

God purges them. There also remain millions more Jews to be gathered “out of the countries wherein [they] are scattered” (v. 34). This process also must be completed. We do not yet see clearly how these steps are to be brought about.

Four facts of prophecy

It is now time to consider in a little more detail the plan by which this series of articles will proceed. The aim is to answer some current challenges to the relevance of Bible prophecy about Israel for today. To promote that aim the intent is to reinforce the following facts of prophecy:

- 1 that the prophecies about Israel and their land were not all fulfilled in the return from Babylon or in first-century events;
- 2 that those that have not yet seen fulfilment still remain valid;
- 3 that Israel’s return to their land, chiefly over the past century, and the rebuilding of their national status, was purposefully brought about by God Himself, even though it has been a return in unbelief;
- 4 that Israel, or the Jews as they are called today, are still the people of God and nation-

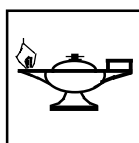
ally have a special part to play in His future purpose.

There are many ‘Christians’ who deny the validity, or seek to undermine, these aspects of Bible prophecy, and it is important that their arguments should be answered.

Before we proceed with this objective, we should comment on and briefly try to remove the distraction of a further line of spurious argument. This line is even more fundamental in its misunderstanding of Scripture and prophecy, and for many prevents a true appreciation of the Bible evidence. It is the critical approach to the Bible, which starts from a disbelief in its literal inspiration by God, and attributes its message in whole or in large part to human thoughts. Each critic judges for himself what he thinks is theologically primitive and impossible of Divine origin, and tries to propose a historical development to show the advance of human ideas.

The next article will consist of a brief answer to some of the commonly held higher-critical views about Israel. Subsequent articles will answer other challenges to the relevance of Bible prophecy about Israel for us today.

(To be continued)



Encounter

Reprinted items from earlier issues, chosen by the Publishing Editor

The Law given through Moses

5. The cities of refuge*

Islip Collyer

THERE ARE SOME provisions of the Law that cannot be linked with any of the Ten Commandments, but they all come within the threefold classification suggested in the first article of this series (Dec. 2000, p. 457). Their tendency was moral or practical or prophetic, or a blend of these main objects.

One of these additional laws of practical value was connected with the cities of refuge. While in the wilderness the people were told of these cities (Num. 35), and when the Land was divided among the tribes, six cities were appointed, three on the west side of the Jordan and three on the

east (Josh. 20). The provision of these places of refuge was linked up with a larger matter affecting the whole nation, and with a promise of great moral benefit. The Levites, members of the tribe from which Moses and Aaron came, were given no portion of land such as fell to the other tribes. They were separated for Divine service, and were given cities with their “suburbs” in various parts of the Land in order that they might guide and judge the people (Josh. 21).

* First published May 1947.

In the final blessing which Moses pronounced, the duties of the Levites were thus described: "They shall teach Jacob Thy judgments, and Israel Thy law: they shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar" (Deut. 33:10). In order that these members of the priestly tribe should be able to discharge their duties as teachers and judges, they were given no land to till. They were supplied by tithes taken from the workers, and they were separated in various parts of the Land with cities and the suburbs immediately surrounding them. No man, to whatever tribe he might belong, would be very far from the nearest of these cities, where it should always have been possible to receive instruction and judgement.

WE have to remember that every cluster of dwelling places with any kind of permanent defence was accounted a city. Forty-eight of such cities were given to the Levites, and six of them were appointed as places of refuge, where a man who had unwittingly slain another could find sanctuary until the circumstances of the tragedy could be investigated.

Some readers may retain rather misleading impressions drawn from stories read in early youth—stories of Bible times in which there has been an attempt to portray the ancient customs with faulty imagination, and without a sufficiently careful investigation of the old records. In one such written picture a man is seen running, shouting 'Refuge!' that none shall stop him. Close on his heels runs the avenger with a lethal weapon in his hand.

