



Light

...on a new world

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

Volume 31.3

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the launch of NASA's latest mission
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FROM THE EDITOR

In July this year, as part of their ongoing quest for knowledge about the 'red planet', three nations, The United Arab Emirates, followed by China and then the United States (NASA) launched rockets on missions to explore Mars.

Every 26 months, Mars and Earth end up in an alignment on the same side of the Sun, and are much closer together than at other times. This creates a window of opportunity to launch missions, as the distance between the two planets is greatly reduced, and consequently less fuel is needed to make the journey. These three missions are expected to reach Mars in 7 months' time, in February 2021.

Why is there such interest in a cold and inhospitable planet that seems to be completely devoid of the requirements to sustain life as we know it? A recent article in the news media had the headline 'As crises rock Earth, humans look to Mars' (the Washington Post, 29 July 2020). The article says: 'human expansion through space may remain in the realms of speculative theory and absurdist fantasy. But those planning for it are

spurred on by a sense of looming existential peril on Earth – a planet facing epochal climatic change, over-population and the steady depletion of its resources. Proponents of space exploration and colonization see them as necessities for the preservation of the human species'.

We agree with the statement that the Earth is in crisis; no-one would be so foolish as to deny that. Human governments seem at a loss to solve these major issues threatening the future of our planet. But there is a solution to the world's problems which does not need human governments to agree on a way forward, which will never happen.

The solution is found in the Bible, which teaches us that planet Earth has been formed and made habitable by the God of heaven. In the beginning God created the right environment to sustain human life. Here are some important Bible verses:

'For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited...'
Isaiah 45:18

‘The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD’s; but the earth he has given to the children of men.’

Psalm 115.16

If we accept the Bible’s message, including the record of how things began, rather than the man-made theory of evolution, this gives us a firm foundation for belief in God’s revealed plan for this world and the future of the human race. We will discover that God has made great promises which cannot be overturned. These promises give us an assurance that the preservation of the human species is not dependent on the colonisation of another planet like Mars.

The Bible reveals that God’s plan for the world is to change the threatened environment that man has created, and restore this planet to its former state described in this way: *‘God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good...’* (Genesis 1.31).

The key to these great changes is the return of Jesus Christ to implement God’s plan to fill the earth *‘with the glory of the LORD’* (Numbers 14.21). This was the essence of the Gospel (good news) that was preached by Jesus and his apostles. It was all about setting up a divine kingdom – the restored kingdom of God on earth.

This message is not just confined to the New Testament and is the subject of many Old Testament prophecies. Isaiah chapter 11 for example describes the attributes of the future ruler and there is no mistaking that he is referring to the future work of Jesus Christ. The word picture in this chapter contains this wonderful promise: *‘They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea’* (Isaiah 11.9).

The preaching of the Apostle Peter referred to this coming time of change which we believe is not far off. His words are a call to make changes to our own lives, so that we can share in the future that has been promised to all that love God and obey His Word:

‘Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.’ Acts 3.19–21

Editor

A Philistine cemetery in Ashkelon being excavated in 2016



THE BIBLE STANDS THE TEST OF TIME

The Philistines

Many of our readers will have heard of Samson and Delilah, and David and Goliath. But who were these Philistines who caused so much trouble for Samson, and through whom the boy David came to fame, by slaying their champion Goliath? The Philistines are mentioned about 250 times in the Old Testament, and the Biblical record is full of information about Israel's dealings with their antagonistic neighbours. It is the prime recorded historical source, because the Philistines wrote nothing about themselves. They left no literature, not even an inscription. They were good at fighting but not writing it seems!

It has even passed into our language that to call someone a Philistine is to accuse them of being uncultured. It is



One of the most famous Bible stories: David slays the Philistine giant Goliath. Michelangelo's painting in the Sistine Chapel

in the Hebrew Bible that we learn a great deal about the Philistines, and the existence of these ancient peoples is backed up by Egyptian inscriptions and numerous archaeological

discoveries. We can read about events involving these people reaching back more than 4,000 years! The Bible is unique in this respect.

Philistine origins

Generally, scholars are of the view that Philistine culture is related to the Aegean islands and Crete, in the Eastern Mediterranean. One theory is that when the Greeks became dominant, they migrated by ship to settle in the coastal plain (see map opposite). The Bible, however, tells us that the Philistines were descended from Casluhim, a son of Misraim, son of Ham, who was a son of Noah (Genesis 10.14).

Misraim is called Egypt in modern translations, and Egyptians today call their land Misraim. So it is possible that Casluhim and his brother (or descendant) Caphtorim, also associated with the Philistines, migrated north from Egypt being originators of these coastal peoples, called 'sea peoples' by the Egyptians. They settled on the South West Mediterranean coastal strip around Gaza

and displaced the original inhabitants (see Deuteronomy 2.23 and Amos 9.7). They may have mixed with migrant peoples and adopted an Eastern Mediterranean culture, for Philistine pottery bears close resemblance to that of the Eastern Mediterranean (see picture below).

Archaeology

The Leon Ley expedition excavated Ashkelon from 1985 to 2016. The discovery of a cemetery at Ashkelon in 2016 ended 30 years of excavations, the object of which was to throw light on the origins of these people. However, analysis of the skeletons showed that there was no pronounced evidence of European heritage. Rather, the DNA profiles in the bones were indistinguishable from the surrounding peoples.

This could be taken as evidence to back up the Bible's statement that they were descended from Ham's son, Misraim, and his sons. They were related to the neighbouring

Typical bird decoration on a shard of Philistine pottery



Canaanites, as Canaan was also a son of Ham. Whilst we cannot be certain of this, their precise origin does not really matter for our study. What we do know for certain is that the Philistines were a separate, warlike people, who were for centuries in bitter conflict with Israel.

Philistine and Palestine

The Romans named the whole land of Israel and Judah up to the border of Syria as Palestine, a name which we clearly recognise to this day. The origins of the word are related to the name Philistine. So the conflict between the Palestinian peoples and the Jews today, are a mirror of an ancient animosity reaching back into the mists of time, regarding the occupation of territory!

Where was the Philistine territory?

The Bible records five principal cities which had Philistine rulers. The book of Joshua records the first reference to the five Lords of the Philistines (Joshua 13.3). They ruled over five cities: Gaza, Gath, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron (see map above). This gives us a clear idea of their territory, and reminds us of the modern Gaza Strip, a similar, though smaller area, which is occupied by the Palestinians today (see map overleaf).



The Philistines were able to carry out raids on Israel and Judah from their territory on the Mediterranean coast

Abraham and Isaac

Both Patriarchs had a lot of dealings with the Philistines and spent many years in the coastal plain. Abraham and Isaac at least had a working relationship with a Philistine king, Abimelech, and even made a covenant with him after a dispute over a well of water (Genesis 21.22-34). Later, Isaac retreated there in a time of famine (Genesis 26.1). Water was clearly an issue, as the Philistines had blocked up Abrahams's wells after his death, and

The Gaza Strip today



Isaac had to re-dig them. But it is not until much later, in the times of the Judges of Israel, that the Philistines came to prominence.

Samson the Judge

The Philistines were one of several surrounding nations to expand their borders into Israel's tribal lands during the turmoil of the Judges period. Those five Lords were a continual thorn in their side, and the Book of Judges tells us why:

‘Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and

they forsook the LORD and did not serve him. So the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the people of Ammon.’

Judges 10.6,7

This is the reason God raised up Judges to deliver Israel and used the strengths and weaknesses of the mighty Samson, aided by the Spirit of the Lord, to fulfil the divine purpose. It was like a personal crusade that Samson carried out over a 20-year period, during which much Philistine blood was spilled. Only certain aspects of his life are recorded for us, specifically his victories over the Philistines. Read for yourselves Samson's exploits in Judges chapters 14–16.

