

Articles by Gordon Franz

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Bloodline - - Serious Documentary or Hollywood Hoax?

Biblical archaeology can be an exciting subject to study and even more exciting to participate in an actual excavation of biblical significance. Hollywood was able to capture the excitement and adventure of biblical archaeology in the now-famous fictitious Indiana Jones movie, "Raiders of the Lost Ark."

Sometimes Hollywood has a sinister motive when dealing with the subject of archaeology and the Bible. Recently a new archaeological movie was released that claims to cast doubts on two of the basic tenets of Christianity: the deity of the Lord Jesus and His bodily resurrection. "Bloodline" is produced by 1244 Films; the director and narrator of the movie is Bruce Burgess, and the producer is Rene Barnett.

The premise of the movie, that purports to be a serious documentary, is that there is "incontrovertible proof" that "totally refutes" Christianity. The movie claims that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and had a child, or children. After the crucifixion of Jesus, Mary hid the body of Jesus and she and her child, or children, moved to France. The Knights Templar rediscovered the body of Jesus and brought his mummified body to Rennes-Le-Chateau, in southwest France in the 12th century AD.

Sounds familiar? This movie claims to have the "proof" for the fictitious novel by Dan Brown, The Da Vinci Code. The film suggests that the mummified body of Mary Magdalene was recently discovered in the area of Rennes-le-Chateau along with other 1st century AD

artifacts from the Jerusalem area that were associated with the wedding of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. I attended the May 5th press conference for the movie in New York City. In the press packet was a "For Screening Only" edition of the movie. I have seen the movie several times and will base my critique on that edition.

What is the "Incontrovertible" Evidence?

I will only summarize the "evidence" presented in the movie. For a detailed and documented refutation of the claims in this film, see my lengthy review *The "Body" of Mary Magdalene*. In 1999 a British adventurer named "Ben Hammott" (not his real name) allegedly found a cave with treasures in it -- as well as a burial with a shroud that had a red Knights Templar cross on it -- in the hills to the east of Rennes-le-Chateau. When he returned with Bruce Burgess in 2006, "Ben Hammott" cut away part of the shroud and exposed the head and hands of a mummified person. They also took a hair sample from the body and submitted it to the Paleo-DNA Labs at Lakehead University in Canada for analysis. The mitochondrial DNA from the hair strand suggested "the Middle Eastern maternal origins of the individual based on haplotyping information." The mummified body was on a slab of marble that suggests the individual was venerated by someone in the past. The conclusion that was drawn from this "evidence" was that this was the body of Mary Magdalene. This mummified body (if in fact it is a real body) could not be that of Mary Magdalene, or any other Jewish person for that matter. During the Second Temple period (the time of Jesus), Jewish people never mummified their dead. At the burial of Jesus normal Jewish burial customs were followed (John 19:38-40), and one would assume the same thing

would have occurred with Mary Magdalene's burial. Jewish burial entailed letting the flesh decay and after a year, the family gathered up the bones and placed them in bone boxes called ossuaries. This practice was called ossilegium, or secondary burials.

The Artifacts from Jesus and Mary Magdalene's Wedding

The second startling discovery was a wooden chest that contained a small bowl or cup, an ungenterium, a glass phial with a parchment inside and about 30 coins. These 1st century AD artifacts, probably originating from the area of Jerusalem, were claimed to be from the wedding of Jesus and Mary Magdalene!

Before we review these objects, we should address the issue as to whether Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married. This is the premise of *The Da Vinci Code*, but there is no biblical evidence - or other first-century AD evidence -- for this idea so it should be dismissed. "Ben Hammott" allegedly discerned "clues" in the statues and pictures on the wall of the Mary Magdalene church in Rennes-le-Chateau that led him and the producer on an archaeological scavenger hunt for bottles that provided further clues that led them to the wooden chest. In the third bottle there was a parchment that allegedly contained the confession of the priest that reburied the "body" of Mary Magdalene in the Knights Templar tomb. It said: "The resurrection of Jesus was a trick, it was Mary Magdalene who took his body from his tomb. The disciples were fooled. Later, the body of Jesus was discovered by the Templars and then hidden three times. The Knights protected a great secret which I have found. Not in Jerusalem. The Tomb is here. Parts of the body are safe. Rome knows all about this, but they can

not afford to let the secret be known. They threatened to kill if the location of the tomb was revealed.” This is the over riding message that “Bloodline” is trying to convey. Jesus did not come back from the dead, thus He is not God. This statement goes contrary to what Dr. Luke writes about in the beginning of the book of Acts. “To whom [the apostles] He [the Lord Jesus] also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (1:3).

As an archaeologist, my imagination was taxed as I watched the scavenger hunt. Even the messages found rolled up in the bottles looked like they were written with red felt-tipped pens! Once they found the cave that had the chest in it, they used a dowsing rod to locate the exact spot of the chest. After digging a few centimeters, voila, there was the wooden chest! (If only real archaeology could be this easy).

In the press release, it was stated that the chest was “extremely damp and rotten.” When I looked at it during the New York news conference, it did not look rotten (although I did not handle the chest). In the movie, when Hammott was using the petech (a tool used by archaeologists for digging dirt), he hit the wood of the chest. It gave a sound of a solid piece of wood from a box that was hollow inside, and did not give the sound of wood that was “damp and rotten.” If the wood was “damp and rotten” it would have crumbled, or at least left a hole in the top of the chest made by the petech.

The first artifact in the chest was described in the press release as a “simple pottery drinking cup.” The pottery

expert that examined it, Professor Gabriel Barkay from Bar Ilan University in Israel, said it could also be a small bowl and stressed that it was a “common” artifact in everyday use by everybody.

Jewish weddings during the Second Temple periods were elaborate and festive affairs. The bride and groom would not have used a common cup made of coarse pottery for their wedding festivities, but rather, one of silver, gold, glass, or Eastern terra sigillata pottery. Using a “common” cup, if it was a cup and not a bowl, would be like a wealthy bride and groom at a wedding today toasting each other with a Styrofoam cup!

The second artifact in the box was identified as an ungenterium. In the 1st century AD it was called a piriform bottle. This object is used to hold unguents, or perfumes, and is used for domestic as well as funerary purposes. They were regularly left in tombs so that the perfumes could counteract the smell of the decomposing flesh.

This piriform bottle could not have been the object used by “Mary of Bethany, alias Mary Magdalene” (according to the movie) to anoint Jesus for His burial for three reasons. First, the piriform bottle is made of clay, but the Bible says that the vessel Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus with was made of alabaster (Matt. 26:7; Mark 14:3). Second, the piriform bottle is completely intact. The Bible says Mary broke it in order to anoint Jesus (Mark 14:3). Finally, the vessel is too small. The Bible says it contained a pound of spikenard, thus the vessel would have been much larger than the one found in the chest (John 12:3).

Professor Barkay was asked how these objects could have made their way to a cave in France. He suggested two possibilities. First, the Knights Templar brought them back to France with them in the 12th century. The second possibility is that they were purchased on the antiquities market in Israel and taken to Europe recently. I am inclined to believe the latter makes more sense.

I suspect, but can not conclusively prove at this point, that this is all a Hollywood hoax. The “mummified body” apparently is made of plastic; the artifacts were probably recently bought on the antiquities market in Jerusalem and placed in a wooden chest that was buried in a cave near Rennes-le-Chateau; and the elaborate archaeological scavenger hunt was concocted by the Hollywood types for suspense and adventure in the movie. Bottom line: this movie should not be taken seriously and comes nowhere close to the exciting adventures of the fictitious Indiana Jones. Skip this flick.

The Agenda of Bloodline

At the end of the movie, Bruce Burgess said, “For the record, I do think that it’s possible that these discoveries, especially the chest and maybe even the tomb were somehow placed there for Ben, and us to find. That doesn’t make them fake in any way. It just means that someone with an agenda wanted this material revealed, but who?”

I can think of three possibilities. First, some secret organization (in the movie it is the fictitious Priory of Sion) who wants to disprove the deity and bodily resurrection of Jesus and will bump off anybody in the way of their agenda. Second, people who want to sell

books and movie tickets. There is a third, yet more driving, possibility. Bloodline has an agenda. The message they are trying to get out, disguised as a serious documentary, is that Jesus is not God manifest in human flesh and He did not come back from the dead.

The Conclusion of the Matter

The poster for the movie asks the provocative question: "What if the greatest story ever told was a lie?" I think the wrong question was asked. It should have been, "What if the premise and storyline of 'Bloodline' is a lie?" The historical, biblical, and archaeological evidence suggests that this is the case.

The greatest story ever told is still true. The Lord Jesus, in love, left the glories of heaven, humbled Himself, veiled His glory and became a man in order to die on a cross outside of Jerusalem in order to pay for all the sins of humanity (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Phil. 2:5-11; I John 2:2). Three days later, He was bodily resurrected from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of the Father. He left no physical bloodline because He never married Mary Magdalene; He lived a perfect, sinless life here on earth as God manifest in human flesh. However, He does have a spiritual bloodline that is composed of all who have put their trust in Him and Him alone for their salvation (Heb. 2:10). His spiritual children did not earn their salvation, they did not work for it, they did not join a church or be baptized, they simply trusted Jesus to forgive all their sins so He could give them His righteousness so they could enter a perfect Heaven and be in the presence of a holy God forever (Acts 13:38, 39; 16:30, 31; Rom. 4:5; Phil. 3:9; Titus 3:4-7; I John 5:13).

Do not believe the lie of the movie “Bloodline”, but rather, believe the truth of the Word of God, the Bible. Your eternal destiny, Heaven or Hell, will be determined by what you believe.

About the author

Gordon Franz is a Bible teacher who holds an MA in Biblical Studies from Columbia Biblical Seminary, SC. For almost 29 years, he has engaged in extensive research in archaeology and has participated in a number of excavations in and around Jerusalem, including Ketef Hinnom and Ramat Rachel; as well as the excavations at Tel Lachish, Tel Jezreel and Tel Hazor. He has taught the geography of the Bible and led field trips in Israel for the Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies, the Institute of Holy Land Studies, and the IBEX program of Master’s College. He also co-teaches the Talbot School of Theology’s Bible Lands Program. Gordon is on the staff of the Associates for Biblical Research.

Bloodline: Serious Documentary or Hollywood Hoax?

Gordon Franz

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A former graduate student of mine, Brenda, did an undergraduate degree in journalism. She recounted a statement that was made by her professor in one of her "Journalism 101" lectures. The professor said, "The two things that sell newspapers, books, and movies are sex and sensationalism!" Evangelical authors generally don't dabble in the first (unless it's Dr. Tim LaHaye who wrote *The Act of Marriage!*), but there are some who have mastered the art of the second. In evangelical circles, we are inundated by the sensationalistic archaeological claims by so-called modern day Indiana Joneses who claim to have found everything from the Ark of the Covenant with the blood of Jesus on it in Jerusalem (or in Ethiopia, minus the blood), the real tomb of Jesus on the Mount of Olives, Noah's Ark in Iran, the real Cave of Machpelah, Pharaoh's chariot wheels in the Red Sea, the Ten Commandments, the ashes of the red heifer, Mount Sinai in Saudi Arabia, the plan of the ages in the pyramids, the manger of Jesus, and the list goes on and on. Unfortunately for them, under close scholarly scrutiny, these claims evaporate into thin air.

The secular world is not immune to the sensationalistic approach to archaeology either, but sometimes with a more sinister twist: to try and discredit the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. One just has to read *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown (2003); *The Jesus Dynasty*

by James Tabor (2006); and *The Jesus Family Tomb* by Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino (2007). Now there is a new movie out that makes the same attempt to attack the deity of the Lord Jesus and His bodily resurrection. It is called “*Bloodline*” produced by 1244 Films (2008). The director and narrator of the movie is Bruce Burgess and the producer is Rene Barnett.

I went to the Jewish Museum on 5th Avenue in New York City on Monday, May 5, 2008, for the press conference of this new movie. As I entered the museum, there was a large poster on a tripod in the lobby that had a picture from a stained glass window in the Kilmore Church in Dervaig, Isle of Mull, Scotland of Jesus and Mary Magdalene holding hands (and Mary looking pregnant). Above the title of the movie was the provocative question: “What if the greatest story ever told was a lie?” I thought to myself, this is going to be a very interesting news conference, especially with the cast of characters on the panel—and they did not disappoint.

The premise of the movie is that they have “incontrovertible proof” that would “totally refute” Christianity. The movie claims that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and had a child, or children (the sex selling point). After the crucifixion of Jesus, Mary hid the body of Jesus and she and her child, or children, moved to France. The Knights Templar rediscovered the body of Jesus and brought his mummified body to Rennes-Le-Chateau, in southwest France. The movie suggests that the mummified body of Mary Magdalene was recently discovered in the area along with other 1st century AD artifacts from the Jerusalem area associated with the wedding of Jesus and Mary Magdalene (the sensationalism selling point). Another version of the

story is that Jesus skipped out of Jerusalem before the crucifixion and they had “incontrovertible proof” that he was living in France in AD 45 with Mary Magdalene and children [0:38:40]. The movie isn’t clear on which scenario actually happened.

A Knight’s Templar “tomb” was found in 1999 by an English adventurer and treasure hunter, named “Ben Hammott”. This name, however, is an alias because he is afraid that some people are out to get him. Interestingly, the Hebrew meaning of his name is “son of the death.” He is also known on the Internet as Tombman. He was intrigued by the Rennes-le-Chateau mysteries after reading Holy Blood, Holy Grail. Hammott claims that the tomb of Mary, Jesus and others, along with lots of other treasures, were found by a local priest named Berenger Saunier at the end of the 19th century. The priest reburied them in this Templar’s tomb and then blackmailed the Vatican for a “princely sum.”

The priest allegedly left a note with his last confession in a bottle that was found by “Ben Hammott”. The priest’s confession purportedly is: “The resurrection of Jesus was a trick, it was Mary Magdalene who took his body from the tomb. The Disciples were fooled. Later, the body of Jesus was discovered by the Templars and then hidden three times. The Knights protected a great secret which I have found. Not in Jerusalem. The tomb is here. Parts of the body are safe. I have abandoned and renounced my false Church [He is referring to the Roman Catholic Church - GF]. I have done what I have done to preserve the secret. Maybe in the future the time will come for the secret to be revealed.” These are pretty serious claims that are protected by a shadowy organization called the Priory of Sion.

Where's the Beef?

Some will recall the Wendy's hamburger commercial that compared their large hamburgers with their competitor's very small hamburgers and the now famous question that was asked: "Where's the beef?" With this movie, a similar question is asked, "Where's the evidence?" But unlike the Wendy's commercial where the competitor had at least a small beef patty, this movie has no credible evidence for its claims!

This movie purports to be a serious documentary about the proof for the bloodline of Jesus. One should be suspicious these days when "documentaries" come along that make amazing and sensational claims.

