

# The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

Vol. 73 No. 7

July, 2006

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

## **What is your position with regards to Israel and her people? As a body of believers do you support Israel ?**

(Allan Ashurst, Stretford)

### **FOREWORD**

This is a complex subject. Is the questioner asking about the political situation between Palestine and Israel or whether the Jews have a Divine right to reoccupy that land? I will present some observations on both aspects.

What I say is essentially my understanding on these matters. The congregation of Christ that I belong to, like many other churches of Christ throughout the world (Romans 16:16), is autonomous in that we are not affiliated with any religious organisation and do not have any centralised authority. Each congregation is directly under the Lord Jesus Christ with nothing in between. We accept the Bible as our only authority in matters of faith and practice and endeavour to understand it and apply it to our manner of worship and daily lives. We have no creeds or articles of faith. On all matters we refer to the Bible as our authority. It follows that even though there is general agreement on most matters, on some understanding will differ from place to place and person to person. So even though many in churches of Christ might agree with my answers to these questions, my answers must not be taken as authoritative statement of what members of churches of Christ believe. If what I say on biblical matters says more than the Bible says, I say too much; If what I say is less than the Bible says, I say too little; If what I say contradicts what the Bible says, I am wrong.

### **ANSWER**

The views I currently hold are:

- 1) The love of the Christ constrains all genuine Christians to love all people in the world. That includes Jews and Muslims.
- 2) Jews and Gentiles can have eternal salvation in Heaven, both on the same terms.
- 3) The Hebrew nation has forfeited its right to 'the promised land'.

### **My personal views on the political situation in Palestine/Israel**

This is somewhat similar to other situations where land has been taken over and populated by incomers. Three examples are: The mainland Europeans who centuries ago took over England from the ancient Britons; The Turks who also centuries ago took over Asia Minor and adjacent lands. More recently the Europeans who took over from the 'Red Indians' the lands that are now the USA and Canada.

**Contents: 1-Israelism; 3-When did immersion become...; 5-Women of the Bible; 7-Question Box; 13-Understanding the Life of Jesus; 15-News & Info.**

The setting up of the 'Nation of Israel' is now history. However ill-advised that was, we are faced with a fait-accompli. We cannot turn the clock back. A compromise must be negotiated between the two nations. The major stumbling block is the Zionist desire to restore the whole nation, its temple and worship as it was in the days of Solomon. They have to abandon that obsession. Palestinians will have to accept with grace that the imposition they suffered is history. Both sides will have to come together to negotiate a compromise on territorial boundaries. This will inevitably cause hardships and distress for residents on both sides. They should be compensated as far as possible. May God's wisdom penetrate the hearts of both Jews and Palestinians and direct their deliberations. For that I earnestly pray.

### **Bible teaching on 'the promised land'**

"God promised the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants, but this would be as God's tenants. The land remained God's property (Leviticus 25:23). Also their tenancy was conditional on their being obedient (2 Chronicles 7:19-20). When the children of Israel were returning from Egypt and were disobedient, God made them wait in the wilderness until that generation had died (Num. 14:20-35) before allowing them to enter Canaan, and even Moses, for an act of disobedience, was not permitted to enter (Numbers 20:12). Later, a great part of the nation of Israel was taken captive into Assyria, again for failing to keep the Lord's commands (2 Kings 17:23). Then the remainder were taken captive to Babylon for 70 years (2 Chronicles 36:20-21), but at the end of that time some were allowed to return. When Jesus was born many Jewish people were living outside the land of Israel.

Jesus and his apostles preached the Gospel first to the Jews, then to the Samaritans and finally to the Gentiles. This fulfilled prophecies such as Micah 4:1-2, that many nations should learn of the Lord from Jerusalem. But Jesus also foretold the destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:34-39) because of disbelief, which happened in A.D. 70. As Jesus said to the woman of Samaria (John 4:21) worship would no longer be at Jerusalem or Samaria, but in spirit and truth. As Paul made clear (Romans 10:1-4) the Jews needed to believe in Jesus to be saved. The same salvation, eternal in heaven, is available on the same terms to both Jews and Gentiles (Matthew 28:28-29; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:37-41,47).

The remaining majority of the Jewish people do not accept Jesus as their Messiah. The present day State of Israel was set up because so many Jews were refugees at the time and particularly wished to return there. However, there is no reason to suppose that it is the will of God for them to return there. What the Hebrew/Aramaic scriptures\* say about their return were amply fulfilled when the nation returned from captivity in Babylon and rebuilt the temple. God's will for them today is for them to accept the Gospel in the same way as the Gentiles and serve him wherever they live." [\*generally known as The Old Testament]

There are former Jews, Muslims and people of all nations, who have been baptised into Christ, worshipping together and in loving harmony in many churches of Christ. The middle wall of partition is broken down. [Ephesians 2:14,16 and Galatians 3:26-28]

### **The Hebrew nation forfeited its right to the promised land**

The covenant God made with the Hebrew nation was everlasting in essence but they violated the terms of the covenant. In several places in the book of Zechariah God states events which would occur "in that day" - the time when He would finally sever that covenant. Note that this was to be the end of the covenant with all the Hebrew tribes. It was never to be reinstated! The Jewish nation forfeited its right to the land of Palestine. There is no Divine authority for the Jewish restoration of the nation of Israel !

