

Israel in their wilderness journey remembered with lamentation the abundant fish they had eaten in Egypt at no cost to themselves (Num. 11:5).

How the people of the Hebrews responded to this first plague, and to the ineffectual parley that Moses had had with Pharaoh, is not stated, nor how they were affected by the polluted waters of the Nile. The pasturelands of Goshen were mainly far from the river, but there was, as has been shown, a substantial population of Hebrew slaves working in the Delta whose water supply could have been just as critical as was the Egyptians'. In later plagues a distinction is drawn between

their effects upon the Egyptian areas of population and those of the Hebrews, so was this also true of the first plague? If so, the reaction of the elders of the Israelites when Moses and Aaron returned could only have been favourable. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had at last revealed Himself as their champion. But neither Moses, nor the people themselves, could have guessed the Divine course that events would take for the humbling of the mighty nation that had so long held them in thrall, much less Pharaoh, dining sumptuously in his palace off the fat of the land.

(To be continued)

Your Letters



Zipporah and the circumcision

Brother John Mitchell, in the fifth article of his series "[Moses: earth's meekest man](#)" ([Dec. 2006, p. 424](#)), has perceptively noted the significant placement of God's additional instructions to Moses between his setting out for Egypt and his crisis with the angel at the inn (Ex. 4:21-23). With strong references to first-born sons, both Yahweh's and Pharaoh's, the context clearly implies that it was therefore the uncircumcised status of Moses' own first-born son, Gershom, that was the obstacle to his progress.

I doubt, however, if Moses neglected his obligation to circumcise his son because of any opposition from Zipporah, as suggested by Brother Mitchell.¹ All six sons of her ancestor Keturah were circumcised in Abraham's household, as were Ishmael and Esau, and established their tribes in the Arabian Peninsula. Arabs still circumcise their sons in their thirteenth year, as this was the age when Ishmael received the rite. A list of Semitic circumcised tribes, including all the desert dwellers, appears in Jeremiah 9:25,26. (By the time of Jeremiah, the Egyptians had also adopted the practice, as shown in tomb paintings.)

By contrast, circumcision among the Hebrews had lapsed during their captivity in Egypt, so that God commanded Moses and Aaron to circumcise *all* males at the time of the Exodus (Ex. 12:50).² Despite reinstating this rite with the Law, Moses' record with circumcision continued to be poor. It

is surprising to note that he neglected to enforce it for the rest of the wilderness wanderings, so that the entire generation at the entrance to the Land had to be circumcised by Joshua (Josh. 5:2-8). We might speculate as to his reasons, whether apathy or distraction, but it is nonetheless clear that it had nothing to do with Zipporah.

Zipporah's issue was and continued to be with her own status as a 'foreign' wife among the Israelites. She would have been well aware that her ancestor Keturah was a slave-wife, and her sons were sent away so that they would not inherit with Isaac, the 'seed of promise'. With Moses now commissioned as leader of the Hebrew nation, Zipporah anticipated that she and her sons would not be deemed 'good enough'. This was soon borne out when Miriam criticised Moses for marrying a Cushite (Num 12:1). How interesting it is, therefore, that Zipporah used the words *hatan-damim*, 'blood relative',³ as she reproached Moses at the inn! It seems she was saying, "Now

1. See my article, "[Zipporah and the circumcision](#)" ([Sept. 2004, p. 350](#)).
2. See my article, "[The Circumcision at Marah](#)" ([Dec. 2001, p. 451](#)).
3. In Moses' writings, *hatan* is translated twice as 'marriages', once as 'son-in-law', once as 'mother-in-law' and fourteen times as 'father-in-law' (all referring to Jethro), but nowhere else as 'husband'. It refers to a relative by marriage through the bride.

[at last] you are truly related to me because of the circumcision [of our son]!”.