Did Mary Magdalene Make it to France?

The movie claims that there was a "thriving Jewish community" in southwest France in the 1st century AD [0:47:34]. That would be an ideal place for Mary and her children to flee from Jerusalem after the crucifixion of Jesus. Unfortunately there is no documentation for this statement, nor are any "expert witnesses" interviewed to substantiate this claim. In fact, the opposite is true, there was no thriving Jewish community living in southwest France in the 1st century AD.

Emil Schurer, in his monumental work, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, states: "As for Southern Gaul it is possible that Jews resided there in the earlier Imperial period, since Christian communities were established in Lyon and Vienne already in the second century, and the Christian missions, at least in the New Testament times, tended to follow in the traces of the Jews. Apart from very

scattered individual items of archaeological evidence, there is however no definite attestation of a Jewish settlement in Gaul until the fifth century” (1986:III. 1:85). Notice Schurer’s evidence for a possible Jewish community in the 1st century is based on speculation. The hard evidence does not point to a thriving community in the area at the time of Jesus, but rather the 5th century AD.

Other scholars addressing the archaeological evidence for Jews living in France point out that of the 245 Jewish Greek inscriptions that are scattered around the Mediterranean world, none have been discovered in France (Safrai and Stern 1976:II:1043). There was, however, one Herodian lamp found in France (1976:II: 673), but that could easily have been brought back to southern Gaul by a French soldier in the Roman Legion.

At the news conference in New York, one of the reporters asked Bruce Burgess what evidence there was that Mary went to France. He replied that there was no strong, hard evidence, just 800 years of “evidence.”

The earliest legends we have of Mary Magdalene living in France are from the 12th century AD, about the time the Knights Templar returned to France with their relics. As Bishop John Spong, the retired Episcopal bishop of Newark, NJ, so keenly observed at the news conference, relics are a great way to increase tourism in small villages! When people come to venerate an object in a church, they would spend money in the village to boost the local economy. John Calvin, the great reformer, wrote a book on these relics, including the tail of the donkey Jesus rode into Jerusalem on (1854: 243). He noted that Mary Magdalene had “two bodies, one at

Auxerre, and another of great celebrity, with its head detached, at St. Maximin, in Provence" (1854: 265). Apparently "Mary Magdalene" was schizophrenic and Calvin was unaware of the Rennes-le-Chateau "body"!

The Parchments and Scavenger Hunt

"Ben Hammott" discovered the cave that contained the tomb with the "corpse" of Mary Magdalene, as well as a wooden chest with the relics from Jerusalem of the 1st century AD. He did this based on clues and measurements he was able to discern in the pictures and statues in the St. Mary Magdalene Church in Rennes-le-Chateau, as well as clues found in bottles that were hidden under rocks or in caves.

On his website he describes a few of the clues but not all of them. He said he will reveal them in his soon to be released book, *Lost Tomb of the Knights Templar. Rennes-le-Chateau Secrets and Discoveries*. Is this an infomercial for the book?

As I watched the movie it looked like an amateurish archaeological scavenger hunt. It taxed my imagination that somebody could move a rock or go into a cave and voila, there was a bottle with a note inside. What really alarmed me was how fresh looking, flexible and clean some of those "parchments" appeared in the movie.

Anybody who has done any research in libraries knows how brittle and discolored pages could be in books from the 19th century. When these books are copied there is always a concern that the pages will crack. In the movie, the "parchments" unroll too easily for paper that had been rolled up for 100 years. The paper did not look

faded and should have cracked when opened so quickly, if in fact, they are 100 years old.

To add credibility to this story, the producers of the film should have a paper expert independently test the paper and ink in order to determine the age of each “parchment.” Experts in this field could examine the paper and tell the date of the paper. Chemical analysis can determine the content of the ink which could give us a date for the ink as well. Readers may recall that similar tests were done on the so-called “Hitler’s Diary” that was eventually determined to be a hoax.

There are some Rennes researchers who question the French and Latin of these parchments and suggest they were written by an Englishmen. One researcher thinks the whole movie is bogus.

The Body of Mary Magdalene

The movie, following the lead of Reverend Lionel Fanthorpe, an Anglican priest from Wales and an avid Rennes researcher, suggests that Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany are the same person [1:41:14] See also Fanthorpe and Fanthrope 1999: 231-238. The evidence for Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany being the same person is non-existent (Bock 2004:13-59; Witherington 2006:15-51).

“Ben Hammott” discovered a small entrance inside a cave that led to another cave complex in 1999. On his first visit, his video camera fell down the hole, but he was able to retrieve it. At the hotel he watched the video and saw what the camera had captured. It revealed what appeared to be a shrouded corpse with the red cross of the Knights Templar. A year later, they returned

with better equipment and lights for the video camera. This time they clearly saw the shrouded object as well as other treasures in chests and boxes.

In December 2006, “Ben Hammott” went back to the cave with Bruce Burgess who brought along a “remote camera rig.” In the movie, Hammott has some kind of device (a knife? on a pole) that cuts the shroud in order to reveal the face of the corpse [1:32:58]. He then cuts the area where the hands are and exposes them. I do not know what the antiquities laws are in France, but the cutting of the shroud could be a deliberate desecration of an archaeological artifact. I am puzzled as to why they did not just lift the whole shroud off the body and expose the entire corpse without cutting the shroud. I suspect the shroud was cut to expose only two parts of the “body”, the head and the hands. The head was exposed in order to show that the corpse was a woman. The hands had a unique clasp that they associated with the clasped hands of Mary Magdalene on a picture on the altar of the church dedicated to her in Rennes-le-Chateau.

A hair sample was obtained and submitted to the Paleo-DNA Labs at Lakehead University in Canada for analysis. The mitochondrial DNA suggested “the Middle Eastern maternal origins of the individual based on haplotyping information.”

It was also noted that this individual was placed on a slab of marble as if she was being venerated [1:36:26]. The conclusion drawn by “Ben Hammott” is that this is the mummified body of Mary Magdalene [1:34:43; 1:39:23].

The body, however, could not be Mary Magdalene, or any other Jewish person, for that matter. During the Second Temple period (the time of Jesus), Jewish people never mummified their dead. At the burial of Jesus normal Jewish burial customs were followed (John 19:38-40).

When a Jewish person died, they were taken to the family tomb and buried before sundown. The body was washed and perfume and spices put on it to counteract the decaying stench of the corpse once it started to decompose. The family would have a one week period of intensive mourning, called shiva. Then there was a less intense period for thirty days, called sholshim. At the end of the year, the family met at the tomb and gathered the bones of the dead individual, washed and anointed them, and placed them in a bone box called an ossuary. This funerary practice is called ossilegium, or secondary burial (Fanny 2000; Rahmani 1961; 1981; 1982a; 1982b; Zlotnick 1966).

The Jewish people during the Second Temple period practiced secondary burial and did not mummify their dead. The only known Israelites to be mummified were Jacob and Joseph (Gen. 50:2, 3, 26), and they were the exception to the rule. Who the mummified “person” is in the movie, I do not know, but it is not Mary Magdalene, nor are any of the other mummified bodies that are purported to be in the tomb those of Jewish people either, and for sure, not Jesus.

If the producers of the movie wanted a better Biblical connection with the burial of “Mary of Bethany, alias Mary Magdalene” (which I do not believe is the case), they should have looked to Jerusalem. In the early

1950's the Franciscan archaeologists excavated a necropolis at Dominus Flavit on the Mount of Olives. In Loculi 70 an ossuary was found, designated no. 27, with inscriptions in Hebrew with the names "Martha and Mary / Miriam" three times! (Bagatti and Milik 1981:77-79; Fig. 3-5; Photo 77, 78). It is quite possible that this ossuary contained the bones of two sisters. We know from the New Testament that there were two sisters with these names from Bethany, on the back side of the Mount of Olives, that lived together (Luke 10:38, 39), one of them was named Mary of Bethany (John 12:1-3). If we follow the movies' scenario, one could make a better case that this ossuary contained the bones of "Mary of Bethany, alias Mary Magdalene", and not the so-called mummified remains in France. At least this burial followed the Jewish burial practice of ossilegium, or secondary burial.

The Wooden Chest with First Century Artifacts

There was a parchment in the 4th bottle found by "Ben Hammott" that indicated that a wooden chest could be found with "the parchments of Abbe Bigou, the cup of Jesus and Mary, and the anointing jar" [1:09:06]. The location of this chest was found by using "clues" from the church and parchments from the bottles. These all pointed to a place, known by the locals, as the "Burial Cave of the Magdalene." Once they located the cave, they used a very unorthodox method to locate the exact spot of the wooden chest. The dowsing rod they used pointed them to the back of this cave [1:10:51]. When they dug down a few centimeters, voila, there was the wooded chest! (If only real archaeologist could be so lucky!).

Bruce Burgess commented that the chest was “extremely damp and rotten.” When I looked at it during the news conference in New York, it did not look rotten, although I did not handle it. The chest should be examined by experts and the kind of wood determined as well as a sample taken for carbon dating and it should be tested. The chest could easily have been purchased from an antique dealer recently somewhere in France. In the movie, when Hammott was using the petech (a tool used by archaeologists for digging dirt) or geologist hammer, he hit the wood of the chest. It gave a sound of a solid piece of wood with a hollow inside [1:11:23; 1:11:46-48], and did not give the sound of wood that was “damp and rotten.” If the wood was “damp and rotten” it would have crumbled or at least left a hole in the top of the chest made by the petech.

The parchment and the movie claim that these 1st century artifacts were connected with the wedding of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Professor Gabriel Barkay of Bar Ilan University in Israel attested to the authenticity of these objects and stated that they dated to the time of Jesus (some of the coins, however, were earlier and later than this time). I personally looked at them during the New York news conference and I am sure they are authentic and were correctly identified and dated by Dr. Barkay. In the wooden chest was a ceramic cup, an ungenterium, a glass phial with a parchment rolled up inside, and about thirty coins. Can these items be associated with the wedding of Jesus?

Before this question can be answered, the issue of Jesus’ marriage should be addressed. This is an idea that has been popularized by *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), but it has been circulating in some theological circles (Spong

1992:187-199; Fanthorpe and Fanthorpe 1999:231-238; Starbird 1993). When the movie, *The Da Vinci Code*, came out, evangelical scholars responded to the ideas expressed in both the book and movie. The works of Dr. Darrell Bock (2004: 13-59) and Dr. Ben Witherington III (2004: 28-37) should be consulted. There is no Biblical evidence to support the claim that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene or anybody else, for that matter. Now let us turn our attention to the artifacts found in the wooden chest.

The first artifact in the chest was a ceramic drinking cup. In his analysis, Dr. Barkay described it as a “bowl with an out flaring rim and a flat base” [1:18:13], similar to what Paul Lapp identifies as a small deep bowl (Lapp 1961:175). In the press release it was described as “simple pottery drinking cup” Barkay stressed that it was “common”, thus an ordinary household item that was used everyday by everybody.

Reverend Lionel Fanthorpe states that Mary of Bethany is Mary Magdalene and she was very wealthy [1:41:15]. A case can be made that Mary of Bethany was wealthy, but not that she was Mary Magdalene. Jewish wedding during the Second Temple periods were elaborate and festive affairs. The bride and groom would not have used a common cup made of course pottery for their wedding festivities, but rather, one of silver, gold, glass, or Eastern terra sigillata pottery (Avigad 1980:91). Using a “common” cup, if it was a cup and not a bowl, would be like a wealthy bride and groom at a wedding today toasting each other with a Styrofoam cup!

The second artifact in the box was identified as an ungenterium. This object is used to hold unguents, or

perfumes, and is used for domestic as well as funerary purposes. They were regularly left in tombs so that the perfumes could counteract the smell of the decomposing flesh. The first century ungenterium is called a piriform bottle in the archaeological literature (Kahane 1952a, 1952b; Lapp 1961: 199; Avigad 1980:127-129, photo 124; Vitto 2000: 88, 107, 111). This piriform bottle could not have been the object used by “Mary of Bethany, alias Mary Magdalene” to anoint Jesus for His burial for three reasons. First, the piriform bottle is made of clay, but the Bible says that the vessel Mary anointed Jesus with was made of alabaster (Matt. 26:7; Mark 14:3). Second, the piriform bottle is completely intact. The Bible says Mary broke it in order to anoint Jesus (Mark 14:3). Finally, the vessel is too small. The Bible says it contained a pound of spikenard, thus the vessel would have been much larger than the one found in the chest (John 12:3).

The third object in the chest was a glass phial, also called an alabastra. Inside of this glass vessel there was a rolled up parchment which was carbon dated by the University of Oxford radiocarbon accelerator unit. The results suggest that there was a 68.2% chance that it dated between AD 1440 and 1480, or a 95.4% chance that it was dated between 1450 and 1520. Unfortunately the test was done only on the parchment and not the ink. All that the test reveals is that the parchment was made about AD 1452, but does not tell us who wrote the message, when it was written and what their motives may have been for writing it. For all we know, somebody could have taken a blank corner of a parchment that was known to be old and wrote a “message” on it a couple of years ago, rolled it up and placed it in the glass

alabastra that could have been recently bought on the antiquities market in Jerusalem!

The clues from the fourth bottle said they would find the “parchments (plural) of Abbe Bigou” in the chest [1:09:06]. Abbe Bigou is identified as the priest of Rennes-le-Chateau before the French Revolution. There are two unexplained discrepancies with this discovery. First, the clue from the fourth bottle said there would be parchments, plural, more than one. There was only one in the phial and none others in the wooden chest. Second, the French Revolution began in 1789. It is not stated what years before the French Revolution that Abbe Bigou was the priest. The movie needs to explain why there is a 300 some odd year discrepancy between the carbon date of the parchment and the beginning of the French Revolution.

There were about 30 coins in the wooden chest and all the coins appear to have been minted in Jerusalem. This hoard of coins covered a range of about 1,400 years, including Hasmonean coins (2nd century BC), Herodian coins (end of 1st century BC), first century procurator coins, Byzantine coins (5th, 6th century AD), one Umayyad (Islamic) coin and the latest was a Jerusalemite Crusader coin, probably of King Baldwin, of the 12th century AD. The last coin hints at the fact that the hoard was gathered by the Crusaders, most likely in the 12th century. If it was gathered the 12th century then it would be possible that the Knights Templar brought them back when they returned to France. However, it could also that they were gathered together in the 21st century. Anybody could have easily purchased them on the antiquities market in Jerusalem or even from the young boys outside of Jaffa Gate or

near the Gihon Springs in Jerusalem who sell post cards and ancient coins.

Internal Inconsistencies

There are internal inconsistencies within the movie, but I will leave them to be pointed out by the Rennes researchers who know a whole lot more about the subject than I ever will.

