



Summer 2006

אבן פינה
Jerusalem Cornerstone Foundation

Breaking Rank



by Charles Kopp

Pastoring a church in Jerusalem, I have often looked for parallels between this city and the Jerusalem of Jesus' times, and imagined how he would have handled the pressures and conflicts we often face. Our small community sits on so many fault-lines; it becomes difficult to know at times if the tensions and ruptures we experience are religious, political, racial, social, economic, familial, or any combination of the above.

Jesus would have been no stranger to the political and social upheaval characteristic of the Middle East. He would have been quite familiar with what we now call ethnic strife, internecine religious conflict and the foreign occupation of an imperial western power. His was a diverse but fractured society, multicultural but not a melting pot. However, precisely because of our over-familiarity with names such as Samaritans, Pharisees and Romans we often tend overlook this historiographic context and the profound – if not revolutionary – implications of Jesus' words and actions on his world.

It could not have been a popular stance for Jesus to take to recommend carrying a Roman soldier's pack another mile beyond the mandatory (Matt. 5:41). Or how could his compatriots have stomached Jesus' lavishing the praise of "no greater faith in all Israel!" on a Roman centurion, who represented that same brutal regime which daily crucified its subjects (Matt. 8:5-12)? Yet Jesus commended this centurion, not only for the faith he displayed in Jesus' healing power, but because he broke rank and paid immense respect where the custom dictated a Roman to disdain a lowly Jew. Despite the corruption of, and oppression by many a hated official, Jesus often engaged them, speaking truth and holding out faith.

These can be difficult attitudes to swallow for us in the West, where attacking those in authority and defaming the rich and powerful is more than fashionable, especially to the media. We don't like to think of Jesus being friendly with a convicted CEO of Enron or a deposed Saddam Hussein. We much more readily connect with Jesus' compassion for the weak and



downtrodden, and not without good reason.

But what to do with Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman who begged him to heal her daughter? Jesus first ignores her, then declares he was sent only to the Jews, and finally glibly remarks to her relentless pleas that "it is not proper to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs" (Matt. 15:26). There can be no softening of these harsh words. They are meant to be harsh because he is describing perfectly the sentiments so prevalent in his society. Yet again, like with the centurion, he praises the Canaanite's "great faith". But it's not merely her faith he's praising; in fact in Hebrew the notion would have been closer to "faithfulness". It was her persistence, her chutzpah, her refusal to bow to the terrible political, social and religious conventions of her day – her breaking rank (Matt. 15:21-28).

Only Jesus could be so politically incorrect and so tender at the same time. And what greater witness to Jesus' message and power than those instances of breaking rank?

As I stand in my church and am greeted by three-year-old Rahouz, his father, Lukman, and mother, Pakhshan, I can't help but think that little has changed in the Middle East since Jesus' time. Rahouz was brought from Kurdistan in Iraq by members of our church who are part of a ministry which seeks to have Christians act as a bridge. They focus their efforts on bringing Muslim children with heart diseases, like Rahouz, to Israel for life saving operations performed by Jewish doctors. One can only imagine the suspicions, fear and danger felt by all parties involved.

There is more to these operations than mending a heart, more than meeting a personal need, more than faith and healing. Lukman mentioned how he believed God had given his little boy a bad heart so that he and his family could come to Israel and discover the one true God. Just as a mere centurion and a simple Canaanite woman became models of great faith, so too we pray God will honor the brave faithfulness of little Rahouz and his family, of the doctors and volunteers – so that they may be witnesses to the region, and indeed the whole world, for breaking rank.

Along the Road from Jericho

Adapted from *Jesus as Archelaus* By Brian Schultz



Anyone who has read through the Gospels will soon discover that there is more than one way to tell a parable. This would have been true for Jesus as he was teaching as well as for the Gospel writers as they were recording. Understandably, it is common practice to compare one Gospel's account against another's in an attempt to gain additional insight from the details found in only one of the accounts. However, such a comparison can sometimes lead to more questions than answers, at least initially. Such is the case when trying to explain the combination of similarities and differences between Luke's Parable of the Pounds (Lk 19:11-27) and Matthew's Parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14-30).

