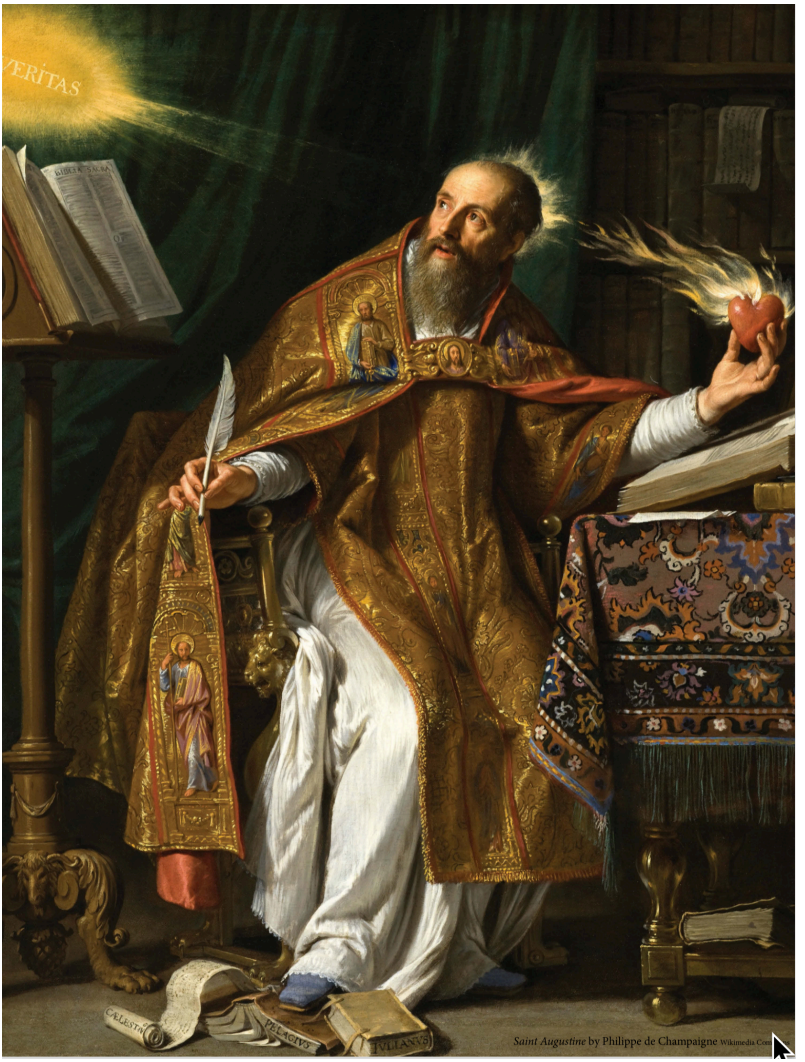
THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church

Livingston, Alabama

Volume XXVI, Number 7 July/August 2019



Saint Augustine by Philippe de Champaigne Wikimedia Com

July/August 2019

This Month's Cover

Our cover painting this month is *Saint Augustine* by Philippe de Champaigne. It is a relatively small oil on canvas, measuring about 2'7"x2'. It was completed sometime around 1645-1650, and is on display in the National Gallery of Art in Washington. It depicts Saint Augustine of Hippo (August 28) writing one of his powerful theological works. Saint Augustine (A.D. 354-430) was the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, near modern Algiers. He was one of the greatest of the early Christian theologians, formulating many of the doctrines of the Church that are considered fundamental interpretations of the Faith deposited with the Apostles, including that of Original Sin. His mother, Saint Monnika, was a Christian and his father Patricius was a pagan who converted to Christianity on his deathbed. Augustine was a profligate atheist until in 386. At the age of 31 he was converted to Christianity by Saint Anslem, the Bishop of Milan, who was a friend of Saint Monnika.

The painting depicts St. Augustine trampling on the works of the apostate Roman emperor Julian, and the writings of the heretics Pelagius and his disciple Caelestius. He wears the ecclesiastical vestments of a bishop, and is holding a writer's pen. In his left hand is a flaming heart that some say represents the Sacred Heart of Jesus, but more likely refers to the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus: "Were not our hearts burning within us … while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (Lk. 24:32). The flames of understanding rush toward his head, while over the Holy Bible the light of the Holy Spirit beams to him in the other direction. The light is labeled *Veritas*, Truth.

Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674) was one of the leading painters of the French Baroque era. He was born to a poor family in Brussels, Belgium, but his talent was recognized early.

The Epistle is published monthly except August by Saint James' Episcopal Church, P.O. Box 446, Livingston, AL 35470-0446, the Rev. R. R. Losch, Editor, email *rlosch33@gmail.com*, Phone 205-499-0968.

He first studied under the landscape painter Jacques Fouquières, then moved to Paris where he worked with Nicolas Pousin on the decoration of the Luxembourg Palace. The director of the project was Nicolas DuChesne. He was jealous of Champaigne's talent and resented his attentions to his daughter, eventually forcing him to move back to Brussels where he lived with his brother. After DuChesne's death Champaigne returned to Paris and married his daughter. He was under the patronage of the Queen Mother, Marie de Médicis. She granted him an impressive annual pension of 1200 *livre* (c. $350,000 in today's money). He made several paintings for Notre Dame Cathedral and the palace, and designed many magnificent tapestries. One of the Queen Mother's favorite churches was the Carmelite Church of Faubourg Saint-Jacques, for which he made numerous paintings. It was destroyed during the French Revolution, but fortunately many of his paintings were rescued before the destruction, and survived.

Champaigne is noted for his portraits of the French royalty, particularly for his attempt to reflect their character and personality in their faces, unlike the stiff and sterile expressions used by most portrait painter of his time. He was well enough known that in the play *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Ragueneau tries to insult Cyrano by saying, "Truly, I should not look to find his portrait by the grave hand of Philippe de Champaigne."

In his last years Champaigne painted mainly family members and religious subjects. He died in Paris in 1674 at age 72.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

In his book *Extreme Ownership*, Retired Navy Seal Jocko Willink says that discipline is the route not only to success, but also to freedom. He points out that while motivation can be a factor in success, it is an emotion and therefore is unreliable and ephemeral. You cannot count on motivation being there when you may most need it. Discipline, on the other hand, is a choice, and therefore we are completely in control of it.

This is especially true of Christian discipline. It is a choice,

and can often be not only inconvenient but downright uncomfortable, but it is what keeps us going along the path to spiritual success and accomplishment. Motivation, being an emotion, is easily fired up by an inspiring sermon or an exciting spiritual experience. Unfortunately, though, because it is an emotion it can fade away just as easily. We see this all too often on a Sunday afternoon when, after a thrillingly powerful sermon or a super-entertaining megachurch performance we come home to a great Sunday dinner, and after the afternoon ballgame is over there is nothing left of the motivation that was so strong a few hours earlier. Discipline, on the other hand, being a clear choice to make ourselves do something or refrain from something, is not dependent on the feelings or conveniences of the moment. It lasts because we choose to make it last.

This year's Lent is now only a fading memory to many, yet Christian discipline is what Lent is all about. While Lent may be a specific season early in each liturgical year, it is meant to be an ongoing experience that sustains us throughout the year until it is reinforced again the next spring. The choices that we make year-round should be of the same sort as the choices that we make for Lent. Whether they be to deny ourselves something, to take on extra duties and responsibilities, or to make ourselves persevere against seemingly insuperable odds, they are the thing that disciplines our minds, bodies and souls to stay on the path to success. Success never comes easily, but when it does come it brings with it a sense of emancipation and empowerment. Whether it is in business, finance, love, or spiritual growth, success requires work. The key to that is discipline.

Father Rick Losch+

The Epistle is Online

The last six years of *The Epistle*, including this issue, are now online. Go to *http://rlosch.com* and click on the "Epistle" tab at the top. You can read it online or download it as a *.pdf* file. This is an easy way to share articles with others.

Richard R. Losch+

July 4th Evening Prayer and Supper

On Thursday, July 4th, Independence Day, we will have a service of Evening Prayer at 6:00 p.m. with a barbeque supper following in the parish house. Pulled pork barbeque will be furnished and signup sheets for baked beans, salads, buns/bread, deserts, other items, and tea are posted on the bulletin board in the vestibule, as well as a sheet for those planning to attend (so that we may know how many to plan for). So that we may know how much barbeque to order, you are asked to sign up *no later than Sunday, June 30th*. As always, there will be plenty of good food and fellowship. Please make your plans to attend.