Some have already noted objects in the “tomb” that have been moved about even though there is only one small entrance and nobody has supposedly been in the cave. Another is the incorrect spelling of the French and Latin on the parchments that were allegedly made by the well-educated priest, Berenger Sauniere. I think once the movie is released to the public, more inconsistencies will be discovered as it is scrutinized by the knowledgeable Rennes researchers.

Two inconsistencies I noticed are these. First, when the interview with Gino Sandri, the supposed general secretary of the Order of Priory of Sion, was finished, Bruce Burgess said they turned off the cameras. We see a man in the back of the café get up and hand Sandi a note before this mystery man walked out of the café [0:11:39]. The next scene we see Sandi holding the card with his thumb partially covering the note, but part of the note can be read. Burgess said, “Who he was and what the note says, I do not know.” Yet the note is shown in the movie. Is this a Hollywood reconstruction of the event for dramatic purposes? If so, is that really Gino Sandri in the movie or just an actor? At best, this movie should be called a docudrama, but not a documentary.

The second inconsistency was the discovery of the third bottle. In this “discovery” “Ben Hammott” and somebody else are trying to remove a rock from the ground. When it is finally loosen, Hammott rolls down the hill with the rock. For a brief second, we see the ground that was underneath the rock and there is no bottle to be seen [1:00:53]. After Hammott stops his roll, the movie cuts back to the spot where the rock is, and there is the bottle [1:01:02]. The question that needs to be answered is who put the yellow or orange bottle there?

One burning question I have is who was the second person in the cave with “Ben Hammott” when he cut the shroud and exposed the head and hands of “Mary”? In the movie it is a night scene [1:27:19], Ben is spooked because he thinks somebody is out to get him. He leaves Bruce and his cameraman to watch the car while he walks to the cave alone with one flashlight and a large carrying case, presumably containing the remote camera equipment [1:29:27]. Once inside the cave, we see the lights on the floor of the cave from two flashlights [1:29:40] and the shadow of somebody using a video camera [1:30:03]. “Ben Hammott” could not have done that alone. Was there a fourth person in the party that we are not told about? Or did Bruce and the cameraman get scared of the wild boars and go in anyway?

Will the Tomb Ever be Excavated?

At the end of the movie it was announced that, “Planning is now underway for a full scale archaeological examination of the tomb site with Ben Hammott and the French government” [1:55:06].

At the press conference I asked Lionel Fanthorpe when the excavation will be conducted. He said it would depend on “Ben Hammott” because he is taking care of his cancer-stricken son. If his son does have cancer, we wish him well and pray for his recovery. However, this could be a very convenient excuse to postpone the “examination” indefinitely. I, for one, am not holding my breath waiting for a news conference from Paris, London or Hollywood about spectacular discoveries from some cave near Rennes-le-Chateau. My mind, skeptical from experience, doubts the possibility that the French antiquities authority, the DRAC-LR, has jurisdiction over a movie set in Hollywood, California, or even England!

The Agenda of Bloodline

Bishop Spong stated at the news conference that the premise of the movie was “nuts” and that the movie itself was “speculation” and “off-the-wall.” Normally I do not agree with the bishop’s theology, but I was shouting inside myself, “Amen, preach it!” (He even autographed one of his books for me after the press conference).

At the end of the movie, Bruce Burgess said, “For the record, I do think that it’s possible that these discoveries, especially the chest and maybe even the tomb were somehow placed there for Ben, and us to find. That doesn’t make them fake in any way. It just means that someone with an agenda wanted this material revealed, but who?” [1:49:53].

I can think of three possibilities. First, some secret organization who wants to disprove the deity and bodily resurrection of Jesus and will bump off anybody in the way of their agenda. Second, people who want to sell books (a la *Lost Tomb of the Knights Templar*) and movie

tickets (a la Bloodline). There is a third, yet more driving, possibility. Bloodline has an agenda. The message they are trying to get out, disguised as a serious documentary, is that Jesus is not God and He did not come back from the dead.

Bruce Burgess, however, dropped some subtle hints that this movie might be a hoax. He said: when he saw the video of the shrouded corpse for the first time, he thought it looked like a movie set, and too good to be true [0:48:49]. When some locals wanted to show him parchments he said he knew it was a “scam”, but he wanted to see them anyway! [0:41:14]. When he asked Professor Barkay how the 1st century artifacts got to France, Barkay said they could have been bought on the antiquities market in Israel recently and brought to Europe, or they could have been brought to France by Knights Templar [1:20:04]. The “buying antiquities” remark was not edited out of the movie, even though it was omitted from the press release. Professor Barkay stressed that the antiquities were “common” objects. In other words, they are a “dime a dozen” and could easily have been purchased on the antiquities market in Jerusalem, or even on EBay®, for that matter.

The film asks the question: “What if the greatest story ever told was a lie?”

Perhaps the question that should be asked is: “What if the premise and storyline in this movie is a lie?” What if somebody recently placed the parchments in bottles for the archaeological scavenger hunt in order to find the wooden chest? What if somebody recently bought some ancient coins, an ungenterium, a common clay cup, and a glass phial from one of the antiquities dealers in

Jerusalem several years ago and places it in the wooden chest? What if somebody recently forged all those parchments? What if somebody recently recreated a plastic mummified “body” of Mary Magdalene (actually just her head and hands)? What if somebody had an agenda to attempt to disprove the deity of the Lord Jesus and His bodily resurrection? What if they wanted to lead people away from the truth of the greatest story ever told, and also try and cash in on the run away best selling fictitious novel, the Da Vinci Code? If this is the case, we have on our hands another Hollywood Hoax.

The movie began with this quote from the apocrypha Gospel of Thomas: “Do not tell lies for there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed, and there is nothing covered up that will not be uncovered” (Gospel of Thomas 6; for a more accurate translation, see Blatz 1991:1:118). We will end our critique of the movie with this passage. While this text was not inspired of the Holy Spirit it speaks for itself!

The Conclusion of the Matter

Fortunately the greatest story ever told is still true. The Lord Jesus, in love, left the glories of heaven, humbled Himself, veiled His glory and became a man in order to die on a cross outside of Jerusalem in order to pay for all the sins of all humanity (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Phil. 2:5-11; I John 2:2). Three days later, He was bodily resurrected from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of the Father. He left no physical bloodline because He never married Mary Magdalene or anyone else while living a perfect, sinless life here on earth as God manifest in human flesh. However, He does have a spiritual bloodline. Hebrews 2:10 says: “ For it is fitting

for Him [Jesus], for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering.” Jesus’ spiritual bloodline is composed of all who have put their trust in Him and Him alone for their salvation. His spiritual children did not earn their salvation, they did not work for it, they did not join a church or be baptized, they simply trusted Jesus to forgive all their sins so He could give them His righteousness, or perfection, so they could enter a perfect Heaven and be in the presence of a holy God forever (Rom. 4:5; Phil. 3:9; Titus 3:4-7; I John 5:13).

The Apostle John wrote in the introduction to his gospel: “He came into his own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:11-13). In one of his epistles he also wrote: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now are we children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (I John 3:1, 2). Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are the true spiritual bloodline of Jesus, not some fictitious Merovingian line that claims to descend from Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Do not believe the lie of the movie “Bloodline”, but rather, believe the truth of the Word of God, the Bible. Your eternal destiny, Heaven or Hell, will be determined by what you believe.

Footnotes

I have placed the beginning of a quote or fact from the movie in brackets. For example, [1:07:33] means the quote begins at one hour, seven minutes and thirty-three seconds into the movie. I have the “For Screening Only” version so the numbers may be different when the DVD is finally released. Some statements are taken from the press release and are not footnoted, but can be found on the Bloodline website. Others are from websites and they are list in the bibliography.

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ERASTUS: “Salt and Light” in the Government of Corinth

Introduction

In 1780, at the age of 21 years and two weeks, William Wilberforce was the youngest man ever to be elected to the British parliament. He was an eloquent orator, a gifted singer and was invited to join five exclusive clubs in London. He enjoyed the London social scene: dining, playing cards, dancing and the theater. Here was a man who “had it all” at such a young age.

In February 1785 he began to read a book entitled *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* by Philip Doddridge. During that spring he traveled on holiday to the Continent with Isaac Milner, a tutor at the Queens College, Cambridge. As they traveled they discussed the book by Doddridge and other spiritual matters. It was not until November or December of that year that the “Great Change”, as Wilberforce describes it, took place. William Wilberforce put his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior from sin. What a change that was. Among other things, he was delivered from the power of darkness and conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Col. 1:13).

With his decision to trust Jesus Christ as his Savior, he began to struggle within himself over the issue of whether politics was compatible with the Christian life. Whether serving in parliament was consistent with his spiritual walk with the Lord, or should he leave parliament altogether and go into full time Christian ministry? During this struggle, he visited an old family

friend, John Newton, a pastor in London, and asked for his advice. The former slave trader and author of the famous hymn “Amazing Grace” encouraged Wilberforce to remain in Parliament. As a result of that conversation, Wilberforce wrote: “When I came away I found my mind in a calm, tranquil state, more humbled, and looking more devotedly up to God.” John Newton later wrote to his friend and fellow song writer, William Cowper: “I judge he [Wilberforce] is now decidedly on the right track. ... I hope the Lord will make him a blessing both as a Christian and a statesman. How seldom do these characters coincide!! But they are not incompatible” (Metaxas 2007: 59-61). Please notice Newton called him a statesman and not a politician. There is a big difference between the two.

As Wilberforce grew in his Christian life, his mind was transformed as he studied the truths set forth in the Word of God. He concluded that “all that was his – his wealth, his talents, his time – was not really his. It all belonged to God and had been given to him to use for God’s purposes and according to God’s will. God had blessed him so that he, in turn, might bless others, especially those less fortunate than himself” (Metaxas 2007:63).

You know “the rest of the story.” Wilberforce, as a member of parliament, got legislation passed in 1807 to abolish the slave trade in Great Britain. But it was only on his deathbed in 1833 that he learned that legislation had passed that abolished slavery throughout all the colonies in the British Empire. Here was a very influential Christian who understood the truths of the Word of God, the inhumanity of slavery, and became

“salt and light” in a corrupt world and changed the course of human history.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the believers in the church in Corinth: “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called [to Christian service]. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence” (I Cor. 1:26-29).

Let us examine the life of Erastus, one of the exceptions to the rule: “not many mighty”. Here was a “mighty” person in Corinth that God called to Christian service even while he was an important government official in the city, a man who was “salt and light” in his community for the glory of God.

Erastus in Scripture

The name Erastus appears only three times in Scripture. Scholars have debated whether all three passages refer to the same person, or if they are two or three different people. For the purpose of this paper, I will assume that all the passages refer to the same person, Erastus from the city of Corinth.

We first meet Erastus near the end of Paul’s stay in Ephesus during his third missionary journey in AD 55. Dr. Luke writes: “So he [Paul] sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time” (Acts 19:22). There are two things to notice in this passage. First,

Erastus ministered to Paul. He had a servant's heart and helped Paul out in the work of the Lord in Ephesus. Second, most likely Timothy and Erastus were sent into Macedonia to organize the collection for Jerusalem. Erastus would have been a wise choice for this project because he had, as we shall see, a background in financial matters.

We are not told when Erastus came to faith in the Lord Jesus as his Savior. Nor are we told his financial status. One could speculate that he came to know the Lord Jesus as his Savior while Paul, Timothy and Silas were ministering in Corinth during Paul's second missionary journey (AD 50-52; Acts 18:1-17).

Murphy-O'Conner speculates on how Paul might have met Erastus. He suggests: "Two aediles were elected each year, and ranked just below the duoviri, who were the eponymous magistrates of the city. Their responsibilities included the management of the public markets. It is not impossible that Paul first met Erastus in the latter's official capacity – that is, when paying rent or taxes on his workspace, which would explain why he called Erastus 'the treasurer' of the city'" (1984: 155).

Erastus seemed to have some wealth because he could afford to take time off and rejoin Paul when he was ministering in Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey (AD 52-55; Acts 19:1-Acts 20:1).

After Erastus organized the collection for Jerusalem with Timothy he apparently returned to Corinth. He is not listed with the men that take the collection to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). When Paul later visited Corinth in AD 57 he wrote a letter to the church in Rome. He sent greetings to the believers in the church in Rome from the saints in

Corinth, including Erastus. "Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother" (Rom. 16:23). In this passage, Erastus is called the "treasurer of the city" (ho oikonomos tes poleos). It is interesting to note, that even though this was an influential position, Erastus was actively involved in the assembly in Corinth that apparently met in the villa of Gaius. The second thing to notice is that Erastus was also missions minded. He asked Paul to send his greetings to the church in Rome. Apparently he knew some of the people in the church in that city. More than likely he knew Aquila and Priscilla from the time when they lived in Corinth after they were expelled from Rome in AD 49 (Acts 18:2).

The third reference to Erastus is found in the last epistle that Paul penned during his second imprisonment in Rome right before his death in AD 67. He wrote: "Erastus stayed in Corinth" (II Tim. 4:20). He apparently decided to settle down and be "salt and light" within his community and be a help to the assembly in Corinth.

The "Erastus" Inscription in Corinth

In 1929, the excavator of Corinth, Theodore Shear, discovered an inscription that would become famous in Biblical studies. It was found on the edge of a public square near the theater.

In his preliminary report, Shear describes his discovery this way: "On a long pavement block at the entrance of the square from the street are cuttings for letters that were presumably for bronze and were fastened in place with lead. The stone, which is 2.26 m. long, is cut away at both ends, but the spacing of the second line of the inscription is such that probably not much of the stone is

missing. The inscription reads ERASTVS - PRO - AED / S - P - STRAVIT. 'Erastus, procurator, aedile, laid the pavement at his own expense.' The archaeological evidence indicates that this pavement was in existence in the middle of the first century AD. A procurator of Corinth named Erastus, who was in office at this time, is mentioned by St. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans, XVI, 23. A Roman procurator of a great provincial city would normally be a man of wealth and influence and as an administrator of the city he would be opportunely situated for the execution of public works at his own expense. It is, therefore, most probable that the procurator Erastus who paved the square is identical with the Erastus who was 'chamberlain of the city' and a friend of St. Paul" (Shear 1929: 525-526).

Cicero and Paul on Wealth and Generosity

Cicero (106-43 BC), the great orator and political thinker, wrote a treatise on civic duties to his son who was studying in Athens in 44 BC and entitled it *On Duties* (2005). The early Church Fathers called Cicero "the model of the good pagan" (Everitt 2003: viii).

