

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

Editorial

**Faith does
not rely on
'proof'**

There are some exceptional and, on the face of it, some unlikely examples of faith recorded in the New Testament. Increasingly our world demands 'proof' as -the basis for the acceptance of ideas and the whole concept of faith is increasingly seen as unsustainable. And yet the eternal and spiritual dimensions of faith are essential to its very nature. Writing to Corinth Paul says, **"For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we**

look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

We are a long way yet from eliminating 'spiritual' characteristics from the nature of mankind but the quest for 'hard evidence', facts and scientific proof does seem to be gathering pace. Scientists recently claimed to have identified the 'love' gene and these kind of claims have an element of reductionism in them (reductionism being the belief that complex phenomena can be explained in terms of something simpler). No doubt somewhere down the line will come the claim, and maybe the reality, that if you can identify the gene then you can manipulate and control it? Suddenly that ephemeral, spiritual quality that is love is reduced to an element of the body's make-up that can be switched on or off. But isn't there something magical and mystical, something that is beyond our normal comprehension, in the way that the harmony of music can stir the human soul and the way in which the beauty of an unspoiled landscape can provide an almost 'spiritual' experience. These experiences make our world richer, our lives less predictable and certain because they arise from something deep inside the human psyche. However the fact that they are not definable does not make them any less real; the emotional charge that arises from true love, the tears and joy that well from powerful or sublime music are no less real because we cannot 'prove' their source or adequately define their nature. In the same way, faith (the evidence of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen) is not provable, not in a scientific sense anyway, but it is no less real or compelling. **"Hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?"**

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'GO ON BELIEVING'

There are examples of great faith revealed in the New Testament. Faith that apparently did not arise from lengthy sermons and that did not arise from a detailed study of the Scriptures; nor did the people involved in these demonstrations of faith have time or opportunity to seek 'proof' or to rationalize their innermost feelings. In modern phraseology they 'let their hearts rule their heads'. There would too be little or no understanding of the scope of the eternal nature and work of Jesus. The woman with the chronic problem of the issue of blood, a condition that she had spent a lot of money trying to treat but which was getting worse, **heard reports about Jesus**. That was it; she had heard reports. Nothing more solid than reports about the workings of Jesus. She was probably desperate to 'try anything' to alleviate her condition, but in her own words she had concluded, "If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well." And Jesus himself confirmed the nature of her cure. It wasn't his power; it was the woman's faith in his power that had effected the cure.

It was the same with the ruler's daughter. Matthew records that the ruler came and knelt before Jesus asking Jesus to lay hands on his daughter, in the belief that this would make his daughter well. Mark records a further important dimension to the healing process, recording that Jesus said to the ruler, "Don't be afraid, go on believing." Members of the ruler's household told him to stop bothering Jesus; the crowds at the home of the ruler where his daughter lay ill, laughed at Jesus when he told them she was 'only sleeping'. Faith was not universal; many did not believe. But something in the ruler persuaded him to 'go on believing' and once again it was the belief of the ruler that was vital to the healing.

WORKING THROUGH FAITH

Jesus can only work through faithful people. Mark records an incident that follows on from these great acts of faith by people who had nothing more to go on than reports of the amazing power of Jesus. Jesus returned to Nazareth and far from being welcomed in to his 'own country' there was a significant amount of disquiet surrounding the reports of the work of Jesus. Like many today, they couldn't rationalize what they were hearing with what they 'knew'. To them, Jesus was the carpenter's son, one of a family that was well known to them. They wanted to know where Jesus received his power from; where his wisdom came from; how he could do the reported mighty works. Mark clearly states the upshot of this: "And he could do no mighty work there, except he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief." Now Jesus did not suddenly lose his power to heal; rather because of their unbelief, their inability to accept in faith what they had heard about the miraculous power of Jesus, there was no conduit, no faith or belief, through which Jesus could work. (Mark 6:1-6) Reading farther on into this chapter Jesus sent out the disciples to preach the gospel with the clear understanding that there would be many who would not respond. They were to preach that men should repent and there is an implication that it was those who repented that were able to enjoy the beneficial effects of the healing powers of the disciples.

It is in mankind's nature, the nature that God has given to us, to explore and search our environment, to want to know what we are, how our world operates, what the future holds. It was part of the seductive power of Satan in the garden to entice Adam and Eve with the fruit of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil". Maybe it is an essential element of God's great scheme of things that we do in fact have to overcome that very inquisitiveness in order to rely on faith. That for once facts and proof and empirical evidence simply have to take a back seat. Just as we don't know where love comes from, or how the emotions are charged by music or any other 'spiritual' experience, so faith in Jesus and the God who sent him to save us, arises within us not by virtue of proof, but because, like the people noted above, we have heard the reports, and we believe that Jesus is the Saviour, the one who has brought salvation to the world.

