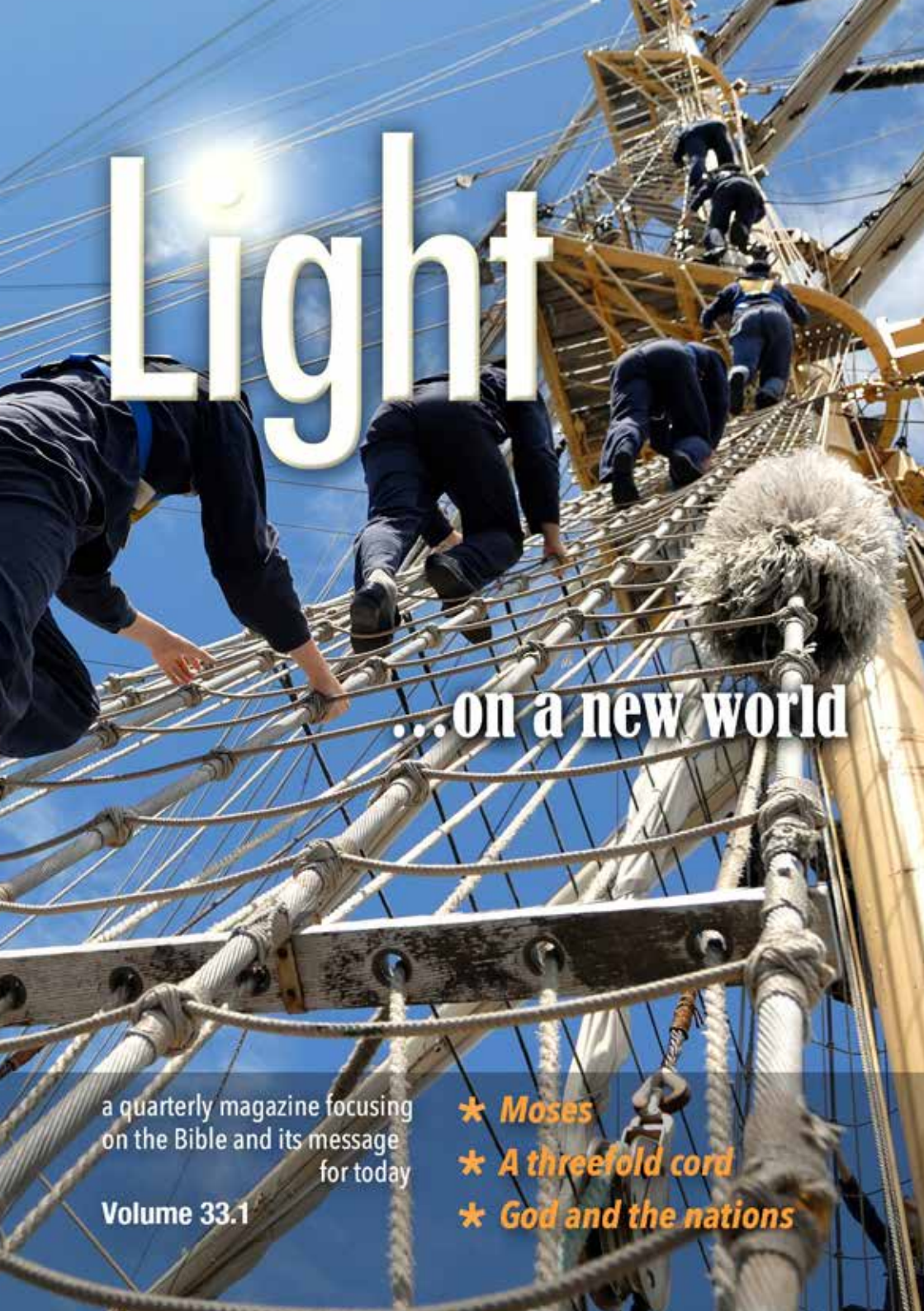




Light

...on a new world

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

Volume 33.1

- ★ *Moses*
- ★ *A threefold cord*
- ★ *God and the nations*

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cover picture

Sailors in training swarm up the rigging of a traditional sailing vessel. Rope-making is one of the oldest human technologies – see article ‘a threefold cord’ on page 13

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Evidence for the Resurrection

of Jesus Christ from the dead

Part 2 The New Testament records

It might seem that too much time has elapsed since the death of Jesus Christ for us to be able to come to any firm conclusion as to what may have happened. Evidence, we might think, has by now been lost with the passing years, but there are some facts that have withstood the passage of time and stubbornly refuse to go away. We wish to examine some of these in this article.

From a historical point of view our major source material for the resurrection of Jesus is the New Testament, particularly the four Gospel records. It is often suggested that these writings are not reliable from a strict historical perspective but were compiled by enthusiasts to tell a spiritual story. It has been further suggested that they are the product of a later age, at least one hundred years after the events they narrate. So we pose the question, how reliable are they?

The New Testament was undeniably recorded by enthusiasts who were telling a profound spiritual story, but

that does not count as evidence that what they wrote was not historically true. Indeed the system of belief that they put forward in the gospel was called '*the way of truth*' (2 Peter 2:2) or simply '*the truth*' (Romans 1:18; 2 Corinthians 4:2; Galatians 3:1; 1 Timothy 2:4 etc). If they considered that they preached '*the truth*' why would they base it on a falsehood?

The resurrection, as we noted in the first article, was fundamental to the preaching of the gospel. It was both the motivation for, and the substance of their teaching. It must also be remembered that most of the early exponents of the gospel suffered greatly for their belief and many were put to death for it (see below). This is not the behaviour of people who knew they were teaching fables.



The Apostle Philip is recorded as dying for his faith in the same way as Jesus, by crucifixion. Painting by Rubens

Rather it shows that they believed what they were preaching was true. To them it would seem the resurrection was something worth dying for.

The change in outlook between the early believers, sometimes called the primitive church, and the later established church is profound. The establishment of the church as the state religion of the Roman Empire took place nearly three hundred years after the death of Jesus Christ. From being a persecuted minority they became the established majority and took on the trappings of authority, political power and influence. It is therefore important to establish when the New Testament documents were written. Were they the product of the early church or the later product of the church establishment? Was there a long tradition of passing on the gospel message by word of mouth before it was written down in the form we have today, or was it written down within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses? If a late date for the writing of the Gospel is true, then it leaves room for corruption and embellishment of the original message.

The age of New Testament documents

Evidence of an early date for the writing of the four Gospel records is found within the pages of the Bible

itself, particularly the letters of the Apostle Paul. In about the year AD 66 he sent a letter to his companion Timothy. In that letter he wrote: ‘For the Scripture says, “*You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain*”, and “*The labourer is worthy of his wages*”’ (1 Timothy 5:18). This is interesting to us because the first quotation he makes, concerning the ox, is taken from Deuteronomy 25 verse 4 in the Old Testament. The second quotation he makes about the labourer is taken from Luke 10 verse 7 which is in the New Testament. He treats both of these quotations as ‘Scripture’. By this he means they are both inspired writings (see 2 Timothy 3:16). In other words the Gospel of Luke was available at the time that Paul was writing, and this Gospel record was regarded as inspired Scripture, equivalent to what might be found in the Old Testament.

