

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"

Only people

As I write this the war with Iraq has started and by the time you read this magazine the fighting will either be continuing or the nations and individuals involved will be coping with the aftermath of the fighting. I'm sure that many of you have listened to and read the countless words that have been spoken and written about the situation as the arguments have gone back and forth and will have formed your own views. I find myself, no doubt like many of you, in the position of being horrified by what we are told about the way the Iraqi regime conducts itself and yet finding the chosen means of attempting to deal with the situation wrong.

Nothing is gained by pretending that the war isn't happening, but I do find that the minute by minute television coverage portrays the war like some kind of giant computerised video game or film. If people do have to fight and die, then surely they, and their families and friends, deserve the dignity of doing that without it being in the glare of television lights. And that applies to both sides. Sometimes it seems like the ultimate in 'reality television' is being played out and it is disturbing.

I do not believe that this is a 'religious' war; I don't believe it is a war against Islam or Muslims. It don't believe it's a war against the generality of Iraqi people. We are all, Iraqi's, Britons, Americans, Africans etc simply people and I hope that we, the readers of the SS will continue to uphold the finest traditions of the Christian ethic, "Love thy neighbour as thyself." Our love for the brotherhood of mankind should be undiminished by this conflict. We should continue to hold the religious views of those who differ from us in respect rather than contempt as we seek to persuade them towards our understanding of God's revelation. We should continue to stand out against those abhorrent forces in our own communities who would seek to incite racial and ethnic hatred just because people have a different colour, creed or culture.

The wisdom of God is once again supremely vindicated when he promised that, in Christ, divisions would be done away with. **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; you are all one in Christ Jesus."** If only many more were in Christ to share that freedom from the causes of bigotry and division.

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God and the Nation of Israel

(Stephen Woodcock, Wigan)

In the second of three articles summarising the main characteristics of the development of God's relationship with Israel, Stephen looks at the Exodus, The Promised Land and Wilderness & Exile.

(5) THE EXODUS

It is hard to over estimate the theological significance of the Exodus for Israel.

It underscores God's faithfulness in regard to His Covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. See Exodus 2:23-25.

It is connected with God's intention to create a community that lives in fellowship with Him. See Genesis 17:7; Leviticus 22:33; 25:38; 26:45.

It becomes (in conjunction with the covenantal-law) the ground upon which God calls Israel to upright living. For example, they were not to extort from others since they had been rescued from Egyptian oppression (Lev.25: 35-38). Slaves were not to be mistreated because Israel was rescued from slavery (Deut.15: 12-15). Widows and orphans were to be cared for because of Israel's rescue from the oppressor. (Deuteronomy 16:10-12).

The Name YHVH is related peculiarly to the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 6:3ff). It became the shorthand way of summing up everything that was connected with it. In Leviticus 18 -26, He lays down the principles of conduct and He signs them repeatedly, **"I AM YHVH" (LORD)**. He is calling the exodus to mind and all it involves. The name manifested the power of God:

- **against the impotent idols and false gods.**
- **over earthly rulers and their armies. (Ex.15).**
- **His expression of love to Israel. (Ps.136: 10-15).**

THE PROMISED LAND

Woven into the Abrahamic covenant is the Promised Land (see Genesis 11:31-12:3; 15:17). Genesis 1-11 speaks of people who were driven from land because of disobedience and from chapter 12 on there is a movement towards land because of grace.

The Promised Land was a gift! Rebellious Israel tried to seize it (Num. 14:38-45) and failed. They were not allowed to strike a blow against Jericho. It was given to them.

The Promised Land was a place of fellowship! It was associated with the creation of the Israelite community. (see Exodus 2.3ff; Joshua 23:14-16; Lev. 15:23).

The Promised Land illustrates the sovereignty of God! Israel could not seize the land but God could expel nations before her and then give the land (Neh. 9:7; 22-25 and Psalm136:17-22).

The Promised Land demanded a certain lifestyle! To live in the land is to live with God, who owned the land (Lev. 25:23). Warnings against all kinds of wickedness were given. Other nations were driven out due to their wickedness (Gen. 15:16; Dt. 7:1-6; 16, 25ff; 9:4). Covenant loyalty was to be maintained. See Deuteronomy 24:4 and Joshua 23:14-16.

(7) WILDERNESS & EXILE

Here is another theme that is full of theological significance from which Paul took instruction (see 1 Corinthians 10).

The wilderness underscored the sinfulness of Israel! This is clearly seen in

Numbers 13 & 14. The wilderness is the epitome of "being without land". Wilderness people were under judgement.

The wilderness stressed the almighty power of God! He supplied in the wilderness what normally could only be supplied in a "landed condition". In Exodus 16:3 Israel spoke of Egypt as a place of bread, flesh and fullness. In 16:8 God responded to their complaint and promised bread, flesh and fullness. In 16:12 He repeated what He said and also said to them that by this they would know He was YHVH. It was in the wilderness that God demonstrated His glory.

