

Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages
Volume 34, Number 3, September 2023

Two Overturnings of the Tables — Two Miracle Fish Draughts

A few days before he finished his earthly course, and his last Passover, three Gospel accounts describe Jesus entering the temple complex and overturning the tables of the moneychangers. This was at the close of his ministry, and is recorded in Matthew 21:12, Mark 11:15, and Luke 19:45.

However, the Apostle John relates an overturning of the tables event that seems to occur at the beginning of our Lord's ministry, also in the context of the Passover (John 2:13-17). It is only the Apostle John's Gospel that relates all four Passovers that Jesus celebrated after his baptism; the other evangelists cover only the last Passover. Here is the list of Passovers from the Gospel of John:

- John 2:13, "The Jews' Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem."
- John 5:1, "After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem."¹
- John 6:4, "And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh."
- John 12:1, "Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany."

Jesus said, "no man putteth new wine into old bottles" (Mark 2:22). The Pharisees realized that if they accepted Jesus' teachings, they would have to give up on all their traditions, their entire system would have to be changed, and this made them fearful. Even if they could not answer him, even if they saw that his teachings were far above what they ever learned, they willingly opposed the light that was amongst them. In consequence, His blood came upon them and their house was left desolate.

But his true followers, who worship God in Spirit and in Truth, know that their faith in God is not dependent on the system, or on the synagogue, or on the temple.

A GREATER OVERTURNING

Likewise at the second advent, in the harvest, the teachings and the practices developed for thousands of years cannot hold the new wine, the new teachings, and meat in due season. So our Lord returned and overturned the system that was preventing people from knowing

God's loving character and the beautiful plan of salvation. Our Lord also revived the concept of full and unreserved consecration, the in-depth devotion to our heavenly Father that was hidden by the system and its traditions. In Romans, Paul writes about our baptism into Jesus' death. We thank the Lord that he opens our eyes to understand baptism, and to practically live it and be dead to sin.

When we talk about the Babylon, our minds automatically think of the churches around us, their belief in traditional doctrines that we know are not true. As a whole, that is correct and we thank the Lord that he opened our eyes to understand the meaning of a full and unreserved consecration. But the Spirit of the world also is a danger for the true followers of Christ.

In R5678, subhead "Why Thousands Are Falling," Br. Russell suggests that the spirit of the world and Babylon can be a delusion for sincere Christians. Unfortunately many will fail this test: "This is the time long foretold, when 'a thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand.' Why will all these fall? Because they have neglected this necessary development of character; because they have failed to put on the whole armor of God; because under the delusions of the Adversary and the spirit of the world and of Babylon they have become deceived in their minds."

The harmful characteristics of the Nominal Systems are its teachings and practices, setting forth fear, rather than love, full devotion, and a sacrificial life. These are

IN THIS ISSUE

<i>Two Overturnings, Two Draughts</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>The First Trumpet, Ephesus</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Gehenna Without the Garbage Dump</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Languages and Babel</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Evidence Missing!</i>	<i>8</i>

BEAUTIES OF THE TRUTH is published as a service for brethren to stimulate their appreciation of the riches of God's Word. It is published free of charge. Subscriptions will be entered for all requestors. Address: Beauties of the Truth, 6748 Breckenridge, Lisle, IL 60532. Editorial Board: Bros. Richard Doctor (Managing Editor), Bill Dutka, Adam Kopczyk, David Rice, Tom Ruggirello, and David Stein. Online: www.BeautiesoftheTruth.org.



Jesus overturning tables in the temple complex

core values that Satan always tries to twist to deceive if possible even the elect.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THIS?

We need to learn the same lesson that given to the early church. Even if they accepted Christianity and gave their lives in a full consecration to the Lord, it took them many years to leave behind the old teachings, the old practices, and to grow in the image of His son.

“Love therefore is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10). Do the teachings of Christ develop in us such a love that moves us to give our lives for each other? This is described by the apostle. “That they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Judgment will be rendered and just consequences follow. This may be seen as a contemporary fulfillment of overturning the tables. “Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is” (1 Corinthians 3:13).