Our next piece of evidence for an early date of the Gospels comes in another of Paul’s letters. In about the year AD 59 he wrote:

‘For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures’ 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Nowhere in the Old Testament is it stated that a) Christ died; or b) that

he was buried; or c) that he rose on the third day. The Old Testament Scriptures were completed some four hundred years before that time. Whilst there are prophecies of these things in the Old Testament, nowhere do we find them explicitly linked together. Rather this is reference once again to the New Testament Scriptures, the Gospel records, all of which clearly record these things and were evidently available at the time when the Apostle Paul wrote this letter (see for example Matthew chapters 27 and 28).

Our third reference for the early writing of the Gospel records comes once again from one of Paul's letters. The letter to the Galatians was probably written around the year AD 58. Paul wrote: *'O foolish Galatians,*

who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?' (Galatians 3:1 KJV). The original Greek word for 'evidently set forth' is '*proegraphe*' which means 'set forth in writing'. The passage would therefore be better translated as '*...before whose eyes Jesus Christ was set forth in writing among you as crucified*'. Once again there is reference to the written Gospel records, in circulation among his readers at this time, which set forth in writing the crucifixion of Jesus.

The fall of Jerusalem AD 70 - a historical milestone

A relief from the Arch of Titus in Rome, showing Roman soldiers carrying off the sacred temple furniture, including the candlestick (Menorah) from the Holy Place



More evidence which points to an early date for the writing of the Gospels comes when we consider the historical setting of the New Testament. The Jewish nation, which is the background to these times, was a vassal province under the sway of the Roman Empire. Just under forty years after the death of Christ there was a Jewish rebellion against the Romans which was crushed and the city of Jerusalem destroyed in the year AD 70. This marked the end of the Jewish state, its capital and its temple.

This of course had a profound effect on the Christian community, which at the beginning was an entirely Jewish body. Jesus preached exclusively to the Jewish people, as he said: ‘... “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”’ (Matthew 15:24). It was some seven years after his death that the gospel message started to be preached to Gentiles (see Acts chapter 10) and only gradually was Christianity seen as anything more than a sect of the Jews.

If the Gospel records were compiled after AD 70 then this would be evident from the way things were recorded. The fact that there is no reference to the end of the Jewish state is clearly consistent with them being written before the fall of Jerusalem. (Reference is made to the fall of Jerusalem in the Gospel records e.g.

Matthew 24:1-2 but only ever in the form of prophecy. This was something yet to happen).

John’s description of the pool of Bethesda is a case in point: ‘Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches’ (John 5:2). We should note this is recorded in the present tense –it was the state of things at the time of writing. The pool of Bethesda used to be situated just to the north of the Temple area in Jerusalem, but this area was subject to the severest destruction during the Roman siege of Jerusalem. If this had been written after that time, then at the very least it would be recorded as, ‘Now there was in Jerusalem...’. Many similar examples could be cited to illustrate this point.

The description of the tomb where Jesus’ body was laid also has a historical bearing. We read: ‘and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed’ (Matthew 27:60). The type of tomb described here was only used for a short period of time and is only found in the land of Israel. The ‘rolling stone’ tombs (see picture opposite) were only used between about 30 BC and AD 70. They were unknown after this time. If the Gospel accounts were the product of a later



A replica of a rolling stone tomb from Nazareth

age then it is extremely unlikely to be described like this.

The integrity of the gospel writers

Even a casual reading of the Gospel accounts of the circumstances of the death and burial of Jesus reveals the freshness of a first-hand eyewitness. There is no hint of tradition or legend in the record as one would inevitably expect if they were the product of a generation or two of being handed down by word of mouth. We have every reason to believe that the authors of the Gospels were indeed Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Matthew and John feature in the accounts themselves and would therefore have been eyewitnesses to the events. Luke alone amongst the Gospel writers does not appear to have been an eyewitness to the events, but his reputation for meticulous historical accuracy is widely recognised in all of his writing, and we need have no doubt that what he wrote, although from second-hand sources, is equally an accurate record of events.

Mark is widely believed to feature in the events surrounding Jesus' arrest in the garden of Gethsemane. In an incident only recorded by Mark himself we read of a '*certain young man*' who fled away into the night.

This we can understand to be Mark's way of saying, 'Yes I was there too, I know what happened.' He wrote: *'Then they all forsook him and fled. Now a certain young man followed him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him, and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked'* (Mark 14:50-52). Internal evidence for connecting this episode with Mark comes from Acts 12 verse 12 where we are told that Mark's mother had a house in Jerusalem that was used as a meeting place. It was most likely the place of the keeping of 'the Lord's supper' from whence the young Mark followed the disciples to the garden.

The ring of truth

Do men tell false stories that show themselves in a bad light? If the apostles made up the story of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, then surely they would want to frame their story to show themselves in the best possible light. Yet this is far from the case. They openly record their own disbelief when first confronted with the evidence of the resurrection. Luke records the risen Christ castigating the disciples for not believing:

'Then he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have

spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?"' Luke 24:25-26

Further apostolic disbelief is recorded by Mark: *'And when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe'* (Mark 16:11).

Why do they record the witness of women? Under rabbinic law the testimony of women was despised and not allowed as legal witness. Yet it was the women disciples who are on record as the first to see the risen Christ. Why record Nicodemus, a leading Jew, in a good light at the death of Jesus if it was not a true record? *'And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds'* (John 19.39). This behaviour, we should note, was in sharp contrast to the disciples at this time who are recorded as having forsaken Jesus and fled.

The Gospel accounts portray a traumatised and frightened group of disciples who were genuinely taken aback by the evidence of the resurrection. The sheer honesty of their records, testifying to their own failures of belief and action at a critical time for their faith, bears witness to the truthfulness of the words they wrote.

Ian Giles
Norfolk UK

Bible Questions and Answers

Many years ago I was asked a question after a Bible presentation. The enquirer had been reading his Bible and was puzzled about what it said in relation to what he had been brought up to believe. He asked:

where is Abraham?

It is an excellent question because it touches on the very essence of the true Christian faith. The answer is a simple one and it explains what Abraham's hope was based on, and how that hope has been, still is, and will be worked out in God's purpose. The answer is, Abraham is dead, still in the grave where he was buried. But the point of the question was, if Abraham is dead does he have a future life, and if so, when and where? You see the questioner understood that nowhere in the Bible is heaven mentioned as Abraham's place of reward. But God did offer Abraham a future life. So how is this possible?

Promises made to Abraham

Abraham, like every human being since creation, was subject to death. But while he was living he was given promises by God, as recorded in Genesis chapters 12 to 22. In fact, you can trace seven distinct promises that cover the following points:

1. Abraham was told to leave his home in Ur (now in Iraq) and travel to a land God would show him (Genesis 12). He left the relative prosperity of Ur and as a nomad made an 800 mile trek from Ur in Mesopotamia to reach that promised land.
2. This land was known as Canaan or what later became the kingdom of Israel. The ancient Greeks re-named the land Palestine.
3. Abraham was promised a 'seed' or descendant through Sarah his wife.
4. He and his descendants would become numerous.
5. They would inherit the land and live in it for ever.
6. A particular descendant would become victorious and bring blessings to all nations of the earth – not just to Abraham's family.
7. We know from the New Testament that the 'seed' or descendant of the promises was most importantly, Jesus Christ – a very special and unique offspring of Abraham (Galatians 3:16).

The promises were not fulfilled in Abraham's lifetime

It is evident from the book of Genesis however, that these promises were not fulfilled during Abraham's lifetime. We are told that he wandered like a stranger around the land, even having to buy a burial plot from a family of the Hittites (Genesis 25:9-10). He certainly did not own the land and has not lived in it for ever, as promised. Neither did his son Isaac, nor his grandson Jacob, both of whom had these same promises repeated to them.