A quick reminder of what the two parables are about may prove helpful. They revolve around a master and his servants with the core elements as follows: on the eve of an imminent trip, a master entrusts some of his servants with his assets (Lk 19:12a-13; Mat 25:14-15); these servants either choose to invest it so as to make it multiply, or to simply safeguard it by hiding it (Lk 19:16,18,20; Mat 25:16-18); upon his return, the master calls his servants to account (Lk 19:15; Mat 25:19), rewarding those who made his wealth grow (Lk 19:17,19; Mat 25:21,23), and reprimanding those who simply hid it away so that it could not even collect interest (Lk 19:24; Mat 26-28,30).

This is where the similarities stop and the differences begin. For example, the number of servants and the corresponding sums given to each differs between the two accounts. Likewise, in Matthew the 'unworthy' servant

wraps his talent in a cloth whereas in Luke he buries his pound in a hole. Also, while in Luke the rewards come in the form of physical profit, in Matthew the faithful servants receive a spiritual rest as their reward. But perhaps the most significant difference is that Luke includes an element of the master being a cruel claimant to the throne. Unlike in Matthew, where all we know of the master-figure is that he is rich, in Luke we are told he is a nobleman who hopes that as a result of his trip he will inherit a kingdom (Lk 19:12b). However, he is hated by his citizens who send a delegation after him to prevent his appointment (Lk 19:14). They fail in their effort, so that when the nobleman comes back as king (Lk 19:15a), he has all the dissenting citizens slaughtered before his very eyes (Lk 19:27).

It is almost unanimously agreed that this motif of a cruel throne-claimant is based on the life of Herod Archelaus: in 4 B.C.E. after the death of his father Herod the Great, Archelaus set out for Rome to be crowned King, just as his father had been. Unfortunately for him, a delegation of Jews followed him and, accusing him of exceptional brutality, petitioned Caesar

not to appoint him as their king. Nevertheless, Caesar made him Ethnarch over Judea. In the end, however, Archelaus' brutality (such as the slaughter of 3,000 Jews worshipping at the temple whom he feared would incite rebellion against him) cost him his position, and in 6 C.E. he was removed from office.

Perhaps you can already see how this added element raises a problem. Namely, the master, who in both accounts is portrayed as a type of Messiah, is in Luke apparently based on the life of Herod Archelaus, a ruler remembered above all else for his brutality. Obviously, he is hardly a model fitting for such a comparison. Why then did Luke preserve this motif in his parable, especially when it is absent in Matthew?

Few commentators tackle the problem, and the answers put forward by those who do fail to convince. One commentator suggests it has the purpose of bringing verisimilitude to the story; another, that it was simply for the sake of irony; yet another downplays the slaughter of the citizens in the presence of the ruler, a rather gratuitous albeit grim detail, as simply their being 'cut-off.' Still, it is hardly



- continued inside

 Jerusalem Cornerstone Foundation: P.O. Box 54351 Tulsa, OK. 74155 (918)•622•9573

Chairman: Charles M. Kopp, P.O.Box 546, Jerusalem, 91004, Israel. Tel. 972-2-671-4351 chuck@jerusalemcornerstone.org

Israel Director: Jon (Yoni) Gerrish, P.O.Box 546, Jerusalem, 91004, Israel. Tel/Fax 972-2-673-1096 yoni@jerusalemcornerstone.org

U.S. Director: Larry J. Ehrlich, P.O. Box 54351 Tulsa, OK. 74155. Tel. 918-622-9573 larry@jerusalemcornerstone.org

