

' For the LORD will be your everlasting light...'

Light

...on a new world

- ❖ *The kingdom of God and you*
- ❖ *A long way to swallow*
- ❖ *Does Israel have a future?*

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

Volume 34.4

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cover picture

God promised through the prophet Isaiah (60.20) that we and our planet will not always be shrouded in spiritual darkness – His future kingdom will be filled with light and joy (see page 12).

LIGHT BIBLE PUBLICATIONS

for contact details see inside back cover



from the editor

As you will see from the questionnaire enclosed with the printed copy, this is the last issue of the quarterly magazine 'Light on a new world'. There is a possibility that a similar Bible based magazine may be published next year by a new team, and we would ask you to complete the questionnaire, to indicate whether you would be interested in receiving this.

Our website www.lightmagazine.org will continue to provide downloads of back issues and special issues of the magazine. Printed copies of the special issues will also be available on request. The website also contains a new section with articles on a number of specific Bible subjects.

The first issue of 'Light on a new world' was published in July 1969. The purpose of the magazine was



stated 'to be the means of awakening its readers to a realisation that God has revealed His purpose with this earth and that He is going to reconstitute it and make it a new world.'

Coincidentally, on 20 July 1969 the Apollo 11 mission achieved the astonishing feat of landing two American astronauts on the moon. As Neil Armstrong stepped from his spacecraft onto the moon, he made the famous statement: 'that's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.' Whilst this may have been a great human achievement, it has not proved to be the 'giant leap for mankind' that was envisaged – far from it.

The present war between Russia and Ukraine, with its huge loss of life and destruction of property, has been going on for nearly two years and threatens to engulf the world in another major conflict. The recent terrifying events that began in Israel on 7th October have resulted in the world's attention being diverted from Ukraine to the Middle East. The war in Gaza could so easily escalate into a much wider conflict. Despite the atrocities committed by Hamas, in the eyes of many people, Israel is perceived as the aggressor, and a fresh wave of antisemitism is occurring in many countries.

A few days ago, on 11 November 2023 (Armistice Day), many people remembered those who had died in two world wars. At the same time



there were huge demonstrations in London and other European cities by banner-waving supporters calling for an end to the war in Gaza. The message on some of the banners read: 'from the river to the sea Palestine will be free'. The implications of this message are that the State of Israel will one day cease to exist and the land they occupy between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean sea will become a Palestinian State.

Little do they realise that in demanding the freedom of Palestine, they are acknowledging a promise made long ago to Abraham, the ancestor of the Jews – God's promise to give the land of Israel and a much greater geographical area to the Jews – and it was promised to Abraham for ever! (see Genesis 13:14 and 15:18) The promise was repeated to Joshua just before he led the Israelites into the promised land. God said to him:

'... go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them – the children of Israel... From the

wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates... and to the Great Sea (the Mediterranean) ... shall be your territory.'

Joshua 1:2-4

How this will come about is the subject of the article on page 5 entitled 'Does Israel have a future?' The recent events in the Middle East and the demonstrations seen in many countries suggest that Israel's future is in doubt. On the other hand, the Bible tells us that Israel's future is linked to '**the new world**' which we believe will soon become reality.

Each day that passes brings us one day closer to the time in the Divine calendar when Jesus will return to set up the kingdom of God. That day will be like no other, but will you be among those who Jesus will recognise as his friends? You and I can be part of that glorious '**new world**' that we believe is coming soon. The article on page 12 contains an urgent personal message to all our readers – please read it. Now is the time to prepare for the world-shaking events that will usher in a time of unprecedented change.

Today is the day of opportunity – seize it!



To some people the name of Israel and the word future do not sit comfortably together. Many would pose the question – ‘Is there any future for Israel?’

Today there is a growing body of opinion around the world that openly condemns the Israelis for the way that they are dealing with the Palestinian problem. Israel is condemned for what is generally seen as heavy-handed tactics in retaliating against the attacks from their hostile neighbours. The pictures in the news media show the damage caused and, in many cases, the destruction of buildings including the homes of civilians, together with many civilian deaths and injuries including children. Public opinion is aroused by the way the news media report these events.

Statistics indicate that the instances of anti-Semitic violence around the world have doubled in the last

decade. These things come together to paint a very gloomy picture of the future for Israel. Many who would have considered themselves supporters of Israel have felt compelled to question their allegiance. Since the founding of their State in 1948, the nation of Israel has fought several wars for its survival and has survived against all the odds.

A time of trouble ahead for Israel

Israel feels particularly threatened at this present time by Iran, which has made a public declaration of intent to ‘wipe Israel off the map’. Iran is well on the way to the development of nuclear weapons in spite of the opposition of many nations. The Israeli government has declared that, if necessary, it is prepared to go ahead with a pre-emptive strike against Iran to destroy their nuclear facilities.

Should we expect such an escalation in the tensions of this volatile region, due to the threats and counter threats from opposing forces with such a divergence of political and religious ideals? Further, if these threats turn into action, what should we expect the outcome to be?

Bible students do not need to speculate on such matters. However, in considering the future of Israel, we need to be able to discern certain signs or indicators that are given in the Bible. It is the only book which can provide reliable information about God's people the Jews, in the future.

An invasion of the land of Israel

Israel is a westernised and secular nation, and in the main shows little regard for God. Therefore, the question must be asked whether we will see Israel on the receiving end of an assault by her enemies that will bring about the defeat of the State of Israel. There are a number of Bible prophecies that indicate this will indeed happen as the result of Israel's departure from God. The



Israeli artillery during the Yom Kippur war of 1973, when Israel was very nearly overwhelmed.

pattern of future events is suggested by those events of long ago.

Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, she has proved to be successful in her military campaigns against her enemies. We should not allow ourselves to think that such successes will continue. Surrounded as Israel is, by hostile nations vowing to destroy her and to wipe her off the map, we would do well to watch developments in that area very closely.

The Bible tells us of a time when a confederacy of nations will be brought into the land of Israel for a conflict that will surpass any conflict that has ever been experienced before. The Divine power to be revealed at that time will draw many people to the land of Israel. The prophet Ezekiel had this to say about this confederacy of nations who will eventually attack a peaceful Israel:

‘... In future years you will invade a land that has recovered from war, whose people were gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate. They had been brought out from the nations, and now all of them live in safety... on that day thoughts will come into your mind ...You will say ... “I will attack a peaceful and unsuspecting people...and turn my hand against... the people gathered from the nations” ...’ Ezekiel 38: 8,10-12 NIV

This prophecy suggests that the expected period of peace, will prove to be but a lull before the final storm of an invasion of Israel. The prophet Ezekiel shows in chapters 37 and 38 that the return of the Jews to Israel and this final attempt to destroy them, will ultimately result in the annihilation of the enemies of Israel. Careful reading of Ezekiel chapter 38 leaves us in no doubt that this group of nations including Persia (Iran), will attack the land of Israel.