Concerning wealth, Cicero wrote: "For the greatest privilege of wealth is, beyond all peradventure, the opportunity it affords for doing good, without sacrificing one's fortune" (*On Duties*, Book 2.64; LCL 21:237). The Apostle Paul, on the other hand, put an eternal perspective on wealth and warned his son in the faith, Timothy, about it. He wrote: "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and

harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness" (I Tim. 6:7-11). Wealth, in and of itself, is not evil, but if it controls the life of the believer in the Lord Jesus, it could cause the believer to stray from his or her faith and this would lead to greed and sorrow. Paul wanted Timothy to emphasize the eternal aspect of life and pursue godly living and be content with food and clothing.

Cicero wrote to his son about generosity in financial matters. He said: "Next in order, as outlined above, let us speak of kindness and generosity. ... Now, there are many - and especially those who are ambitious for eminence and glory - who rob one to enrich another; and they expect to be thought generous towards their friends, if they put them in the way of getting rich, no matter by what means. Such conduct, however, is so remote from moral duty that nothing can be more completely opposed to duty. We must, therefore, take care to indulge only in such liberality as will help our friends and hurt no one. The conveyance of property by Lucius Sulla and Gaius Caesar from its rightful owners to the hands of strangers should, for that reason, not be regarded as generosity; for nothing is generous, if it is not at the same time just" (On Duties, Book 1:42-44; LCL 21: 47-49). One can not help but notice some modern political trends in what Cicero wrote: pay to play and spread the wealth around! Cicero said these

things are not moral. That is why he is called the “model of a good pagan”!

Civic leaders used to spend their own money on such things as banquets for their friends and entertainment for the masses. The latter usually came in the form of gladiatorial games. Juvenal, at the end of the 1st century AD, would coin the phrase “bread and circuses”, in other words “food and entertainment.” As long as the people were fed and entertained, they were happy and the politicians could do what they wanted.

Cicero thought that spending money on food and entertainment was not a wise thing to do. He offered a better alternative for the civic leaders. He suggested: “Again, the expenditure of money is better justified when it is made for walls, docks, harbors, aqueducts, and all those works which are of service to the community. There is, to be sure, more of present satisfaction in what is handed out, like cash down; nevertheless public improvements win us greater gratitude with posterity” (On Duties, Book 2:60; LCL 21:233). In other words, Cicero believes that the investment of ones own money in public works projects, and not the taxpayers, would benefit more people over a longer period of time and was a better use of ones wealth. Apparently Erastus followed this advice and spent his own money on the pavement near the theater in Corinth when he was the “treasurer of the city.”

The Apostle Paul wrote about the Christians relationship to the civil government (Rom. 13:1-7). He admonishes Christians to “Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same [civil authorities]” (Rom. 13:3). Perhaps

Paul had Erastus and the pavement he gave to his community in mind when he penned these words.

Application

There are several important lessons that we can learn from the life of Erastus. The first lesson to be learned is that God's ways are not always our ways. Generally, God uses the foolish things, the weak things, and the base things to confound the wise, the mighty and the noble. However, there are exceptions to this rule. Erastus was an example of a mighty person, in a very important civic position, that God used as "salt and light" in the government of Corinth. Christians are admonished to pray for all men including "kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence" (I Tim. 2:1, 2). When we hear of a Christian politician (I realize that is an oxymoron) we should pray even more for them, that they would be honest, have integrity and not be tempted towards corruption.

The second lesson to be learned is that even though Erastus was an influential person in the city of Corinth, he did not neglect the Lord's work in the city. He was actively involved in the assembly and he was missions minded because he had a concern for the Lord's work elsewhere in the world.

The third lesson has to do with the questions: Should a Christian be involved in politics? Or, should a Christian run for public office? The Bible does not give a definitive "yes" or "no" answer to these questions. The answer to these questions would be based on our motives. Why do you want to get involved in politics? Or, why do you want to run for public office? If the believers answer is: I want

to run for fame, fortune, glory and power, then the motive is wrong and the venture should not be perused. If, on the other hand, the answer is: I want to be “salt and light” in a corrupt political system and want to be a “servant” to my community, state or nation, then the motives are proper and one should pursue this avenue of service.

Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Cyprus, trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior under the preaching of Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary journey.

Interestingly, the proconsul did not resign his post after he got saved but he continued to govern. He apparently did have a concern for the spiritual well being of his family and friends. Since he could not leave Cyprus, he sent Paul and Barnabas to his hometown of Psidian Antioch to reach his family and friends with the gospel (Acts 13:6-14).

The fourth lesson to be learned from the life of Erastus is that we should give back to our community in a practical way. Erastus paid for the pavement and had his name placed on an inscription. Whenever he shared the gospel with fellow Corinthians they would remember seeing that inscription and say to themselves, “This man is genuine, he’s one of us, and I should listen to him.”

Perhaps this is what Paul had in mind when he penned the words: “For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ” (II Cor. 2:17).

“Peddling the word of God” has the idea of trying to sell something for personal gain. Erastus did not do this. He gave a practical gift to his community and this afforded him an opportunity for the gospel.

I always tell my students, tongue-in-cheek, that the best business to be in is the religious business. You can suck more people, con more people, in that business, than any other business in the world. The only drawback is that you will have to answer to the Lord for it at the end of the day!

Believers in the Lord Jesus do not peddle the gospel. We are not trying to make money on it. We are sharing something that is free to any and all who would put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. We all have a problem, it is called sin. We have all come short of God's glory, or perfection. If we were to pay for our own sins, we would spend eternity separated from God in Hell. That's the bad news. The good news is this: the Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest in human flesh, died on the Cross and paid for all our sins. He rose from the dead three days later. This proved that sin had been paid for, death had been vanquished and Satan defeated. He offers His righteousness to any and all who would put their trust in Him. Over and over in John's gospel, the word "believe" is used. The word means to put ones trust in, or rely upon, the Lord Jesus as ones Savior.

What can we do to demonstrate to a cynical world that we are not peddling the gospel? A good practical demonstration to those around would be to give something back to the community. How can a church or individual do this? If there is a local disaster, the church can step in and help in a practical way: food, clothing, and shelter. A church could also have a day-care center for the community. If the church has a gym, allow the youths to use it for recreation. The church as a body could get involved in some civic project. I am aware of one church that was involved in the "adopt a highway"

project. They clean a segment of one of the highways in the vicinity of the church. A sign was posted along the road saying: "Highway cleaned by (and the name of this church)." Or perhaps have a teaching English as a second language program. On a personal level, one could volunteer as a fireman, or ambulance worker, or in the library. Even a public school teacher is giving back to the community.

Erastus was a "mighty" man in a very influential government position. He was "salt and light" in a corrupt city, but did not neglect his responsibility to the local assembly in Corinth. He was also missions minded and had a concern for the Lord's work beyond Corinth.

In a society that is starving for true heroes, Christians should talk about, and emulate such Christian statesmen as William Wilberforce, but also realize an example of a Christian statesman is grounded in Scripture: a good example being Erastus.

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Jesus IS Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), is the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. It begins at sundown on the eve of the 10th of Tishri on the Jewish calendar. If you are in Jerusalem, it is a day like no other day. It is absolutely quiet and nothing moves, except people walking. There are no cars on the roads. The only vehicles that are allowed are emergency vehicles.

One year I was in Jerusalem on Yom Kippur. The silence was deafening! So much so, that even the birds could be heard singing. I was staying at the Institute of Holy Land Studies on Mount Zion and could hear casual conversations by people across the Hinnom Valley as if we were talking one to another.

The Biblical Yom Kippur

On the LORD's "Divine Calendar" (Lev. 23), Yom Kippur is observed on the tenth day of the seventh month (Tishri). On this day, no work is to be done and the people are to afflict their souls (Lev. 23:26-32).

When the Tabernacle and Temples stood, the nation of Israel was to follow certain rituals and the High Priest was to offer specific sacrifices on this Day (Lev. 16; Num. 29:7-11). These sacrifices could atone for (cover) sin, but could never take sin away. The Holy Spirit gives a divine commentary on this Day and its services and shows how the Lord Jesus is the fulfillment of Yom Kippur and the perfect sacrifice that paid for all sin and removed sin once and for all (Heb. 9 and 10; especially 9:12, 12; 10:1-4, 12, 14, 18). For a discussion of the Yom

Kippur practices during the Second Temple period, see Edersheim 1976:302-329.

Interesting Added Traditions

The Mishnah, the rabbinic commentary on the Bible as well as the Talmud, the commentary on the Mishnah, devotes a whole tractate to this day. The tractates are simply called Yoma, the Day. Perhaps this is the day the Book of Hebrews refers to when it states: “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (10:25). Most commentators suggest “the Day” is either the return of Christ, or the Day of Judgment, or the destruction of Jerusalem, but the context may indicate that it is the Day of Atonement.

Sometime during the Second Temple period, a tradition was added, based on Isaiah 1:18, of tying a scarlet wool cord, or skein, around the horns of the scapegoat that was to be sent into the Wilderness. The tradition stated that if the Lord forgave the nation of Israel sins for that year, the cord turned from scarlet to white (BT Yoma 67a, pp. 314, 315 in Soncino edition). Yet the Talmud records: “Our Rabbis taught: ‘During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot [“for the LORD”] did not come up in the right hand nor did the crimson-coloured strap become white” (BT Yoma 39b, p. 186 in Soncino edition). The Temple was destroyed in AD 70. Forty years prior to that was AD 30. What happened in AD 30 to cause the cord never to change color again and show the nation of Israel that their sins were forgiven by the Lord? At Passover of AD 30, the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect, spotless Lamb of God,

died as the perfect sacrifice to take away sins forever (Heb. 10:1-10; I Cor. 5:7; I Pet. 1:18, 19). After His death, the nation in general, rejected the Lord Jesus as their Messiah and sought salvation by their own works (Rom. 10). Thus, the nation's sins were not forgiven.

The Prophetic Significance of Yom Kippur

The Feasts of the LORD recorded in Lev. 23 are for Israel, not the Church, and provide a prophetic outline for the re-gathering of Israel back to the Land of Israel (Isa. 11:11; 27:13) and their final salvation. The Lord Jesus, in His great Olivet Discourse, describes a future period of Tribulation for the nation of Israel. At the end of the Great Tribulation, the Lord will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, in order to gather together His elect [in the context, Israel, not the Church] from the four corners of the earth, back to the Land of Israel (Matt. 24:29-31). These ten days of gathering the nation back to the Land, will lead up to the Day of Atonement, when "they will look upon Me (the LORD) whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10-13:1). When was the LORD pierced? The Second Person of the Triune God was pierced on the Cross of Calvary when He voluntarily died in our place (John 19:34; Rev. 1:7; John 10:11, 14-18). It will be on this day in the future, that Israel shall "call upon the name of the LORD" (Jesus, God manifest in human flesh) and "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 10:8-13; 11:26, 27). Then, the nation of Israel will be born in a day (Isa. 66:8).

The Book of Jonah and Yom Kippur

Before Yom Kippur begins, the book of Jonah is studied by the Jewish people. As the sun is setting at the end of

Yom Kippur the book is read in the synagogue. There are two reasons for this reading. The first reason is to show that one can not run from God; and the second is to show that God is gracious and merciful when people turn to Him.

What to do on Yom Kippur?

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, Yeshua ha-Mashioch, you can rejoice that all your sins have been paid for and completely forgiven: past – present – and future sins.

If you have never trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as your sin-bearer, then you need to trust Him as the One who died for all your sins and rose again from the dead three days later. The resurrection demonstrated that sin has been paid for, death vanquished and Satan defeated. The Lord Jesus offers the forgiveness of sins, a home in Heaven and His righteousness to any who trust in Him and not in their own works or merits for eternal life (John 3:16; Isa. 53:6; Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8, 9; Phil. 3:9; I John 5:13).

Again for believers in the Lord Jesus today should read through the Book of Jonah. As you do, there are two thoughts to contemplate: first, “remember that we can run, but we cannot hide from God”. He knows where we are and what we are doing at all times (Ps. 139:7-10). Second: meditate on the grace and mercy of God. In Jonah 4:1-3 the people of Nineveh turned to the LORD; from the king in the palace all the way down to the beggar on the street (Matt. 12:41; Luke 11:32), yet Jonah was displeased with the results of his preaching and was angry with the Lord. Jonah knew his Bible. He knew all about the grace and mercy of God (4:2), yet he

did not want God to show grace (giving them what they did not deserve) to these people by extending salvation and forgiveness; nor did Jonah want God to show mercy (not giving them what they did deserve) by executing judgment. Jonah was more interested in watching God nuke Nineveh, then seeing God forgive them. Thus embarrassed, he prayed to the Lord to take his life.

How many times in our daily life do we do something wrong, and we know it's wrong from the Bible, yet we try to justify our sin, or rationalize it away? We should contemplate the grace and mercy of God in our own life, because just like Jonah experienced another opportunity, Jesus is also the God of the second (and the third, and the fourth, and the fifth, and ...) chance (3:1). Truly He is gracious and merciful to His children.

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Psalm 63: Longing to Worship the LORD while in the Wilderness

PSALM 63: Longing to Worship the LORD while in the Wilderness Gordon Franz Introduction Let's be honest, we do not live in a perfect world, nor is our homeland Paradise. There is a Millennial Kingdom coming when King Jesus will rule from Jerusalem with justice and righteousness, but that day is still in the future. We live in the nasty, here and now where Murphy's Law is the norm. "If anything can go wrong, it will go wrong!" This world we live in is far from perfect. It is a world where injustice is the norm and unrighteousness prevails.

King David was in a very inhospitable environment with disastrous circumstances beyond his control when he composed Psalm 63. His son, Prince Absalom, instigated a revolt against him. King David fled eastward from Jerusalem through the Judean Desert, most likely at the end of the summer (cf. 2 Sam. 16:1). David escaped to the Levitical city of Mahanaim, in the friendlier region of Gilead on the other side of the Jordan River (2 Sam. 17:24; CBA 109).

As we examine this psalm, we will see David's desire to worship the Lord even though he had been cut off from access to the sanctuary in Jerusalem. He uses three metaphors from his own personal experience to convey this desire and how God might bring it to pass: (a) thirsting for the Lord in the wilderness, (b) satisfaction after a gourmet banquet in the sanctuary, and (c) following the Lord as his Shepherd and trusting in His protection so he can return to the sanctuary and worship the Lord.

Historical and Geographical Setting

This psalm's superscription reads: "A psalm of David when he was in the Wilderness of Judah." The Wilderness of Judah (Midbar Yehuda) is a specific geographical location within the tribal territory of Judah (Josh. 15:21, 33, 48, 61). It is situated to the east of the cultivated farmland of the Hill Country of Judah and slopes down to the Dead Sea with a vertical drop right before the sea. Its northern limit was the Hill Country of Ephraim, delineated by the present-day Wadi Auja to the north of Jericho, and it extended south about 96 kilometers (60 miles) to the Biblical Negev. The words wilderness and desert are used interchangeably in different translations of the Bible for the Hebrew word *midbar*. The same will be done In this paper.