EXILE

In order to understand this, we need to read Psalm 89. God had made a covenant with David that he said was unalterable. **"I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations"** (verse 4). Verses 30 to 37 say that God may punish David's descendants when they are unfaithful but He would not violate His covenant. **"Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness and I will not lie to David, that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky"** (v.35-37). So what happened was unbelievable for the Jews. It seemed that God had broken His promises when the last King, Zedekiah, was disposed by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC.

Just as shocking to the Jews was the removal of sacred vessels from the temple when Daniel was deported (Daniel 1:2). They had been taught that only the priests and Levites could handle them. Any other Jew, who tried, did so under the pain of death. So how could a GENTILE be allowed by God to take them away and still live?

The final devastating shock came when the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. This Temple was meant to be the dwelling place of God and contained his Glory. Yet they had not studied their scriptures close enough because God gave a warning to Solomon, soon after the temple was completed, which is recorded in 1 Kings 9:1-9.

Why had all of this happened? Simply because the nation of Judah had become so wicked that God had to punish them severely. He promised He would back in Deuteronomy 29: 25-28. Other passages such as 2 Chron. 36:15-21; the prayer of Nehemiah (Neh.9) and the prayer of Daniel (Daniel 9) also explain that Judah had rejected God, from the King down and so needed to be taught a lesson. So what about Psalm 89? Had God gone back on His promise and totally rejected His covenant with David. No, if we read the words carefully God had established the royal line and that would last, even though the kingdom of Judah came to an end. As a matter of fact, Jeremiah prophesied that this would happen in Jeremiah 22:28-30. So it seemed that the throne of David would come to an end and that God's purpose had failed. But Isaiah prophesied of one who would rule from David's throne in Isaiah 9:6-7. Peter on the Day of Pentecost tells us quite clearly that Jesus is on the throne of David, see Acts 2:29-36.

So what was the ultimate purpose of the Exile into Babylon? To purify God's people from the wickedness they had been involved in. Jeremiah says this in Jeremiah 3:14-18. Isaiah 54 talks about their hopeful future. God could not stand by and watch His people become so depraved that there would be no possibility of turning the situation around. Certainly people like Daniel, Ezekiel, Ezra and Nehemiah recognised the justice of God (see Daniel 9, Ezekiel 8, Ezra 9:5-15, Neh. 9). When the people did return there is no record of them getting involved in the same kinds of wickedness.

(The series will be concluded next month with a review of Election,
The Remnant and The Law)

Word Study Meekness

Ian Davidson (Motherwell)

Words are important. Indeed, it is impossible for man to express his ideas without words. It is even impossible to think without words. Someone once said: "Words are the currency in the realm of ideas". We have, therefore, to be careful with words. John Adams wrote: "Abuse of words has been the great instrument of sophistry and chicanery, of party, faction, and division of society". I think it is true that every word employed by the Holy Spirit through the envoys of Christ has been abused and given a misleading connotation in our generation. I need but mention here: bishop, priest, minister, deacon and baptism to prove the point.

To understand the Word of God is to understand the words of God. An important rule for proper interpretation is this: "Common usage, which can only be ascertained by testimony, must always decide the meaning of any word which has but one signification; but when words have, according to testimony, (i.e. the Dictionary) more meanings than one, whether literal or figurative, the scope, the context, or parallel passages must decide the meaning; for if common usage, the design of the writer, the context, and parallel passages fail, there can be no certainty in the interpretation of language." (Alexander Campbell). All my life I have tried to interpret God's word correctly. I believe God has spoken in the Bible. I, therefore, try at all times to approach it with the humility and docility of a child. "To such a one there is an assurance of understanding, a certainty of knowledge, to which the man of letters alone never attained, and which the mere critic never felt." (Campbell).

The word we are considering this month is *meekness*. A lot of people equate meekness with weakness. They could not be more wrong. Meekness is actually strength under control. The word, for example, was used in ancient times of a horse subject to the bit. There is a lot of strength in a horse and there is a lot of control by a rider.

The Bible speaks of meekness on thirty plus occasions. Here are a few passages for our consideration: "**Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men who were upon the face of the earth.**" (Numbers 12:3). "**The meek will He guide in judgement: and the meek will He teach His way.**" (Psalm 25:9). "**But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.**" (Psalm 37:11). "**For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the meek with salvation.**" (Psalm 149:4). "**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek...**" (Isaiah 61:1a). "**Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.**" (Matthew 5:5). "**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.**" (Galatians 5:22-23). "**Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering...**" (Colossians 3:12). "**But you, O man of God,**

flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.” (1 Timothy 6:11). **“...but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.”** (1 Peter 3:4).