This federation of nations is led by a power situated to the North of Israel and named by Ezekiel ‘Gog... *the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal*’. (Ezekiel 38:2) It should be noted that both in the past, and at

the present time, Israel has needed to look carefully to the security of her northern borders. The Syrians are a threat from that direction, just as the Assyrians were some 2,800 years ago. God, speaking through the prophet Ezekiel concerning this northern aggressor, said:

‘... you will come from your place **out of the far north**, you and many peoples with you... You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in the latter days...’ Ezekiel 38:15,16

Directly to the north of Israel as mentioned above, is Syria, one of Israel's many Arab enemies. Further north through Armenia we come to the troubled, now largely independent States of the former USSR. We note with interest the high Islamic following that there is among this group of nations. Further north still is Russia, one of the world's superpowers that, after a period of decline has grown in both economic and military strength.

As in the past, following a change of heart and an acceptance of their failures, God will provide a deliverer for Israel in the person of Jesus Christ. In the main the Jews today do not accept that Christ is their

promised Messiah. This rejection of Christ is also the subject of Bible prophecy, as is his subsequent acceptance by the Jews, foretold by the prophet Zechariah:

‘And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced... they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for him as one grieves for a first-born.’

Zechariah 12:10

Israel's final deliverance

Now this acceptance of Christ will coincide with the time of the final deliverance of Israel from all her enemies. The subject of the future deliverance of Israel is very important. There are many references in the Bible to this aspect of Israel's future and details are given about events that will unfold when the promised return of Christ to the earth becomes a reality. While this task is being completed, it will become apparent to the rest of the world that an entirely new and unexpected force will have appeared in this region.

We have become used to the attempted predictions of military strategists, as they have tried to

assess the offensive capabilities of countries around the world; considering as they do the degree of threats posed by factions and driven by extreme political and religious idealism. These experts can only base their predictions on what they have learnt from history. The appearance of a force predicted by the Bible falls into an entirely different category. This begs the question – will the nations of the world accept this intervention?

The Bible's answer to this question is **No!** Instead, it will lead to a final great conflict as predicted by the ancient prophets of Israel. This conflict will bring about the solution to Israel's problems and indeed the problems that affect the whole world. It will not be the final destruction of Israel, as envisaged and plotted by her enemies – but the setting up of the kingdom of God on earth, with none other than the Lord Jesus Christ as its king!

The word ‘**Armageddon**’ conjures up a picture of complete world devastation in the minds of many people. However, it must be noted that the name ‘Armageddon’ occurs only once in the Bible in the Book of Revelation, which predicts the final conflict that will take place

(Revelation 16:16). For this reason we must consider other Bible prophecies that tell us about this conflict. The prophets Joel and Zechariah predicted that such a battle would take place in the land of Israel:

‘In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will put them on trial for what they did to my inheritance, my people Israel, because they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land.’ Joel 3:1-2 NIV

‘I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured...Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle.’ Zechariah 14:2-3 NIV

The Tower of David, Jerusalem

The future of Jerusalem – undivided capital city

Few, we suggest, would disagree that the world is in desperate need of a complete change in practically all aspects of life. Radical changes will come about, as described in the Bible, starting with Israel. Following the dramatic deliverance of Israel, the whole world will then become subject to this wise and righteous ruler, Jesus Christ.

Jerusalem will become the capital city, not only of Israel but also of the whole world. This will be the centre from which laws and justice will be perfectly administered. Jerusalem will no longer be a divided city with so many claims upon its ownership, as the Old Testament prophet Isaiah foretold:

‘...in the latter days... Many peoples shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He



will teach us his ways, and we shall walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.’

Isaiah 2:3

Today we find the three major religions of the world making claims with regards to who should have the right of control over and access to Jerusalem. As the words of the prophets of Israel foretold, God himself, through the work of His son Jesus Christ, will determine the future of this city. A reading of Isaiah chapter 62 underlines the prophetic statements above. This confirms that God himself will make Jerusalem ‘a praise in the earth.’ (Isaiah 62:7)

There can be no doubt that the world needs a single all-powerful ruler and a unified government. However, it must be accepted that this kind of authority will be superior to anything within our experience. You can rest assured that the form of government to be administered with divine authority by Jesus Christ will be based on divine principles as foretold by the

prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 11:1-5 – see below the Isaiah scroll from the Dead Sea caves, written well over 2,000 years ago but still so relevant today!)

The blessing of Abraham to come on all nations

Such a time of change and blessing, for Israel and the world, is at the very centre of all of God's promises throughout the Bible. Way back in history, as recorded in the Book of Genesis, when God chose Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, He made him a promise. That promise is centred in a particular descendant of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ (see article on page 17). From the time of Abraham, God has developed His purpose through the nation of Israel and is still working through that same nation today. Israel's existence today, its revival and survival, confirm the existence of God as we read in these words:

‘You are my witnesses...that I am God. Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No-one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it? ...I am the LORD, your



Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King.'

Isaiah 43:12-13,15 NIV

Now whatever our personal feelings or prejudices regarding the Jewish race, the fact remains that God has chosen them, and the Jews are central to His plan for the world. What we need to focus on is the outcome and the culmination of this divine plan which was revealed to Abraham and his descendants - a three-fold promise. God said to Abraham:

'I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'

Genesis 12:2-3 NIV

The whole world will benefit from the blessings that God will bring about following the return of Jesus Christ to this earth and the establishment of His kingdom. It will only be then that the conflict between Jews and Arabs will be resolved. As we consider the state of the world today, we find that the ongoing problems of the Middle East and in particular the Palestinian conflict are at the very centre of the political arena.

The future of Israel and you

It is recognised by politicians and statesmen that the resolution of this conflict is essential to the future stability of the whole world. We recommend that you forget what the politicians say and concentrate on the only authority that really matters. As we have seen from the Bible, Israel's long-term future is assured - but what about your future?

Although it may not be apparent to you that God is active in our present world, you may rest assured that very soon these events will affect us all. For this we should be very grateful. However, this message comes with a warning in the form of a question:

Are you watching out for the return of Jesus to the earth as its future king, and, more importantly, will you be prepared and ready for it when it happens?

Editor's note:

This is an edited version of an article that first appeared in the Light special issue entitled 'Light on Israel' in 2008, a copy of which can be obtained from the correspondence secretary or downloaded from our website (see inside back cover for details).

The kingdom of God and you

A personal message

‘The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.’ Isaiah 32:17

Can you imagine a greater contrast to the world we live in today!

This is not our world – this is the world of tomorrow, the prophet’s vision of the future kingdom of God on the earth. It will be the fulfilment of the promise God made so long ago to Abraham, that *‘in you all families of the earth shall be blessed’* (Genesis 12:3); a time when *‘all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD’*. (Numbers 14:21)

The big questions are: will you, will I, be there to experience it? What can we do to prepare ourselves for it, to ensure that we are there to enjoy this wonderful time?

A series of world-shaking events will usher in this kingdom: the return of Jesus to the earth, the resurrection of the dead and the reward of the righteous, the removal of all forms of human government, and Jesus taking on the role of world king. He will be helped in this by those he calls his ‘friends’, those who have kept his

commandments (John 15:14), who will be rewarded with eternal life. These are the people who will escape the turmoil and destruction of this critical time and will live for ever, to take their part in the joy and peace of the kingdom of God.

How can we make sure we are among them?

What shall we do?

