

Light

A man in a green tracksuit with white stripes on the sleeves and pants is standing on the deck of a sailboat. He is looking off to the side with a serious expression. The sailboat's mast and ropes are visible, and a large white sail is partially seen. In the background, there are golden sand dunes under a clear blue sky. The overall scene suggests a journey or exploration.

...on a new world

a quarterly magazine focusing on the Bible and its message for today

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COVER:

A deckhand trims the sail on an Egyptian ‘felucca’ on the Nile near Thebes. The technology has barely changed in more than 3000 years since the Jews were slaves in Egypt. See article on the Exodus, page 31.

Note:

All Bible quotations taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) except where another version is indicated after the text.

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The cave of Machpelah

The very first instance of a land purchase in the Bible occurs in Genesis chapter 23, when Abraham bought a field and a cave as a burial site for Sarah his wife who had just died at the age of 127. That self-same place in central Hebron is known today by Jews and Muslims alike, who both correctly revere Abraham as their ancestor.

The passage of 4,000 years has doubtless changed the external

environment of that wooded field with a cave at one end, that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite (Genesis 23.16-18), but it has not changed its known location. That field had a cave and over the cave is built a castellated mosque-like structure, with walls some 23 feet (7 metres) high with stone steps leading up to it (see below). It was built by Herod the Great, almost 2,000 years after Abraham, just before the time of Jesus.



the Bible stands

THE TEST OF TIME

Although it would be unrecognisable to Abraham today, the fact that the place has been continuously identified from generation to generation over such a long period of time is amazing! But there are several other interesting and faith strengthening features about this account which we will examine in this article.

Hittite land transfers

The field originally belonged to a Hittite landowner of the 'sons of Heth' called Ephron. Heth was the ancestor who gave his name to the Hittite people. The Hittites were a powerful influence in the land of Canaan (now Israel) at the time of Abraham and occupied the hills and mountains. Their empire was based to the North of Canaan in what we know today as the centre of Turkey, and they had a language, laws and customs of their own. Their distinctive culture and military skills had been developed in the remote and rugged mountains of central Turkey. So when they settled to the South their natural environment was the hill country of Canaan which they were able to fortify and defend.

Abraham was well known to the 'sons of Heth' and must have been

held in high regard, for they call him '*a mighty prince*' (Genesis 23.6) and the detailed negotiations are meticulously recorded for us, there being no refusal or dispute between the parties.

There are so many things that have the 'ring of truth' about this account which completely agree with what is known of Hittite law. The Bible refers many times to the Hittite peoples, but they were only discovered as a culture in the early years of the twentieth century. The way in which Genesis 23 describes Abraham dealing with Ephron, accords exactly with the known Hittite code of land transactions. These were only discovered just over 100 years ago in excavations at the old Hittite capital at Bogazkoy in modern Turkey (see the 'Lion Gate' below).



The law required the new owner of all of a seller's property to render service to the king in some way. If just part of the land was not sold the seller would not rid himself of those obligations. This would explain why, when Abraham only wanted to buy the cave at the end of the field, Ephron insisted that the whole field go with it (see Genesis 23.9-11). Abraham said he would buy the whole plot and asked Ephron to name his price which was 400 pieces of silver. Just how big the field was is not stated, but Abraham paid, without query, the full price which on the face of it appeared to be high! That seems to show how Abraham esteemed the land which God had promised to him.

Then there is specific mention of the trees: *'the field and the cave which was in it, and all the trees that were in the field, which were within all the surrounding borders, were legally transferred'* (Genesis 23.17). Trees were always counted and detailed in Hittite land transfers. Finally Abraham went to the city gate before the elders of Heth to formally complete the transaction (verse 18). The detail is compelling and has the ring of truth.

what is the cave like?

The cave entrances today are inside the outer Herodian walls, and the largest is like a decorated shrine, for Machpelah is not only precious to Muslims but is the second most holy place to Jews, after the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. A clue as to what lies underground, however, may be discerned by the meaning of Machpelah. The Hebrew words 'Me'arat Hamachpela' mean 'Cave of the Double Tombs'. This may well refer to the structure of the caves. Jewish tradition on the other hand suggests that the meaning refers to the Patriarchal couples being buried there, e.g. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah.

A description of what the caves consist of is sketchy. No-one is allowed access, owing to the political sensitivity of the site, and any information relies on anecdotal accounts. According to one ancient account, the cave had been re-discovered in AD 1119 by a monk named Arnoul, who on noticing a draught in the floor, had removed the flagstones and found a room lined with Herodian masonry. He discovered a narrow partly blocked passage leading to a large round room with plastered walls. In the floor of the room he found a square



stone slightly different from the others, and upon removing it found the first of the caves. They were filled with dust and, it is said, bones which the monk washed in wine, and stacked neatly.

In 1967 after the Six Day War, the Israeli defence minister Moshe Dayan carried out a brief impromptu exploration, sending down a slim twelve-year old girl named Michal into the chamber with a camera, but she failed to notice the stone in the floor that led to the caves. Another report states that in 1981, Dr Seev Jevin, the former director of the Israel Antiquities Authority, entered the first chamber, discovering the stone slab leading to the first cave beneath. He also found a passage leading to a second oval chamber, smaller than the first, which contained shards of pottery and a wine jug. Perhaps this

was evidence of the ‘double cave’ of Machpelah.

what of the promise to Abraham?

Finally, we need to consider the significance of what Abraham did when he needed to bury Sarah. Clearly he did not own any part of the land of Canaan. He said to the Hittites: *‘I am a foreigner and a sojourner among you. Give me property for a burial place among you...’* (Genesis 23.4). And yet it was this Abraham who had been promised that he would inherit the whole land from the Egyptian border in the South, to the Euphrates in the North, as his own land for ever. He was also promised that he would live in that land for ever with his greater family.

Abraham was now an old man, and that promise had not been fulfilled.

LEFT; a worshipper at the place revered as 'the tomb of Abraham'

He needed to throw himself on the goodwill of the local inhabitants and ask them to sell a small burial plot. Those *'great and precious promises'* as Peter later calls them (see 2 Peter 1.4) were not fulfilled in Abraham's lifetime. God had said *'...I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God'* (Genesis 17. 8).