www.jerusalemcornerstone.org

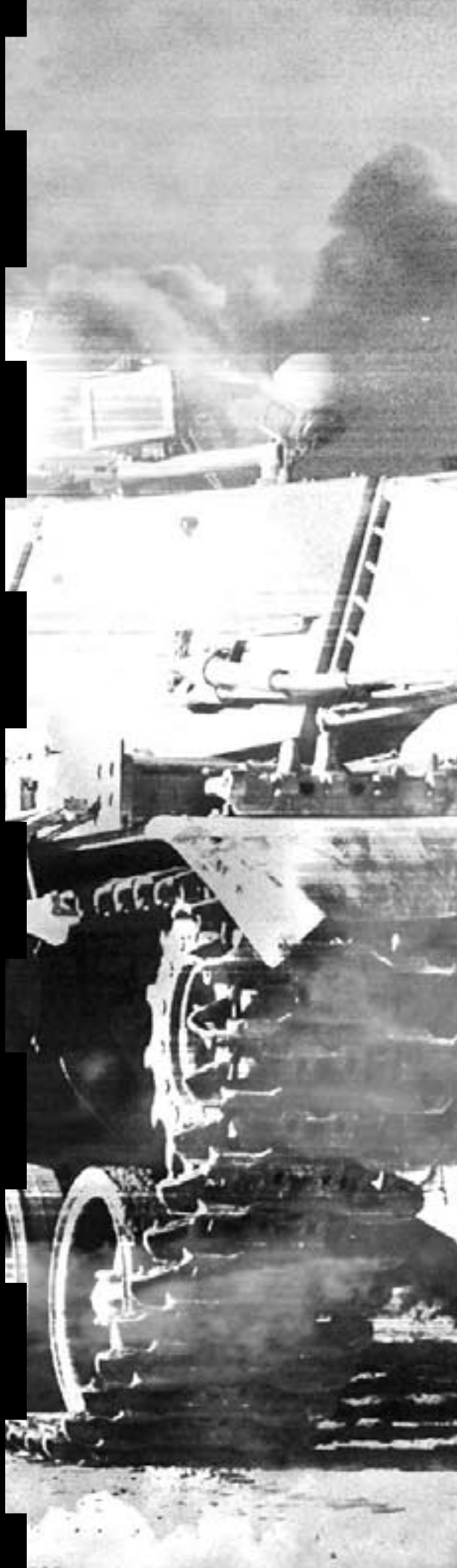
INDIGNATION & HOPE

By Charles Kopp

The Middle East is ablaze again. The terrorist organization, Hezbollah, has cynically flouted international law by using residential suburbs in Lebanon to launch its deadly attacks against Israel with Iranian and Syrian supplied rockets, only to cry foul when Israel's retaliation regrettably takes its toll on innocents who are unwillingly put in harms way. What is even further astonishing is that media outlets worldwide (with few exceptions) have uncritically fallen for the ruse by venturing nothing but overwhelming condemnation for Israel. It seems clear to me that such colossal self-deception has its roots in a spiritual dimension.

By a strange set of circumstances, on July 26, with the outbreak of hostilities in Lebanon, a 1200-year-old portion of the Psalms was discovered in an obscure Irish bog. What was initially announced to be Psalm 83 was later confirmed to be Psalm 83 of the Vulgate, which is our Psalm 84. Too late! For by then, the whole world had already turned to its own Psalm 83 to see what was referenced in that chapter. The timing of the discovery and the message of that chapter are too remarkable to overlook. Psalm 83 features the cry of ancient Israel to God against the onslaught of the nations seeking to wipe out the name of Israel.

Weekly, if not daily, the president of Iran and his guerilla surrogates in Lebanon brazenly do just that: literally call for Israel to be destroyed. It is nothing short of astonishing to see how many nations have idly sat by without taking action. That said, we guard our hearts from natural responses of anger and revenge, and instead turn and testify to Jesus' saving grace. We remind ourselves that our mission is redemptive in nature and one to express true sorrow at the loss of both Israeli and Lebanese lives - lives that were created in God's own image. Our hope and prayer is that the expansive vision of Isaiah 19, with Assyria, Egypt and Israel being a source of tremendous blessing on the earth will be fulfilled. And may those who are blessed through that alliance only proceed 'from strength to strength', as the real recovered Psalm 84, verse 6, prayerfully chants.



- Along the Road continued

conceivable that Jesus would have compared himself, either with a greedy man "who drew out where he had not paid in, and reaped where he had not sown" (Lk 19:21), or with a brutal despot, gloating over the sight of his enemies slaughtered before his eyes (Lk 19:27). Whichever way one chooses to look at the problem, one cannot be rid of this 'embarrassing motif'.