NO GOING BACK

Colin Hilton, Hindley

Hebrews 11: 15,16: **"And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly city. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city."**

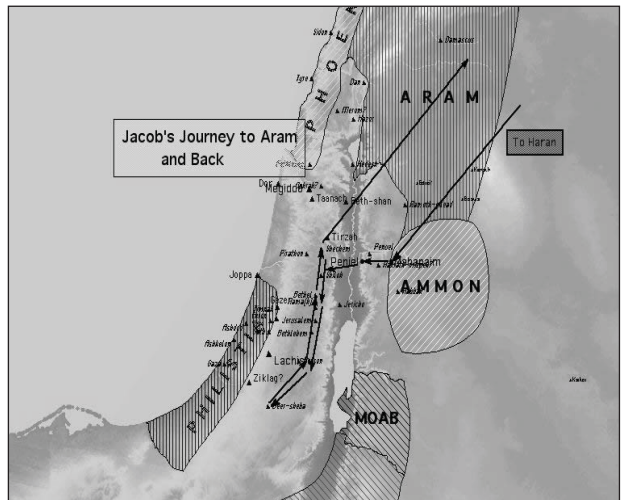
Abraham left the land of his birth at God's command, and never went back again. From his home area of Padan-Aram in Mesopotamia he 'emigrated' to Canaan where he spent the rest of his days in a nomadic kind of existence. The proof of faith lies in perseverance like this because Scripture records that Abraham left at the call of God, "not knowing where he was to go".

There is a different sort of faith; one that runs well for a time, but soon comes to an end and furthermore doesn't obey the truth. However Paul tells us in Hebrews that the people that he refers to were not forced to continue because there was no opportunity to return. Rather he states that had they been mindful or conscious of the place that they had come out from, rather than the eternal home God was leading them to, they may well have found an opportunity to return. Had they wanted to exploit them, countless chances to return had come their way.

Indeed the record indicates that Abraham and his family maintained contact between themselves and the old family home at Padan-Aram. News and information regarding events surrounding the family household came to them. Messages were exchanged and sometimes servants were sent between them and so the relationship was maintained even though they were away.

Jacob, one of the patriarchs, was allowed to go, by Isaac at the behest of his mother Rebekah, to the household of Laban in Padan-Aram. He went and whilst there took Rachel to be his wife; he stayed for 20 years but always felt unsettled. Finally he slipped away secretly with his wives, children and flocks to return to the land of Canaan and to his father Isaac. So Jacob came back to the proper life that he had chosen – the life that God had commanded him to live that of a stranger and pilgrim in the land of promise.

You see then they had plenty of opportunities to have returned, to have settled down comfortably and farmed the ground that their fathers did before them; but they



continued to follow the uncomfortable life of weary wanderers, who dwelt in tents, who didn't own any land to call their own.

They were aliens in the country that God had given them by promise!

WE ARE IN A SIMILAR SITUATION

The Bible teaches us that as many of us as have believed in Christ have been called out. The very meaning of church (ekklesia) is those that are called out by Christ; those who have been separated by virtue of their relationship with Christ. We have no abiding home in this world; no true dwelling place for our spirits. Indeed it could be said that we are looking for our spiritual home amongst the things that are unseen.

We too are strangers. We are living here in this world temporarily, as all of our forefathers in the faith were, dwellers in this present wilderness but passing through it to reach our own 'Canaan's land' that will be the place of our eternal inheritance.

Let's reflect then on the opportunities that we have had, and still do have, to return to the old house were we to be 'mindful' of it. Maybe the word 'opportunities' isn't strong enough to reflect the pull that the world can have on us. I don't marvel that saints should persevere; but sometimes when you remember the very weakness of our nature, it does seem to be a miracle that there should be one Christian in the world for even one hour. Why? Because the devil is at work and the enticements and allurements of the world are constantly around us. It is nothing short of the Godhead's utmost stretch of might that keeps the Christian from falling back into his old regenerate condition.

We too have 'opportunities' to return, and every day we are faced with the enticements of the physical world that we sojourn in. Many of us are in daily contact with ungodly people, whether in the course of work or leisure. We have chances to sin just as they do, to fall into their excess, be influenced by their forgetfulness or rejection of God, or even by their blasphemies.

And it is not just bad company that is a threat. Even when we are on our own, there is at least one 'person' who is sure to keep us company and try to lead us into mischief – the destroyer himself, the devil. So there are snares in company, and there are snares in loneliness. Where then can we go to escape these 'opportunities' to return?

WE CAN GO TO THE LORD

Opportunities to return may be plenty, but we can pray that grace and strength might be given to us, so that if others play the Judas, instead of leading us to do the same it will only bind us more tightly to our Lord and make us walk more carefully. We might ask, "Why does the Lord make these opportunities so plentiful?" Could he not keep us and shield us from temptation? There is no doubt that he **could** and he has promised that our temptations will be within our capacity to bear them. But God never intended us to be like protected hot-house plants being nurtured in a warm, cosy and controlled environment. He taught us to pray, "lead us not into temptation", but at the same time he **does** lead us there, and intends to do it; for this is the proving of our faith, to see whether our faith is true or not.

