

were colleagues; it was Meitner who initiated the uranium problem in Berlin, persuaded Hahn to join her, pursued it, and, finally, explained it. It is surprising that in a book devoted to physicists, Snow incorrectly gives total credit for the fission discovery to a chemist, and incorrectly relegates the physicist to subordinate status.

The book has so many errors that I, for one, can't believe any of it. For my undergraduates, I shall recommend biographies that I know to be scholarly.

RUTH L. SIME

Sacramento City College
Sacramento, California

8/83

Explaining the Flood

Robert Brehme's letter (July, page 100) shows a lot of mathematics, evidently making fun of the concept of the Flood as found in the Bible. To help this type of thinking, may I point out one or two concepts. First of all, the atmospheric pressure at sea level is a nominal 14.7 psi. If the entire mass that produces this pressure were all converted to liquid water (which of course cannot be done), it would produce only 34 feet of water. If this water all ran into the oceans, the oceans would rise to only 50 feet. Therefore, all of the questions and answers given in Brehme's letter in reference to rain and the Flood certainly have no substance of reality, and such calculations would be a waste of time.

Scientists today recognize that the only large sources of water are within the Earth. The ocean itself is believed to have come from the core and mantle of the Earth (being some of the lighter elements of the Earth that have been pushed upward as some of the heavier elements, such as iron and nickel, have sunk to the center of the Earth.) We now assume that water still circulates within the Earth, from large fountains deep in the oceans. Present-day estimates of the amount of water still remaining in the core and mantle is over 100 times more than what is present in today's oceans.¹ This amount of water appears adequate to cover the 3.09 figure calculated by Brehme.

Of course, God was not smart enough to know all this, especially way back when the Bible was written. If God had been as smart as Brehme and present-day scientists, He probably would have had Moses write something like this:

"In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up...."²

And of course, when the Flood was completed, He, if He had been smart,



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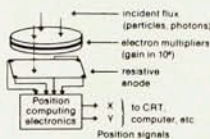
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letters

should have had said:

"The fountains also of the deep... were stopped..."³

But of course, we have only known about all this in the last few years, and we definitely should not look in the Bible to see what was actually said.

References

1. *Handbook of Chemistry and Physics*, 62 Edition (1981-1982), page F-161.
 2. Genesis 7:11 (King James Version)
 3. Genesis 8:2 (King James Version)
- GERALD L. O'BARR
San Diego, California

THE AUTHOR COMMENTS: I am not sure that Gerald O'Barr's letter is answerable. Of course, my letter to PHYSICS TODAY was facetious and specious. But if I was making fun, it was only of those who take some matters too seriously.

It is difficult to respond to the first paragraph of O'Barr's letter because I don't understand what atmospheric pressure has to do with the Flood or with any of the calculations one can make regarding it.

The second paragraph concerning the source of the water in the Flood is, of course, pure conjecture. Since the flood waters arrived on the Earth as rain, some natural mechanism, such as intense heat, would have to be brought into play to dislodge the water from the mantle. I say natural because the tenor of the story is that the Flood was a natural phenomenon. Conceivably such heat might have been generated naturally—perhaps through a minor pulsation of the Sun, perhaps through some inner convulsion of the Earth. But would not both of these disturbances have been sufficient to wipe out mankind? Perhaps we should ask our prospective class in Bible study to calculate the amount of heat needed to evaporate the Flood waters and to estimate the surface temperature needed on the Earth to release water from the rocks.

ROBERT W. BREHME
Wake Forest University
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

9/83

Glass flow revisited

George Elliot's letter in August (page 86) related the story of how an overturned box of wine glasses yielded one broken glass with its stem smoothly bent at a 90° angle. It is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine how this result could have been produced by an impact at room temperature, but there may have been an alternative *modus oper-*

andi. As youths, most of us have experimented with glass lenses to produce fairly high temperatures, that is igniting bits of paper. Is it possible that the configuration of wine glasses, "repacked loose, with no padding" and left on the window sill, was such that light could enter the box and be focused by one or more glasses upon the stem in question? If such a heating mechanism is realistic, then the only remaining question is whether the bending occurred before or after the great fall.