Although Samson's mission was divinely arranged, it was his weakness for Philistine women that led to his final imprisonment at Gaza by those very people he had fought all his life on Israel's behalf. However, the final act of the now blind Samson was to destroy the temple of the false Philistine god, Dagon. He prayed for strength to do this, and sacrificed himself in the process, to deliver his own people from their oppression (Judges 16.23–30).

We cannot help but think of the way in which the Lord Jesus gave his life to deliver his people from sin. There

is of course one big difference – Jesus was raised from the dead, but Samson still awaits the day of resurrection. He is listed among those men and women whose names are recorded in the letter to the Hebrews *‘having obtained a good testimony through faith’* (Hebrews 11.32,39).

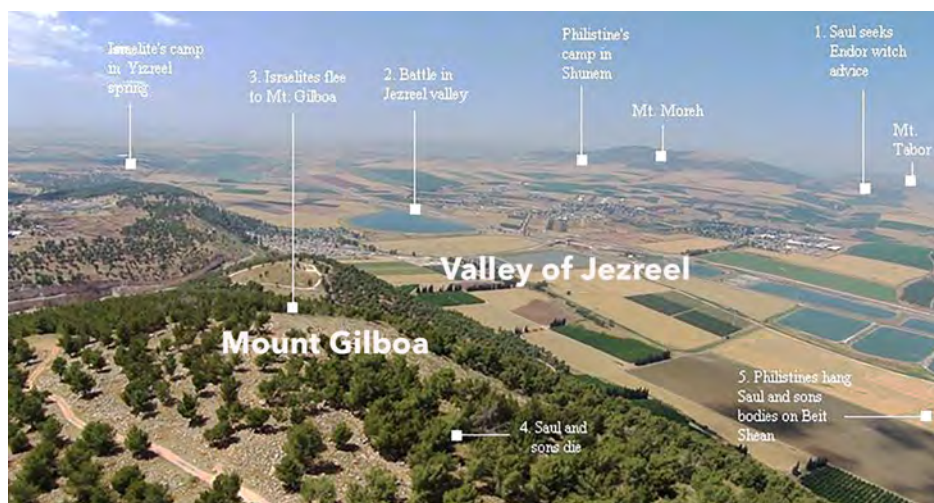
Saul and David

The Philistine lords play a big part in subsequent events. Saul, the Ben-jamite, was anointed king over Israel, primarily to deliver his people from the Philistines. We find that the Philistines penetrated deep into Israel’s territory, by reference to the location of various battles fought. Saul himself, and his son Jonathan, David’s friend, lost their lives to the old arch enemy in a battle on Mount Gilboa (1 Samuel 31.1–6 see landscape photo below). This place is in the very

heart of Israel, near the valley of Jezreel, not far from the Jordan river and far away from the coast. It demonstrates the ease with which the military strength of these people wreaked havoc with God’s people.

It is ironic that while Saul was trying to kill David, insanely jealous of his own son-in-law, David had retreated to Philistine territory pretending to be friends with them, whilst secretly carrying out acts against them! But most of the Philistine lords were still suspicious of David’s motives, and rightly so! (1 Samuel 29.1–6).

David had previously risen to fame as a young and despised youth. He showed remarkable courage when Saul and his army allowed Goliath of Gath to come out day after day and defy the armies of Israel. No-one was taking up the challenge. Saul, no doubt, thought that David, equipped



merely with a sling and five stones, was about to face certain death. But such was David's spiritual mind and faith in God, that he uttered this incredibly brave declaration in the face of the terrifying giant:

'...you come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hands.'

1 Samuel 17. 45-47

So, ultimately, it was left to David, called '*a man after his (God's) own heart*' (1 Samuel 13.14), to finally subdue the old enemy. After he succeeded Saul as king, David's military campaigns, in which he expanded and secured all of Israel's borders, included the suppression of the Philistine lords. The Second Book of Samuel records campaign after campaign that David fought with the

Philistines, pushing them back, until they were effectively a vassal state.

The demise of the Philistines

Along with Edom, Moab and Ammon, Philistia succumbed to the onslaught of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian armies around 600 BC, when Judah, Israel's southern kingdom itself became a subject people. It disappeared, never again to rise as an independent, recognisable nation. Ezekiel recorded God's judgement:

'Thus says the LORD God:
"Because the Philistines dealt
vengefully and took vengeance
with a spiteful heart, to destroy
because of the old
hatred," therefore thus says the
Lord GOD: "I will stretch out my
hand against the Philistines, and I
will cut off the Cherethites (a
Philistine clan) and destroy the
remnant of the sea-coast. I
will execute great vengeance on
them with furious rebukes; and
they shall know that I am the LORD,
when I lay my vengeance upon
them".'

Ezekiel 25.15-17

Why has Israel survived?

We may well ask, why has Israel survived when many of these minor nations (and the major ones) were lost to history 2,500 years ago? Humanly speaking it should not have happened. Where are the Philistines?

Why did they not make an impact on human history like the Jews? The same can be said of Edom, Moab and Ammon (see previous articles in this series). Where are the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks and the Romans? This is one of the compelling arguments for accepting the inspiration of the Scriptures, and indeed evidence for the existence of God Himself, and His purpose with the Jews. The Bible is a Jewish book; it records their history, why they came into existence and their destiny. The Prophet Jeremiah wrote under divine inspiration:

‘For I am with you,’ says the LORD, ‘to save you; though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you.’ Jeremiah 30.11

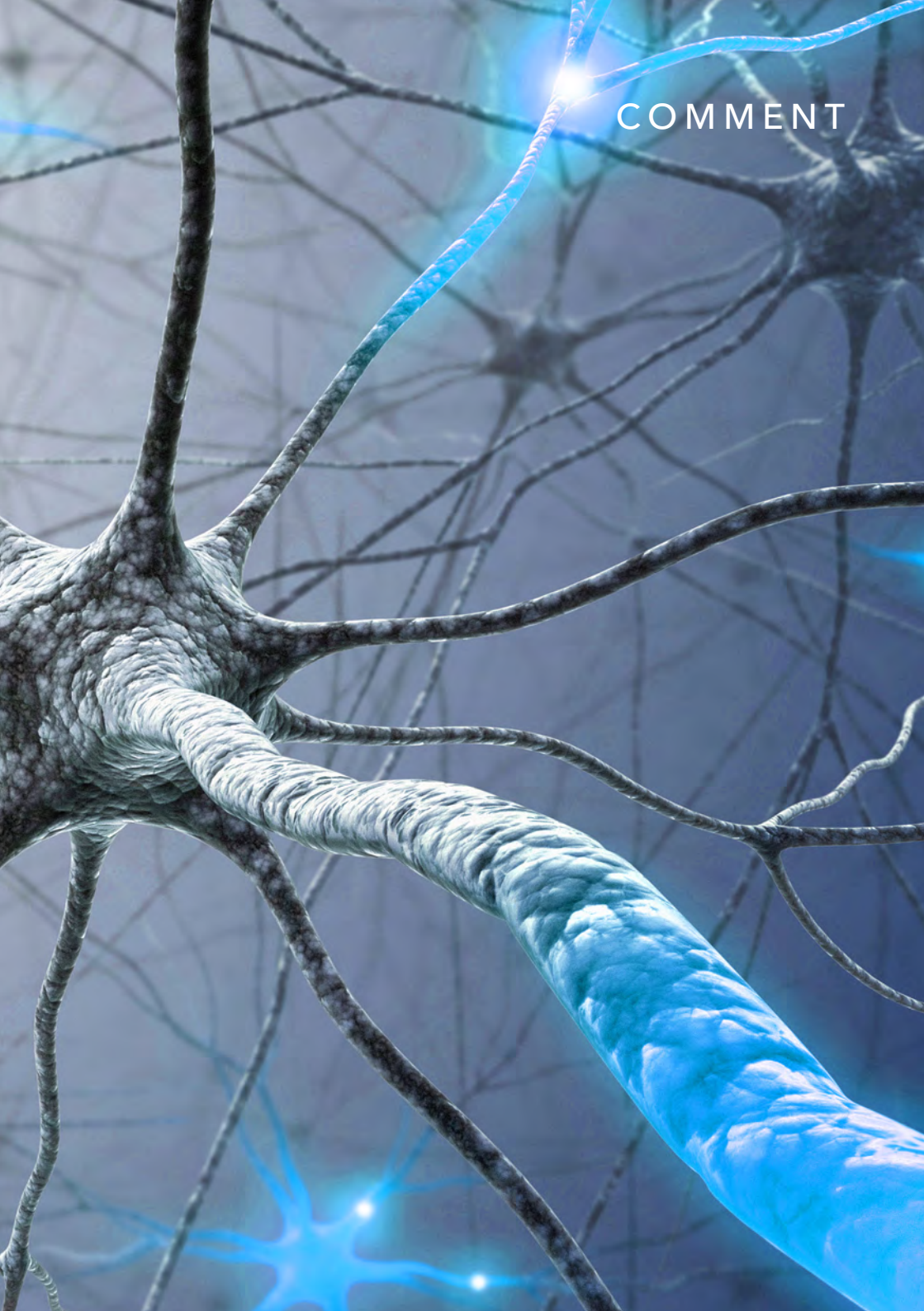
This is undeniably true – Israel still exists!