TWO MIRACULOUS CATCHES OF FISH

The first miraculous catch is described in Luke 5:1-11. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus boarded Peter’s fishing boat and taught the people from there. He then directed Peter to launch into deep water and let down his nets. Peter responded that they had tried all night but had not caught anything, yet he obeyed and did as Jesus had instructed.

They soon caught so many fish that the nets started to break. Faced with such an obvious miracle, we read, “He fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8).

How many times do we face God’s power, His goodness, and mercy in our lives? Does this make us to be more like Peter, recognizing how weak we are without him?

Does this encourage us to leave everything behind and be fishers of men, and to serve our master even more, and live just for him?

ANOTHER MIRACULOUS CATCH

The second account of a miraculous catch of fish is in John 21:1-14. It occurred during the 40 days of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances. A few apostles including Peter, James, and John were discouraged due to their unfulfilled expectations of Jesus’ ministry, so they returned to their original fishing trade.

As we look at these events, and retrospectively look at our lives, we may find ourselves in similar situations. We can get discouraged when certain things do not occur as expected. Maybe our ideas or efforts are not supported by brethren as we had hoped. This can cause us to give up, or spend our resources in a different direction. In moments like this, it may be necessary to remember how much the Lord has helped us in our lives and put our expectations aside. We should accept the Lord’s will whatever it is, because he knows what we need better than we do ourselves.

The apostles fished all night without success. In the morning, a stranger on the shore asked if they had anything to eat. The answer was “no,” since they had not caught anything. The man then told them to throw their net on the right side of the boat, and when they did they drew in a “multitude of fish.” Now, logically, if there were no fish on the left side of the boat, there would be none on the right side either.

However, their obedience suggests a certain humility. At this point they did not know who Jesus was and, despite being experienced fisherman, they obeyed. This is a powerful lesson. We should have open ears, and be willing to consider the advice and help from others. God speaks to us through His word, and sometimes through brethren, friends, and even strangers. After a successful catch it was John who said: “It is the Lord.”

In general, the two catches of fish may well represent the gathering of God’s people and the final selection and sifting in both harvests. Many are called, but few are chosen, and fewer are faithful unto death. In both harvests, the chief reaper is our Lord who came to gather his people. In both harvests the number of those pretending to be God’s followers was very high, pictured by the many fish in the sea that were not caught. Only a very few were chosen, i.e. taken in the net.

Jesus gave a number of parables that help make this connection. In Matthew 13, our Lord gave the parable of the wheat and tares. God’s people grow together with the rest of Christianity, but he returns at the end of the age, to gather his faithful jewels.

Another parable, which is even more directly associated with the picture of fishing, is the parable of the net. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into



Jesus, beckoning from shore, to cast their net on the right side

the sea. Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away” (Matthew 13:47, 48).

The sea is full of fish, even as Christianity is spread all around the world and contains many who profess Christ. The net in the parable catches just a few fish and even these will be sorted again. This illustrates God’s high standard and how much is required to be more than overcomers.

SOME DEEPER LESSONS

At the First Advent our Lord came to “gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable” (Luke 3: 17). “He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:11, 12). He chose twelve disciples as the foundation of the church and many other “Israelites indeed.” These received him as their Messiah and followed him to the end and are now rejoicing with him. At the Second Advent, Jesus came to separate the wheat from the tares.

In another parable the wise virgins that filled their lamps with oil were ready to enter with Jesus when he arrived, and continue to do so until the full completion of the church (Matthew 25). In Luke 12:35-37, those who are attentive and hear the knock of our Lord during the harvest, and open themselves to the Truth, receive a wonderful feast. As Jesus said in John 14:2,3, he went “To prepare a place for you,” and now has “come again [to] receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2,3).

