



"The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1)

REASONS TO BELIEVE - SEATTLE AREA CHAPTER

NEWS AND VIEWS

MARCH 2010

What's Happening?

Radio Interview/Debate

Hugh Ross (Old Earth) from Reasons to Believe and Jason Lisle (Young Earth) from Answers in Genesis debate the age of the earth LIVE on the Frank Pastore Show, Wednesday, March 31, 5-6 PM. For more information go to: http://frankpastore.blogspot.com/2010_03_01_archive.html.

Social Networking

RTB is now using several social networking sites. Check them out at: Twitter at http://twitter.com/RTB_official, Facebook (you can login through www.reasons.org/rtb-social-networking), and You Tube at <http://www.youtube.com/user/ReasonsToBelieve1>.

We Do Presentations

The Seattle chapter does presentations on wide range of topics. If your church or group is looking for speakers or discussion leaders, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. We are also happy to help you with questions and resources for your personal studies and/or efforts.

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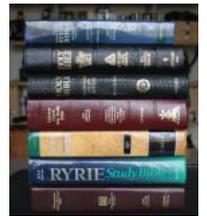
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Historic Age Debate: Dependence on Translations (Part 1)

DR. JOHN MILLAM

These days there's a bewildering array of Bible translations to choose from. How do we know which one to choose? What difference does it make anyway? For most purposes, any translation will do. However, in the debate over the age of the Earth, selecting the right translation makes a big difference.

Since 2007, I've been addressing different aspects of the historic age debate on [RTB'S] Today's New Reason to Believe with the purpose of yielding insights into the modern dispute over the age of the earth by studying what theologians and scholars have written on this issue over the last 2,000 years. So far, I've provided an overview, examined the doctrine of creation ex nihilo and discussed a beginning of time. Before jumping into a detailed discussion of Genesis 1, one more issue must be addressed: the impact of relying on translations of the Bible.



This issue is among the most important—yet most overlooked—factors influencing the age debate. Though, we are fortunate to have good English translations available to us today, they can never perfectly communicate the original text. Additionally, wide gaps in time and culture separate us from the Old Testament's (OT) initial audience. In this five-part series, I will discuss how a dependence on translations of the OT's ancient Hebrew language affects interpretations of Genesis 1–11 throughout history.

THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

Following the deaths of the apostles, church leadership was passed on to various theologians and scholars collectively known as the early church fathers. Due to the times in which they lived (90–476 AD) it is natural to assume that these post-apostolic men were closer in language and culture to the writers of the Bible than we are today.

This assumption proves largely true for the New Testament, but the OT is another matter. Prior to Jerome and Theodore of Mopsuestia at the end of the fourth century, none of the early church fathers were fluent in Hebrew. Before that only Origen (third century) is known to have made an effort to learn Hebrew, although he probably never

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Thinking as Christians Part 3

DAVID PETERSON

From the beginning of the church, it has had to deal with “intersections” with the intellectual world around it—because the claims of the gospel relate to physical and historical reality, not just to abstract ideas about an invisible world. Jesus showed *physical* evidence of His resurrection; Luke cited *historical* details in his gospel to emphasize the reality of the events on which our faith is based; Paul *reasoned* with Jews (from the Old Testament), and with Greeks (from their philosophy or experience), and with rulers sitting in judgment on him.

This use of reason to support the truth of our faith is called *apologetics*. The word “apologetics” comes from the Greek word for “defense”—“an answer to an accusation.” The idea is very different from the word “apologize” in English; rather than “I’m sorry for what I did,” or “I didn’t mean it,” it says “Here’s why I’m not guilty”—not an “apologetic” attitude that submits to an accusation, but a strong stand against false accusations. When Paul speaks in his own defense to a crowd (Acts 22:1), or Felix (24:10) or Agrippa (26:2), it is called an “apology.” And we are told to do the same: “... always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you ...” (1 Peter 3:15).

Apologetics has a long and varied history in the church since Paul’s time, defending Christianity against an ever-changing list of attacks. Let’s look at a few examples of apologetics, to get a sense of the many ways in which our faith has been, defended.

Can we trust the Bible? For some, the first hurdle in coming to Christ is to be willing to take seriously what the Bible says. This doesn’t mean we must prove that it is inspired and inerrant; that can come later, after they trust Christ. But many people see no reason to pay attention to the Bible at all, because they have been taught to believe that it is nonsense. Would you listen to someone who said the earth is flat, or that Hitler never existed?

The *scientifically minded* person is taught that the Bible’s story of creation is incompatible with what science has found. The *historically minded* person hears that some Bible statements disagree with known history. The *literary-minded* person is told that the Bible was not written down until years after the event, and is more myth than history; or that it contradicts itself. Such claims arise every day on television or in the news, and need to be answered in order to gain a hearing.