Hiram Patrenos

Parish Directory

Copies of the updated Parish Directory are available on the table in the vestibule and in the parish house. If as you are using your directory you discover an error, please give the corrected information to Hiram Patrenos in writing or by e-mail to *patrenoj@bellsouth.net*. The Parish Directory will be updated again in December.

Hiram Patrenos

Altar Flower Volunteers

Volunteers are needed to provide Altar Flowers through the season following Pentecost. A sign-up chart is located in the sacristy. You may use flowers from your yard or if you wish, make arrangements with a florist to provide them. For more information, please speak with Carolyn Patrenos.

Hiram Patrenos

Ancient WMDs

Most people have the image of ancient warfare being grounded in honor, chivalry, valor and skill. The noble heroes of Troy are the stuff of legend, but it seems that they were little more than that–legend. Ancient warfare was at least a vile as

warfare today, and despite their lack of modern technology, ancient warriors came up with some amazingly clever (and despicable) weapons of mass destruction. For example, the Scythians (nomads from the Asian steppes) poisoned their arrows with *scythicon*. They would take a mixture of snake venom, human blood, rotting carcasses and dung, and let it ferment for months. When they coated their arrowheads with it, it would cause immediate death or leave festering wounds that would not heal. This also had a powerful psychological effect on their enemies, who feared to face them. The ancient Indians used a similar poison made from snake venom that caused convulsions and a horribly painful death. When Alexander the Great attacked Harmatelia in Pakistan he lost a huge number of soldiers to a similar snake-based arrow poison. When the Romans conquered Spain, the people carved beautiful wine flasks out of yew wood and sold them to the Romans as souvenirs. Yew leeches a deadly poison into the wine that over time causes convulsions and slow painful death.

Biological warfare was also well known in ancient times. Diseased cattle would be left in the path of approaching armies, who usually depended for food on what they could scavenge along the way rather than on supplies form behind the lines. When Atilla's Huns were camped outside Rome they were suddenly decimated by plague and had to retreat. Many historians believe that they plague may have been introduced into the camp intentionally by the Romans.

Chemical weapons were also used. The Romans considered petroleum to be sacred, and used it only for religious rites. Their enemies, however, were never averse to pouring flaming petroleum on them during a siege. The Greeks developed a weapon known as Greek Fire whose formula is unknown today. It was probably a blend of naphtha and phosphorus. It was much like modern napalm, in that it clung to its object and could not be extinguished.

If war is hell today, so it was also in ancient times, with weapons that struck terror into the hearts of enemies.

Richard R. Losch+

Be Wordly Wise

Hob

This interesting but uncommon little word actually has had a number of meanings over the ages. We are more familiar with it in its compound forms than as a word by itself. Its most common meaning today is a shelf inside a hearth, on which vessels are placed to keep food warm. The first use of the word with that meaning was in the 16th century. In Britain the word is also used for a flat stovetop, a stove lid, and an electric hotplate. The hobnail, a large-headed boot nail, is so called because its head is reminiscent of a stove-lid.

In the 17th century two common nicknames for Robert were Robin and Hobbe.[1] Robin was often used as a name for a mischievous imp, as in Shakespeare's Robin Goodfellow (Puck) in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.[2] Because of this, hobbe came to mean mischief. This is still used today in such expressions as to play or raise hob, and in the word hobgoblin, a mischievous spirit. In British slang hob is still used as short for hobgoblin. It also appears in the verb to hobnob, which originally meant to associate with someone under less than honorable circumstances. A male ferret is called a hob, possibly because of the ferret's mischievous nature (a female ferret is a gill).

In the 19th century the word hob was used for a machinist's tool that cuts gear teeth or screw threads, although today it is most commonly used in that context for a device that repairs and recuts damaged ones. A damaged gear can play hob with the operation of a machine.

Richard R. Losch+

In the word "scent," which is silent–the 's' or the 'c'?

---

[1] Robert was originally a French name. Hobbe probably derived from the French pronunciation of Rob. The French pronounce *r* on the back of the tongue in the throat rather than on the sides of the tongue as we do. The *r* sound as the French make it can easily be mistaken for an *h*.