The Wilderness of Judah is easily distinguished on a geological map because it is composed of Senonian soft chalk. The chalk formation is not conducive to agriculture, but grass and flowers do grow there during the rainy season, thus providing food for pasturage.

The prophet Isaiah describes the wilderness (of Judah) in his comfort passage (40:3-9). The Voice, John the Baptizer (cf. Mark 1:3, 4), was crying out: "All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath [*ruach* = hamsin winds] of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isa. 40:6-8; all quotations from Scripture are from the NKJV). Isaiah is describing the phenomenon of the hot, dry hamsin winds that blow from the Arabian Desert soon after Passover in the spring. This east wind

kills all the grass and flowers very quickly. David had used a similar word picture in Psalm 103:15-17.

Bethlehem, the hometown of David, was in the transitional zone between the agricultural land of the Hill Country of Judah and the pastures of the Wilderness of Judah. As its name, literally House of Bread, implies, there was plenty of fertile soil around Bethlehem in which to grow wheat and barley (cf. Ruth 2), and yet just to the east was the place for shepherding.

There are three periods in David's life when he was in the Judean Desert. For each period in the wilderness, there were important lessons for David to learn.

For young David, the Wilderness of Judah was a place of growing and learning. While tending his family's flock, he honed his hunting skills by killing a lion and a bear (1 Sam. 17:34-37). There was plenty of time to practice using his slingshot. His preparation paid off when he went big-game hunting in the Elah Valley and bagged the giant, Goliath. There was plenty of time to fine-tune his musical talent as well. The Lord used David's skillful harp playing to calm the distressing spirit that possessed King Saul (1 Sam. 16:14-23). The Lord would also use David's musical abilities to bless and instruct the souls of men and women throughout the ages as they sang his psalms, some of which were composed in the Judean Desert.

The wilderness also afforded David solitude and quiet times to contemplate the Lord, His ways, and His attributes. At night, while tending his flock, he saw the majestic starlit sky and sang, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Ps. 19:1).

While in the wilderness, David also learned some lessons in shepherding that would be helpful when God called David to shepherd His people Israel (2 Sam. 7:8). Yet David realized it was the Lord who was his Shepherd and He was the One who provided for David, guided, protected, and comforted him until he dwelt in the House of the Lord forever (Ps. 23). The prophet Ezekiel tells us that, in the future, a resurrected David will be the shepherd over a united Israel (34:22-25; cf. Jer. 30:9).

The second time David spent time in the Judean Desert was during his flight from Saul (1 Sam. 19:18-27:6; CBA 92).

The final time David was in the Judean Desert was when he fled from his son Absalom (2 Sam. 15-19). The internal evidence of Psalm 63 suggests that the historical setting for this psalm was during this flight. The psalm was composed after David had become king (63:11) and after he had seen the Ark of Covenant (63:2).

Literary Structure

There is no consensus among Bible teachers as to the literary structure of this psalm. For the purpose of this exposition, one phrase (actually one word in Hebrew) that repeats itself three times in this psalm will be used as the touchstone for each stanza. That phrase is “my soul” (63:1, 5, 8). The word God (Hebrew El) is found only in verses 1a and 11 and it forms an inclusio (bracket) for this psalm.

The psalm begins with a superscription that is part of the inspired psalm and states where this psalm was composed. Unfortunately, it does not tell us the

circumstance (the when), but the time frame can be discerned by examining the internal context of the psalm.

Theme

The psalmist longs to worship the Lord in the sanctuary in Jerusalem, but he cannot, because he is in the Wilderness of Judah fleeing from those seeking to kill him. His confidence is in the steadfast, covenant love (hesed) of God, because it is better than life itself. The psalmist trusts the Lord to protect him from his enemies so that he will again be able to rejoice and praise the Lord in the sanctuary.

Exposition

David's Declaration of Faith and His Purpose in Life.
63:1a David begins this psalm with a declaration of faith:

O God, You are my God;

Early will I seek You.

David declares his faith in the Lord as his personal God. For David, God was not an idol of gold, silver, wood, or stone. He was the living God who acted in history and was intimately involved in David's life. David had a personal relationship with the Lord. Today, a person can have the same personal relationship with the Lord through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our personal relationship with the living God begins by realizing that we are sinners because we have offended a holy God. Our sin separates us from God. Yet God reached down to His creatures by sending His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to earth to live a perfect life, not sinning once, and then dying on the cross outside the

walls of Jerusalem in order to be the Perfect Sacrifice to pay for all our sins. The Lord Jesus did the hard part to reconcile us to God – He died. But three days later, He was bodily resurrected from the dead to demonstrate that all sin had been paid for, Satan had been defeated, and death had been conquered. Now He offers each of us salvation as a free gift, which one can receive by simply putting one's faith in the Lord Jesus and trusting Him alone for salvation. When a person puts his or her trust in Christ alone, he or she is born into God's family and becomes a child of God (John 1:12).

In this verse we also see David's purpose and priority in life. He states: "Early will I seek You." His purpose in life was to seek the Lord and His face. This he could do in the tent sanctuary that rested near his palace in Jerusalem. His priority was to do this early, apparently early in the morning. This passage seems to suggest that the first thing he did in the morning was to leave his palace and visit with the Lord in the tent sanctuary. This pattern can also be seen in the life of the Lord Jesus. He would rise up early in the morning for prayer (Mark 1:35).

David's Soul Is Thirsting for God in the Wilderness.
63:1b-4 In the first stanza, David sings:

My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You
In a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.
So I have looked for You in the sanctuary,
To see Your power and Your glory.
Because Your lovingkindness is better than life,
My lips shall praise You.

Thus I will bless You while I live;

I will lift up my hands in Your name.

David uses hyperbolic language to describe his longing for the presence of the Lord in His sanctuary. The Judean Desert is depicted as a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. David, when he was a shepherd in the Judean Desert, knew where all the springs and waterholes were. In the summertime, even when it is extremely dry, there is water in the desert. It may be scarce, but there is water nonetheless. Yet this language expresses the fact that David is totally cut off from the Lord and His sanctuary in Jerusalem. The people with David, however, were hungry, weary, and thirsty when they got to Mahanaim (2 Sam. 17:29).

In the rainy months (October to April), the Judean Desert gets between 100 millimeters and 350 millimeters (4-14 inches) of water. Most of the rain falls in the Hill Country; rainfall tapers off to about 100 millimeters near the Dead Sea (Rasmussen 1989: 42). There are five sources of water in the wilderness. Three of the sources are natural: rainwater, springs, and waterholes that collect run-off water. The other two sources are man-made: wells and cisterns dug by the inhabitants of the area (Hareuveni 1991:57-66).

I have the utmost respect for the sun and dry heat in the Judean Desert in the summer. The air is so dry that your perspiration evaporates almost instantaneously, which means that one may be unaware that he is dehydrating. Therefore, it is very dangerous to be in the Wilderness of Judah without adequate water.

The first summer I was in Israel, I experienced what David describes. Several fellow students and I walked

the approximate 14 kilometers (8 ½ miles) down the Wadi Qelt from Ma'aleh Adumim to Jericho on Shabbat (the Sabbath). Each of us had brought one canteen of water. In the blazing summer heat, it was not enough. By the time we got to the oasis of Jericho, each of us had a headache and was very thirsty. I'll tell you, freshly squeezed orange juice never tasted so good!

Later, when I was a field-trip instructor in Israel, I always encouraged my students to drink plenty of water. I informed them that I knew where all the toilets were in Israel and would be glad to stop if they ever needed to use them. I would quip, "It is easier to stop for toilets than it is to take you to the hospital because of dehydration!" Water is essential for survival in the Judean desert. Now, when I hike in Israel during the summer months, I leave early in the morning, wear a hat, and take two or three one-and-a-half-liter bottles of water with me.

In the second verse, David reminisces about the power and glory of God in the sanctuary. Early in his reign, after he had conquered Jerusalem, David brought the Ark of the Covenant up to Jerusalem from Kiryat Jearim (2 Sam. 6:12-23) and placed it in a tent dwelling (2 Sam. 7:2, 6). He had the desire to build a house for the Lord, but was not allowed to build it because he was a man of war and had blood on his hands (1 Chron. 22:8; 28:3). Yet God made a covenant with David that stated that his son would build a house for the Lord and that one of his sons would sit upon the throne of David forever and ever (2 Sam. 7:12-16). After this unconditional covenant was made, David went into the tent and sat before the Lord and prayed (2 Sam. 7:18-29). More than likely, David

saw the Ark of the Covenant, God's strength and glory, on this occasion (cf. Ps. 78:60-61; 96:6; 132:8).

When David fled from Absalom, the Levites brought the Ark of the Covenant out of Jerusalem. David insisted that they take it back. He said to Zadok: "Carry the Ark of God back into the city. If I find favor (chen) in the eyes of the LORD, He will bring me back and show me both it and His dwelling place. But if He says thus: 'I have no delight (hephzati) in you,' here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him" (2 Sam. 15:25-26).

David resigned his fate to the Lord but was fully confident in His sovereignty and lovingkindness. In verse three, David declares that the LORD's "lovingkindness is better than life." The Hebrew word for lovingkindness is *hesed* and it has a powerful word picture associated with it. Like a stork (*hesedu*) that lovingly watches over and guards its young so the Lord is lovingly loyal to the covenants that He made with His people Israel. He is faithful to His people, even when they are not faithful to Him. He watches over His people, provides for them, and protects them because He made unconditional covenants with Abraham and David. Because he understood this important attribute of God, David said that, even with parched lips, he would praise the Lord. He blessed the Lord by lifting up his hands and would do this for the rest of his life (63:4; cf. Ps. 104:33; 146:2; 1 Tim. 2:8)

David's Soul Is Satisfied in the Lord as after a Gourmet Banquet. 63:5-7 In the second stanza, David sings:

My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness,
And my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips.

When I remember You on my bed,
I meditate on You in the night watches.

Because You have been my help,

Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice.

Although David was thirsty because of the dryness of the wilderness, he was satisfied and content because his confidence was in the Lord and His promises. As the king lay awake that night contemplating the lovingkindness of the Lord, he was reminded of the sacrifices that were offered in the sanctuary. He said he was satisfied as with “marrow and fatness,” in other words, the best and richest food. David could be contemplating a banquet in his palace, but it is more likely that he was thinking about the sacrifices in the sanctuary. The “fatness” (chlev) was the result of the pleasant Bar-B-Q aroma of burning animal fat on the altar. The Mosaic Law prohibited people from eating any fat (Lev. 7:23-25) because all the fat was for the Lord (Lev. 3:16). Don’t worry; God does not have a problem with cholesterol! We do. David’s palace was not that far away from the sanctuary, and, if the wind were blowing just right, he could smell the sweet-smelling aroma of burning fat.

As David lay awake that night in the Plains of the Wilderness (2 Sam. 17:16) near Jericho, he was trying to sort out the day’s events. He was thankful to the Lord for His help in getting his family and followers out of Jerusalem before Absalom’s army was able to approach the city and do any harm to it. He remembered the goodness of God and meditated on the Lord Himself.

The word meditate is the same word used in Psalm 1:2: “But his delight is in the Law of the Lord, and in His Law he meditates day and night.” It is in the Torah (Genesis to Deuteronomy) that the Lord and His ways are revealed. The word meditate is a pastoral word that David gleaned from observing his sheep. Sheep have four stomachs. The sheep would eat the grass and flowers in the fields, and the foliage would go down into one stomach. Later, while the sheep was resting in the shade, it would regurgitate, which is the same word that is translated meditate, the foliage, chew it over again, and send it back down to another stomach.

I am sure David had large portions of the Torah memorized so that at night he could bring to mind those passages that spoke of the Lord and apply them to his present situation. God is an avenging God. “‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Rom. 12:19; cf. Deut. 32:35). When David heard that Ahithophel was conspiring with Absalom, David prayed: “O Lord, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness” (2 Sam. 15:31).

David rejoices in the shadow of God’s wings. Some commentators have suggested the wings were a reference to the cherubim above the mercy seat in the sanctuary. Moses used a similar word picture in Psalm 91:4: “He [the Almighty] shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge.” David uses this word picture in other psalms (Ps. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1). I think David’s word picture came from nature. Perhaps that evening David had seen a partridge in the wilderness gathering her young under her wings when she felt threatened by the people with David, or, in

the heat of the afternoon, the young might have sought shade under their mother's wings.

The Lord Jesus uses a similar illustration in His Olivet Discourse. He said: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who were sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Matt. 23:37).

Twice in this stanza David praises the Lord with rejoicing in spite of his terrible circumstances. The Lord Jesus might have had this psalm and David's circumstances in mind when He instructed his disciples: "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:11-12). David was a prophet (Acts 2:30). This was the same lesson that James the son of Zebedee recounted in the opening verses of his epistle: "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials" (1:2).

David, as he fled over the back side of the Mount of Olives, was cursed by Shimei at Bahurim (2 Sam. 16:5-14). David's servants wanted to behead Shimei, but David forbade them. He said: "Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the LORD has ordered him. It may be that the LORD will look on my affliction, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing this day" (16:11-12). When the revolt was over, Shimei sought forgiveness from King David and it was granted to him (2 Sam. 19:16-23). On his deathbed, however, David instructed his son Solomon to kill Shimei (1 Kings

2:8-9). Solomon eventually carried out this instruction when Shimei reneged on an oath he had made to the Lord at Solomon's request (1 Kings 2:36-46).

David's Soul Follows His Shepherd as a Defenseless Lamb. 63:8-10 In the third stanza, David sings:

My soul follows close behind You;

Your right hand upholds me.

But those who seek my life, to destroy it,

Shall go into the lower parts of the earth.

They shall fall by the sword;

They shall be a portion for jackals.

David turns to his younger days for the word picture of a defenseless lamb following close by its shepherd for protection. The right hand of God is always the hand of power and protection. David was advised by his commanders to stay within the walls of Mahanaim while they went out to fight Absalom's army. The revolt ended with the slaughter of twenty thousand Israelites in the woods of Ephraim and the death of Absalom at the hands of Joab (2 Sam. 18:1-18, 28). The dead went into the "lower parts of the earth," another description of Sheol, the place of the departed spirits (cf. Luke 16:19-31; Hades is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Sheol).

The bodies of the dead were eaten by scavengers. The Hebrew word shaliem is translated foxes or jackals. In the context, jackals makes more sense because jackals are the vacuum cleaners, or scavengers, of the desert. On a number of occasions as he wandered in the Judean Desert, David would have seen dead animals. Later,

when he walked past the same place, the animal carcass would be gone. Jackals had been there and cleaned up the mess, bones and all. The only thing to be seen was the jackal poop! David is saying that his enemies would not be afforded a proper burial with their families, as was the Israelite custom and practice.