There are Christian scholars working in many fields who can give well-researched and detailed answers for their fellow scholars. For the rest of us, there are popular works that summarize these ideas at a more basic level. Each of us ought to become familiar with those issues that are relevant to our own interests and the needs of those we meet. But be careful: if we try to use complex technical arguments that neither we nor our hearers fully understand, we may be like David in Saul’s armor, trying to use weapons that we don’t know how to handle safely! Sometimes it is wiser just to refer a questioner directly to the experts if he wants details; these might be good books, or experts within the church on specific fields.

Continued on last page

In the NEWS...

[What Wiped Out the Dinosaurs?](#)

In this article, Hugh Ross explains the recent findings of a panel of scientists who determined that the dinosaurs were wiped out by an asteroid collision (the Chicxulub crater), not a series of super volcanic eruptions in India as some contend. Go to: <http://www.reasons.org/what-wiped-out-dinosaurs-part-2-effects>.

[Things Moral Relativists Can’t Do](#)

This article by Greg Koukl of the Stand to Reason Ministry examines relativism from a different perspective: what moral relativists can’t do. Ultimately, his seven rules show that few moral relativists actually practice what they preach. Go to: <http://www.salvomag.com/new/articles/salvo1/koukl.php>.

[The Social Gospel](#)

This Breakpoint article examines the social gospel—the view that it is our responsibility to eradicate poverty and other societal “sins.” The problem, it maintains, is the focus becomes prosperity and the creation, rather than the true gospel of Christ. Go to <http://www.breakpoint.org/features-columns/articles/14545-the-social-gospel-and-eternity>.

[Sea Monkey Hypotheses](#)

This article critiques evolutionists’ explanation for the fact that certain types of African monkeys also live in South America, when there was no landbased route for them to get there. Their answer? They floated across the ocean on rafts! Go to http://www.evolutionnews.org/2010/03/sea_monkey_hypotheses_refute_t.html.

[Translating Genesis 1:1](#)

This RTB article examines how some new Bible translations change the wording of Genesis 1:1 and impact theology in a profound (negative) way. Go to: <http://www.reasons.org/translating-genesis-11-aristotle-or-big-bang-part-1-2>.

reached fluency. So, for the first 350 years after the apostles, the debate over the days of creation within the church relied almost entirely on Greek and Latin translations of the OT. In this way, a Greek/Latin-based view of Genesis 1 became entrenched prior to any church fathers attaining fluency in Hebrew.

The lack of Hebrew scholarship in the early church comes as a surprise considering that Christianity was birthed within the matrix of Judaism. Jesus, the apostles, and the New Testament writers (not including Luke) were all faithful Jews. They would've known Hebrew (or at least Aramaic) and had access to Jewish ideas about Genesis—yet they remain silent on the age of the earth and the days of creation. During much of the apostolic period (c. 30–90 AD), the church was predominantly Jewish in composition, centered in Jerusalem, and operated as a part of the Jewish community. The destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple by the Romans in 70 AD marked the beginning of a rapid decline in the number of Jewish believers. These events, combined with the substantial influx of Gentile converts, meant that by the mid-second century, the post-apostolic church was heavily dominated by non-Jews. These converts spoke in Greek or Latin, but not Hebrew, and had little connection to Jewish culture and tradition.

All of the early church fathers included in this study came from non-Jewish backgrounds. They carried a Greco-Roman perspective into the church. Thus, Greek culture and language, rather than Hebrew, was a driving force in the early church's understanding of Genesis.

LATER THEOLOGIANS

Dependence on OT translations continued throughout the Middle Ages (sixth to fifteenth centuries). During that time the Latin Vulgate was the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church. A resurgence of interest in studying the Bible in its original languages didn't occur until the Reformation (sixteenth to seventeenth centuries). It should be kept in mind, however, that for nearly fifteen centuries prior to the rise of Protestantism, interpretations based on Greek and Latin had set the model for interpreting Genesis.

This time also saw an explosive growth of common language translations, which was an essential element of the Reformation. While these translations greatly increased laypeople's access to Scripture, it still meant that many remained unfamiliar with the original Bible.

EARLY JEWISH WRITERS

Since Christianity emerged out of Judaism, it is important that we also consider the works of early Jewish writers. They were linguistically and culturally closer to the original Hebrew, which gives their opinions of the Genesis creation account significant value. Their predecessors, the authors of the OT, simply believed that the seven "days" in Genesis formed the basis of the Sabbath pattern.

A concern over the age of the earth and related issues didn't emerge in Jewish thinking until the introduction of Greek philosophy and language. Hellenization—the process of spreading Greek ideas to other cultures—began in earnest after Alexander the Great's conquests (fourth century BC). Over the next few centuries, Jews living outside of Israel became progressively Hellenized and, therefore, spoke and read Greek (those living in Israel largely retained Hebrew).

Our primary source of information on the Jewish reaction to the encroachment of Hellenism is the Apocrypha and other intertestamental works. These are a collection of mostly anonymous Jewish writings spanning the time between the close of the OT and the destruction of the Jewish temple in the first century. This era saw the development of a clear declaration of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, which rejected the popular Greek notion of eternal matter. Beyond that, these writings tell us little about how the Jews of this period understood creation or the age of the earth beyond what Genesis 1 directly teaches.

