



Light

...on a new world

VOLUME 30.1

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

in this issue

3 signs of the times

ancient Babylon and a
message for today

7 the Bible stands the test of time

the kings of Babylon

15 from the editor

17 comment

the Pride of the Peacock

24 what did Jesus mean?

“the Kingdom of Heaven is
at hand”

31 basic Bible teaching

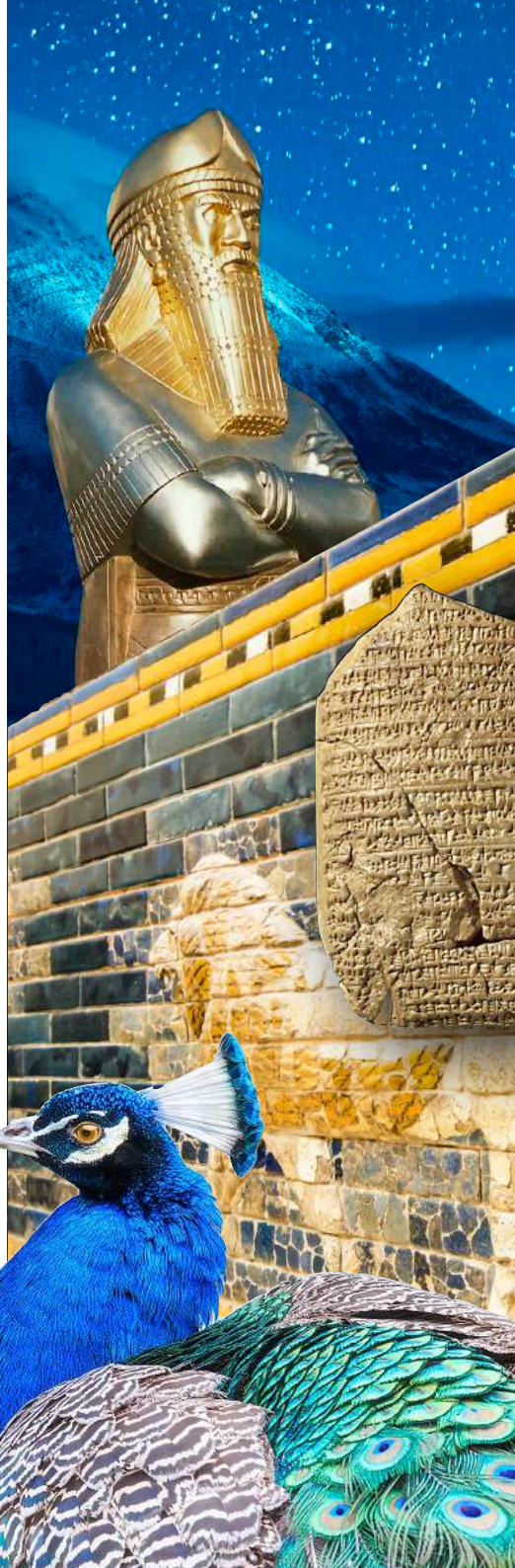
The Holy Spirit

front cover

The wing of the male birdwing
butterfly. The brilliant colours are
due to an effect known as ‘thin film
interference’, also seen on the
feathers of the peacock (see article
page 17).

**LIGHT BIBLE
PUBLICATIONS**

for details see page 39



the **signs** of **times**

In the last issue we talked about threats to the environment: why we have no real confidence that humankind can deal with them, and yet we are not worried about the outcome. We referred to the 'Strongmen' in politics and how they are becoming more powerful behind a facade of democracy, and the lack of honesty in politics.

We suggested you read Paul's second letter to Timothy chapter 3 verses 1-7 and spend a few minutes comparing what is written with what you see happening in the world, based on the news media. Any reasonable comparison between these words and the reality of what's going on in our world will show a correlation between the two. But this comes as no surprise based on what the Bible tells us about human nature.

ancient Babylon and a message for today

About 2,500 years ago there lived a king of ancient Babylon (located in present-day Iraq). You might remember that the former ruler of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, was a big fan of this king and saw himself as a kind of modern version of the man. The king's name was Nebuchadnezzar (see page 10) and you can read about him in the book of Daniel. In this article I have quoted a few verses from chapter two. If you want to know more of the details, I suggest you read this chapter. If you like history, it is most interesting, and you can validate the prophetic details from any history book about the eras covered by the prophecy. However, before we get into this, I want to quote another verse:

'... in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever he will, and sets over it the lowest of men.'

Daniel 4.17

This is a very important verse because it tells us that it is God who determines who are the rulers of nations. He does this for His purposes and with people that often do seem to fit the ‘lowest of men’ quite well! It is for this reason that Christadelphians don’t take any part in politics, including voting. It is therefore important to note that any comments we make about politics and government are as neutral observers and not as participants.

Back to the account in the book of Daniel, where we read that Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. He saw an image (see opposite) with a head of gold, chest of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. Then he saw a stone smash the image to fragments by striking it on its feet. Daniel explained to the king what God had told him about the meaning of the dream:

the head of gold

‘You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, he has given them into your hand, and has made

you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold.’

three more great kingdoms

‘But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.

And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others.’

a divided state

‘Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile... but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.’



the kingdom of God and the stone

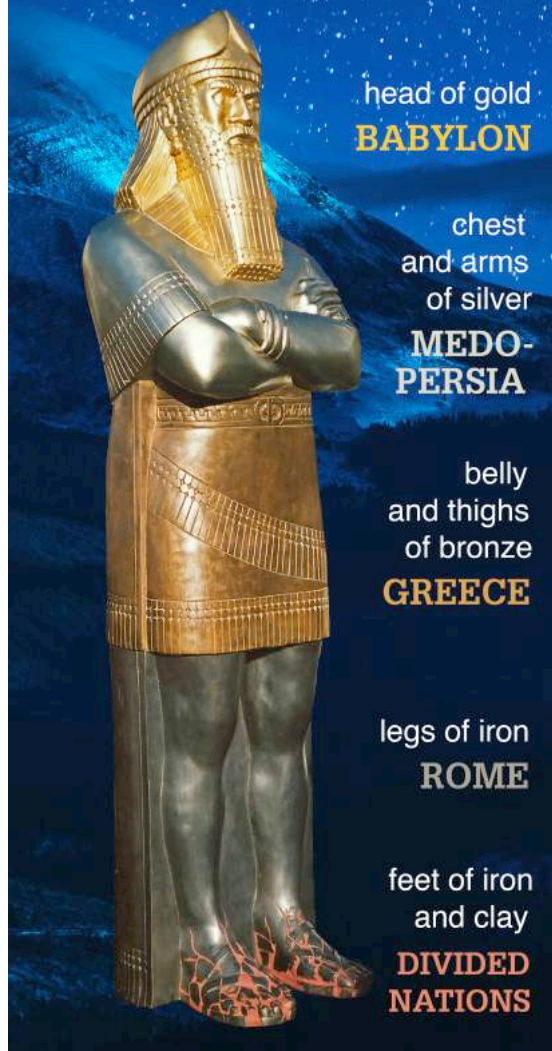
‘And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold – the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.’

Daniel 2.37-45

That may seem like a story from a long time ago. But while it started around 2,500 years ago, we are still waiting for the ‘*kingdom which shall never be destroyed*’. So, what is it all about, and why have I put it in the context of ‘signs of the times’? The answer is in the diagram on the right. It shows the historical details that relate to the various sections of the image. The feet of iron and clay bring us right up to our time. As the verses say, iron and clay simply don’t mix. What a great way to describe our political world. In politics, alliances

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream

Daniel chapter 2



are made and broken all the time, and on a nation to nation level too. Look for example at the changes occurring with the U.S.A. and its alliances; they are breaking down in so many ways.