But equally, God asks us to pray, "Deliver us from evil". Depend upon this: faith that has never been tested is not true faith. Sooner or later faith has to be put into

practice. God doesn't create or seek useless characteristics. He intends that the faith that he gives us should have its tests and that through our faith we should glorify His name. These tests, these opportunities to return, are indeed meant to refine our faith and they are sent to prove that we are volunteer soldiers and not conscripts into the Lord's ranks.

If grace was some kind of chain that is fastened around our hands and feet so that we couldn't leave our Lord, if it were that it had become an impossibility to forsake our Saviour because we were **forcibly** bound to Him, then there would be no credit in our remaining faithful to Him. No-one proves himself or herself to be a hero by not running away because their legs are weak; the hero proves himself to be a hero by being **able** to run but staying to fight the battle. We will know whether we are Christ's when we have the opportunity to return, but don't!

Here is a simple analogy. Two men are walking down the road and a dog is following on behind. I don't know to whom that dog belongs, but I'll tell you in a few seconds. The two men approach a crossroads; one takes the road to the left, the other the road to the right. Which man does the dog follow? Well, he follows the one that is its master.

When Christ and the world go together, you cannot tell which a person is following. But when there is a separation, and Christ goes one way and our interest or pleasure goes the other way, then if we can part with the world and go with Christ, then we are one of His. These opportunities to return can serve a real purpose in trying our faith and demonstrating to us the strength of our commitment to the Lord. The Christian must resist every chance to return to the former life, because we desire something far better than we could ever achieve by doing so.

An insatiable desire has been implanted in us by the divine grace, that compels us to forget the steps that we have already taken, and press ever onward toward the rich promise of the reward that God has prepared for us. Notice again what our text states: "But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one."

THIS WORLD IS NOT OUR HOME

Don't we then desire something better than this world? Has this world ever truly satisfied us or has it now the capacity to do so? Maybe it once did when we were dead in our trespasses and sins. But surely not now, now that we have tasted something of the heavenly bliss! After we have had all the world could ever give us, have we not even then been forced to conclude with the writer of Ecclesiastes: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

Look at this from another angle. What would our reaction be if right now the Lord were to say to us, "You shall have all the world and that will be your portion?" Wouldn't it break our hearts if the 'heavenly Jerusalem' of which Paul speaks later in Hebrews were to be denied to us? I feel greatly encouraged when I read: "now they desire a better country." And because we too desire this better thing we can't go back and be content with those things that once satisfied us. Rather let us think of that better place, of heaven where Jesus awaits, of innumerable angels in festal gathering, of the blessings of the new covenant that Christ has ushered in. The more our thoughts and desires draw us towards heaven, the more we will be separated from the world and the easier we will turn our backs on those 'opportunities to return'.

Your God is your true joy; make your true joy to be in your God!



The historical and cultural background to the New Testament (10)

Ian S Davidson, Motherwell

THE WEALTHY ROMANS

The Romans had their poorer classes and slaves. They also had their Senators and Equestrians. The Senators were at the highest level of Roman society and, in the Republic, they controlled finance, foreign policy and military operations. The group originally numbered 100, but later the number was increased. By 82 BC they reached 600. Senators normally served for life. "Its 600 members were each expected to have a minimum of a million sesterces, roughly the equivalent of £30,000. As the law excluded them from trading by sea and through state contracts, they invested their wealth in large estates. Senators wore tunics with broad purple stripes." (Edwin Yamauchi) The Senate gradually declined in importance as the Empire grew.

The Equestrians (*Equites*) were originally the 1,800 cavalry of the Republican army. Later their descendants became wealthy businessmen and they grew in influence politically. Senator numbers were limited, but the number of Equestrians was not. By the first century BC male citizens of good health and character could qualify as Equestrians if they had a minimum of 400,000 sesterces (£12,000). They wore a toga with a thin purple stripe and a gold ring. Equestrians served as officers in the army and as governors over 'minor' provinces such as Judaea. Pilate, for example, was of the Equestrian order.

THE ROMAN ARMY

The Roman army was of vital importance in the expansion of the Empire. Soldiers were grouped into units called legions, each of which had 5,400 men. During the reign of Augustus there were 25 legions. Legions were sub-divided into ten cohorts of 540 men each. Each cohort was further sub-divided into 6 centuries of 90 men. The legion was led by a *legatus*; the cohort, by a *tribunus militum*; and the century, by a *centurion*. Other officers included the trumpeter, the standard bearer and the centurion's deputy.



Until AD 5, full-time soldiers served for twenty years. Later this was increased to 25 years. Army life was tough. There was the daily drill and the continuous practising of swimming, running, jumping, javelin throwing and fencing. Soldiers were expected to undertake long marches. Often they carried all their belongings, food tools for building and digging, two heavy wooden stakes for a camp fence, and cooking pots'. Thereafter, they constructed a camp. Some soldiers, therefore, also had to be trained as surveyors, engineers or stonemasons, and supervisors in the construction of roads, canals and buildings. Disobedience resulted in a flogging with reduction in rations. If mutiny was suspected in a legion, every tenth man was executed. The word in Latin was *decimatio*; hence our English word decimate, which means to reduce by a tenth. Loyalty was initially to a commander. Later, this was replaced by an oath to the Emperor.

