

let us not lose our hope and faith on the verge of its fulfilment.

*James Farrar*  
Hamilton, Canada

Another reader has provided an extract from *The Christadelphian Advocate* of November 1897, which reads:

“In Ezek. xxxvii, ‘The whole house of Israel’ is likened to a valley of dry bones, a fitting representation of the dissolution of their national existence. The question, ‘Can these bones live?’, was one not many years ago that would have been answered in the negative. The general public sentiment was that Israel was gone never to become a people of any note again. But within the latter part of the nineteenth century they have forced themselves to the front in every department of life. This is as it should be according to prophecy of the latter days; and it is what is prophetically called the noise and the shaking of the bones, and the bones coming together, bone to his bone, sinews and flesh being formed, preparatory to the breath of resurrected national life being breathed into them, when Israel shall ‘live and stand upon their feet, an exceeding great army’ (Ezek. xxxvii:10)”.

This is the earliest piece of Christadelphian writing referring to the ‘dry bones’ prophecy as one which commences to be fulfilled prior to Christ’s return that has come to my attention so far. Thus the assertion of a correspondent that “An examination of Christadelphian magazines from 1860 to 2000 demonstrates that every sign (however insignificant) that indicated the *gradual* return to the Holy Land was hailed as a fulfilment of Ezekiel 37” (Feb. 2001, p. 54) remains unproven. It is undoubtedly true that such signs were hailed as a fulfilment of prophecy, and evidence of the nearness of Christ’s return, but not, it would appear, specifically as a fulfilment of Ezekiel 37:1-14. As cited on that same *Testimony* page, Brother Thomas, in *Eureka*, regarded this prophecy as being post-adventual in fulfilment, and it appears that this remained the general view until the end of the nineteenth century. At that time there was an explosion of interest in Jewish matters across the various Christadelphian fellowships existing at the time as a result of the inception of the Zionist movement, which was linked to the fulfilment of the ‘dry bones’ prophecy.

Supporters of the original Christadelphian view that the ‘dry bones’ prophecy is post-adventual in fulfilment have asserted that the pre-adventual view was derived by Christadelphians at the end of the nineteenth century and beyond from non-Christadelphian sources. The first references to the new interpretation of Ezekiel 37 do not cite such sources, and I doubt that it can be shown that they did rely on the works of others. However, my attention has been drawn to the fact that one widely read nineteenth-century book on prophecy, *Light for the Last Days* by Grattan Guinness, published in 1886, refers to Ezekiel 37:1-14 beginning to be fulfilled in the formation of an organisation called the Universal Israelite Alliance, dedicated, amongst other things, to Jewish colonisation of Palestine.<sup>5</sup> Earlier books on prophecy I have consulted either do not refer to this prophecy at all or do so in a way which is not specific to either a pre-adventual or post-adventual fulfilment.—*T.B.*

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5. p. 193.

### The sign of the Son of man in heaven

The Lord Jesus said that in the time of the end there will be a sign in the sky, “the sign of the Son of man in heaven” (Mt. 24:30), the Greek word translated ‘heaven’ here being used both for the abode of God and the celestial firmament. There are two ways of interpreting such prophecies, the figurative/metaphorical way and the literal/physical way. In the last few centuries more attention has been paid to the former method than to the latter, but I would like to share with readers a recent discovery I have made of a literal fulfilment of the prophecy.

The link between the Lord Jesus and the fish is well known. In the Gospels we read that some of the disciples of Jesus were fishermen, that Jesus fed thousands of hungry people with bread and fish miraculously multiplied, and that he caused large numbers of fish to be caught by miraculous means. Later the fish became a symbol of Christianity, because in Greek the initial letters of the statement ‘Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Saviour’ make the Greek word for fish. There is a remarkable astronomical link with this fact, which we will now explore.