Are we living at the time represented by the feet of the image? I think so. We do not know when that stone will smash the image, but it could be any time now!

God's view

We read these words in the last book of the Bible:

'The nations were angry, and your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that you should reward your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth.'

Revelation 11.18

These words refer to the time when Jesus will return to this earth and set up his kingdom. But it's the last phrase that I believe specifically relates to what we have been looking at. That word **'destroy'** can mean both physical and moral destruction. In my view it is a direct reference to destroying the environment as well as the moral values of humanity at large.

Humans are destroying God's creation in so many ways. There is climate change (see previous articles in this series), huge extinction of wildlife, deforestation, plastic in the oceans, general

pollution and so much more. When you stop and think about it, all in all, it is a pretty bleak picture. Or you can just get on with the minutiae of daily life and refuse to acknowledge it. I suspect that most people do just that.

There are no grounds for optimism that humanity will put in the effort needed to contain global warming or all the other problems that face us. Our societies are too polarised, and the sacrifices that would need to be made would be too great. As the Bible explains, it is not in the nature of human beings to behave selflessly over a sustained period of time and on a large scale.

conclusion

The final stage in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, interpreted by God's servant Daniel all those years ago, is the only answer to the world's many problems. Humanity, even with good will, and that's all too rare, can't solve the problems. But the person represented by the stone that smashes the image will fix the problems and so much more! He is the only hope for us. But what a wonderful world this will be when Jesus comes back and sets up His kingdom. That's my hope for the future; is it yours too?

David Gamble
Melbourne, Australia

THE KINGS OF BABYLON

When the young prince Daniel was taken to Babylon around 605 BC (Daniel 1), he was being taken to the capital of the greatest empire that had ever existed. When Daniel appeared before the great king Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2) and gave him one of the greatest of all Bible prophecies, he faced the most powerful man in the world, ruler of the greatest empire on earth, who at a whim could take away a man's life. But who exactly was Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian successors and how did they become the inheritors of so great an empire?

The Bible gives some intricate details of events concerning the kings of Babylon insofar as they affected the Jews, and the land of Israel. It records their names, their battles, sieges and victories, and the people who were there at the time. The wonderful thing is, from the Bible believer's viewpoint, there is external archaeological proof of these details which give us a new and exciting

perspective on the truth and reliability of Scripture.

Assyria falls to Babylon

Babylon had long been subject to Assyrian domination (see previous article in this series: volume 29.4). But in the turmoil that erupted in 627 BC with the death of Ashurbanipal, the last great king of Assyria, a soldier called Nabopolassar seized control of Babylon. So began a long rebellion that eventually resulted in the sacking and burning of the Assyrian capital Nineveh, to the north-west, in 612 BC. For the next 70 years the kings of Babylon reigned supreme over the old Assyrian empire. Although Nabopolassar is not mentioned in the Bible, the man who was the Crown Prince at the time, and leading the Babylonians in battle, certainly is. Nebuchadnezzar is mentioned 91 times, which gives you some idea of the importance of this man in God's purpose.

The partly restored ruins of ancient Babylon



**THE BIBLE STANDS
THE TEST OF TIME**



The Babylonian Chronicle

How do we know anything about Nebuchadnezzar outside the Bible's account? A group of tiny clay tablets called the Babylonian Chronicle, each no bigger than a mobile phone, were discovered in the ruins of Babylon in the 19th Century, but lay untranslated until the mid 1950's. Tiny cuneiform script records details of the defeat of Assyria and the exploits of successive Babylonian kings. Two tablets cover the first 11 years of Nebuchadnezzar's 43 year reign. They are concise and factual, not as boastful as the Assyrian records. For this reason they can easily be compared with the Bible, where recorded history of the same events overlap from both the Jewish and Babylonian point of view. The tablet known as the 'Jerusalem

Chronicle' (see left) tells of the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC and the siege of Jerusalem in 597 BC.

Carchemish

In 610 BC king Josiah of Judah had opposed and halted Pharaoh Necho's army at Megiddo, which was heading north to Carchemish. Necho's strategy was to support the Assyrians against the Babylonians. But Josiah thwarted him, although he lost his life in so doing. He died as a result of wounds received in that battle as recorded in the Bible: *'After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him'* (2 Chronicles 35.20).

It was sad that Josiah, the last good king of Judah, should have his kingship cut short. But God had decreed the end of Judah because of the gross wickedness of his grandfather Manasseh (2 Kings 24.3). Judah would eventually fall to Babylon, but meanwhile Necho put Josiah's son, Jehoiakim, on the throne of Judah in 609 BC and he paid tribute to Necho (2 Kings 23.34,35).

Carchemish, a fortress in what is now Northern Syria, on the river Euphrates, did see a decisive battle 5 years later, in 605 BC, between

Nebuchadnezzar's forces and the army of Pharaoh Necho, who this time had travelled unopposed north from Egypt. The Egyptians fled the battlefield, soundly beaten, and the tablet describes how they were pursued and 'wiped out' at Hamath (modern Hama in Syria) as they fled back south.

Jeremiah mentions the Carchemish battle of 605 BC:

'Against Egypt. Concerning the army of Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, which was by the River Euphrates in Carchemish, and which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah.'

Jeremiah 46.2

The tablet states that Nebuchadnezzar led the battle in the 21st year of Nabopolassar (605 BC), which agrees with the Bible's '*fourth year of Jehoiakim*'. The Babylonian account also tells us that Nabopolassar died and Nebuchadnezzar was crowned in 605 BC. So it was a busy year for him. The Bible records that Jehoiakim then became subject to Nebuchadnezzar, but foolishly he rebelled, looking to Egypt for support. This brought about a siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, resulting in his captivity and death in 598 BC.

The siege of Jerusalem

The 'Jerusalem Chronicle' tablet is remarkable in its detail here: "In the seventh year, the month of Kislîmu, the king of Akkad mustered his troops, marched to the Hatti-land, (that is what the Babylonians called the region) and besieged the city of Judah and on the second day of the month of Addaru he seized the city and captured the king. He appointed there a king of his own choice, received its heavy tribute and sent to Babylon".

The date of the initial military action of Babylon, in Nebuchadnezzar's seventh year, can be shown to be December 598, and after three months, the capture of Jerusalem as 15th-16th March 597. Following the capture and death of Jehoiakim, outside the walls of Jerusalem, the people crowned his young son Jehoiachin king in his place.

This three-month period corresponds exactly with the Bible record. In fact the Bible is even more specific: '*Jehoiachin was eight years old (more likely to be 18 - see 2 Kings 24.8) when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months and ten days. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD. At the turn of the year King Nebuchadnezzar summoned him and took*

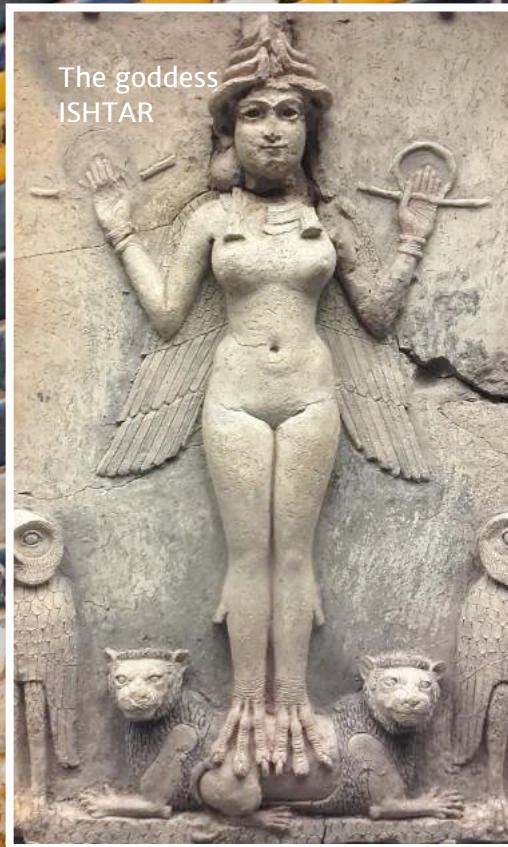
him to Babylon, with the costly articles from the house of the LORD, and made Zedekiah, Jehoiakim's brother, king over Judah and Jerusalem' (2 Chronicles 36.9,10).