A DIFFERENCE IN DETAILS

There are a number of details that draw differences between the two catches of fish. In both instances it was difficult to pull in the net, showing that many are called. In the first catch, at the opening of Jesus’ ministry, many fish were taken in, but the account does not say how many. In

the second catch, at the end of Jesus’ ministry, we are told specifically that 153 “great” fish were caught (John 21:11). Providing an exact number perhaps suggests that in the harvest of the Gospel Age, the number of the church will be complete. Whereas the previous catch, the first catch, was just the beginning of the selection process for the members of the church.

In the first catch the nets broke, probably showing that the Judaic teachings, the Law, could not hold any fish catch, or bring salvation. Jesus opened a new way and gave a new commandment. For the second catch, during the Second Advent, the net did not break. The same work of revealing God used by Jesus at the First Advent, and during the Gospel Age, will be used in the Kingdom.

Additionally, for the second catch, the narrative specifies that they were close to the shore, only 200 cubits away (John 21:8). This indicates that we are very close to the Promised Land, the Kingdom. It also says that there were seven apostles fishing that day (John 21:2). This may show that the church will be complete after the 7 stages of the Gospel Age.

For the first catch, Jesus was with them in the flesh. For the second catch they recognized him only through his works, showing that at the Second Advent he is invisible to the world and seen only through the eye of faith.

In the second catch Jesus said, “Come and Dine” (John 21:12), indicating that Jesus returns with meat in due season for his followers. The word “dine” is defined as “the principle meal” (G709), meaning supper. Supper (sup) is also indicated in the following text. “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). Supper is the last meal of the day, again indicating that we are very close to the completion of the church, the last meal of this age.

In both cases they could not catch anything on their own, showing that without the Lord we can do nothing. He is the Captain of our Salvation, the forerunner. He is the head, we are the members. He is the shepherd, we are the sheep — he is the vine, we are the branches. Let us listen to his voice, and together with him join in this great work of the harvest. “But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore” — indicating that he returns in the morning of a new age (John 21:4).

When Jesus asked them to come and dine, none of the apostles asked who he was. He simply broke the bread and gave it to them. They recognized him through the miracle of the fish and even the way he broke bread. He wanted them to recognize him not through the flesh, but through the Spirit, and through his works.

The Apostle Paul encourages us in the same way to be spiritually minded. “Henceforth know we no man after the flesh” (2 Corinthians 5:16). How well this fits with our returned Lord! He came not as a human being, but in a spiritual form, invisible to the entire world, as a thief in

the night. As the apostles did not see the familiar Jesus, neither can we see him with our natural eyes. But we can recognize his presence through His works.

It is not a coincidence that the nation of Israel was spread throughout the world, but after 2,000 years brought back to life as a nation. We also see present society falling apart. These are the works of our returned Lord as he prepares the world for his incoming kingdom. Jesus said that no man would put a piece of new cloth on an old garment (Matthew 9:16). So, the events we are witnessing in the world should not plant any seeds of fear in our hearts, but rather encourage us to “look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28).

On a personal level, it is imperative that we see his presence and works in each of our lives, in our daily activities and experiences. We should be like the Apostle John who sat quietly in the back of the boat telling his fellow apostles, “It is the Lord.” Or we can be more like the Apostle Peter, who, after hearing John’s words, put on his coat and jumped into the sea, enthusiastically rushing to Jesus’ side.

Our goal is to live so close to Him, that his invisible nature becomes visible and clear to us. May the Lord bless us to be faithful to Him to the end!

— Adapted from a discourse by Br. John Bivol

(1) Editor note: was this a Passover? Purim? Other? In any case, it seems there must have been a Passover between the one mentioned in John 2:13, and the one mentioned in John 5:1.

The First Trumpet, Ephesus

“And the first [trumpet] sounded, and there came to be hail and fire, mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of the earth was burnt up, and the third part of the trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up” (Revelation 8:7, RVIC).

The first to trumpet was the Apostle Paul for the Ephesus period of the Church.¹ Historically, this is the time when Israel lost its land, the time that Rome was challenged by emerging Christianity, and the time when Christianity grew dramatically — all because of a loud message called “The Gospel.” It is not difficult to see how Paul’s message to Ephesus became a “trumpet,” not only heard around the world, but affecting the whole world.

