

THE EPISTLE

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This Month's Cover

Our cover picture this month, in honor of the feast of St. Barnabas (June 11), is “Saint Barnabas Healing the Sick” by Paulo Caliari (1528-1588, *aka* Paolo Veronese). Completed in 1566, it is oil on canvas, measuring 8'6"x6'4". It is in the Late Renaissance Mannerism style. It is displayed in the Museum of Fine Arts, Rouen, France. Although it is well known, information on it on the internet is very sparse. We could find nothing about who commissioned it.

The Gospels are unclear on an accurate list of the twelve Apostles, but in Acts 14:14, Saint Barnabas is identified as an Apostle. He is not to be confused with Barabbas, the insurrectionist whom Pilate released at Jesus' trial. He plays an important role in the Book of Acts. He was a Jew from Cyprus and was of the priestly tribe of Levi (Acts 4:36). He accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey and is usually identified as the cousin of St. Mark. He and Paul frequently healed and ministered to the sick when they were on the mission trip together, and this is the subject of Veronese's painting. Tradition says that he returned to Cyprus, where he founded the Cypriot Orthodox Church, and that he was stoned to death at Salamis on Cyprus during the early persecutions.

Paolo Veronese was an Italian artist of the High Renaissance, who painted mainly in Venice. He is noted not only for his talent but also for a huge collection of very large historic, mythological, and religious paintings. His most famous paintings are “The Wedding at Cana of Galilee” (1563) and “The Feast in the House of Levi” (1573). He was born Paulo Caliari, but in the early years used the name Paulo Spezapreda (“Stonecutter”). It was common for a man to take his father's trade as his surname. He took the name Veronese from the city of Verona in the Republic of Venice, where he was born. He painted under all three names at first, but during most of the latter part of his career he just used Veronese. At age 13 he was apprenticed to Antonio Badile, whose daughter he would later

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marry. His talent was recognized early, and he was taken under the patronage of the Guistiniani family, a wealthy and powerful noble family in Verona. They commissioned him to do several paintings for churches in the area. In 1553, he was commissioned to do a fresco on the ceiling of the town hall in Venice and moved there to do so. He remained in Venice most of the rest of his life. During the last 35 years of his life, he painted a great number of very large historical, mythological, and religious works. He died in Venice in 1588 at age 60 and is buried there.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

Almost 60 years ago the Beatles released a song called “With a Little Help from My Friends.” It deals with loneliness and the need for someone who really cares. It includes the lines, “Do you need anybody? / I just need someone to love. / Could it be anybody? / I want somebody to love.” This song is probably even more relevant today than it was in the ’60s. Despite being surrounded by people almost every day of their lives, huge numbers of people are in fact very lonely. We tend to use the word “friends” a bit too liberally. In many sad cases, people have hundreds of friends, but they are all “Facebook friends.” These are people whom they barely know or have never met, yet they regularly interact with them digitally. In an overpopulated world, countless people are very lonely, interacting with others through a little black box. Many don’t even talk on the phone anymore. Rather than hearing a human voice, they prefer to communicate by texting. This gives them an anonymity that seems to lend a feeling of power, control, and a defensive barrier. In reality, it generates nothing but more isolation. I am richly blessed in that I have many friends, many of whom are true friends in that they have stood by me through thick and thin and countless times have demonstrated a willingness to help with whatever I needed. This has been driven home to me in a rather difficult last couple of years, and especially during my recent illness. I don’t think I could have gotten through it without “a little help from my friends.” Sometimes their gifts of time, treasure and talent have been mind-boggling. When I count my blessings, that is one of the first things that comes to mind. True friends are a true gift of God. Our ultimate true friend, of course, is Jesus Christ, but we must be careful never to start looking

on him as our pal or our buddy. This leads to a relationship with him that demeans him. He is not a pal or a buddy, but he is the truest friend we could ever have. He is the ultimate friend who sends us our earthly true friends. We can get by with a little help from him, because it is he who support us in this life through the earthly friends he gives us. Without him, our earthly friendships, pleasant as they may be, would be shallow and often unreal. With him and them, "I can get by." We need to keep this in mind as we relate to him in prayer, meditation, and experience.