The promises God made to Abraham and David apply to Israel, the promised land. They will be fulfilled in their entirety in the kingdom age after the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. In that day, all nations of the earth will be blessed, as Abraham was promised (Genesis 12.3).

Justin Giles
London, UK

RIGHT: Philistine captives after an unsuccessful invasion of Egypt.
Relief from Rameses III's mortuary temple at Medinet Habu, Thebes



A detailed illustration of a neuron. The cell body (soma) is on the left, with several dendrites extending from it. A long, prominent axon extends from the soma, covered in a myelin sheath that has a textured, segmented appearance. This axon is highlighted with a bright blue glow. Other axons and dendrites are visible in the background, some also glowing with blue light. The overall color palette is dark blue and black, with vibrant blue highlights on the neural structures.

COMMENT

A morsel of brain

Our brain can sometimes be frustrating.

A well-known name, the password or pin number we have used a thousand times, sometimes they vanish into thin air at the most embarrassing moment. But generally, we have the impression that our brain is quite amazing, though we may not have much idea about how it works.

The picture opposite gives you an impression of a small part of the human brain. The large objects that look like satellites are ‘neurons’, and you can see they are connected to each other in various ways by what look like cables or wires.

Neurons are the most important component of our brains, the ‘grey matter’ as we call it. A neuron is a nerve cell, the basic building block of our nervous system, designed to process and transmit information (in a chemical or electrical form) throughout our bodies. In a computer you might describe it as a micro-processor. There are several different types, for example ‘motor neurons’ transmit information from the brain to the muscles of the body, to trigger the action which may be needed.

The cables in the picture are ‘axons’ which link the neurons together and

enable them to talk to each other. They are covered with a whitish fatty deposit (myelin) that protects the signals from interference, rather like the insulation around an electrical wire (see diagram overleaf). The axons account for most of the ‘white matter’ deeper in the brain’s structure. So, the brain is like a big communications hub or exchange, handling minute coded signals, identifying, decoding and sorting them, sending them to different parts of the hub and storing them when required.

How much of the brain can you see in this picture?

The neurons are easily identifiable and I can count about six of them, but how many are there in total in your brain?

One hundred billion –

100,000,000,000 – and each neuron is connected to about 10,000 others in a vast network. Some have said that this is comparable to the whole of the world wide web.

So this picture is definitely quite a small bit of brain – scarcely even a ‘morsel’!

‘The most complex piece of matter in the universe’,

so far as we know – that is how the brain has been described. And it will remain that way until we discover the fabled ‘aliens’ who might even have

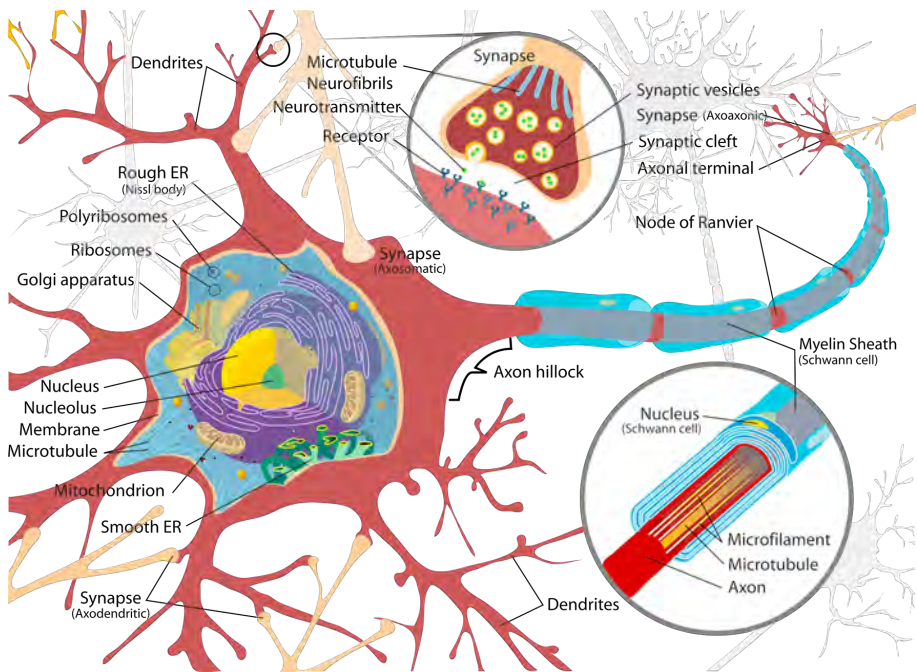


Diagram showing a single motor neuron cell with its axon and myelin sheath

made us themselves, according to popular mythology and even a few serious scientists.

So-called ‘accepted wisdom’ tells us that this astonishing apparatus is an accident, the end result of several billion years of the creative mistakes that are called ‘evolution’. Everything that can be attributed to our brain, the capacity for rational thought, the laws of language and logic, the science of mathematics and everything else, is likewise the product of chance and essentially purposeless.

In 2004 Norman Geisler and Frank Turek wrote a book entitled ‘I don’t

have enough faith to be an atheist’ (published by Crossway). Their argument was that atheists who so often pride themselves on not requiring faith of any sort, in fact subscribe to a whole series of propositions that have no scientific basis. Their belief in them is a matter of faith – faith in a particular materialistic worldview that excludes divine action.

I think Geisler and Turek are absolutely right. It requires a lot of faith to believe that the human brain is the product of chance, and I do not have it. I would go further: I do not understand how anybody with moderate intelligence and a healthy

dose of common sense, can possibly believe such a thing, unless they are already determined they 'cannot allow a divine foot in the door,' as one biologist puts it (Richard Lewontin – see footnote at the end of this article).

Our brain in action – just one example

Perhaps the least tangible of our senses is our sense of smell. Scent is elusive, it seems to defy analysis. We cannot collect it or preserve it with a photo or a recording, we cannot describe it except in terms of other scents that we have stored in our memory. An airborne particle of matter is drawn into our nostrils and encounters the tiny hairs (cilia) in the top of the nostril. These are attached to 'receptor' cells (about 12 million of them) which generate a signal specific to that molecule and pass it on to the axons.

Several thousand axons bundled together like a multi-strand cable make up the 'olfactory' nerves, one from each nostril, which connect to a bulb on each side of the frontal lobe of the brain. There, the 'magic' of data processing produces in our consciousness that elusive sensation which we call smell. It is said we can identify up to 10,000 different smells. But that is just the beginning.