Absalom's body, however, was placed in a pit in the forest of Ephraim and covered with a huge pile of rocks (2 Sam. 18:17). This was to keep the jackals away, but it also symbolized the death of a rebellious son who should have been stoned to death (Deut. 21:18-21).

David's Declaration of Praise because His Critics Are Silenced. 63:11 David concludes this psalm by singing:

But the king shall rejoice in God;

Everyone who swears by Him shall glory;

But the mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped.

David speaks of himself in the third person as "the king." His victory, however, was bittersweet. The revolt had been suppressed, but his son was dead. On a personal level, David mourned the death of his son (2 Sam. 18:33-19:7), yet he says in this psalm that, because the revolt was over, the king rejoiced.

David and his followers had sworn an oath to the Lord and were victorious because they feared Him (Deut. 6:13; 10:20). But those who had not sworn by the Lord were speechless (Ps. 38:12; 41:5-8). This is a euphemistic way of saying they died. Ahithophel hung himself and Absalom was killed by Joab and his men (2 Sam. 17:23; 18:14-15).

Singing Psalm 63

The songwriter David Strasser adapted the first part of this psalm in his composition of the lyrics for the song “Step by Step.”

O God, You are my God

And I will ever praise You!

O God, You are my God

And I will ever praise You!

I will seek You in the morning,

And I will learn to walk in Your ways.

And step by step You’ll lead me,

And I will follow You all of my days.

Lessons from the Psalm for Our Daily Life

There are several lessons that we can learn from this psalm that should encourage us in our daily walk with the Lord.

The first lesson is set forth by the eloquent late fourth century AD preacher, John Chrysostom (“golden-mouthed”) of Antioch-on-the-Orontes, when he commented: “That it was decreed and ordained by the Primitive Fathers that no day should pass without the public singing of this psalm.” Based on the phrase, “early will I seek you” (63:1), this psalm was sung on a daily basis during the morning liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox churches. Without being legalistic or ritualistic, perhaps this practice of singing, or reading this psalm, at the beginning of our daily quiet time would sharpen our focus on the Lord in spite of any adverse circumstances in which we might find ourselves. Also, David and the Lord Jesus set apart the early

morning hours for prayer and communion with the Father. We should follow their example and set apart a portion of our day for Bible reading and prayer.

The second lesson we can learn from this psalm is that David resigned his fate to a sovereign God who was in control of the affairs of history. He was content with whatever the Lord had in store for his future; whether he lived or died he would be content because the lovingkindness of the Lord was better than life. He knew that if he died, he would be with the Lord forever. The Apostle Paul had the same attitude. When he wrote to the Philippian believers, he said: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21; cf. Acts 20:24).

The third lesson we can learn from this psalm is that David rejoiced in the Lord in spite of his terrible circumstances. This he could do because he remembered the Lord and meditated on Him and His ways. Our contentment and joy is based on Christ's unfailing lovingkindness and mercy toward us and is not based on our circumstances. The Lord Jesus is always faithful to us and can be trusted to get us through our difficult circumstances. Thus, we can live joyfully and triumphantly in the midst of unpleasant circumstances. We are reminded of the words of the Lord Jesus when He said to "rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:12). Similarly, James tells us to "count it all joy when you fall into various trials" (James 1:2).

The fourth lesson to be learned is that God will eventually vindicate His children and set things in order. David was confident that those who sought his life would have a reversal of fortune and God would judge them.

This lesson is probably the most difficult to learn because we have no control over our future. We see Christians being martyred for the cause of Christ, and God does not seem to act on their behalf. Ultimately, God will set things in order, if not in this life, then He will do so in the future. For those who are martyred, there is the crown of life (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10).

The final and probably most important lesson for the believer in the Lord Jesus who is walking close to the Lord is that there is no spiritual refreshment to be gained from watching most of the popular television shows or movies, listening to contemporary secular music, or even reading the latest fiction book if it is devoid of spiritual content and Biblical truth.

Refreshment and satisfaction for the soul are found only in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the Word of God. It is only when we are content and refreshed that we can come together corporately to truly worship and sing praises to the Lord Jesus Christ. Our sole focus must be on Him.

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The "Christmas Myth" as displayed by the American Atheists

Introduction

At the beginning of this Christmas season (2010), I was going into New York City to do some research at the New York Public Library. As usual, I took public transportation into the city (it's less stressful than driving and you don't have to worry about parking). As we were approaching the Palisades in the bus lane to the Lincoln Tunnel, I saw out the left-hand side of the bus a billboard that caught my attention. It had what looked like a scene from a Christmas card. I thought to myself: "That's nice; somebody is wishing us a joyous Christmas." As the bus got closer, I saw the three wise men riding their camels in the starlit night toward an open-sided shelter with a gabled thatched roof next to a couple of palm trees; a donkey was tied to the stall, a bright star overhead, and Mary and Joseph watching over the new-born Baby Jesus. Then I saw the words: "You KNOW it's a Myth. This Season, Celebrate REASON!" It was signed by the American Atheists and said they were "Reasonable since 1963." Their web address was also given.

The Unbiblical Christmas Myth

I had mixed emotions when I saw the sign. Should I laugh or cry? I would laugh because the Lord will have the last laugh with this sign. His Word says: "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good" (Psalm 14:1). The psalmist's

description perfectly fits the atheists and their sign! They have been foolish, not reasonable, since 1963! I would cry because they were mocking the precious truth of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus.

But when I looked at the picture and read the words again, I started chuckling. I said to myself: "They are absolutely correct; the picture on the billboard depicts a myth! The American Atheists are the unreasonable ones. They are ignorant of the Scriptures because there are at least three things Biblically wrong with that picture. The foolish atheists were propagating an unbiblical Christmas myth!"

The Mistakes of the American Atheists Myth

I wondered to myself: "If somebody had recounted the events of the birth of the Lord Jesus as the Bible actually presented it, would they have become atheists?" It is sad to consider that what is depicted on this billboard is also presented yearly in most Sunday Schools Christmas pageants in America!

The first mistake the atheists made was to put three wise men on the billboard. The Bible does not say how many wise men there were! We assume that there were three because there were three gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. We also sing "We Three Kings of Orient Are" every Christmas and there is a church tradition that says there were three wise men and even gives their names, but the Bible never records how many wise men there were.

The second mistake they made was to put the birth of the Lord Jesus in a shelter outside under the starlit sky. Dr. Luke says the Lord Jesus was born in a stable that was in a cave under a house because the guest chamber

of that house was already taken by other relatives (2:7, 12; see Bailey 2008: 25-37 for a proper understanding of the cultural background to this passage).

<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/11/08/The-Manger-and-the-Inn.aspx> The final, and most glaring, mistake they made was having the wise men come to Jesus at His birth. The Gospel of Matthew says that the wise men appeared “after Jesus was born” and they inquired: “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?” (2:1-2). When they find Jesus in Bethlehem, He is a “young child,” not a “babe wrapped in swaddling cloth” (Matt. 2: 8-14; cf. Luke 2:12, 16). Dr. Luke recounts the birth of the Lord Jesus and Matthew records the event of the wise men’s visit a year to a year and a half after the birth of the Lord Jesus. Unfortunately, the American Atheists billboard (and the Sunday School Christmas play), fuses the two events together. That is unbiblical.

“Come now, and let us REASON together,” says the LORD

The atheists want us to celebrate REASON this season. The prophet Isaiah set forth God’s challenge to His wayward people Israel when he proclaimed: “‘Come now, and let us REASON together,’ says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool’” (1:18). Just as God wanted to reason with His wayward people in the 8th century BC, so today, God welcomes the opportunity to reason with foolish atheists in the 21st century AD. The Lord has not changed and He is still long-suffering and is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2

Peter 3:9). That includes every member of the American Atheists!

One of the ways God reasoned with His people was by predictive prophecy. Over 70 times the prophet Ezekiel, at the beginning of the 6th century BC, says that God gave predictive prophecy so that when the prophecies were fulfilled, the people, both Jews and Gentiles, may “know that I am the LORD.” Predictive prophecy was given because it demonstrates that the Lord Jesus is God who knows and reveals the future and is sovereignly acting in history. This might deflate the atheist’s ego because there is Someone greater than the human centered atheist. It would also show that they would have to be accountable to Someone greater than themselves. Humbling thought!

The events surrounding the birth of the Lord Jesus were foretold by the holy Hebrew prophets as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit hundreds of years before the Lord Jesus was born (2 Peter 1:19-21). The prophet Isaiah, who recorded that God wanted to reason with His people, gave some of the most powerful and profound prophecies about the Person and work of the Lord Jesus.

King David was also a prophet and the Spirit of God took him beyond himself and his own experience when he composed Psalm 40 (Cf. Acts 2:29, 30; cf. Matt. 22:41-46). In verses 6-8, David sang: “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. Then I said, ‘Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart’.” The Divine commentary

on this passage, written a thousand years later, is found in Hebrews 10:1-18. The Spirit of God changed the 6th verse of the psalm and said: "But a body You have prepared for Me" (Heb. 10:5). Thus the Son, not David, is speaking to God the Father and said He would do the Father's will. The Father prepared a body for His Son in the womb of Mary. Her conception was by the Holy Spirit.

During the reign of King Ahaz, the prophet Isaiah challenged the king to test the Lord by asking for a sign. The king, with false piety, refused. Isaiah then turned to those in the royal court, including Prince Hezekiah, and announced a profound sign to the House of David: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Immanuel. Curds and honey He shall eat [= His humanity], that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good [= His divinity]" (7:14). Matthew records the fulfillment of this sign when an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and told him that Mary will conceive the Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit while she was a virgin. When he quotes Isaiah 7:14 from the Septuagint, he uses the Greek word *parthenos* which can only mean a virgin (1:20-23).

There are actually three aspects to the nature of this Child in these verses. First, He would be virgin born. Second, He would have a humble beginning. And third, He would have a sinless nature, thus divine. The first part of verse 15 states: "Curds and honey He shall eat." These are the foods of the poor, not a symbol of a royal diet (contra Young 1992:I:291). The sign to shepherds was that He would be born in poor circumstances (Luke 2:10-12), not royal surroundings. When Mary dedicated her first-born in the Temple, she offered two turtle

doves, the offering of the poor (Luke 2:22-24; cf. Lev. 12:8). The wise men did not arrive until a year, to a year and a half after the birth of the Lord Jesus, before they presented Jesus with gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Verse 15 goes on to say, “that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good.” In this passage Isaiah is pointing out the sinless nature of the Child. Unlike us (and Hezekiah and Isaiah’s children), who by nature are sinful human beings that choose evil and refuse the good (Rom. 1-3), this Child will have a sinless nature as demonstrated by the fact that He chooses good and refuses evil.

Later, Isaiah would prophesy the dual nature of the Lord Jesus and His names. He would be fully God and fully Man. “For unto us a Child is born [= His humanity], Unto us a Son is given [= His divinity]; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6).

J. A. Alexander so eloquently summarizes this verse: “These words are strikingly appropriate to Jesus Christ, as the promised child, emphatically born for us and given to us, as the Son of God and the Son of Man, as being wonderful in His person, work and sufferings; a counselor, prophet, authoritative teacher of the truth, a wise administrator of the church, and confidential adviser of the individual believer – a real man, and yet the Mighty God; eternal in His own existence, and the giver of eternal life to others; the great peace-maker between God and man, between Jew and gentile, the umpire between nations, the abolisher of war, and the giver of internal peace to all who being justified by faith

have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1)” (1981:134).

A contemporary of Isaiah, the prophet Micah, would predict the place of the birth of the eternal Messiah: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting” (5:2 [5:1 Heb.]). There were three Bethlehems in the Land of Israel during the time of the prophet Micah. One was in the tribal territory of Zebulun (Josh. 19:15); another one was in Benjamin (Neh. 7:26); and the last in Judah (Josh. 15: 60 LXX). Micah singled out the tribal territory of Judah as the place where Messiah was to be born.

When the wise men visited Jerusalem after the birth of the Lord Jesus they inquired “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him” (Matt. 2:2). The paranoid schizophrenic King Herod heard this and was afraid, so inquired of the chief priests and scribes where the Messiah was to be born (2:3-4). They gave Herod the correct answer, Bethlehem of Judah, and even quoted the prophecy of Micah 5:2, yet they were oblivious to the Messiah because they did not act on their knowledge of Micah’s prediction in the Word of God!

The reason the Messiah, the everlasting Ruler in Israel, was to be born in Bethlehem was because He was to be from the House and lineage of King David (Luke 2:4).

The Attack on the Davidic Covenant

Ironically, in this year’s December issue of National Geographic there is an article about King David. It is a very subtle, and probably deliberately timed for the

Christmas season, attack on the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is entitled “Kings of Controversy,” and casts doubts on the historicity of King David and his son Solomon. It begins by asking the question: “Was the Kingdom of David and Solomon a glorious empire – or just a little cow town?” The answer that is given is: “that despite decades of searching, archaeologists had found no solid evidence that David or Solomon ever built anything” (Draper 2010: 73). In other words, they did not have a glorious empire or magnificent buildings. They did not exist!

The article depicts those who take the Bible seriously and believe the historicity of King David as having an agenda or being politically motivated; they are engaged in an unscientific case of circular reasoning, and naïve. The story of David and Goliath is a metaphor made up around a campfire (2010: 75), and the accounts of David and Solomon were “probably written at least 300 years after the fact, by not-so-objective authors” (2010: 79). David and Solomon are “fictitious characters” (2010: 79), and Solomon’s existence “remains wholly unverified” (2010: 83).

If King David was a fictitious character and not a historical person, then God did not give the Davidic Covenant to a real person. In fact, the Davidic Covenant would be null and void. This covenant, however, promised a real King David that one of his descendents would sit upon a real throne of David forever and ever (2 Sam. 7:12-16). In fact, this covenant is the basis for the angel Gabriel’s promise to Mary: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will

be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:30-33).

If King David was a fictitious character, then the covenant was also. The angel Gabriel, if he existed, would have lied to Mary. There would have been no virgin birth and Jesus would have been a mere sinful man, just like the rest of us. He would have had no divine purpose in life and no throne or a kingdom to rule.

The Son said, “Behold, I have come ... to do Your will, O God”

The Holy Spirit gives a divine commentary on Psalm 40 in the Book of Hebrews and explains the purpose that the Lord Jesus came to earth (10:1-18). He was to do the will of the Father and replace the sacrificial system instituted by Moses, which could only atone for (or cover) sins, but could never take away sins or make the sinner perfect.

The Lord Jesus was a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, thus His death on the cross was an infinitely perfect sacrifice that paid for all the sins of all humanity, once and for all and it was never to be repeated. There was no more need for any sacrifices after that. After His bodily resurrection from the dead, He sat down at the right hand of the Father and is waiting till His enemies are made His footstool (10:9-13; cf. Ps. 110).