In the New Testament we are clearly told that Abraham and his wife Sarah were among those who didn't receive their promised inheritance:

'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, they were assured of them, embraced

them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.'

Hebrews 11:13

However, it is abundantly clear that Abraham during his lifetime believed implicitly in the personal fulfilment of those promises; even to the point of being prepared to obey God's command to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice, when his faith in those promises was put to the test. We might call it the ultimate test. The Genesis 22 account explains that God intervened and provided a ram for a sacrifice in place of Isaac. But one of the salient points that come out of this incident is Abraham's implicit belief in the ability of God to raise the dead. He believed that, even if he had sacrificed his son, God would have raised him from the dead.

This is clearly implied by Abraham's conversation with his servants beforehand, and confirmed by the

The traditional site of Abraham's family tomb in Hebron



New Testament commentary in the letter to the Hebrews:

'By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.'

Hebrews 11:17-19

The supreme faith of Abraham was the feature that God recognised when He confirmed that promise. The promise involved living again on the earth, as we see from these words of the Apostle Paul: *'For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith'* (Romans 4:13). Note the phrase *'heir of the world'*.

We must now answer the related question – what happened to Abraham when he died? Regular readers of this magazine may well be familiar with the Bible answer to this question. Man dies because of sin. Death was a punishment given to Adam, Eve and all their descendants. Indeed, the real story of the Bible is all about the divine plan to reverse that process – and that is what Abraham believed in, the resurrection of the dead to eternal life!

What happened when Abraham died?

The Bible is very clear about the state of the dead; they know nothing. Even those related to a resurrection are described as being 'asleep', in other words completely unconscious (see Ecclesiastes 9:5-6; Daniel 12:2). Abraham, his wife Sarah, and Isaac and Jacob were all buried in the cave of Machpelah in the plot of land that Abraham had bought at Hebron.

There is no record in the Bible of Abraham (or anyone else) having an immortal soul which went on living in heaven after death. In fact, the phrases 'immortal soul' and 'ever-living soul' do not appear in the Bible at all! The Bible is consistent in teaching that all men and women are mortal and will perish completely after death. Let the three following passages suffice to emphasise this point:

❖ It was God who pronounced death as a punishment for sin in the first place and this was very clear in his curse upon Adam:

"Cursed is the ground for your sake...In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return".'

Genesis 3:17-19

- ❖ The wise man Solomon wrote in the book of Ecclesiastes:

‘For what happens to the sons of men also happens to beasts; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust.’ Ecclesiastes 3:19

The ‘one place’ is the grave.

- ❖ David wrote: ‘For in death there is no remembrance of you; In the grave who will give you thanks?’ Psalm 6:5

So, if Abraham is dead and not in heaven, then God’s personal promises to him that he will live for ever have not yet been fulfilled.

Abraham’s hope

What then is the hope of Abraham? He awaits a future resurrection from the dead to inherit those promises with his family of faith, together with his special offspring Jesus Christ. His work to defeat sin and its consequences has made the future inheritance of the kingdom possible for ‘Abraham and his seed’. To live in ‘the land’ forever involves an inheritance in the kingdom of God to be established on the earth. As the commentary in Hebrews chapter 11 states, all the faithful men and

women listed in that chapter lived their lives in the hope ‘that they might obtain a better resurrection’ (Hebrews 11:35).

We are clearly told in the same chapter that all God’s faithful children, even those alive today, will receive their reward at the same time:

‘And all these having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.’

Hebrews 11:39–40

This will be the day spoken of by the Apostle Paul:

‘I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom: Preach the word !...’ 2 Timothy 4:1–2

In summary then, we can say with confidence that Abraham, together with all the men and women of faith throughout the ages, are dead, ‘asleep’ and unconscious, awaiting the call to resurrection, judgement and a glorious gift of immortal life; to be with Christ at his second coming when he comes to establish God’s heavenly kingdom on the earth.

Justin Giles
London, UK

COMMENT

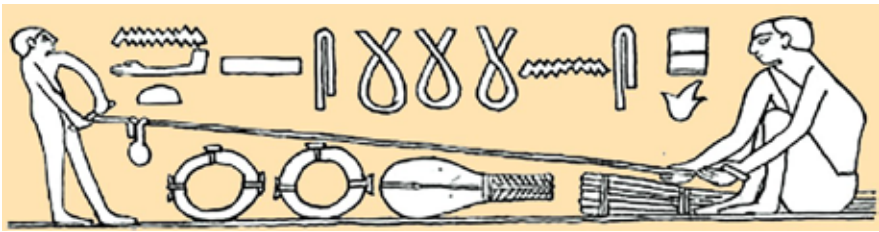
'Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And

a threefold cord

is not quickly broken' (Ecclesiastes 4.12)

This may have been a popular saying or proverb before Solomon wrote it down; a nugget of commonsense wisdom widely known to his readers. A rope with several strands will always be stronger than a single strand, so he says it is better to live and work together with our neighbours, and benefit from their company and help, rather than pursuing a solitary course through life.

The art of rope-making seems to be one of the oldest technologies known to mankind, going back at least three or four thousand years to the time of



the Pharaohs in Egypt, and beyond (see above). For millennia we have been turning natural fibres like cotton and hemp into cord, twisting and braiding separate cords into rope, and using rope in a hundred and one different ways to pull, to bind, to lift, to secure and to climb. In a rather similar way women have been doing the same with their hair, twisting and braiding the individual strands into plaits in the name of convenience or fashion.

As technology developed, the demand for longer and stronger rope increased, (a large sailing vessel from the navies of the late Middle Ages went to sea with about 20 miles of rope on board! see cover picture).



The simple techniques and machines were replaced by the great rope walkways of the industrial age (see previous page). The natural organic fibres gave way to the new materials of nylon and terylene and many others. The recreational industries of sailing and climbing made their own demands for high performance and utterly reliable rope of every kind.

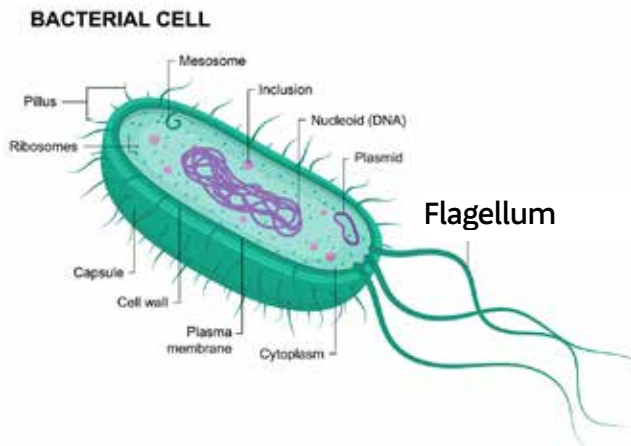
It's a familiar story that can be seen in any field of human technology. First, we identify a need, a problem that needs solving. Then using our natural inventiveness and intelligence we begin to work out solutions, starting with simple hand-made tools and using commonly available materials, developing and improving techniques over long periods of time. Then we invent new materials and machines until the latest technology far exceeds the capacity of the earlier individual craftsman. But, with rope in particular, the essential principle remains the same: 'a threefold cord is not quickly broken'. So, when we retrieve a scrap of rope from an ancient Egyptian tomb, we know where it came from, and we understand something of the process by which it was made, and which links it to the ball of twine in our garden shed.

