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PEOPLE ON THE ROAD TO JERICHO

The Good Samaritan—and the Others

by ERIC F. F. BISHOP

THIS study in the characters who figure in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 30-35) follows on an earlier article by Mr. Bishop, "Down from Jerusalem to Jericho", which appeared in THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY for April-June, 1963.

OUR Lord must have gone up or down the Jericho road a score of times. Even if this story of four men be deemed a parable and not the narrative of an incident within the knowledge of Jesus, He could hardly help imagining the scenes from experience of the road. St. Luke too may have gone the road himself; so that the story for him was as true to life as it was to the Author. The leading figure—"a certain Samaritan"—does not give the impression of being a fictional character. It was "a certain priest" too. There were fewer of them than of the Levites; but it is interesting that the pair of them had other concerns than work in the Temple Area.

Pilgrims and tourists for many a year have been shewn the so-called Good Samaritan Inn, just about half-way to Jericho.¹ There is no proof that the inn to which the Samaritan took the half-dead traveller was on the road or in Jericho, which to some has seemed much more likely. The district round about, however, has many of the features making it an ideal place for waylaying travellers. "The bandits, who under British regime do not hesitate to waylay and murder": so wrote Stacey Waddy, sometime Archdeacon of Palestine.² There may well have been a caravanserai in this direction but no one would want to remain in the vicinity longer than absolutely necessary. The Turks had a police post nearby—not the first government to have done so; while the Crusaders built one of their castles well above the present site of the inn. Today the inn, which has assumed importance for pilgrimages and tours through the provision of light refreshment or small mementoes, is known as *Khan al-Ahmar* (red) from the colouring

¹ This study is in debt to hints and ideas in *The American Colony Palestine Guide*, 237/8; Eugene Hoade, *Guide to the Holy Land*, 441ff.; Leslie Farmer, *We Saw the Holy City*, 137.

² *Homes of the Psalms*, 274.

of much of the rock round about, though whether this is connected with the name of the road on both sides of the hill is not certain. This is *Tala'at ad-Dum*—the “Ascent of blood”, in itself a corruption of the Hebrew “going up to *Adummim*”.³ The story of the man who fell among thieves is indication enough that scenes of bloodshed have occurred near the spot. Does the topography—anyhow this most acceptable site half-way to Jericho—supply any clue to help in the interpretation of this story that has “gone the whole round of creation”, without exhausting the exegetical possibilities?

Of the five “parties” on the road there were two on the same route down from Jerusalem—the traveller attacked by the highway robbers and the priest. In the former case Jerusalem is specifically mentioned; in the second instance, St. Luke’s *καταβαίτω* is enough,⁴ apart from the fact that the priest would be leaving from (his period of work presumably in) the Temple Area. He wasn’t expecting to come across anything like this. “It so happened” (N.E.B.). Perhaps *ἰδών* means nothing more than that he noticed there had been trouble but took no time to investigate. So he went past. What should be understood by the phrase “on the other side”? It renders the first of the two prefixed prepositions. Prior to the recognized influence of western versions, Arabic translations rendered the Greek as *passed on* or *passed by*.⁵ In the case of the priest this would not have been so obvious, with the wide expanse of the Judean desert at this locality. Traditionally the robbers have been connected with the village of Abu Dīs, opposite Bethany; but of this there is no proof. It would seem probable that they would have avoided the usual thoroughfares, but emerged from one of the hide-outs out of sight of travellers. There are plenty of these, as became too clear during the long riots, when people appeared from “nowhere” to blow up bridges and disappeared as they had come. If Abu Dīs in Turkish times was “a nest of bandits”, it is hardly just to give it this reputation down the centuries.⁶ The marauders in the gospel story could have come on the scene from almost anywhere.

It is difficult to think that the Levite followed suit. Our Lord

³ Joshua 15: 7; 18: 17.

⁴ This Lukan consistency in *ἀναβαίτω* and *καταβαίτω*, going up to or down from Jerusalem, is borne out in modern Palestinian usage.

⁵ See A. B. Bruce, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. i, 543.

⁶ *American Colony Guide*, 237.

⁷ *Praeteriit* and then *pertransiit*.

was naturally a good teacher, never *merely* repeating Himself. St. Luke too does not use the verb of "going down". The Levite is represented as more "heartless" (Plummer) than the priest. It was by chance that the priest went down that way and neglected any opportunity for doing good. But the Levite apparently came to the actual place where the man was lying, long enough to take stock of the situation and decline to do anything to alleviate it. The Vulgate uses different words for "passed by".⁷ The Levite may have been on the way up or on the way down; but he did not "happen along" like the priest. The rare word describing how each acted in the end might perhaps imply that the wounded man noticed the different treatment—was he in part responsible for the story and some time after told our Lord about it? Each went his way on the other side of the wounded traveller; not necessarily the other side of the road.