[2] The legend of Robin Hood is believed to be based on an ancient legend of a mischievous thieving forest sprite named Robin who helped the poor.

Ecclesiastical Etiquette

Jesus said, "Could you not watch with me one hour?" (Mt. 26:40). Rarely would anyone go to a friend's home for dinner, and when the meal was over simply get up and walk out without so much as a "Thank you." Even so, this is becoming increasingly common in the Church. On a recent Sunday we had a larger than usual congregation, but half left immediately following Communion. Admittedly this is occasionally justified, such as when one feels ill or there is an emergency, but unfortunately it seems to be becoming a habit. Beating the Baptists to the restaurant does not qualify as an emergency. The next time you are tempted to leave early, ask yourself if the extra five minutes you will save are really all that important.

Richard R. Losch+

Giants of Yore

We see giants referred to in the Bible in the pre-flood stories as the Nephilim (Gen. 6:1ff) and the Rephaim (Gen. 14:5, *et al*.), and we find them even as late as the time of David, with Goliath, the giant of Gath. For the most part, despite Goliath, Biblical giants are looked on as heroes rather than adversaries, but there is little detail given about them. Ancient people believed without question in the existence of giants, and not without reason. When you have never heard of dinosaurs and you unearth a bone that looks for all the world like a human thighbone but is six feet long, there is only one logical conclusion that you can draw–you have discovered the remains of a giant.[1]

The universal belief in these creatures led to pagan legendry creeping into some of the early Biblical writings. For example, the Nephilim are explained as being the result of sexual relations between the "sons of God" (i.e. angels) and the "daughters of men" (Gen. 6:4). Because they are mentioned just before

[1] There are many fossils of gigantic flying dinosaurs (such as the 36-foot-long quetzalcoatlus) found in the shallow prehistoric mud flats of eastern Asia. These are believed to be the source of the ancient oriental belief in dragons that eventually found its way into western Europe.

the flood narrative they are often seen as one of the causes of God's anger that brought about the flood. If we read the passages carefully, however, we find nothing negative said about them–they are identified as "the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown." The very concept of them, however, is nonetheless pagan. Pagans believed that the gods often had children by humans, and these offspring were called heroes.[1] The Jews, of course, completely rejected this kind of thinking, but the Greco-Roman influence was still strong even on them. When the Roman centurion pierced Jesus' side he said, "Truly this was a son of God." As a Roman it is unlikely that he understood this as Christians do, but rather believed that Jesus was a *heroas*, a half-man-half-god hero in the Greek sense.

One of the later giants in the Bible is Goliath (1 Sam. 17:4 *et al.*). He is said to have been "six cubits and a span" (9½ feet) tall. This sounds a bit extreme, and may well be one of the many exaggerations that we often find in ancient literature. On the other hand, the pituitary disorder that produces gigantism did exist in ancient times. At any rate, it is entirely reasonable to believe that Goliath was a huge man by the standards of his time. In an age when an average man stood a little over 5 feet tall, a well-muscled 6½ foot tall warrior in full bronze armor being slain in hand-to-hand combat by a shepherd boy in only a loincloth would not be easily forgotten over the centuries.

In modern parlance we frequently refer to great people as giants or titans in their field. No one takes this literally as a reference to their physical size. The same metaphor was used in ancient times, but over centuries of oral tradition some of these metaphoric references may have come to be taken literally. So it may be in the Bible as well.

Richard R. Losch+

---

[1] The Greek word *heroas* (ʻήρωας), hero, means a half-human and half-divine being. The Geek hero Heracles (Hercules) was the son of Zeus and the human woman Alcmene, and the Roman hero Aeneas was the son of the human Prince Anchises of Troy and the goddess Venus. It was very rare in ancient mythology that a goddess would mate with a human man, but male gods frolicked with human women on a regular basis.

July Birthdays . . .

6 Madelyn Mack
7 Milburn G. Lamb
7 Meredith Underwood Shah
13 Chris Thompson
14 Lindsey Moore Thompson
14 Abby Rankin
16 Carl Sudduth
27 Ethel Garth Scott
29 Mira Muñoz

. . . and Anniversaries

8 Charles & Linda Muñoz

August Birthdays . . .

