scholar described it, was known to those to whom Jude sent his letter. It ranks with other stories of a similar nature, such as the claim that, after predicting the Fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Captivity, the prophet Jeremiah took the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle (!) and the Altar of Incense, and hid them in a cave on Mount Nebo, intending after the Return to retrieve and restore them. Tradition said that, after the return from Captivity, he lived on in Jerusalem for another three hundred years, and that he even appeared to Judas Maccabeus another two centuries later, as 'a man with grey hairs and exceeding glorious'.

Conclusion

It seems, then, that, in exposing those who were troubling the Church with their false teaching, their denial of the Lord Jesus and their rejection of authority, Jude makes use of a story, which, even though it lacks scriptural endorsement, is familiar to his readers.

He uses the story in order to encourage them to remember that the apostles of the Lord had warned that such men would arise, and, being aware of the danger, to build themselves up in their faith, keeping themselves in the love of God, waiting for the eternal life that comes through the mercy of the Lord Jesus.

**Questions please to:
Frank Worgan, 11, Stanier Road, Corby, Northants. NN17 1XP**

Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand;

Balaam's Ways (5)

(Brian J Boland)

At the end of the discourse on Balaam we are told that Balaam declares to Balak that **"For there is no enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel:"** (Numbers 23.23 ESV) Having come to terms with this we are then told, **"When Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he did not go, as at other times to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness."** (Numbers 24.1 ESV) This is a key admission to understanding the earlier incidents

in Balaam's life, when he made statements that seem at first glance to come from a true worshipper of God. In Numbers 22.18 he tells the servants of Balak, **"Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the Lord my God to do less or more"**. The angel of the Lord a little later tells Balaam **"speak only the word that I tell you"** (Numbers 22.35 ESV), which on the surface Balaam seems to have accepted. But, as we have seen, he was at the same time looking for omens!

What then do these verses tell us of Balaam's standing with God? Moses' warning against idolatry provide the answer **"that prophet or dreamer is to be put to death; because he urged rebellion against Adonai your God"** (Deut 13.5 CJB) The wily Balaam avoided being classed as a danger by not saying "follow other gods" and "giving a sign or wonder" or by openly denying God, all of which Israel had been warned about and required that such a prophet should be put to death (Deut 13.5) but he could not escape the condemnation of those who secretly entice others to serve other gods (verses 6-11). Fine words then relating to the Lord God should not lull us into a sense of security of a person's fidelity. Balaam's ploy was to emphasise **"The word that God puts in my mouth, that must I speak"** (Numbers 22.38) but it had no real substance. In Deuteronomy 13:1 in the Hebrew, and also the Greek Septuagint (Ralph's), this point is emphasised (which is lost in the KJV chapter divisions). Verse one reads, **"Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take away from it"** (as Deut. 12.32 ESV) We saw last month how Balaam was changing, in the subtlety of ways, what God had told him to do. Now here again with the seeds of corruption sown the leading players leave the scene (Numbers 24.25): the people just remembering the grand words of Balaam and the elaborate religious ceremonies of Balak. Note that no mention is made of the heresies Balaam founded by getting Balak to build 7 altars at Peor [Numbers 23.28] which led Israel to yoke themselves to Baal [Numbers 25.3] for which God sent the plague to destroy its followers (Numbers 25).

The Apostle Peter warns us that today there will also be false prophets and false teachers among us **"who will secretly bring in destructive heresies"** (2Peter 2:1). The secretive nature of Satan's assault on truth is then clearly demonstrated. Peter gives us the grave warning **"For it would have been better for them never to know the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandments delivered to them"** (2Peter 2:21 ESV). Not only are we warned of false prophets but also of false brethren who can also **"spy out our freedom in Christ"** (Gal. 2.4), and false apostles (2 Cor. 11.13). Apostasy is not just seen as practising the things of darkness (Eph. 5.11) but also as being disguised as **"angels of light"** (2 Cor.11.14) and **"servants of righteousness"** (2 Cor. 11.15) or as Jesus himself said **"dressed in sheep's clothing"** (Mat.6.15) This is the stumbling block that Balaam taught Balak to cast before the sons of Israel, **"so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality"** (Rev. 2.14 ESV).

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (I Jn 4.1 ESV).