All recruits wore a uniform. All new garments had to be paid for out of wages. Legionaries, for example, wore a tunic of wool and linen or a leather tunic with metal strips attached; a scarf; a groin-guard; heavy sandals with nails; metal leg-protectors known as greaves; metal helmets; vests of fine chain-mail; and woollen cloaks (in cold weather). They carried a dagger; a sword; a shield made of wood and leather with an iron rim at the top and bottom; and two metal-tipped javelins to throw in battle.

The Romans built permanent stone forts along their frontiers. At times they also constructed walls. They worked hard to keep invaders out and to maintain law and order within the conquered population. The Romans also had warships, ranging in size from biremes, which had two banks of oars to quinquiremes, which had five. They were used in many a battle, especially against pirates.

Soldiers received several awards for bravery, such as medals and crowns. After a successful battle, they participated in the *triumphus* for the victorious general. When they retired they were given either money or land. Many settled in the *coloniae* of the Empire.

PASTIMES

The Romans liked their Sports and Games: running, jumping, wrestling, javelin throwing, fishing, hunting, chariot racing, gambling, etc. They also liked music, dancing and the theatre. They played instruments such as lyres, flutes, trumpets, tubas, pan pipes and tambourines. At the theatre, Roman audiences preferred comedies. At first, only men were allowed on stage and so they acted the women's parts. "In later tragic plays, the words were spoken by the chorus, a group of men who stood in the orchestra. The actors mimed. This kind of actor was called a *pantomimus*. In comedies there were changes too. The actors stopped wearing masks and women were allowed on stage." (Anne Millard) Paul, incidentally, in his writings, refers to athletics and boxing. For example, he wrote: "Know you not that they who run in a race run all, but one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain." (I Corinthians 9:24)

ROMAN CITIZENSHIP

There were two kinds of occupants of Roman territory: *cives* (Roman citizens) and *peregrini* (foreigners). "Citizens had special privileges. They were allowed to vote in elections and to serve in the army; non-citizens were not. At first only people with Roman parents qualified for citizenship. Later the government began granting citizenship to certain foreigners...Non-citizens included provincials (people who lived outside Rome itself, but within Roman territory) and slaves." (The Usborne World History)

The apostle Paul was, of course, a Roman citizen. We read: "And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what you do: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, are you a Roman? He said, Yes. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born." (Acts 22: 25-28) When was Roman citizenship conferred upon Paul's family in Tarsus? We simply do not know. "Presumably Paul's father, grandfather or even great-grandfather had rendered some outstanding service to the Roman cause. It has been suggested, for example, that a firm of tent-makers could have been very useful to a fighting proconsul." (Bruce)

Proof of citizenship was in the form of a certificate. Paul could well have carried his about with him. Certainly, his citizenship would be registered in a local register of declarations. So, if in the event of a lost certificate, enquiries could be made at the relative office. It is important to point out here that a false claim of citizenship was regarded as a capital offence. I often wonder what happened to all the old records. Two thousand years later, they are gone. But imagine the excitement if Jesus' family records and his trial records were discovered or Paul's family records came to light. Undoubtedly, such discoveries today would make the news headlines.

Paul did not renounce his Roman citizenship. Indeed, he took full advantage of it, which included an appeal to Caesar himself. But he taught others of a far more important citizenship—a citizenship of heaven. A vital question: What are the credentials of this citizenship?



Understanding the Life of Jesus - The Miracle at the Wedding Feast

(Andrew Marsden, Wigan)

The first of Jesus' miraculous signs, the changing of water into wine at Cana in Galilee (John 2. 1-11), can in some ways be rather puzzling. The action seems to have almost been forced on Jesus, rather than springing directly from his own will. In addition, there is no great crowd of witnesses aware of what has taken place; it takes place in a social context and, to an extent, his action does not meet any vitally urgent need, such as in the feeding of 4 or 5 thousand people, or calming a violent storm.

In his temptation in the wilderness, Satan urges Jesus to turn stones into bread and Jesus refuses as "man shall not live by bread alone but by the words of the Father." Yet here, only a short time later, he appears to be performing a very similar act, albeit at his mother's instigation. We might almost expect his reaction to what she says to be, "Then let them drink water."

The Gospel records teach us however that there was a purpose to every action performed by Jesus. The first 2 chapters of John's account outline to us the progress of the first week of Jesus' ministry. We first see him in Bethany, not far from Jerusalem, where John the Baptist was announcing the coming of Jesus as Christ, and baptising. The two men meet and John the Baptist begins the ministry as recorded in the fourth gospel, by giving his testimony that this is indeed the Son of God - a status he had freely disclaimed for himself.

On the next day, Jesus begins to call his disciples. This process continues into the third day, on which Jesus calls Nathaniel, though by this stage he has resolved to make the long journey to Galilee. Is it just a coincidence that, after the three days journey from Bethany, it is to Cana, from where Nathaniel hails, (John 21. 2), that Jesus and his disciples go? Nazareth is a neighbouring village to Cana, and Nathaniel's opinion of Nazareth is withering. Yet the fact that he follows Jesus is another indication of the charisma of the Nazarene carpenter, enabling him to inspire and change lives in an instant. Of course the chief priests and Pharisees held similar views, not just of Nazareth, but of Galilee as a whole, (John. 7. 52) but would prove much more reluctant to revise their opinion.