The adjective in Hebrew is *ʿanaw* and the noun is *ani*. The Greek adjective is *praus* and the noun is *praotes*. The Hebrew adjective has also been translated as “humble”, “lowly”, and “poor” in the OT. In classical Greek, *praus* meant “gentle” (of things) and “mild” or “gracious” (of persons). Aristotle saw *praotes* as the secret of equanimity and composure. Many scholars have defined *praus* as: “Someone who is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time”. Anger is very often seen as a sin, but, in the Bible, we read of God’s anger and wrath. Jesus manifested righteous indignation during His ministry on earth. We recall, for example, His action in driving the money changers from the temple (Matthew 21: 12-13; Mark 11: 15-17). The words of Paul come to mind: **“Be you angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.”** (Ephesians 4:26). In other words: “If you be angry, which may be the case, and which may be unavoidable, see that the sudden excitement does not become sin. Do not let it overleap its proper bounds; do not cherish it; do not let it remain in your bosom even to the setting of the sun. Though the sun be sinking in the west, let not the passion linger in the bosom, but let his last rays find you always peaceful and calm.” (Albert Barnes).

“The supreme characteristic of the man who is *praus* is that he is the man who is under perfect control.” (William Barclay). Perfect control does not lie in self-control, but in God-control. It is vital that we all allow God to control our lives – that we all become true servants of the Paraclete, His Holy Spirit. Then we can be masters of ourselves and servants of others.

One final point. What does it mean: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth?” Was Jesus speaking of this earth? Where is the evidence for the meek possessing this present earth? I have thought about this a lot. Edwin W. Rice has commented: “The proud, the ambitious, the rich, may appear nominally to have much of earthly things, but they do not really enjoy them; only the meek take in all the true benefits to be drawn from the earth.” That may well be right. However, R.E.Nixon has written: “The *earth* may simply mean the ‘land’ with the idea of the promised land.” The Christian’s promised land or rest is, of course, beyond this scene of time. In other words, our everlasting inheritance is the “new earth” (Revelation 21:1). My late brother in Christ, Tom Nisbet, held this view. Many years ago I corresponded with him on various Biblical topics. On Matthew 5:5, he said: “ From our experience in this world we know that the physically meek person is not the one who inherits this physical earth or any part of it; it is usually the very opposite kind of person who does that. Therefore it cannot be the earth on which we now live that is meant. It is spiritual, and I believe the answer is in 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1. Jesus would not promise us something that was to be burned up – not much use inheriting that. But after the earth and the works that are therein are burned up, then there will come about the “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwell Righteousness”.

Practical Christianity

Love

(A second article by our late Brother Alf Marsden from a series entitled 'Aspects of Living')

"But the greatest of these is love." So says the Apostle Paul in that beautiful thirteenth chapter of the first letter to Corinth. What is this love, which is never off the lips of people throughout the world? The poets write of it, songwriters eulogise it; people say they have it for partner, family, friends; there are those who even love themselves. Is it a word, which falls too easily from our lips? Do we confuse love with other human feelings such as kindness, pity, sympathy, etc.? Let's take a look at some Biblical statements, which may confuse the unwary.

Defining scriptural love

Jesus said on one occasion, **"If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments"**. I have known some Christians who have equated the keeping of commandments with love, as if to say, "if I do what I'm told, doesn't that prove my love"? No, it doesn't. It's like a mother saying to her child, "I'll love you so long as you do what I tell you to do." The implication being that love would cease if the obedience was not forthcoming. I'm quite sure that the Lord didn't mean what He said in that way. The Lord would no doubt be pleased that we had kept the commandment, but if love means nothing more than keeping the letter, then we have not understood the depth of the love of the Lord, and our 'keeping of commandment' response would be less than He expected of us. The idea is more like 'if you really love, then you will do anything for me; true love always gives what is asked of it, and often more! I believe the Christian has to reach the point where he doesn't even need to be asked.

In 1 John 4:19 we read, **"We love him because he first loved us"** (A.V.) The RSV omits the word 'him' and reads, **"We love, because he first loved us"**. Some people might take the wrong view of this. They may equate this with the giving of presents, or invitations to a meal, etc. They may take the view, "Oh, well, they did this first, so we had better reciprocate". This may be in keeping with a socially acceptable practice, but may not indicate any great degree of love. What John means here, of course, is that we would want to reciprocate the kind of love that Christ demonstrated in dying for the sin of mankind; **"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man would lay down his life for his friend"**. We are not dealing here with social niceties, but with a response, which, in spite of ourselves, indicates the soul-depth of affection for the One who has revealed the sort of love which the world had never seen before. We must always understand that in our talks and discussions with people of the world, we are not always dealing with scripturally educated people, but with those who may have plucked a word or phrase out of the Bible without any real knowledge as to how it should be interpreted.