The one exception to that rule is the Book of Jubilees (140–100 BC), which does assume that the days of creation are simple solar days and that the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 can be used to construct a chronology up to Abraham. However, Jubilees should be used with caution because it contains many legendary embellishments to the OT accounts, which was done to encourage Jews to keep the law and to avoid Hellenization.

The two most important Jewish writers to emerge in the first century were Philo and Josephus. Their writings influenced the thinking of the early church fathers. Philo provided the most extensive early Jewish commentary on Genesis. He flatly rejected a calendar-day interpretation; however, his work shows influence of Greek thinking and therefore doesn't represent a pure Hebrew perspective. Josephus, a Jewish historian and contemporary of Philo, also discussed Genesis 1 but remained ambiguous as to the nature of the creation days.

CONCLUSION

Given that most believers over the history of the church didn't study the OT directly in Hebrew, it is important to examine what implications this has for the age debate. In my study, one can identify at least three distinct ways this reliance on translations influenced people's interpretations of Genesis 1–11:

- linguistic factors (to be discussed in part 2);
- cultural factors (part 3);
- issues associated with specific translations (part 4).

I will conclude in part 5 with a look at what this means for us today.

[Parts 2-5 of this article will be published in the coming issues of the Seattle Chapter newsletter.]

Are Christian doctrines rational? Once a friend is willing to listen to what the Bible has to say, he may still find that its ideas are foreign to him, because his worldview (his basic orientation to the world, by which he interprets everything around him) does not have room for miracles, or for absolute truth, or for guilt before a holy God. So he challenges our core beliefs: How can God become a man? How can you claim to have the only truth? How can a loving God condemn anyone to hell?

Sometimes it's easy; the skeptic may just be arguing against a "straw man" and needs only a clear explanation of the genuine Christian teaching, in language he can understand. We ought all to be able to give such an explanation.

Where more is needed, the Bible itself may give us good arguments to use to defend the truth, or we may need to combine scriptural knowledge with what we know of modern thinking to develop explanations that will speak to the person's own worldview. Many resources are available for this kind of apologetics.

Does it make sense not to believe? Apologetics sometimes plays a more proactive role, not answering objections, but instead challenging the unbeliever's position on his own ground. Philosophers, for example, have well-developed arguments for the existence of God, or for the reality of sin and judgment, or against scientific naturalism or relativism, based entirely on human reason. These are sometimes too technical to work well for the ordinary person; but Christian philosophers have been effective working this way among their peers, and this in turn can influence those who trust those "experts". Another positive argument outside of scripture is the "Intelligent Design" movement, which is working to build a strong case for creation from scientific evidence alone, without direct reference to the Bible or even to Who the creator might be. A weakness of this approach is that even when an atheist is brought to believe in a creator (as recently happened to Anthony Flew), he may be no closer to faith in Christ, and to salvation. These efforts can have a place, however, in making a case for the rationality of faith, on which others can build more evangelistically.

This quick survey leaves out many other aspects of apologetics, for which I do not have room. In future months, I will look at one area at a time, so I can give more space to each. But next month I will conclude this introduction to "Intersections" with a look at the importance of apologetics to the ordinary Christian.



Seattle Chapter Reasons To Believe

Who Are We?

The Seattle Chapter of Reasons To Believe is a local extension of the worldwide, interdenominational Reasons To Believe ministry. We exist to support our parent organization and foster local involvement in the ministry. We serve the Puget Sound area and are composed of Christians of different ages and backgrounds.

It is our conviction the same God who created the universe inspired the Bible. Therefore, what God says through His word must agree with the facts of nature. We reject the notion that science and the Bible are at odds and provide a scientifically-sound and Biblically-faithful alternative to Darwinism and young-Earth creationism.

What Do We Do?

Our mission is to remove the doubts of skeptics and strengthen the faith of believers. We provide scientific, historical and philosophical evidence that supports the Christian worldview and helps remove barriers to a belief in God, the Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We carry out this mission by:

- Helping people access RTB and other scientifically and biblically sound resources.
- Bringing nationally-known speakers into the area to promote the scientific reliability of the Bible.
- Assembling a team of local apologists to address questions about science, the Bible and related topics.
- Working with teachers and homeschoolers to achieve a balanced approach to the teaching of origins.
- Building alliances with local churches, ministries and groups to maximize the exposure of the RTB ministry.
- Reaching out to unbelievers with gentleness and respect, encouraging them to evaluate their worldviews.

We welcome your involvement and support. For more information, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to: Seattle RTB, PO Box 99683, Seattle, WA 98139-0683.

Questions? Get Answers.

Whether you are looking for scientific support for your faith or answers to questions about God, the Bible, and science, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. You can also call the RTB hotline seven days a week, 5:00 to 7:00 PM at 626-335-5282.