

29<sup>th</sup> May

### Memory Verse

**In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.** Colossians 2:3

If you can say your verses to an older family member or friend from church over the phone or by Skype or zoom so much the better! Or you could make some Memory Verse Cards and send them in the post; see today's lesson for one idea of how to do this. Today's lesson relates to treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Sometimes in human history important knowledge gets lost... or very nearly!

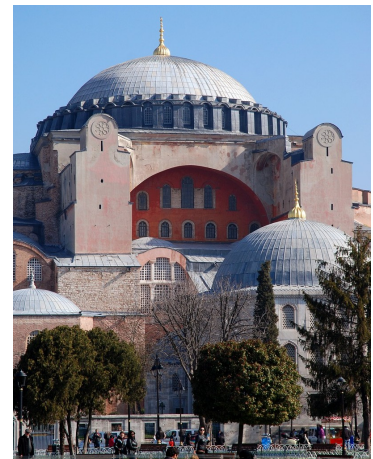
We are going to look at one of the most significant events of the last millennium in this lesson. I wonder if you know what it was.

### Map work

“Constantinople is a very long word. Can you spell it?” This old chestnut of a joke has amused generations of children – I'm sure you've all heard it!<sup>1</sup> But a harder question to answer is “*where* is it?” You will not find Constantinople on a modern map. However, you will find **Istanbul**; look for it on the map now. Why would a city in such a place be very strategic? Keep your map open as you read more of today's lesson; there will be some more places to find. If you can find a historical map showing the Roman Empire, especially in its decline, that would help too. Later in today's lesson you might find a map showing the Ottoman Empire and the other Islamic Empires that went before it useful too. Look out for the places highlighted in **green** as we go along.

### Something to read from history

– spot the lost knowledge in the story. In 395AD the Roman Empire had split into two parts permanently with the Eastern Empire ruled from the city called Constantinople or, as the Romans had called it earlier, Byzantium. The Emperor Constantine, who had made Christianity legal in the Roman Empire, had moved the capital of the empire from Rome to this city earlier.<sup>2</sup> The city was then named after him. The Roman Empire in the west fragmented and fell apart but in the East, in Constantinople, the empire survived in one form or another for nearly 1000 more years. The Emperor Julian I (482-565AD) built the Hagia Sophia (left), the stunning domed cathedral with its breathtaking interior that is still standing in the city.



Let's leave Byzantium/Constantinople/Istanbul behind for the moment and go forward in time now to the middle ages in Western Europe.

Many languages were spoken in Europe in the middle ages – as they are now – but scholars all communicated with one another in Latin, the old language of the Roman Empire. The Bible had been translated into Latin long ago by Jerome (347-420AD) who had a good knowledge of Hebrew and Greek. Now Western Europe was no longer part of the same Roman Empire as the eastern part where Greek was a main language. Knowledge of Hebrew was kept alive in the west by Jewish Rabbis, although they usually had little contact with non Jews, but knowledge of Greek died out in the west – it became a knowledge so rare that it was virtually lost. Scholars used Jerome's Latin Bible, they did not, and then could not, consult the original Greek of the New Testament.

A situation arose where the ordinary people had no Bible in their own tongue. Scholars themselves could only understand the Latin translation. This translation was known, ironically, as the *Vulgate* because it was in the common or *vulgar* tongue. But Latin was no longer common or vulgar! When John Wycliffe (c.1320-1384) translated the Bible into English he was not able to do so from Hebrew

<sup>1</sup> Answer is “I.T.”

<sup>2</sup> More about Constantine in the lesson for 25<sup>th</sup> July.

and Greek as Jerome had done, he had to make a translation of a translation, the *Vulgate*, as he did not know the original languages.<sup>3</sup> Darkness was descending on western European thought. The common people had no Bible. The scholars spent their time tying themselves up in knots trying to reconcile a vast and contradictory body of Latin documents *about* Christian thought which wandered further and further away from what was actually taught in the Bible itself.

And then on **29<sup>th</sup> May** 1453 it happened! Disaster struck Constantinople. Since early April the city, sadly decayed since the days of Constantine and Julian I, had been besieged by the Islamic forces of the Ottoman Empire which totally outnumbered the defenders. Worse still, the Ottoman army was able to use gunpowder to bombard the city. Nevertheless, Sultan Mehmet II ‘the Conqueror’ (1451–1481) nearly gave up his attempt to defeat this key city that had defied Islamic forces for some 800 years.