Through this amazing network of communication, other parts of the

brain are alerted to the same information and trigger a number of different responses. A smell may bring back memories from the past, a trip to Africa, a place from our childhood, a particular person, or a special incident. In a different part of the brain, it may stir a range of emotions, from love to fear and disgust. The smell of burning or gas may trigger panic and a flight response designed to place us as far from the source of the smell as possible. In this way different specialised areas of the brain all respond in different ways to the same tiny signals.

Is it really possible to believe that all this is accidental? It may be a convenient explanation that avoids the embarrassment of acknowledging a Creator, but do we **truly believe it?**

Doesn't our intuition, our common sense, our experience of life, all tell us the opposite? What would Darwin himself have thought if he had known a fraction of what we know today? He could see that a highly specialised organ like the eye was a problem for his theory. What would he have to say about a computer operating system (OS) controlling 100 billion microprocessors?

That is what the brain requires.

What does the Bible say?

Most translations of the Bible do not use the word 'brain' at all. The closest to it is the word 'mind', a reference not to the biological organ but to the consciousness which the brain provides, a precious gift from our Creator.

'Who has put wisdom in the mind? (AV 'the inward parts'), or who has given understanding to the heart?' God challenges Job (Job 38.36).

'...They did not like to retain God in their knowledge' said the Apostle Paul about mankind (Romans 1.28). 'The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so' (Romans 8.7 NIV).

We can, we must, be different. Conformity to the spirit of our age is not an option. The age that is coming will be very different:

'...do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God'. Romans 12.2

'I will put my laws in their mind, and I will write them on their hearts.' Hebrews 8.10

Roy Toms
Norfolk, UK

Footnote:

The following is a quotation from an atheist biologist who is unusually honest about the 'mindset' of many contemporary scientists:

'Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfil many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, we are forced by our...adherence to material causes to ...produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated.

Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a divine foot in the door.'

Richard Lewontin,
Harvard University

Who are the Christadelphians?

From time to time readers ask who the Christadelphians are, and what do they believe. We are not affiliated with any other church and are a community of Christians whose beliefs and way of life are based on the teaching and example of Jesus Christ and his immediate followers. An explanatory booklet is freely available entitled 'Light on the Christadelphians'. The following is an extract from the booklet:

'Christadelphians' may sound a rather imposing name but it simply means 'Brethren in Christ'. John Thomas, an Englishman born in London in 1805, first used the name. He was the son of a clergyman and became a doctor of medicine. In 1832 as a young man, he emigrated to the U.S.A., sailing from St Katherine Docks, London, aboard a ship called The Marquis of Wellesley. He helped to pay his passage by working as the ship's surgeon.

The stormy Atlantic crossing was so bad that the ship lost its mainmast and ran aground. The passengers feared for their lives and at this point Dr Thomas determined that if he ever reached land he would never rest until he found out the truth about life and death. The ship eventually reached port after eight dreadful

weeks and the relieved passengers and crew disembarked in New York.

At that time America was full of people with new ideas and a freedom of thought that gave rise to the formation of many different religious communities, unrestricted by any form of state religion. It was in this 'cauldron' of religious activity that Dr Thomas began to implement his resolve to search for the truth about life and death.

With his religious family background he already had a foundation belief in the Bible, and it was to the Bible that he looked for answers to his questions. He read the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament avidly, learning the original languages and searching out the beliefs of the people of the Bible. He found, to his astonishment, that a great deal of what was accepted as established church doctrine was not in the Bible!

In between earning his living in medicine, Dr Thomas travelled widely in America preaching what he now understood to be the message of the Bible. He involved himself in debates and addressed many congregations, finding there were others like himself who had searched

God's Word for the answer to these vital issues.

Dr Thomas then began to publish his own conclusions about the true doctrines found in the Bible. These were published in 1848 in a book entitled 'Elpis Israel' ('The Hope of Israel') while he was on a visit to England (this book is available free of charge, see inside back cover).

By this time his preaching efforts had led to a number of people in America and England studying God's Word and realising that this man had indeed uncovered original Christianity as taught by Jesus and his apostles. They became associated with Dr Thomas but they still had no fixed name although they were known in some places as 'Thomasites.' However he resisted this, as he was not a man who sought a following or wanted to have his name associated with a newly formed religious group.

The American Civil War

It was the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861 that made Dr Thomas choose a name for those who had accepted his understanding of the Bible's teaching. It seems little thought had been given to a name, as it was not considered to be a necessary part of their faith. They followed the teaching of Jesus, and like the 1st Century believers, they

simply regarded themselves as his brethren and sisters.

The war between the Northern and Southern States of America resulted in believers living in 'opposing camps', and this raised the question as to whether the followers of Jesus should serve in the armed forces. Should they obey the call to take up arms if the Authorities ordered them to do so? After much thought, and by searching the Scriptures, they came to the conclusion that they had no alternative but to become conscientious objectors if they were to follow the commandments of Christ and the apostles (Matthew 5.43,44; John 18.36).

Conscription was resorted to by the Authorities in both the Northern and Southern States and the rules for exemption were different on both sides. Negotiations were necessary with the Authorities, who would only consider the cause of conscientious objectors who belonged to a recognised religious group.

The brethren asked Dr Thomas for help in adopting a name that would be recognised by the military authorities and so he set his mind to the task and decided to adopt the name 'Christadelphians'. He later wrote, 'I did not know a better denomination that could be given to such a class of believers than 'Brethren in Christ.' This declares

their true status, and as officials prefer words to phrases, the same fact is expressed in another form by the word, 'Christadelphians', or Christou adelphoi', (Greek words meaning brethren in Christ).

With this new name, the Christadelphians now had official recognition in America. Dr Thomas travelled widely, even into battle zones, to represent those who were having difficulties with the Authorities, but generally the adoption of the name Christadelphian gained the exemption they sought in their desire to uphold the teaching of Christ. The name was also accepted as an established religious denomination in the U.K. from about the same time.

An apostolic fellowship

For the enquiring reader, it is perhaps already noticeable that the Christadelphians look back to the first century to the teachings of Christ and his apostles to see what they originally preached and to what we can only describe as true Christianity. We would hope that the circumstances that led us to adopt the name 'Christadelphians' do not divert your attention from the fact that the basic beliefs of our community are apostolic. The same fundamental teaching of the first century believers forms the basis of Christadelphian beliefs. The fact that the established churches have

strayed from first century Christianity is the reason for our position today.

Christadelphian beliefs are based on the Bible's claim that it is the inspired Word of God. This claim is supported by a substantial weight of evidence (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-21). When Jesus preached the Gospel, he taught from the Old Testament Scriptures. It was from these ancient Jewish Scriptures that Jesus expounded to the people of his time the 'Gospel' or 'good news' of the coming kingdom of God. It is to these same Scriptures that Christadelphians look for the foundations of true Christianity.

Editor's note

The special issue entitled 'Light on the Christadelphians' is available free of charge (please see back cover).



Protests against government-ordered lockdowns have taken place across the world

signs of the times

The world-wide outbreak of the coronavirus is already the biggest event in my lifetime. To put that in context, I was born in 1951, six years after the end of the Second World War. That war, I think, qualified as the biggest event of the 20th century, followed closely by the First World War from 1914-18, the Great Depression in the 1930's, and the Spanish Flu pandemic from 1918-20 which was particularly lethal. Wikipedia says: 'It infected 500 million people – about a third of the world's population at the time. The death toll is typically estimated to have been somewhere between 17 million and 50 million, making it one of the deadliest pandemics in human history'.

If historians get to analyse and write about the coronavirus and its effects on the world in a similar way to these other events, what will they

conclude? A story from 1973 may provide an answer to that question. It certainly sets out a requirement for proper meaningful analysis.