Just before his ascension to heaven, Jesus gave his apostles a very clear commission to continue the work that he had begun: *‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.’* (Mark 16:15–16)

The apostles responded to these instructions immediately. Only a few days after Jesus’ ascension, Peter preached in Jerusalem and his words touched the hearts of many who heard him. *‘What shall we do?’* they asked. Peter responded without hesitation: *‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.’* (Acts 2:37–38)

The meaning of repentance

Repentance is a Bible word that literally means 'to perceive afterwards'. It implies a change of mind and a change of direction in our lives. It always means a change for the better – understanding and believing God's Word and forsaking our former way of life. The Bible tells us about our natural state as sinners, and what God requires of us to become His servants rather than the servants of sin. It teaches us to follow the example of Jesus rather than our natural inclinations. Once we have learned what God requires of us and we want to be a part of the things He has promised, then we need to act on this. In following Jesus, we learn that we too must be baptized. Jesus himself set the example by being baptized (see Matthew 3:13-17).

What is baptism?

Baptism is the first active step to take as part of our preparation for a new life in the kingdom of God, but what is it? There are three different ideas about this. The established church teaches that sprinkling holy water from a font upon a person's head is sufficient. Others teach that it is necessary to have moving holy water, so this is poured on the head from a

jug rather than sprinkled. Thirdly there is baptism by full immersion, which means that the person is completely covered with water.

But what does the Bible say about baptism?

The Gospel accounts tell us that John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness of Judea to the east of Jerusalem. The people of the cities and villages went out to hear what he had to say and those who accepted his message were baptized by John in the river Jordan. He didn't go into the cities and villages with a supply of holy water and sprinkle people there. No, they went to him and were baptized in the river, where they would be immersed in the water just like Jesus (see John 3:23).

A lesson from the Old Testament

Long before the time of Jesus we read in the Old Testament about a successful Syrian army commander called Naaman, who was a leper. He was told by the prophet Elisha that he would be cured of his leprosy if he washed in the river Jordan seven times. This was something his pride would not allow him to do, and he was indignant at this instruction, feeling that the Syrian rivers were far

better than the river Jordan.

Naaman was reminded by his servants that if he had been asked to do something great, he would certainly have done it. He realised his error, swallowed his pride, washed in the Jordan as instructed and was cured of his leprosy. You can read about this in 2 Kings chapter 5.

We can learn much from this incident. First, sufficient water is required for us to be completely cleansed of our 'leprosy', which is used in the Bible to represent sin. Then we need to humbly submit to baptism by full immersion in water to please God and obtain forgiveness of past sins. Once cleansed in this way, we can start our journey that will lead to eternal life in the kingdom of God.

A lesson from the New Testament

This need for immersion in water is also shown in the record about the conversion of an Ethiopian eunuch in the book of Acts. He was reading a Bible passage as he returned home after a visit to Jerusalem. Philip joined him in his chariot and explained the meaning of the passage from Isaiah chapter 53, a prophecy about the work of Jesus as the Saviour.

When he understood what he must do to be saved through belief in the work of Jesus, the Ethiopian asked Philip: '*... "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may".*' (Acts 8:36-37) On hearing the Ethiopian's confession of his faith, we read that

'both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him... when they had come up out of the water the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing...'
Acts 8:38-39

The significance of baptism

Baptism unites us with Jesus Christ. We become his friends with the aim that the rest of our lives are willingly spent in his service. In his letter to the Christians at Rome, the Apostle Paul sets out the full significance of baptism for those who wish to become the friends of Jesus. We recommend that you read Romans chapter 6 carefully for a clear understanding of the meaning of baptism. The teaching of this chapter clearly shows why we need to be completely covered with water when we are baptized:

‘...do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.’

Romans 6:3-4

How can we be *‘buried with Him through baptism into death’* if we are not completely covered by the waters of baptism? Jesus rose to a new life and Paul shows that at baptism we also start a new life. We should no longer please ourselves but dedicate our lives to God and make it our priority, in Jesus’ words, to *‘seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness’*. (Matthew 6:33)

The hope of resurrection

What happens if we die before Jesus comes?

The Gospel accounts explain that after three days in the tomb Jesus was raised from the dead. This was the main theme of the Apostles’ preaching. Peter wrote to those *‘who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.’* (1 Peter 1: 21)

Paul reminded the Corinthians that *‘Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep’*. (1 Corinthians 15:20) The resurrection of Jesus as the *‘first-fruits’* of the harvest, gives his disciples the assurance that they too will be raised from the dead at his coming when the full harvest is gathered in. This is not a vain wish but a confident expectation of the fulfilment of God’s promises.

If we have been baptized into this hope, then there is no fear that we will be overlooked at Christ’s appearing if our present life ends before his coming. We will be raised from the dead and, if found to be among the friends of Jesus, we will be given divine nature. We will then be fitted for the role of ruling the nations and teaching those who have not heard or understood the gospel message.

The hope of the resurrection is not just a New Testament doctrine. In the book of Job we learn about a man who lived many centuries before Christ. He is described as *‘blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil’*. (Job 1:1) Despite undergoing very severe trials he maintained his confidence in God and expressed his hope in this way:

‘...I know that my Redeemer lives, and he shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God’.

Job 19:25-26

The prophet Daniel was told about the state of the world just prior to the return of Christ. It is described as *‘a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation’* and the passage continues: *‘at that time your people shall be delivered.’* (Daniel 12:1) Not only will the living be delivered but the dead will also be raised, as we learn from the next verse:

‘And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament (heavens), and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever.’

Daniel 12:2-3

Conclusion

We have thought about the need for change in our lives. Before anything else, we must come to a knowledge of what the Bible teaches and be moved by a real desire to be involved in its wonderful promises. A conviction of the truth of these things will lead us

to repentance and baptism into the saving name of Jesus.

Baptism associates us with the work of Jesus, enabling us to receive forgiveness of our former sins. It is also a public confession of our beliefs before witnesses and a figurative burial of our old life and resurrection to a new life ‘in Christ’. This sets our feet on the path to God's kingdom.

There is nothing else we can undertake in this life that offers so much promise for the future and is so certain of being realised. It is our sincere wish that you may be included among those who share the honour of being with Jesus in his coming kingdom.

‘To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.’

Revelation 3:21

Editor's note:

This is an edited extract from the Light Special Issue about the coming kingdom of God on earth entitled ‘The last great chapter of the human story’. Send for your free copy today or download from our website.

Bible Questions and Answers

Who was Abraham's greatest son?

This is a question from our Bible Correspondence Course. The answer is important to our faith.

We understand that Abraham lived and died around 2,000 years before Jesus was born. So, you might ask: 'how then can Abraham be relevant to any hope the Bible has to offer?' Abraham had several sons during his lifetime, from more than one wife, which was the custom and not unusual in those far off days. His most well-known son is Isaac, born to Sarah, but there was also Ishmael who was born to Hagar, Sarah's handmaid. Later, Abraham married Keturah and had six more sons. No doubt there would have been daughters, but these are not recorded in the Bible narrative.

The question gave several alternatives to choose from (a) Judas, (b) Jacob, (c) Joseph, (d) Jesus. Which would you choose and why?