The tablet refers to Nebuchadnezzar (King of Akkad) setting up 'a king of his own choice'. As we can clearly see from the Bible, that was Zedekiah. The Babylonian new year started at the Spring Equinox, exactly in line with the Scripture 'at the turn of the year'. We can marvel and be encouraged at the way the Bible meshes in perfectly with the Babylonian records!

Nebuchadnezzar 605–562 the great builder

One of the most iconic of Nebuchadnezzar's buildings was the Ishtar gate, a huge and impressive dark blue glazed structure, now reconstructed in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin. (see detail on right). Ishtar was an ancient Mesopotamian goddess associated with love, beauty, desire, fertility, war, justice, and political power. She was originally worshipped in Sumer and was later worshipped by the Akkadians, Babylonians, and





The goddess
ISHTAR

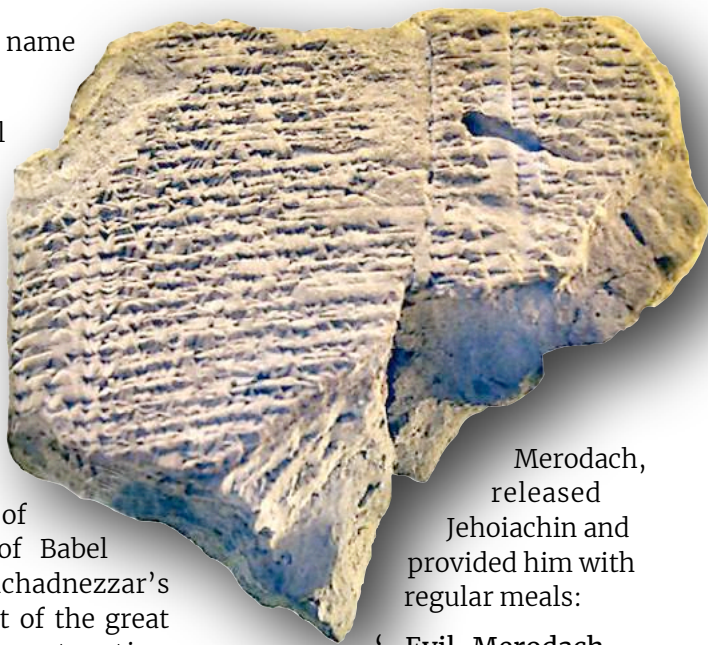
detail of the glazed brickwork of the Ishtar Gate,
restored and reconstructed in the Pergamon
Museum, Berlin

Assyrians under the name Ishtar.

A great processional way decorated with lions and dragons, led from the gateway down to the great ziggurat, the temple of Marduk, the chief god of Babylon. This ancient ziggurat is thought to be none other than the site of the original Tower of Babel (Genesis 11.4). Nebuchadnezzar's inscription, to the left of the great arch, details the construction which replaced a former less impressive structure. Bricks found with the moulded inscription of the king stand testimony to the boast of Nebuchadnezzar when he said: *'Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honour of my majesty?'* (Daniel 4. 30).

Evil-Merodach 562-560 (Amel Marduk - man of Marduk)

In 597 BC, when the young king Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon, he was held confined in prison until the death of Nebuchadnezzar. However, his son and successor whom the Bible names as Evil-



Merodach, released Jehoiachin and provided him with regular meals:

'...Evil-Merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison. He spoke kindly to him, and gave him a more prominent seat than those of the kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments, and he ate bread regularly before the king all the days of his life. And as for his provisions, there was a regular ration given him by the king, a portion for each day, all the days of his life.'

2 Kings 25.27-30

Astonishingly, this detail has been proved by a tablet found in a

vaulted building near the Ishtar gate (see picture on left). This gives details of the rations given to the king of the land of Judah and his five sons. The evidence for the accuracy of the Biblical record is compelling.

Nebo Sarsekim – chief eunuch

When Jerusalem fell in 586 BC, the names of the Babylonian high officials and princes who were present are all recorded: *‘Then all the officials of the king of Babylon came and sat in the middle gate: Nergal-sar-ezer of Samgar, Nebu-sar-sekim the Rab-saris, Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag, with all the rest of the officers of the king of Babylon’* (Jeremiah 39.3 ESV).

Firstly, it was as recently as 2008 that an Italian scholar visiting the British Museum first identified Nebu-Sarsekim as Nebuchadnezzar’s chief eunuch. He was deciphering a seemingly unimportant tiny tablet which recorded a delivery of 850 grams of gold for a temple. But this tablet identified the organiser as Nebu-Sarsekim. These were powerful men in the realm: men who were loyal and entrusted to carry out the king’s will to the letter. Of course you would expect such a man to be amongst the Babylonian hierarchy when Jerusalem fell. He evidently

was there and Jeremiah the prophet names him in the Bible!

Nergal-sar-ezer 560–556 ‘the Rab-mag’, Neriglissar

Secondly, Nergal-sar-ezer who bore the title ‘the Rab-mag’, also mentioned in the list, was a Babylonian official of high rank. Fascinatingly, records outside the Bible, including the tablets, lead to the conclusion that he was the one who conspired against Evil-Merodach (his brother in law), had him assassinated and claimed the Babylonian throne. So the Nergal-sar-ezer, mentioned twice in Jeremiah 39, is Neriglissar, the next Babylonian king who was married to one of Nebuchadnezzar’s daughters. McLintock and Strong’s Biblical Cyclopaedia states: ‘This identification depends in part upon the exact resemblance of name which is found on Babylonian bricks in the form of Nergal-shar-uzur; but mainly it rests upon the title Rubu-emga, or Rab-mag, which this king bears in his inscriptions’.

Belshazzar – crown prince and ruler of Babylon

The history of this period is typical of man’s rule. Nergal-sar-ezer was succeeded by his son Labashi Marduk who reigned for only nine months before he was murdered by

his 'uncle' Nabonidus, another son in law of Nebuchadnezzar who claimed the throne. Whilst neither Labashi nor Nabonidus are mentioned by name in the Bible, Nabonidus' son Belshazzar definitely is. It is now known from the tablets that Nabonidus was warned to stay away from Babylon because of bad omens and spent his entire 17-year reign outside Babylon, often waging war to quell rebellions and repel invasions. However, scholars now know that his eldest son was Belshazzar, the crown prince, left in charge of Babylon. He is described as its king in Daniel 5, and as 'grandson' of Nebuchadnezzar, justified because of his father's marriage into the family.

Daniel's account of the fall of Babylon in 539 BC is dismissed by critics as fable. Indeed the very existence of Belshazzar was doubted, as for many years the

translated tablets only referred to Nabonidus as the last king. However, a clay cylinder (see below) buried under a corner of the great ziggurat dedicated to Sin the moon god (beloved by Nabonidus) contains a prayer for himself 'and Belshazzar my firstborn son, the offspring of my heart'.