8 Garland Scott
12 Harris Marks
25 Joe Moore
26 Hannah Rankin

. . . and Anniversaries

27 Mitesh & Meredith Shah

SAINT JAMES' EPISCOPAL CHURCH
LECTOR AND USHER SCHEDULE

July 2019

	Old Testament	New Testament	Ushers
7	Roy Underwood	Jimmy Collins	Roy Underwood
14	Charles Muñoz	Rosalie Dew	Charles Muñoz
21	Mary Helen Jones	Ethel Scott	Jimmy Collins
28	Madelyn Mack	Ethel Scott	Joe Moore
ALTAR GUILD: Rosalie Dew			*Hand out bulletins and ring bell

August 2019

	Old Testament	New Testament	Ushers
4	Charles Muñoz	Linda Muñoz	Charles Muñoz
11	Jimmy Collins	Mary Helen Jones	Joe Moore
18	Rosalie Dew	Madelyn Mack	Roy Underwood
25	Roy Underwood	Ethel Scott	Charles Muñoz
ALTAR GUILD: Virginia Derby			*Hand out bulletins and ring bell

If you cannot serve on the day assigned, please exchange with another server and call Hiram Patrenos at 205-499-0506 as soon as possible.

Noah's Flood: Aye or Nay?

The story[1] of Noah's flood in the Bible has been a challenge to Biblical scholars for millennia. It offers a number of problems, not the least of which is the number of animals saved. Even in ancient times it was evident that as large as the ark as described was, there is no way that it could have held two each of all the animal species on earth,[2] even considering the limited knowledge of the earth's fauna in ancient times. It is true that God can do whatever he wants, but he does not abrogate his own laws of nature any time he wants to achieve something.

Another problem is that modern engineering has shown that a wooden ark built according to the Biblical specifications would break apart as soon as the waters rose enough to buoy it up.[3] Another problem of which the ancients were aware is Cain's great-great-great grandsons Jabal and Jubal (Gen. 4:19ff). Jabal was the ancestor of all who have livestock, and Jubal was the ancestor of all who play the lyre and pipes. Noah was a direct descendant of Adam's third son Seth, and had no descent from Cain. If Noah's immediate family were the only survivors of the flood, then Jabal's and Jubal's descendants would have been wiped out–after the flood there would be no herdsmen, and no players of the lute and pipes.[4]

---

[1] Biblical scholarship shows that the account of the flood in Genesis (Ch. 6-9) is actually a conflation of at least two stories intricately woven together. Generally, however, it is treated as if it were a single story.

[2] It was actually one pair of each of the ritually unclean animals, and seven pairs of the clean ones (Gen. 7:2). This was to ensure that there would be clean animals available for sacrifice and for food once the ark landed. There were no sea creatures–they were not in any trouble in the flood.

[3] There is a reproduction of it at Williamstown, Kentucky, built according to the Biblical specifications. Having examined it, however, engineers still maintain that while it is stable on land, it is not seaworthy and would break up as soon as it started to float. Ironically, it was damaged in a recent flood in the region (God clearly has a sense of humor).

[4] If we look at Cain's genealogy in ch. 4 and Seth's in ch. 5, the similarity of names is an indication that both are different versions of the same genealogy that have been garbled through centuries of oral transmission.

Finally, the question still stands as to where and when the Flood was. A few years ago it was generally thought that the question had been put to rest with the discovery of a massive flood when the Mediterranean broke through to the Black Sea about 7500 years ago and flooded thousands of square miles in the region. Subsequent geological research, however, has shown that this never actually happened. There was a large flood in the Black Sea about that time, but it was nothing compared to what the early reports made it out to be. On the other hand, Mesopotamia has had a number of massive floods throughout its history. Both the Tigris and Euphrates rivers meet there[1], and when they overflow they flood vast regions.