"...that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people. And it was broken in that day: ... - ... they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. ...they shall look on me whom they have pierced... In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." Zechariah 11:10-12, 12:10, 13:1

In the day the Jewish religious authorities bought the Messiah for 30 pieces of silver and had him crucified, God broke the covenant he had made with all the tribes of Israel and the Jewish nation forfeited its right to the land of Palestine.

On the other hand a fountain was opened for sinners. This blessings of this fountain are extended to the house of David and to all mankind. As the hymn writer puts it, "those plunged beneath its flood loose all their guilty stains".

Take note that the ending of the covenant is directly linked with the Messiah's passion. All the predictions in Zechariah to "that day" so evidently refer to what is generally called 'the passion week.'

**What a wonderful Saviour!**

# When did immersion become pouring or sprinkling?

(Rose M Payne)

Historians write such things as "As immersion was replaced by sprinkling." (Encarta Encyclopedia), and "Infant baptism was common by the mid-third century." (Lion Handbook) We know that certain church authorities permitted these changes at an early date, but the archaeology would suggest that many Christians resisted these innovations for a long time.

In Britain under the Roman Empire, Christians appear to have been reluctant to be baptised openly in rivers and pools. Maybe this was because of persecution, or because some of these sources were associated with pagan worship. There is evidence that they met in ordinary houses and the remains of seven or eight lead tanks bearing Christian inscriptions and apparently intended for carrying out baptisms have been discovered. The writer has seen one of these. It was cylindrical and was large enough for the immersion of adults, providing that they knelt down and dipped their heads. It was discovered very near the river Thames, which would indicate that the people in the area were not usually baptised in the river.

After 313 AD it was possible for Christians to erect buildings, and the design of these was very similar from the Mediterranean world all the way across Europe to Britain, for the Roman Empire was a very orderly place. They had baptisteries in or near church buildings. The foundations of one such meeting place were uncovered at the abandoned site of a Roman town at Silchester in England. This was a very small example and had a baptistery just outside the entrance, after the style of some separate baptistery buildings still to be seen in Italy. This was a square of pavement with a brick wall around it, probably some kind of roof over it, and a drainage pit behind. Again, this would have been just big enough for immersions although, as the water may have had to be carried from a public fountain, it was no larger than was absolutely necessary. It was probably used for about one hundred years before the town was abandoned. No doubt there were other church buildings of similar design in the main Roman towns in Britain, but the sites were later built over.

So it would seem clear that immersion of believers was the practice in Britain in Roman times. In the 5th century the east and south of Britain were invaded by pagan Anglo-Saxons. One of the lead baptismal tanks was crushed and thrown down a well, which illustrates the fate of the local churches. For the next few centuries the situation is not very clear. There were missionary expeditions and further destruction by pagans, and there are written records of mass baptisms in rivers.

The next archaeological evidence dates from about the 11th century. This consists of surviving fonts of all shapes and sizes, round and square. There are some very interesting photographs on the internet of these fonts. Near one old Roman town, several churches had re-used great stones from the tops or bases of columns and hollowed them out to make basins. Elsewhere several lead tubs had been cast from the same mould, indicating a sudden demand. One internet site claims that in Ireland in the 12th century the Normans, acting on behalf of the Roman church, ordered that all baptisms must take place inside church buildings, indicating that it was not always the custom until then. Presumably they had succeeded in enforcing this rule in England by that time, and people now had to provide facilities inside the buildings.

These fonts have two things in common: they were intended to stand on the ground, and they were too small for adult immersion but too large for new-born infants. One was two feet square and one-and-a-half feet high. It was known that baptism meant immersion, and early church wall paintings of the baptism of Jesus show him up to

his waist in the river Jordan. But in practice it seems that compromises were made, on account of the need to draw water from wells, carry it up hill perhaps, and the fact that it was very cold for most of the year. One can only guess that children or adults would stand in these tubs and have water poured over them. This was not immersion as described in the New Testament, but neither does it fit with the claims about infant sprinkling.

There were still variations in practice, for as late as the 12th century the abbey at Lenton commissioned a tall square stone font which was obviously intended for the immersion of adults and is still in a nearby church, and Ripon Cathedral has a "massive" bowl-shaped font from that date.

The next change is indicated by the fact that many of these old fonts were hoisted on to makeshift pedestals to bring them up to a convenient height for immersing infants. Some were too tall for this to be done, but still remain in use. This occurred by the 13th or 14th century, when the majority of church buildings in Britain were being rebuilt or enlarged. Where a new font was installed at this time, it was designed with a pedestal and of a suitable size for immersing babies. Because of the unscriptural teaching of the Catholic Church about the state of the dead, parents were now very fearful of what would happen to babies who died before christening. Artists of the time who tried to depict the baptism of adults drew curious pictures of people who had apparently climbed into large basins raised on pillars, which shows how unfamiliar they had become with the old ways.