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

We pass on the thanks received from our Ghanaian brethren to donors. You have not only helped them to evangelise and extend the Lord's Church, but have enabled many to receive medical aid when necessary. Brethren are alive today who would not have survived without it.

Unfortunately a brother who had been discharged from hospital had become unwell again and died. The wife of a leader from the same congregation has also died. In another congregation a brother is receiving treatment for what appears to be a brain tumour, while elsewhere the wife of a prominent Church leader requires specialist treatment for a stomach ailment.

Ghanaians readily listen to the gospel account and the ongoing evangelism of our brethren continues to bear fruit. We continue to hear reports of outreach by churches into surrounding areas.

Although buildings in towns must be of brick construction, the use of mud bricks is permitted in villages. These are fairly durable, especially when cement rendered. However, one such meeting-house has recently been destroyed by a severe rain storm and some assistance will be needed to rebuild it.

Those wishing to help please make cheques payable to: **Dennyloanhead Church of Christ Ghana Fund and send to treasurer: Mrs. Janet Macdonald, 12 Charles Drive, Larbert, Falkirk, Stirlingshire. FK5 3HB. Tel: 01324 562480**

Editor's Notes

Foundations of the Faith

Last month's article in the Foundations of the Faith series was unattributed so my apologies to the author, Bro. John Griffiths of the Wembley congregation. However John has agreed to be a regular contributor to the SS as he was to Truth for Today for many years and I am sure his contributions will be extremely valuable.

What do you think?

Apologies to readers also that in the 'What do you think' article last month the closing date for contributions relating to this feature was stated as 21st May which was about the time you were receiving the May issue. In the circumstances I am going to leave this feature open for contributions until 7th July so if you do have anything to say (and I hope you do) about the Passion of the Christ, and related thoughts on the crucifixion, then please submit them (see last month's issue for details). I hope the lack of response is due only to the error in the deadline date (it was scheduled for an earlier issue but had to be omitted due to pressure on space).

Woman to woman

Finally I am delighted to inform you that Sis Ann Boland has agreed to run a monthly 'Woman to Woman' feature and this will commence in the July issue. Ann actually lives in Germany with her family (husband Kim and children) but the powers of email make it perfectly feasible for this to be managed. Thanks are due to

Ann for taking on the role and she will be letting you know some of the plans in due course but I'm sure that she will be looking for contributions from the readership so please plan to give her your full support.

Contributions

Spontaneous contributions are still extremely rare but are essential if the balance of the SS is to be preserved and to prevent regular writers (to whom I am very grateful) becoming tired. It's your publication and needs your input.

Thanks

Sister Mary Gorton and family would like to express their sincere appreciation for all the cards. Letters, phone calls and visits following the sudden death of Graham.

Due to the large volume of mail it is impossible to reply individually but we thank all concerned for the help and encouragement received.

Sister Mary Gorton

Coming Events

Kentishtown, London

October 2nd and 3rd, 2004

ANNIVERSARY MEETINGS

Speaker: Geoff Daniell (Bristol)

Saturday, 2nd

3.00pm **Tea**

6.00pm **Gospel Meeting**

Sunday, 3rd – **Normal Services**

Newtongrange, Scotland

Saturday, October 9th, 2004

ANNUAL SOCIAL

Speaker: Graeme Pearson,
Dunfermline

Meeting will start at 1.00 pm

**** Please note earlier time ****

Would a gospel preacher be your friend if he knew of an error in your religion and did not bring it to your attention?

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICE PER COPY – POST PAID FOR ONE YEAR

UNITED KINGDOM. £10.00

OVERSEAS BY SURFACE MAIL. £10.00 (\$16.00US or \$20.00Can)

OVERSEAS BY AIR MAIL. £14.00 (\$22.00US or \$28.00Can)

PLEASE MAKE CHEQUES PAYABLE TO "SCRIPTURE STANDARD"

DISTRIBUTION AGENT & TREASURER:

JOHN K. KNELLER, 4 Glassel Park Road, Longniddry, East Lothian, EH32 0NY.

E-mail: john@kkneller.freemove.co.uk

Tel: 01875 853212 to whom change of address should be sent.

EDITOR: ROBERT MARSDEN, 4 The Copse, Orrell Road, Orrell, Wigan, England, WN5 8HL. Tel: 01942 212320 E-mail: bob.rock@virgin.net