Almost every culture in the world, including the American Indians, has a legend of a great flood that destroyed the world, from which one hero saved his family and all the world's animals. The stories of Noah's flood bear a striking resemblance to several Mesopotamian legends, particularly the Gilgamesh Epic and the Atrahasis Epic. In these stories the god Enki orders Atrahasis (later known as Utnapishtim) to build an ark, put breeding samples of all animals on it, and save himself and his family from a devastating flood. The ark lands on Mount Nimush in the Kurdish region of modern Iraq. In the Noah legend it lands on the much higher Mount Ararat in modern Turkey. These stories were passed on by oral tradition for thousands of years before they were ever written down. It is entirely possible that they are actually based on fact. As a river was rising, some wise farmer might have seen the danger and built a large boat (probably a reed coracle)[2] and saved his family and the most valuable of his animals from the flood. As the tale passed from generation to generation, it, like most heroic tales, continued to grow and be elaborated. We can see the same thing in how the

[1] The name Mesopotamia comes from the Greek for Middle of the Rivers.

[2] A coracle is a round boat made of reeds or wicker. It is covered with a watertight material, usually sewn leather impregnated with oil and pitch, and propelled with paddles. This was a common type of river boat in ancient Mesopotamia, and some were quite large enough to hold several people and animals. Coracles were also common in ancient Ireland and Wales.

story of the battle for a small Bronze Age city in Anatolia eventually grew into Homer's epic saga of the fall of Troy.

There is one striking difference between the Noah story and all other ancient flood tales. That is that in the Noah story, God destroys the world because it has become irretrievably evil and corrupt. He seeks the most righteous man he can find to be saved and repopulate the world. In every single other flood tale a god sees the flood coming, fears it, and helps someone to survive it in order that he may help the god. In the Gilgamesh Epic, for example, the god Enki fears the flood, and helps Utnapishtim save his family because he thinks Utnapishtim can in turn help him. In all the stories except that of Noah, the gods are subject to nature, and the flood is a threat to them. In the Noah story, God controls the whole situation. It is a story in which God voluntary reverses creation–he returns it to the chaotic waters of Genesis 1:2–and then restores it cleansed, and places it into the care of a righteous man.

An often-overlooked aspect of this story is its conclusion. God places his bow (the rainbow) in the sky as a sign of his promise that he will never again destroy mankind with a flood. The Hebrew (*qesheth*, קשת) indicates that this is a warrior's bow, and it is significant that it is aimed toward God, not downward toward his creation. This can be interpreted as a prophecy: the next time sin fills the world it will not be mankind who dies for his sins, but God himself–the Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ; and that water will not be a means of punishment, but the means of salvation through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

If we pay a bit more attention to the real meaning of the story of Noah and a bit less to trying to prove the historicity of its details, we see it as a powerful tale of human relationships to each other, to family, to nature and to God. It is a story of trust, patience and obedience. The story of Noah's ark may never have happened literally as described in Genesis, but if we read it as an allegory instead of as history it is indeed a true story.

Richard R. Losch+

There are two kinds of people: Those who can extrapolate complete and accurate information from incomplete data.

Seeming Barbarity in the Pentateuch

There are a number of laws in the Pentateuch[1] that on first appearance seem to be rather barbaric. Christians and modern Jews often tend to explain them away by attributing them to the harsher culture of ancient times, saying that this was not what God really intended. This poses some serious problems to those of us who believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God–if it contains things that God never really intended, then which passages can we trust and which should we cast aside? The Bible is not a theological or moral cafeteria from which we can pick and choose what appeals to us at the moment, and toss aside the rest. A more careful consideration of these laws, however, often reveals that they were in fact quite enlightened, and served a very beneficial purpose.

A classic example of this can be seen in Deuteronomy: "If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father and mother, who does not heed them when they discipline him, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his town at the gate of that place. They shall say to the elders of his town, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.' Then all the men of the town shall stone him to death" (21:18-21a). It is interesting that scholars have scoured every record they can find, including the Talmud and Midrashim, and cannot find a single incident of this law ever having been carried out. It is also important to remember that this law was written in a time when in every known culture

[1] The Pentateuch (Greek for "Five-book") is the first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. In the Jewish tradition they are called Torah (Hebrew for "Instruction"). The total body of Jewish law, which governed Israel throughout its history and was the fundament of Jesus' thought, is based on these writings. Ancient tradition says that they were written by Moses as dictated by God. In fact there is little question that while they are the inspired Word of God and contain teachings given to Moses, they were first written down sometime around the sixth century BC (700 years after Moses) as the record of centuries-old oral tradition.