However, I suggest that a re-examination of the Lukan context of the parable may offer us an important clue in understanding how this 'embarrassing motif' may not have been as embarrassing as we assume it to be today.

In Luke 19:11, we read that the Parable of the Pounds was given immediately after the Zacchaeus incident. This has led some commentators to suggest that Jesus is considered to be still in Jericho, possibly even in Zacchaeus' home. Others have put more emphasis on the parable's opening clause, "because he was near to Jerusalem," claiming only that the setting is said to be at some point before the arrival of Jesus and his disciples there. What is certain is that this is the last event in Luke's recounting of Jesus' pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Probably the best way to understand the progression of events is that Jesus had finished his visit with Zacchaeus in Jericho and had set out on the last leg of his journey to Jerusalem. With Jerusalem being less than twenty kilometers from Jericho, the pilgrims would have arrived before nightfall. It is as they set out on this journey that Luke gives an account of Jesus' Parable of the Pounds.

It is this Jericho nexus that has a special connection to the element of the Archelaus motif. We learn from Josephus, a first-century historian, that Archelaus rebuilt Herod the Great's palace in Jericho. This palace complex has long been identified as the modern Tulul abu al-'Alayiq, an archaeological site situated on the southern part of the city on the banks of the Wadi Qelt. Recent excavations of this site have provided direct evidence for the destruction of Herod's Palace right after his death, as well as of Archelaus' repairs and use of the site. The palace complex continued to be used during the first half of the first century CE, and was even expanded, until its destruction by an earthquake in 48 CE.

The ancient road from Jericho to Jerusalem passes just south of this enormous palace complex, and as it makes its way up into the hills of the Judean Wilderness, it offers travelers quite an impressive view of the royal estates. It is not difficult to see how the memory of Archelaus would have been recalled by travelers as they made their way up and down the Jordan Valley en route to and from Jericho. Could it be that this Herodian palace complex, still standing in Jesus' day, triggered the Archelaus motif we find in the Parable of the Pounds?

If this indeed were the case, the problem raised by this 'embarrassing motif' of Jesus being compared to Archelaus would be resolved. One can easily imagine how Jesus and his disciples, still accompanied by the crowd escorting him out of Jericho, would have passed by these magnificent palaces and recalled, in thought if not in words, the history of the last Jewish ruler, Archelaus. Taking that this Jericho

road was the actual setting for the giving of the parable, the brutality of Archelaus is not to be understood as some allegory on the person of Jesus, but merely as part of the circumstantial setting employed by Jesus to make his parable more communicable. To that effect, Jesus used as his teaching tool his immediate surroundings, the 'stuff' of everyday life, as was so customary in Jewish parables of his day. One might even imagine how he may have used a very recent, if not the last, topic of conversation among his companions.

There remains the question about the purpose of such a hard-hitting message at such a time. In light of the miracles that had just transpired in Jericho, together with the anticipation of an imminent arrival in Jerusalem, believed as it was by the disciples and others to be the event that would usher in the Kingdom of God and a new era of Jewish rule, there understandably would have been much excitement and anticipation in the crowd (Lk 19:11). To correct these false expectations and to highlight the more important matter of living faithfully, Jesus uses a poignant reminder of the seriousness of one's position vis-à-vis the Kingdom of God: Jesus, the king-judge, will bring reward or punishment according to how one has chosen to serve him. This applies to his disciples as well as to his enemies.

By associating the Archelaus motif of the Parable of the Pounds to the Jericho context suggested by the Gospel of Luke, we are able to read the parable without contradicting what we know of Jesus himself.



The palaces as seen today from the Jericho road

JCF STUDY TOURS 2006-07

Although the regional events during July and August required tour operators to rearrange itineraries and put future planning on hold, the tourism industry is once again back to full operation. This is an opportune time to consider visiting Israel.

Please be in contact with JCF directly for a rescheduled list of upcoming tours.

yonit@jerusalemcornerstone.org