As an aside, we really should not go around branding as hoaxes that which we cannot immediately explain.

ROBERT L. OLDERSHAW
Dartmouth College
Hanover, New Hampshire

8/83

This was not a hoax! Haven't you seen the windows of a very old house? The glass is thicker at the bottom than the top due to gravity constantly pushing the glass down. Glass will bend due to steady low pressure, such as gravity. Elevated temperatures will speed up the bending. The glasses were probably kept on their side while a steady elevated temperature was applied (maybe the glasses were kept in an attic or on a radiator just before they were bought, and since the glasses were not seen between the time when they were bought and the time when they were dropped, Elliot mistakenly thought the drop caused the bend when the glass was actually bent before he brought them. The glass was stored on its side during this period: The weight of the bowl part of the glass was enough pressure to cause the glass to bend at the stem.

MARK NAGEL
Beltsville, Maryland

8/83

THE AUTHOR COMMENTS: The comments of Robert Oldershaw and Mark Nagel no doubt have some valid points under certain practical conditions, but, unfortunately, they do not fit the conditions of this particular event. The glasses were packed in a cardboard box with a lid and left on a north-facing window sill. The season was early winter, so that there was little chance of receiving heat from the Sun. The glasses were borrowed from a wine store for the occasion, and were observed to be in normal condition before the party and before being re-packed in the box for return. Mark Nagel's observation on old window glass leads us back to some of the original arguments in the earlier correspondence on this topic, and there does seem to be evidence for glass flow in old windows. A friend has reminded me of a demonstration experiment for physics students, in which a glass rod was clamped at one end to a bench, while a suitable heavy weight was attached to the

opposite end, causing the rod to bend. After a period of time (not specified) the weight was removed, revealing that the rod was permanently deformed into a curve.

The important point about the incident I described was the rate of bending, which I estimate was somewhere in the millisecond range—the duration of the impact of the box with the floor. One cannot imagine how glass could deform at this rate at room temperature. As the photograph shows, the bowl of the glass, which probably took the first impact, did actually shatter, but the stem did not.

As Oldershaw suggests, we should maintain an open mind with regard to events that are difficult to explain. The event shows that there may be some gaps in our knowledge of materials science.

GEORGE ELLIOTT
Chelmsford, England

9/83

Last word on first computer

Recently C. N. Yang called my attention to a photograph in the November 1981 issue (page 16), showing Oppenheimer and von Neumann. They are standing in front of what is described in the caption to the picture as "the Institute for Advanced Study's EDVAC computer." This caption was responsible for a letter in May 1982 by Yale Jay Lubkin (page 116), a letter in January 1983 issue by John G. Brainerd (page 13), and a rebuttal in August 1983 (page 13) by Lubkin.

In the interests of accuracy, let me correct a few errors in the caption and in the letters cited. The computer built at the Institute for Advanced Study—the IAS machine with descendants ILLIAC, MANIAC, ORDVAC, and so on—was not an EDVAC-type machine. It was a novel design that serves as the prototype for most modern computers and was based upon a machine architecture described in a 1945 paper, "Preliminary discussion of the logical design of an electronic computing instrument," by A. W. Burks, H. H. Goldstine and J. von Neumann. Brainerd says in his letter that the IAS machine "was completed much after the EDVAC." In fact, the two machines were finished around the same time—the EDVAC in 1950 and the IAS machine in 1952.

There is a marked omission in Brainerd's paper, where he attributes the design of EDVAC to "John W. Mauchly and J. Presper Eckert." It would be wrong not to quote words of Eckert, Mauchly and S. R. Warren Jr, director at the time of the EDVAC project on this subject. They said in March 1945:

The problems of logical control have been analyzed by means of