So far, so good, but where is all this going?

This becomes really interesting when we find a piece of rope which is clearly not the result of human technology, something which uses the same principle of construction but supposedly without the intelligence behind it. The natural world is full of examples, though they are too small for us to see. Some of the smallest and most numerous of living things, bacteria, use this same technology – the use of multiple strands of material tightly twisted together to provide strength, lightness and flexibility.

The flagellum

This is a simple diagram of what a typical bacterium looks like under a microscope – a roughly oval-shaped body attached to a lengthy filament about ten times the length of the body. It looks like a tail, but in fact rotates



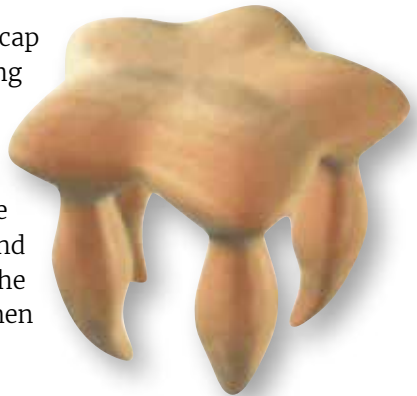
to act like a large, corkscrew-shaped propellor that enables the bacteria to move around. Some bacteria have several of them working together. Each one is driven by a tiny motor in the body of the bacteria, at about 200 to 1,000 rpm, with forward and reverse gears. Biologists like to give Latin names to things, and this tail/propeller is called a 'flagellum', the Latin word for 'whip'.

This flagellum must meet a very tight engineering specification. It needs to be long enough and stiff enough to provide propulsion, strong enough to resist breakages, and light enough to be driven by the tiny rotary motor inside the body of the bacteria. To achieve this, the flagellum is made not just of one strand, but **several strands twisted together like a rope**. The number of strands varies, depending on the type of bacteria; the example shown here has five strands. The raw material which is used is a special protein, produced as a single continuous extruded filament by a site in the bacteria linked to the motor, and travelling up a tiny capillary tube at the centre of the flagellum.

So how does a single strand of protein become a rope of five or more strands twisted tightly together?

The filament cap

This is the key to the whole process. The cap (see right), made from a special capping protein (Flid), is like a five-sided button, but projecting from its underside are five legs of a quite complex and specific shape. As its name implies, the cap sits over the top of the emerging filament of protein and remains there throughout the growth of the flagellum until it is complete. The cap is then discarded, its job done.



This is how it works...

The legs underneath the cap and their precise shape are the critical components here. As the filament emerges below the cap, it encounters one of the legs on the cap. It fills up the space between the cap and the leg and at the same time is guided to one side. The cap then rotates one fifth of a turn, the next leg moves into position, the next piece of filament does the

same as the first, and so on. So, the original single filament builds up by small increments into a helical shape (like a spring), the cap slowly moves outwards to accommodate the growing filaments, and the flagellum gradually grows as a strong lightweight 5-stranded rope of protein (a computer animation of this process can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/B7bBczQ?t=4> from 4.0). When the flagellum is long enough (about 20,000 molecules strung together), the supply of filament stops, and the cap is discarded.

The toothpaste experiment

It's difficult to find a similar everyday process to illustrate what is happening here, but you could try this....

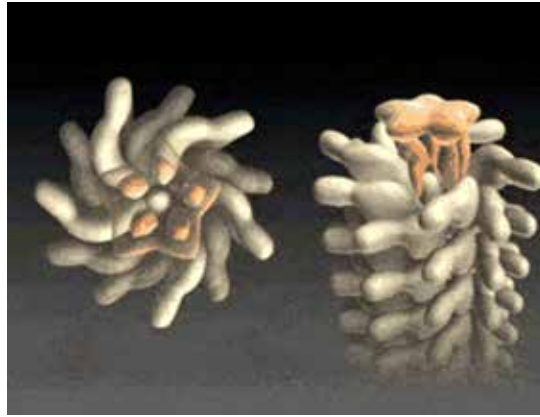
Imagine a tube of toothpaste (or ideally something a bit stiffer, like processed cheese!). You remove the cap, reverse the cap so that the closed end is facing the open end of the tube, and hold it very close and slightly off centre. Squeeze the tube, and transfer a small amount of paste onto the cap. If you then partly rotate the cap, that bit of paste moves round out of the way, and a new section of paste can be squeezed onto the cap. Once the cap has made one complete turn, continuing the process will add further paste to each blob that already exists.



Now imagine the plastic cap replaced by a much more complex shape like the flagellar cap (previous page), and imagine the tube of paste replaced by a completely self-contained toothpaste/protein manufacturing machine

Computer model of the cap sitting on top as the filaments grow below it, rather like a spiral staircase

that provides a continuous supply of paste. Maybe you are now beginning to get the idea of what is happening here. Perhaps you can also see how much can go wrong (toothpaste everywhere!), how carefully the legs of the cap need to be shaped, how the rotation rate of the cap needs to be synchronised with the flow of the protein supply. Note too, the protein needs to travel the full length of the growing flagellum down a tiny capillary tube before it reaches the cap.



All this takes place at an unbelievably small molecular scale; it is only within the last few years that the technology has existed to enable us to study it. It's going on all the time – it's happening in your body and billions of others at this moment. It's happening because all the information that describes it in every detail is securely stored in the bacteria's DNA.

The bacterial flagellum and the motor that drives it display all the qualities we have learnt to expect from human technology: the clear sense of purpose, of a need being first identified and then satisfied by a creative, imaginative solution. And yet this is the 'natural' world. The accepted wisdom of a materialist worldview is that this arrangement ('machine') shows no sense of purpose, no design, no foresight, and no creativity. It is simply the result a long series of accidents called 'evolution', a succession of entirely fortuitous mistakes. It is surely obvious that the whole mechanism needs to be in place before it can produce any useful product. No-one has provided any explanation of how an undirected step-by-tiny-step evolutionary process could produce such a result. In my view it is futile even to attempt it.

This is my own attempt to understand and convey in a hugely (over?) – simplified way how this astounding 'natural' mechanism works. If you would like to see some of the original research, this can be found at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC307601/pdf/10015528.pdf>

This is the comment of one of the scientists involved:

‘Since the flagellum is so well-designed and beautifully constructed by an ordered assembly pathway, even I, who am not a creationist, get an awe-inspiring feeling from its ‘divine beauty’. However, if the flagellum has evolved from a primitive form, where are the remnants of its ancestor? Why don’t we see any simpler forms of flagella than what they are today? How was it possible that the flagella have evolved without leaving traces in history?’

(Shin-Ichi Aizawa, ‘Pili and Flagella: Current Research and Future Trends’ Caister Academic Press 2009).

Contrary to popular belief, scientists have their own preconceptions just like everybody else, and inevitably their worldview and personal beliefs colour their interpretation of the evidence. Jonathan McLatchie, after describing the flagellum, makes this interesting comment:

‘The sheer **beauty** and **elegance** of the bacterial flagellum has been largely hidden from the public view because of the **time** and **patience** it takes to understand and absorb the details of its assembly and operation. Without such detail, however, **it is all too easy to under-appreciate the engineering grandeur** of the flagella apparatus’ (scribd.com – my emphasis).

‘Beauty’ and ‘elegance,’ requiring ‘time’ and ‘patience’ to appreciate it.