Neither Isaac, Ishmael, nor the lesser known six sons of Keturah are in that list. Jacob was his grandson, and Joseph his great grandson, both of whom had challenging lives and both

were righteous men. But Judas is certainly incorrect, for he was the betrayer of Jesus. So that just leaves Jesus.

How is Jesus the son of Abraham?

The answer to this question is given to us in the first verse of the New Testament: '*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.*' (Matthew 1:1) The family tree of Jesus can be traced from Abraham through the generations leading to Joseph, the husband of Mary his mother. Luke's gospel contains a similar family tree through Abraham's descendants and is the likely line of Mary, for it differs significantly from Matthew, taking the line through David's son Nathan rather than Solomon.

But we are left in no doubt that Jesus is the greatest son of Abraham and of King David. The opening verse of Matthew's gospel emphasises the importance of Jesus being descended from Abraham and David. Jesus Christ was promised as the coming 'Son' from the very beginning in the book of Genesis, in the Old Testament writings of Moses and the prophets, to the prophet Malachi, the

last book of the Old Testament. This son, the Messiah and saviour of Israel, was announced – the time had arrived when all the promises of long ago would commence their fulfilment in the person of Jesus Christ, the son of Abraham through Mary. At the same time he was the son of God because he was conceived through the power of God, the Holy Spirit, acting directly upon Mary. Joseph, therefore, was Jesus' stepfather, not his biological father.

Jesus is the son of God

The fact that Jesus was born a human being is largely lost and ignored, or simply not believed, by many Christians. They maintain that Jesus was God from the very beginning – the second person of a Trinity. This is not how the Bible speaks of Jesus. The essential mortality of Jesus before his death is shown by verses like this, commenting on Jesus' state of mind just before and during his crucifixion. Jesus needed saving from death by God, his father: *'... who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.'* (Hebrews 5:7-8) Jesus

was a son (descendant) of Abraham, and through his mother, was flesh and blood. He inherited human nature, and the record clearly shows he was tempted in every way possible: *'For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.'* (Hebrews 4:15)

Tempted? Yes, tempted to sin, to disobey his heavenly Father. But he was always able to resist that temptation, for he was born into the world by the direct action of God through the power of the Holy Spirit acting on Mary. Jesus was born into the world to *'save His people from their sins'* (Matthew 1:21). His mission was to defeat the power of sin, which he accomplished in his sinless life, and through his death and resurrection. (Acts 2:23-24; Hebrews 2:14)

Jesus is Abraham's 'seed'

This fact is of vital importance to a correct understanding of the gospel. But why use the word 'seed', which in Bible usage denotes offspring? Abraham was called by God to leave his home and go to an unknown land which God promised that one day he would inherit:

'Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed".'

Genesis 12: 1-3

The promises made to Abraham

Genesis chapters 12 to 22 contain seven repeated promises made to Abraham by God. They are personal to Abraham, yet far reaching. They form the basis of the New Testament gospel of Jesus Christ. In the Hebrew language the word 'seed' is used to describe Abraham's descendants, but especially one descendant. The following are the essential points:

- ❖ Through Abraham's 'seed' all nations of the earth would be blessed (not just Jews but Gentiles as well: Genesis 12:3 and 22:18).
- ❖ He was promised the land of Canaan (now Israel) as a possession, together with his 'seed' for ever (Genesis 13:14-17; 17:8).
- ❖ His 'seed' would be multiplied to become a great nation (Genesis 17:6).
- ❖ An everlasting covenant would be made between God, Abraham and his 'seed' (Genesis 17:7).
- ❖ His 'seed' would be victorious over his enemies (Genesis 22:17).

We don't have to guess who the 'seed' is. We could perhaps read and interpret the promises to refer simply to Abraham's descendants in general, but in the New Testament, Paul's letter to the Galatians is very clear, connecting Abraham with his greatest son the Lord Jesus Christ:

'And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.'

Galatians 3:8-9

'Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.'

Galatians 3:16

Paul's teaching in this chapter provides a vital link between the promises made to Abraham and the work of Jesus Christ, who is the singular 'seed' of the promises.

Abraham died in faith

Abraham did not possess the promised land during his long life of 175 years; neither did he see the fulfilment of those 'seed' promises. He and his descendants, Isaac and Jacob, were nomadic farmers. Abraham even had to buy a piece of land as a burial plot for Sarah his wife upon her death, which reminds us that he did not own the land. They all died without seeing the fulfilment of these promises despite both Isaac and Jacob having those same promises repeated to them personally. The letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament emphasises the fact that *'These all died in faith, not having received the promises'*. (Hebrews 11:13)

The New Testament provides the answer to how Abraham and other believers in Old Testament times will see the fulfilment of these promises. For they relate to the future kingdom of God to be established on this earth by Jesus Christ at his return. Then we shall see the complete fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, when he will live for ever in the promised land, together with men and women of faith.

Summary

The answer to our question lies in the work of Jesus Christ, the seed of the promise. Here is a summary:

- ❖ Jesus has accomplished a great victory over sin in human nature because he fought it successfully until he was crucified. He laid down his life as a sacrifice to take away sin, in complete obedience to the will of his Father. The victory was rewarded with a wonderful resurrection from death to immortality, and an ascension to the right hand of His Father in heaven, now to act as a High Priest for believers who put their faith in his saving work (Hebrews 2:14-18).
- ❖ Jesus fulfilled the everlasting covenant when he laid down his life to atone for human sin. This is the new covenant guaranteed by Jesus' sacrifice. As he said to his disciples: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you.' (Luke 22:20)
- ❖ Jesus will make Jerusalem the capital of God's kingdom which will last for ever (Psalm 2:6-8; Matthew 5:35).
- ❖ Jesus will raise Abraham from the dead to live in the promised land together with men and women

related to these promises because of their faith (Hebrews 11:39–40).

- ❖ Jesus will judge and reward those who are accountable to him and will give eternal life to the faithful. This will happen when Jesus returns to the earth. (Matthew 25:31–36; 2 Timothy 4:1)
- ❖ Jesus fulfilled all God's promises, as the Apostle Paul wrote: *'For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.'* (2 Corinthians 1:20)

Jesus confirmed the promises

Jesus warned the unbelieving Jews of his day that they would not inherit the kingdom of God, but at the same time confirmed that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would! He said: *'There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.'* (Luke 13:28–29)

'If you are Christ's then you are Abraham's seed'

Our final reference is taken from Paul's letter to the Galatians. Here confirmation is given about how believers today can be associated

with those promises made to Abraham. Again, Jesus Christ is at the centre. Baptism by full immersion in water is an outward public sign of a change within; a repentance of past sin, and the start of a completely new relationship with God, through Jesus Christ. Jesus can be our representative before God; our high priest through whom our sins are forgiven. This relationship of being *'in Christ'* makes us sons and daughters of God and part of *'Abraham's seed'*. We can be heirs, and inheritors of the promises, related to everlasting life and the abundant blessings of the coming kingdom of God on earth.

'For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.'

Galatians 3:26–29

Justin Giles
London, UK

The kingdom of God

This final article in the series looks at the Bible teaching about the coming kingdom of God on earth and how you can have a part in it.