When the Church of England broke away from Rome at the Reformation in the 16th century, a prayer book was issued which largely followed the former Catholic practices. It stated that a baby must be dipped into the font unless it was considered to be weak, when water could be poured on it. It was left to the parents to decide whether it was weak, and no doubt some would claim that it was for the sake of convenience. The book also laid down that people of an age to speak for themselves might be either dipped or have water poured on them. This appears to recognise the fact that in a few places facilities still existed to immerse adults.

During the English Civil War in the 17th century, some Church of England buildings fell into the hands of Puritans for a time and in a few cases a proper baptistery was installed but, unlike earlier examples, these were designed to allow full-length baptisms, being about six feet long. Fonts for babies were replaced later, although immersion of adults was permitted.

We are told that the practice of sprinkling instead of pouring first arrived in Scotland with the Calvinists and spread later to England. Some of the Protestant denominations regarded faith as the only thing really necessary, so in practice they felt free to carry out a so-called baptism in the most convenient manner with the minimum amount of water or even not to baptise at all.

It would be easy to collect a set of photographs showing how the size of fonts has declined by degrees from the large Roman baptismal tanks to something hardly bigger than a saucer at the present day. This would show that immersion was not replaced by sprinkling at an early date, but there appears to have been a long interval when pouring was the custom.

The scripture reads: **"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."** Rom. 6:2,3. Only complete immersion properly illustrates burial and resurrection. Also a newborn baby cannot "walk" in "newness of life". It cannot yet walk and one must have an old life before being able to take on a new one.

# Women of the Bible 12 & 13

## Bathsheba

Last issue I said I would look at Bathsheba in this issue. We all know her and David's story fairly well, and there are lessons to be learnt from it. David had taken another man's wife, which was, and still is, against the will of God. To add to this sin, he ordered her husband, Uriah, to return to Jerusalem, hoping that the child to be born would be seen as Uriah's, and not his. Contrary to his plans and hopes, Uriah slept at the palace entrance with the servants and didn't go home to Bathsheba (**II Samuel 11:9**). This complicated matters for David, and he ordered that Uriah should be put in the front line, where the fighting was the fiercest. The result was what David hoped – Uriah was killed and Bathsheba was free to marry him. Happy endings, you might think. However, as we all know, dishonesty doesn't pay. God sent Nathan to David with the story of the rich man who took an ewe lamb from a poor man to prepare a meal for a traveller (**II Samuel 2:4**). David was angry with this man, and wanted to punish him. What more awful accusation could David have from Nathan than **"You are the man"** (**II Samuel 12:7**). The outcome was that the son of David and Bathsheba died, although David fasted and prayed that the child would live. They had another son, the famous Solomon.

There is not much said about Bathsheba's feelings in the matter. Indeed, it must have been difficult for her: David was the king, and should be obeyed. One thing in her favour was that she mourned for Uriah for the appropriate time (**II Samuel 11:26 and 27**), before she married David. The two were punished as we know, their son died, but the next son became the wise king Solomon (**I Kings 1:28 – 31**).

David truly repented of his sin, as we can see from **II Samuel 12:16 – 23**. He also wrote a Psalm to God (**Psalm 51**). He was forgiven his sin, as we are also today. Although the Old Testament has been replaced by the New, there is still place in our lives today for the teachings of the Ten Commandments (**Exodus 20**), especially not to steal or covet – all day we are bombarded by the modern world to take what we can. Christians view this with pity, as love is the greatest gift anyone can give.

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## Jezebel, the Shunammite woman & Job's wife

In this article we will look at three women, one of whom the world would "love to hate", namely Jezebel. Her name has become synonymous with bad deeds. The Chambers dictionary describes a "Jezebel" as a shamelessly immoral or scheming woman, which is a fair description when we read about her deeds.

We first meet her in **I Kings 16:31**. The preceding verses describe how evil the king was **"Ahab...did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before**

him” (**I Kings 16:30**). I will leave it to you to read about these evil men. He married Jezebel and then started to worship Baal. Jezebel turned out to be more ruthless than Ahab, as we can see from **I Kings 18:13** – she was killing the prophets of God, while having the prophets of Baal eat at her table. Even after the triumph of Elijah over the prophets of Baal (the wonderful story of Elijah setting fire to an altar, even though the altar was drenched in water) didn’t make her think twice about what she had done. She threatened to kill Elijah, and her reputation was such that even he feared her, and hid himself (**I Kings 19: 3**). Her evil deeds didn’t stop there. In **I Kings 21** we read the story of how Ahab wanted Naboth’s vineyard, but Naboth wouldn’t part with his inheritance. **I Kings 21: 4** gives us a wonderful picture of Ahab: **he went home, sullen and angry**. The result is that Jezebel “fixed” it for him, by having Naboth falsely accused and stoned. Her end was predicted by Elisha: **dogs will devour Jezebel (I Kings 21:23)**. This happened in **II Kings 9: 30 – 37**. Even when she heard that Jehu was coming to Jezreel, after killing the king of Judah, she did not think of the consequences of her past actions – she **painted her eyes and arranged her hair (II Kings 9:30)**. She was thrown out of the window, and the dogs devoured her, as Elijah had predicted. Truly a “shameless, immoral” woman, who encouraged her husband in all his evil ways (**I Kings 21:25**).