The constellations are arbitrarily divided areas of the sky in which are stars that may be

quite different from each other in brightness, spectral class and distance from the earth. There are eighty-eight of them today. Some were named by Europeans less than 500 years ago during expeditions into the southern hemisphere. The twelve constellations of the Zodiac, through which the sun makes its annual course (as it appears to us), have long been identified as such, the identification of some constellations being traceable back to the Babylonians or even to more ancient Near East civilisations. The constellation known as Pisces has been known as such since the first century A.D., and, together with Venus as the Bright Morning Star, played a major role in East Mediterranean astrology.<sup>1</sup>

During the era of the great geographical discoveries, when the oceans were widely explored, there arose a need for a unified method of naming stars, the only navigational aids in the open seas. The German astronomer Johannes Bayer (1572-1625) introduced, in his 1603 stellar atlas *Uranometria Nova*, the practice of designating the brightest stars in the constellations by the letters of the Greek alphabet. Today it is not the only method of denoting stars, but, apart from the individual names given to the brightest stars, it is the most convenient one.

Usually the brightest star in a constellation is designated *alpha* ( $\alpha$ ), the first letter in the Greek alphabet, but this is not so in the case of the constellation Pisces. Here the star designated *omega* ( $\omega$ ), the last letter of the Greek alphabet, is slightly brighter than *alpha* and much brighter than the star *beta* ( $\beta$ ), the second letter. It is in fact the third brightest star, after *eta* ( $\eta$ ) and *gamma* ( $\gamma$ ), among the approximately seventy-five stars in Pisces visible to the naked eye. The reason for this change from the normal way of designating stars in a constellation remains a puzzle.

At this point, let me remind you of what the Lord Jesus says of himself in the book of Revelation: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (22:13; cf. 1:8,17; 2:8; 21:6). In the same chapter he refers to himself as "the bright and morning star" (v. 16).

At present the sun is in Pisces at the time of the vernal (spring) equinox.<sup>2</sup> However, due to a slight wobbling of the earth on its axis, the position of the sun within the twelve constellations of the Zodiac gradually moves backwards over the years, the whole process being calculated as taking 26,000 years before it is back in the same position again.<sup>3</sup> As there are twelve Zodiac con-

stellations, this means that the sun remains in a particular constellation of the Zodiac at the time of the spring equinox for just over 2,000 years. The sun moved into the constellation of Pisces, the Fishes—representative, as shown above, of the Lord Jesus Christ—shortly before his birth, and is calculated to leave Pisces and enter Aquarius, the Water Carrier, in the next 100 years. The present age is therefore sometimes referred to as the Age of Pisces.

We now need to consider the concept of the meridian. This is an imaginary line running from the horizon due north of an observer through the heavens to the horizon due south of an observer. The meridian at the vernal equinox is called the zero meridian, and it runs through the constellation of Pisces in which the sun is situated. At the time of the birth of Jesus Christ the nearest visible star in Pisces to the zero meridian would have been that designated *alpha* ( $\alpha$ ). However, due to the slow movement of the sun through the Zodiac, mentioned above (the precession of the equinoxes), the nearest star in Pisces to the zero meridian, in fact the nearest of all the 1,800 brightest stars as listed in a star catalogue, is now that designated *omega* ( $\omega$ ). It is calculated that it will be exactly on the zero meridian early in 2012.

It is surely significant that, in the constellation with a name that is particularly identified with the Lord Jesus, a star designated *alpha* by astronomers was closest to the zero meridian at the time of his birth, and a star designated *omega* is the closest to the zero meridian at the time when we expect him to return. This is especially so when, as explained above, astronomers have departed from their normal convention and designated one of the brightest stars in the constellation *omega*.

But there is more. I mentioned above the fact that the planet Venus was referred to as the Bright

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1. See the article, "Starry fish in the firmament", E. C. Krupp, *Sky and Telescope*, USA, Dec. 1998.
  2. The term 'equinox' refers to the two occasions each year, spring and autumn, when day and night are of equal length all over the world. In the northern hemisphere it is normally 21 March, and is technically the first day of spring. The vernal equinox is significant in calculating the start of the Jewish sacred year in spring, which commences on the third day after the first new moon following the vernal equinox.
  3. This phenomenon is called 'the precession of the equinoxes'.