The trumpet of Revelation 8:7 challenges us to define new symbols first introduced in it. Fractions become important in the Trumpet messages. They do not represent equal divisions; they represent the total number of parts to be considered — in this case, three. This pattern of thirds, not necessarily equal parts, can be applied to each of the remaining trumpets.

We do have a clue from the cross as to which three parts of society (earth) are being referenced in this verse. Pilate had a sign placed on the cross saying that Jesus was “King of the Jews.” But he had the sign written in three languages — Hebrew, Greek, and Latin (John 19:20). These are likely the three parts of “earth” mentioned in this verse. Latin represents the Roman Empire. Greek represents the new Christianity whose sacred writings were to be in Greek, and a large part of Christians in this period were to be Greek-speaking Gentiles. Hebrew represents Israel, whose sacred writings were in Hebrew. “Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in **Hebrew**, in **Latin**, and in **Greek**” (John 19:20, NRSV).

SYMBOLISMS

- **Earth** usually need only be defined as society. In this verse we must deal with “a third of the earth.” Consequently, we must divide earth’s society into three recognizable parts. Pilate’s sign on the cross did this for us. The “third” here is the Hebrew third, which is the primary focus of this trumpet.
- **Trees** represent (among other things) stalwarts of society. But again, only the trees in the Jewish third of society are affected.
- **Grass** represents people (Isaiah 40:6,7, I Peter 1:24). In this verse “**All** the green grass was burned up.” Green symbolizes life. The implication is that this verse is speaking of justified people, people “alive” (green) under the Law. Even though “all” grass is mentioned, the spirit-begotten saints are not “burned up.” Thus, we are correct in saying that this “green-grass” reference is exclusive to “all” the typically justified ones under the Law. The Law no longer functioned for them. They were “burned up.”
- **Hail** represents hard truths — truths which damage or irritate opposers, rather than bless or edify them.
- **Fire** represents destruction as a consequence of righteous judgments.



Seven angels with seven trumpets prepare to sound.



Jerusalem plundered by Rome was part of the First Trumpet judgment.

• **Blood** (in this context) represents the loss of life or vitality. Since “fire” and “blood” are “mixed,” we are being told that the righteous judgments of the period removed, shed, and poured out the functional life from something. That “something” is the Law and its adherents. Those Jews who were not converted to Christ.

With all of this information, the effects of the First

Trumpet (in the context of the Ephesus period) are historically accurate and relatively straight-forward.

A wordy interpretive paraphrase of this Trumpet (8:7) would read: “Paul spread the Gospel message far and wide. Its effects were heard and caused great changes in Israel, in Christianity, and across the Roman Empire. (And those changes endure and still cause effects, even to our day).

“Particularly on Israel were the results profound. Paul’s truths were well reasoned, Scriptural, and powerful in their presentation. To the unreceptive Jews, they were like hailstones. These truths were not received; they merely irritated and caused dissent and disruption. All of Christianity was the proverbial thorn in the Jewish side.

“Furthermore, the new religion was growing, while the Lord was pronouncing righteous judgment and abandonment of Israel, leaving their house desolate. This, culminating in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the diaspora, drained the very life-blood out of the nation and its religious services and beliefs.

“Thus were these trumpeting hurled down on the Jewish third of society — leaving it burned (in part even literally). Their esteemed leaders had no answers and, thus “went up in smoke” with the nation. And the people, all of them who thought the Law justified them, also lost that justified relationship with God. By AD 36, John’s baptism ceased to have validity. Israel and its Law were ‘dead.’

“The First Trumpet destroyed Israel’s polity, social structure, homeland, and religious practices.”

— *Extracted from the New Albany-Louisville Ecclesia Revelation Notes*

(1) Editor’s note: Some brethren make a strong case for the Apostle Peter as the first messenger to Ephesus. Our Lord gave Peter the “keys” in Matthew 16:19. They ask, “Was not the Ephesus period almost half over before the Apostle Paul got started?”