At the wedding feast, Jesus is with his mother and his disciples. The relationship between Jesus and Mary is intriguing. In Matthew 12: 46-50, Jesus seems to be dismissive of his mother and family, yet surely he is stressing the greater importance of the new relationship through God with fellow believers, rather than rejecting his family. Again in Luke 2:41-52 Jesus, 12 years old, is aware of his main responsibility, that to the Father, but we read in v.51, that "Mary treasured all these things in her heart" and saw Jesus "grow in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men". We can only guess at the experiences Mary must have shared with Jesus over the 20 years between that time and the start of his ministry.

The faithfulness of Mary, and acceptance of what might be seen as her diminished status, is a lesson to us all. She is there throughout his life, loving, loyal and believing

in him as far more than just her son. When she informs him at Cana that the wine has run out, Jesus' reply can again sound abrupt or even patronising, but she believes constantly in him and tells the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." What has she seen and heard over many years that gives her such unshakeable confidence in him, before he has performed this, his first miracle? We can only surmise.

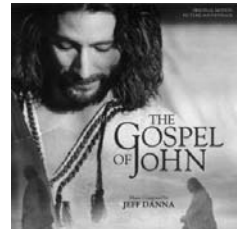
The 6 stone water jars were huge, containing more than 450 litres of water. Can we read any symbolism here into the fact that this water, intended for Jewish ceremonial washing, is to be changed into wine, which is to become a symbol of the new covenant in Jesus' blood? Perhaps this is to read too much into it, but the initial response of Jesus, "my time is not yet come", shows that he is set already on the destiny for which he had come to earth. His time did indeed come on the cross and at his resurrection.

Already, here, at the outset of Jesus' ministry, we have an awareness of impending crisis and climax. Jesus refers again and again to "his time." (John 7.6, 8, 30; 8. 20; 12. 23, 27; 13. 1; 17. 1) Like the disciples, it is only with hindsight that we fully understand to what Jesus was referring.

So the water changed to wine. The embarrassment of the host, whose responsibility it was to provide wine for his guests, was avoided, even though he and the master of the banquet were unaware of what they owed to the divine power of one of their guests.

Incidentally, it seems fruitless to contend, as some have done, that Jesus actually turned the water into grape juice. There is no doubt that it was the custom to use fermented and therefore alcoholic wine. Indeed, the fermentation process, which kills bacteria, ensured that wine was safer to drink than some of the water. The implication is that guests would normally be too inebriated to notice the poorer quality of the later wine. I am no wine buff, but suspect that the presence of grape juice would be remarked on in a negative rather than a positive way. What is more important is the *superior quality* of the miraculous wine, pointing us forward to what he would later provide for the Messianic feast. Just as he would give not just water but living water, so he would invest wine as a symbol of the blood which washes us clean, pure and spotless.

In John's gospel, most of the miraculous signs recounted are to lead into a discourse by Jesus on a related theme. Here the conclusion to this first sign is very brief, but, in its context, very important. "He revealed his glory" (v. 11) in public for the first time, even though only a few were aware of what had happened. Those few, however, were very significant - his mother, who would remain faithful to the end, and his disciples, who so recently had decided to follow him, but would now take the next step and "put their faith in him". This faith would be sorely tested but, because it was initially inspired, and subsequently consolidated, it enabled the gospel to reach us down through the centuries. Read the account again. A phrase such as "nearby stood 6 stone water jars" can easily be passed over without a thought, but it is redolent of the account of an eye-witness. Another person, recounting the story later, would not say, "nearby".



The witnesses saw, believed, were inspired to faith, told what they saw, and we read their account today. Thanks be to God!

The 'Quasi-trials' of Jesus the Christ

(Ernest Makin, Wigan)

PART 3

"JEWISH ILLEGALITIES IN THE TRIAL OF JESUS?"

"Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus."

The illegal role of Annas

From his arrest until his crucifixion the treatment of Jesus was unjust and bore no relationship to due process under either Jewish or Roman jurisprudence. The sad tragic-comedy before Herod Antipas was no part of a Galilean kingly judgement. Academic scholarship cannot agree on the precise number of violations of Roman and Jewish law that occurred, though the current view is that between twenty one and twenty seven infractions of just law are observable in the text of the scriptural accounts. In one of the saddest but yet most magnificent messianic prophecies, we read: **"He was taken from prison and his judgement was taken away."** Another translation of the same text reads: "In his humiliation his judgement was taken away." In the Acts of the Apostles Luke recounts that an evangelist, Philip, sat with an Ethiopian and read: **"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearers is silent so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation his justice was taken away."**

Justice, common humanity, due process, call it what you will, was withheld from an alleged felon accused of capital crimes. Jesus was violated by the legal process, as well as physically, emotionally and mentally; and Jesus was aware of such treatment from the start: **"If I tell you, you will by no means believe. And if I also ask you, you will by no means answer me or let me go. Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God."**