The prophet Isaiah, looking down the corridors of time, saw the cross work of the Lord Jesus as well (Isa. 52:13-53:12). What this work would accomplish was the

salvation of any or all who would put their trust in the Lord Jesus as their Savior. Isaiah writes: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (53:6). Isaiah elsewhere tells us that all our righteousness, all the best we can do, is as filthy rags in God's sight (64:6).

After David's sin with Bathsheba, he confessed his sins before the Lord (Ps. 51), and trusted Him to forgive his sins. When David realizes that God had forgiven him, he rejoiced by singing: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit (Ps. 32:1-2).

The way of salvation, a home in Heaven, the forgiveness of sins, and peace with God is open to all who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. This invitation is as broad as "whosoever will may come" (even the American Atheists can come to Jesus), but narrow as Jesus' statement: "I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Have you believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior? (Acts 4:12; 16:30).

Jesus is the REASON for the Season!

On the New York City side of the Lincoln Tunnel there was another billboard. This time it had a picture of Joseph and Mary looking at the Baby Jesus and the sign said: "You Know it's Real. This Season, Celebrate Jesus."

That was a good response, but I think a more powerful and pointed response should have been: "You KNOW He's the Truth. This Season Celebrate the REASON for the Season - the LORD JESUS CHRIST!"

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The Household Of Stephanas: Firstfruits of Achaia

Introduction

Sometimes I will see this little ditty on the marquee of a church: "The family that prays together - stays together." There is a lot of truth to this statement. I suspect that it was true of the household of Stephanas. Not only did they pray together, but they also poured their lives into serving the church at Corinth together.

Stephanas and his household are mentioned in only two passages in Paul's first epistle to the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:16; 16:15-18), and a member of the family is hinted at in one verse in the book of Romans (16:5b). Yet these passages tell us quite a bit about this active family in the city of Corinth. Probably no family in the Early Church did more for the Apostle Paul and their local church than this family, yet they were not fully appreciated for the work that they were doing among the saints at Corinth. The lack of appreciation, I would like to suggest, was due to the Corinthian's prejudice against non-Corinthians within the church. Paul appealed to the believers in the church at Corinth to give them due recognition.

Have you ever observed in a local church, people who are living only for themselves and their ambitions and agendas; verses those who are selflessly serving others, expecting nothing in return? Have you observed those who are always suspicious of "outsiders" and those people who are not quite like them; verses those who wholeheartedly welcome anybody and everybody who

walks through the front door? If so, you are not the first and you won't be the last. People over the millennia have not changed because we all have a sin nature. Our sin nature creates the same problems that the Apostle Paul saw and addressed in his day, as we have in churches today. By examining the way the Apostle Paul understood, addressed and resolved similar problems in the Church's earliest days, we can bring timeless Biblical wisdom and truths to our own church problems.

In this study, the self-centeredness of the Corinthian believers will be examined (Paul calls it carnality), and ask why it was hard for the Corinthian church to accept the selflessness of the household of Stephanas who were not originally from Corinth and what the solution is to this problem.

Textual, Geographical and Chronological Problems

At the outset of this study there is a textual problem that needs to be addressed. It has led to a misunderstanding of the geography of the narratives. First Corinthians 16:15 states: "I urge you, brethren – you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia" (NKJV, NASB, NIV). In Romans 16:5 it states: "Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ" (KJV, NKJV). The Westcott – Hort tradition states that Epaenetus was the firstfruits of Asia (RSV, NASB, NIV).

It can be suggested that an early copyist saw an apparent conflict between these two texts and wondered how Epaenetus and the household of Stephanas could both be the firstfruits of Achaia. This "problem" was resolved by emending the text in Romans 16 to read that

Epaenetus was from “Asia” [Asia Minor is western Turkey today] because 1 Corinthians is clear that the household of Stephanas was from Corinth, the capital of the Roman province of Achaia.

The statement that the household of Stephanas was the firstfruits of Achaia (1 Cor. 16:15) also raises a potential geographical and chronological problem. The household of Stephanas was ministering in Corinth, yet Paul had already led some people to the Lord in Athens (Acts 17:34) which was also part of Achaia. How could the household of Stephanas be the firstfruits of Achaia if Paul has already led people to the Lord in Athens?

I would like to suggest that Epaenetus was a slave, a freedman or a son within the household of Stephanas. This family originally lived in Athens where Paul first led Epaenetus to the Lord and then eventually the rest of the family. The entire household was baptized in Athens and later moved to Corinth to be involved in the work of the Lord in that city. This view is consistent with all the Biblical, geographical and chronological data and there would be no need to emend the text in Romans 16 (Lenski 1963:47-48; Hiebert 1992: 203).

Achaia in the First Century AD

Epaenetus and the household of Stephanas are both called the “firstfruits of Achaia.” It would be helpful to discuss the historical geographical background to Achaia in order to understand this phrase.

During the Classical period, Achaia was restricted to the northern part of the Peloponnesus, along the southern coast of the Gulf of Corinth (Pausanias, 1995: 5: Plate 7). When the Apostle Paul and Dr. Luke wrote about Achaia

in the first century AD, they were referring to the Roman senatorial province of Achaia which was a much larger area than the Achaia of the Classical period (Acts 18: 12, 27; 19:21; Rom. 15:26; 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Cor. 1:1; 7:5; 9:2; 11:10; 1 Thess. 1:7, 8).

In 46 BC, Julius Caesar began to rebuild the ruined city of Corinth into a Roman colony. In 27 BC, his successor, Octavian (known as Caesar Augustus in the Gospel of Luke), separated Macedonia (Northern Greece) from Achaia and made Corinth the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. The province of Achaia consisted of the Peloponnese, Central Greece (including Athens) and possibly Thessaly and Epirus, but the last two are not with certainty. In AD 15, Emperor Tiberius took Macedonia and Achaia away from the Roman Senate and joined it with Moesia (today, northeastern Bulgaria) under the rule of a legate. Emperor Claudius restored both of these provinces back to the Roman Senate in either AD 41 or 44 (Suetonius, Deified Claudius 25:3; LCL 2:51). "By AD 65 the provinces of Thessaly and Epirus were clearly defined and constituted Achaia's northern border; Actium and the coastal territory to its immediate south, became part of Epirus" (Pattengale 1992:1:53). Thus, the area of modern Greece today was known as "Macedonia and Achaia" in part of the first century AD (Acts 19:21; Rom. 15:26; I Thess. 1:8).

Thus, during Paul's second missionary journey in AD 50 he visited the Roman Senatorial Province of Macedonia. When he left Berea by ship, he was departing from the province of Macedonia. When he disembarked from that ship in Athens he was in the province of Achaia.

The Household of Stephanas - the Firstfruits of Achaia - 1 Cor. 16:15

When Paul visited a new city, his practice was always to seek out the synagogue of the Jewish community in order to share the gospel with them. He would then proclaim the gospel to the pagans in the agora, or marketplace (Acts 17:17; cf. Rom. 1:16). Based on hints in the Scriptures, I suspect, but can not conclusively prove, that Epaenetus was part of the household of Stephanas, either as a son, freedman or a servant of Stephanas, and the family was of Jewish heritage. This suggestion is consistent with the passages in 1 Cor. 1 and 16, as well as Romans 16.

If my suspicion is correct, more than likely Paul met Epaenetus in the synagogue of Athens and shared with him the good news of the gospel. Paul would have showed Epaenetus from the Hebrew Scriptures that the Lord Jesus was the fulfillment of the Messianic passages in his Bible (Gen. 3:15; Ps. 16:8-11; 22; Isa. 7:14; 9:6; 52:13-53:12; Dan. 9:24-27; Micah 5:2). Once this fact was established, Paul would have gone on to share the reason why the Lord Jesus came to earth. As God manifest in human flesh, the Lord Jesus died on the cross of Calvary to pay for all of Epaenetus' sins and three days later, He was raised from the dead.

As Epaenetus listened to the apostle, the Spirit of God convicted him of his sin of unbelief (John 16:7-11). He realized that his righteousness in the sight of a Holy God was like filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). He also knew that he was a sinner because Isaiah said, "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way;

and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (53:6).

Paul carefully pointed out that a sinner is justified (the act of God whereby He declares a sinner righteous) by faith alone in the Lord Jesus and not by any works or merits of his own. He invoked Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation, who believed that God would send a Sin-bearer to take away his sins and trusted Him to do just that. God declared him righteous because of his faith alone (Gen. 15:6; cf. Rom. 4:1-3). King David, after the Law was given, was declared righteous the same way - by grace through faith in a coming Messiah (Ps. 32:1-2; cf. Rom. 4:4-8).

Paul led Epaphroditus to faith in the Lord Jesus as his Messiah and Savior. The joy of sins forgiven, a home in heaven and the righteousness of God freely given to him by grace through faith alone in the Lord Jesus (Phil. 3:9), was more that he could contain. He in turn shared this wonderful gospel, along with his new found mentor, the Apostle Paul, with the rest of those in his household and they too came to faith. These were Paul's first converts in the Province of Achaia and they were subsequently baptized, probably in Athens.

After the Apostle Paul's defense before the Areopagus, he departed Athens for Corinth. In this city, he met Aquila and Priscilla, exiles from Rome, who apparently had an assembly meeting in their home in Corinth, possibly started by Peter. Paul joined forces with them in the work of the gospel, but also worked with them in their mutual occupation, that of tentmakers. Silas and Timothy later joined them in the work of the gospel. Paul, Timothy and Silas ministered in the city for a year

and a half (AD 50-52; cf. Acts 18:11). Sometime after this, Stephanas and his household moved to Corinth and got involved in the work of the Lord in that city. The timing and circumstance of this move is unclear because the Scriptures are silent on this issue.

The Baptism of the Household of Stephanas - 1 Cor. 1:14-17

In the winter of AD 55-56, during Paul's third missionary journey and six years after Paul began his Corinthian ministry, Paul wrote a letter to the church in Corinth from Ephesus. Some visitors from Corinth, mainly those of the household of Chloe, had told him that there were contentions and divisions within the church of Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10-11). This division was now confirmed by a letter from the church at Corinth that was carried by Stephanas and two other delegates from the church (1 Cor. 16:17). It should not be surprising that the Apostle Paul heard from different believers in Corinth because the maritime lines of communications between the two cities were direct and regular.

The division in the church was over personalities that had ministered in the church within the last six to fifteen years. Some believers were followers of the Apostle Paul, others of the eloquent Alexandrian Apollos, others of the Apostle Peter and the real pious ones were followers of Jesus (1:12).

Paul wrote to the divided church at Corinth: "I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptized, but to

preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect" (1:14-17).

Paul stated that he "baptized none of you [Corinthians] except Crispus and Gaius." Crispus was the ruler of the synagogue who came to faith in the Lord Jesus (Acts 18:8). Gaius was an individual who later would be Paul's host and a patron of the church at Corinth (Rom. 16:23). The implication of this verse is that these two believers were the only ones he baptized in Corinth. Once the local church was established in Corinth, Paul moved out of the way and let the local leadership take over the ordinance of baptism which is a function of the elders in the local church.

Paul then adds, almost as an afterthought, that he "also baptized the household of Stephanas." Paul does not include the household among the Corinthians. Thus it could be assumed that they were baptized elsewhere, most likely Athens. When Paul penned these words, Stephanas was looking over his shoulders and said, "Don't forget us! We were your firstfruits in Achaia." (1 Cor. 1:16).

The ordinance of baptism has nothing to do with one's salvation. The salvation of an individual is determined when a person puts their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and Him alone as their Savior. Baptism is an outward testimony before the local church to the changed life of the new believer (1:17). It is also a testimony to the unsaved in the local community and provides an opportunity for both courage and accountability of the one being baptized.

The Ministry of the Household of Stephanas in Corinth - 1 Cor. 16:15-18

The Apostle Paul concludes this epistle with the usual salutations, greetings and exhortations. He writes of the household of Stephanas: "I urge you, brethren – you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints – that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us. I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied. For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men" (1 Cor. 16:15-18).

Paul reminds the believers in Corinth about two things that were unique to the family of Stephanas. First, they were the firstfruits of Achaia. This was an honor that could never be taken away from this family. Others would follow, but they would always be known as the first.

The second thing Paul reminds them about is that they devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints. In verse 14, Paul had mentioned: "Let all that you do be done with love" (cf. 1 Cor. 13). He then mentions the household of Stephanas that exemplified the principle of doing all things in love because they devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints (16:15). Lenski suggests that this family rendered their service of their "own accord with an eye only to the benefit resulting for others" (1963:777). That was Biblical love, seeking the best for the one being ministered to. This was a self-imposed obsession of this Athenian family that

apparently had the financial means to minister to the needs of others and they voluntarily jumped right into the Lord's work when they arrived in Corinth.

What the ministry of the saints was, we are not told. There are several possibilities as to what this was. It could be hospitality to the saints, possibly a food kitchen to help the poor and needy believers. They could have opened their home for the church to meet in, or hosted travelling preachers and apostles. It could also be a spiritual ministry such as teaching the Word of God. It is interesting to note that Paul does not say he was the beneficiary of their ministry to the saints, unlike the household of Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:16). This might suggest that the family arrived in Corinth after Paul left for Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19). Perhaps Paul did not specifically state what their ministry was so that future believers could draw broad applications to their own work.

The household of Stephanas, being filled with the Spirit of God, was submitting to the leadership in the church of Corinth (Eph. 5:18-21). Paul had to admonish the church of their reciprocal duty, "you also submit to such" (1 Cor. 16:16) who work and labor for the Lord. The household of Stephanas worked together and took the hard tasks in their ministry for the Lord in Corinth.

Apparently the Corinthian believers were suspicious of this family and their motives for coming to Corinth to work because they were Athenians and not Corinthians. The apostle Paul had to admonish the Corinthian believers to submit to those who labor in the Lord's work (16:16). By implication, he is commanding them to submit to those in the household of Stephanas who are

in leadership positions because of their works and appointments. Paul had also admonished the Thessalonian believers: “And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thess. 5:12-13).

Clement of Rome, a bishop (or, elder) in Rome at the end of the first century AD, penned an epistle to the church in Corinth. While this epistle is not inspired of the Holy Spirit, it is instructive to the saints. He wrote: “They [the apostles] preached from district to district, and from city to city. And they appointed their first converts, testing them by the Spirit, to be bishops [episkopos] and deacons of the future believers. And this was no new method, for many years before had bishops and deacons been written of; for the scripture says thus in one place ‘I will establish their bishops in righteousness, and their deacons in faith’” (Clement of Rome, 1 Clement 42:4, 5; LCL 1:81). The word that is translated “bishop” in this passage is the same word for the office of the elder in the New Testament (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:7). Apparently it was the practice in the early church for the apostles to appoint the firstfruits of their converts as elders and deacons in the churches after they were tested by the Holy Spirit. This would suggest that Paul appointed at least Stephanas as one of the elders in the church of Corinth soon after he arrived in the city even though he was originally from Athens. The Corinthians would be suspicious of him and perhaps wonder what his motive was for coming to Corinth.