True fellowship

The word fellowship means sharing or having in common. Those who have learned and understood the true teaching of God's Word, and been baptised into Christ, share that knowledge, and have fellowship with their fellow believers. The New Testament records that the first century believers in Jerusalem '*continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers*' (Acts 2:42). Fellowship is broken if a believer starts to believe wrong things or behave in a way that is contrary to the teaching of the Bible.

Read: 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14; 1 Timothy 6:3-5; 2 John 9-11.

Departure from the true gospel

The New Testament foretold that the pure gospel message taught by Jesus and his apostles would be contaminated with other man-made ideas. For example, the Apostle Paul wrote about a '*falling away*' (2 Thessalonians 2:3) which had already begun. The apostles warned believers to be on their guard against false teachers as the following verses show.

Read: Acts 20:29-30; Galatians 1:6-7; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 6:20-21; 2 Tim. 4:1-4; 2 John 7.

The future kingdom of God on earth

God's message about His future kingdom on the earth has been constant and unchanging. The gospel we believe today is that same message that was preached, for example, to Abraham more than 2,000 years before Jesus was born, and to Moses and Daniel. The Old Testament prophets also tell us much about the coming kingdom of God.

Read: Galatians 3:8; Numbers 14:21; Daniel 2:44-45.

In a previous article it was shown that the kingdom of God on earth is not just a future concept, but that it existed in the past in its initial phase. When God led His chosen people out of slavery in Egypt, He brought them into the Promised Land, having organised them into a holy nation and given them a detailed set of laws; He was their king. It was only later on, after their repeated rebellion

against Him, that He overturned the kingdom. But even as He did so, He recognised his promises to the Jewish fathers and set a time limit to that overthrow. The prophet Ezekiel foretold that the kingdom would be overthrown ‘until He comes whose right it is and I will give it to Him’ (Ezekiel 21:27). This is a clear reference to the return of Jesus as earth’s future king and the restoration of the kingdom of God.

Read: Deuteronomy 4:32-40; Ezekiel 21:25-27; Luke 1:26-33.

The second phase of the kingdom of God on earth will be inaugurated at the return of Jesus as already referred to in earlier articles in this series.

Read: Acts 1:6-11; Acts 3:18-21.

Sin to be restrained

This second phase is another interim one. Under the control of Jesus, immortal kings and priests will rule over the kingdom, and will instruct the mortal population of the earth. Under this rulership, which will last for one thousand years (called the millennium), the natural evil tendencies of human nature will forcibly be held in check, and the rulers will uphold righteous principles. Among other prophets, Isaiah’s prophecy is rich in descriptions of the blessedness of the millennium, including the firm and Godly rulership of the worldwide kingdom. The Book of Revelation describes the restraint and control of sin by the use of symbols.

Read Isaiah 2:1-5; 9:6-7; 11:1-5; 32:1-18; 65:17-25; Rev. 20:1-3.

Worship during the millennium

The confused state of religion in the world today – many non-Christian religions and very many different Christian denominations, will be a thing of the past. A major initiative will be the launch of a worldwide educational programme to teach people about the correct way to worship and praise God. The centre of this new single worldwide religion, which will be eagerly accepted, will be Jerusalem. A magnificent new temple will be built there as described in detail by the Prophet Ezekiel.

Read: Isaiah 25:6-9; Ezekiel chs. 40-48; Micah 4:1-2; Zephaniah 3:9.

When the kingdom of God existed in the past the priests were taken from the tribe of Levi and the kings from the tribe of Judah. In the future Jesus will combine both roles in himself as a Priest-King ‘according to the order of Melchizedek’ (Hebrews 5:6; Melchizedek is described as a priest-king in Genesis

14:18). Those believers who have been accepted by Jesus on his return will be made immortal and will assist him in his future work. They, too, will be kings and priests ruling and instructing the people. The mortal population will be fully instructed in the ways of God, and there will be none who are ignorant of Him. They will not be allowed to neglect their religious responsibilities and God's laws will be obeyed. This form of worship will continue throughout the millennium.

Read: Isaiah 2:1-3; Zechariah 14:16-21.

Some people believe that we are innately good, but God, who created us, tells us very differently: *'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?'* (Jeremiah 17:9 – see also the words of Jesus in Matthew 15:18-19). In view of this it may not be surprising to learn that, at the end of the millennium, there will be an attempt to overthrow the kingdom of God and for mankind to regain control of the earth. But the rebels will be defeated by the immortal and all-powerful Jesus.

After that, the still mortal population of the earth will be subject to a final resurrection and judgment when they will be appraised by Jesus and will be rewarded with eternal life or punished with never-ending death according to how they have lived during their time of opportunity during the millennium. These things are described in Revelation chapter 20 and, as that Book is largely written in symbolic form (see Revelation 1:1), the rebellious and sinful ones are described as *'Satan'*. The word as it is used in the Bible simply means an adversary.

Read: Revelation 20:7-15 which is also partly written in symbolic language but the overall message is clear as explained above.

Sin and death removed from the whole world

At this point God's plan with the earth will be completed. The earth will be populated entirely by a race of immortal beings who, by the way they live, will fill the earth with His glory. All sinful people will have been removed. Since death is the punishment for sin, it too will be abolished. When this state of perfection has been reached, Jesus will hand the kingdom back to God for a future which is not described in the Bible and is therefore unknown to us.

Read: I Corinthians 15:24-28.

The final state

When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden they were driven out and lost the privilege of open communion with the angels of God. But when Christ, who is described in the New Testament as the ‘the last Adam’ (1 Corinthians 15:45), removes sin and death from the earth, the redeemed of all generations will have the joy of perfect communion with God Himself. No priest or mediator will then be necessary.

Read: Revelation 21:1-4 where ‘tabernacle’ means dwelling place.

You can have a part in this wonderful future...

This series has explained God’s purpose with the earth and how it will be fulfilled. Now you have a choice to make. Only those who are determined to do what God requires of them will find a place as immortal beings in His kingdom which is coming on the earth. Whether you are so determined is a question only you can answer for yourself. Jesus urged his followers:

‘Therefore do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.’

Matthew 6:31-33

Sadly, most people do not heed this advice, preferring to ‘seek first’ things relating to our short time on earth now, before being laid to rest in an eternal grave. You are urged to be different by believing the gospel, being baptised, studying God’s Word and living in a way that is in accordance with Jesus’ commands. May God bless you in this endeavour.

Our final appeal is the same as that made by the Apostle Paul, in his farewell message to the Christians at Ephesus. He said:

‘I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.’

Acts 20:32



The giraffe story and why it's important

It's easy to admire the giraffe.

It's the tallest land animal we know, a vegetarian that doesn't kill or threaten other animals. We can hardly fail to be impressed by its extraordinary stature and anatomy and the unique and striking pattern of its hide, as it pursues its stately progress across the plains of Africa.

The giraffe is not mentioned in the Bible. When you look at the map showing its natural habitat in Africa, this is hardly surprising. There is a unique wall painting in the tomb of Rhekmire, governor of Thebes in Egypt 1504–1425 BC (not long before the time of Moses, see above) which shows a captive giraffe being led by two slaves and presumably presented to Pharaoh as tribute or an exotic pet. The Jews may have encountered the giraffe during their stay in Egypt, but it seems unlikely. So why does a Bible-based magazine like *Light* have an article about the giraffe?