John's account of the trial of Jesus records the confrontation between Annas and Jesus. The synoptic writers though remain silent on this interrogation. (Refer to John 18:12-24). Annas, placed in office by Quirinius the then governor of Syria, was deposed by Valerius Gratus in AD 14/15. Thus at the time of the first interrogation of Jesus after his night-time arrest, Annas was at the most, 'emeritus' High Priest. Although the office of High Priest was for life, there was always in place a ruling High Priest and in this instance it was the son-in-law of Annas, Joseph Caiaphas. Annas though remained the doyen of the Sanhedrin and he retained influence of the highest order. This particular injustice, the involvement of Annas, was compounded by 'one of the officials nearby striking Him (Jesus) in the face'. Annas must shoulder responsibility for the official's action because the official was a servant of the temple and the incident took place either in the home of Annas or a wing of the residential palace of the High Priest.

Annas is described in 'The Trial of Jesus' by K. Schilder, as 'the father of a generation of priests (he had 5 sons who attained the office of High Priest) and even the founder

of a dynasty of High Priests.' In spite of his towering authority in the Grand Council he abused his privileged theocratic position. Annas was a murky figure in the annals of the gospel and if the speculations of F. Morrison in the book 'Who Moved the Stone' are correct, there was a continuing dialogue on the night of Jesus' betrayal and through the early part of Friday morning. It is quite feasible to speculate that Annas/Caiaphas communicated with the Roman authority to seek help in the arrest of Jesus by involving Roman soldiers, reminding Pilate that his reputation was already quite sullied in Rome (Pilate was suspended in AD36) and thus were able to command cooperation in the expedient plan of ridding Jerusalem of Jesus. I have no doubt that there were also Roman soldiers on guard at the tomb and such disposition of Roman soldiers would have required the rubber stamp of Pilate or one of his officers. Nevertheless, whether such communication took place, whilst it is entirely feasible, must remain as speculation.

The illegal actions of the Sanhedrin

What isn't speculation is the part played by Judas Iscariot in the betrayal, arrest and early conviction of Jesus. In Leviticus 19: 156-18 it is said to be morally and legally wrong for a Jew to inform on his fellows when death might result. Judas' identification of Jesus, identifying him with a kiss in the Garden of Gethsemane, led to an unjustifiable arrest. This action was made even more untenable when no charges were preferred at the place of arrest, another mismanagement of Jewish justice, as was the arrest at night-time. The words of Joseph Caiaphas, "**it is expedient that one man should die for the people**", illustrate that the decision had already been made and verdicts already decided that would lead to the confirmation of the charge of blasphemy in the first place. Perhaps one day it will be satisfactorily explained why the initial verdict of blasphemy was allowed to become a charge of sedition, perverting the nation and opposing Caesar.

It seems that all of Jerusalem was the pawn of Annas and Caiaphas. They dominated the Grand Council and secured unanimity, even with false witnesses. We must remember, however that there were nevertheless, some good Jews within the Council. Annas and Caiaphas played Pilate like a hooked fish on the end of an angler's rod and ultimately swayed a baying and bloodthirsty crowd to release Barabbas rather than Jesus. All of this took place within the constricted time slot between late on Thursday night and early Friday morning. This was expediency with a vengeance.

The custom and practice of Sanhedrinic law in the case of capital accusations allowed arguments for acquittal to be aired. There was also the practice of allowing the more immature members of the Sanhedrin to speak first (presumably so that they would



Jesus before Sanhedrin

not be easily swayed by their more mature and experienced colleagues). Such practices are blindingly absent from the gospel records, and we must assume that we have a full account of the main players in the unfolding drama. When Jesus was questioned about his teaching and doctrines, Jesus made the only argument for acquittal that we have on record: "I always taught in the synagogues or the temple, where all the Jews came together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Surely they know what I said."

It would have been relatively easy to use the authority of the Council to summon those Jews who had heard Jesus teach, to attend the Council and give evidence. This was a stifling of due process, a mockery of Mosaic and rabbinical law and a neglect of the working principles of the Sanhedrin. Jesus was guilty until 'proved' guilty. Arrested late on Thursday night, matters had to be brought to a deadly conclusion by six o'clock on Friday evening, the beginning of the Sabbath. Night time arrests, particularly ones involving capital offences, were illegal. Such illegalities did not deter Annas and Caiaphas had no barriers in Roman jurisprudence. The undue speed to have Jesus killed headed illegality upon illegality:

- > The eve of any Mosaic/Jewish festival, including the Sabbath and especially the Passover, was sacrosanct and death penalties could not be passed at such time;
- > There was a requirement in Jewish law that there should be a delay of at least 24 hours between the hearing and the judicial verdict;
- > Next to the temple was the 'place of decision' regarding decisions leading to capital punishment. This was the 'Chamber of Hewn Stone'; there is no mention of this custom being observed in any of the records;
- > Having 'expediently' fashioned the death penalty, the judges ignored Jewish law. In Jewish law there always had been only four forms of capital punishment – strangling, immolation, decapitation and stoning. The death of Jesus was by any means possible. Annas, Caiaphas and their willing followers sought a Roman solution to their problem.