In 1973 US President Nixon had an historic meeting with Chinese Premier Chou En Lai. Nixon asked, as an 'ice-breaker', what the Chinese Premier's view was of the effects of the French Revolution. The reply was: 'It's too soon to tell'. Even if, as was likely, the Premier was referring to the turmoil in France in 1968, rather than the events of the late 18th Century, the point of the story remains valid – and it still is.

Bible 'certainties'

Bible prophecy predicts many things that I believe are certain. Prophecy-wise some key things can be stated quite simply. Israel will be catastrophically invaded and taken over

completely by the invader. After this happens, Jesus, having returned to this very troubled world, will save Israel, and then set up a world-wide kingdom with its centre in Jerusalem.

When will these things happen? Looking at the state of the world around us it may well be very soon. At a personal level, I certainly hope so. It will solve so many problems and alleviate so much suffering. Though the Bible does not tell us exactly when this will happen, it gives us some strong indications. Jesus himself told us to ‘watch’ which means to be actively attentive to both how we live and what we are watching for. He said:

‘Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the cock, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.

And what I say to you, I say to all:
Watch!’

Mark 13.35-37

Bible prophecies

Look at the verses below in relation to my brief summary of Bible ‘certainties’. There are many more verses, and the true strength of my convictions comes not simply from verses like these, but from reading the Bible in its true context – what God has done and will do in relation to humankind. Notice the diversity of the books that the verses quoted come from! The consistency of God’s message through-out the Bible is truly remarkable:

‘Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say to Gog, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “On that day when my people Israel dwell safely, will you not know it? Then you will come from your place out of the far north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great company and a mighty army. You

Picture taken during the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918. Similar scenes are taking place throughout the world today



will come up against my people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in the latter days that I will bring you against my land, so that the nations may know me, when I am hallowed in you, O Gog, before their eyes.” Thus says the Lord GOD: “Are you he of whom I have spoken in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied for years in those days that I would bring you against them?”

Ezekiel 38.14-17

‘...“Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven”.’

Acts 1.11

‘Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever!”’

Revelation 11.15

‘At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. They shall walk no more after the stubbornness of their evil heart.’

Jeremiah 3.17

Is there a Bible reference to COVID-19?

One more quotation; and this one is especially notable given our current circumstances. Jesus said to his disciples:

‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and **pestilences**; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.’

Luke 21.10,11

These words may well refer to our times, in which case the word in bold type has a special relevance. An online dictionary defines the word ‘pestilence’ as ‘a contagious or infectious epidemic disease that is virulent and devastating.’ Perhaps a synonym for ‘pestilence’ covers it better. It does for me, and that word is ‘**plague**’. What a resonance that has with COVID-19!

All in all, the Bible predicts a difficult time ahead for us, followed however by an unimaginably bright and everlasting future when Jesus returns.

How are we dealing with the virus?

Back to the present; just how are we dealing with COVID-19? My answer to that question is that it is a ‘mixed bag’. But the tendency seems to me to be leading more and more towards dissension.

An analogy I heard many years ago compared human nature to the bowls used for the game of carpet bowls. The bowls must be bowled with considerable skill. It is not as simple as bowling in a straight line between yourself and the intended target. You must bowl with enough speed to reach the target but not with too much force. If this isn't difficult enough, the bowl (see right) is not completely spherical. It has a 'bias' built in to cause it to pull away from a straight line and you have to allow for that. Use enough but not too much force and bowl enough away from the target to hit it despite the bowl's bias.

What is the analogy? We have a built-in bias to veer away from the straight line unless we actively and continually adjust for it. Thus, while there is the capacity for good in us all there is a tendency to evil. The Bible puts it this way: *'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?'* (Jeremiah 17.9). With this in mind, consider just a few representative quotes from various sources that relate to how we are handling the virus crisis; first an example of the good.

The highly respected gospel music singer, Mavis Staples, had this to say. 'We are all in this together, and I think that when we come out of this, we're going to be a much better

people. It's a bad thing that's happening but it really seems to be bringing us together. People are doing things that they have not done for others, and it is plain to see that this is the way that we should be towards each other' (Rolling Stone Online 29 April 2020). I have experienced this side of human nature myself with offers of help from neighbours during our lockdown and so have my parents-in-law.

Now the not so good; there seems to be something of a disconnect between community level response and politics, especially international politics, and this seems to be on the increase. At a press conference on 30th April this year the UN Secretary-General lamented the lack of global



leadership in the face of the pandemic, including at the United Nations. He said: 'We know that the relation between the major powers in the world today is very dysfunctional, and that makes it difficult for the Security Council to act'.

A primary example of this disconnect is that the US and China have been unable to agree on the wording of a UN Security Council resolution. The US wants no reference to the WHO (World Health Organisation - a UN body). The Chinese insist it be there. One consequence of this was noted in a headline from *The Economist* magazine of 5 May 2020: 'Coronavirus and conflict. How Covid-19 gave peace a chance, and nobody took it. Ceasefires are breaking down as America and China bicker at the UN.' I do not really need to specify the details. The headline says it all.

Conclusion

There is so much more in the news every day for you to read yourself if you are so inclined. Sadly, even the positive progress between nations in a willingness to discuss issues like climate change in a post COVID-19 world is undermined by some countries' refusal, particularly the US, to participate. At a time when it is obvious that the world is facing issues that do not recognise international boundaries, the virus being a

major example, the ability to reach a world-wide approach seems absent. The US appears to have abdicated its world leadership role, held since the end of the Second World War.

Near the beginning of this article I asked: 'If historians get to analyse and write about the coronavirus and its effects on the world in a similar way to these other events, what will they conclude?' The sentence started with the word 'if'. This was very deliberate because I feel that historians are unlikely to be given the opportunity to reflect on the coronavirus for the time needed to provide a balanced analysis. The virus appears to have a while yet to run its course (as at the time of writing in early May). If the Chinese Premier felt five years after the event was 'too soon to tell' will we even get to that point before Jesus has returned? Looking around me, I do not think so.

Whatever my thoughts, which I know many Christadelphians share, two things are certain. Jesus is coming back at a time that is already set, and events are following God's plan in every detail. You and I can be a part of a world transformation, but as Jesus said in the quotation from Mark (page 21), we must watch and be ready!

May that time come soon!

David Gamble
Melbourne, Australia

BASIC BIBLE TEACHING

The development of mankind (2)

The Flood

Read Genesis chapters 6 and 7 carefully.

'The 'sons of God' (Genesis 6.2) refers to those men who believed in and followed God's ways. We read in this verse that they married 'the daughters of men'. We should understand that here is a description of women who were not daughters of God but were unbelievers.

The action of 'the sons of God' marrying 'the daughters of men' resulted in the population of the earth becoming wicked in the sight of God. A lesson that is emphasised throughout the entire Bible narrative, is that it is important for God fearing men and women to marry only those of a Godly disposition towards their Creator and His ways.

(For explanation of the meaning of Godliness see article on page 32).

Many years later, the life of King Solomon is a striking example of how things can go wrong when the above principle is ignored. Read how God greatly blessed Solomon in 1 Kings chapter 5 onwards. But note carefully how his foreign marriages were a disaster for him (1 Kings 11.1-13).

Genesis chapter 6 makes it clear that only Noah and his family were righteous before God (6.9). God's way had become completely corrupted (6.12) and God instructed Noah to build an ark (6.14).

The Ark

From the measurements given in the Bible, it has been estimated that the Ark was about 440 feet (134 metres) long, 73 feet (22.25 metres) wide and 44 feet (13.4 metres) high. *Read Genesis 6.14-16 for further details.*

To show how the message of the Bible is consistent, compare these passages:

Universal wickedness of mankind before the flood: Compare Genesis 6 with Luke 17.26-30 where Jesus is comparing the similarity of his second coming to the times of Noah; also 1 Peter 3:20 where the Apostle Peter

compares the salvation of Noah and his family ‘through water’ with the act of baptism. Out of the millions alive, only Noah and his family were saved. Again compare some of the words of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament writers with the Genesis account: Read Genesis 6.8,9 and 7.1 and compare with Ezekiel 14.14, a prophecy about the destruction of Israel for unrighteousness, and compare with Noah and other righteous men and women in Hebrews chapter 11.