The touching (*nag'a*) of the bloody foreskin to Moses feet, legs and/or groin may have been part of the eastern circumcision ceremony signifying the connection and succession of father and son, just as ‘putting the hand under the thigh’ intimately sealed a solemn oath of action (Gen. 24:2,9; 47:29). In any case, Zipporah was binding Moses closer to her through Abraham’s rite, and transferring the completed act to him in order to save his life. This scene also prepares the reader for the blood-smearing on the lintel and two doorposts, which repelled the angel of death from Israel’s first-born sons (Ex. 12:22).⁴

This was now the fifth time that Moses’ life had been saved by women, but, in sending Zipporah and her sons back to Midian, “the east country” (18:1-7), he unwittingly repeated the exclusion of Keturah and her sons (Gen. 25:6). This hurtful significance was probably not lost on Zipporah, so it is to her credit that she cooperated in the smooth and happy reunion arranged at Sinai by her father Jethro, who showed outstanding wisdom and statesmanship. The Kenite tribe was thereafter adopted into Judah and continued to provide examples of faith and loyalty.

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4. See “Ethnicity, exogamy and Zipporah”, Karen Strand Winslow, *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, Winter 2006, 4.1.

The promise of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2

I found the recent exchange of views between Brother Harrison ([Aug. 2006, p. 291](#) and [Dec. 2006, p. 442](#)) and Brother Crawford ([Nov. 2006, p. 412](#)) to be interesting. I found myself agreeing with points made on each side. It seems to me that the scope of the bestowal of the Spirit and the range of its gifts is broader than Brother Harrison would allow, but, on the other hand, Brother Harrison’s argument on the bestowal of the Spirit at Pentecost and the beginning of Luke’s Gospel seems substantially correct. There are several other arguments which support this conclusion:

- 1 Luke’s distinctive use of *pimplēmi*, ‘to fill’,* in relation to the Spirit is found in relation to

the apostles (for example, Acts 2:4) as well as John the Baptist, Elisabeth and Zacharias (Lk. 1:15,41,67).

- 2 John the Baptist and Jesus are presented as prophets in Luke’s story (Lk. 1:76; 4:24; 7:16,26; 13:33; 20:6; 24:19; Acts 3:22,23; 7:37), and as such their possession of the Spirit falls within the compass of Joel’s latter-day bestowal of the Spirit, which is couched in terms of prophesying. The principal term for their preaching is one employed in Joel’s prophecy, since Joel 3:5 in the Septuagint (which is Joel 2:32 in the AV) uses *euangelidzō* (“they that have the good news preached to them”) as the corresponding term for the Hebrew *sryd* (“the remnant”). The same verb *euangelidzō* is used by Gabriel to announce the birth of John the Baptist (Lk. 1:19), as well as the preaching of the gospel (for example, 4:18), and the apostolic mission (for example, Acts 5:42). This commonality ties the three ministries of Luke–Acts together as an activity directed to the same *generation* rather than separate actions belonging to different epochs.
- 3 Luke’s use of the concept of ‘power’ also suggests that he was writing the fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy into the terms of his story opening. The expression “power of the Highest” (Lk. 1:35) strikes an echo with Luke’s later expression, “power from on high” (24:49), which refers to the bestowal of the Spirit at Pentecost. Similarly, this language of ‘power’ is used in connection with Jesus (4:14; Acts 10:38), which suggests that Luke does not regard Jesus’ anointing with the Spirit as different *in kind* from that of other characters in his story, even if there is a difference of *degree* in the range of its effects through Jesus. Accordingly, Luke retains the same metaphor for the possession of the Spirit, *plērēs*, ‘full’ (Lk. 4:1), and *pimplēmi*, ‘to fill’ (1:15,41,67; Acts 2:4), throughout his account.

In addition to these three points, there are other arguments that can be made in support of Brother Harrison’s approach, but essentially they amount to the point of view that Luke narrates a

* Readers who investigate this for themselves in a concordance will note that *plēthō* not *pimplēmi* is given. The following comment by Vine (*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*) may help: “*Pimplēmi* and *plēthō*, lengthened forms of *plēō*, to fill (*plēthō* supplies certain tenses of *pimplēmi*) . . .”—T.B.