(2) Editor’s note: Further study might consider which hard truth, or what many hard truths? For example, that Christ Jesus was the promised Messiah who tasted of death for every man? That the high calling was now open? That the Law had been broken and was now ending? That Judea would now go into Diaspora?

Can We Explain Gehenna Without the Garbage Dump?

Most modern translations of the Bible transliterate the Hebrew Sheol and the Greek Hades, both of which refer to the death state from which resurrection is possible. It is still, however, the general practice to translate Gehenna as “hell,” allowing readers to think that the reference is to a place of eternal torment.

Gehenna is the Greek form of the Hebrew *Gai Hinnom*, or “Valley of Hinnom,” and until recently the scholarly consensus was that this was originally the name of the city garbage dump of Jerusalem. Consequently, *Smith’s Bible Dictionary* states: “This was originally the valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where the filth and dead animals of the city were cast out and burned; a fit symbol of the wicked and their destruction.”¹

In explaining Gehenna, it was quite natural for Brother Russell to accept this explanation. Thus, in Reprint 700 (originally published in 1884) the statement is made: “Gehenna (the name of a valley outside of Jerusalem where fires were kept burning to destroy the offal of the city, and never used as a place of torture) is used in Scripture to represent in a symbolic manner the *utter and hopeless destruction* (not torment) of the second death, from which there is no hope of recovery.”²

The “garbage dump” theory lends itself to the thought that the incorrigibly wicked will be destroyed, not tormented. Understanding Gehenna to refer to the “second death” is in line with Jesus’ own teaching: “Fear him [God] who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna” (Matthew 10:28, ASV margin). That is, God can destroy both the body and also the “soul” (the prospect of future life) in Gehenna. However, not everyone has drawn this conclusion. Besides stating that Gehenna is “a fit symbol of the wicked and their destruction,” Smith also states that this term is used “for the place of future punishment.” Sound logic, however, indicates that if Gehenna was originally a garbage dump where nothing live was cast, it must be a symbol of annihilation.

The problem is that, while the New Testament may indicate contextually that Gehenna is a symbol of the second death, we must rely on scholarship to explain the background of this term. Brother Russell relied on the scholarship of his own day, but now scholars are increasingly coming to realize that the “garbage dump” explanation is of a later date. It can be traced back only so far as that given by Rabbi David Kimhi³ around the year 1200 AD. Thus, Thayer’s lexicon states that “this common explanation ... is found in Rabbi David Kimchi (fl.c. 1200 AD) on Psalms 37:13.” Kimhi is quoted in R112 (originally published 1880) as follows: “It was a place in the land

(valley) near to Jerusalem, and was a place contemptible where they did cast things defiled and carcasses, and there was there a continual fire to burn polluted things and bones ... and therefore, the condemnation of the wicked in a *parabolic* way, is called *Gi-hinnom*.”

Because this explanation of the city garbage dump can be traced back no further than Kimhi, it is now being called into question. Bible scholar Bart D. Ehrman, while himself believing that Jesus taught annihilation for the wicked, states: “As it turns out, there is no evidence for this claim; it can be traced back to a commentary on the book of Psalms written by Rabbi David Kimhi in the early thirteenth century CE. Neither archaeology nor any ancient text supports the view.”⁴

In an article published in *Biblical Archaeologist* magazine, Lloyd R. Bailey⁵ writes: “Kimhi’s otherwise plausible suggestion, however, finds no support in literary sources or archaeological data from the intertestamental or rabbinic periods. There is no evidence that the valley was, in fact, a garbage dump, and thus his explanation is insufficient.”⁶ While others may think that Kimhi’s explanation cannot be entirely discounted, it is wise to attempt to explain Gehenna without resorting to the garbage dump.

HISTORY OF GEHENNA

The Valley of Hinnom is first mentioned in the Bible as being part of the boundary between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. “And the border went up by the valley of the son of Hinnom unto the side of the Jebusite southward (the same is Jerusalem)” (Joshua 15:8, ASV). Mention of the “son of Hinnom” seems to imply that Hinnom was originally the name of a man, and inheritance of this valley went to his son.