When the Prophet Daniel interpreted the writing which appeared on the wall at Belshazzar's feast, he was promised as a reward, *third rulership* in the kingdom (Daniel 5.7). Now we know exactly why this was. Nabonidus, the king ruling outside Babylon, was first; Belshazzar the Crown Prince was second, leaving Daniel as the potential third ruler.

How perfectly the external evidence of archaeology supports the smallest detail of the inspired Word of God!

Justin Giles
London, UK

the Nabonidus cylinder that mentions Belshazzar



Light special issue 'Light on Archaeology' is available in print or for download – see page 39 for more details.



from the editor

This year, **Easter Sunday** falls on 21st April, but have you ever wondered why Easter sometimes falls in March and sometimes in April? Since the time of the early church, determining the precise date of the Christian festival of Easter has been a matter for continued debate, since the Church wanted to differentiate it from the date of the Jewish Passover.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ happened after the Jewish Passover, so Easter came to be celebrated after the Passover. Since the Jewish calendar is based on solar and lunar cycles, each feast day is movable, with dates shifting from year to year.

The Roman Emperor Constantine effectively put an end to this problem in AD 325 by calling the Council of Nicaea to fix, among other things, a definitive date for Easter. They decided that Easter should be celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon after the Vernal (Spring) Equinox, and it

set 21st March as the date. From then on Easter has always been celebrated on the first Sunday following the first full moon after the Spring Equinox. This falls on 19th April 2019, which means that Easter Sunday is on 21st April.

Easter is the name given to the Christian festival which commemorates the death and resurrection of Christ. The word is derived from a Saxon word (Eostre) which was the name of the goddess of Spring, and in whose honour sacrifices were made at this time of the year. However, the origin of Easter goes back much further in history to the pagan cults of the ancient Babylonians who lived in Mesopotamia, now Iraq.

There is much historical evidence to confirm that the goddess of Spring was originally regarded as the mother goddess called 'Ishtar' by the Babylonians (see page 11). She was also known as Astarte or Ashtoreth, names which are mentioned in the Bible. She was worshipped as a goddess of fertility and as a kind of 'mother nature'. The pagan rites which surrounded this idolatrous worship included moral depravity and other evil practices. Even King Solomon became involved in these pagan practices (I Kings 11.5).

None of these ideas are found in the teaching of the Bible. The word Easter is only mentioned once and this occurs in connection with the arrest of the Apostle Peter by the Jewish authorities (Acts 12.4 KJV). The early English versions translated the New Testament Greek word 'pascha' as 'Easter,' whereas more modern versions translate it correctly as 'Passover.'

'Passover' is the name given to the Jewish feast that commemorated the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. This involved the sacrifice of a lamb and the sprinkling of its blood on the lintels and door posts of each house as commanded by God. By carefully observing this ritual, the Jews were saved from certain death at the hands of the angel of God, who went through the land and killed all the firstborn of Egypt (Exodus 12.21-30).

The Passover lamb pointed forward to the saving work of Jesus as the lamb of God (I Peter 1.18-21). However, the Jews did not recognise Jesus as their saviour. They disowned him and he was crucified by the Romans at the request of the Jewish leaders. But his miraculous resurrection on the third day provided a way of escape from death, not just for a short time as experienced by the Israelites who

came out of Egypt. As Paul explained to the believers at Corinth, he was the 'firstfruits' of a new creation of believers, who will be raised from the dead at his second coming (I Corinthians 15.20-23).

The significance of the Passover feast for Christ's followers is called to mind in the words of the Apostle Paul: '*...Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast...*' (I Corinthians 5.7,8). Paul is not referring to Easter in this passage, for Easter was not celebrated in the early church. He was reminding believers of the importance of another feast. Jesus commanded his followers to remember his sacrifice in a special way by sharing bread and wine to represent his body and blood (Luke 22.14-20).

To sum up, Easter and the symbols connected with it are derived from ancient rituals associated with the worship of pagan fertility idols. The true significance of Christ's death and resurrection, and God's plan of salvation centred in him, have been obscured by these pagan ideas. For many they form part of Easter celebrations, but they have no part in the worship of a true Christian.

Editor

the Pride of the Peacock



“The sight of the peacock’s tail, whenever I gaze at it, makes me sick”

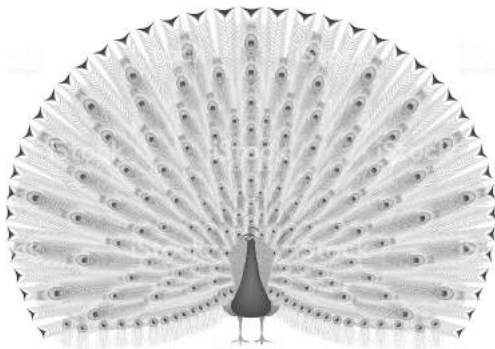
(Charles Darwin, in a private letter to his friend Asa Gray, 3 April 1860)

That seems rather a strange reaction, doesn’t it?

Maybe you have never seen a peacock with its tail feathers fully displayed as part of its courtship ritual. If so turn to pages 20–21. Does it make you feel sick?

Darwin had a problem. He realised that the peacock’s display posed a real problem for his theory of evolution, which demanded that every change, every advance up the ladder of evolution depended on its practical usefulness, its survival value. Yet here was a highly decorative feature which seemed to be of no practical value but rather made the peacock more conspicuous, slower and therefore more vulnerable to predators and less likely to survive.

Some years later Darwin came up with an explanation. The peacock’s display he said was an example of ‘sexual selection’; it was demanded by the female in her selection of a suitable mate, and the genes of the most colourful and beautiful bird would be perpetuated in their offspring. Evolutionists ever since have adopted this idea when



confronted by examples of design and beauty which are otherwise inexplicable, but they have not always found it very convincing.

Let's forget about that just for a moment, and look at this wonderful exhibition in more detail. What makes the peacock's tail so special?

symmetry

When fully displayed the feathers form a complete semicircle of 180° or rather more, with the stems of every feather pointing directly towards the geometrical centre of the semicircle, even though in fact each feather is growing independently from its own follicle over quite a wide area of the peacock's back. So this seems to be an exercise in pure visual symmetry without any practical purpose.

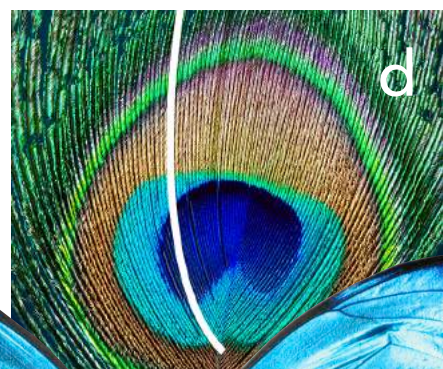
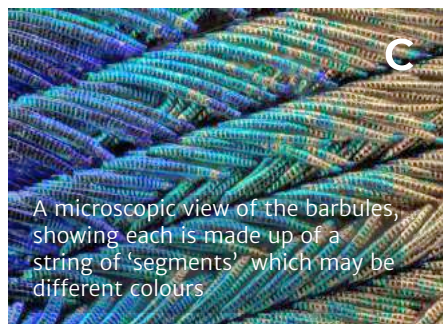
Each feather has a main stem (white) with 'barbs' (brown) branching off the stem. The barbs are then covered with 'barbules',

tiny ribbon-like threads, and this is where the colour comes from (c). There are about 200 feathers in all, of two types, the 'eye' feathers (170) and the 'T' feathers (30). Each 'eye' feather ends in a spectacular multi-coloured design usually called the 'eye', whilst the darker and longer 'T' feathers form a backdrop and an elegant fringed border to the edge of the semi-circular display (see left).

the eye feathers

The colours of the 'eye' are iridescent – in other words the colour changes according to your angle of view. This is because the colour is not the result of pigment but rather the structure of the barbules and the way they interfere with white light in an optical effect known as 'thin film interference.' Think for example of a film of oil or petrol floating on a puddle of water, (a) which produces a kaleidoscope of colours, or the surface of a soap bubble (b).