The next woman is as opposite to Jezebel as the light is to dark. Her story is short, but full of love and faith (**II Kings 4:8 – 36**). I refer to the Shunammite woman. We do not know her name, or much else about her, except that she was married, and was well off. She recognized Elisha as a man of God, and set aside a room to be used by Elisha when he was in the area. The result of her faith was a son, as she had no children. We know the story of how her son died, but again she showed great faith. She told no-one of the death, but went to find Elisha, as she knew he could help. The son was restored to life, truly a reward for such faith, unlike the evil Jezebel.

The third woman was more like Jezebel, than the Shunammite woman. She is Job’s wife. All we read of her appears in **Job 2:9**, when she tells Job to curse God and die, because of what has happened to him. A few words, but what meaning there is in them. We know that Job was a good man (**Job 1:8**). We would expect his wife to stand by him in “thick and thin”. However, her words show that she was weak. On the other hand, how many of us have failed in our faith when bad times, or what we think of as bad times, have come to us? It is all too easy to think “Why me? What have I done wrong?” Perhaps it would be more constructive to turn the question on its head: “What have I done right, that the devil wants to tempt me?” There can always be good in evil times, especially if we hold to our faith. I can only quote the beautiful verse I used in issue 1: **1 Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”** If we remember this, we can be like Job, and not his wife. We will also be blessed for our faith.



QUESTION:  
“Why should the Lord’s  
Supper be celebrated every  
week?”



The question to be considered this month has been supplied by a brother whom I judge to be fairly new in the Faith, but who – unwisely, I believe – accepted an invitation to the home of a member of the organization whose members call themselves ‘Jehovah’s Witnesses’, and there engaged in what he calls ‘a *Bible Study*’. Knowing how the ‘studies’ of these people are organized, I seriously doubt if it really was the *Bible* that was studied. If a book was employed in the ‘study’, it would almost certainly be a ‘Watchtower’ publication, which had questions at the foot of each page, and with the ‘correct’ answers conveniently supplied in the text!

Our brother says that ‘*the Lord’s Supper was mentioned*’, and his ‘J.W.’ friend informed him that the “Watchtower” followers “*have a memorial once a year*”, and wanted to know “*Why the Lord’s Supper should be every week?*” This “J.W.” friend also made several statements, to which our brother would like a response.

## 1. No Need to mention the Supper!

The ‘Jehovah’s Witness’ pointed out to our brother that, in 1st Corinthians 16:2, ‘*the collection was on the first day of the week, but there is no mention of the Lord’s Supper*’, thus implying that it was *not* the practice of the early Christians to celebrate the Supper each first day of the week.

But, if, instead of seizing on a single verse in 1st Cor.16, his “J.W.” questioner had taken the trouble to read *more* of Paul’s letter – say, from chapter 11 verse 10 onwards, - he would have seen that the apostle had already written, in great detail, about the Lord’s Supper, its origin, the manner in which it should be observed and who should observe it. By the time chapter 16 is reached, the discussion has moved on. Paul is no longer dealing with the conduct of believers in the worship of the Church, but is now concerned with the plight of poverty-stricken Christians in Judea, who are suffering because of the famine predicted in Acts 11:29.

There was a pressing reason for this. During their meeting in Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 15, Paul had been requested by the Elders and his fellow apostles, not to forget the needy as he travelled among the churches, and he tells us, in Gal.2:10, that he had expressed his willingness to act as they have asked.

This is what he is doing in the opening verses of the 16th chapter of his letter to the Corinthians. When he urges them to give, he mentions their coming together on the 1st day of the week. There is no need to tell them *why* they come together on that day. They already know! And because the meeting on the first day of the week was a time for worship, fellowship and thanksgiving, what better time could there be, for them to give!

This is what ‘fellowship’- *koinonia*- means. It means ‘contribution, distribution, sharing, giving, receiving, communion, communication’ – these are all involved in ‘fellowship’. Acts 2:42 tells us that those who had been baptized, ‘**kept going on in the teaching of the apostles, the fellowship, the breaking of the bread and the prayers**’.



## 2. A 'Jehovah's Witness' Error

Referring to the Lord's Supper, the official history of the "Watchtower" organization, entitled "*Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*", states that because the Lord established the Supper at the time of the Jewish Passover, early students of 'Pastor' Russell's books, collectively known as the "*Millennial Dawn*" series:- "*called this occasion the 'Anniversary Supper', 'implying that it should be celebrated only on an anniversary and once a year. Today Jehovah's Witnesses call this the Memorial, which indicates the same thing*". (pp 24-25)

This is why they celebrate a 'Memorial' only once a year, and why our questioning brother's friend told him that, "*In the 1st and 2nd Centuries, 'this annual Memorial Feast was held in April/May*".

Well! If he really meant to say that *the Jews* continued to celebrate Passover Day and the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed, no-one will argue with him, because the orthodox Jews still observe their feasts at the ancient times! But if this "Jehovah's Witness" is implying that, in those early centuries, *the Christians* held an *annual celebration of the Lord's Supper at Passover time*, he is grossly misinformed and needs to make a serious study of early Christian history.