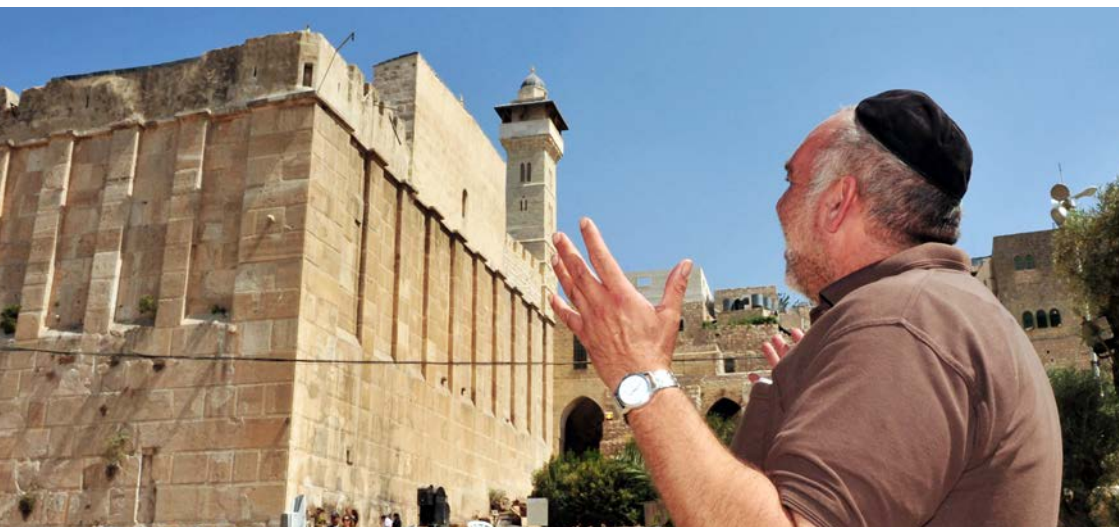
Was the land purchase a sign of his lack of faith in God's promise? By no means! On the contrary, it signifies that the fulfilment of the promises still lies in the future. In the New Testament letter to the Hebrews we read that Abraham and Sarah among others *'died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, they were assured of them, embraced them , and confessed that they were*

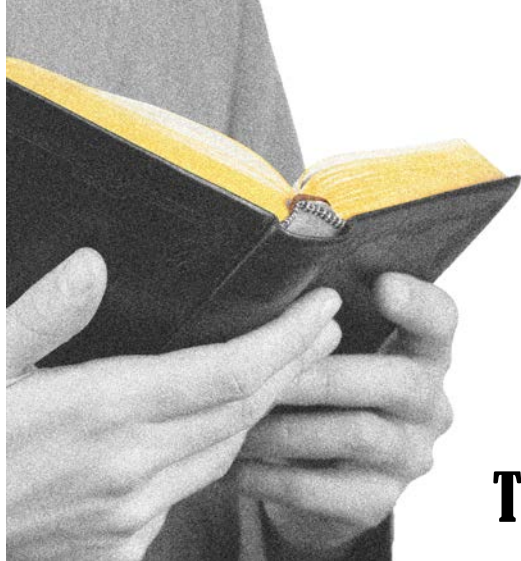
strangers and pilgrims on the earth' (Hebrews 11.13).

Abraham, Sarah and their descendants, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah were buried in that cave. Together with all those who have died in faith, they await a resurrection from the dead to inherit that land and live in it for ever (see Daniel 12.2, John 5.28,29 and Hebrews 11.39,40). Abraham's special descendant, Jesus Christ, will indeed raise Abraham and all those who have died in faith, at his return.

We believe that time is coming soon. If you have faith in God's promises, like Abraham, you too can share in these promises which will become reality when Jesus returns to establish the kingdom of God on earth.

Justin Giles London UK





basic Bible teaching

The nature of God

The Bible claims to be the completely inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3.16). It is the only source of reliable information about God and it is there that we find God's revelation about Himself. Indeed, God, LORD God and other titles appear very many times in the Bible. Here is an example from the prophet Isaiah:

'I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides me... that they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things... I have made the earth, and created man on it. It was my hands that stretched out

the heavens, and all their host I have commanded.' Isaiah 45.5,6,12

The very first sentence of the Bible reminds us that *'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'* (Genesis 1.1).

What does God teach us about His nature or character?

Firstly, that He desires a relationship with mankind. Genesis chapter 1 says that God made us in His own image (likeness – see Genesis 1.26, 27). His Word has been given to mankind, in which He has made known His requirements to us. The first two of the 'ten commandments' are the starting point:

'You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in

heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love me and keep my commandments'

Exodus 20.3-6

Surely, our Creator is entirely reasonable in saying these things! How can anyone or anything challenge the Creator of all things? He has the absolute right to be jealous of His status, to bring punishment upon those who rebel against Him, and to show mercy on those who love Him and keep His commandments.

As we are the creation of God, it follows that we must acknowledge this fact and treat Him with the utmost reverence. Isaiah warned the people of his day: *'Woe to him who strives with his Maker!'* (Isaiah 45.9). But on a positive note we read this:

'...But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my

word' (Isaiah 66.2). Thus, we see both *'the 'goodness and severity of God'*, as the Apostle Paul puts it (Romans.11.22).

God as a Father

Perhaps the character of God is best illustrated by the metaphor of a good father. Does not the *'Lord's Prayer'*, as it is commonly called, begin *'Our Father in heaven'*? The very next phrase is *'hallowed be your name'* (Matthew 6.9). Our thoughts immediately picture a warm and trusting relationship between a child and its father, a relationship based on reverence and love.

One senses the emotion of this close relationship in Moses' description of the loving care taken by God in bringing His people (Israel) out of Egypt and through the wilderness to the *'Promised Land'*: *'...in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place'* (Deuteronomy 1.31). Again we read of God's care when he spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai:

"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will

indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." Exodus 19.4-6

God's love is conditional

The passage quoted above from the Ten Commandments reminds us that the love of God for His children is conditional. God brought them to Himself and they would be His special treasure on the condition that *'you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant'*.

God opens His heart, as it were, in the emotional prophecy of Hosea:

'When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son' (Hosea 11.1). But says God:

'..the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim (Israel) to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them'

Hosea 11.2-4 NIV

Just as a father hates to punish his child, so God portrays the anguish He felt over punishing Israel: *'How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?....* (That is,



for punishment) *My heart churns within me; my sympathy is stirred. I will not execute the fierceness of my anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man, the Holy One in your midst; and I will not come with terror.*' (Hosea 11.8,9)

God trains and disciplines His children

Just as a good father takes the trouble to train and discipline his son so does God:

'you should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you. Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in his ways and to fear him.' Deuteronomy 8.5,6

God is compassionate

Compassion is a prominent characteristic of God as the Psalmist reminds us:

'The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will he keep his anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to

our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.'