The Apostle Paul tells us that the great Creator reveals Himself to us in the astounding beauty, complexity and wisdom of nature – the ‘book of nature’ as it has often been called. Paul wrote ‘...since the creation of the world his (God’s) invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead...’ (Romans 1:20).

But God speaks to us directly through another book – his Word, the Bible. This book too is a thing of grandeur and beauty, and it demands our time and our patience. As the writer above puts it: ‘It is all too easy to under-appreciate’ it.

How much time, how much patience do you have?

Roy Toms
Norfolk, UK



signs of the times

Rome burning – painting by David Roberts

Legend has it that Nero played the violin while his capital city Rome burned in the disastrous fires of AD 68. The saying ‘Nero fiddled while Rome burned’ has come to be an expression for ineffectual action, or even indifference, during a crisis where you have a serious responsibility that you ignore. There’s also an inference that the activity being indulged in is frivolous, especially in comparison to the severity of the crisis being ignored.

It seems to me that there are not one, but two existential crises in our world. As I write these words in late December 2021, I can sadly be confident that both crises will still be there if you read this article when it is published, God willing, in March 2022.

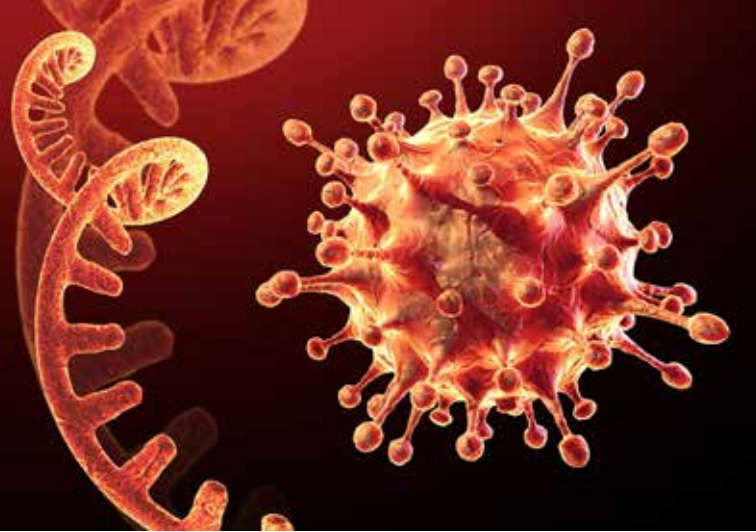
So, what’s my point in referring to Nero? Simply that I often think of him, and the saying about him, when

I read news media. Right alongside articles about very serious matters, things that may well compromise the survival of humanity, you find the story of what dress the latest celebrity wore to the latest celebrity event. And an amazing range in between. I know it’s about human interest and not making everything doom and gloom. But I think there’s at least a bit of Nero in most of us. At least in a tendency to have a good time while ignoring serious realities. As the Scripture says of life without God: ‘*Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die*’ (Isaiah 22:13).

And the crises?

Covid

At the end of 2020 there was a strong feeling that 2021 would be better. Surely! Well, it wasn’t, was it? Not in relation to our experience with Covid anyway. What wave number is your



The Omicron variant of Covid which is spreading rapidly across the world

country up to now? Israel is on number 5! The Covid virus has mutated, changed its shape, and become, if not more deadly, certainly much more infectious. We've been through Alpha; Delta is still around, and now there is Omicron. Current medical opinion is leaning towards Omicron not being as harmful as Delta but much more infectious. Of course, only time will tell when there is more for medical scientists to examine. One thing is for sure. It is spreading around the world like wildfire.

Will the coming year be better than 2021? On the basis of Omicron alone you'd have to say - unlikely. It probably won't be better. Eventually the Covid virus may mutate its way out of existence. But how many more variants will there be before that happens - if it does?

This extract from The Economist dated 19 December 2021 is a good and relatively brief summary of the situation at that time:

'The highly infectious Omicron variant already accounts for a majority of Covid-19 cases in London. It is now surging in continental Europe, prompting governments there to rush in new rules. Germany is imposing a 14-day quarantine on all travellers arriving from Britain, starting on December 20th. France closed its borders to tourists from Britain on December 18th. Restrictions on international travel will not be enough to contain the spread of the variant, however. On December 19th the Netherlands introduced a strict new lockdown, which will last until at least January 14th. Tighter rules are in prospect elsewhere, too.

The scramble comes just as many European countries had begun to turn the corner on a prior wave of infections caused by the Delta variant. A peak had been passed in Germany and the Netherlands; the rate of increase in new cases in France had also begun to slow. Omicron is upending such trends. It

is taking over in Denmark. The variant is spreading across the rest of Europe at 'lightning speed', said Jean Castex, the French prime minister, on December 17th, with the number of new cases due to Omicron doubling every two to three days. Oliver Véran, the French health minister, says that the variant could make up a majority of cases in France by Christmas.'

How's all that looking if you are reading this in 2022?

Climate Change

There are few people who do not acknowledge that Covid exists. There seem to be many more people who, if they do not deny climate change is a reality, consider themselves as sceptics. Over the last several years climate science has improved to the point where much clearer conclusions can be drawn about what is affected by climate change and what is not. As I write, the recent and unprecedented tornadoes in the US are still being studied to determine what role, if any, climate change has played.

There is however enough evidence about rising temperatures, changes in sea level, and concerns about the polar ice caps melting at a greatly increased rate, to be unequivocally clear that there is climate change. How much, what effect, when, how catastrophic? These things, and more, remain unclear. But the reasonable conclusion many of us draw is that climate change is real. It does pose a serious threat to the human race today – and exponentially so in the future. Many fear for the future of this planet, if not for us now, for our children and grandchildren.

So, what is the world doing about all this? Co-operating? After all, climate change affects the whole world, so a whole world approach is surely a sensible thing. It takes very little investigation to discover that the overall approach to climate change is anything but a coordinated international effort. The same applies to the Covid crisis. All in all, the outlook for humanity is grim.

I wrote about the **international Glasgow conference on climate**

The buildings for the Glasgow conference lit up in green



change in the last article. It was then upcoming. I suggested that ‘Glasgow will most likely be yet another occasion that world leaders (see picture below) have got together and made supposedly binding decisions on reducing the harmful emissions that appear to be affecting climate so severely. Some changes will be made and indeed have been made. But there is doubt about whether it is enough.’

As predictions go it was pretty accurate and sadly, easy to predict! The Bible is clear about the limitations of human nature. Self-interest, greed, and much more come to the fore, ahead of altruism and co-operation. So, no surprises about the lack of action.

What the Bible says about all this, and more

I’ve chosen a few Bible passages that say something about the present and the future that God will realise in His good time. Taken together they explain why humanity is faced with crises, and why, to a believer in God’s Word, it comes as no surprise.

Jesus is coming back, and when he does, his power will be unlimited:

Joe Biden, the president of the USA, addresses the Glasgow conference

‘And while they looked steadfastly towards heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “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 1:10–11

‘Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.’
Mark 13:26

When Jesus comes back, God’s servants will rule this earth with him:

‘And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.”’
Revelation 5:9–10

I’ve quoted the words ‘...and should destroy those who destroy the earth’



from Revelation 11:18 in previous articles. They are important because the destroyers of the earth are those who wilfully pollute God's creation in both a moral and a physical sense. And they themselves will be destroyed. Very relevant to climate change and pollution!

Jesus told his disciples:

'And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heaven will be shaken.'