An outpouring of love

We are by nature observers and learners. The appreciation of beauty in any art-form leads us on in our quest for things more beautiful, and so we try to find a beauty that transcends even our earthly experience. So it is with our earthly experience of love. The love of partner, children, family, friends, leads us ever upward to the type of love which is sexless, impersonal, impartial, and all consuming in its intensity. The love, which we seek as Christians - and which, is held out to us in the Incarnate God - is Divine in origin. It had to be shown to us in the flesh because earthly love, ruled by its passions, could not even begin to understand it. **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"**. This when we were poor, wretched, blind, and unrighteous. When sexual and violent passions ruled. Into this impure cauldron God poured pure and Divine love in the Person of Christ Jesus His Son. The promise to the soul of man is fulfilled in generous measure.

The N.T. uses two Greek words to illustrate the meaning of love, although it throws little light on the distinctive meaning of love itself. The two words are AGAPE and PHILEO. AGAPE conveys the love of the Father for the Son, and for mankind in general, hence, the sending of a Saviour.

It also typifies the love of Christ for the Church, and the love of Christians for each other. It can best be seen in the sort of actions it prompts, eg. The love of God as seen in the action of God in sending His Son to die for fallen humanity, and the love of Christians for each other.

PHILEO, on the other hand, more nearly represents 'tender affection'. We can see the distinctive use of the two words in two well-known scriptures. In John 12: 25 we read, **"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life"** (This is saying that he who wants to preserve his earthly life has the wrong sort of love. PHILEO is used here) In 1 Pet.3: 10 we read, **"He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile, etc."** (This is the righteous and God-given love for life that will go on into eternity. This is AGAPE love). This love enhances the senses so that we see God in nature; we hear His voice in the silence, we are touched, and we touch others, by His grace. The Apostle Paul says, **"Let love (Agape) be without dissimulation"**. Hypocritical or pretended love is no love at all. He also goes on in his Roman letter, **"Owe no man anything. But to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law"**. The debt of love can never be paid off, but we should keep the interest paid up by loving one another.

We ought always to keep before our minds the words of Paul to Timothy, **"Now the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned"**. If our faith is sincere then so will our love be. That's what God requires of us and that sort of love is the only thing, which can save mankind.

Editorial **Big Bangs & Miracles**

The following quotation is attributed to Albert Einstein:

“You can live your life with one of two thoughts. Either that nothing about us in life is a miracle; or that everything around us in life is a miracle.”

Einstein – some history

Albert Einstein is acknowledged as one of the great modern figures of the scientific world. Einstein died in 1955 after a remarkable scientific career that places him at least alongside Sir Isaac Newton as one of the greatest influences on modern thinking about the dynamics of the universe. He was born into a Jewish family in Germany in 1879, but moved with his family to Italy in 1894. He renounced his German citizenship and took up Swiss citizenship in 1921. Although he later returned to Germany he was opposed to war and spoke out against the First World War and continued to speak out during the 1920's and 1930's in response to the growing military threat of Germany. He had renewed his German citizenship but was considered as suspect as both a Jew and a pacifist. He was in California in 1933 when Hitler came to power and never returned to Germany renouncing his German citizenship for a second time in 1940. As well as an outstanding scientist, Einstein wrote extensively about peace and against a background of rising fascism in the years before the Second World War he signed a letter to President Roosevelt in 1939, warning that Germany could create an atomic weapon, which then led Roosevelt to set up a project to secretly develop an atomic bomb. Einstein became a firm supporter of disarmament and of a Jewish state and in 1952 the then young state of Israel offered him the presidency, which he declined.

As a child Einstein is reckoned to have had no great intellect. He was slow to read and slow to talk. On leaving school he struggled to secure a job and it was in 1902 that he entered his first employment in the Swiss patent office in Bern. Yet in 1905, at the age of 26, he published what quickly came to be recognized as three groundbreaking pieces of work in physics. These related to the motion of particles suspended in liquid, the photoelectric effect and the special theory of relativity. Dissatisfied with some of the aspects of his special theory, Einstein continued to grapple with the effects of gravity and in 1915 published his then extremely radical General theory of Relativity.

The Big Bang comes

It is Einstein's General theory of Relativity that is the basis of the Big Bang theory and the development of that theory seems to have gone something like this:

- In 1919 a solar eclipse occurred during which astronomers were able to make observations which proved the general theory of relativity;
- In 1922 a Russian mathematician named Alexander Friedman first put forward the idea that the universe was expanding;
- In 1929, Edwin Hubble proved that galaxies are flying away from each other – i.e. confirmation that the universe is expanding;
- In 1952, George Gamow proposed what came to be known as the Big Bang Theory.
- In 1965 two scientists, Arno Panzias and Robert Wilson detected cosmic microwave background, regarded as the afterglow of the Big Bang, which revealed that the Universe was once a very hot, hostile place. These discoveries led astronomers to deduce that the Universe began as an infinitely compact fireball.