Psalm 103.8-14

The Prophet Jeremiah lamented the effects of severe punishment brought by God upon Israel following years of His pleading with them. However, he admitted that

'Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness'. Lamentations 3.22,23

God's compassion is shown in the gift of His Son

God's compassion cannot be better shown than through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus. What more could God do to impress upon us His concern to rescue us from perishing in eternal death. Perhaps the best known verse in the Bible is this:

'For God so loved the world that

he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life’ John 3.16

That God would save us from our sins through the death and resurrection of His beloved Son is a promise that goes right back to the first sin in the garden of Eden. That first sin was essentially disbelief of the Word of God.

God is truthful

The promise of God to bring redemption focussed in His Son, came to pass thousands of years later. But it illustrates another crucial aspect of God’s nature, His truthfulness. The Apostle Peter said this:

‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears him and works righteousness is accepted by him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ...who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews

and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with him after he arose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is he who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets witness that, through his name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.’ Acts 10.34-43

God revealed His character in Jesus

God had shown us His character in the life of His Son Jesus. Through preaching the gospel and doing good, he showed men by undeniable evidence that he had been sent by God. How astonishing it was then, that he should be rejected, *‘taken by lawless hands... crucified and put to death’*. Even more astonishing is the fact that all this happened according to *‘the carefully planned intention and foreknowledge of God.’* (Acts 2.23). What greater appeal could God have

made to men's hearts and consciences?

When those in Jerusalem heard Peter explain these things they were profoundly shocked by what they had done. We are told that *'they were cut to the heart'* and asked the apostles *'what shall we do?'* To which the amazingly merciful answer came: *'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins'* (Acts 2.37,38).

The grace of God

It can be no wonder, therefore, that we read in the Word of God so much about God's love and grace. This is His offer to forgive us our sins, although undeserving, provided we come to him in reverence, love and obedience. As Paul wrote to Titus:

'...the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age.'

Titus 2.11,12

The age in which we live is largely godless and the immense challenge to us is to repent, that is to think again and change from a godless way of life. As Paul reminded the first century Christians at Ephesus, we must become

'followers of God as dear children'

Ephesians 5.1

Are we prepared to do this?

Geoffrey Mitchell
Norfolk, UK

you are exceptional

‘An average healthy human brain contains some twenty billion nerve cells connected to one another through hundreds of trillions of synapses (one synapse can contain about 1,000 molecular scale microprocessor units). The studies’ results showed a single human brain has more information processing units than all the computers... on earth.’

(Dr Jeffrey P. Tomkins quoting E. A. Moore on CNET Nov 17 2010).

Really? Can you believe it? All that between our ears!

Obviously most of us do not use our brains to anything like full capacity, but now and then exceptional individuals give us a glimpse of the marvels our brains are capable of. In the evening of September 7th last year the pianist Sir András Schiff sat down at the piano on stage at the Royal Albert Hall in London. For the next two hours he played music by J. S. Bach* entirely from memory and without a break (see <https://youtu.be/RNCuPAgG9eo>)



* 24 Preludes and Fugues, Book One of Bach's 'Well-tempered Clavier'.

Part of Bach's original manuscript.

To play from memory the performer has to remember the key and time signatures of each of 48 pieces, the pitch and the length of each individual note (about 500 on this page), how each note stops and starts and how it relates to other notes on either side and above and below it.

This is just one page of the entire work of about 120 pages (about 60,000 notes).

The audience in the Royal Albert Hall

If the pianist's performance was phenomenal, the 'performance' of the audience was also remarkable. For two hours 5,000 people sat in complete silence, listening to every note, absorbing this mountain of information, allowing it to stir their emotions and challenge their minds. Afterwards they were able to talk about it with their friends, to go home with memories which maybe would last a lifetime, so that in years to come they would be able to recreate and relive some of those unique moments, retrieved from the archives of that magic box which we call our brain.



Meanwhile our supposed nearest relatives, the Great Apes, continued to swing from tree to tree in the forests of Africa.

We are exceptional.

No matter how much the high profile atheists of our day may dislike and disguise the fact, we are totally different from the animals who are supposed to be our immediate ancestors in the evolutionary line of descent. And those differences are quite inexplicable in terms of the 'survival of the fittest'. Of what purely practical value is the gift of composing music, or the astounding manual dexterity of the performers who bring it to life? Is the fact that we can question the very meaning of our own existence of any value in the struggle for survival? Probably the reverse. Acute intelligence is of very doubtful value if all we need to do is survive. 'It is not clear that intelligence has any long-term survival value' says Stephen Hawking.

The book of Genesis gives us a satisfying and life-changing explanation of why we are so different. Mankind was and is a special creation by God, made, unlike every other animal, *'in the image of God'* (Genesis 1.27). As a reflected *'image'* of our Creator,

comment

our unique abilities are a reflection of His. Our extraordinary creativity in so many different ways reflects His creative power, the skill which brought our universe into existence and designed its myriad life forms. He has given us the gift of speech, our unique power to communicate, and when we speak, we do what He does; when He spoke in the beginning, He brought the worlds into existence: ***‘Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light’*** (Genesis 1.3).

When God gave us these remarkable gifts, He gave us something else: freewill, the power of choice, the capacity to weigh up different courses of action and choose one from another, the power to choose just how we use these remarkable gifts that God has given us. ‘We are unquestionably a unique species – the only species capable of even contemplating ethical issues and assuming responsibilities – we uniquely are capable of apprehending the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, right and improper conduct’ (Wesley J. Smith, author of ‘The war on humans’).

We have a choice to make. Do we recognize the One who gave us these great gifts, who made us so exceptional, and follow Him, or not? The great Old Testament prophet Elijah spelt it out to the people of his day:

‘How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him’ I Kings 18.21

Most people, then and now, have rejected God and followed the idols (‘Baals’) of their day, with terrible consequences for humanity. God’s great gifts to us are squandered and perverted, to the point where we threaten our own future on this planet (see back cover).

You can make a different choice.

You are exceptional.

Roy Toms *Norfolk UK*



from the editor

As I write this editorial early in January 2018, I am reminded of 'The March of Time' by the new calendar which now hangs on the wall in front of me. In addition to this it serves another purpose, to remind me of dates that are important, commitments to be carried out, deadlines to be met and meetings to be attended etc.