## 3. An Early Christian Statement.

Let me offer just one quotation, which I am convinced is sufficient to lay down the truth. "*On the day called Sunday all (believers) who live in the cities, or in the country, gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles and prophets are read for as long as time permits. Then, when the reader has ceased, the president instructs us by word of mouth, exhorting us to put these good things into practice. Then we all rise together and pray and, as we have already said, bread and wine mingled with water are brought, and the president, in like manner, offers prayer and thanksgiving, according to his ability, and the people assent by saying 'Amen'*".

This record continues to describe the 'contribution' in words which remind us of 1st Cor. 16:2. "*And those who are well-off and are willing to do so, give as much as each desires, and the money is deposited with the president who takes care of the widows and orphans and those who are in straits through sickness or any other cause, and those in prison, and our visitors from other parts - in short, he looks after all who are in need*".

Can you not see the early Church in this statement? When was this written? It is taken from the first '*Apologia*' of Justin, who is usually called 'Justin Martyr' who was born in 100 AD, and was put to death in 165 AD. Just a few years before his martyrdom, in the period between 150 and 160 AD, Justin wrote two '*Apologies*'. These are not '*apologies*' in the modern sense of the word. They are *defences* or *explanations* of the faith and practices of the early Church, and anyone who knows the New Testament scriptures will recognize in them a great deal that is familiar.

You will notice *when*, according to Justin, the Christians came together to break the bread and drink the cup. It was not an Annual Memorial. It was a Weekly celebration, held on what the Roman world called 'Sunday', which we know as 'the Lord's Day, or, 'the first day of the week'. Of course, there were no "Jehovah's Witnesses" around in those days, because the "Watchtower" disciples only gave themselves this name in 1931!

## 4. A Pagan's View of the Church.

We also have a pagan's view of the worship of the Christians, written even earlier. It



is found in one of the 121 letters written by Pliny, the Governor of Bithynia, to the Emperor Trajan.

Pliny was born in 63AD, and was first given political office by the Emperor Domitian, in 96AD. This means that he was alive at the same time as the apostle John, whom Domitian banished to Patmos. In his letter numbered '96', sent to Trajan, he describes his attempts to learn about the Christians and tells the Emperor that he has learned that they: "*met regularly before dawn on a fixed day.*" Notice the words '*regularly on a fixed day*'.

And do not be surprised that it was '*before dawn*'. We must remember that the first day of the week was a working day for these early Christians, the overwhelming majority of whom were slaves. Consequently, if they were to worship on the Lord's Day, it was necessarily in their own time - '*before dawn*'.

These two historical accounts, one provided by a believer and the other by a pagan, both witness to the fact that the early Christians did *not* hold the Lord's Supper as an annual 'Memorial', but as the regular weekly celebration of a risen and living Saviour.

## 5. A "Watchtower" mistranslation.

The 'Jehovah's Witness' friend also referred to Acts 20:7, which records Paul's visit and stay in Troas. He accepted that the verse mentions '*the breaking of bread*,' but claimed that this was an ordinary meal, which Paul shared with his brethren. And he also thought it significant that there is no mention of 'wine'!

No doubt he holds this view of the passage because Acts 20:7, in "*The New World Translation*", produced by 'The Watchtower', reads: "*On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to have a meal...*"

But this is an erroneous translation which reveals that the unnamed and unidentified translators of their version apparently did not understand the idiom of New Testament Greek. Acts 20:7 tells us that the first day of the week was the day on which '**the disciples came together to break the bread**'. But this was not a meeting for an ordinary meal. Notice the phraseology. When *ordinary meal* is indicated, a present participle is used - '*breaking bread*', as in Acts 2:46. But when the expression '*break the bread*' or '*the breaking of the bread*' is used, as in v.7, and Luke 24:35, it relates to the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Referring to Paul's stay in Troas, the N.T. commentator, E.H. Plumtre, pointedly states, "*It is on the surface that the motive for this stay was to keep the Lord's Day*". No reputable commentator will dispute this. It was after worshipping with the church in Troas, that Paul set sail to Assos, about 24 miles away.

## Conclusion.

So, why do we celebrate the Lord's Supper every first day of the week? Because, in obedience to the Lord's personal request/command, '**Do this in remembrance of Me**', and the Spirit-inspired words of Paul, His apostle, "**As often as you eat the bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death, until He comes**", the early Church faithfully met each 'first day of the week' - '*the Lordian Day*' as John calls it in Rev.1:10, both to remember Him, to proclaim Him, and to wait for His return. And we wish, like them, to be obedient to His word.

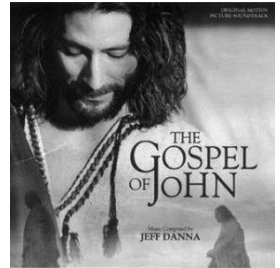
Frank Worgan, 11, Stanier Road, Corby, Northants. NN17 1XP.  
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# *Understanding the Life of Jesus*

## *Jesus' claim to be "The Bread of Life"*

**(Robert Marsden, Wigan)**

This series of articles, based on events in the life of Jesus as recorded in John's gospel, presumes that Jesus' life was the culmination of the unfolding revelation of God's redemptive plan for mankind, a revelation that had started from the very dawn of creation.