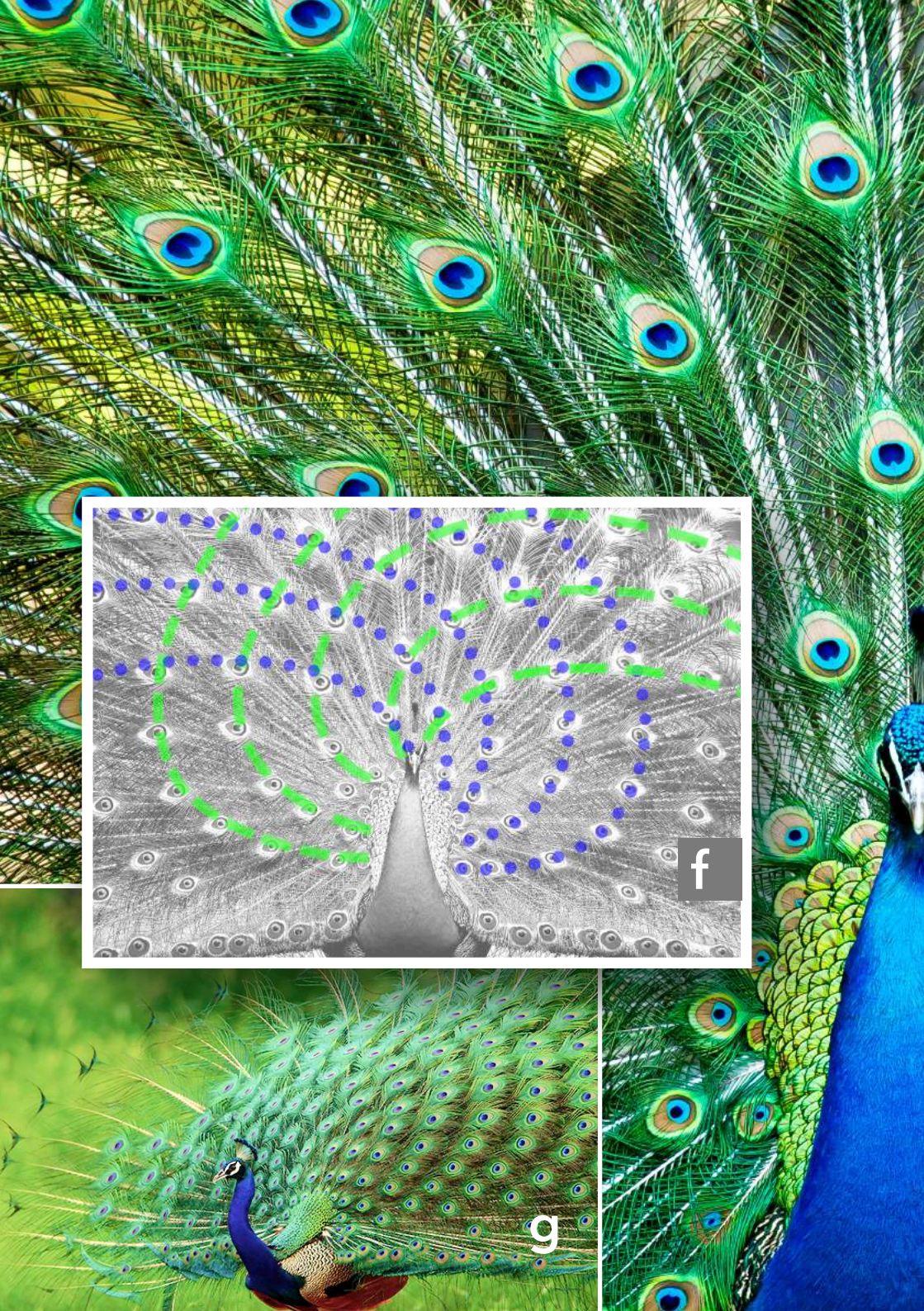
This iridescence is found in a variety of animals: butterflies (e and front cover), insects and birds like the humming bird and the kingfisher, and it depends in every case on an incredibly fine and precise structure. As far back as 1704, Isaac Newton commented in his famous book 'Optics' that the iridescence in peacock feathers was



due to the fact that the transparent layers in the feather were so thin.

How does this 'thin film interference' work in the peacock's feather? The 'barbules' of the feathers are coated with three thin layers of a transparent protein called keratin. By thin I mean really thin – about $0.4 - 0.5\mu$ where μ is one thousandth of a millimeter, very close to the wavelength of light itself. White light is reflected, retarded (slowed down) and scattered inside these films and then emerges as a colour; which particular colour depends on the thickness of the film and other factors.

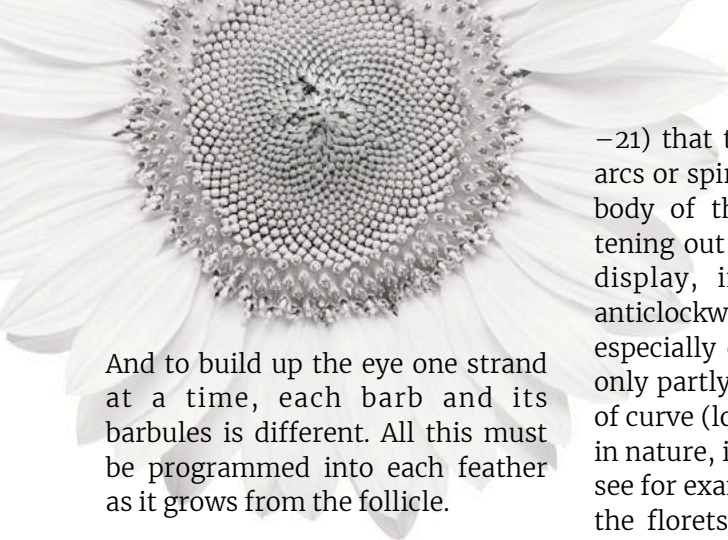
So the colours of the eye in the peacocks feather depend on very fine control of these keratin coatings at a microscopic scale. There are basically five different colours in the 'eye', and each requires a different thickness of film. Where a barb extends right across the eye design, the barbules need to change colour many times (d). There are about 100,000 barbules in each eye pattern and they all need to change colour at a precise position on the barb in order to maintain the overall design of the eye and the boundaries between the different colours.



f

g





And to build up the eye one strand at a time, each barb and its barbules is different. All this must be programmed into each feather as it grows from the follicle.

If this is blowing your mind, so it should!

