

for several hundred years, but its real past has begun to come to light only very recently.

In August of 1970 the scientists of the Deep Sea Drilling Project moved into the Mediterranean with their drilling equipment to begin the investigations of their thirteenth cruise. It was a time of keen anticipation, as preliminary samplings of the bottom sediments had for several years given hints that there was something special and different about this sea. As we now know, the team was to find some very different sediment layers in the sea floor here from what they had found out in the Atlantic and other oceans. Of course some of the layers were of the usual oceanic types, but the drillings also revealed many thick layers of evaporite minerals buried deep in the Mediterranean floor and extending to practically all areas of this sea. This condition was more like what one would expect to find in modern shallow seas where rapid evaporation produces layers of salts and other evaporite minerals.

The Mediterranean is by no means a shallow sea, being over a mile deep in most places. But the evidences brought to light by the deep drillings show that there was a long period of time when this entire body of water was essentially a great evaporative basin which was receiving and storing thick layers of salts all across its floor. Some of the chief scientists of Cruise 13 even went so far as to conclude that this sea was once a dried up basin with only small salty lakes here and there--something like California's Death Valley, only much larger.⁴² Much evidence for this condition was found, and many oceanographers have adopted the dried-up basin view. On the other hand, some prefer to see the evaporative period as a time when the water was of only moderately shallow depth, with evaporative loss high enough to provide for precipitation of calcium carbonate, gypsum, and occasionally halite (common salt). The physical laws according to which these minerals are precipitated are well known, and several aspects of them are described in Chapters 5 and 6 above.

In any event, the presence of thick and sea-wide layers of these evaporitic minerals deep in the Mediterranean floor leaves absolutely no doubt that there were at least a few hundred thousand years of evaporative deposition, after which greater quantities of water became available to return this sea to a salinity level similar to that of the oceans. Because of the presence of a few to several hundreds of feet of normal oceanic sediments now covering the evaporite layers, most oceanographers believe that the time of evaporite deposition ended about 5.5 million years ago, near the close of the Miocene Epoch.⁴³ We will consider the nature of both these and the evaporitic layers in succeeding paragraphs.

One question which may be asked is, "Does the Bible say anything about a time when the Mediterranean Sea was drying up, or was more salty than usual?" It is not likely that we can find any direct reference to these events which occurred so long before the creation of man, but there are a few interesting statements in the Old Testament concerning God as having power to dry up the seas (Isaiah 44:27;