It is important to note that Old Testament prophets living about 2,000 years after the flood, Christ himself and other New Testament writers 2,500 years after the flood, all confirm that Noah was a real person and the flood really happened.

Take some time to review the descriptive and unambiguous words of Genesis 6.17, Genesis 7.11 and 7.17–20. Because of the detailed genealogy in Genesis 5 we can say that the flood occurred 1,656 years after the creation of Adam.

It is recommended that Genesis chapter 8 is read carefully.

God’s covenant with Noah

The regularity and continuity of harvest, seasons, day and night were promised by God. This permanence paved the way for the great covenants made with the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and later with King David. Their fulfilment depended on the continuance of life on the earth, and the development of a line of righteous descendants of Noah.

Read Genesis 8.20–22, Isaiah 55.8–11 and Jeremiah 33.20,21.

God made a covenant that stipulated that there will never again be a similar destruction of the world by water. God made the rainbow appear in the sky as a token of His promise. He also established an important principle concerning sacrifice referred to in the previous article (Light Volume 31.2 page 31).

Read Genesis chapter 9 verses 1–7 and 11–17.

The Flood: a type of baptism

Earlier we saw that the flood was referred to in the New Testament as a likeness or ‘type’ of baptism. As is often the case in the Bible, we have an interesting idea where one thing symbolises something else that is more

relevant for us today. In this way, the saving of eight persons in the ark 'through' water is a pointer to baptism 'in type'. Or perhaps we can think of it as a kind of parable. It is interesting to note that, since the New Testament was written in Greek, the Greek word literally means 'anti-type' as translated in the New King James version (1 Peter 3.21).

In the Bible we find a great number of types and anti-types. We can think of this like prophecy and its later fulfilment, where something happens (type) and it is later duplicated in another significant way (anti-type). By this means, common teachings and ideas are linked throughout the Bible. The idea of the flood as a type of baptism (anti-type) is the first case we have come across in these 'Basic Bible Teaching' studies. Another example of this is described by Jesus as '*the sign of the prophet Jonah*' (Matthew 12.38-40).

The Time of the Flood: a 'type' of 'the last days'

The days in which Noah lived are also a 'type' of the 'last days'. The 'last days' are spoken of in the Bible as being the days immediately prior to the return of Jesus to the earth – his second coming. This is the climax of the Bible's message for today. Jesus referred to the time of the Flood as a reminder or 'type' of God's intention to intervene again in an equally sin-filled world in these last days.

In Noah's day people were godless and believed only in themselves and the pleasures of this life. There are strong similarities to today. At the time of Noah the earth was full of wickedness and violence. God's judgement came suddenly after He had warned them what was to happen. Jesus said that the time just before his second coming and the judgement of mankind will be just like the days of Noah.

Compare Matthew 24.3, 37-39 and Luke 17.26-30 with Genesis 6.11.

We have already noted that God promised not to flood the world again. So we can be sure judgement will not take the form of a world-wide deluge. This future judgement will be carried out by the Lord Jesus Christ. *Read: 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18 and 2 Thessalonians 1.7-9.*

In the last days mankind will generally ridicule and ignore the idea of the creation, the flood and Christ's return. This is exactly what we see around us today across the whole world. The words of the Apostles clearly predicted the age in which we live and we believe that the return of Jesus Christ is imminent. *Read: 2 Peter 3.3-11 and 2 Timothy 3.1-5.*

Conclusion to this two-part consideration of the Development of Mankind

Two points stand out from this consideration of the first 1,600 years or so of human history, as recorded in Genesis, the first book of the Bible.

1. This Old Testament history (i.e. 4,000 BC – 2,350 BC) is confirmed by many references in the New Testament (c. AD 50). Jesus Christ and his apostles accepted it and used it implicitly in their teaching and writings.
2. This history establishes principles and teaches us lessons. We can see how lessons from the past embody lessons for the present and the future. Mankind's future is very short – we are living in 'the last days'.

From all of this we have learnt how it is necessary to choose whether in our own lives we follow God's ways or man's ways. We have seen how it is important to recognise the need to do exactly as God requires. Above all we have seen that God gives opportunity for repentance but will not tolerate persistent wickedness.

God will reveal His power by sending His Son Jesus Christ back to judge the world. God's Word, the Bible, tells us about how we can follow God's ways and be saved from the terrible judgement that is coming on the world very soon (see the next article pages 32,33).

BIBLE SYMBOLS

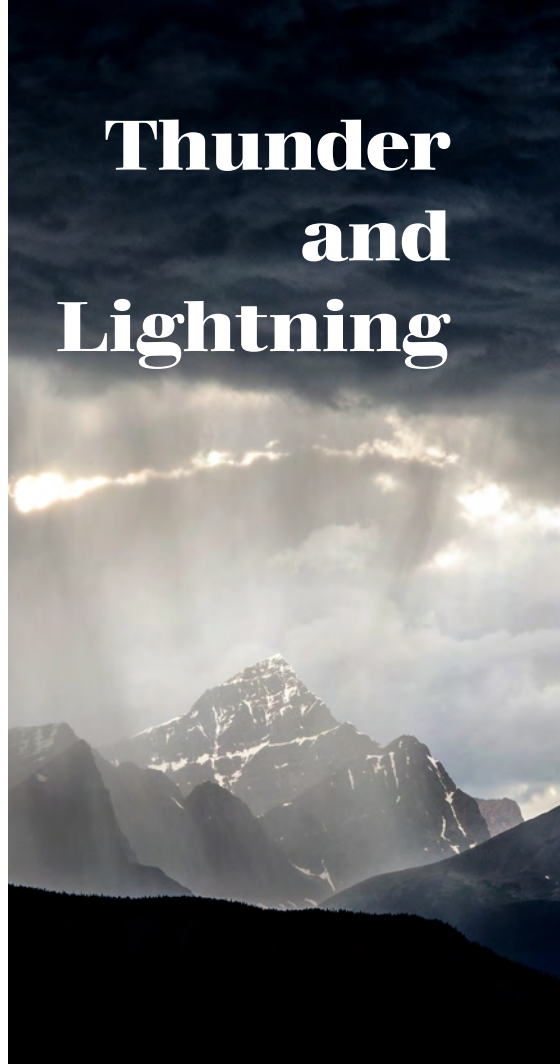
We have all witnessed a thunderstorm.

We have felt the awesome power of its deep rumblings; we have seen the bright flashes of lightning which come in an instant. We have probably counted the time after the flash, before we hear that clap of thunder to try to work out how far away the strike was. We know that at the end of that lightning bolt could be fire and destruction or even death. We all respect a thunderstorm and, rightly so, even fear it.

So what causes thunder and lightning? In basic terms, ice crystals form in clouds that cause an electrical charge to build up. Like magnets where opposite fields attract, the negative charged electrons are strongly attracted to positively charged particles. The charged electrons held in the cloud start to make invisible jagged fingers reaching down to the earth, which is the opposite charge.

As soon as the negative charge from the cloud connects with the positive charge from the earth, a huge current, made of all those electrons, flows from the ground up to the cloud – and that is the sky-to-ground flash of lightning you see. More frequently there is an electrical discharge within the clouds them-

Thunder and Lightning



The writer's picture of a storm in the Rocky Mountains of Canada

selves, and that is when intra-cloud or cloud-to-cloud lightning occurs.

A lightning flash heats the air around it to about 25,000°C. This happens so quickly that the surrounding air expands fast. The extreme speed of this expansion causes a shock wave in

the air. That shock wave is the thunder that you hear. Lightning and thunder therefore are created at the exact same time. However, because light travels much faster than sound, there is always the delay after seeing the lightning flash before the thunder clap is heard.