Richard R. Losch+

The Ethiopian Eunuch

The Book of Acts is the first history of the Christian church ever written. It is more of an overview of the first few years of the Church rather than a thorough history. Because of this, we often meet important characters, hear a bit about their story, and then move on and find out nothing more about them. This is consistent with the book of Acts, however, because its main purpose seems to be to show, in case after case, how the Church broke down the old restrictive boundaries of Judaism, opening them up to offer salvation to the whole world. Acts is more interested in enlightening the blind and ignorant as a mission to the world than it is in individuals. One such character who is introduced and then never heard of again is the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:26ff. First, it is important for us to understand a little about Ethiopia in the first century AD. It was known as the land of Kush, and one of the primary ethnic groups there were the Nubians. For centuries, they had been, off and on, subject to the Egyptians, and for a brief period in the eighth century BC they ruled Egypt. They claimed to be descendants of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and therefore had a Jewish heritage. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church today still makes that same claim. When Haile Selassie was Emperor of Ethiopia (1930-1974), one of his titles was Great Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

In most ancient royal courts, eunuchs played an important role. They were not only guardians of the harem, but also high court officials. Those officials who had any financial responsibilities were also eunuchs. The reason for this was that since they could never have descendants, they were much less likely to try to amass an inheritance to leave to their heirs. Most of them lived very luxurious

lives, and had no need to steal. The Ethiopian eunuch in the Book of Acts is described as an important official in the court of the Kandake, the Nubian Queen of Ethiopia. He also obviously honored his Jewish heritage, because he was in Jerusalem to worship at the Temple. An angel told the Apostle Philip to go down the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. Philip obeyed, and as he was traveling he saw the eunuch in a chariot heading back home to Ethiopia. Philip heard him reading the book of the Prophet Isaiah. If you recall the article on biblical literacy last month, we mentioned that in those days everyone read aloud even when he was reading alone. Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading, and he asked Philip to explain it to him. Philip explained that this was a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah, and how it had been fulfilled in Jesus. After his explanation, the eunuch asked Philip to baptize him, and thus he returned to Ethiopia a baptized Christian.¹ That is the last we hear of the eunuch in the Bible, but he and others like him may have been the first Christian missionaries to the pagan Ethiopians.

Richard R. Losch+

Be Wordly Wise

Daughter, Slaughter, and Enough Laughter

English is often accused of being a completely illogical language because of such things as different pronunciations of words that are spelled almost the same. For example, why does “daughter” rhyme with “slaughter,” but if you remove the “s”, “laughter” rhymes with “rafter”? In fact, there was a time not all that long ago when this was not a problem. In the 17th century, all three words rhymed with “rafter.” Until the early 18th century, there were almost no standard rules of spelling or grammar for the English language. In 17th-century documents and earlier, we often find the same word spelled differently at different places in the same document. In Shakespeare’s own lifetime, his name was spelled six different ways. Many people in those days were illiterate or only partially literate. While they could read and write a bit, their ability to do so was quite limited. A

¹ At that time the Church still called itself “The Way.” If the word Christian was used at all, it was used as a pejorative by the Church’s enemies, probably in the form *Chrestiani*, “Followers of the Fool.” Acts tells us that it was in Antioch that they were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

valuable resource today is several letters written by accused witches in the time of the Salem witch trials. Accused people who could write were encouraged to write a statement in their own defense. In several of these letters, we have reference to people's daughters, and the word is often spelled "dafter." This is how we know that it was pronounced that way in those days. In Middle English, "gh" represented a sound made in the back of the throat that sounded like a harsh "h". That sound is still common in many languages, particularly the Semitic ones, but it no longer exists in English. It is very hard to distinguish the "th" and "f" sounds if you simply hear them without seeing a person's lips or knowing the word. Likewise, it is hard to distinguish between the "gh" and "f" sounds when spoken, and as a result, over the course of time, many of the "gh" sounds became pronounced like an "f". We see this in "laugh" and "enough." Often the "gh" sound disappeared altogether, as in the poetic "enow" for "enough," or in the "bough" of a tree. This is what happened to "daughter."