I'm no scientist (Grade 9, GCE when it was possible to fail exams, all down to a poor teacher!!) but the Big Bang Theory is conceptually quite simple. If you can observe and measure the rate at which the universe is expanding, then by extrapolating that rate of expansion backwards into time, you can arrive at the point when the universe must have been concentrated at one single point. That's the point at which the Big Bang must have occurred and set in motion the expansion that is now observed – and that point is generally calculated at about 15 billion years ago. I suppose it's a bit like saying that if you observe three cars traveling away from Wigan, one up the M6 towards Scotland, one south towards Birmingham and one East towards Leeds, then by observing their rate of movement away from each other, you can calculate at precisely what time they all left Wigan. (The way traffic is on the M6 these days it's likely to be close to 15 billion years ago!).

Does the Big Bang explode God?

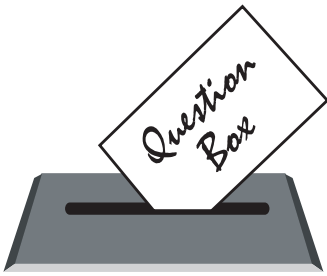
In my research I haven't found any statements from Einstein as to how he viewed the development of his work into the Big Bang Theory. He is quoted as saying, **"I want to know how God created this world. I am not interested in this or that phenomenon, in the spectrum of this or that element. I want to know his thoughts; the rest are details."** And, **"Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind."** So it seems that his work did not deflect him from a belief in the Creator God.

Isn't it quite remarkable to consider that, even if we take the first development of the theory back to Friedman's work in 1922, the Big Bang Theory is still only 81 years old? That is, this theory, which is so fundamental to modern scientific thinking about the origins of the universe, has been around for a period of time that represents 0.0000054% of the total time that, by scientist's own calculations, the universe has been in existence. Is that statistic relevant? Not really because it's just playing with figures. But it does demonstrate that today's theory is more than likely to be transitory and is only a staging post towards tomorrow's new discovery. This theory is younger than some readers, and was only formally put forward in 1952. By that measure, it's as young as me.

One website I looked at contained this introduction, **"For untold millennia, mankind has searched for his origins. Every culture of mankind has tried to explain the origins of the moon and the stars and the Earth. *Until fairly recently, we had to rely on religion or myths to explain the origins of the universe.*"** The italics are mine because it's precisely that kind of certainty, (the assumption that we can now 'rely' on science, which can by its very nature, only ever be at a stage of development), that 'creation Christians' are accused of naively relying on.

Einstein said that he wanted to know how God created the world. Not if, but how. I've come quite some way from where I was heading when I started this article but going right back to the quote at the start, I'm content to live my life with the thought that everything about us in life is a miracle, and that one of, if not the greatest, is the miracle of God's creation and the order that he has brought to bear on His universe. **"Let them (the heavens) praise the name of the Lord! For he commanded and they were created. And he established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds which cannot be passed."** (Psalms 148:5,6)

(I'll get back to my original thoughts next month - Editor)



This month we are looking at Exodus 4:18-26, in which we are told that God 'sought to kill' Moses.

The Septuagint version of this passage, in common with several others such as the Arabic versions, says that it was '*an angel of the Lord*' who met Moses and sought to kill him at the resting-place on the way to Egypt. Probably the translators found it uncomfortable to have to think that the Lord Himself might have '*sought to kill*' his servant Moses. Our English versions are true to the Hebrew text, and therefore we must

take it that it was, indeed, God Himself who was involved in this remarkable Old Testament event.

Did God truly 'seek' to kill Moses?

Do we not find the language rather strange? Surely, if God had *really* wished to kill him, He could very easily have done so. I suggest that what occurred was of the nature of an ominous warning, and what is there described was an illness, serious enough to be life-threatening, inflicted on Moses by God as a punishment for some offence or other. But, a question now arises.

What was the reason for the punishment?

What had the prophet done – or failed to do – that merited such a stern judgement? I believe we find the answer in the exclamation of Moses' wife, Zipporah, which suggests that the reason for this divine act of judgement was the failure of her husband to have their newly born, second son Eliezer circumcised. She said to Moses, "***You are a husband of blood to me!***" v.25.

Zipporah was a Midianite, not an Israelite, and, apparently, it was not a custom of her people to practice the rite of circumcision. Consequently, she regarded the religion of her husband as cruel, and, although she personally performed the crude surgery, after the child had been circumcised, she re-acted very vigorously (v.20). Customarily this would have been performed by the father, and only in exceptional circumstances by the mother, and the implication is that Moses was, at that time, too ill to fulfil his responsibility.