Sadly, it is because the giraffe has become an emblem of something else, a symbol of evolution. When we look at the giraffe, we are seeing evolution in

action, so we have been told. Darwin did not mention the giraffe until a later edition of his book 'The origin of Species' (6th edition 1872), but his outline was clear. The giraffe started life as a much smaller short-necked animal. Some of them with a slightly longer neck found that they were able to reach the upper leaves of the trees not available to their fellows, which gave them an advantage, and over long periods of time they flourished, whilst those with shorter necks died out – 'survival of the fittest' in action. So eventually the giraffe became a unique species.

This story is simple enough, and so widely accepted and repeated that the giraffe has become an 'icon' of evolution, the standard 'go-to' example of Darwin's process of evolution that we are told is responsible for all living things that we know today. 'To biologists, the giraffe's long neck is a prime example of evolution's handiwork...' (Sofia Moutinho, science.org 17 Mar 2021). We look at the giraffe's long neck, and we see evolution, 'natural selection', in action before our eyes...

or maybe not?

Stephen Jay Gould was a well-known exponent of evolution, one of the best known since Charles Darwin himself. This is what he wrote in his (American) Natural History magazine column in 1996:

'I made a survey of all major high-school textbooks in biology. Every single one – no exceptions... use the same example to illustrate Darwinian superiority – the giraffe's neck. Giraffes, we are told, got long necks in order to browse the leaves at the tops of acacia trees... available to no other mammal.'

But Gould himself was not impressed, in fact quite the reverse. This was his comment:

'... if we continue to illustrate our conviction (of Darwinian evolution) with an indefensible, unsupported, entirely speculative, and basically rather silly story, then we are clothing a thing of beauty in rags – and we should be ashamed... If we choose a weak and foolish speculation as a primary textbook illustration... then we are in for trouble...'

Here is one of the foremost evolutionists of our time speaking (Professor of palaeontology and zoology at Harvard University etc.). He was an agnostic, not

Some animals may reach 6 m high

Model by 4D VISION

5

4

3

2

1

'rete mirabile' protects brain from high blood pressure when necessary

7 massive vertebrae to neck

Bony extensions to vertebrae provide anchor points for neck muscles

TRACHEA (windpipe)

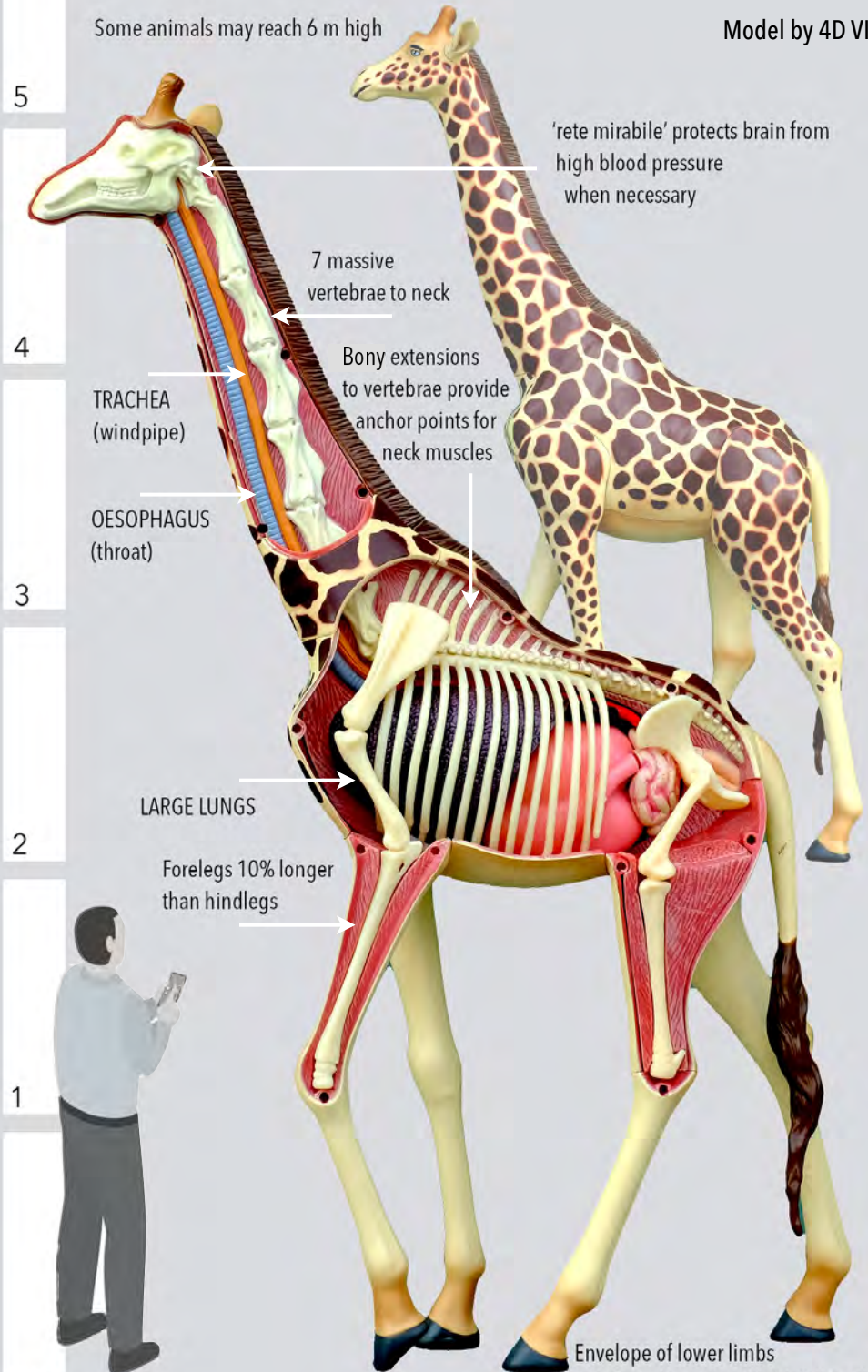
OESOPHAGUS (throat)

LARGE LUNGS

Forelegs 10% longer than hindlegs

Envelope of lower limbs reinforced to cope with high blood pressure

SCALE in metres



a religious devotee or creationist. But he says the story of the giraffe's neck is 'indefensible', 'unsupported', 'entirely speculative', 'weak and foolish', and 'basically rather silly'. He goes on to explain some of his reservations about the story:

'Even if we assume that the giraffe's neck evolved as an adaptation for eating high leaves, how could natural selection build such a structure by gradual increments? After all, the long neck must be associated with **modifications in nearly every part of the body** (our emphasis) – long legs to accentuate the effect and a variety of supporting structures (bones, muscles, and ligaments) to hold up the neck. How could natural selection simultaneously alter necks, legs, joints, muscles, and blood flows (think of the pressure needed to pump blood to the giraffe's brain)?'