The location became notorious in the days of Judean kings Ahaz and Manasseh. At that time, children were sacrificed to the pagan deity Molech by passing through fire. Concerning Ahaz it is written: “Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom Jehovah cast out before the children of Israel” (2 Chronicles 28:3 ASV). And concerning Manasseh: “He also made his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom” (2 Chronicles 33:6 ASV).

King Josiah, however, as part of his reform, ceremonially defiled the valley so that it could no longer be used for these purposes. “And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech” (2 Kings 23:10 ASV). “Topheth” means “place of burning,” and this was the specific location in the valley where the sacrifices took place. Topheth came to be synonymous with the larger area of Hinnom.

Those who prefer the torture theory of hell may seek to by-pass the garbage dump and trace the Scriptural mean-



The Valley of Hinnom today (southeast of Jerusalem)

ing of Gehenna back to the human sacrifices, claiming that these are a symbol of torment. We would not expect Jesus to utilize a pagan sacrifice to a false god as an explanation for his use of Gehenna. Rather, the true meaning of the word is found in Jeremiah’s condemnation of these practices, in which God declares that the Valley of Hinnom would become a place of slaughter.

“And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded not, neither came it into my mind. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that it shall no more be called Topheth, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The Valley of Slaughter: for they shall bury in Topheth, till there be no place to bury” (Jeremiah 7:31,32 ASV, 19:1-7, 32:35). Thus, from the divine standpoint, Hinnom (Gehenna) became a symbol of the destruction of the wicked, not torment. We can draw a straight line from Jeremiah to Jesus, without mentioning the garbage dump.

THE TEACHING OF JESUS

Jesus, however, in his teaching about Gehenna, referred to another prophet, Isaiah. He said: “And if thine eye cause thee to stumble, cast it out: it is good for thee to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into Gehenna; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:47,48, ASV margin). {7} This is a reference to the final verse of Isaiah (66:24) in which those who survive the “little season” at the end of the Millennial Age will consider the judgment of those consigned to the second death. It reads: “And they shall go forth, and look upon the dead bodies of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh” (ASV). Here nothing live is exposed to the consuming fire and devouring worms, but rather “dead bodies” are depicted. This is a picture of annihilation, not torment.

Jesus may also have had in mind the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the king of Assyria: “For a Topheth is prepared of old; yea, for the king it is made ready; he hath made it deep and large; the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of Jehovah, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it” (Isaiah 30:33 ASV). Topheth here, being a place of burning, is used as a symbol for the fiery destruction of the king of Assyria. Not that the king went to the final state pictured by Gehenna, but that the destruction could be used to picture that state.

Our Lord consistently used Gehenna as a symbol of annihilation. As we have seen, he said that God can “destroy both soul and body in Gehenna” (Matthew 10:28, ASV margin). He contrasted entering into Gehenna with entering into life. “And if thine eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is good for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the Gehenna of fire” (Matthew 18:9, ASV margin). He meant by this that it is better for someone to lose anything dear to him as an eye than to retain it and be destroyed in Gehenna. He was in full accord with Jeremiah, who described Gehenna (Hinnom) as “The Valley of Slaughter” (Jeremiah 7:32 ASV).

It is not necessary to appeal to the garbage dump as an explanation of Gehenna in order to refute the teaching of eternal torment. Unless or until more evidence is found to substantiate the former, it might be wise to hold this explanation in abeyance.

— Br. Robert Virgil

(1) Quoted from article “Hell,” pages 240-41.

(2) See also Reprints 2601-2603 where an explanation is given for each text in the New Testament where the word Gehenna appears. Reproduced in the booklet *Where Are the Dead?* pages 37-48, published by Chicago Bible Students.

(3) Alternatively pronounced “Kimchi.”

(4) *Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife.* 2020. Simon & Schuster: New York, NY. Pages 157-58.

(5) Retired Professor of Hebrew Bible at Duke University and Barrow Professor of Biblical Studies at Mount Olive College.