The phrase 'The March of Time' was coined by the American magazine 'Time'. It was used as the title of an American [radio](#) news series broadcast from 1931 to 1945, and a companion [newsreel](#) series shown in cinemas from 1935 to 1951. As these broadcasts demonstrated during the 1930's and 1940's, we live in a turbulent and ever-changing world with an uncertain future.

The word calendar is derived from a Latin word 'calendae', which was

used to describe the first day of the month in the Roman calendar. It is related to the verb *calare* 'to call out', referring to the 'calling' of the new moon when it was first seen. We use the calendar to measure time in years, months, weeks and days. Each of these divisions of time are based on the precise movement of the Earth round the Sun.

On a personal level, we live our lives and they come to an end with the passing of time. As the wise man Solomon observed: *'To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die...'*

(Ecclesiastes 3.1,2)

In contrast, the Bible tells us that God is not bounded by time. The Psalmist observed: *'... even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God... For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night'* (Psalm 90.2,4).

Our lives then are but a moment in time when compared with God, but the Bible also tells us that we are here for a reason. We have each been given an opportunity to respond to Him as the Psalmist puts

it: *'... teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom'* (Psalm 90.12).

If we are truly wise we will study God's Word the Bible, and discover that God has a plan for the world which has been marked out in the divine calendar by a series of events designed to demonstrate that we are not here as a result of blind chance. Each of us have been given an opportunity to 'gain a heart of wisdom' and respond to God's invitation to become associated with His plan.

The greatest event marked out in the divine calendar was the birth of His son Jesus. The Apostle Paul described it like this: *'...when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law...'* (Galatians 4.4 NIV). The consequences of this event have been far-reaching, providing an opportunity for all men and women to be redeemed or saved from the limitations of our present short existence. The Apostle Peter explained, God is *'long-suffering towards us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance'* (2 Peter 3.9).

The climax of God's plan is also marked out in the divine calendar. It is a world-shaking event which Paul described like this: *'...he (God) has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all, by raising him from the dead'* (Acts 17.31). Although we do not know for certain when that time will be here, the Bible gives us many prophetic signs which indicate the nearness of that day.

Jesus commanded his followers to be alert to the signs that herald his second coming. He illustrated this by a parable about a man who travelled to a far country, leaving his servants to look after his affairs and to keep watch:

'Watch therefore (he said), for you do not know when the master of the house is coming... lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!' Mark 13.35-37

So next time you look at the calendar, think about the most important date of all, which is known only to God. Will you be ready for that world-shaking event?

Editor



from our mailbag

think logically, make decisions and recognise that choice also brings with it consequences. God gave Adam one simple instruction, that they should not eat the fruit from a particular tree described as *'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'* (Genesis 2.17). To eat the fruit of it would result in them becoming subject to death.

A reader has asked – does Bible teaching require our body of sin to have a covering?

Nakedness is often used in the Bible as a symbol of unforgiven sin that needs to be covered. In a literal sense, nakedness can be covered by clothing but spiritual nakedness needs a spiritual covering in order for sins to be forgiven and God in His wisdom has provided the required covering.

We need to go to the first book of the Bible, as our starting point. There we read of the creation of Adam and Eve, who we are told were made in the image of God (Genesis 1.27) and are described as being *'very good'* (Genesis 1.31).

It is clear that right from the start they had the mental capacity to

There was another special tree in the Garden of Eden described as the *'tree of life'* (Genesis 2.9). But they chose to take the fruit from the forbidden tree in disobedience to God's command. This conscious decision to disobey the divine instruction led to a significant change in their lives and the consequences of their action made them subject to death.

This new awareness made Adam and Eve realise that they were naked before God and they attempted to cover their sin by sewing fig leaves together. But this covering was unacceptable to God, who gave them a suitable covering that was acceptable to Him. We read that *'for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them'* (Genesis 3.21).

So what was the difference?

To provide *'tunics of skin'* required the death of an animal, which had to be sacrificed in order that the first human pair would be suitably covered. But there was more to this than just an alternative form of clothing. It was to set the seal of God's requirement from mankind, if they wished to be at one with their Maker. This is referred to as *'atonement'* in the Scriptures and requires blood to be shed as we read in the New Testament: *'without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness'* (Hebrews 9.22 NIV).

Now when we move on to consider Adam and Eve's first two sons, we see that the same principle applied in the sacrifices offered by Cain and Abel. They had no doubt seen their parents offerings and been taught what to offer, but again one form of covering was acceptable whilst the other was not.

They made their choices and these led to consequences, especially for Cain, who is remembered as the world's first murderer, when, in his anger at his rejection he killed his younger brother Abel. The record in Genesis tells us:

'In the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering

of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but he did not respect Cain and his offering...'

Genesis 4.3-5

In the second book of the Bible we learn how the Israelites (Abraham's descendants) were saved from slavery and repression in Egypt (see page 31) God inflicted ten devastating plagues on the Egyptians and the final plague resulted in the death of the first-born male in every Egyptian household. The Israelites were saved from this slaughter by taking a year old male lamb or goat *'without blemish'* which they had to kill and put some of its blood on the door frame of their dwellings (Exodus 12.1-14).

Because the Israelites were saved in this way by the angel of death passing over their homes, it was called the feast of *'Passover'* (Exodus 12.26,27). This became a regular annual sacrifice so that future generations might remember how God protected them. It is still recognised today by their descendants the Jews, in their religious month of Abib, equivalent to our months of March and April. That act

of slaying an animal and putting the blood on the door posts provided them with a covering that was to protect their lives.

If we summarise so far, we see that God appointed the way of approach to Him and the need for men and women to bridge the gap of alienation, by having their sins covered. This was achieved by shedding the blood of a *'perfect'* male animal.

The word translated 'atonement' in the Scriptures is best understood as 'at-one-ment' or reconciliation and in Old Testament Hebrew means 'to cover over'. If you refer to a Bible concordance, you will see that the act of atonement features many times in the Old Testament books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, to reconcile the people to God in spite of their sins.

How does that apply to us as we do not carry out these sacrifices?

The answer is that the divinely appointed sacrifices in Old Testament times all pointed forward to Jesus Christ, who as a representative of the human race was sinless and therefore able to atone for our sins and reconcile us to God. Jesus fulfilled the require-

ments of God's law as he said: *'Do not think I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil'* (Matthew 5.17). Jesus not only fulfilled the Mosaic Law but he superseded the requirements of the Law by the offering of himself as a 'perfect sacrifice', which the Passover and all the other sacrifices foreshadowed.