Another amazing property of lightning is its beneficial effect on plants:

‘Each bolt of lightning carries electrical energy that is powerful enough to break the strong bonds of the nitrogen molecule in the atmosphere. Once split, the nitrogen atoms quickly bond to oxygen in the atmosphere, forming nitrogen dioxide. Along with the lightning in the cloud are cloud droplets and raindrops. Nitrogen dioxide dissolves in water, creating nitric acid, which forms nitrates. The nitrates fall to the ground in raindrops and seep into the soil in a form that can be absorbed by plants.’

(Extract from internet article entitled ‘Does Lightning add Nitrogen to the soil’ by The Weather Guys).

God’s Creation

We learn from the Bible that God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in it. This includes the weather that we all experience. God then created these powerful forces of thunder and lightning, over which He has total control. The prophet

Jeremiah reminds us of this by quoting from Psalm 135:

‘When he utters his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens: and he causes the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, he brings the wind out of his treasures.’ Jeremiah 10.13

We read in the book of Job how a young man named Elihu spoke to Job and his three companions about many things concerning God. As he spoke, the sky began to darken with an approaching storm, so he used it to explain how God forms the rain, the clouds, and thunder and how the power of the storm is the same power that God uses to govern the nations. This thunder of the approaching storm is more than just nature at work here. Elihu recognised the approaching presence of God:

‘Hear attentively the thunder of his voice, and the rumbling that comes from his mouth. He sends it forth under the whole heaven, his lightning to the ends of the earth.’

Job 37.2,3

In these words, Elihu spoke of God’s voice as if it were thunder from heaven. As we will see, the use of thunder and lightning in the Bible is not just to describe natural storms but is used symbolically to describe attributes of the Creator.

God revealed at Sinai

We have seen from Scripture that God creates and controls storms, but let us now consider how thunder and lightning are used symbolically. The word ‘thunder’ is often used in the Bible to express the idea of power, authority and might, of which a perfect example can be seen in the power of God. After the Israelites had been freed from Egypt and crossed the Red Sea, they came to Mount Sinai. It was here, on the mountain, that God revealed Himself to His people in a great storm:

‘Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.’

Exodus 19.16,17

We note here that God manifested Himself in awe-inspiring Divine majesty before His people.

The voice of God

It was not just God’s presence that was represented by the storm at Sinai; we also have God’s voice or words associated with thunder. Moses was commanded to go up the mountain to receive the law and commandments from God.

When he came down, he delivered God’s law to the people. They had witnessed all the thunder and lightning flashes, and the mountain smoking; they were very much afraid and stood a long way off. They were prepared to hear Moses talk but were worried that if they heard God speak, they would die because of the greatness of the storm.

‘Then the LORD said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.’

Exodus 20.22

The people of Israel had to learn about their God. They had to learn of His power, they had to learn to give Him respect, and to worship Him as their creator and king. So here at the mountain, the Israelites were shown the true power and strength of their God, symbolised in the thunderous roar and bright flashes of lightning that came down from His presence.

Following this great experience at Sinai, Israel promised obedience to their God, and so entered a covenant relationship with Him. You can read more about the time that Israel spent in the wilderness in the book of Exodus.

The judgements of God

God’s voice at Sinai was used to demonstrate His power, His strength, and His majesty to His people. Later

in their history, God used His voice for a different purpose, as a power poured out in judgement. Here lightning is used to demonstrate how God's judgment will strike.

After David had been delivered from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of King Saul, he wrote Psalm 18 to thank the Lord. In this Psalm he described God in this way:

'The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire. He sent out his arrows and scattered the foe, lightnings in abundance, and he vanquished them.'

Psalm 18.13,14

Here lightning is a symbol of God's power poured out in judgement, like arrows from His bow. This judgement was poured out on those that had turned away from God and the enemies of His people. It resulted in a force of destruction that can only be likened to the power and violence of a great thunderstorm, and of earthquakes and fire, from which there is nowhere to hide. The prophet Isaiah wrote about Divine judgement in similar language: *'You will be punished by the LORD of hosts with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with storm and tempest and the flame of devouring fire'* (Isaiah 29.6).

Speed of lightning

Another aspect of lightning is its speed and suddenness. We are often not fully aware that there has been a strike until after it has finished, having experienced only a bright flash in our peripheral vision. The Scriptures too use this swiftness as a metaphor when describing fast movement; for example, to describe the speed of the Babylonian chariots as they invaded the city of Nineveh: *'The chariots rage in the streets, they jostle one another in the broad roads; they seem like torches, they run like lightning'* (Nahum 2.4).

The brightness of lightning is also used elsewhere in Scripture to describe the appearance of the manifested power of God. An example of this was seen by Daniel in his prophetic vision of Jesus Christ, at the time of his return in glory:

'His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in colour, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude.'

Daniel 10.6

Appearance of the kingdom

Many Bible symbols point forward to the work of the Lord Jesus. At the time of Jesus' second coming, as foretold in Scripture, the symbology of thunder and lightning is used to

describe his future work. Matthew chapter 24 describes one of the signs of his return in this way:

‘For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.’

Matthew 24.27

Lightning is always recognisable for what it is. Its sudden flash, seen from an enormous distance, is anything but secret or obscure. Jesus is speaking of looking for his return and when it happens, it will be unmistakable, and unexpected as a sudden flash of lightning!

We have seen lightning used with reference to judgement; the same will occur when Jesus returns to judge the earth. We read in the book of Revelation of the time when Divine power will be used against the adversaries of Jesus, to judge the nations. This judgement will be carried out by Jesus Christ through his saints from his throne in Jerusalem:

‘From the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices’

Revelation 4.5

Lightning and thunder, therefore, represent the unleashing of divine power by which human rule will be overthrown. The prophet Zechariah speaks of this *‘day of the LORD’* and tells us what it will be like. You can read about it in Zechariah chapter 14.

It will mean complete destruction for those that oppose Christ, sparing only those that are obedient to him.

Echoes of thunder until Christ returns

Can we hear the thunderous voice of God today?

The Old Testament prophets and other writers have recorded the thunders heard from Almighty God. We can witness echoes of these thunders by reading the Bible, the Word of God. We also can learn from His teachings, learn to give Him absolute respect and worship Him in the way appointed as the Psalmist recognised:

‘Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker’

(Psalm 95.6)

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus is to return very soon, and that, having Divine authority invested in him, he will again bring thunders of great power to the earth. That day could be any time now. We do not know when, but when he does come, it will be with the suddenness and power of a flash of lightning.

Will you be ready for him?

Matt Owen
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Godliness

The title of this article is likely to be rather unappealing to many people. It suggests discipline; restrictions on the freedom to please oneself. Godliness is defined as 'the quality of being devoutly religious, pious'. How off-putting is that? There are many religions in the world, all of which have devout adherents and pious followers. But human beings are prone to follow their devotions only as far as it suits them.

A blunt piece of advice

We begin with this sentence from the Bible:

'For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come'.

1 Timothy 4.8

This is quite a forthright statement to start with! Bodily exercise is highly recommended today as a healthy lifestyle choice. The aim is to increase our lifespan and to avoid life threatening diseases. Yet the Bible says that *'bodily exercise profits a little'*! So it is at loggerheads with the current wisdom of this world! But it is actually telling us that exercise is worth something, but not much. On the other hand, godliness is profitable for all things. If it is so

important for us, would it not be sensible to weigh up the pros and cons?

What then is the value of being devoutly religious or pious? The Bible says that it has *'promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.'* God is giving the reader a great incentive. He is saying 'It will be very much to your advantage to become godly. It will be good for you in this life, but much more, it will gain for you the life which is to come'.

