

# Your Letters

## Science mysteries

I would like to make a few comments on Brother David Burges' interesting article, "[Science mysteries](#)" (Oct. 2005, p. 401).

Firstly, Stephen Hawking is no longer hopeful that a unified theory of everything will, or can, be found. Recently, in an interview with the editors of the American science journal *Discover*, he admitted that there are so many mysteries and fundamental contradictions in the universe that resolving them is unlikely to be possible, and even if they could be explained they will be beyond human comprehension.

Secondly, it is not surprising at all that *New Scientist* should recognise our intellectual fallibility. As a frequent contributor to scientific journals over the past forty years, I can say that most of them, and the science they publish, have changed greatly during that time. Now, hundreds of fascinating research papers and books are being published on teleology (evidence of design), which was a taboo subject when I was a young scientist.

Thirdly, I would suggest a slight change, but an important one, in the first paragraph of the article, the prefatory one. I can speak for many of my colleagues when I say that very rarely do we as scientists "give the impression that science can explain everything". The unfortunate reality is that it is the media—print, radio and especially television—that always give the impression that scientists can explain everything. It is quite infuriating! Media personalities invariably choose the more confident, or shall we say arrogant, scientists for interview, not the best.

Of course, as Bible believers we can be equally (or more) arrogant, assuming often that *we* can explain everything. We cannot. Agur admitted that there were "three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand" (Prov. 30:18).<sup>\*</sup> David confessed, "I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me" (Ps. 131:1). And in Psalm 8 he had to admit that there was no intellectual way he could resolve the fundamental mystery of how the Creator of an incomprehensibly vast cosmos could feel love and compassion towards a minute, mortal speck

of briefly animated dust: "what is man that You are mindful of him . . . ?" (v. 4).

A final comment. Brother Mark Vincent's "P.S." in the same issue (p. 407) is superb, right on the mark! Online gaming has not just conquered Korea and Britain. In the Caribbean, where most people are poor, it is now a wild craze that has become to many young people more important than anything else in their lives, even their meals and their sleep.

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\* Quotations from the NIV.

## Caleb the son of Jephunneh

May I make a few observations on the article "[Kenezites and Kenites](#)" (Sept. 2005, p. 348), particularly the idea that Caleb married a Kenite, one of Jethro's daughters?

Firstly, regarding the people who went into Egypt, it would not have been possible for all those named in Genesis 46 to have literally gone down into Egypt. The sons of Pharez the son of Judah are mentioned in verse 12, but it would not be possible for them to have been born before Jacob and his family went into Egypt, as Pharez and his brother would have been infants themselves then. (Judah's two sons who had died are also included in the list.) It would seem from Genesis 38:1 that Judah took his Canaanite wife as soon as Joseph was taken as a slave into Egypt. It was a generation later that he had the twins, Pharez and Hezron, by his daughter-in-law Tamar. If this was, say, twenty years later, this would have been shortly before the time when the family came into Egypt. This can be worked out from the fact that Joseph was seventeen when he went with the Midianites, thirty when he appeared before Pharaoh and around forty when his family came down to Egypt after seven years of plenty and two years of famine (37:2; 41:46; 45:6).

It can also be shown that not all Benjamin's children would have been born when Jacob and his family came into Egypt, although ten are mentioned in 46:21. We are told that as soon as

Joseph was born, Jacob asked Laban to let him return home, but he stayed another six years to work for his flocks (30:25; 31:41). Benjamin was not born until some time after Jacob and his family entered Canaan, leaving insufficient time for him to grow up, marry and have ten sons before the entry into Egypt.

From this we conclude that the record in Genesis 46 is a stylised one, and we have to think about who actually went into Egypt. There is no mention of servants, though Jacob must have had some in the light of the fact that he was wealthy like his grandfather Abraham.

This leads me on to the suggestion that there could have been Kenezite servants amongst the family of Jacob going down into Egypt, and it is not too speculative to suggest that a descendant of these, Jephunneh, could have married a woman of the family of Hezron. It is the names 'Caleb' and 'Achsah' that lead me to think this. 'Caleb' was a Hezronite name (1 Chron. 2:18), and this Caleb had a daughter called Achsah (v. 49). Caleb son of Jephunneh is listed under the descendants of Judah in 1 Chronicles 4:1-23, as are also Kenaz and Othniel. I believe this shows that Caleb son of Jephunneh was both a Kenezite and also of the line of Judah.

My suggestion is that Hur, son of Caleb son of Hezron, had a sister who married Jephunneh. If this suggestion is correct, (the later) Caleb, son

of Jephunneh, would have been within the family of Judah, and well able to represent the tribe as one of the spies. If, as the article suggests, he had married a Kenite, becoming brother-in-law to Moses, then the relationship would have leaned towards Levi and not Judah.

I believe a postscript is necessary, however. Further down Hur's line we are told that there were Kenites, referred to as descendants rather than sons (2:55). Josephus, I believe, intimates that Hur married Miriam, and this is shown on the genealogy accompanying the [original article](#) (Sept. 2005, p. 349); and it is possible that the connection with Jethro's daughters could still apply at another juncture.

Perhaps these suggestions could be considered by your readers.

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*In the article being commented on, the author rules out the idea that Kenezites entered Egypt with the Israelites. The fact that Kenaz was the grandson of Esau makes it difficult to see how he could have had descendants by this time, although Esau married considerably earlier than Jacob. However, we do know that a "mixed multitude" came out of Egypt with Israel, and this may have included Kenezites who joined the Israelites in Egypt sometime after the Israelites had arrived there.—T.B.*

## Gleanings from the Land

Tony Benson

### Ancient date palm germinated

ISRAELI researchers have succeeded in growing a date palm from seed found in excavations at Masada. The seed is believed to be from a variety of date palm which became extinct in the Middle Ages. It must be 2,000 years old. Scientists from the Louis Borick Natural Medicine Research centre in Jerusalem think that this particular variety may have medicinal properties, and a leaf from the plant is being analysed for its properties.

A researcher at the centre says that dates had "an enormous amount of use in ancient times for infections [and] for tumours. We're researching medicinal plants for all we're worth, we think that ancient medicines of the past can be the medicines of the future". This use of the date palm for dealing with infections and tumours is reminiscent of the way Isaiah told Hezekiah to place a lump of figs as a poultice on the boil that was threatening his life. Though there was, it would seem, a miraculous element in Hezekiah's recovery, presumably the poultice of figs

had something to do with it as well, otherwise why was he commanded to do it?

Source: "Date palm buds after 2,000 years", BBC News website, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/4086348.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle_east/4086348.stm).

### Arrival of the cranes

IT IS often difficult to know for sure what species of bird is indicated by particular Hebrew words used in Scripture, especially if they occur rarely. Modern translations are often very different from the AV. One curious case is that of the Hebrew words *sis* and *agur*,