in the world, parents had the right of life or death over their children. Parents could kill an infant or minor child whenever they felt like it and not have to answer to any legal authority. In Rome the head of the family, called the *Paterfamilias*, had that right even over his adult children as long as they lived under his roof and were dependent on him.[1] This law, then, was not a sign of barbarity, but rather of enlightenment. It was the first time in history that a law was written that limited the rights of parents over their children. Discussions of this law in the Talmud make it clear that it was written as a challenge to the barbaric custom of the time by putting the decision into the hand of the elders of the city rather than leaving it purely to the discretion of the parents. Also, there is a touch of Solomonic wisdom here. Even though parents might exert harsh discipline at home, it would indeed be a rare set of parents, no matter how angry and frustrated they might be, who could bring their child to a public death-penalty hearing and then watch him be stoned to death. This law was written not to be obeyed, but as a deterrent to parents who might otherwise act unreasonably in a moment of anger. Even today laws are often written with no intention of their being carried out, but as challenges to current law or custom, requiring the attention of a higher authority.[2]

This Deuteronomic law may seem shocking to modern people, but it was equally shocking to the people of its time, because it forced them to confront a custom that otherwise had been taken completely for granted. It also required them, if they had carried it out, to make painfully public something that otherwise would have been done quietly and without fanfare.

[1] In the first century BC, under the consul Gaius Marius, a law was passed requiring that the Paterfamilias give notice of at least one *nundinium* (eight days, the Roman equivalent of a week) to a magistrate before killing his child. This law was not to protect the child, but to protect the Paterfamilias from doing something in a moment of anger that he would later regret.

[2] We see this today in many extreme state laws on both sides of the abortion issue. Often they are passed knowing that they will not be executed, but purely for the purpose of forcing the Supreme Court to revisit and refine its interpretation of the almost 50-year-old Roe v. Wade decision.

Because of this law, despite its seeming harshness, children were safer than they had been before.

While this law about disobedient children seems brutal on the surface, it was in reality an act of mercy. When we find something in the Bible that seems to us to be inconsistent with a loving God, it is important not only that we remember the culture of the time, but also that we examine the purpose of the law itself, what circumstances may have brought it about in the first place, and the possible positive effect it may have had on the thinking and attitudes of the people of its time and of today.

Richard R. Losch+

Dogs in Ancient Israel

It has long been accepted that the ancient Israelites despised dogs, but more recent archaeological finds and their interpretation indicate that this is not entirely true. Dogs were listed as ritually unclean animals in Judaic law, but this does not automatically relegate them to the same status as, for example, pigs. There were many aspects to ritual uncleanness. Some ritually unclean things were so odious that even to touch them rendered a Jew ritually unclean to the point that he could not socialize with other Jews or even enter a synagogue or the Temple, or participate in any other religious ceremonies, until he had offered the proper sacrifices and rituals to become purified. Touching a pig, a leper or a dead body is an example of this. Some unclean animals, on the other hand, were not so odious. They had no stigma other than that Jews were forbidden to eat them. Horses, donkeys, camels and dogs fall into that category.

It is true that until a little before the second century BC most people in the Middle East wanted nothing to do with dogs, even though in many other parts of the world they were used not only for work, but also as companions and pets. There is a rational explanation for this. Throughout much of the ancient Middle East the countryside was rife with roaming packs of wild dogs that were every bit as dangerous as wolf packs. They were a threat not only to flocks of sheep and goats, but also to humans. With little understanding of their potential as com-

panions and workers, humans naturally feared and despised them.[1] A common insult was to call someone a pig[2] or a dog (to this day people, even those who love dogs, are sometimes heard to insult someone by calling him a dirty dog).

By the sixth or fifth century BC many Middle Eastern cultures, including the Phoenicians, Mesopotamians and Persians, had started using dogs for work and even keeping them just as pets. When the Jews were in exile in Babylonia they began to realize that dogs were not all that bad, and they developed a new relationship to them. By the second century BC domestic dogs were common in Palestine. Part of this was the result of the influence of the Greeks and Romans, who had had working and companion dogs for centuries. Dogs were not only excellent herders, but since they are the only common animal that barks, they made good sentries. They were used for guarding homes because not only did they warn of intruders with their barking, but also few intruders wanted to tangle with a large angry dog. Also, it was not long before the instinctive affection between humans and dogs surfaced, and people started valuing the just as companions. In the Book of Tobit we read that when Tobias set off on his journey he had two faithful companions– the Angel Raphael, and his pet dog (Tob. 6:2, 11:4).