Luke 21:25-26

Before Jesus returns there will be troubled times, as he told his disciples. Our times qualify, don't they? It's easy to relate *'men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth'* to Covid and climate change.

Jesus then said:

'Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.'

Luke 21:27-28

We don't have to worry about these things if we believe in God. They are a sign to us that Jesus is coming back. The media is full of events that are signposts to the certainty of Jesus' return. I have highlighted Covid and climate change but there's so much more – wars, corruption, social inequity (the gap between the super-rich and the rest gets inexorably bigger and bigger). And so on.

Conclusion

Earlier in this article I emphasised the word **'if'** in the statement **'if you are reading this in 2022.'**

It's entirely possible that you won't be reading it. Why? Because Jesus has come back to this earth. One minute he won't be here and the next minute he will be back! There won't be any more need for articles about Jesus' return then, will there?

I hope there will be lots of people waiting eagerly for him and the wonderful future in a perfect world that he will usher in. In a time of turmoil believing these words is a great comfort to me. And I hope it will be to you as well.

David Gamble
Melbourne, Australia



from the editor

As I write this at the beginning of 2022, I'm reminded of an event that occurred almost exactly one year ago on 6th January 2021 in the US. What was perceived as unthinkable actually happened – protesters against President Biden's government, seeking to overturn the defeat of Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election, rioted and violently overran the Capitol building, the seat of government, in Washington DC.

A study released recently has asked the question – **are we in an historic age of protest?** Entitled 'World Protests: a Study of Key Protest Issues in the 21st Century' this examined more than 900 protest movements or episodes in 100 countries and regions around the world. The study has found that the number of protests has more than tripled in less than 15 years, and they are becoming increasingly violent with the passing of time.

Protest movements seem to be part of everyday life. In the UK, they include seemingly harmless petitions

to try and bring about change or to stop changes that may harm our way of life. Recently protesters in the UK have sat in the middle of busy motorways and even glued themselves to the road, risking life and limb in an effort to make their voices heard.

But why? The short answer is democratic failure. The conclusion of the study is that the majority of protests (54%) were prompted by a perceived failure of political systems or representation. Lack of real democracy, inequality, corruption and lack of real action over climate change were among the main themes.

The failure of human governments is nothing new, it's been with us for a very long time. Protests often result in violence and death as seen in the attack on the Capitol building last year. They can also result in the overthrow of governments or violent crackdowns on protesters with much injury and loss of life. This has also resulted in the mass movement of

people fleeing from oppressive regimes and trying to build new lives in other countries, leading to a rapidly growing refugee crisis.

To many people the world is heading for disaster, but for Bible students this comes as no surprise. Jesus warned his disciples to expect this to happen in the time leading up to his return. He used symbolic language to describe the state of the world that we see today as ***‘the sea and the waves roaring’*** (Luke 21:25). The Old Testament prophet Isaiah described the wicked as being ***‘like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt’*** (Isaiah 57:20). If you’ve ever seen a storm at sea or watched huge waves crashing on a shore, I’m sure you will agree that it’s an apt symbol of the turmoil we see in the world in this age of protests.

The message of the Bible is that, despite appearances to the contrary, God is in control. As the prophet Daniel told the king of Babylon: ***‘...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). The Bible reveals his ultimate plan for the world, and this plan is coming to its grand conclusion. Jesus will return as he promised, to replace all forms of human government with one world-wide government, and the day is fixed in the divine calendar.

The Apostle Paul told the Athenians: ***‘...he (God) has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all, by raising him from the dead’*** (Acts 17:31).

The true followers of Jesus will not get involved in protests of any kind, because they have the assurance from God’s Word that His plan will be realised. His unseen hand is directing the nations to bring about its fulfilment. Paul’s advice to the first century Christians who lived in Rome was very clear: ***‘Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established... Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgement on themselves’*** (Romans 13:1–2 NIV).

We can rest assured that the present world order will be overturned before long. The advice of Jesus in Luke 21 is to be patient and prepare for the day of his coming. He told his disciples that the day would come unexpectedly for the majority, but to them he said:

‘Watch, therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man’.
Luke 21:36

Moses as a type of Christ

What is a type?

As we have seen in previous articles in the series, the idea of a type is that of a prototype or forerunner. So when we see someone compared to Jesus Christ, we can note certain similarities in the lives of Bible characters that point forward to his life and mission. Different characters will foreshadow different aspects of the life and work of our saviour. In this article we will look at Moses, and how his life gave us glimpses or insights into Jesus' life.

Moses was an Israelite from the tribe of Levi. The name Moses was given to him by Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him (Exodus 2:1-10). It is interesting that the name has relevance in both Egyptian and Hebrew. It's from the Egyptian words 'mo' meaning water and 'mes' meaning child. In Hebrew it's from the verb 'masha' meaning to extract from water. This name refers directly to the early event in Moses' life, when he was placed in a floating basket in the River Nile and entrusted to God, because his parents were not allowed to keep him.

Moses' life in brief

Although Moses grew up in the household of an Egyptian princess, he was nursed by his real mother. This meant that he was well aware of his heritage, even as he was being groomed in the Egyptian court, possibly to assume some princely role. However, there is no mention of what that might have been, even though he was there until he was 40 years old. The New Testament records that *'Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds'* (Acts 7:22).

When Moses was 40 he killed an Egyptian and fled to Midian (Acts 7:23-29). He settled with the family of Jethro, a priest, and married Jethro's daughter, Zipporah, in Midian and had two sons (Acts 7:29). When he was 80 (Acts 7:30), Yahweh, the God of Israel, called to him out of a burning bush and told him he must return to Egypt and rescue the Israelites from the oppression they were suffering as slaves there (Exodus 3:1-10).

After a succession of plagues on Egypt, Pharaoh eventually let the Israelites leave and they headed for the land (now called Israel) promised to their ancestor Abraham. After forty more years, travelling through the wilderness of Sinai, a rash outburst of temper, and failing to give God the glory for the provision of water, meant that Moses was prevented by God from entering the Promised Land (Numbers 20:12; Deuteronomy 34:1-5).

It may seem a harsh punishment for someone who had faithfully served God for so many years, but (a) it was a lesson for the other Israelites and (b) there was a lot of work to do, and it was time for the next generation to take over. The account of Moses' life ends with the divine assessment of his character in these words: *'But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face...'* (Deuteronomy 34:10). There are many similarities demonstrating that Moses was a true 'type' of Jesus Christ. In the table overleaf are some of the most obvious ones:



From the splendour of Egypt, through the torrid wilderness of Sinai, Moses led his people for 40 years toward the Promised Land



Event	Moses	Jesus
Both survived massacres of infant boys through the actions of their parents	By being placed in the river Nile in an 'ark'. (Exodus 2:3)	By being taken to Egypt (Matthew 2:13)
Both came out of Egypt	Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 12:41)	Jesus' parents brought him out of Egypt when the threat from Herod had passed (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15)
Both were lawgivers	God gave the Law to Moses, who wrote it on stone tablets (Deuteronomy 31:9)	Jesus gave new commandments, based on the spirit, rather than the letter of the Law (John 13:34)
Both communed with God on a mountain.	Receiving the Law from God on Mount Sinai (Exodus chs.19 and 24)	The transfiguration: A vision of Moses appeared to Jesus along with Elijah (Matthew 17:1-3)
Both had a close relationship with God.	'the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend' (Exodus 33:11)	Jesus called Almighty God 'Father' and prayed to him constantly. More importantly, God answered him (John 12:28) God called Jesus his beloved Son (Matthew 3:17)
Both faced opposition – people turning away and no longer following.	Worshipping a golden calf (Exodus 32:1-8) Demanding other food (Numbers 11:4-6).	Would not accept Jesus' teachings (John 6:52, 59-64)