(6) *Biblical Archaeologist*, Issue of September 1986. Page 189.

(7) Identical statements about the worm and the fire in verses 44 and 46 of the KJV are not found in the better manuscripts and are therefore omitted in modern translations.

Languages and Babel

“God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and **fill the earth**” (Genesis 9:1). But Nimrod and those like him rebelled and said, “Come, let us build a city and a tower ... **lest we be scattered** abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (Genesis 11:3-4). Therefore, God set about to punish them (or let them punish themselves) for refusing to populate the whole earth.

Initially, we may posit that the rebellion had to be carried on covertly. Words were used with different meanings, to create the world’s first underworld language. (Somewhat like modern youth create their own slang.) Apparently, this was the origin of the Sumerian language (later divided into Sumerian-A and Sumerian-B, both long since extinct.)¹

In Genesis 11:7 God said what He will do. Genesis 11:8 tells what He then did.² Jehovah God “scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off building the city.” God scattered them, and as they became isolated from one another their languages began drifting apart. (Historical Linguistics confirms that 99% of the world’s people today speak languages that trace back to a common original language. That includes Indo-European, Dravidian, Semito-Hamitic,³ and Chinese languages.)⁴

Archaeology shows that the Sumerian rulers of Babel were cruel to the point that some people rebelled from them; so the city of Kish (Cush) was conquered and destroyed; other people spread far and wide — eventually even to Africa, Australia, and the Americas. As they spread apart, they multiplied to seventy languages by Moses’ time (Genesis 10) and to perhaps seven thousand languages today.

The city was to rule over all people. The tower was to be a shrine “to reach unto heaven” (Genesis 11:4), but this was not a temple dedicated to Jehovah, but Satan!⁵ Yet, within a few centuries it was brought to nought.

— Br. James Parkinson

(1) Historical Linguistics shows tenuous similarities with Dene-Caucasian languages (including Chinese) and Nostratic languages (including Indo-European and Dravidian), but Sumerian is distant from all language groups. (Sumer is the Biblical “Shinar.”) Reference: “Materials from the First International Interdisciplinary Symposium on Language and Prehistory, Ann Arbor, 8-12 November, 1988” (5 Volumes), ed. Vitaly Shevoroshkin; Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1989-1992. BPX 25, pages 56-58; BPX 32, pages 158-161; BPX 33, pages 334f., 421, 433-457. Merritt Ruhlen, “A Guide to the World’s



Possible site of the Tower of Babel with original height, reference 5

Languages,” Volume 1, Classification; Stanford University Press, 1987, page 377. Also, Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Bros., 1959, page 7 ff.

(2) Similar to the “check-list” of Genesis 1, where six times “And God said, Let ...” is followed by what was accomplished, like “And God made ...” or “And God created ...” (However, Genesis 1:26, 27 tells only that part of the ultimate intent was accomplished at that time: “God created man in his own image ...”).

(3) Abraham travelled from Haran to Canaan to Egypt, with no suggestion of a need for interpreters or translators (Genesis 13). Two centuries later, Joseph used an interpreter between the Egyptian (a Hamitic language) he was speaking and the Semitic (from which Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic would later derive) his brethren were speaking (Genesis 42:23). (Joseph understood his brothers perfectly but did not want them to know it.) Thus, we may have a record for a secondary separation of languages recorded in Genesis 10:6, 24, Mizraim (Egyptian) and [H]eber[ew].

(4) People commonly think the language became confused first, and only then the people scattered.

(5) E.g., www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtUNHjDmGOY, especially beginning at the 11-minute mark.

Evidence Missing!