The illegal use of witnesses

The part played by the 'agreeing' witnesses, the lack of other witnesses as well as the reluctance of the Council to find honest witnesses is a sad commentary on the lengths to which the opponents of Jesus were willing to go to achieve their nefarious purposes. The chief priests and their followers were seeking false evidence and this of course demanded false witnesses. They were unlucky in their search, although many false witnesses did come forward. A felon could only be condemned by a plurality of witnesses, a minimum of two. In effect the witnesses acted as prosecutors. Without substantial total agreement between witnesses there was no case to be answered and the hearing should have ceased. Caiaphas dominated proceedings in the Council to the extent that procedures were ignored to the point of criminality. There was no interest or desire to find the truth. Caiaphas was only determined expeditiously to despatch Jesus with the utmost alacrity. As a result there was no evidence of defending counsel, no speeches for acquittal. The domination and browbeating of Caiaphas was complete. The High Priest demonically pursued a unanimous condemnation at the expense of the truth, justice and common decency. **"I (Caiaphas) adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."** **"It is as you say,"** Jesus replied, at which Caiaphas, quite illegally, used this 'adjuration of oath' (a legal mechanism) as self-incrimination on the part of Jesus. A hypocritical renting of the high priestly garments in an ostentatious manner compounded this illegality.

The performance of the Jews, from the arrest in the garden to the death of Jesus is, as we have seen, shot through with illegalities. Annas and his sycophants, for that is what they appeared to be, systematically abused the whole process of justice to achieve their ends. **"And they were filled with madness; and communed with one another what they might do to Jesus."**

(In part 4 we will consider the Roman illegalities that occurred during the interrogation of Jesus)



What do you think?

DOES GOD INVOKE DIRECT ACTION?



There are many statements made by preachers that are either true, half-true, exaggerated and, sometimes, downright wrong. None of us are free from making errors of judgement and application when it comes to matters of scripture. This it seems is true of the statements attributed to Pat Robertson as they fall into some of the categories mentioned above. It is true to say that "our spiritual actions have consequences" and "God is tolerant and loving but we can't keep sticking our finger in his eye forever."

Peter says (2 Peter 3:9,10), "The Lord is... forbearing toward you not wishing that any should perish ... but the day of the Lord will come." Scripture makes it very clear in a number of places that "he has appointed a day when he will judge the world." (Acts 17:31)

It does seem that today we do not use this warning aspect enough in our teaching and preaching and that we are the worse for it. The prospect of not responding to God, not living rightly, is a fearful one and we neglect it at our peril.

In the article in October's issue, "Does God Invoke Direct Action", there are several aspects to consider. The Bible covers the whole age of mankind in establishing its principles. Today we are not outside of the scope of God's will and actions. For some reason there are those who don't seem to link themselves to what is being dealt with in Scripture. Oftentimes the equation seems to be 'the age of miracles has passed therefore God is not involved in our world anymore'.

In Scripture there are three clear outpourings of miracles:

- > At creation – after which the natural order continued;
- > At the Exodus and wilderness wanderings;
- > At the coming of Jesus and during the establishment of the Church.

But look outside of these 'special' events and whilst the occurrences of God's direct intervention are fewer – God is still at work when it is necessary for him to be so. Relevant to the consideration of the matters raised is God's punishment of sin. God intervened in sending the Flood and in the action towards Sodom and Gomorrah. In 2 Sam 24:15 some 70,000 Israelites are said to have been slain and in 2 Kings 6:18 the Syrians were struck with blindness. In Acts 5:11 the retribution towards Ananias and Sapphira is recorded and Acts 12:23 Herod is reported as slain by the direct action of God.

All of these incidents have two things in common. Firstly God acted directly, and secondly he told us that he had acted directly. There are disasters recorded that

appear to have nothing to do with God's direct intervention. For example 18 were killed by the collapse of the Tower of Siloam, recorded in Luke 13:4. In Acts 27 Paul is shipwrecked on the island of Malta with many others. Reactions from the people involved in these incidents might well have been similar to those that we see today, "Why has God done these things to us?" And, "God has done this for a purpose!" But these incidents were simply the natural and normal occurrences of life. Disasters occur, innocents suffer and both the Bible and life itself teach us these things.