The next 'incident' that we consider is one of what are commonly known as the "I am's" of Jesus, and in Chapter 6 of John's Gospel Jesus refers to himself as "The Bread of Life". In John's account, the narrative of Jesus, based on his assertion that he is the bread of life, is juxtaposed with the miracle of the feeding of the 5000. Although, unusually, all of the synoptic gospels relate the feeding of the 5000, none of them make any reference at all to his narrative, even though John indicates that the people to whom Jesus spoke were from amongst those Jews who had benefited from the physical miracle.

In the last article we noted that the healing of the sick man by the pool of Bethesda was an action undertaken by Jesus almost in spite of the man's apparent reluctance to engage with the process. The man could be characterised as the unwilling recipient of Jesus' divine power and authority – it seems that he neither seeks Jesus healing, rejoices in it nor give thanks for it (though this must not be taken as suggestive of the idea that God will save people against their will).

### The effects of the food miracle

When the 5000 were fed the record at least shows that the multitude, having seen the signs (of healing) that Jesus had carried out, were sufficiently interested and impressed by what Jesus had done to seek him out and follow him. No doubt the motivation was wrong at this stage but something had been awakened in their minds that provoked these people to want to know more about what Jesus was doing. It seems likely that many who witnessed these events, which took place around the northern shore of Lake Galilee, would be Jews travelling to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and it is likely that the stories would be retold amongst the wider community when they arrived in Jerusalem.

Once again, as he had with the Samaritan woman and the man at the pool, Jesus follows the pattern of seeing to the physical needs of people before trying to teach the spiritual lesson (maybe there is something for us all to think about there). Despite the negative reaction of the disciples and regardless of the fact that it is probably late in the day, Jesus proceeds to miraculously feed the hungry people – a sign so powerful to them that they immediately regarded Jesus as "the prophet who is to come into the world" and would have sought to install him as their revolutionary leader to lead them against the Roman authorities had not Jesus taken himself away

back up to the mountain.

Overnight of course the disciples took to boats and sail across Galilee to Capernaum and it is during this journey that a storm breaks out and Jesus walks on water and stills the storm. It wasn't long before the multitudes also followed them across Galilee where they again followed Jesus – and it was time for them to learn some spiritual truths.

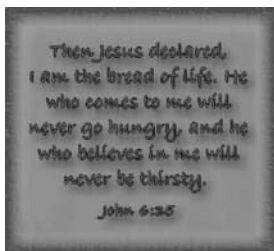
## Food that endures to eternal life

To the Samaritan woman Jesus had contrasted the physical water to be drawn from the well with the spiritual “spring of water welling up to eternal life” and advised her to seek the latter. This time, knowing the mind of the multitude, and that the people really wanted more food, Jesus makes a similar statement. “Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal” (v27). Jesus first points out exactly in which direction their efforts should be channelled and it is towards food that endures for eternal life – spiritual rather than physical life. But there are also, I think, two very significant points in this statement. Firstly Jesus associates himself directly with the provision of the ‘food that endures to eternal life’. It is the Son that is to give this to them. Whilst some have misinterpreted this statement in terms of the communion, that shouldn't detract from our appreciation of the fact that Jesus identifies himself as the source of life as he would shortly state even more clearly. Secondly Jesus re-affirms that he has the seal of approval of God the Father. Jesus was fully aware of the fact that the Jews were not going to easily accept his claims to deity and indeed had already been threatened with death because he “called God his Father, making himself equal with God”. Undaunted Jesus again associates himself directly and intimately with Father. It is not the first time that John's record stresses this relationship. John the Baptist had done this: “No one has ever seen God; the only Son (literally the only begotten God), who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.” The Spirit had borne witness to Jesus. Nathaniel had exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God.” Jesus himself had entered into the Jewish place of worship, the temple, and exclaimed: “You shall not make **my Father's house** a house of trade.” And we have already referred to the incidents on the way to Samaria and at the Bethesda pool where Jesus makes the same claim to oneness with the Father. Jesus is constantly and deliberately confronting the Jews with this eternal reality.

## Jesus superior to Moses

The Jews were on their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The Passover of course celebrates the exodus of the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt and in this they were led by Moses. Moses had been called by God not only to lead the people out of bondage but also communicate God's will to them. He was the communicator of God's law, the forerunner of all the prophets and as such held a supremely elevated status in the Jewish history – and he was of course the one who they regarded as having fed them with manna during their time in the wilderness. The challenge therefore to Jesus now became: “What sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the

wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" (v31) That provision had of course lasted for 40 years – much superior in their eyes to the one-off act that Jesus had performed the previous day.



Here then Jesus is presented with (or perhaps better has orchestrated) an opportunity to 'shoot another fox'. He declares that it wasn't Moses at all who provided the bread from heaven, but God. More tellingly he says, "**my Father** gives you the true bread from heaven" (v32). (Given that Jesus has made his direct association the Father, the message that he was also the provider could be implied as well in this statement). Jesus now makes his claim to be the eternal provider, to be that 'bread of heaven' or 'bread of God' that was to give life to the world. He effectively tells

the people that true bread was right there in front of them and that it was to be through him, Jesus, that they could have life. Not for one day, not for 40 years, but, gloriously, for eternity. "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (v35). Through an every day physical need, Jesus had presented an eternal, spiritual lesson.