Richard R. Losch+

A Touch of Trivia

In many languages, it is sometimes very difficult to tell precisely what an auxiliary phrase refers to. A classic example of this is in Luke's account of the tax collector Zacchaeus. When Jesus was teaching to a crowd, Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see him, "because he was short in stature" (Luke 19:3). Most people, when they read this, assume that it was Zacchaeus who was short. Many scholars, however, believe that it may have referred to Jesus. Even in the original Greek, there is no way to tell for sure. We usually think of Jesus as a strong and imposing person. We tend to think of such people as being tall, but there is no physical description of Jesus in the Bible. Scholars have debated this for about 1800 years, but most readers, unless it is called to their attention, assume that it was Zacchaeus who was short. In those days, being short (unless it was extreme) was not considered anything particularly good or bad. It was just sometimes inconvenient. If it was Jesus, it would be difficult to see him in a crowd. Unfortunately, we will never know for sure what Luke meant, but in the big picture, it really doesn't matter.

Richard R. Losch+

The Fate of Cain

Legend and ancient rabbinic interpretations have given the impression that we know a great deal more about Cain than the Bible really tells us. Genesis says that after he murdered his brother Abel he fled, married, and had descendants. That is all we know about him after the murder. There is no explanation as to whom he married or how he died. The only people in the world that the Bible tells us about were Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel, so who did he marry? This was a bigger problem in the days when people accepted every word of the Bible literally. Today, most people accept the story of Adam and Eve as allegory or metaphor, presented to set major theological issues before us. If that is the case, the details of such things as who Cain married become much less important. Another explanation, of course, is recognizing that the Bible frequently never mentions daughters unless they are important to the story being told. Frequently, even when they are mentioned, they are not named.¹ Since Adam and his family were the only humans on earth, the only logical conclusion is that Cain married one of his unmentioned sisters. That would not be thought of as sinful incest, however, since there were no other women available, and God had commanded the humans to be fruitful and multiply. Other legends tell of semi-human or demonic creatures, one of whom he married. The Bible says nothing about this, but legends of such things abounded in ancient times.²

The question that has nagged Bible readers for millennia is whether Cain was fairly punished for the murder of his brother. The punishment seems to have satisfied God, but many readers are not content with how fair his treatment was, believing that he should die for what he did. From all we are told in Gen. 4:11-16, it seems that he lived on in the Land of Nod with his wife and family, protected

¹ The reason for this was that publicly mentioning a woman's name cast doubts upon how decent a person she might be. Not mentioning her name beyond family and friends unless it was necessary to do so was considered protecting her dignity.

² There is a very ancient legend that Adam had a wife before Eve who was a semi-demon named Lilith, and that it was her offspring who populated other portions of the land. It was one of them whom Cain married. The legend of Lilith still survives today among some people, and she has been taken as an emblem of the feminist movement.

by God from harm by other humans. His only punishment was his exile and curse, and the scorn of the rest of mankind. It sounds like he got away with murder. The only thing that can be said in his defense is that until he killed Abel, no human being had ever experienced or probably even contemplated human death. They sacrificed animals, so they understood death, but it is fair to say that they may never have associated it with humans. Perhaps Cain did not understand what he was doing. That is a weak excuse, but it is an excuse.¹

The Bible gives us no information about Cain's death. This does not bother modern readers, as there are many characters in the Bible whose deaths are never mentioned. This was not so with ancient readers, however. They wanted a conclusion to the story. This led to the development of many legends, some of which have lived so long that many people today do not realize that they are not biblical. For example, one says that Cain was killed by his great-great-grandson Lamech. This story grew out of a passage in Genesis, where Lamech says to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times" (Gen. 4:23f). The ancient scholars based their conclusions on a single Hebrew word that appears only twice in Genesis 4. That word is *ish* (אִישׁ), which is usually translated "man." When Cain is born, Eve says, "I have gained a man (*ish*)" (4:1), and Lamech says, "I have killed a man (*ish*)" (4:23). It was on this basis that the ancient sages concluded that Lamech killed his great-great-grandfather Cain.