Of this we can be sure – our God is one and he is unchangeable. There is no such concept of a God of the Old Testament and a God of the New Testament. He is the same powerful God over all who is constantly concerned about his people. He has acted directly in human affairs and is still able to do so as his sovereign right determines. He has not changed his nature or purpose nor has he lost control of his creation, as some might believe. "His ways are past finding out" and though we are often puzzled, we must not guess or speculate nor allow our faith in him to falter. In Colossians 1:17 Paul speaks of the Lord's creative power and then says, "In him all things hold together". God **maintains in being** what he has **brought into being**. In Hebrews 1:3 the writer speaks of the Son of God who is not only the creator but also is the one who "upholds the universe by the word of his power". The Holy Spirit reveals that, "it is the living Christ who died to redeem man that is the sustainer of the universe and unifying principle of its life". (FF Bruce, NIC)

Sadly there are those who view God's action toward us like the little boy who made a boat, placed it on the sea, gave it a push, crossed his fingers and hoped it wouldn't sink. Not a bit of it! That which he created and declared 'good' will continue to be his concern and be under his control until he decides his purpose has been fulfilled. It is a Bible principle that God has the power and exercises his control as and when he chooses. (Psalm 75:6,7; Dan. 2:21,22)

Finally we should consider that if God doesn't invoke direct action today, isn't the value and purpose of prayer severely impaired? True, through prayer we demonstrate our trust in God and maintain our fellowship with him. But doesn't Scripture give us the assurance of action? Why pray for him to bless us if he no longer gives graciously and in abundance? Why pray for help if no help will be forthcoming? Why pray for wisdom if he does not give it? In 2 Cor. 9:8,9 we are told: "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance", "...he scatters abroad, he gives to the poor, his righteousness (right doing) continues for ever."

In Hebrews 11:29-35(a) we have a group of faithful souls for whom God acted directly. In verse 35(b)-38 we have faithful ones for whom God did not act directly in terms of release from suffering or death. Let us learn to accept whatever his sovereign will decides and let us never doubt his ability nor reject the possibility that God is at work in our world. Someone once heard these words of Jesus, "not one sparrow falls to the ground but your Heavenly Father knows," and responded, 'Yes, he knows, but does he do anything about it?' Today we cannot say when he has acted since we no longer have prophets through whom God reveals these things. But God, our Father, has not relinquished his care over us. Our faith in him isn't based only on what he can and has done for us, but also on his continuing care for his people.

(For personal reasons the writer has asked for his name to be withheld. However I can confirm to readers that the brother is known to me and is a respected member of the Church. Editor)

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

Again we thank donors for assistance in this work. The need is constant and your help continues to save lives through medical treatment and souls through evangelism.

In country areas dwellings can be built with mud bricks and we have helped brethren reconstruct their homes and meeting houses which were damaged in the recent storms mentioned in our last Appeal. As we mentioned before, tropical conditions involve ailments that are not prevalent in more temperate climates. A further sixteen congregations have reported cases of snake bite and we have provided Wellington boots for those particularly at risk, as well as medical treatment for those affected.

It is encouraging to see the harmony between congregations and the effect this has on outreach. In order to reach such areas where there is no church, or to increase growth in existing churches, brethren from different congregations travel together to various localities with the help of a strong, effective preacher to preach the Word. During the preaching brethren mingle with the assembled crowd, handing our leaflets and arranging personal study meetings with those who are interested. A megaphone, or loud speaking system is a great advantage in this.

Donors and Ghanaian brethren together have brought many from darkness into light. Together the planting has been accomplished and God provides the increase.

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**

Question Box

Bro. Frank has been in touch to confirm that he now feels well enough again to re-commence the Question Box feature. We give thanks to God for Frank's recovery. Please submit your questions to Frank by email to:

Frank@fworgan0.wanadaoo.co.uk or by post to 11 Stanier Close, Corby, Northants.

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Coming Events

European Christian Workshop

Lancaster University:

31st August to 2nd September 2006

Speakers are:

Alastair Ferrie (Dundee)
Mark Hill (Loughborough, UK)
John Griffiths (Wembley, UK)
Trevor Williams (Bristol, UK)
Tony Coffey (Dublin, Ireland)
Earl Lavender (Lipscomb Univ., USA)
Mike Williams (Lipscomb Univ., USA)

Evertt Huffard (Harding Graduate
School of Religion, USA)

For more information visit our website:
www.christianworkshop.net

Alternatively you can email for informa-
tion to:
paulhalliday@yahoo.com
stephen.woodcock@tesco.net

We are in the process of finalising costs
but will provide that information as soon
as possible.

Paul Halliday (Newport)
Stephen Woodcock (Wigan)

Tranent, Scotland

Annual Social to be held on
18th March 2006 in
St. Martins Hall, Tranent.

Speakers:

Niall Scobie, Dennyloanhead
Graeme Pearson, Dunfermline.

Stretford, Manchester

Saturday evening Gospel meetings.
Each to start at 7.00 p.m.

April 22nd

Speaker: Mark Hill, Loughborough.
Subject to be announced.

September 23rd.

Speaker: Ernest Makin, Longshoot.
"Who is Jesus?"

October 21st

Speaker and subject to be announced.

Kirkcaldy, Scotland

Annual Social.

Saturday, April 15th at 1.00 p.m.
Speaker: John Mooney, Livingston.

Reading the Bible

Who that ever read the tale of the
Prodigal Son failed to remember it?

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knit as the New Testament, no library
richer than the Bible. Fine literature it
may be, but this goes for nothing if we
do not make it so by fair reading. It is a
sober fact that not only the Church but
civilisation is built upon it. "Reading
maketh a full man." Shall we be content
with a Sunday ration? No feast is richer
than the Bible.

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