In the New Testament we read that John the Baptist saw Jesus coming towards him and acknowledged his sacrificial work exclaiming: *'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'* (John 1.29). How appropriate is such a description when we think back to the Old Testament and the need for a *'perfect'* male sacrifice. But by very definition, Jesus is able to cover our sins, just as those sacrifices were designed to bring the offerer to an understanding that a Saviour would be provided.

This atonement or reconciliation made possible by Christ's sacrifice is underlined in Paul's letter to the believers in Rome:

'But God demonstrates his own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by his blood, we

shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received the reconciliation.’ Romans 5.8-11

Our brief survey of Bible teaching has shown us that Adam and Eve were alienated from God by disobeying his strict command not to eat of the tree of the *‘knowledge of good and evil’*. They needed the skins of animals to clothe themselves in order to cover their sin which necessitated a sacrifice being made on their behalf. Then in the case of Cain and Abel, the same lesson was being taught. The sacrifice of an animal was what God required.

Later, the Israelites were saved from certain death in Egypt by the shedding of the blood of the Pass-over lamb. This need for a covering was clearly demonstrated in the instructions given by God to Moses, in the laws governing sacrifice. These all pointed forward to Jesus *‘the Lamb of God’* whose blood was

shed for those who have faith, in order that they might be reconciled to God through him.

So, in answer to our reader’s question, Jesus has provided a perfect covering for our sins by his sacrifice on the cross. Believers who are baptised by full immersion into the saving name of Jesus can avail themselves of this covering (see Romans 6 for the Apostle Paul’s teaching on the importance of baptism).

Note: for more information about baptism send for a free booklet *‘Understanding the Bible’s teaching: Baptism’*.

Jesus is our mediator in the presence of God to receive our prayers for forgiveness. This gives us an amazing hope for the future – the prospect of eternal life in the kingdom of God at the second coming of Jesus, as we read in Hebrews:

‘...Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.’

Hebrews 9.28 NIV

Correspondence Secretary

A large colony of bats is shown in flight against a dark blue night sky. In the foreground, a large bat is prominently featured, its wings spread wide, revealing the intricate structure of the wing membrane and the reddish-pink veins. The bat's body is light-colored, and its face is visible. Numerous other bats are scattered throughout the background, some in sharp focus and others as silhouettes, creating a sense of a massive swarm. The overall scene is dynamic and captures the nocturnal activity of these mammals.

“marvelous are your works”

BATS

Bats represent about 20% of all mammal species, and they are the only mammals capable of true flight.

Along with the Etruscan shrew, Kitti's hog-nosed bat is one of the smallest mammals known, weighing about 2.5g and with an average body length of 3cm. The largest bat, the giant Golden-Crowned Flying Fox, can weigh up to 1.6kg and has a 1.7m wingspan. The Mexican free-tailed bat is the fastest animal in level flight and, like some 70% of bats, catches insects on the wing.

In order to do this bats use echolocation, squeaking loudly and listening to the echoes. One of the difficulties of echolocation is that the emitted chirp is approximately one million times louder than the returning echo. The bat has a special system which locks the ear bones as it squeaks to prevent it being deafened by its own noise. The locking is lifted immediately the squeak stops, and due to the intermittent nature of the chirping this locking and unlocking has to happen many times a second when the bat is hunting.

Bats use a variety of techniques when pursuing insects, some using pulses of frequency-modulated sounds, some with constant frequency pulses and some with both. They may switch between modes depending on the situation. They also increase both sound frequency (pitch) and pulse rate as they home in on an insect in order to refine their aim. It is thought that the squeak can also be used to stun the prey.

For most bats the echolocation chirp is typically above 20 kHz, the limit of human hearing. But the sound behaves the same way as when you listen to the echo of a shout. The sound travels through the air and bounces off any object it comes across. The bat's brain calculates the distance to the object from the return time, and its loudness tells the animal how large its quarry is. But there are other subtleties to a bat's echolocation ability.

Distance is one measurement, direction quite another. The bat can determine this much as we do, a sound on our right taking a fraction less time to arrive at the right ear than the left, the brain calculating the angle accordingly. But a bat's ears are a complicated mass of folds

which modify this, enabling far greater accuracy. With suitable head movements the bat can determine not just lateral (side-to-side) positioning, but vertical as well.

Further, the bat can tell whether an insect is moving away from or towards itself, and whether it is changing direction as it does so. It can do this because if the returning squeak is of a higher pitch than the bat produced, the insect is, relatively speaking, coming closer, and vice versa. This is known as the Doppler Effect, approaching sound sources being higher-pitched, receding ones lower. This is best illustrated by the drop in tone as an emergency vehicle passes by with its siren sounding.

Bats also use their squeaks for communication, enabling a bat to locate its mate, an astonishing feat in a cave which may contain millions of the animals. Its echolocation ability also allows the bat to pinpoint a suitable landing point with appropriate footholds, and avoid other bats, flying or stationary.

To illustrate just how well integrated all the bat's abilities have to be, one researcher trained a bat to fly through the spinning blades of a guard-less domestic fan, and

photographs revealed the animal's amazing finesse in doing this . The fan was started slowly and the speed gradually increased until at several hundred rpm the bat suddenly veered away, the animal's acceptance or avoidance perfectly matching the fan's speed.

To have a superb echolocation system would be pointless unless it was combined with flying agility. To name just four of some fourteen crucial differences between bats and other mammals, the bat's body must incorporate such things as:

- ❖ Lower-arm locking to prevent twisting of the wing in flight.
- ❖ Wing leading-edge and trailing-edge control.
- ❖ The synchronization of the wing beats to respiration.
- ❖ A centre of gravity much further forward than in other mammals.