The Lamech legend was extremely popular in late antiquity on up to the time of the High Renaissance, and it inspired many chancel plays, ballads and poems, adding detail after detail that the ancient legends never thought of. One chancel play depicts Lamech as a blind but skilled hunter, whose young son Tubal-Cain guides his bow when they are on the hunt. One day, the boy guided his father's arrow to a sound in the brush. When they went to get their quarry, they discovered that it was Cain who had been killed. To the medieval mind, this solved several problems. Cain received his just punishment, and Lamech could not be held guilty because he was blind

¹ That is like the situation of Adam and the forbidden fruit. God warned him that if he ate of it he would die, but he could well have asked, "What is die?" At that point, they had not even seen death in animals.

and did not intend to kill Cain. Also, any question about God's justice was removed because Cain received the capital punishment that people felt was his due.

Another legend says that Cain died in the Flood. This is consistent with the enormous ages the Bible attributes to the earliest humans. He was not one of the ones on the Ark, so if he were still alive at that point, he drowned with the rest of the wicked people. Neither of these stories is confirmed by the Bible.

One of the reasons for the popularity of the many stories about Cain's death was not that scholars were so concerned with it, but that the common people like closure and want to know how things come out in the end. The problem is that in folklore there is usually very little concern for what is a reasonable conclusion versus what is simply a good tale. People were familiar enough with the Bible to want to know how the story ended, but not familiar with it to realize that we are just not told. To the people, it was important that God not let Cain get away with murder. That was the bottom line, and inserting a little imaginative storytelling seemed to them to be perfectly acceptable as long as it solved the problem.

Richard R. Losch+

Daily Life in Early Israel

After the Exodus from Egypt, the Israelites¹ wandered in the Sinai deserts for 40 years,² and then finally arrived in the land of Canaan that God had promised to them. They were separated into thirteen tribes, and each of twelve of them was allotted a portion of the land. The thirteenth tribe, the Levites, were the priests. They were given special privilege and living space among the other twelve

¹ We refer to them as Israelites, not as Jews. Judaism as we know it was firmed up as a faith after the return from the Babylonian exile in the sixth century BC. Before that, the religion was very much in the developmental stage. The word Jew comes from Judah, the Southern Kingdom, which became the stronghold and center of the religion.

² The expression "40 years" in ancient Hebrew literature did not mean 40 years by the calendar, but simply a very long time. The book of Exodus tells us that they were there long enough that the Israelites who entered Canaan were the descendants of the ones who had left Egypt. The only ones still alive who had been born in Egypt were Joshua and Caleb.

tribes. There was very little formal tribal unity. There was no central government. It was a loosely formed confederation, with each tribe governed by what the Bible calls Judges. These were men for the most part, although there were some female Judges, such as Deborah (Jdg. 4-5). These were not judicial figures, but men and women whom the people recognized as wise and competent leaders to whom they looked for guidance. This was the Iron Age, and lasted from about 1200-1050 BC, when the people demanded a king, and Saul was anointed the first king of Israel. It would not be until David ascended the throne in about 1000 BC that the twelve tribes were united into what is called the United Monarchy of Israel. That would survive for a little less than a century, when a rebellion broke the monarchy into two kingdoms: Israel to the north and Judah to the south. By that time, the culture and religious practices had become fairly well developed, but in the early days they were still primitive. As for religion, the one thing that bound them all together was the Torah (the Religious Law given at Mount Sinai). That is the period of the Judges we will explore here.

Although decades of war drove out or destroyed most of the Canaanites, there were still many of them around, and they were obviously enemies of the Israelites. The Israelites also had a more dangerous enemy in the Philistines, a Hellenic people who arrived along the Gaza coast at about the same time that the Israelites had entered Canaan from the east in the 13th century BC. The Israelites were severely harassed by the Philistines during most of the period of the Judges, and it was not until the time of David in the late 12th century that they were finally subdued.¹

Extensive archaeology in the 1980s and 90s has revealed much information about what daily life was like among the Israelites in the period of the Judges. The first Israelite settlements were small villages, mostly nestled on the hilltops along the Jordan River. Hilltops were a good defensive position because they were hard to attack and it was easy to see enemies coming. Even so, very few of the villages had defensive walls. Most attackers were just local bandits, not armies. Although there were a few large towns, a village of 400 people such as Shiloh would have been considered a very large