Both faced opposition from their own family	Miriam and Aaron criticise Moses for marrying a Cushite (Numbers 12:1-2)	The brothers of Jesus do not believe in him. (John 7:4-6)
Both clashed with the authorities	Constant battle with Pharaoh to let the people go! (Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 14:4)	Contending with the religious teachers (Luke 5:21,30, 9:22) Jewish council tried to condemn Jesus (Matthew 26:59-60)
Both had a 'last Supper'	Before leaving Egypt – the Passover meal (Exodus 12)	With his disciples, before his arrest and execution (Luke 22: 7-20)
Both performed miracles (or had miracles performed through them)	Water from the rock (Exodus 17:6, Numbers 20:8) Parting of the sea (Exodus 14:21) etc.	(Mark 6:2) Performed signs and wonders (John 7:31) Multiple events in Jesus' life (John 21:25)

Conclusions

Out of all these similarities between Moses and Jesus, we can perhaps focus on just three:

- ❖ leading their people out of slavery.
- ❖ giving a Law or Covenant.
- ❖ initiating a significant meal of remembrance.

Out of Slavery

We might not know exactly what it was like to be a slave in ancient Egypt, but, at the very least, it was forced labour and lack of liberty. Moses was tasked to lead the Israelites out of Egypt to freedom. We may not be slaves in the literal sense, but, as the Scriptures plainly spell out, we are slaves to our sinful natures:

‘... we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.’

Romans 7:14

‘Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.”’

John 8:34

However, we are still subject to sin, but if we are ‘*in Christ*’, sin no longer has ultimate power over us, as the words of the Apostle Paul show:

‘For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable puts on the imperishable, and this mortal puts on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written: "DEATH HAS BEEN SWALLOWED UP in victory. WHERE, O DEATH, IS YOUR VICTORY? WHERE, O DEATH, IS YOUR STING?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.’

1 Corinthians 15:53–57 (NASB)

We can see here the direct parallel between the work of Moses and the work of Jesus.

Giving a Law or Covenant

The Law that God gave to Moses started with 10 straightforward commandments. This was added to and elaborated, particularly to do with worship and food, although it covered just about every aspect of daily life. There were also penalties given for breaking any law, most usually a sacrifice but occasionally the ultimate penalty – death by stoning.

The Law that Moses was given provided no lasting solution for sin, only a temporary fix. Each Israelite would continue to sin and would continue to offer sacrifices for those sins. Under the Law of Moses, the high priest entered the Most Holy place of the tabernacle, once every year on the Day of Atonement, to obtain forgiveness for himself and the sins of the people (Leviticus 16:29–34). But Jesus instituted a new and better law or covenant with a permanent solution for sin, atoned for by his own sacrifice (the Hebrew word translated ‘*atone*’ literally means ‘to cover over’). We read in the letter to the Hebrews:

‘But Christ came as high priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood he entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.’

Hebrews 9:11-12

Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses perfectly because he was sinless and he took it out of the way through his death, ‘*having nailed it to the cross*’ (Colossians 2:14).

So, it is very clear in the giving of the Law that Moses was a ‘type’ or forerunner of Jesus.

Initiating a significant meal of remembrance.

Before the Israelites were allowed to leave Egypt there was a series of plagues, the last of which was the death of the firstborn: ‘*...at midnight...the LORD struck all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of livestock*’ (Exodus 12:29).

The angel of death that God sent was told to ‘*pass over*’ the houses of the Israelites, which is how the meal came to be named the Passover. The Israelite houses were identified by blood daubed round the doorway. The blood was from a lamb that was sacrificed, and was the main ingredient of the Passover meal that the Israelites ate in haste before leaving on their journey.

Jesus and his disciples met together to celebrate the Passover meal, to which Jesus gave a new significance, linking his own body and blood to the bread and the wine:

‘Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, “Where do You want us to go and prepare, that you may eat the Passover?”’ (the Passover lamb is also a powerful symbol of Jesus, but we will not digress right now).

‘And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” Then he took the cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all

drank from it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many".'

Mark 14.12

So the meal pointed forward to the sacrifice of Jesus, just as the Passover meal instituted by Moses did.

and finally...

We are not alone in seeing the strong similarities between Moses and Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews saw it as well, and showed that Moses pointed forward to Jesus as a 'type', in Hebrews chapter three:

- 1 'Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our confession, Christ Jesus,
- 2 who was faithful to him who appointed him, as **Moses** also was faithful in all his house.
- 3 For this one has been counted worthy of more glory than **Moses**, inasmuch as he who built the house has more honour than the house.
- 4 For every house is built by someone, but he who built all things is God.
- 5 And **Moses** indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterwards,
- 6 but Christ as a son over his own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.'

We are grateful as ever for the clear and consistent message of hope contained in the Scriptures for our guidance and encouragement.

Andrew Longman
Milton Keynes,

God and the nations

This series of articles highlights key Bible events and teaching, and hopefully will encourage the reader to pick up a Bible and read the relevant passages that are the basis of Bible teaching. We can provide you with previous articles in this series on request.

In earlier articles we wrote about God's promise to establish His Kingdom on Earth, that Jesus Christ will be the king over the Kingdom of God on Earth, and that God made an unfailing promise to Abraham: through his seed or descendant (Jesus Christ) – that all nations will be blessed. Read again the passages which have these verses at their centre:

Read: Genesis 13:14-15 and Genesis 22:18.

God is in control

Almighty God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, does have a purpose with the Earth and with mankind. The Bible clearly shows throughout its pages that the affairs of the nations are under His control. This control extends to individual people as well. After a period of study of the Bible's message this control can clearly be seen, not just in Bible times, but also since the Bible was written right up to the present day. Two passages on this topic are recommended reading to start with:

Read: Daniel chapter 4 and Acts 17:24-28.

The fulfilment of God's purpose with the Earth is clearly spoken of in Bible prophecies, and central to that purpose is, firstly, the exile of His people, the Jews, from the Land of Promise, and secondly their regathering to their ancient homeland after a period of dispersion and persecution among the nations. Many hundreds of years before the time of Christ, Bible prophets wrote that the Jews would be exiled from the Land of Israel.

However, just as Bible prophets also wrote, the Jews were regathered to their land from exile. This has taken place throughout the first half of the twentieth century and continues even to today. This has happened after their persecution in every corner of the globe to which they were exiled. The nation of Israel was re-established in 1948. This makes Israel today

absolutely pivotal in international events as far the return of Christ to this Earth goes, because God is in control. *Read: Deuteronomy chapters 28–30.*

In these chapters, notice how Moses during the last days of his life some 3,500 years ago, acting under divine inspiration, told Israel how they would develop as a nation if they obeyed God's instructions, and how they would be punished by God if they ignored him and became like the idol-worshipping nations around them.

God clearly has the nations under his control. To give a small insight into this huge subject we will now focus on the prophet Daniel. He was taken into captivity when Jerusalem was sacked at the end of the period of the kingdom of Judah around 600 BC. The story of Daniel in the lions' den is well known to most people, but other things happened to Daniel whilst he was in Babylon. To familiarise yourself with the context of Daniel's prophecies read Daniel chapter 1.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream

A broad outline of world history is given in Daniel chapter two. This book was written over 500 years before the time of Christ, that's over 2,500 years ago. The framework of world history (in the future to Daniel and still partly future today) is divinely laid out and quite awe-inspiring.