It is surely very improbable that there were often, if ever, such crudely dramatic scenes as this. We cannot suppose that a people instructed in the Law would be more unreasonable than other nations when a tragedy was obviously the result of accident. It is certainly wrong to suppose that after an accident the normal sequence would be a dramatic race of many miles, possibly even scores of miles, to the nearest city of refuge, the avenger thinking it was the proper thing if possible to catch the fugitive and kill him before he could find sanctuary. All the people would surely recognise that the proper thing was for the offender to "stand before the congregation for judgment" (Josh. 20:6). Unfortunately, human history is eloquent in telling us that angry passion will not always wait on sober judgement. In many countries, and even in Great Britain, there have been blood feuds, continuing

from one generation to another, with mounting passion and with acts of violence rendering the feud more bitter and a just settlement more difficult.

If there has been an accident in a rural part and it is possible to blame someone for it, the continued presence of a delinquent in a village will aggravate the anger of those who accuse him. Men will take sides, far more influenced by feeling than by reason, until it is possible that such a degree of bitterness will be reached that a hot-headed member strikes and the situation goes from bad to worse. This is what has repeatedly happened in many countries, even where the softening influence of Christianity has been at work for centuries. Under the Mosaic Law the cities of refuge made provision against this evil. A man who had been so unfortunate as to cause the death of another was wise to get to the nearest city of refuge without any delay, but we need not think of him as racing for his life with the avenger of blood close on his heels.

WHEN the circumstances of the tragedy could be investigated, the man would be brought "before the congregation" (Num. 35:12) for trial. If it could be proved that he had committed murder there was no possible ransom, he had to pay life for life. If, however, there had been no previous enmity, and the prisoner could satisfy the judges that he had not intended to slay, he would be cleared of the charge of murder. There might still remain a conviction or a suspicion that he was in measure guilty. To use modern terms, he might have been negligent, even criminally negligent, and the relatives of the one who had lost his life might regard him as the proper object of their vengeance. In such circumstances "the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of the hand of the revenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled: and he shall abide in it until the death of the high priest" (v. 25).

This banishment might seem a severe punishment for a man who was perhaps not even willing to admit that he had been careless. It has its counterpart in modern times. When a human being has been slain by the act of another, it is murder, or manslaughter, or accident. If it is murder, the guilty man is condemned and executed; if it is manslaughter, he is imprisoned; whilst if it is brought in as an accident, he may have to pay heavy damages. In this last matter of pecuniary compensation, it may well be doubted

whether it is a public advantage that in our day the greatest menace of accident can be so covered by insurance that delinquents are in large measure relieved from fear. Men are more careful when they know that the slightest accident is almost sure to cause them loss. Under the Mosaic Law the period of banishment would provide a measure of punishment, while at the same time removing the slayer from the society where his continued presence would be so provocative of continual wrath and resentment.

A man was not prohibited from returning to his home before the death of the high priest, but if he went thither it was at his peril. Therefore unless the tragedy had been so obviously an accident that even the relatives of the dead man recognised the slayer's innocence, the wise course was to remain in the city of refuge until the time of safety specified in the Law. We must of course remember that Palestine was a hilly land without the numerous modern amenities that we have come to regard as normal. The roads were few and faulty, there were hardly any waterways other than the Sea of Galilee, and many parts of the Land were remote from the centre of government. Even in Christian England, duelling was a curse until comparatively recently. In Scotland there were blood feuds, sometimes continuing for many generations. In ancient Israel the cities of refuge provided a means for avoiding many of the bitter disputes and feuds which so easily arise among faulty human beings.

THE three cities of refuge on the west side of Jordan can be identified without much difficulty. Kedesh in Naphtali can be found a little to the north of the waters of Merom. Shechem in Mount Ephraim is near the famous mountains of blessing and cursing, Gerizim and Ebal. This city is about seventy miles south of Kedesh. Hebron in Judah is another sixty miles to the south. To the east of Jordan the southernmost city of refuge was Bezer in the wilderness, out of the tribe of Reuben. Ramoth Gilead is in the centre and Golan somewhere in Bashan, in the half tribe of Manasseh. The only one of these which can be identified with any degree of certainty is Ramoth Gilead. Attempts have been made to locate Bezer and Golan, but no one would claim that any clear evidence has been found as to their exact position.

We read very little regarding these cities of refuge after the time of Joshua. Hebron truly often comes into the history as a city, but not in

connection with the idea of refuge. David reigned in Hebron before the submission of the northern tribes. The slayers of Ishbosheth came to Hebron, but clearly not with the idea of finding refuge there. They came to find David, hoping for a reward for having slain the son of Saul. They found condemnation and death for their crime.