As for the Samaritan, it has never been proved whether he was on his way home to Samaria, as has been thought from "when I come again",⁸ i.e., on the next expedition to Transjordan; or whether he was off to Transjordan on business and would be back again with this completed. It looks as if his trip previous to his finding the wounded man had been through Ephraim (Ophrah), normally avoiding Jerusalem.⁹ He could have returned by a more direct route without touching Jericho again. But the promise to return and reimburse the inn-keeper gives the impression that he and the inn-keeper took the line that it would be some time before the sick man was fit for the road again. Presumably the Samaritan and the inn-keeper were already acquainted from the former's previous trips across Jordan.

There are interesting philological and Palestinian details all through the story, some of them both, as in this last scene in the inn. The word πανδοχείον, only here in the New Testament, has stayed on in Palestine in its corrupted form of *funduq*, a testimony to the influential provenance of Greek; it is quite an ordinary word for "hotel" in these times and is naturally the word used here in

⁸ A. Plummer, *International Critical Commentary: St. Luke*, 285ff., who understands "in the course of my return journey". A. B. Bruce says "he expects to return to the place on his business, a regular customer at that inn" (*op. cit.*, 544). *Interpreter's Bible* (8.197): "on my return journey". The *I.B.* however suggests that "the Samaritan was a merchant with business in Jerusalem", this being the implication of the story. This view seems to raise problems.

⁹ This place, the modern Tayyibeh, can be seen on the way down in a break in the hills.

the Arabic versions of the gospel. Then there are the couple of $\delta\eta\nu\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\alpha$, which the Samaritan gave as earnest of his financial responsibility. This Greek had taken over from Latin; but the word has lasted down through Arab times. Jordan (and 'Iraq) today know the *dīnār* as the equivalent of the pound (JD). The imperial government in Rome saw to it that Jew and Samaritan used the same currency, even if Jerusalem and Shechem had no commercial relations.

As for the Palestiniana, there are the homely details, the donkey of course; and probably both priest and Levite had their own, while the Samaritan seems to have had a couple, in the panniers of one of which were the "Oil and Wine" which proved so useful for soothing and cleansing, if unexpectedly. The Jericho Road has always had its flies and dust!

There are a few unusual words, some almost unique in the New Testament, like the one used for "passed by on the other side". "Half-dead"—was this St. Luke's Greek version of an Aramaic idiom that our Lord used?—there have been two renderings in Arabic, one of which renders the idea in its own idiom, "between living and dying". The phrase in the A.V., "by chance", is rendered verbally in Arabic as in the N.E.B. "it happened that"—again only here in the N.T. So too with the phrases employed for the Samaritan rendering of first-aid, for binding the wounds and the application of oil and wine by pouring. St. Luke must have been glad to render these medical words of Jesus. Old Arabic has two ways of interpreting St. Luke's Greek for "looking after the victim". In the case of the Samaritan himself there was personal attention in "concern for his matter". Next day, when handing over the two $\delta\eta\nu\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\alpha$, he is made to say, "Have a mind to him with these two (coins)". It was an important issue.

So the traveller landed up in Jericho, his intended destination when he set out from Jerusalem, though not in the condition he had anticipated. He had experienced the diverse attitudes of some of his contemporaries. If the inn-keeper in some sense was paid for his lodgement, this was after all the way he lived—ordinary and unexciting. The robbers represent the "type" that takes the line that "whatever you have, I'll get it, if I can, no matter what happens to you". The priest, relieved of temple duties, is confronted unexpectedly by the tragedy and treats it all in an attitude of unconcerned apathy; he couldn't think what to do about it and so did nothing. The Levite seemed interested at first; he was at the place, curious perhaps to start with, and then after having taken

a look, turned away as it was none of his business, perhaps hoping he hadn't been noticed.¹⁰ The Samaritan, making his journey (another word only here in the N.T.), was bound by the regulations of the same Torah, which the lawyer knew and the priest and Levite just as well. It was Scripture they all held equally binding. But it wasn't just "one up" for Gerizim as against Jerusalem; but the natural way of treating fellow travellers on the road to life. He showed him a kindness. Not rival shrines for worship; but loving deeds on unsafe ways.

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¹⁰ Details in the narration of the story, almost as if Jesus had come across the incident in the comparatively recent past, make for historicity, not least in the treatment meted out to the victim from the various participants.