Read: Daniel chapter 2.

The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar dreamed about an image made of different metals. If you have read the chapter, you will know that the symbology of the image is described by Daniel, and also the explanation of what it represents – see opposite:

NOTE:

If you would like to know more about these prophecies, please see our Light Special Issue '**Light on Bible Prophecy**.' You can apply for a printed copy, read it online or download from our website. For contact details, please see inside back cover.

Daniel Chapter 2

Explanation

Head of gold:

the **Babylonian Empire** (626–539 BC)

v. 38

Breast and arms of silver:

the **Medo-Persian Empire** (539–336 BC)

v. 39

The belly and thighs of brass:

the **Greek Empire** (336 –c.150 BC)

v. 39

Legs of iron:

the **Roman Empire** (c.150 BC – AD 500)

v. 40

Feet and toes – a mixture of iron and clay:

conditions across the world since the

collapse of the Roman Empire – i.e. weak and

strong nations (AD 500 to the present day).

vv. 41–43



In the dream, the image was then struck on the feet (i.e. at the time of the world's divided state – verses 34, 35, 45) by '*a stone cut out without hands*'. Because of Christ's pedigree as 'Son of God', (his work, his death and resurrection), we understand that the stone striking the image is a metaphor for his return to the Earth. He is the stone cut out without hands which will smash the kingdoms of men and set up the Kingdom of God in their place.

Ezekiel's valley of dry bones

This is a simpler example but no less powerful. The prophet Ezekiel had a vision in which Israel, after being scattered throughout the world as a punishment for their waywardness before God, were represented by heaps of dry bones lying in a valley. Ezekiel was shown that the bones came together and had sinews and flesh covering them. Breath was breathed into their bodies and they stood on their feet, a very strong army. This is how he was shown the representation of the revival of Israel, who would be brought back to their own land and there become a nation.

As indicated earlier, Israel was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70 and the Jews were scattered throughout the Roman world. In human terms the likelihood of them being integrated into the nations and losing their national identity was high. Yet the Bible prophecies held good because God was and is in control. Even in the face of terrible persecutions down the ages, including the Nazi Holocaust in the twentieth century, the Jews have survived.

In modern times the UK's 'Balfour Declaration' of 1917 paved the way for the Jews to return to their land. In 1948 the State of Israel was established, an event which some readers will remember, and Israel is still with us today. And so, against all natural odds, after exile and persecutions for almost 1,900 years a few million Jews have been re-established as a nation in their ancient homeland. This is the power of these prophecies and the power of God's hand in the affairs of men, and we see them being fulfilled before our very eyes!

Read: Ezekiel 37: 1-22.

Ezekiel's prophecy about a final invasion of Israel

In spite of Israel's comparatively small footprint and population, since 1948 they have weathered wars and terrorist attacks aimed at destroying them as a nation.

Many Old Testament prophecies describe the state of the world at the return of Jesus Christ. Ezekiel foretold that when Israel is settled back in their own land, there will develop a great military power to the north, which will invade her. The state of the Middle East today resonates strongly with this. In Ezekiel chapter 38 this confederacy of nations led by Gog are named: Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, Persia (Iran), Ethiopia, Libya, Gomer and Togarmah from the far north. The chapter describes how God controls these nations.

There is a piece of homework for those who would find out what territories these nations occupied in Bible times, in order to understand how they fit with today's geographical picture of world powers. It is not something we will develop in this article, but there are strong indicators in the pages of the Bible, secular history, and in archaeological discoveries, all of which

give these names a location in today's world. They are mainly in the area north of Israel, currently in Turkey, Syria, Iran, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Iraq. We know that pressure on Israel, even today, comes from this direction. We do well to remember that God is in control.

Read: Ezekiel chapter 38.

The prophet Daniel wrote about 'a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation'.

Read Daniel 12:1.

There are other indications in the new Testament of the state of the world just before God intervenes by sending Jesus Christ back to the Earth.

Read: Luke 21:25-28; 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

The Kingdom of God on earth

Nebuchadnezzar's dream came to an end when a stone struck the image on the feet and destroyed it (Daniel 2: 44). In place of the image a great mountain grew and filled the earth, thus giving context to the words of the prophet Isaiah: '*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).

These are a small selection of passages from the Bible that show how God's purpose will be accomplished on the Earth. We should be confident that the Bible, having been provided by Almighty God, clearly shows how He is in control of things and how the end of mankind's rule of the world is to come about, giving way to the Kingdom of God ruled over by Jesus Christ from Jerusalem.

We have looked at a mixture of prophecies, some fulfilled and some yet to be fulfilled. The more we look at Bible prophecy, we see that much of it has been fulfilled. There are still a few prophecies to be fulfilled before the return of Christ. Here's a simple outline:

Ezekiel chapter 38 illustrates:

1. An invasion of Israel by a northern confederacy of nations is yet to take place.
2. Divine intervention in person, by Jesus Christ.

In the following prophecies we have **three more key points:**

1 The pouring out of God's judgments on the nations to cleanse the earth from evil and wickedness.

Read: Joel 3:1-2,9-17; Zechariah 14:1-3.

2 The establishment of the world-wide Kingdom of God in which peace and security will be assured.

*Read: Zechariah 14:9; Psalm 2;
Isaiah 2:1-4; Isaiah 32:1,17-18.*

3 The final abolition of sin and death.

*Read: Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 21:4;
1 Corinthians 15: 24-26.*

The complete fulfilment of these prophecies and the establishment of Christ as king over a worldwide kingdom after his second coming, is what true Christians look forward to. All these things hinge on the work of Jesus Christ during his first advent, his death and resurrection. God willing, in the next issue we will examine some more details about his life and work.

In the meantime take a look at this passage in the first letter of Paul to the first century Christians at Thessalonica: **1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.**



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this magazine

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The Christadelphians believe the Bible (Old and New Testaments) to be the wholly inspired and infallible Word of God. Its principal theme is the salvation of mankind through the saving work of Jesus Christ, and the setting up of the kingdom of God under his rulership when he returns to the earth.

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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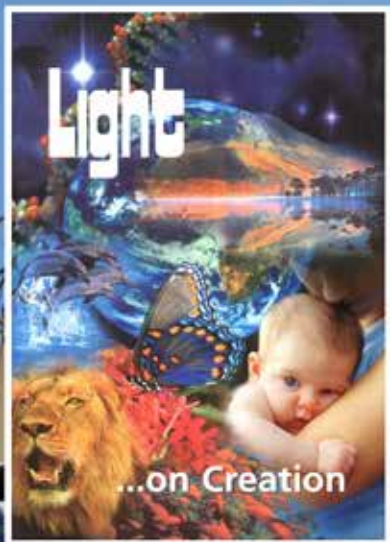


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The amazing complexity of the rigging on this traditional sailing vessel is evidence of the intelligence and skill of the great ship builders of past generations.

Today, science has uncovered the astounding complexity of the natural world which surrounds us (see article 'A threefold cord' page 13 in this edition). This too is evidence, a witness to the existence of our Creator, the supreme power and Grand Designer of all living things.

Please send for 'Light on Creation', a free special edition of Light Magazine — see contact addresses on inside back cover.