¹ Contrary to a current folk legend, the Philistines were not the ancestors of the modern, so-called Palestinians, even though the word Palestine derives from Philistine. The modern Palestinians are mainly Arabs.

one. The villages were generally subject to the authority of the larger towns near them. Although these could not be called city-states, they were roughly the same concept. The town acted as a patron and provided a reasonable amount of protection for its surrounding villages. The terrain was irregular and rocky and not compatible with raising sheep. That would not come until much later. In those days, the hills had a dense growth of scrub pine, oak, and terebinth trees. These were small, the largest usually being under 13 feet. The people would clear an area for the village and then, in regions within an hour's walk of the village, they would terrace the hillside for the growing of crops. Their main crop was wheat, but they also grew barley, millet, and smaller vegetables like garbanzo beans, lentils and onions. They had goats for milk and cheese, possibly a few sheep for wool, although not many, and chickens for eggs. These animals were valuable for their wool and milk and were far too expensive to be used for meat. The only time that most of the Israelites in those days ate meat was at the Passover meal or if the meat from sacrifices at a local shrine was distributed. For the most part, their diet was vegetarian. Farming was done by human labor, not with the help of oxen or asses. The farms were generally community efforts, not individual property.

Although the community worked together in most of its activities, nuclear families lived in their own houses. The nuclear family has been essential to Israelite culture from the beginning. The average family had two or three children who lived past infancy. Extended families were very close, however, and usually relatives clustered their houses together around the common courtyard where many of the family activities, such as cooking, winemaking, oil pressing, and so on, were done by the whole extended family together. Houses were built out of mud brick on a stone foundation. Many were one story high, but some had a second story, usually made of wood. The living quarters were three or four rooms, but these were not bedrooms. Sleeping was usually done on the roof or in a shelter built on the roof. Eating was usually done either on the roof or in the courtyard. The climate of that area was such that this could be done most of the year, with only a short period during the winter rains when they would have to move inside. One of the first floor rooms would have been where the animals (perhaps a couple of sheep, a goat and a few chickens) would be brought in during the night to protect them from predators and thieves. This general

architecture survived for centuries and was still a common type of house in Jesus' time.¹

As always, every town and village had its rich and poor, who usually lived in different sections of the community. The villages were gathered into larger communities that might be called chiefdoms, and the leaders or chiefs were what the Bible calls Judges. Some of these that the Bible talks about were Samson, Gideon, and Jephthah. Some of these chiefdoms were large. The one around Shechem, where Abimelek was the Judge (Jdg. 9), was about 20 miles in diameter. Most of the villages in the southern tribal area of Benjamin were smaller, averaging about half that size.

Archaeology can give us a great deal of information about the physical circumstances under which people lived, but oftentimes the finer points of their culture and religion are not so evident. What does seem evident is that the religion of the early Israelite settlers in Canaan was very confused and unified only through the common bond of the Torah. This is fairly well confirmed by the Book of Judges. There were no centralized religious authority and no temples. There were local shrines, some of which became famous enough that people made pilgrimages to them. An example of this is Shiloh, where Eli was the priest who raised the Prophet Samuel. The first centralization of the religion was when David was king and established Jerusalem as his capital. After the building of Solomon's Temple, all official sacrifice was made only there, and that was established as the central authoritative location of the faith.

With the rise of Saul as a king over all the tribes, centralized authority was firmed up, and the power of the Judges waned to the point that they were nothing more than local chieftains. The final unification of all the tribes, even though it was a tense relationship, was established under the rule of King David. At that time, national culture and religion took precedence over local ones. From then on until its destruction by Rome in AD 132, Israel was a kingdom.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Many scholars believe that Jesus was not born in a stable (there were no such stables in Palestine in those days). They believe that he was born in a house. There were also no inns, but the word that is usually translated "inn" (*kataluma*, καταλυμα) means the living quarters of a house. Since there was no room in the living quarters, the Holy Family had to stay in the room where the animals were kept, where there would be a manger.