These feathers are shed every year and completely regrown, recreating the same exquisitely fine tolerances time after time, for generation after generation. This is only possible because every detail of the peacock's tail is stored as genetic information in its DNA. As you can imagine, a lot of information is required. One writer suggests a minimum of 20 separate genes, many thousands of units of chemical information that according to evolution are merely the sum of various mistakes and copying errors over the generations, without intelligent input or control.

distribution of the eyes

The eyes at first glance appear to be randomly distributed across the face of the display – but look a little closer. You will see (pages 20

–21) that the eyes are arranged in arcs or spirals, starting close to the body of the bird, and then flattening out towards the edge of the display, in both clockwise and anticlockwise directions (**f**). This is especially obvious when the tail is only partly open (**g**). This is a type of curve (logarithmic) widely found in nature, in plants and sea shells – see for example the arrangement of the florets on the head of a sunflower (see picture on left).

Remember, each eye marks the end of an eye feather. These curves are only created because each successive eye feather is exactly the right length to place the eye in its correct position on the curve. In other words, each feather, whilst appearing to grow independently from its own follicle, is in fact linked to all the others by a 'programme' that ensures each feather grows to exactly the right length and then stops, so that the eye occupies its right place on the curve and in the overall display.

Does this sound like an accident to you? A 'programme'? Have you ever heard of a programme created by accident? Ask a computer programmer whether what he does could happen by accident, and you will get a rather dusty answer! Then ask him if a few random changes in his code would improve

it, and you will get a similar answer – but that is what evolution demands.

And where does evolution go from here? What conceivably is the next step in the evolution of the peacock's display? What more can the peahen demand to win her favour?

Darwin's idea of 'sexual selection' was not his finest hour. There are numerous objections to the idea, and some biologists will admit to them, but this is not the place to deal with them. The theory of evolution is pathetically inadequate to explain the splendour of the peacock's tail and the astonishing precision bio-engineering and programming which make it possible. Here is the work of a supreme creative intelligence with the power and wisdom to include such striking beauty in His creation, for our pleasure and to display His glory.

the Bible's comment

At the end of the book of Job in the Old Testament, God rebukes Job for his obsession with justifying himself rather than yielding to God's authority and wisdom. In part of God's answer (Job chapters 38 to 41), God describes the wonderful diversity of His creation as evidence of His power (38.39–

39.40). The animals mentioned are common enough, probably well known to Job, yet each of them displays the power of its creator: the lion, the raven, the wild ox, the ostrich, the stork, the horse, and, nearer to our subject, the hawk and the eagle.

Job accepted the testimony of created things, and humbled himself:

'I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know... Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.'

Job 42.3,6

God speaks to us today in the same way, if we have the humility to accept it. He speaks to us through the peacock and myriads of other miracles of design in creation, and He speaks to us through His Word. All we need is the humility and wisdom to accept and obey Him, so that we in our turn reflect something of His glory and fulfill the purpose for which God created us in the beginning.

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With acknowledgements to Professor Stuart Burgess, author of 'Hallmarks of Design' – Day One Publications.

“the kingdom of heaven is at hand”

This phrase was a key part of Jesus’ preaching, at least at the beginning of his public ministry, as we learn from the Gospel records: *‘From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”’* (Matthew 4.17). And not only did he speak this message himself, but later, when he sent his twelve disciples out to preach, he taught them to say the same (Matthew 10.7).

However, Jesus wasn’t the first to use this phrase. The message was started by his relative John: *‘In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”’* (Matthew 3.1,2).

The words carry a sense of urgency, exhorting the hearers to take action. The implication is that if they did not repent of their sins soon, they would lose out when the kingdom of heaven comes. The window of opportunity was short.

the kingdom of heaven

Before we consider what was meant by *‘at hand’*, we should first explore what *‘the kingdom of heaven’* is. The phrase occurs 33 times in Matthew’s Gospel, which is an indication of its importance in the teaching of Jesus. Surprisingly, it is found in no other book of the Bible, but comparison with the other Gospels shows that the expression in Matthew is equivalent to *‘the kingdom of God’* elsewhere.

Presumably the difference arose as an alternative way of translating Jesus’ words, probably spoken in Aramaic or Hebrew, into the Greek of the New Testament manuscripts. There is no difficulty in seeing the two phrases as equivalent. As God Himself declared: *‘Heaven is my throne’* (Isaiah 66.1; see also Matthew 5.34). A ruler’s throne is a symbol of his authority, so it is reasonable to say that the kingdom that belongs to God belongs to heaven. It is also worth noting that the words *‘the kingdom of heaven’*

do not necessarily imply that the kingdom is **in** heaven.

long-promised

Laying aside whatever preconceptions we may have about the expression 'kingdom of heaven', it is worth considering what it is likely to have meant to those who first heard it. Matthew records John and Jesus warning people that the kingdom was at hand, but with no explanation of what the kingdom is – as though they expected their Jewish audience to already know, and with good reason.

The Old Testament contains many prophecies of a future kingdom of God, and of the man chosen by God to rule over it. One example, a foundation for this subject, is the promise made by God to David the great king of Israel: *'When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be my son'* (2 Samuel 7.12–14). God, through the prophet Nathan, spoke about a kingdom that will last forever, to be ruled over by a descendent of David who will also be the Son of God.

A similar prediction is found in the prophecy of Daniel (see article page 5): *'And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever'* (Daniel. 2.44). So this kingdom, to be set up by God, will replace all human governments.

the son of David

Against this Old Testament backdrop, the kingdom of heaven spoken of by John and Jesus must be the same kingdom as foretold in these prophecies. And in case we should miss this link, the beginning of the New Testament serves to underline it: *'The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David'* (Matthew 1.1). There would be no reason to mention Jesus' descent from David unless he is the promised descendant who will reign for ever.

The matter then becomes beyond question when we read the angel Gabriel's announcement to Jesus' mother Mary:

'And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called

the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’ Luke 1.31–33

a kingdom on the earth

Summarising what these prophecies tell us about the kingdom of heaven, we know that:

- ❖ Jesus Christ, the seed of David, will reign forever.
- ❖ The kingdom will never be destroyed.
- ❖ It will replace the political powers of the earth.
- ❖ It will be a re-establishment of David’s ancient kingdom.
- ❖ Its principal subjects will be the descendents of Jacob (Israel), also known as the Jews.

These facts describe a literal kingdom located on the earth, like David’s kingdom, ruling over the land and people of Israel. The prophecy of Isaiah adds further detail, identifying the capital city, legal system and the extent of Jesus’ dominion:


‘The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house

shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; he will teach us his ways, and we shall walk in his paths”.

For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords unto ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.’ Isaiah 2.1–4

We can now add to our list:

- ❖ The capital city will be Jerusalem, also known as Zion, David’s ancient capital.
- ❖ All nations will come to worship God at His temple in Jerusalem.
- ❖ Jesus will rule the nations according to God’s law.
- ❖ His rule will bring lasting peace to the earth.



What a wonderful prospect this is,
of true justice, wise government
and peace. God's kingdom will end
all the problems and suffering that
result from human mismanage-
ment, greed and immorality –

**the kingdom of heaven
is exactly what we need.**

the gospel of the kingdom

It is quite clear that these prophecies have not yet been fulfilled – the kingdom of heaven is yet to come. So why were John the Baptist and Jesus, 2,000 years ago, urging people to repent of their sins if they would be long dead by the time the kingdom came?

The answer is of course the hope of salvation, the opportunity God has given us to be raised from the dead to everlasting life, made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins. This was the gospel message

This painting by Edward Lear shows Jesus' route as he rode a donkey down the slopes of the Mount of Olives towards Jerusalem. Here was Zion's future king, but his time was not yet.

preached by John, Jesus and the apostles; this was the reason they were urging people to repent and change their way of life.