The giraffe's extended neck (taking it up to 5m and more in height) is backed up by a range of other special engineering features, without which the long neck would be a liability, not an asset. As Gould notes, they would all have to appear at the same time if the giraffe was to remain a viable organism. Here are some of them:

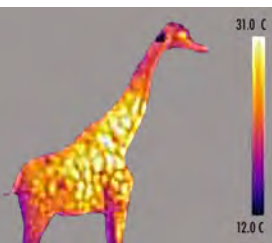
1. Blood and oxygen supply

The brain demands a good supply of oxygen, but the giraffe's brain is some 2.5m away from its heart and vertically above it for most of the time. A huge muscular heart (11.5kg or 25lb in weight) is vital and creates a very high blood pressure ($2\frac{1}{2}$ x that of a human and probably the highest in the animal kingdom) to make sure the brain's demands are met. For such a large animal its heart rate is fast, about the same as ours, to keep up this pressure. But as with humans, high blood pressure can create problems, for example when the giraffe lowers its head to the ground to drink or graze, a 'rush of blood to the head' could be fatal. So a web of small blood vessels (called the 'rete mirabile' or 'marvellous net') between the arteries and the brain reduces the blood pressure to acceptable limits when necessary (see anatomical model opposite).

The lower limbs could also be susceptible to damage, and recent research has found that giraffes minimise swelling in legs and ankles with the same trick that nurses use in dealing with high blood pressure: a tight wrapping of connective tissue around the legs act like an elastic support stocking. Thick-

walled arteries around the knees restrict the flow of blood, and the entire vascular system, the kidneys and the heart, are all designed to function at this exceptionally high blood pressure.

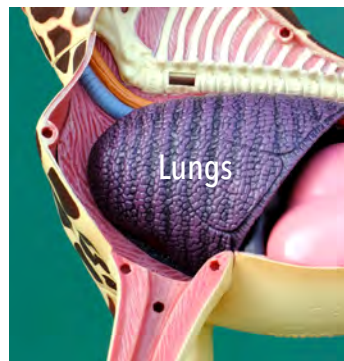
Like other very large animals in hot climates, the giraffe needs an efficient cooling system; (compare for example the elephant's ears) and this is where the unique pattern of patches on its hide comes into play. The outline of each



patch is marked by a blood vessel which links up a network of smaller vessels across the patch; the giraffe's hide acts as a heat transfer system, cooling the animal's body temperature as required. Heatmap pictures that capture radiated heat clearly show this heat loss pattern directly related to the hide pattern. So, what looks like a random camouflage pattern performs a vital role unique to the giraffe.

2. Windpipe (*trachea*) and lungs

The giraffe's windpipe is a tube around 3.6m long from mouth to lungs, and 35–51mm in diameter. This means that there is a large volume of air in the trachea itself before it gets to the lungs. This air has to be completely expelled at every breath, otherwise at the next breath the giraffe will draw in again some air which has already been used and will soon suffer from oxygen starvation and/or carbon dioxide poisoning. So, the giraffe's lungs are huge, eight times bigger than ours. Its rate of breathing is also slowed down to prevent 'windburn' in the trachea, the effect of large volumes of air constantly whistling at high speed backwards and forwards through the long windpipe.



3. Throat (*oesophagus*)

The giraffe is a ruminant, i.e., having once swallowed its food, it later regurgitates it for further chewing, before swallowing it again. The swallowing action, like our own, is a complex action that relies on a progressive squeezing of the muscles around the throat, programmed by impulses from the brainstem. Due to the long neck, the giraffe's oesophagus is similar in length to the trachea. So, you can imagine the muscles and programming required to

both swallow and then regurgitate food over this distance. Of course, any change in the length of the neck would require the swallowing action to be reprogrammed.

4. Long legs

Can you imagine a giraffe with short legs? It's astonishing that the story of the giraffe focusses entirely on the length of its neck and ignores the extraordinary length of its legs. The effectiveness of the neck extension would be much smaller if the legs had stayed the same length as its supposed ancestor. Interestingly, the front legs are 10% longer than the back legs, shifting its centre of gravity backward and giving the animal its distinctive continuous sloping backline and easy motion.

5. The evidence

There are just two animals classified as being in the 'giraffa' family, the okapi (see picture) and four species of the giraffe itself. The okapi is a much smaller animal similar to a zebra. Evolutionists tell us that both descended from an unknown common ancestor. Is there any evidence that this ancestor ever existed? None whatever. And where are the fossils of the multitude of intermediate forms which must have existed over eleven million years (so we are told) as the giraffe evolved and its neck grew longer and longer?

There is no evidence that the ability to reach the highest leaves of the acacia tree is crucial to the giraffe's survival, or ever has been. Scientists now wonder whether other factors are involved, e.g., the giraffe's use of its neck as a weapon in fighting its competitors – the one with the longest, strongest neck wins the mate, and their offspring carry the same advantage.

Recent research has now defined some 97% of the giraffe's 'genome', the complete blueprint of the animal held in coded form in its DNA. Comparing it with other similar animals like the okapi, the research identifies around 490 genes (smaller packets of information within DNA) unique to the giraffe, genes which define the outstanding and unique features of its cardio-vascular system, bone growth and so on. The current theory of evolution has only one available explanation for these unique genes: they are the result of accidental changes and errors in DNA over long periods of time, which just happen to



make sense and produce something new and useful. The chances of this happening are beyond credibility. ‘Silly’ is the word that comes to mind.

Why is it that ‘scientists’ generally hold such a position of influence and respect in our society? Because we believe they deal in facts, they can back up their theories with hard evidence. Sadly, that is far from being the case. There is as much evidence for the story of how the giraffe got its neck, as there is for Rudyard Kipling’s ‘Just-so’ stories of how the elephant got its trunk, or the leopard its spots! That is why one distinguished scientist calls it ‘weak and foolish’, and ‘basically rather silly’.

The real story stares us in the face but is deeply unacceptable in the atheistic and materialistic world we have built for ourselves. This story is exhibited, not just by the giraffe, but by every living thing that we care to examine; an astounding display of purposeful design, intelligent engineering and programming, that we recognise from our own experience, if we only open our minds to it. The amazing living world we inhabit owes nothing to chance, but displays the work of a supreme Creator and Designer.

So here is the authentic story of the giraffe. It was expertly designed and created by God on the sixth day of the Creation Week as described in Genesis chapter 1. It was saved from destruction in the great Flood of Noah’s day, by finding refuge in the ark, as many different artists have imagined. The Flood story is another that is now widely dismissed as naive and childish, but it is shared by many different cultures across the world, witnessed by the great swathes of sedimentary rocks that cover our planet, and authenticated by Jesus Christ himself: ‘...as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be...’ (Matthew 24.37, see also Hebrews 11.7 and 1 Peter 3.20)

The giraffe, and other unnumbered miracles of creation, are God’s handiwork. He invites us to recognise that fact, to worship Him as our Creator, to obey Him and embrace the hope that he offers us through His Son Jesus Christ. So many in our world today dismiss this hope as childish and ‘silly’.

The giraffe tells a different story. Like children, we should listen.

Roy Toms Norfolk, UK





signs of the times

Russian tactical nuclear missiles

'People will be terrified at what they see coming upon the earth ...' Luke 21:26 NLT

The New Living Translation emphasises very well the meaning of this phrase, taken from words spoken by Jesus so long ago.