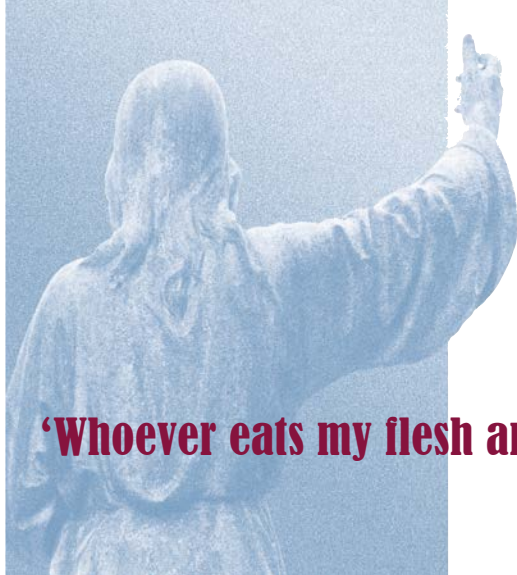
All these, of course, must be put in place together, and it defies belief that it could be the result of mere chance. Only a highly intelligent Creator could have endowed a mammal with such amazing abilities, as the Psalmist exclaimed:

‘O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all’.

Psalm 104.24

Laurie Broughton
Bedfordshire, UK





what did
Jesus mean?

‘Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood...’

These words are found in John’s Gospel record where we read:

‘Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.’

John 6.54-56

First of all we note the importance of Jesus’ command to his followers. If we obey this instruction we can have a special relationship with him and the prospect of eternal life, but if we ignore it the opposite is implied.

The day before Jesus spoke these words, we are told that he had miraculously fed 5,000 people with a

few loaves and fish. The people acknowledged this great miracle saying *‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world’* (John 6.14). They saw him as the promised Messiah and wanted him to be their king and overthrow their Roman oppressors. This was the hope of all those who understood the Old Testament scriptures. The words of their prophets had foretold the coming of Messiah to reign on David’s throne in Jerusalem, but Jesus disappointed them by saying:

‘...you seek me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you,

because God the Father has set his seal on him.’ John 6.26,27

Confused, they asked him how they could labour (work) to please God. He replied: ‘...*This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he sent*’ (John 6.29).

misplaced enthusiasm

Jesus was a hero to many in the crowd because he had fed them, but he discerned something very wrong with their misplaced enthusiasm. They only wanted the physical bread that he provided – bread that they did not have to work for.

Wanting the blessings that Jesus provides is not the same thing as believing in him. Indeed, Jesus had come to give them bread from heaven but not the kind of bread that they were expecting. In order to test them he began to say things that sounded very strange. He told them that he was the true bread from heaven that gives life to the world and whoever eats this bread will live forever. He said, ‘...*the bread that I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world*’ (John 6.51).

At first reading this might sound like Jesus was advocating cannibalism.

His listeners were very puzzled and argued among themselves about the meaning of his words but he pressed it even further:

‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.’ John 6.53-55

The record in John tells us that many of his disciples completely misunderstood what Jesus was saying and they ‘*walked with him no more*’ (John 6.66).

So what did he mean?

the importance of belief in Jesus

It is clear from a careful reading of this chapter that Jesus’ words about eating his flesh and drinking his blood should not be taken literally. The spiritual meaning can be discerned if we consider what Jesus said. Moses had indeed given them ‘*bread from heaven to eat*’ (John 6.31,32). But Jesus was offering them something far more satisfying, if only they could see it:

‘...I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.’

John 6.35

‘...this is the will of him who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.’

John 6.40

For the followers of Jesus, eating is believing and drinking is believing. He offers spiritual food and drink which is able to give eternal life to those who believe in him.

The people had witnessed a great miracle that had satisfied their immediate hunger. But apart from this, there was no lasting benefit for the people who listened to his words, no promised overthrow of their Roman oppressors. Instead he offered them a hope of salvation from death itself, based on bodily resurrection *‘at the last day’*.

what does it mean to believe in Jesus?

Just before he ascended to heaven Jesus told the apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel, the good news concerning the coming kingdom of God on earth. He added these words: *‘Whoever*

believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned’ (Mark 16.16 NIV).

Believing the gospel and baptism are essential if we are to become disciples of Jesus – there is no other way! Belief or faith in Jesus, means a full acceptance of the divine plan centred in him. By the giving of his body and the spilling of his blood he made the supreme sacrifice for sin and because of his sinless life, God raised him from the dead to die no more (see Romans 6.9). Through belief in his saving work and a commitment to following him we can obtain forgiveness of sins and have hope of unending life in the kingdom of God.

As we learn from Genesis chapter 3, Adam and Eve introduced sin into the world in Eden. All their descendants from that time till now have inherited their nature and die because of sin (see Romans 5.12). But belief in the saving work of Jesus gives us a hope of deliverance from death. This is confirmed by the Apostle Paul who reminded the Christians at Corinth that *‘...as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he*

comes, those who belong to him' (1 Corinthians 15.22, 23 NIV).

a very important command

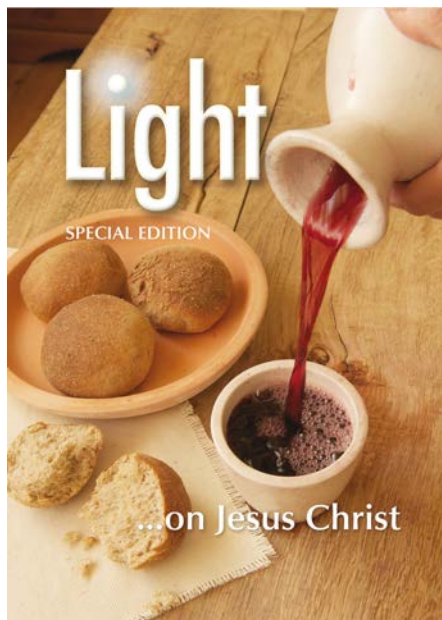
The instructions that Jesus gave to believers include a very important command to remember him in a special way. We read in the Gospels how Jesus shared bread and wine with the twelve apostles just before his crucifixion. You may be familiar with this event which is known as the Last Supper. Luke's account records these words of Jesus:

"...With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it, until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God"...

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me". Likewise he also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you".'

Luke 22.15,16,19,20

The deeper significance to believers was emphasised by the Apostle Paul:



'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?'

I Corinthians 10.16

Paul also reminded the Corinthians to do this as often as they could: *'For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes'* (1 Corinthians 11.26). The Acts of the Apostles records how the believers came together regularly on the first day of each week to remember Jesus in this way (see Acts 20.7).

By carrying out Jesus' command, believers associate themselves with his death and resurrection. It is a way of demonstrating to Christ and to others our understanding of his saving work and our commitment to him. It is a joyful and solemn occasion that necessitates self-examination by believers before sharing the bread and wine as symbols of Jesus' sacrifice on their behalf (see 1 Corinthians 11.27-29).

the example of the first century Christians

The example of the immediate disciples of Jesus is recorded in the book of Acts for the benefit of all those who truly wish to become associated with him. The Apostle Peter preached to the crowds assembled in Jerusalem and his words are no less applicable to those who want to be disciples of Jesus today:

'Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.'