The hope of salvation is bound up with the coming of the kingdom of heaven, because it is in the kingdom that the faithful will be rewarded, as Jesus taught: *'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven'* (Matthew 7.21). When Jesus returns to the earth to set up the kingdom, the dead will be raised and judged, and then all the faithful will be made immortal and will enter into the kingdom. This is why Jesus' teaching is sometimes called the gospel of the kingdom (e.g. Matthew 4.23).



the kingdom is ‘at hand’

So in what way was the kingdom of heaven ‘at hand’? Strong’s Concordance defines the word used in the original Greek text of Matthew as meaning: ‘to make near, to approach’, and defines the root word as meaning: ‘near (literally or figuratively, of place or time)’. So John and Jesus were saying that the kingdom of heaven had come near, but the nearness could either be in place or time and might not be literal – it could be figuratively near, for example that the kingdom had become better known or more accessible.

As we have seen from the Scriptures and the evidence of history, the kingdom was not literally near in time when these words were spoken, far from it. But certain things very closely linked with the kingdom were literally near at that time.

Firstly, of course, there was its future king, Jesus Christ himself. In a sense he embodied the kingdom that was to come, as was clearly shown when he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. He was hailed by the crowd as ‘*the son of David*’ (Matthew 21.9) and fulfilled a prophecy from the book of Zechariah: ‘*All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: “Tell the*

daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey’”’ (Matthew 21.4,5). He came as Zion’s king, but not to rule just yet.

Secondly, God’s Holy Spirit power was in evidence, by which Jesus performed many miraculous signs. He declared: ‘*But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you*’ (Matthew 12.28). The power Jesus exercised then is the same power by which he will rule the earth, so his miracles were a foretaste of the kingdom to come.

Thirdly, the law Jesus taught is the law by which the kingdom of heaven will be ruled, referred to in the quotation from Isaiah chapter two (see page 26). If we wish to become citizens of that kingdom when it comes, we must subject ourselves to its law now.

the kingdom figuratively near

In addition to these representations of the kingdom of heaven being literally near, there is a way in which the kingdom was figuratively near at the time of Jesus. The statement that ‘*the kingdom of heaven is at hand*’ was coupled with an urgent call to repent, so it must relate to the

individual's personal opportunity for salvation.

The gospel of the kingdom was revealed by God from the earliest times, in His promises to Abraham and David, in the words of the Old Testament prophets and even in the rituals of the Law of Moses, but the message could easily be missed by those who did not seek to understand it. When John the Baptist came, the gospel was proclaimed plainly and with a direct personal call to repent and do what God requires.

The preaching of John was a watershed in the revelation of God's plan, as Jesus taught: *'The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it'* (Luke 16.16).

So the preaching of the kingdom of heaven by John, Jesus and his disciples, greatly increases our awareness and understanding of the kingdom, and of what we need to do to enter it. Their words, both when they were spoken and now through the pages of the Bible, have brought the kingdom of heaven near to our minds, made it more accessible, more pressing.

be ready!

Although the kingdom of heaven must be much closer now than in New Testament times, the urgency of the call to repent and get ready has not changed:

'But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect him.'

Matthew 24.43,44

The call is urgent, not only because we do not know when Jesus will return, but also because our lives may be cut short unexpectedly. Whether we will receive the gift of everlasting life and enter the kingdom depends on how we respond now.

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The Holy Spirit

About two thousand years ago, a group of people assembled in an upstairs room in Jerusalem. The book of Acts in the New Testament (NT) records what followed in these words:

‘...suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them forked tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.’

Acts 2.2-4

This is the account of the receiving of the Holy Spirit by the disciples of Jesus. It was a momentous occasion and was to have a profound effect on the First Century Christian church. The immediate result of this strange phenomenon was that ordinary men were able to speak in other languages so that visitors to Jerusalem, who had travelled there from many parts of the Roman world to celebrate the feast of

Pentecost, could understand the message in their own languages when the disciples preached the gospel (the good news of the coming kingdom of God). On that day alone three thousand new believers were baptized in Jerusalem.

what is the Holy Spirit?

Traditional Christian teaching claims that the Holy Spirit is part of the Godhead – the third person of the Trinity. Many Christians also claim that they possess the power of the Holy Spirit and, like those first century disciples, can speak with tongues and perform miracles. The Bible, however, does not give support to these claims.

The phrase ‘Holy Spirit’ occurs almost exclusively in the NT. However, the Holy Spirit in the NT is the same as the Spirit of God referred to in the Old Testament (OT). Two examples will illustrate this point. At Pentecost, the Apostle Peter explained to the amazed crowds that this wonderful display of Holy Spirit power was in fulfilment of God’s Word spoken

some eight centuries previously through the prophet Joel (see Joel 2.28, 29):

‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on my menservants and on my maidservants I will pour out my Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.’ Acts 2.17, 18

Jesus himself drew the same inference after he received the power of the Holy Spirit at his baptism. Preaching to the Jews in the synagogue, he read these words of the prophet Isaiah (see Isaiah 61.1, 2):

‘The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the LORD.’

Luke 4.18, 19

When Jesus had finished this reading, he added these words: *‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’* (Luke 4.21). Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, applied the words of that prophecy to himself.

the Spirit is God’s power

In the original Greek language of the NT, the word translated Spirit is ‘pneuma’. In the original Hebrew language of the OT the word is ‘ruach’. Both these words mean ‘breath’ or ‘wind’, giving the idea of an invisible, immaterial and impersonal power; they are used in association with God and both refer to His power. For example, in the Genesis account of Creation we read of the creative power of the Spirit of God:

‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.’

Genesis 1.1–3

Compare this with some words of the prophet Jeremiah: *‘I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are on the ground, by my great power...’* (Jeremiah 27.5) and *‘He*

(God) *has made the earth by his power...*' (Jeremiah 51.15). From these two references we see that the power of God is the same as the Spirit of God referred to in the Creation account (Genesis 1.2).

The Spirit or power of God also continuously sustains the beings that God created. This was recognised by Elihu when he spoke to Job about the greatness of God. He acknowledged that he was created by the power of God. He also recognised that it was God's Spirit or breath which kept him alive and that God could withdraw that breath of life whenever He wished:

'The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life... If he should set his heart on it, if he should gather to himself his Spirit and his breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.'

Job 33.4; 34.14, 15

God's power used for specific purposes

Not only does God use His Spirit power to create and sustain all life, He also uses it to further His specific purpose which is, ultimately, to fill the earth with His glory (see Numbers 14.21). The word 'holy' in both Hebrew and Greek means

'separate' or 'set apart'. In both the OT and NT the Holy Spirit refers to the power of God used for His specific purpose with mankind. This purpose involves a '*calling out*' (a separation) of a people for His holy Name. God declared that He is holy and so He called out His people, Israel, to be holy also (see Exodus 19.5,6; Leviticus 20.26 and Deut-eronomy 7.6-9).

This separation of God's people from the unholy, pagan idolatry of ancient Egypt involved God showing '*signs and wonders*' (Deuteronomy 6.22) when he brought supernatural plagues on Egypt and caused the miracle of the dividing of the Red Sea to release His people. He then miraculously fed and clothed His people for forty years throughout their wilderness journeys.

There are many other instances recorded in the OT where God gave His Spirit to individuals so that He could work out His purpose with His people. David, Israel's great king and prophet, was inspired to write many beautiful Psalms when he was moved by God's Holy Spirit power. David acknowledged that his Divine gift was received from God when, after his great sin with Bathsheba, he pleaded: '*Do not cast me away from your presence, and do*

not take your Holy Spirit from me' (Psalm 51.11).