Morning Star by the ancients,<sup>4</sup> a title used of the Lord Jesus in Revelation 22, in close proximity to the reference to him as "Alpha and Omega". On 30 March Venus became the 'Morning Star' and will remain so till the end of 2001. Moreover, for the period 24 January to 10 June (137 days) it was situated in the constellation of Pisces, a rare astronomical event. Such a long sojourn in one constellation was only possible because, instead of moving straight on through the heavens, the path of Venus in our skies performed a loop within the constellation of Pisces. Also, on 11 and 12 April Venus passed very close to the star *omega* ( $\omega$ ) in Pisces, probably the closest for millennia.

Whatever might be the figurative application of Matthew 24:30, these remarkable astronomical phenomena surely provide a literal fulfilment of "the sign of the Son of man in heaven", and warn us that the day of his return is near.

*Lyuben Piperov*  
Sofia, Bulgaria

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4. Venus orbits between the earth and the sun. It is therefore visible (when it can be seen at all) either for a few hours before sunrise or for a few hours after sunset, never throughout the night. This led the ancients to refer to it as both the Morning Star and the Evening Star, thinking they were different 'stars'.

### The 430 years of Galatians 3:17

I recently completed a short article on the above subject, and am pleased to see that Brother Ralph Green has come to the same conclusion regarding the length of the Israelite captivity in Egypt ("Bible chronology reassessed and the seventh vial", April 2001, pp. 132-3). The following are a few extra thoughts to add to his conclusions.

The 430 years are usually calculated from when Abraham was seventy-five years of age (Gen. 12:4), for it is argued that the promise of the land as a possession to his *singular* seed did not occur until Abraham was already in Canaan (Gal. 3:16,17; Gen. 12:7). Nevertheless, there is some disagreement about which of the promises Paul refers to when he cites the words, "And to thy seed" (Gal. 3:16). Some are confident that the first reference to a singular seed occurs in the promise given to Abraham after the sacrifice of Isaac: "and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:17, 18). This prom-

ise, however, was given quite late in Abraham's life, when he was nearly 120 years old. To begin the 430-year countdown to the giving of the Law at that point leaves insufficient time for the various stages set out in the tables below.

The only recorded promise that contains the exact words, "and to thy seed", was given after Lot separated from Abraham: "for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, *and to thy seed* for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered" (13:15,16). However, this passage generally speaks of a plural seed, with emphasis on the great number of Abraham's future descendants. From both Paul's words in Galatians 3:16,17 and Stephen's in Acts 7:2-7 it is reasonable to conclude that a promise of the singular seed was made very early in Abraham's pilgrimage, indeed right at the first, even though this aspect is not so clearly detailed in the first recorded promise (Gen. 12:1-3).

Table 1 gives the usual breakdown of the 430 years. However, the 115-year gap between the death of Jacob and the birth of Aaron seems a little too long when the overlapping generations within it are considered. Kohath, having entered Egypt with his grandfather Jacob (Gen. 46:11), must have been at the very least eighteen years old when Jacob died seventeen years later. Indeed, Kohath had a younger brother, Merari, who also entered Egypt with Jacob, so it is unlikely that Kohath was himself still a baby at the time. Kohath lived for 133 years (Ex. 6:18).

This means, according to Table 1, that Kohath died the year that his grandson Aaron was born ( $1 + 17 + 115 = 133$ ), or some years earlier if he was more than one year old when Jacob entered Egypt. In those days of longevity, it would be unusual for a grandson not to know his grandfather. Furthermore, in surmising how old Kohath was when Jacob went down into Egypt, we note that Kohath's father Levi had eight *younger* brothers who all took children into Egypt, the youngest, Benjamin, having ten sons at the time. This confirms that Levi's own three sons were probably not among the youngest of the fifty grandchildren of Jacob who entered Egypt, and that Kohath was almost certainly older than one year at the time.

Table 2 resolves the above, and simultaneously accounts for both the 430 years of Galatians 3:17 and the 400 years of Genesis 15:13. The sojourn in Egypt is thereby reduced to 195 years.