The Apostle Paul rejoiced in the delegation that came from Corinth to visit him in Ephesus. It included

Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (16:17; most likely the “brethren” in 16:12). Stephanas was the head of the household and he apparently brought two of his slaves or freedmen with him, Fortunatus and Achaicus.

Fortunatus’s name, commonly given to a Roman slave, has at its Latin root, “blessed, fortune or good luck”. His nickname today would be “Lucky”, a name you would give to a dog, but not to your child! Achaicus was named after the province of Achaia.

The delegation from Corinth supplied to Paul what was lacking in this situation - the Corinthians believers themselves (16:17). Paul’s desire was to be able to talk with the church directly, rather than have to write a letter to them, but the delegation was the next best thing. “They supplied” has the idea of filling a cup full of liquid. Paul was able to talk with the delegation, ask questions, and find out exactly what the problems were so he could address these issues in a letter and give the delegation verbal counsel to take back to the church.

This visit refreshed Paul’s spirit as well as the Corinthian believer’s because they would be the beneficiary of Paul’s counsel (16:18, cf. 2 Cor. 7:13; Phil. 7 and 20).

Paul commands the church to acknowledge, or recognize, this delegation made up of the household of Stephanas because they served the saints (16:16) and also refreshed the saints at Corinth (16:18). Whatever their suspicious about the households motives for serving them should be put aside and credit should be given where credit was due.

The Training of a Member of the Household of Stephanas - Romans 16:5b

Paul described Epäenetüs as “beloved” and the “first fruit of Achaia” (Rom. 16:5). Apparently he was a son, servant or freedman in the Jewish household of Stephanas that Paul led to the Lord in Athens and described him as part of the “first fruits of Achaia” (1 Cor. 16:15). For the next eighteen months in Corinth; Paul, Silas and Timothy committed the Word of God to Epäenetüs as a “faithful man” so that he could teach others the Scriptures (2 Tim. 2:2).

Nine years later Epäenetüs is greeted by Paul when he writes to the church in Rome (AD 58). How did Epäenetüs get to Rome? One possible conjecture as to how he got to the Eternal City is that when Aquila and Priscilla returned to Rome from Ephesus after the death of Emperor Claudius, they went via Corinth and invited Epäenetüs to join them in the work in Rome. If Epäenetüs was a son or a freedman in the household of Stephanas he would have had no problem leaving Corinth. But if he was a servant in the household of Stephanas, he would have had to have been freed by his master before he went to Rome as a freedman.

In Romans 16, Epäenetüs is greeted right after Aquila and Priscilla which suggests that they might be ministering together in the same assembly in Rome that met in the house of Aquila and Priscilla which according to tradition is located on the Aventine Hill (16:3-5).

The word “greet” in Romans 16 has the idea of giving a big bear hug to the one being greeted. In the epistle to the Romans, the apostle address the division that was in the churches of Rome that is along ethnic (Jews vs.

Gentiles), gender (male vs. female) and economic (slave vs. free) lines. This was an issue that the apostle had already addressed in an earlier epistle (cf. Gal. 3:26-29).

It is very telling that, nine years later, Paul was still in contact with his convert and disciple.

Lessons from the Lives of the Household of Stephanas

There are at least four lessons that can be drawn from the lives and ministry of the household of Stephanas.

First, it does not make any difference what our economic status is; we should all be involved in the work of the Lord in our local assembly. Paul writes that not many noble are called to the service of the Lord (1 Cor. 1:26-29), but there are some exceptions and they were greatly used of the Lord (Meeks 1983: 57-58). In the Corinthian church there was Crispus, the former ruler of the synagogue; Gaius, apparently a well to do individual who became the patron of one of the churches in the city; and Erastus who was the treasurer of the city (Rom. 16:23). The household of Stephanas could be added to this list of the mighty as well.

Second, the household of Stephanas were obsessed with getting involved in the work of the Lord and poured themselves into the ministry. They took to heart the words of the Lord Jesus in His parable about the servants (Luke 12:41-48). Jesus said, "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required" (12:48). The Lord apparently had blessed this family in a material way and they were good stewards of the wealth that they had. Stephanas, as the head of the household, had a concern for the spiritual oversight of

his family and saw to it that they were all involved in the work of ministering to the saints.

The third lesson we can learn from this family applies to the church. The church should be willing to accept outsiders and make them welcome in the assembly, even if they are “different” than most in the meeting, especially those who want to be involved in the work of the Lord and who are doctrinally sound and walking with the Lord. The household of Stephanas was apparently Athenian Jewish believers in the Lord Jesus. They were different than the Corinthians. Paul said to acknowledge them and the work they are doing. A practical suggestion would be to have an “appreciation day” for those who labor in the church. Perhaps an appreciation dinner for the Sunday School teachers, or others who are involved in various ministries.

The final lesson to be learned is the importance of follow-up and discipleship in the lives of new believers. The Apostle Paul demonstrated this in the life of Epaphroditus. I am sure he prayed for him on a regular basis and had personal contact with him over the years.

The household of Stephanas may not have been appreciated by their adopted church, but Paul appreciated their labor for the Lord and wanted others to do so as well.

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The Imperial Cult And The Resurrection Of The Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:3-4)

Introduction

In 1987, I was participating in the “Who is the Pharaoh of the Exodus?” conference in Memphis, TN. During one of our lunch breaks, a group of us, who were alumni of the Institute of Holy Land Studies in Jerusalem, went to a local eatery. Sitting opposite me was Bishop Mesrob Mutafyan, a bishop of the Armenian Church in Istanbul, Turkey. (He has since been elevated to one of five Patriarchs in the Armenian Church). During our conversation, the subject of liturgy and creeds came up. Since I was from a non-liturgical church I asked him why they repeated the liturgy and creeds over and over again. His answer was very helpful. He said that historically, many people in the churches had never learned to read. When they repeated the liturgy (which is mostly Scripture verses) over and over again, it helped them memorize the Word of God. By repeating the creeds, the participants became grounded in the doctrinal truths of their faith.

One creed that the Western Church recites is the so-called Apostle’s Creed. While it was not composed by the early apostles, one church historian described it as “by far the best popular summary of the Christian faith ever made within so brief a space,” and went on to say “It is not a word of God to men, but a word of men to God, in response to His revelation” (Schaff 1990:1:15, 16). It is solid theology in a concise creed. I believe that

Romans 1:3-4 was one of the original creeds concerning the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Literary Structure

The creed in Romans 1:3-4 is composed of two lines with three clauses in each line and a summary statement at the end. It was formulated by either the Apostolic Church in Jerusalem, or by the great Hebraic minds of the apostle's Peter (cf. Matt. 16:16) or Paul, based on the prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures (Romans 1:2).

“Concerning His Son:

A. Who was born

B. of the seed of David

C. according to the flesh,

A'. and declared

B'. to be the Son of God (with power)

C'. according to the Spirit of holiness, (by the resurrection from the dead), Jesus Christ our Lord.”

In the literary structure of this creed, the central thought of each line is the Person of the Lord Jesus in His role as the “Seed of David” (His humanity) and the “Son of God” (His deity). In order to appreciate these two roles, we must understand the world of the First Century church in Rome, the church that Paul addressed in this letter. They, more than any other church in the Roman Empire, would understand the imperial cult and emperor worship and the sharp contrast Paul was making in these verses between the Lord Jesus and all the Roman emperors.

The “son of God” in the First Century Roman World

On March 14, 44 BC the tyrannical dictator, Julius Caesar was assassinated by a group of men, lead by Brutus and Cassius, who identified themselves as the “liberators.” Brutus commemorated this event by issuing a coin with a liberty cap, flanked by two daggers and the Latin words EID MAR [“Eids of March”] (Vagi 1999:2:198, coin 95). After Caesar’s death, the Roman senate “voted to give Caesar divine honors” (Plutarch, Caesar 67:4; LCL 7:603; see also Suetonius, Deified Julius 88; LCL 1:119). In other words, they added him to the Roman pantheon as a god! This was the first time in Roman history that a mortal was deified. This Roman Senate decision would significantly affect the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ in the years to come.

Plutarch, a Greek writer who wrote a series of books about the lives of famous Greek and Roman personalities, recounted events of “divine ordering” (his words) surrounding the death of Julius Caesar. Among other things, he states there was a “great comet, which showed itself in great splendor for seven nights after Caesar’s murder” (Caesar 69:3; LCL 7:605-607). This was interpreted as a sign that Julius Caesar was taken up to the heavens to join the Roman gods. His adopted son, Octavian, minted coins with the comet on it and the Latin words DIVVS IVLIVS [“divine Julius”]! (Kreitzer 1990:213; Vagi 1999:2:221, coin 278).

Octavian (reigned from 27 BC to AD 14), the grand-nephew and adopted son of Julius Caesar, and known to us from the New Testament as Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1), minted coins with the title DIVI F [“son of God”] on

them in Latin (Vagi 1999:2:217-231). He considered himself the son of the divine Julius Caesar. Some consider that Caesar Augustus was Satan's puppet and counterfeit "messiah" to distract people from the real Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Suetonius (AD 75-140), a Roman historian, reports that after Augustus died and was cremated, an ex-praetor took an oath that he had seen the form of the Emperor on his way to heaven (Deified Augustus 100:4; LCL 1:283-285).

The next emperor was Tiberius (reigned from AD 14-37). He was the son of Livia, the stepson, son-in-law and heir of Augustus. Thus began the Julian dynasty. People married so they were somehow related to by blood or adoption to Augustus and thus by adoption to Julius Caesar, and would consider themselves the "seed of Julius." When Tiberius died, however, he was not deified by the Roman Senate.

Caligula (reigned from AD 37-41), the adopted grandson and heir of Tiberius, could not wait to die so he deified himself. He ordered statues of himself placed in temples, shrines and synagogues so people could worship him. After he was assassinated, the Roman Senate cursed him and had his name erased from all inscriptions and his statues smashed.

Claudius (reigned from AD 41-54) was the grandson of Livia (wife of Octavian), Mark Antony and Octavia (grand niece of Julius Caesar). He was the nephew of Tiberius and the granduncle and adoptive father of Nero. Claudius was also an uncle of Emperor Caligula and was made emperor by the Praetorian guards after Caligula was assassinated. He had physical disabilities,

but was an effective administrator, however brutal at times. Suetonius states that after Claudius died, he was “buried with regal pomp and enrolled among the gods, an honor neglected and finally annulled by Nero, but later restored to him by Vespasian (Deified Claudius 45: LCL 2:81). Seneca (4 BC – AD 65), on the other hand, wrote a religio-political satire that dripped with sarcasm, entitled *Pumpkinification*. (LCL 15:437-483). The title of this book was a slam on emperor worship. The word “pumpkinification” was chosen instead of deification. In Seneca’s satire, Claudius is considered a pumpkin instead of a god!

Permit me to use my sanctified imagination for a minute. I would like to think the book made the International Herald Tribune best seller list for AD 55 when it was published. Perhaps it was a hot item in the bookstores of the Roman colony of Corinth when the Apostle Paul was there in the winter of AD 57-58. Since he wanted to improve his Latin before he went to Rome, he bought a copy of the book and read it in order to get a sense of the imperial cult. When he penned the letter to the church in Rome, he began with the creed concerning God’s Son: “Born of the Seed of David according to the flesh, declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” What a contrast to the recently deified Emperor Claudius!

Nero (reigned from AD 54-68), the adopted son of Claudius, and some say his natural born son (Burns 1996: 6-11), was not deified by the Roman Senate when he died, but in fact, was cursed by them. Following his death there was civil war which saw three emperors in quick succession: Galba, Otho and Vitellius (from June

AD 68 to December AD 69), until General Vespasian was hailed emperor by the Senate.

Emperor Vespasian (reigned from AD 69-79) was born a common man and not related by blood or adoption to the Julio-Claudian dynasty. In other words, he was not of the “seed of Julius”! He came to realize that emperor worship and the imperial cult was a scam. Suetonius reports that Vespasian “did not cease his jokes even when in apprehension of death and in extreme danger; for when among other portents ... a comet appeared in the heavens, he declared that [the comet was an omen about] the king of the Parthians, who wore his hair long, whereas I am bald.” When he finally realized his number was up, he said: “Woe’s me. Me think I am turning into a god” (Vespasian 23:4; LCL 2:319; and also Dio Cassius, Roman History 66:3; LCL 8:295). If he was going to become a god, what did he have to worry about?!

After his death, he was cremated and his ashes put in an urn and the urn placed in the family mausoleum in Rome. A coin was minted by his son Titus with Vespasian’s urn on the reverse side, flanked by two laurel branches (Mattingly and Sydenham 1926:123, coin 62; Vagi 1999:2:311, coin 958). This coin might have been Vespasian’s last joke from the grave. Whereas there was a posthumous coin of Julius Caesar being taken to heaven on a comet to join the gods, Vespasian knew he would be relegated to ashes in an urn! The Roman Senate, however, did deify him.

Vespasian’s two sons, Titus (reigned from AD 79-81) and Domitian (reigned from AD 81-96), were very much into the imperial cult. When Titus died, his brother Domitian constructed an arch in his brother’s honor that

commemorated the victory of the Romans over the Jewish people and the destruction of Herod's Temple. The tops of each side of the arch contained the inscription: F. DIVI ["the son of the god"]. In the center of the interior of the arch, Titus is on the back of an eagle being taken to heaven (Kreitzer 1990: 210). When Domitian became emperor, he, like Caligula, could not wait to die in order to become a god, so he deified himself in AD 86. And Domitian, like Caligula, was cursed by the Roman Senate after he died. The Emperor worship of Domitian is the background to the book of Revelation (Franz 2006:73-87).

Conclusions

By sharp contrast, Paul writes that the Lord Jesus was "born of the Seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." It was the covenant promise of God to David and the bodily resurrection that set Him apart from all the Roman emperors.

One other aspect of the Person of Christ that set Him apart from the Roman emperors is bringing peace with God to the individual. Some of the emperors could boast that they brought peace to the Roman world "on land and sea", but one thing they lacked was the ability to bring peace to the hearts of men and women. That, only God manifest in the flesh - the Lord Jesus, could do. Later in the epistle to the Romans, Paul wrote: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:1).

The bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated that the payment for sins on Calvary's

cross had been paid in full and accepted by God the Father. It also demonstrated that Satan had been defeated and death vanquished. When people put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior, they are justified, or declared righteous, by a Holy God. Have you trusted the Lord Jesus as your Savior?

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