Peoples' worries about what terrifying things we see coming on our world have changed in my lifetime. As a child in the 1950's and 1960's the major fear was the 'big one' – the nuclear war that would kill us all. We watched the development of atomic weapons as they progressed from the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, to hydrogen bombs which were much more powerful. Such weapons were stockpiled in staggering numbers by the nuclear powers, who had the ability to wipe out life on earth many times over. That's certainly 'overkill' isn't it!

That fear has not gone away in my lifetime, but in the late 1900's and early 2000's it was largely suppressed by confidence in a 'world order' that was thought to ensure nuclear weapons would never again be used. But although it's been 78 years since the bombing of Hiroshima, our world in recent times has again been focused on that possibility. It is thought this time that 'small' bombs might be used as a battlefield weapon, the so-called tactical nukes. But once the 'genie is out of the bottle' will we stop at using one? What about the losers? Won't they want to strike back in kind? It's not inevitable but it's certainly more than possible! Meanwhile there has been a steadily growing threat of nuclear war as an existential fear.

Climate change

This is the current label which seems to have largely submerged the many other environmental threats (e.g., micro plastics in the oceans) from

our collective consciousness, though of course the reality of those mounting problems hasn't disappeared at all. Around the time of writing, two articles caught my eye which have a rather awful connection as I see it. Individually they are interesting.

Combined they are a sign of our times.

Before I go further, I must state my position resulting from my belief that God has total control over this world and that humanity will not be allowed to wreck His creation. This position means that I approach the unfolding drama of climate change and its associated issues with the view of an observer who tries to be as neutral as possible. I see what is happening as a sign in our troubled times that the return of Jesus is likely to be very near, as opposed to taking any strong position on climate change.

Nevertheless, my logic tells me that whatever opposing views there are about climate change, something is happening that is outside the normal. Whether it is an historical anomaly that will right itself or not, unequivocally something is happening to our climate. Indisputably, the oceans are getting warmer which is affecting the moisture in the atmosphere, which

converts to rainfall and storm systems. This last point is particularly relevant to the second article below in connection with the flooding in Libya.

The first article is taken from **The Washington Post** dated September 11 this year. The headline was 'What happened when a scientist denounced his own climate change research' with a byline 'Patrick Brown said that, in their quest for a "clean narrative", editors and reviewers ignore factors beyond climate change.' I quote some of the article:

'It started with a paper in one of the most prestigious scientific journals in the world. Patrick T. Brown, who co-directs the climate and energy team at the Breakthrough Institute, a think tank, published a paper in late August showing that warming temperatures have increased the likelihood of wildfire growth in California. News outlets, including NPR and the Los Angeles Times, dutifully covered the story. That could have been the end of it for Brown and his seven co-authors. But, about a week after the study was published, Brown penned an opinion article for the online outlet The Free Press, where he argued that articles in high profile



wildfires in California

journals — including his own — were distorting the scientific process by focusing too narrowly on climate change.

The subsequent uproar shows how, at a time of escalating extreme weather disasters, identifying the extent to which climate is driving them has become contested scientific territory.

Climate scientists used to say that no individual weather event could be linked to climate change. But in the past decade or so, research that connects individual heat waves, hurricanes or wildfires to global warming has become more common. Scientists thread the needle by analyzing how the risk of a given wildfire or flood has increased as temperatures warm. But even as such

studies become commonplace, a few researchers worry that focusing too much on climate change might distract the public from local government failures that can make things like extreme weather more deadly and destructive...'

The article concludes 'experts argue that there should be room to do two things at once: To both acknowledge the great dangers of climate change and also recognise the multifaceted nature of any disaster. But for now, coming down too hard on one side means getting caught in the crossfire.' What do those concluding words say about humankind and our ability to fix our problems? Not too much as far as I can see!

The second article is from **BBC News** dated September 14 of this year:

‘Libya floods: Why damage to Derna was so catastrophic.’

The article starts: ‘More than 5,000 people are known to have died and thousands more are missing after devastating floods swept through the Libyan port city of Derna. Entire neighbourhoods disappeared into the sea as a huge tsunami-like torrent of water swept through the city.’

The weather event involved in this disaster was Storm Daniel, a Mediterranean hurricane-like system known as a medicane. It brought more than 400mm of rain to parts of the north-east coast of Libya within a 24-hour period. The region usually has about 1.5mm throughout the whole of September. So this was an absolutely massive deluge well outside the normal.

Although they are not unequivocal, scientists think climate change is increasing the frequency of the strongest medicanes. Quoting again from the article:

‘Prof Liz Stephens, an expert in climate risks and resilience at Reading University in the UK, says scientists are confident that climate



change is supercharging the rainfall associated with such storms.’

What happened to Derna was like a reverse tsunami. Two dams upriver in the mountains above the city were constructed of rammed earth and rocks, not concrete which would probably have resulted in an overflow as opposed to the total collapse which occurred. The dams collapsed. The water and debris rushed downstream, very rapidly creating a wall of fast moving water up to three metres high: an incredibly powerful destructive force. It dispersed on the plain the city is located on and pushed most of what was in front of it into the sea. Thousands of people lost their lives. Many of them had been ordered by the authorities to stay in their houses, which were washed away.

Picture above: flood devastation in Derna, Libya

The link between the two articles

The link between the articles for me is this. The first, though specifically about wildfires, points out that disasters are caused, and their consequences exacerbated, by a range of factors. The factors in Derna: deforestation on the mountains above the city increasing water catchment in the dams; poor maintenance of the dam walls; walls made of earth and rocks rather than concrete which would probably not have collapsed; incorrect local disaster advice and so on. All these things are under human control but so often they and other factors, are not controlled, because someone is making money in the short-term at the expense of the long-term.

Often, human beings are not good with nuance, seeking simplicity over reality for explanations. The scientist was not in any way eroding the conclusions of the paper he co-authored; he was simply making the point that we need to consider a range of factors when looking at natural disasters and the present focus on climate change can adversely affect objectivity.

To Bible students, such angst and even worse, opportunism, deliberate distortion of facts and a refusal to let

reality change one's beliefs, comes as no surprise. The portrayal of a fractured, divisive world, in the toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image, has been referred to in many previous articles. It's a clear prophecy of our troubled world with strong and weak nations not being united, just as iron does not mix with clay. (Daniel 2:41-43) It shows how badly we need one authoritative voice with the power to act as needed with total control to achieve results – in other words, a righteous dictator. It's a relief to know just such a man is coming. His name is Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The words spoken by Jesus quoted at the beginning of this article are a true sign in our times, but I finish this article by making an additional and vital point about the rest of what Jesus said which can be summarised by the word 'context'. Always look at the setting of words and the words around them when you want to determine what it all means.

Firstly, what is the overall context of the verse? In this case the words are part of the answer Jesus gave to the questions posed by his disciples earlier in the chapter:

'...“Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will

there be when these things are about to take place?’” Luke 21:7

And the second is about immediate context:

‘And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations,...men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth... 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 21:25–28

It’s the second half of this passage which gives us hope. Jesus is definitely coming back. While we wait for him, we can look at the bad things which are happening around us as signs that he will return. From the sorry state of our world, in combination with humankind’s demonstrated lack of ability to take even commonsense steps to help ourselves, it’s just as well he is coming back! As the verse so importantly says, the followers of Jesus can lift up their heads, because the return of Jesus is near.

David Gamble *Melbourne, Australia*



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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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