## Salvation is through Jesus

I believe that in his discourse with the Jews that follows (vs 41-59), Jesus ratchets up the pressure on them to make a decision about his claims. For many Jews the idea that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, was simply a non-starter and indeed their instant reaction is that Jesus is merely the offspring of Joseph, someone known to them, but in no way special. Yet they have heard Jesus say that he has come down from heaven. Jesus later repeats that he is "the living bread which comes down from heaven". He speaks of eating this bread as the route to eternal life and reminds them that despite the provision of manna in the wilderness, the recipients of it still ultimately died. He extends the analogy from simply 'eating this bread' to 'eating his flesh and drinking his blood'. We know he is speaking spiritually, but I think that Jesus is setting out before these reluctant, disbelieving hearers that the level of association, need, sharing and intimacy with Jesus is so overwhelmingly complete and all-consuming that there is absolutely no room for any ambivalence in their attitude towards him. Their dependence on him for eternal life is absolutely as essential as their dependence on food and drink for physical life.

During the course of these events Jesus has gone yet further in expressing his true nature and his eternal mission. He has reinforced his claims to the divine nature and set out again his unique and abiding relationship with God the Father in an unequivocal way (notice how many times Jesus refers to **my** Father); he has set himself as superior to one of, if not the, iconic figure of the Jewish tradition, Moses, by insisting that his own eternal provision as the bread of life is so much superior to the manna that was supplied to the nation of Israel led by Moses in the wilderness; and he has identified himself utterly and completely as the one through whom eternal life is to be achieved. "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (v40). "I am the bread of life" (v48).

# THE SEVEN LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES (4)

(Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell)

## PERGAMUM



We now consider the letter to the saints in Pergamum (Revelation 2: 12-17). Pergamum was the capital of the Roman province of Asia. It is located 15 miles inland and 2 miles north of the Caicus River in southern Mysia. It possessed, at that time, the second greatest library in the world after Alexandria. Here parchment was developed because of export restrictions of papyri by Egypt. Many famous buildings were found on Pergamum's upper acropolis. M. J. Mellink has called it: "easily the most spectacular city of Asia Minor"; and W. M. Ramsay once wrote: "It is the one city of the land which forced from me the exclamation

'A royal city!'

Pergamum housed the famous sanctuary of Asklepios, the god of healing, and this attracted people from all over the world. R.H. Charles once described the city as "the Lourdes of the province of Asia". Incidentally, the emblem of Asklepios was a serpent and to this day this same emblem can be found in doctors' surgeries. Galen was born in Pergamum – revered as one of the most illustrious physicians in the ancient world.

## THE LETTER

We read of "the sharp sword with two edges" (2:12,16). We immediately recall the famous verse from Hebrews: "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (4:12). (There is an earlier reference to the sword in Revelation 1: 16). "Christ is here said to have the sharp two-edged sword because He is going to war against the Nicolaitans, unless they repent" (Hendriksen).

"Satan's seat" is mentioned (13a). To what does John specifically refer? There has been much debate on this subject. Interestingly, the recent publication of *Biblical Archaeology Review* features an article entitled "Satan's Throne" in which the writer, Adela Yarbo Collins, contends that Satan's throne and the Great Altar of Pergamum are one and the same. This Great Altar now sits in Berlin's State Museum, where it has been reconstructed incorporating original elements recovered in a 19th century German excavation. Originally built in the first half of the second century BC, the altar is surrounded by a monumental frieze depicting mythical battles between the

Greek gods and the Giants, a monstrous-looking race said to be the descendants of Earth and Heaven. Collins writes: "In my judgement, the Great Altar probably served as an altar of burnt offering for the two temples dedicated to Zeus and Athena, respectively". William Barclay and others disagree with the above view. He himself has written: "Pergamum was the administrative centre of Asia. That meant that it was the centre of Caesar worship for the province...Undoubtedly that is why Pergamum was Satan's seat; it was the place where men were required on pain of death to take the name of *Lord* and give it to Caesar instead of to Christ; and to a Christian there could be nothing more Satanic than that."

## DANGEROUS DOCTRINES

We should like to know more about faithful Antipas, who resisted unto blood. We wonder about the exact circumstances of his death. But John immediately goes on to deal with the things God had against them. Some were holding to the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans (14,15). (Note God hates the doctrine or teaching of the Nicolaitans, not the Nicolaitans themselves). In the past the children of Israel had been led "to eat things sacrificed unto idols and to commit fornication." The wicked Balaam was behind it all. He had come at the invitation of Balak, king of Moab (Numbers 22-24; Deuteronomy 23:4,5; Micah 6:5; 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11). Now, there were similar goings-on in Pergamum. We have already encountered the Nicolaitans in the Ephesian letter (2:6). They were obviously advocates within the Church of pagan sexual laxity. It is probable from the evidence of some of the so-called Christian Fathers that this group eventually hardened into a Gnostic sect.

