

# Gilgal for Children!

Address to the School Staff of Edward Betham Church of England Primary School  
at the start of the year 2007-2008

In the book of Joshua, chapter 5, verses 9–12, there is a remarkable passage about the first time the Israelites ate food which they had grown for themselves in the Land of Canaan.

After the Israelites had crossed over the Jordan river,  
9 The LORD said to Joshua,  
'Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.'  
And so that place is called Gilgal to this day.  
10 While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal  
they kept the Passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month  
in the plains of Jericho.  
11 On the day after the Passover, on that very day,  
they ate the produce of the land,  
unleavened cakes and parched grain.  
12 The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land,  
and the Israelites no longer had manna;  
they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.



The story is, of course, part of the very long history of the people of Israel and their relationship with God as they understood it to be. Just before the people cross into the land of Canaan they say goodbye to Moses who dies in sight of the promised land, but never enters it. The task of leadership is handed over to Joshua and he achieves the same respect as Moses was given.

Joshua orders the Ark of the Covenant to be held by its bearers whilst standing in the river water. Then, a miracle happens, similar to the miracle at the crossing of the Red Sea when they had escaped from Egypt. The waters hold back and the people cross the Jordan on dry land. Joshua then orders that 12 large stones be taken from the river and placed in a ring to mark the special nature of the day and the crossing. The name Gilgal is similar to a Hebrew word meaning "taken away." Perhaps this is the meaning we are meant to understand because the shame of the 40 year sojourn in the wilderness has now been taken away. All the men are circumcised and become heirs of Abraham. There were many of them to be done because during the wilderness years, nobody had received the sign of circumcision. The Book of Joshua records that only when the wounds had healed would the people go forward with a fighting force leading them to conquer Canaan.



The cessation of the Manna means that the People of Israel now have to be independent, fend for themselves and recreate the world God has given them with the vision of the Garden of Eden before them, a land flowing with milk and honey. If they obey the Commandments, it will be a land of justice, learning, fidelity, peace and above all, community, in which all will share and from which all will benefit.

The children who come through our schools system are like this too.

- They are being fed with Manna, the manna of “education.”
- They are given rules for community living, as Moses gave his people, such as the Golden Rules.
- They are offered leadership by a Head and all the teachers.
- They are given support from a wide variety of school staff and volunteers, both within school and external agencies.
- They are brought to within sight of a Promised Land and they are invited to cross over and inhabit it and make it work for them, to be their creative project, their life-long endeavour, and to be satisfied in it.

The promised land is the land of independent living and life-long learning. At the age of 16+, they are starting to be ready to get to grips with individual responsibility for learning about our world and making their own way without these wonderful gifts of manna, which all start in the Foundation Stage and continue through Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 until they leave for High schools.

Our task in school is to contribute to the bringing of them to that Gilgal experience, equipping them to be on their own, live by the fruits of their own hands, face the world as adults, and to make the most of the wonders of the great Promised Land ahead of them.

Our task as Governors and School staff is vital to individuals and society alike. Nothing less than the future is being made here, in school. You the school staff deserve the deepest respect and praise for all that you do. I know that sometimes you feel dumped on, under-valued and taken for granted. But when all is said and done, I hope that you know how much your work is appreciated by those who discern the real, lasting and permanent values of our society which emanate largely from the day-to-day work which happens in our country's Primary schools.

We need you, we value your work and we could not do without you.



Photo: Ray Allen