

doctrine fell into disrepute, through the influence especially of Origen".<sup>9</sup>

Returning to the events of A.D. 312–3, it can be seen from the writings of Eusebius that it was a time of great rejoicing in the Roman heavens and earth by the Christians, who benefited from Constantine's favour:

"Above all for us who had fixed our hopes on the Christ of God there was unspeakable happiness and a divine joy blossomed in all hearts";

"And together, the people of every age, male and female alike, with all their powers of mind, rejoicing in heart and soul, gave glory through

prayers and thanksgiving to the Author of their happiness, God Himself".<sup>10</sup>

Another Latin Church Father, Lactantius (d. 320), commented on the peace that had come to the Christians after "ten years of persecution", and called upon the people to "celebrate the triumph of God with gladness".

8. See the author's series, "The mark and number of the beast" ([Jun. 2003, p. 244](#); [Jul. 2003, p. 278](#)).

9. *Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History*, ch. 3, p. 103, Ward Lock & Co., London.

10. *Op. cit.*, pp. 382-3.

(To be concluded)

**Occasional series**

## Travel in the Bible

### Roads

Tony Benson

**T**HE WORD 'ROAD', surprisingly, occurs only once in the AV, and then as a translation of a verb (1 Sam. 27:10). However, the Hebrew word *derek*, the normal word in Israel for 'road' today, occurs frequently in the Bible, usually translated 'way'. But is there anything in the Bible to indicate a prepared road, as opposed to a convenient route which people followed? The word *mesillah*, usually translated 'highway', does seem to carry this meaning.

#### Making and maintaining roads

There are two passages in Isaiah which use the word and which seem clearly to speak of roads actually being made. Both are figurative passages but clearly based on what actually happened in the preparation of roads:

"Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain" (40:3,4);

"Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones" (62:10).

In addition, a passage which uses *derek* rather than *mesillah* also seems to speak figuratively of the same process: "Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people" (57:14).

Three basic procedures are involved here:

- gathering out stones to make a good surface, free of obstructions
- smoothing out ups and downs to make a level track
- straightening out bends.

All three elements are involved in road construction today. There is no indication in Scripture that these roads that ran through open country were surfaced in any way and little evidence from non-Scriptural sources either. Streets in towns were paved, however; archaeological excavations have discovered the remains of paved and cobbled streets within cities.

Roads would have required regular maintenance, especially after the winter rains, which would wash stones onto the road surface, wash away the beaten earth making up the road surface and wash soil from banks onto the road. In addition, roads would have needed to be kept clear of plants such as brambles growing onto them.

Roads were only suitable for travel in good weather; travelling in the wet season of winter would result in getting bogged down in mud, especially if a wheeled vehicle was used. Thus, when Elijah saw a distant cloud developing over the sea, and knew that the drought was to end in much rain, he immediately advised Ahab, "Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not" (1 Kgs. 18:44). For this reason armies remained in their quarters for the winter and went off to battle when the rains had finished in spring, termed in 2 Samuel 11:1, "the time when kings go forth to battle".

#### Literal roads

Besides figurative references to roads and road building, the word *mesillah* is sometimes used of literal highways, usually important roads, which one would expect to have been constructed and maintained as above:

- When Israel wanted to pass through Edom on the way to the borders of Canaan, they said to the king of Edom, "We will go by the high way" (Num. 20:19). The reference is to the important road called "the king's high way" (v. 17), which ran east of Jordan and the Dead Sea, although here "high" is in italics and the word *derek* is used.

- Judges 21:19 refers to an annual feast at Shiloh, which took place "on the north side of Beth-el, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Beth-el to Shechem". This highway would be the main road running along the central spine of hills in Israel.
- The cows that drew the cart containing the ark when it was sent back by the Philistines "went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left" (1 Sam. 6:12) and arrived at Beth-shemesh. This would be the main road leading from the coastal plain into the Judean hills through the Sorek valley.
- After Joab treacherously stabbed him, "Amasa wallowed in blood in the midst of the highway", causing Joab's men to stop and watch rather than following Joab, whereupon one of Joab's men "removed Amasa out of the highway into the field" (2 Sam. 20:12). This gives the idea of a road that was readily distinguishable from the adjacent fields, and in context clearly a main road running northwards from Jerusalem to Galilee.

Research has shown that a typical wheeled vehicle would have been about five foot wide, and roads wide enough to allow two such vehicles comfortably to pass.

### Testimony Index 1981–2005

We are grateful to Brother Brian Armour of Brisbane, Australia, for supplying the four-page Subject Index for 2005. An index to *Testimony* articles covering the period 1981–2005 inclusive is available on the Bible Web website, which he helps to run, [www.bibleweb.org](http://www.bibleweb.org). The index can be downloaded as a zipped RTF file for personal use if desired. This website contains various other items of interest, such as pamphlets about Christadelphian beliefs, indexes to other Christadelphian magazines and items on current events. Scanned copies of articles are available from 1981 to 2003 inclusive. These will be sent by email. This service is limited to six articles per person in any six-month period. Full details are given on the above website.

### "Think on these things"

This 210-page book is subtitled "A collection of ten exhortations based upon some favourite Bible texts", the exhortations being given by Brother Bill Guy, familiar to readers of the *Testimony* through his poems, which we have published over the years. Price £8.40 plus postage and packing of £1.30 for a single copy. Available from Brother Guy at 2E Weld Road, Southport, Merseyside, PR8 2AZ. Cheques payable to W. Guy.

### Testimony Book Exchange

Brother Paul Hamnett has been conducting the Testimony Book Exchange since January 2000 and would like to hand it over to someone else at the end of 2006. This operation is run independently of the magazine. Anyone interested in taking it on is invited to contact Brother Hamnett to discuss it with him (see page 68 for details).