

to Jaffa who get the chance to enter the building and stand on the roof would be able to cast their minds back to that momentous day 2,000 years ago when the gospel was opened up to the Gentiles; though, judging from the picture in the article referred to, it would be rather a hazardous enterprise, for there is no protection against falling off the roof.

Source: "Revealed: the roof of Simon the tanner's house", Daniel Herman, *Archaeological Diggings*, Aug./Sept. 2005.

Ancient church discovered at Megiddo

THE discovery of a very old church near the site of the ancient city of Megiddo caused widespread interest worldwide. The discovery was made when work began to extend a prison, and some of the prisoners were employed in the work of excavation. Much was made of the fact

that Megiddo is supposedly the site of the Armageddon of Revelation 16:16, although as the book of Revelation is a book of sign and symbol there is no basis for trying to equate Armageddon with a specific geographical location.

The church is said to be the earliest found in Israel, and some say perhaps the earliest in the world. A mosaic floor bears the name of Jesus Christ and the fish symbol, an early symbol of Jesus Christ based on the fact that the letters of the Greek word for fish make up an acronym for the phrase (in Greek), 'Jesus Christ, God's Son and Saviour'. Prior to the reign of the Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century A.D., Christianity was not officially permitted, which is why the remains of churches from before that time do not exist. After Constantine had made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire, churches were

widely built, especially in the land where Jesus spent his life.

By this time, of course, Christianity was corrupt, and became even more so when Constantine adopted it. Inscriptions on the mosaics indicate that the doctrine of the Trinity was held by those who built the church. One refers to the fact that the church was built in memory "of the God Jesus Christ", and another reads, "The God-loving Aketous has offered this table to the God Jesus Christ as a memorial". These inscriptions are in Greek because the worshippers at the church would, of course, have been Greek-speaking Gentiles.

Source: "Religion, prison and Armageddon: inmates working on an archaeological dig at Megiddo jail have uncovered possibly the earliest church ever found", Tidhar Ofek and Daniel Ben-Tal, *The International Jerusalem Post*, 18-24 Nov. 2005.

What of distant planets?

Malcolm Edwards

SINCE 1 SEPTEMBER 2004, astronomers have claimed to have located at least two distant planetary systems that are similar to our own solar system, consisting of a central hot star like our own sun, around which several smaller bodies are in orbit.

It may have stimulated journalists at the time, but it was of little surprise to astronomers generally, for it has long been assumed that the bright objects we call stars are really other suns, many of which are very much larger than ours, and that they almost certainly would have their own satellite bodies. In his book *The Story of the Heavens*, published in 1890, the astronomer Sir Robert Stawell Ball, commenting on this very possibility, says:

"When we become aware of the existence of such systems, a multitude of questions arise. We long to know their details; we long to know the sizes of those great suns, and the dimen-

sions of the planets which circulate them; we long to see the configuration of their planets, to learn what their surface is like, and, it may be, to speculate on the possibility of their being inhabited" (p. 370).

So it is not new to think of distant stars as having planets like our own, nor are mankind's speculations about there being forms of life on some of them. What is new are telescopes with much greater magnification to probe ever deeper into space; hence the current possibility of discovering which of our neighbouring stars contain orbiting objects. The question about whether there is life on such planets will always occupy the minds of cosmologists, but their concern is not ours, for what God may or may not do elsewhere in the universe has not been revealed to us in His Word and is not in the context of our salvation.

However, the star systems currently under discussion are said to be some thirty-five light

years away, which in cosmic terms is relatively close. This means that it would take about thirty-five years to send messages there, and the same length of time to receive a reply; so were there to be intelligent life in that vicinity having the same technology as we have, it would take a human lifetime to communicate just once with them. Earth's cosmologists have been consistently transmitting coded radio messages out into space for much more than that length of time, and have received no response whatsoever from any direction, which is most significant.

So here is an interesting consideration. 6,000 years of human life on our planet is a relatively brief existence compared with the alleged cosmic time periods generally given, so were there to exist older systems than our own, containing intelligent life like ours, one would have thought that long ago we should have detected some of their probing messages. Yet this is not the case.

To be receiving absolutely no signals at all would argue that either there is no finite intelligent life beyond our solar system or that such life exists but is so distant that its signals have still not reached us. The first scenario seems to be the more likely.

Some brethren have postulated that the angels are able to travel at the speed of light and that they may have come from a distant planetary system

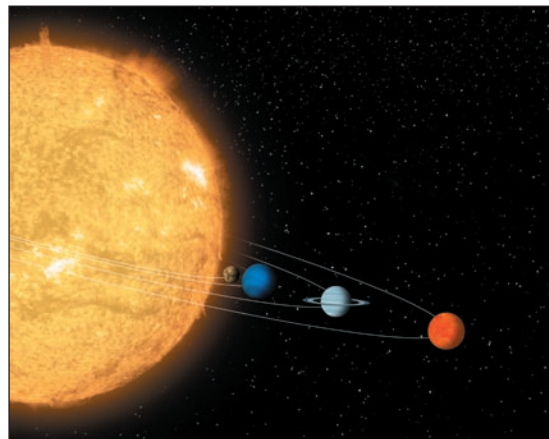


IMAGE: NASA/JPL-Caltech

Artist's impression of a known solar system centred around a star called 55 Cancri, which is about the same size as our sun.

from our own, but once again this is only speculation and has no real bearing on our salvation. We are best advised to concentrate on what has been revealed to us in God's Word, whilst, perhaps, maintaining the hope that, sometime in the future, immortal saints will be shown much more about the wonders of God's universe, for it will surely be much more spectacular than anything man has discovered, or may yet discover.

Fame

1

Fame is the spur that drives
And thereby hurts as it succeeds,
From whence the heavy heel derives
That heady power which it thus breeds.

2

That flagrant partner of ambition,
Almost as bad as blatant greed,
That overrides the very supposition
Of what may be wrong, I'd plead.

3

It's what we never find, but ever seek
Within unwritten pages still unturned,
Not such as flows from those too meek
To grasp that nettle otherwise is spurned.

4

And yet, this spur that's callèd fame
Will die with those who wore it well,
As it returns whence once it came,
For fame's a gong to sound death's knell.

Bill Guy