Acts 2.41, 42

There is an important order of events as seen in the conversion of those first century disciples of Jesus. Belief of the gospel was followed by baptism. Then they shared fellowship with other believers by holding to the Apostles' doctrine and they faithfully carried out their Lord's command to break bread and drink wine in memory of him. True Christians need to follow this example if they wish to receive the reward of eternal life.

conclusion

When Jesus referred to eating his flesh and drinking his blood he was referring to the need for belief in his mission as a saviour and a commitment to live our lives following his example and faithfully observing his teaching. True followers of Christ will ensure they meet together to share bread and wine as often as they can in remembrance of his sacrifice. In so doing they look forward in hope to the fulfilment of his promise:

'Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.'

John 6.54

Stephen Bonner Kent, UK



Fact or Fiction?

the Exodus

The word 'Exodus' simply means 'a going out'. It is usually applied to a mass movement of people from one location to another. In Biblical terms, the Exodus is used to describe the evacuation of the people of Israel from the land of Egypt about 3,500 years ago. These events are recalled in the book of Exodus, the second book of the Bible.

Bible background

The Jews are all descended from one man, the patriarch Abraham, who lived about 1900 BC. He followed a nomadic life in the land of Canaan (now called Israel) to the north of Egypt. His grandson Jacob (also called Israel) had twelve sons, and one of these, Joseph, was treacherously sold into Egypt by his brothers as a slave. After initial setbacks, Joseph prospered in Egypt, eventually becoming vizier (equivalent to a modern Prime Minister) to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.

Sometime later, a famine in Canaan compelled Jacob and his remaining sons and their families to migrate into Egypt, where, under the patronage of Joseph, they settled in the northern Nile delta area. As time went by Jacob's descendants, the Israelites became so numerous that they were considered a threat to Egyptian stability, and so the Pharaohs instituted a system of slave labour by which it was hoped to keep the Israelites in check:

'So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labour, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh ... They made their lives bitter with hard labour in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labour the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.'

Exodus 1.11,14 NIV



The book of Exodus then describes the coming of Moses to be their leader, and how under divine guidance the people of Israel threw off the oppressive yoke of the Egyptians and fled the country. But this Exodus was not accomplished easily. Pharaoh was keen to hold on to his source of free labour, and it was only after God inflicted on the Egyptians a series of ten terrible plagues, culminating in the death of every firstborn, that permission was given for the Israelites to leave.

Even so, Pharaoh had second thoughts and sent his elite chariot corps to recapture the departed slaves, who were apparently trapped beside the Red Sea. But miraculously the sea parted to allow the Israelites to escape, and when the Egyptian charioteers attempted to follow, the sea closed in on them and they were never seen again.

The freed slaves travelled to Mount Sinai where they were constituted

Egyptian charioteers shown on the walls of Rameses' temple

the nation of Israel with God as their king. They went on to settle again in the land of Canaan in which their ancestors had lived about 250 years earlier.

This, in brief, is the record of the Exodus as told in the Bible. But did it actually happen? Is it fact or fiction?

the problem outlined

Needless to say, the Bible account of the Exodus has come in for much sceptical comment. The ten plagues, especially the last one, and the dividing of the Red Sea are miraculous elements of the story. They are either denied outright or considered to be merely natural phenomena that by chance occurred at a fortuitous time. It is also alleged that all accounts have been embellished and exaggerated by continual retelling, and are therefore untrustworthy.

In addition to this, while archaeology gives a wealth of historical information about Egypt, there have been little or no recognisable allusions to the Israelites ever having been in Egypt. If they were sufficiently numerous and influential to pose a threat to Egyptian security it seems most likely, so the argument goes, that somewhere the Egyptians would have mentioned them in their extensive archives.

Even if it did occur as described in the Bible, there is uncertainty among scholars as to the date of the Exodus; suggested dates vary by almost 200 years! In view of this it would seem difficult, if not impossible, to answer the question posed by the heading of this article: is the Exodus fact or fiction?

a Jewish family celebrates the Passover

arguments to support the Biblical Exodus

All is not lost however! Whilst there is no absolute proof that the Exodus actually happened, there is a lot of evidence that gives strong indications that the Bible record is true.

subsequent history

It is an undeniable fact that by about the twelfth century BC the nation of Israel had settled in the land of Canaan, and that some 200 years later was a major power in the area under the kingship of David and Solomon. It is also unquestionable that during this period the Israelites had preserved a consistent tradition that the nation was born in Egypt and had become the chosen people of God by the events connected with the Exodus. References in later parts of



the Bible abound with allusions to the Exodus, and it is inconceivable that the Israelites would have just dreamed up all these. Here is just one example, and there are many others:

‘This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I made a covenant with your forefathers when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery ...’ Jeremiah 34.13 (NIV)

This national tradition continued down to New Testament times. It would be difficult to explain all such references unless the Exodus actually happened.

the Passover

But there is much stronger evidence. On the night of the last plague on the Egyptians, the death of all their firstborn, God exempted the Israelites from the plague provided they carried out a special ritual, later known as the Passover. After the event God commanded His people to keep the Passover every year in commemoration of their deliverance. So over the intervening centuries, right down to our own day, the Jews have kept the Passover. Thus there is a direct link between the Exodus and the present time. If the original miracle is denied, how can the consistent tradition of the Passover

from that day to this be explained?

historical evidence - the date of the Exodus

Until very recently almost every student of ancient history dated the Exodus at about 1280 BC. The evidence goes something like this:

- ❖ A Pharaoh known as Rameses the Great reigned around this time.
- ❖ The city the slaves built was named Rameses (Exodus 1.11).
- ❖ It was assumed that the city was named after the reigning king.



❖ Therefore Rameses was the Pharaoh that enslaved Israel.

However this date has always had its difficulties. Firstly, it does not fit in with the known archaeological finds relating to Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan after leaving Egypt. The well-known Merneptah Stele (c. 1219 BC – see picture LEFT) found in Egypt mentions Israel along with the towns of Ashkelon, Gezer and Yeno'am. The Egyptian symbol for 'town' is attached to the last three, but attached to 'Israel,' is the symbol for 'people'. This indicates that the Israelites were well settled in their land as a nation long before the conventional date for the Exodus.