The Apostle Peter tells us that the whole of the OT Scriptures were written under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit: *'for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit'* (2 Peter 1.21). The Greek word for 'moved' used by Peter is 'phero' which means 'impelled' indicating the irresistible force of the Spirit of God. The writers of the Holy Scriptures were unable to resist this power of God. Paul also refers to this power of God when he wrote: *'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God...'* (2 Timothy 3.16). Literally this means 'by the breath of God' – that is through the Spirit of God. Clearly the Holy Spirit and the inspiration of God are one and the same power.

the Holy Spirit in the First Century

There was a most notable pouring out of the Holy Spirit in NT times. This period was a time of transition from the OT Mosaic era to the establishment of Christianity and the spread of the Gospel message to all nations. Jesus, the long promised Jewish Messiah, foretold by the OT prophets, was born by the power of the Holy Spirit. Luke

records the angel's words to Mary before he was born:

'... "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that holy one who is to be born will be called the Son of God".' Luke 1.35

In these words of the angel to Mary, the phrases *'the Holy Spirit'* and the *'power of the Highest'* are interchangeable, which confirms that the Holy Spirit is the power of God and not a separate person. This angelic announcement cannot be reconciled with the man-made concept of the Trinity – the concept that Jesus was fathered by God the Holy Spirit, was the son of God the Father, and yet was also co-equal and co-eternal with them both!

At Jesus' baptism the Holy Spirit descended in bodily shape like a dove upon him and, full of the Holy Spirit, he returned from Jordan. He went throughout Galilee and Judea preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and performing miracles. By the power of the Holy Spirit he healed the sick, made the blind to see, the deaf to hear and caused the lame to walk. He even raised the dead. We read in John's Gospel record why Jesus performed miracles: *'...these (signs) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the*

Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name' (John 20.31). The Bible teaches that human sickness and death have come into the world because of sin (see Genesis chapter 3). Because Jesus was sinless, he was able to forgive sins, the root cause of human problems.

The teachings of Jesus ran contrary to established orthodox Jewish religious teaching. The power of the Holy Spirit gave Jesus authority to challenge the religious leaders in Jerusalem and gave the people evidence that his power was from a higher authority. The record tells us that *'he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes'* (Matthew 7.29). Jesus was able to do this through the power of the Holy Spirit received from his Father. As he said to the Jews: *'...the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do'* (John 5.19).

Before he ascended to heaven, Jesus promised his disciples that they too would receive the power of the Holy Spirit, to enable them to witness to the truth of Jesus and his resurrection *'in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'* (Acts 1.8). We have already noted the amazing effect this had on the disciples, how that visitors from all over the Roman

world were able to hear the gospel message in their own language.

The apostles went on to perform many wonderful miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit including raising the dead (Acts 9. 36-40). We read how the Apostle Peter made a man walk who had been lame from birth (Acts 3.7). The purpose of the miracle was made clear when Peter exhorted them to repent from their sins and be converted so that their sins would be blotted out (Acts 3.12, 19).

Also in the book of Acts we read of *'unusual miracles'* that the Apostle Paul performed by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19.11, 12). This same apostle, having been miraculously delivered from a shipwreck, was bitten by a viper on the island of Melita (Malta) on his way to Rome (Acts 28.1-5). The terrified islanders waited for him to fall down dead. The fact that he did not was a fulfilment of the words of Jesus when he sent out the disciples to preach the gospel:

'...these signs will follow those who believe: In my name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will

lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.’ Mark 16.17,18

The power of the Holy Spirit was used for witnessing to Christ, not for personal advantage.

do believers possess the Holy Spirit gifts today?

The question arises – does the power of the Holy Spirit operate through believers today in the same way as it did NT times? A careful reading of Bible teaching indicates that it does not. Those gifts of the Holy Spirit were given for the specific purpose of establishing the early Christian church in a very hostile world. Most Jews refused to accept Jesus as their Messiah and he was condemned to death and crucified.

Before his death Jesus had warned that false Christs and false prophets would arise, who would show great signs and wonders and deceive believers (Matthew 24.24). Jesus was leaving the believers in a vulnerable state and he promised them help: *‘But the Helper, the Holy Spirit...will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you’* (John 14.26). This was one of the reasons why *‘the Helper’*, the Holy Spirit (Greek *parakletos* meaning ‘called to one’s side i.e. to one’s aid’) was sent, to

bring all things to their remembrance. When the NT Scriptures were completed this was no longer necessary.

the ‘first-fruits’

When the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, Peter recognised it as being a fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel quoted by Peter (see page 32). Now Peter clearly relates this prophecy of Joel to *‘the last days’* and although this undoubtedly referred to the last days of the Jewish nation (Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70), a study of Joel will show that the complete fulfilment of this prophecy is still future. The feast of Pentecost, however, was also known as the feast of first-fruits, a thanksgiving for the first-fruits of the harvest, a token of the greater harvest that was to come later in the year.

In the same way, this outpouring of the Holy Spirit was a ‘first-fruits’, a visible measure of the greater revelation of God’s power that will be seen in the age to come. In the letter to the Hebrews we read about those who had partaken of the Holy Spirit as having *‘tasted... the powers of the age to come’* (Hebrews 6.5). This revelation of God’s power, however, was only a token of the greater fulfilment of Joel’s

prophecy at the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of his kingdom.

a 'more excellent way'

The Apostle Paul indicated that the gifts of the Holy Spirit would cease when a full knowledge of the gospel was revealed. The various gifts were to enable the church to become an organic body working in harmony for the witnessing to Christ. He wrote to the Corinthians concerning '*a more excellent way*' (1 Corinthians 12.31) and emphasised the need for love, because:

'Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect (complete or mature) has come, then that which is in part will be done away.'

1 Corinthians 13.8-10

Paul is referring here to the completion of the NT by the power of the Holy Spirit. Faith, hope and love were to remain, but the gifts of the Holy Spirit which had revealed knowledge and prophecies only in part, were to be succeeded by a more excellent way - the full revelation of the gospel message

through Jesus Christ in the New Testament Scriptures. Once the Holy Scriptures had been completed by the writings of the apostles, the Holy Spirit gifts were gradually withdrawn and so the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians wrote these words: '*And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love*' (1 Corinthians 13.13).

Believers today, waiting for the return of Jesus, do not have the power of the Holy Spirit, but they do have God's Spirit Word by which they live their lives in faith, hope and love. When Christ's kingdom comes, faith will give way to sight and hope will give way to realisation, but love will always remain. This understanding that the gifts of the Holy Spirit would be withdrawn, was acknowledged by the early church fathers. John Chrysostom (AD 347 - 407) spoke of the cessation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Augustine, another church father (AD 354-430), spoke of the gifts passing away. In AD 1843 James Buchanan wrote: 'the miraculous gifts of the Spirit have long since been withdrawn. They were used for a temporary purpose...' 'Signs of the Apostles' by Walter J Chantry, pages 140 - 143).

There are Christians today who claim the need for the gift of the

Holy Spirit in order to understand God's Word, but this is not true. Paul wrote to Timothy:

'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.'

2 Timothy 3.16, 17

This passage of Scripture is telling us that God's Word can make a believer complete – not the possession of the Holy Spirit power. God's Spirit Word is living and powerful and by believing and obeying its teaching, we are born again to live our lives, no longer following the thinking of the flesh but following the teaching of God's Word.

Do you believe this?

Are you prepared to follow the example of the Bereans of the 1st Century of whom we are told:

'...they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.'

Acts 17.11

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We believe that over the centuries the original message of Christianity has been corrupted. **Light** is published to provide a better understanding of the true Christian hope.

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