WHY is it that we read so little of these cities of refuge in days when violence was rife in the Land and private quarrels might so easily develop into family feuds? There may have been many instances of which the Word says nothing, for the history is a brief one and not in any way designed to satisfy the curiosity of modern students. References to any of the laws only come out incidentally in the history. It is probable, however, that, as in so many matters, the law was neglected. We read repeatedly that 'the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord'. Departure from the excellent rules which might have spared them much violence would probably be one of their first transgressions.

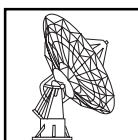
Christians need not affect surprise at their infidelity. Even with the Bible in every home and a general acceptance of the ideals there presented, there have been in Gentile lands such extraordinary departures from apostolic teaching that we ought not to be surprised at anything which happened in ancient Israel. We read that Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him. The children were impressed by the testimony of parents who had witnessed the judgements of God in the wilderness and in the conquest of the Land. When that living testimony had gone, the people soon made compromises in which the influence of surrounding nations exercised an increasing preponderance. There were no Bibles in the tents of Israel, so if the Levites failed to guide the people aright there was little to keep them in the way of truth.

THE Levites in some measure retained their position of influence even when they were sadly decadent. At last there was a superstitious belief that they were nearer to God than members of the other tribes. Even Micah, whose idea of serving God was to make a graven image, thought he would gain Divine favour by having a Levite in his house (Judg. 17). Even the turbulent and wicked Danites, who went to the far north to establish a settlement there, thought that they would benefit by having the same Levite as priest for their colony (Judg. 18). Possibly the Levites

in their forty-eight settlements exercised a restraining influence on the people around them, but the history shows that the general standard of conduct was as far below the ideals that had been placed before them, as with Christian lands in modern times.

In our survey of the Law in its practical bear-

ings we have to remember the frequent intimations that the people of Israel never inherited anything like the amount of land or the degree of prosperity that might have been theirs if they had been faithful. In the full sense of the apostle's words, they "entered not in because of unbelief" (Heb. 4:6).



Science

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Science and the Creator

Let him that standeth take heed

David Burges

A GOOD NUMBER of everyday human activities are used in Scripture as figures of spiritual exercises. Familiar examples are seeing, hearing, sleeping, walking and standing. The last of these is used in two particular ways. The first is of standing firm in the faith now, during our time of probation. Thus the Apostle Paul urges us: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to *stand* against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11); whilst Peter writes of "the true grace of God wherein ye *stand*" (1 Pet. 5:12). The second use is of our appearance before the Son of God at his coming: "But why dost thou judge thy brother? . . . for we shall all *stand* before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10).

In these examples, the action of standing carries the sense of remaining stable and upright, whilst the obvious counterpart to standing is falling. There is a clear danger, if our faith in the Word of God becomes weak, that instead of standing we may fall away. In fact this is precisely the meaning of the word 'apostasy', a falling away from the true faith (see, for example, 2 Thessalonians 2:3). Hence the apostle's admonition: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

Standing upright

Standing seems to be one of the actions in life that is most simple and automatic. We just do it with scarcely a thought, unless we are forced to

stand for too long! Yet scientists in the United States, researching the tendency of elderly people to fall and injure themselves, are discovering that the physical process of standing still is in fact a very complex one.¹ They first devised a special type of weighing platform capable of measuring the vertical, horizontal and rotational forces exerted by the feet of a subject simply trying to stand still.

This yielded the surprising result that everyone, whether fit or not, actually sways. The centre of pressure of the feet—the points on the soles where the body's weight is supported—constantly moves around as muscles twitch, the heart beats and the lungs inhale and exhale. It required the application to this random movement of a type of mathematics known as statistical mechanics in order to study what was happening. This revealed that a series of stages is occurring as we attempt to stand still. For a few seconds we 'drift', and then a reflex response changes the muscle tension in an attempt to bring us back upright. Every now and then a more accurate response, probably based upon visual cues or our balance organs, activates to bring us fully upright, before we start drifting again.

It is remarkable that this apparently simple activity should prove to be so complex. Clearly,

1. "Still Standing", Bruce Schechter, *New Scientist*, 14 Apr. 2001, pp. 39-41.