Jesus said this about that life to come: *'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). No wonder the benefit of bodily exercise for the present life is of little value in comparison to an offer like that! It is not just a matter of prolonging this life with all its problems by exercise, but an offer of a never-ending life.

You might say, who wants everlasting life in a world full of problems and impending disasters? Thankfully, it is not in this present world that everlasting life is to be enjoyed, but in an utterly transformed world referred to in the Lord's prayer: *'Your kingdom come. Your will be done on*

earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6.10). It is also described in the Bible as 'new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' (2 Peter 3.13). Or again we read: 'Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear' (Hebrews 12.28). Those words 'serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear' define godliness concisely.

The advantage of godliness

The Apostle Peter gives more reasons why godliness is so important. Referring to the present earth which is facing catastrophe he wrote:

'Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens being on fire, will be dissolved, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.'

2 Peter 3.11-13

This vital and extremely serious message is available for all to read, in a book that vastly outnumbers any other book worldwide, yet few take the trouble to read it thoroughly.

The characteristics of godliness

The qualities of godliness are emerging in the Bible verses referred to above. We need to be clear what those qualities are so that we know what to aim at.

Jesus speaks of belief in him. The letter to the Hebrews speaks of serving God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. The Apostle Peter wrote that we ought to live in holy conduct and godliness. Holy conduct simply means a different kind of behaviour to normal. Human behaviour is described by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the believers in Rome. In Romans chapter three he referred to six passages from the Old Testament, five from the Psalms and one from Isaiah. They tell us what God thinks of mankind and it makes shocking reading! (Read Romans 3.10-18).

The reason for this awful behaviour is summed up in the last of these quotations from the Psalms:

'...concerning the transgression of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes...' (Psalm 36.1,2). In other words, God's instructions to humanity are ignored, and yet it is these very instructions which will lead to everlasting life. How very sad. Ignoring this advice leads only to everlasting death which the Bible refers to as perishing, as we read

above: *‘whoever believes in him (God) should not perish but have everlasting life’* (John 3.16).

Ungodly behaviour evident in the world today

I wonder whether you think the following quotation from Paul’s second letter to Timothy is a fair description of the world of today?

‘But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.’

2 Timothy 3.1-5

We might say *‘having a form of godliness but denying its power’* is like saying that God is ‘out of sight and out of mind’ until a crisis occurs. Then we hear people saying ‘Our prayers and thoughts are with those whose homes have been flooded or a parent bereaved by knife crime etc.’ God is not content to receive such casual and occasional attention. He says: *‘But on this one will I look: on him who is poor (humble) and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word’* (Isaiah 66.2).

The one God looked on with delight was His beloved son, Jesus. God said this about Jesus long before he was born: *‘The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight is in the fear of the LORD.’*

Jesus is our example

Jesus is the one a Christian professes to follow. He is the one who taught his followers to pray in this manner:

‘Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.’

Matthew 6.9-13 (KJV)

Notice the phrase *‘hallowed be thy name’*. In other words, treat the name of God as holy. ‘Holy’ is the opposite of ‘common.’ Next, the Christian is to pray for God’s kingdom to come when His will is to be done on earth. Then the prayer goes on to acknowledge the complete dependence of believers on God, their Father in heaven. It recognises that the followers of Jesus are not perfect and must ask for forgiveness. But notice

that forgiveness is dependent on forgiving those who have offended them. The prayer finishes by acknowledging the absolute power of God.

The follower of Jesus believes in the existence of God. He or she believes in God's promise about the coming kingdom of God and responds to these words: *'...without faith it is impossible to please him, for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him'* (Hebrews 11.6).

We need to be trained

Believers are people who believe God to be their Father, a Father they worship and revere. He is also a Father who wants His child to trust Him, be close to Him and love Him. He is a Father who is actively involved in training His children; patiently guiding them to be prepared for a great and everlasting future in His kingdom, as we read in Hebrews:

'My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by him; for whom the LORD loves he chastens ... Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they

indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness'.

Hebrews 12.5-10

So, if we look to Jesus as our example, what do we see? Jesus was so close to his Father, so influenced by Him, that he could answer Philip, one of his disciples, who asked him: *'Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us'*. The answer of Jesus no doubt surprised him: *'Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father'* (John 14.9). In his ministry, Jesus reflected the moral image of God his Father. It was in this sense that those who saw him saw the Father.

So, we have an example of a godly man to follow. Jesus showed mankind what it means to be different, to be holy and God-like. The Gospels are full of accounts of his wonderful acts of kindness to the poor and needy, the sick and troubled; of his preaching good news to bring great hope to a people who were oppressed by their religious leaders and the Roman occupying power.

Jesus brought great joy and relief to so many and ultimately laid down his life for the salvation of all who would put their trust in God. It was tragic that despite all he had done for them, they rejected him and demanded his



crucifixion. That however is not the end of the matter. God, his Father raised him to life, not a revival to mortality but to immortality. Jesus did not perish; he was not in the tomb long enough even to begin to decay.

It is astounding to hear what the Apostle Peter said after Jesus had ascended to His Father:

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..."

Acts 2.36–38

If this teaching is new to you, then weigh it up carefully, lest you miss a wonderful offer.

Geoff Mitchell
Norfolk, UK

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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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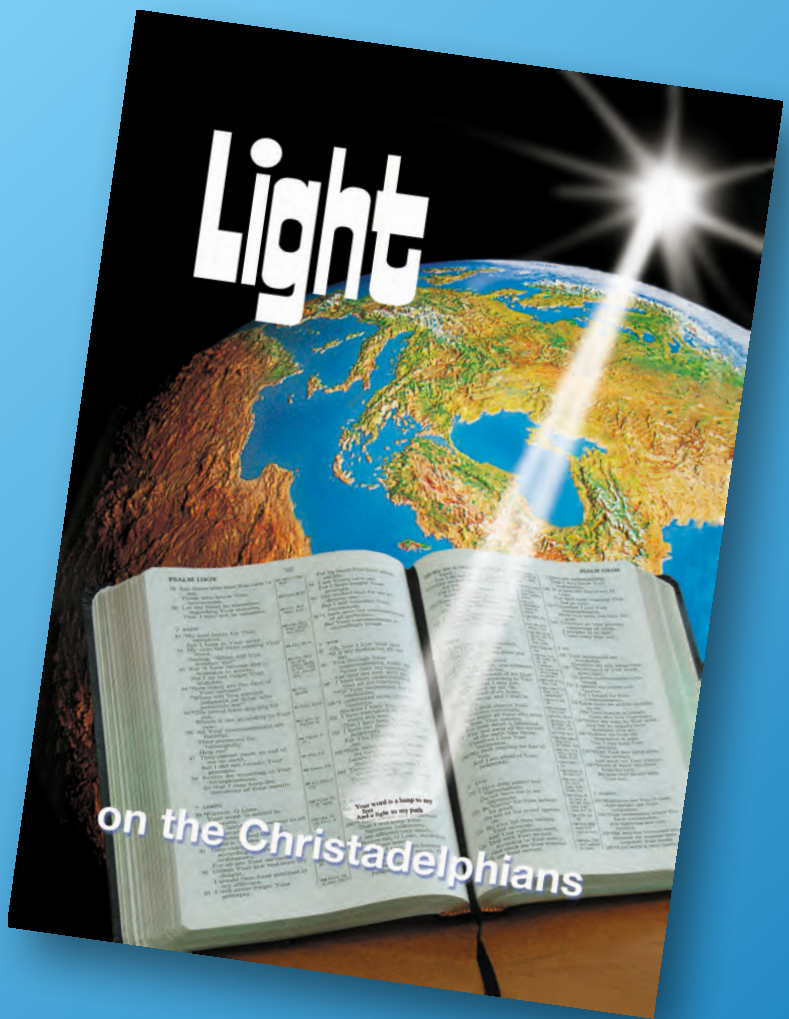


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what do they believe?

how are they different to other christians?

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