The attack of **29<sup>th</sup> May** was Mehmet's last and desperate attempt. He urged his men on with a promise that they could take whatever they wanted for themselves once they had defeated the city and he threatened with death any who were slack. His troops responded with a war cry of “Allahu Akbar!” and “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet!” so tremendous that it was reputed to have been heard on the coast of **Anatolia**. The defenders were terrified. Sultan Mehmet threw wave after wave of troops into the attack in addition to the bombardment. He was victorious. The city was Constantinople no longer, it became Istanbul. The great domed Hagia Sophia was destined to be turned into a mosque.<sup>4</sup> The golden pictures of Christ and his saints that had been worshipped by the idolatrous citizens of Constantinople were plastered over and the walls were decorated instead with texts from the Qur'an.<sup>5</sup>



For years Greek speaking scholars had been making their way out of the troubled eastern part of what had been the Roman Empire. Now that Constantinople was in the hands of the Muslims, there was a dramatic increase. Scholars, often carrying precious manuscripts and books with them, fled

<sup>3</sup> See the lesson for 22<sup>nd</sup> May.

<sup>4</sup> Muslim place of worship – see below.

<sup>5</sup> See below for an explanation of what the Qur'an is.

from the carnage of the city to the West, especially to Italy, in great numbers. Their influence on scholarship in the west was immense. Now western scholars had access to many of the old Greek writers that they had not read before. The study of Greek became much more common. There were effects in art, music, architecture and literature as a result. The study of the Bible changed too. One important event illustrates the difference it made: William Tyndale made his translation of the Bible into English in the 1520s. Unlike Wycliffe before him he was able to translate directly from Greek and Hebrew.

### Something to do

Constantinople/Byzantium was famous for mosaics. Beautiful pictures on walls and floors were created out of thousands of tiny pieces of stone and glass. If you look at the part of a Byzantine mosaic on the previous page from a little distance you can get an idea of what it looked like on the wall of a room. The artist has cleverly caught the light and shade and the bowl looks solid and the birds rounded and chubby. If you look close up you can see how he has carefully graded the colours of each piece of stone or glass to get the effect he wants.

Imagine how many little pieces went into making this face found in the Hagia Sophia! How carefully graded they were!



You can make your own mosaic. If you did the lesson on 28<sup>th</sup> April, you might remember that we did something similar with flower petals. You don't have to have special coloured paper for a mosaic, old greetings cards, pictures from old colour magazines even used cardboard food packaging are all ideal. Cut or tear roughly even sized little squares. As you work on your mosaic you will be able to trim the pieces to get a good fit for your design. If you look at the pieces in the dove mosaic above you will see they are often curved or shaped to fit the edge of the



relevant part of the picture. Get some containers such as old margarine tubs or yoghurt pots and carefully sort and grade the colours of your little pieces of paper. When you have a good collection of pieces consider what colours you have and decide on what kind of picture you want to make. If you have plenty of blue you could do a sea scene or a lake, for instance. Plenty of green and brown might suggest a tree. One idea might be to use the pieces to fill in an outline picture in a colouring book to make your mosaic. If you don't want to do a whole mosaic, just a few pieces can be used to make a birthday card (like the one on the left) for someone – or you could use them for your memory verse as suggested above.

### Something to think about<sup>6</sup>

The Ottoman Empire ruled by Sultan Mehmet II was an Islamic (Muslim) Empire. Sultan Mehmet II's attack in 1453 was not the first time Constantinople had been assailed by the forces of Islam. In fact, as you will see from a map, Constantinople's position made it like a great closed gate keeping Islam out of western Europe. "...had the Saracens<sup>7</sup> captured Constantinople in the seventh century rather than the fifteenth, all Europe—and America—might be Muslim today."<sup>8</sup> But what *is* Islam?

If you have read anything about this subject in a textbook or encyclopaedia you will probably have

6 Information from <https://christianpublishinghouse.co/2019/05/09/the-origin-of-islam-new-path-to-god-or-a-jewish-christian-heresy/> and other sources.

7 Mediaeval term for Muslim.

8 Norwich, John Julius, *A Short History of Byzantium* (New York, 1997) p.101.

read the story of the Prophet Muhammad's life in very exact and detailed terms. However, the origins of Islam are obscure and the life of Muhammad is shrouded in as much legend as that of Robin Hood. Such things are not appropriate for a history book, they belong in a collection of Myths and Legends yet generally that is all you will find in books of reference. However...

Traditions about Muhammad began early in an empire (the Abbasid empire) that by 850AD ruled **Arabia**, and stretched from **North Africa** and western **Sicily** to the edge of **India** and the shores of the **Aral Sea**. He is supposed to have been born in 570AD in the city of **Mecca**. Whether Mecca even existed at this time is disputed since the city is not mentioned in any document until 714AD and is shown on no map until 900AD. Mecca was certainly not on any ancient trade routes, nor was it a place of flourishing vegetation with olive trees such as the story of Muhammad's life describes.