The ancients also considered dogs to have healing powers. One of the symbols of the Greek cult of Asclepius, the god of

[1] To this day the majority of Muslims around the world despise dogs, considering them almost a bad as pigs. This dislike is based not only on the ancient odium for dogs, but also on a Hadithic story that the Angel Gabriel once refused to enter Muhammad's tent because there was a puppy in it.

[2] The Middle Eastern odium for pigs when most of the rest of the world considered them a delicacy and a valued herd animal also has a rational explanation. Pigs have no internal cooling system such as sweating or panting. They rely on wallowing in water to keep themselves from overheating, and they prefer mud because it stays wet and cool on their bodies longer than just water. In most parts of the world there are plenty of creeks and ponds to supply their need, but not so in the arid Middle East. Sometimes pigs have no choice but to wallow in their own body waste. Ancient Middle Easterners, observing this, must have concluded that any animal that would do such a thing must be abhorrent to the gods.

medicine, was a dog. They observed that dogs eat certain vegetation when they are sick, and physicians would then use those same herbs as human medicine. Injured people would go to the temples of Asclepius to have sacred dogs lick their wounds. We see this in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19ff), when the dogs came to lick Lazarus' sores. For centuries this was interpreted as a sign of Lazarus' misery, but in the light of what we now know of the Jews' attitude toward dogs we see it as a sign of sympathy. The dogs ministered to Lazarus when the cold-hearted rich human would not help him. Also, dogs were often allowed to roam around dining rooms to lick up the scraps of food that fell from the table or were tossed to them. Lazarus would have been content to live off the scraps from the rich man's table that would go to dogs, but he would not give them to him. We see this also in the response of the Syro-Phoenician woman to Jesus, "Even the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table" (Matt. 15:27).

The Hebrew word for dog is *kelev* (כלב), which is the root of the name that we translate Caleb. It is interesting that one of the great heroes of early Judaism was the spy Caleb, who accompanied Joshua into Canaan to scout out the possibilities of conquest. Of all the spies who went into Canaan, only Joshua and Caleb had sufficient faith in God's support to believe that the Israelites could conquer the Canaanites.[1] The Egyptians were fond of dogs and Caleb had been born in Egypt, so his name would not have been considered an insult.

Dogs in the Bible, then, are not the malevolent characters that exegetes once considered them to be. They were then, as they are today, faithful servants, loyal companions, and loving friends of humanity.

Richard R. Losch+

---

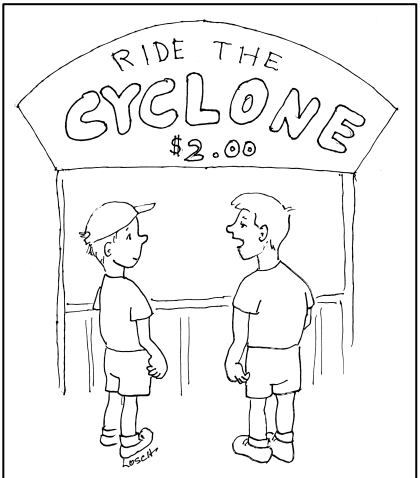
[1] Because of this Joshua and Caleb were the only two Israelites who had been born in Egypt who were allowed to enter the Promised Land. Even Moses was not allowed that privilege. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years until every Egyptian-born Israelite except Moses, Joshua and Caleb was dead. Only after Moses died did Joshua lead the Israelites, including Caleb, into the Promised Land.

A Touch of Trivia

South Africa has four capital cities: Pretoria, Cape Town, Bloemfontein and Johannesburg. The administrative city of Pretoria is the seat of the President and his Cabinet; the Parliament, which is the legislative body, sits in Cape Town; the seat of the judiciary is in Bloemfontein; and the South African Constitutional Court of sits in Johannesburg. Could you imagine having four Washingtons? We find one to be quite enough, thank you.

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE **by Richard R. Losch**



"Why don't we save the money and just throw up right now?"

Saint James' Episcopal Church
P.O. Box 446
Livingston, AL 35470

Forwarding Service Requested

Non Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Livingston, AL
Permit No. 18