This also applies to the fall of Jericho. The Bible describes the destruction of the city by the Israelites 40 years after they had left Egypt, but archaeology suggests that Jericho was already largely a ruin by 1280 BC. The Bible gives its own date for the Exodus. We read:

'...in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel ... he began to build the house of the LORD.'

1 Kings 6.1

The date of the fourth year of Solomon can be established with a fair degree of accuracy, and going back another 480 years gives about 1440 BC for the date of the Exodus. It is most heartening for the Bible student to now learn that over the last 20 or so years some 'experts' are coming round to accepting this earlier date for the Exodus. The important result of this is that many already known items of history fit exactly into place, and the Bible's record of the Exodus is confirmed.

foreign slaves in Egypt

For example, a papyrus roll dating from a generation before the time of Moses lists the names of 95 slaves of a certain Egyptian household. Of these over half had 'Asiatic' rather than Egyptian names, suggesting that they were of Syrian-Canaanite origin. Among these names are several that are the same as those found in the Bible. Issachar, and Asher, both sons of Jacob, are mentioned; and even the name later given to one of the Hebrew midwives in Egypt, Shiphras (see Exodus 1.15) is mentioned.

This papyrus related to a household in southern Egypt. It is reasonable to assume that, if many of the slaves down south were foreign, then in the

Nile delta area to the north, much nearer to their country of origin, the proportion of Asiatic slaves would have been much greater. Therefore the comment in Exodus can be regarded as accurate: *'...the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them'* (Exodus 1.7 NIV).

There were a great number of foreign slaves, some with non-Egyptian names similar to people mentioned in the Bible, at the very time in Egyptian history now thought to be just before the Exodus. This is a striking indication that the Bible's record of the presence and persecution of the Israelites in Egypt is a fact, not fiction.

'a blast of God'

If the 1440 BC date for the Exodus is accepted, then the ruling Pharaoh at

A trench cut through the mound of the old city of Jericho to expose its history

that time would have been a king called Dudimose. In the third century BC an Egyptian priest named Mantheo wrote a history of Egypt. In the record for the reign of Dudimose he notes: *'A blast of God smote us'* (i.e. the Egyptians). Can what has hitherto been regarded as an irrelevant comment (because of the assumption that the Exodus dates from 1280 BC) now be regarded as a reference to the plagues by which God forced the Egyptians to submit?

the destruction of Jericho

In the well-known Bible account the Israelites captured Jericho 40 years after leaving Egypt. The city was circled each day for seven days, and on the seventh day the walls fell down, leaving the defenders at the mercy of the attackers.

Archaeologists now know a lot about the history of Jericho. One thing is clear: if the Exodus had taken place in 1280 BC, then the Israelites, reaching



it forty years later, would have found a city that had been in ruins for about 200 years! Obviously either the whole Exodus story is a myth or, much more likely, the accepted date for it is wrong.

If we take the date for the Exodus as around 1440 BC, everything slots neatly into place. The attack that left Jericho a ruin for a long time is now thought by many scholars to be the assault by Israel under Joshua as described in the Bible. And in the ruins archaeologists have found evidence that agrees completely with the Bible record. The city of this time was covered with a thick layer of ashes. The Bible says that Joshua *'burned the city and all that was in it'* (Joshua 6.24). Contrary to usual practice the city was not looted. Large stores of grain and other produce was found among the ashes (see picture). This is precisely as mentioned in the Exodus record.

The Bible says the attack on Jericho took place at harvest time (Joshua 3.15). Among the ruins of the city were found many jars full to the brim of carbonised grain, indicating that the harvest had just been gathered in. A recent archaeologist (Dr. Bryant Wood) summarises these findings:



storage pots still full of grain found in Jericho

The correlation between the archaeological evidence and the narrative in the book of Joshua is substantial:

- ❖ The city was strongly fortified (Joshua 2.5,7,15; 6.5,20).
- ❖ The attack occurred just after the Spring harvest (2.6; 3.15; 5.10).
- ❖ The inhabitants had no opportunity to flee with their food-stuffs (6.1).
- ❖ The siege was short (6.15).
- ❖ The walls were levelled, as if by an earthquake (6.20).
- ❖ The city was not plundered (6.17,18).
- ❖ The city was burned (6.24).

conclusions and significance of the Exodus

All the main objections that have had the effect of casting doubt on the Biblical record of the Exodus can now be shown to be ill-founded. Once the correct era of Egyptian history is put alongside the Scriptural information any alleged discrepancies disappear. The Exodus of Israel from Egypt can therefore be regarded as a fact, and one that can with assurance be put alongside all the other undisputed events that make up ancient history.

The purpose of this study is not merely to demonstrate that the Exodus took place. The reason why there are so many Bible references to the Exodus is because this one event is crucial to God's purpose with the earth and man. It is viewed in several different ways.

First, it marked a major public intervention by God in human affairs, and thus has set the precedent for all future demonstrations of God's existence and of His purpose with mankind. Further, it marked the choice of the Jewish people (Israel) as God's own nation. It was through them that salvation would come to the whole world, as Jesus said '*salvation is of the Jews*' (John 4.22).

It also demonstrated the power of God. Because He had delivered Israel in such a dramatic way, they should have had no doubt as to His existence, His power and also His mercy.

The Exodus also had a special symbolic meaning that applies to all people, not just Israel. Just as God's people were delivered from slavery and death, led out of Egypt, and after a period of trial in the wilderness allowed to enter the Promised Land, so mankind can be delivered from the bondage of sin and death to inherit eternal life and blessing. In the Exodus this deliverance was achieved specifically by the Passover ceremony, in which the sprinkled blood of a slain lamb ensured the liberation of the Israelites.

No reader of the New Testament can escape the teaching that this predicted the death of Jesus, whose blood was shed to take away the sins of the world and deliver mankind from death. This is why the Exodus is so important to a Christian. How good it is to know that this event as recorded in the Bible is

fact, not fiction!

Peter Southgate
Surrey,

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this is no ordinary clock –

this is THE DOOMSDAY CLOCK

Since the end of World War 2 a group of American scientists has produced a regular bulletin assessing how dangerous a place the world is. The Doomsday Clock is their symbol representing the likelihood of a man-made global catastrophe. On 24th January 2018 they moved the minute hand half a minute closer to disaster.

But God has other plans for us.

What may look like Doomsday will in fact be the start of a wonderful new chapter in human history. See 'from the editor' on page 15 of this issue.