However Zipporah's angry outburst reveals that she had no sympathy for a religion that demanded the shedding of the blood of children, by means of a ceremony which was, in her mind, both incomprehensible and cruel. It was after the child had been circumcised that we read, "***He let him go***", v.20. This sounds rather puzzling, but it simply means that, after the deed was done, God allowed Moses to recover.

Notice, also, that it was *after* the ceremony had been performed that Zipporah explained to Moses why she had called him, '*a husband of blood*'. She declared that it was "***because of the circumcision***", v.26.

Circumcision - before Sinai.

It is sometimes mistakenly thought that the rite of circumcision was first imposed on the Israelite as an essential part of their religion, when God made His covenant with

them at Sinai. But this is not true. The earliest biblical reference to this ceremony is found in Genesis 17:10. There it is recorded that God commanded Abraham and his descendants to practice circumcision, and in Acts 7:8, Stephen reminds the Jews of this occasion. From that time, long before the time of Moses, the Hebrews faithfully obeyed God's command.

Moses would – *or should* – therefore, have circumcised his first son, Gershom many years earlier, and the life-threatening illness with which God later inflicted him, was a punishment for what appears to have been ongoing neglect on the part of the great man.

Can anything be said on his behalf?

We cannot *excuse*, but we may try to *explain* this neglect. Remember Moses' background. Although he was a Hebrew, we must not forget that only his infant years had been spent with his Hebrew family in Egypt. Whilst still a child he had been taken by the Egyptian princess and raised and educated as an Egyptian, groomed to take a high place in Egyptian society.

Until he finally decided to leave Egypt, his entire life-style and, probably, even his mind-set,, shaped by an Egyptian education, (Acts 7:22), had been Egyptian rather than Hebrew, and we may say with absolute certainty, that his rank as the '*son of the daughter of Pharaoh*' would have been given little opportunity of associating with Hebrew slaves, whom the Egyptians scarcely regarded as human! Remember that he was 40 years old before he displayed interest in his Hebrew ancestry, and, for the following 40 years the people with whom he associated, were the Midianites, a nomadic people who later declined the invitation to join the Israelites. (Numbers 14)

So, until he received God's call, Moses had had very little contact with the Hebrews. I think we must take these facts into account before judging him too harshly.

Why, then, did God judge him so severely?

Because later, at Sinai, Moses was to bring to the people the Covenant which he would receive from God. In the Covenant, circumcision would once again be declared obligatory for God's chosen people. It would be, in fact, the rite that secured entry into the Covenant, guaranteeing to the obedient Hebrew the promises that God had earlier made to Abraham, the federal head of the race, who was known as '*Abram the Hebrew*', Gen. 14:13.

Since Moses was to fulfil this important role, he must not be seen to be in disobedience of the command of God. He must be made ready for his task, and, as preparation, he must learn that the higher the office and the honour, the greater the responsibility. Regardless of his Egyptian upbringing, Moses *was* a Hebrew, and, as a Hebrew, not even he was excused from the obligation to practice circumcision. He had been in disobedience until God shocked him into an awareness of this fact in this drastic manner.

We need to remember that when God issues a general command, no-one is granted exemption.

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

Biblical Archaeology 4

Ian Davidson (Motherwell)

Jerusalem was the highlight of our next field trip. The city is the most famous in the Bible. It is also one of the most famous cities in the world. It has a long history.

Originally, Jerusalem was a Jebusite city named Jebus. The Jebusites were a hill people descended from the third son of Canaan (Genesis 10:16; 1 Chronicles 1:14). D.J. Wiseman has written: " Unless Melchizedek was ruler of Jerusalem, its earliest king named in the OT is Adoni-zedek (Joshua 10:1), who raised his local Amorite allies (v.5) to protect the city from the Israelites entering the area...Jebus was burnt after its capture by the men of Judah (Judges 1:8), but its original inhabitants regained control until the attack by David (2 Samuel 5:6)."

Various explorations and excavations have taken place in Jerusalem. The archaeologists have studied the Canaanite city, the Israelite city and the city from the days of Titus, who destroyed it in AD 70. The last period has seen Persian occupation and Arab occupation. The Arabs were then displaced by the Seljuk Turks in AD 1077. This occupation led to the Crusades. In 1244 the Khwarizm Turks captured Jerusalem and restored it to Islam. Three years later these invaders were driven out by the Egyptians, who then held the city until AD1517, when it fell to the Ottoman Turks. Their greatest sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent, built the present walls in 1542. In 1917 Palestine surrendered to the British. 1948 saw the creation of modern Israel.

Notable excavations in Jerusalem have been those undertaken by Prof. Yigal Shiloah of the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Israel during the years 1978-1985. They are known as "The City of David Excavations". These excavations uncovered chapters in the history of Jerusalem from the Chalcolithic period (4000-3150 BC) up to the Islamic period, which began in AD636. Items discovered include pottery figurines, domestic utensils, kitchenware, arrowheads, storage-jars, bullae and coins. There is clear evidence, for example, of the Babylonian destruction in 586BC.