There is evidence for some sort of monotheistic<sup>9</sup> religion among the Arabs in the seventh and eight centuries AD in various ancient inscriptions on rocks but none of them mention Muhammad before 691AD and this is a very important date. At this point Islam begins to emerge into the full light of history. Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (644AD-705AD) (The Great) Caliph and conqueror who ruled **Syria** and the Holy Land (roughly modern-day **Israel**) from his capital in **Damascus** wanted to consolidate the Arabs. He also wanted to demonstrate their superiority over the Jews and the Christian sects over whom he ruled. Al-Malik made Arabic an international language and introduced it on his coinage. He was keen that the Arabs, who saw themselves as descendants of Hagar,<sup>10</sup> should reclaim their birthright, that is the land of Palestine (modern day Israel).



To unite the Arabs, Al-Malik wanted a religion. He made one up out of the “flotsam and jetsam of beliefs left scattered by the great flood-tide of Arab conquests...”<sup>11</sup>

In **Jerusalem** (considered a Holy City by Jews and Christian sects of all kinds) Al-Malik constructed the Dome of the Rock, the massive building pictured here, designed to triumph over the Jews and Christian sects. He was careful to make it higher and more prominent than the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the

same city and he filled its interior with inscriptions denying the deity of Jesus Christ and the teaching of the Trinity. This Dome was Al-Malik's answer to the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople as you can see from the picture. For the first time the words “Muslim”, “Muhammad” and “Islam” (which means “submission”) made their appearance. These inscriptions (though they differ slightly from the Qur'an in its present form) were drawn from Arab writings destined to become the Holy Book of Islam, the Qur'an.

The Islamic Holy Book, the Qur'an, was put together in the mid eighth century from Arab writings based on Jewish and heretical Christian legends and apocryphal<sup>12</sup> writings. At this time there were loud theological quarrels taking place among three groups of Christians and the terrible war between Persia and the Eastern Roman Empire made people wonder about the end of the world when Jesus will come again, thinking it must be soon. Scholars have found traces of these quarrels in texts in the Qur'an. Also in the mix were Zoroastrian (a Persian religion) fables. It includes impossible jumbles such as Mary the mother of the Lord Jesus being the sister of Aaron in the Old Testament! Certainly the original target audience for the Qur'an was familiar with the idea of angels, and of Gabriel in particular and there is much mention of Mary in a way that seems to expect readers to know roughly who she was. Some of the texts in the Qur'an refute the idea that she was to

9 Believing in one God not many gods.

10 The mother of Abraham's son Ishmael.

11 Holland, Tom *In the shadow of the Sword* (London,2012) p.418.

12 Additional books of made up stories often put alongside the Bible.

be worshipped as part of the Trinity. Arabia was the area where persecuted Christian groups often found refuge<sup>13</sup> and was also the place to which exiled heretical groups made their way.<sup>14</sup> It was an area where there was much doctrinal confusion especially about the divinity of Christ. There was no Arabic translation of the Bible at this time so the Arabs could not know what it really taught. “From the propaganda of Roman emperors to tales of Christian saints, from long vanished gnostic gospels to ancient Jewish tracts: traces of all these writings have been convincingly identified in the Qur'an.”<sup>15</sup>

Most history books, even the Christians ones produced in the USA and used in Christian schools and homeschools, just regurgitate the legends of Muhammad's life as though they were facts. Now, more evidence is coming to light and our books need updating. The traditional stories paint the Arab conquest as Islamic and due to the leadership of Muhammad. We now know that the Arab conquests began before there was any Islam and that Islam only arose afterwards.

Depending on where you live in Britain, it is possible that you have a number of Muslim neighbours. We should remember them in our prayers, be as friendly to them as possible and take every opportunity to tell them about the Saviour. Since the time of Al-Malik, Muslims have been in the grip of a made-up religion and Christians, who know the truth, have the words that can set them free!

### Find out some science

How did the architects of buildings like the Hagia Sophia and the Dome of the Rock construct these vast roofed-over spaces without any supporting pillars? The materials used to make the domes were heavy bricks and mortar and the pressure on the supporting structures is immense. *Pendentives* were one of the solutions to the problems of construction. Can you use your encyclopaedias or reference books to discover what Pendentives are?<sup>16</sup>

Where in London would you find a church with a dome supported on pendentives?<sup>17</sup>

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13 See Broadbent, E.H. *The Pilgrim Church* (1931) p.68.

14 Darren M. Slade, “Arabia Haeresium Ferax: Schismatic Christianity's Potential Influence on Muhammad and the Qur'an” *American Theological Inquiry* Vol. 7. no.4 2014.

15 Holland, Tom *In the Shadow of the Sword* (London,2012) p. 351.

16 You can find out about pendentives here: <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-a-pendentive-dome-177310> For a glimpse inside Hagia Sophia you could watch a tourist video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ZQmrQWBESg>.

17 St Paul's Cathedral.