We have a number of warnings regarding false prophets, false teachers, etc. For example, Peter wrote: "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord who brought them, and bring upon themselves destruction" (2 Peter 2:1). No wonder the cry was *Repent!*

## THE REWARD FOR THE OVERCOMER

We read: "To him who overcomes will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knows saving he who receives it" (17b). Manna was once described as "angels' food" (Psalm 78:25) and refers here to heavenly sustenance. Ancient jurors in court cases used white and black stones. A white stone indicated acquittal, and a black one guilt. The custom of giving a new name marked a new status for the individual. The new status will be a glorious one in heaven.

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## ANGER – A THIEF

Of all the passions that are incident to a man, there is none so impetuous, or that produceth so terrible effect as anger; for besides that intrinsic mischief which it works in a man's own heart, in regard whereof Hugo said well, "Pride robs me of God, envy of my neighbour, anger of myself." What bloody tragedies doth this passion act every day in the world, making the whole earth nothing but either an amphitheatre for fight or a shambles for slaughter. "*Be angry and sin not. Let not the sun go down on your wrath.*"

## News and Information

### **Ghana Appeal**

The work of healing physically and spiritually continues and we thank donors for their contributions to further this.

The cost of land in most villages is minimal and, unlike the situation in towns, buildings can be constructed with mud bricks, the main cost being for the roof. Continuous outreach has increased the need for help with this and a newly established church has asked for help in acquiring a plot of land. They have been worshipping under a tree and, as rain in Ghana is extremely heavy, that is not suitable.

Poverty comes through lack of education and, as children cannot attend school without payment of the fees, those of poor parents can be disadvantaged. That means that the poverty situation is carried on to succeeding generations who will also be unable to meet the cost of necessities such as medical treatment. We therefore feel that to supplement the cost of schooling in such extreme cases would not only help educated brethren to live more effectively, but would also be an economic use of funds as they would grow to be completely self sufficient adults.

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**

### **Obituary Sis. Alice Nisbet**

**Haddington, Scotland.**

The church here sadly reports the passing of our esteemed sister, Alice Nisbet,

who died on 25th May 2006 after a relatively short, but serious, illness. Alice was 80 years of age when she died and had enjoyed good health virtually all of her life. A native of Haddington, Alice became a member of the Church about 55 years ago and was ever a strong and faithful member. Even in her final weeks, Alice was always in her place on Lord's Day.

In 1950, Alice married brother Jack Nisbet (Jack was well known in the brotherhood) and had two children, Thomas and Ruth, both members of the Church. Jack died some nine years ago but during his working life was required to move house to different locations, so Alice was well known in many parts of the land, especially so in the St. Bees and Peterhead areas. Jack and Alice were always generous with hospitality and many of us have good reason to remember Alice's culinary skills and lovely meals. Alice was "of good report" in this town, and, due to her interest in local history, was President of "The Haddington Remembered Society".

Needless to say the small congregation here will miss Alice. In her quiet way she was an example to us all: dependable, sensible, knowledgeable, hospitable and faithful – and she is a great loss.

The funeral service was very ably conducted by John Kneller in the meeting-house and by Ian Davidson at the cemetery.

**James R Gardiner**

### **Baptism at Stretford**

**Stretford, Manchester**

We praise God and rejoice with the angels for the baptism into Christ of James Hawkins at Argyle Street, Hindley on Sunday, 9th July 2006.

Brother James is 54 years old and has been a very ardent Roman Catholic, but for some time has wanted to be baptized



fully in water according to the scriptures. He has a deep love for the Lord and is keen to serve Him wholeheartedly.

We pray that he will be blest in this and a blessing to others. We also pray that we will have the spiritual wisdom to help him as he grows in the Lord. We are grateful to the brethren at Hindley for their kindness and love.

**Allan Ashurst, for Church in Stretford**

## Can anyone help?

I would like to run a series in the SS that traces the history of early Christianity from the time of the ministry of Jesus through to the Council of Nicea – approximately the first 300 years of Christianity. I would like this series to cover such things as:

- The influence of the Roman Empire;
- The influence of Judaism on early Christianity;
- The clash of Greek and Jewish cultures in the development of the Church;
- The diaspora and Hellenist Jews;
- The spread of Christianity;
- The Jerusalem Council;
- Peter's mission to the Jews;
- Paul's mission to the Gentiles;
- The Jewish – Roman conflicts and the effects of the fall of Jerusalem;
- Christian persecution;

- What happened after 100 AD?
- How the canon of scripture was formed;
- Other contemporary religions (inc Gnosticism);
- The merging of religious and secular authority in Rome;
- The Council of Nicea etc, etc.

I know that my own knowledge of many of these issues, which put the New Testament into its real context, has been very thin until recently and I believe there is a wonderful opportunity for someone to distil the key events of this vital part of our Christian heritage. Is there anyone who will take up the challenge (or knows someone who might)? If so please contact me to discuss further (contact details on back page). **Editor**

## Coming Events

### Stretford, Manchester

Saturday evening Gospel meeting,  
7.00 pm

**October 21st**

**Speaker:** Augustine Nyamatore,  
Northampton

**Subject:** Salvation in Jesus

Light refreshments and discussion  
after the lesson

*All welcome*

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICE PER COPY – POST PAID FOR ONE YEAR

UNITED KINGDOM. . . . . £9.00

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

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

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