In 1990, I was attending the 2nd International Congress on Biblical Archaeology. The 1st Congress had actually taken place in Jerusalem in April 1984. Eventually, a 500-page book was published detailing all the proceedings of this Congress. It is entitled: *Biblical Archaeology Today*. I read it with great interest prior to my departure. The book includes a section: *Revealing Biblical Jerusalem: From Charles Warren to Kathleen Kenyon*. Warren's book *Underground Jerusalem* was first published in 1876 and Dame Kathleen Kenyon's *Digging up Jerusalem* came out in 1974. The latter archaeologist is world famous, especially for her work on ancient Jericho. She served as Director of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem (1951-1967). A.D.Tushingham has said of Warren: "His contribution to our knowledge of underground Jerusalem extended to many other parts of the city; his recording of rock contours, his investigation of the water works deriving from the Spring of Gihon, and his tracing of the wall stretching from the southeast corner of the Haram southward along the crest above the Kidron – all had much to do with the locale and the directions of further research".

Benjamin Mazar of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem reported on the extensive excavation conducted adjacent to the southern retaining walls of the Temple Mount and Nahman Avigad, also of the Hebrew University, discussed the findings in the Upper City, which covers the area of the present Jewish Quarter, the Armenian Quarter, the Citadel and the traditional Mount Zion. Philip J. King, in his introductory essay, highlighted four great past leaders in the Jerusalem work: Edward Robinson of America, Titus Tobler of Germany, Victor Guerin of France and Claude Conder of England. "Tobler, the father of German exploration in Palestine, made a topographical study of Jerusalem and its environs, including the architectural features of the walls, gates and main buildings of Jerusalem...Of Guerin's impressive seven-volume work on the geography, history and archaeology of Palestine, one complete volume is devoted to Jerusalem. Conder's name is identified with the monumental surveys of the Palestine Exploration Fund. Each of these pioneer explorers acknowledged his indebtedness to Robinson".

Jerusalem has been besieged, captured, or destroyed more than forty times. Ruins, dating back to the time of Jesus, are found thirty feet below current levels. Dig another thirty feet and one is back in the days of famous OT characters. Each excavation is, therefore, a daunting task. However, outstanding discoveries include: remnants of an arch which spanned the Tyropoean Valley; the base of a pier which supported this same arched bridge; Solomon's quarry; the ancient walls of the city; Hezekiah's tunnel; the Siloam Inscription (written in early Hebrew script); Herod's temple inscription, which reads: "No stranger is to enter within the balustrade around the Temple and enclosure. Whoever is caught will be responsible for his death, which will follow"; and, from the time of Christ, the longest Aramaic inscription discovered, which reads: " Hitherto were brought the bones of Uzziah, King of Judah – do not open".

I must admit that it made me think to see walls described by Nehemiah; steps climbed by Jesus; the Mount of Olives; the valley of Kidron; the Temple Mount; the Wailing Wall; etc. However, I was aware too of how much things had changed in two millennia. For example, the Dome of the Rock had replaced Herod's temple. I may not visit Jerusalem again, but I look forward to dwelling in the new and heavenly Jerusalem, which, of course, is far better (Galatians 4: 26; Hebrews 12:12; Revelation chapters 21 & 22).

If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn
If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight,
If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy
If a child lives with shame, he learns to be guilty,
If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient,
If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence,
If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate,
If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice,
If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith,
If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself,
If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, he learns to find love in the world.

(Seen in a school classroom and is probably just as applicable to children of God).

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

As our Ghanaian brethren's success in evangelizing continues and the number of churches increases, the needs of the appeal increase with it. We appreciate the donations that have been given and earnestly appeal for them to continue. The need is very great, particularly in remote country districts.

To help Churches to grow spiritually and in understanding it is proposed to have a course of study lasting one week at which one brother from each of 78 Churches will attend. They will then return to lead their own congregations in Bible study. Although expense will be kept to a minimum, the cost of transport and food for 78 people, many from remote villages, will be considerable.

With the spirit of Christ our brethren help one another in loving care to the best of their abilities, but without your help this would be much less effective. You have helped to avoid much suffering and death but much more is still needed. There is a general need of help for widows, crippled and elderly who, being unable to work, are destitute.

As well as new medical cases arising continually, including hernia and tuberculosis, there is ongoing medical treatment for patients, such as the sister with a heart ailment and the baby born with severe internal abnormalities. We are happy to learn that the child has now been operated on successfully and is making good progress.

Those wishing to contribute, please

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

Baptisms

Glenrothes, Scotland

It is with great joy that we report that Craig Spence, aged 15, was baptized into Christ on the evening of 10th March 2003. Craig had studied with Dan Langdon for some time and it was Dan who acted at the baptism. Please keep Craig in your prayers as he begins his new life in Christ.