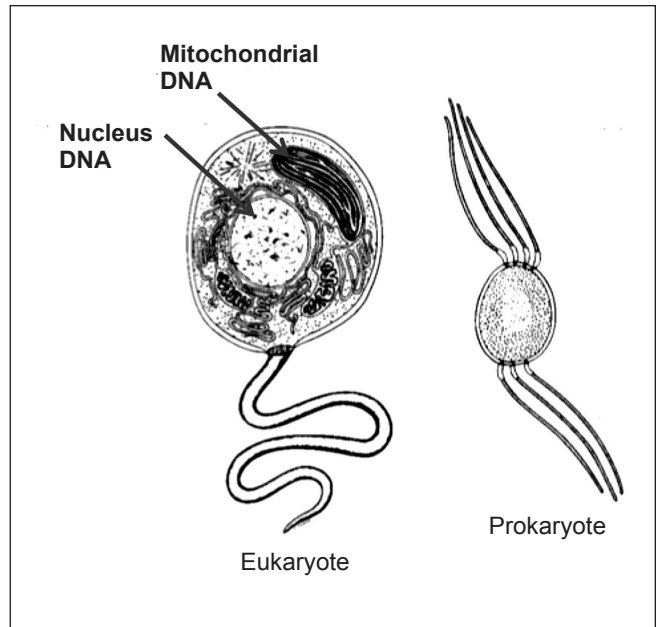
The One-half billion years (give or take a few years) of evolutionary evidence is missing!

The June 22, 2023 *Nature* magazine article “Lost World of Complex Life,” by Jochen J. Brocks, et al.¹ deserves special mention to our readership. The intense interest in all aspects of the appearance of “complex life” by the science community has brought to light compelling proof for the guidance and skill of a master builder (Proverbs 8:22-31). Our loving Heavenly Father was the architect, and his son, the “Logos” (John 1:3), in full harmony with the other angelic host, took great delight in shaping our earth both as man’s home and as a Jehovah’s “footstool” (Isaiah 66:1).

In the way of background, even today most of the life on earth are single cell life-forms such as bacteria that are too small to be seen by our eyes. We did not even know these organisms existed until the microscope was invented. These organisms (called Prokaryotes) have DNA dispersed throughout.

“Complex life” is built up of cells (called Eukaryotes) with a nucleus containing DNA. These cells contain numerous internal organelles called mitochondria. The mitochondria provide all the power to keep the cell alive. Interestingly, these mitochondria have their own special set of DNA. All living plants, animals, fungi, green algae, red algae, that comprise the “complex life” we actually can see, are Eukaryotes. The Lord oversaw the creation of these novel “complex life” forms in the seas long before the continents. For this reason it seems most reasonable to place their creation in the 2nd creative day.²

Over the last few decades, scientists who study life on earth have found that ancient sea floor muds, hardened



Cells are more complex than once supposed.

into shales, hold the identifiable chemical remains from the cell walls of these simple organisms. For “complex life” a breakdown product of cholesterol is one of the many signatures that are teased out of the shale by ever more sophisticated analytical techniques. Brocks, et al. followed 7 chemicals exclusive to bacteria and 3 chemicals exclusive to plants and animals.

Here is where the issue emerges. While the shales from the 1st creative day into the 2nd creative day have a clear record of bacteria, there is no record of “complex life” until it explodes into the fossil record highly differentiated. This leaves the community puzzled as to how all this diversity could appear without leaving a chemical record. Brocks writes, “Current ecological hypotheses do not explain the apparent scarcity of aerobic [oxygen-fueled] Eukaryotes over a time interval of more than half a billion years and across all environments where biomarkers are detectable, including apparently nutrient-rich and oxygenated habitats.” Half a billion years is the time the scientific community believes that random evolution would require to reach the level of diversity found in the fossil chemical record. That is a lot of time.

While we can only applaud the clever investigation by Brocks and his team, we doubt that the obvious hypotheses that the half-billion years of diversity found in complex life are in reality the deliberate work of an intelligent creator will be published in *Nature* anytime soon.

— Br. Richard Doctor

(1) Jochen J. Brocks, et al., “Lost World of Complex Life and the Late Rise of the Eukaryotic Crown,” *Nature*, Volume 618 (22 June 2023) page 767.

(2) Richard Doctor, “Jehovah’s Design is Not a ‘Lucky Fluke’ — The Second Creative Day,” *Herald of Christ’s Kingdom* (January 2020).