Richard Gilmore.

Kelso (via Malta)

We rejoice in sharing the good news with you of the baptism of Bobby Kirk, a member at the congregation in Kelso, on Sunday 23rd February. Bobby was baptized whilst on holiday, and visiting with the Church in Malta. It's a special joy for Jenny and the small Borders congregation and all who know us. Please keep Bobby in your prayers.

Helen Draye

(What a great joy it is to learn of these two, and indeed all, baptisms, and it should be cause for great rejoicing amongst the brethren. If the angels in heaven rejoice, the saints on earth should rejoice with them. In her covering letter Helen asks that we keep the small Kelso congregation in our prayers and I am happy to pass on that request to the readership. Editor)

News

Glenrothes, Scotland

We are pleased to announce two new ministries for the Churches of Christ in Scotland.

E-pistle Scotland delivers people-related news direct to your email inbox, e.g. baptisms, weddings, engagements, prayer requests etc.

E-vents Scotland sends out regular reminders of up and coming Scottish Church events e.g. Gospel meetings, Lectureships, Youth Weekends, Camps, Ladies Days, Church socials etc.

Both ministries share a single mission statement: To share good news of what is happening in Scottish Churches and to promote the support of Scottish-wide events. If you would like to be a part of either or both of these exciting new ministries, send your name, congregation where you attend, your preferred email address and which ministries you wish to subscribe to, to:

Glenrothescoc@yahoo.co.uk

Obituary

Sis. Nellie Stanton

Longshoot, Wigan

The assembly at Longshoot, Wigan has been deeply saddened by the recent loss of a greatly loved and respected stalwart of the faith.

On December 31st, 2002, our Sister Nellie Stanton passed away aged 88. Nellie, the wife of Brother Bill for over 60 years, and sister of our late Sister Edna

Marsden, was born shortly after the outbreak of World War 1, and had been a Christian for over 70 years. She will be widely known amongst remaining Christians of her generation mainly for the generous hospitality with which she and Bill welcomed many of the brethren into their home. In the days when Gospel campaigns could extend for several weeks, they hosted the families of such evangelists as Bro. Timmerman, Bro. Bill Richardson, Bro. Ted Lake, Bro. Albert Winstanley and Bro. Len Channing amongst others who were conducting campaigns at the former Albert Street assembly in Wigan.

She and Bill, with their family, attended many of the summer camps in the 60's at Paddock Wood, Bangor, Scratby, and later on at Kelston. As well as her hospitality and immensely strong and unwavering faith, she will be remembered by any who visited the early Wigan Fellowships for the quality of her cakes, especially the vanilla slices! She will be, and is, sadly missed by all her brethren, but especially by Bill, himself now aged 88, and her surviving children David and John, along with her grandchildren and great grandchildren for whom your prayers are sought. We rejoice that she is now united with her Lord and re-united with her daughter Dorothy, who she missed so much.

Andrew Marsden

Coming Events

Peterhead
Merchant Street
2003

Annual Social
12th & 13th April 2003

Saturday 12th April

3.00 pm and 6.00 pm

Speakers: Joe Nisbet, Aberdeen
Graham Gorton, Manchester

These brothers will also speak on Sunday 13th at the times noted above.

**Sunday 15th - Sunday 22nd
June 2003**

Meetings at 7.00pm each evening
(including Sunday meetings)

Speaker: Bruce MacLarty

Buckie
Social Meeting

Saturday, 3rd May 2003

@ 3.00pm

Speaker: Bro. M. Glover, Birmingham
who will also speak on following
Lord's Day, 4th May

A warm welcome is extended to all.

"Seek Ye First . . ."

In order to achieve the real peace passing understanding, we must develop a proper perspective. Difficult though it may be to realise, God's kingdom and

God's righteousness are to be given pre-rogative over everything else. Jesus said that all else would fall in its place when these two things are given first place (Matt. 6:33).

Sometimes our willing spirits have trouble with the willing flesh. Frequently, like Paul, we have to buffet our body to keep it under subjection. Why? Because all in us that is flesh argues vehemently that God's kingdom and God's righteousness are not the most important things. Our very reason seems to say that material things must come first. We cannot see how the more intangible, spiritual things deserve first place; nor can we realise that when they are given first place the secondary things will also be ours.

This is where we have a need for faith. Only by faith can we reach to the spiritual achievement to see how things must fall into the proper perspective and develop an awareness of the importance of spiritual matters. Remember, God's kingdom and God's righteousness demand first place in our lives. And remember also that the only promise we have of attaining all else comes after we have put God's business in its proper place. To reach this point, we must "walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

Selected.

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DISTRIBUTION AGENT & TREASURER:

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

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

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

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