



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

REASONS TO BELIEVE - SEATTLE AREA CHAPTER

NEWS AND VIEWS

APRIL 2010

What's Happening?

Reasons Institute

Reasons to Believe offers a new Creation vs. Evolution course through its Reasons Institute. The five-to-seven week course is designed to help participants use RTB's creation model to challenge the evolutionary paradigm. For more information go to: <http://www.reasons.org/learning/reasons-institute/courses>.

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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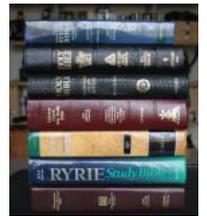
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Historic Age Debate: Dependence on Translations (Part 2)

DR. JOHN MILLAM

When we gaze at the world, light must pass through the lens of the eye before the brain can process it. A good lens will bring light into sharp focus; a bad one will distort or obscure what is being viewed.

In the same way, language stands between us and text. If we hold an incomplete or distorted understanding of language, chances are we will subscribe to faulty interpretations. This is especially true when reading the translation of a document when we aren't familiar with the original vernacular. A greater difference between languages increases the possibility of misunderstanding. Greek, Latin, English, and other European tongues are all fairly similar to one another; therefore relying on translations between these languages poses relatively few problems. As a Semitic language, Hebrew is very different from Western languages. Thus, the jump from the Greek of the New Testament (NT) to modern English is small compared to that from the Hebrew of the Old Testament (OT).



In part 1, I pointed out that most believers throughout church history have relied primarily on translations for their understanding of the OT. Here we will consider two specific ways in which ancient Hebrew is different from English (but also Greek and Latin) and discuss the implications they hold for our interpretations.

FEW WORDS

English boasts one of the richest vocabularies in the world. It gives those who speak and write the language an ability to make very fine distinctions. The Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines approximately 160,000 English words. Ancient Hebrew, by contrast, has a very small vocabulary. In fact, the entire OT was written using only 8,674 Hebrew (and Aramaic) words, and these words are formed from only 2,552 unique root words. Due to the disparity, Hebrew terms are typically far broader and less specific than their English counterparts. Each Hebrew word can, on average, be translated into several possible English words depending on context.¹

Translating involves more than simply looking up words in a dictionary and

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Thinking as Christians Part 4

DAVID PETERSON

In 1940, mathematician G. H. Hardy wrote a book called *A Mathematician's Apology*. The title didn't mean he was sorry for his profession; rather, he was telling why he believed math was worth doing, and thereby defending his life's work. In the same sense, Christian apologists explain why the Bible is worth believing, defending our "life's work."

But why do we need to defend the faith? Can't we just share our faith and leave it at that? If we had to be able to answer everyone's questions, how could anyone feel ready? Could an emphasis on apologetics keep people from evangelism? Also, aren't we supposed to avoid human wisdom and philosophy, which is contrary to simple faith? Isn't faith a matter of believing what you can't prove? And you can't argue someone into believing anyway, can you? After all, faith comes from God, right?

These are good questions. To answer them, I need to defend the defense of the faith – to give an apology for apologetics. So I ask, why is apologetics important?

The top reason is one we saw last time: We're commanded to be prepared with an "apology" (1 Peter 3:15). It can't be either wrong or unnecessary if God tells us to do it! And recall what we're told to do: An apology is a reasoned argument in defense of our position, as in a court of law. We're talking about serious thinking, not just a quick answer. Now, that doesn't mean that everyone needs a deep argument – some people readily accept the Bible as an authority, and just need to be confronted with the gospel. But some will have questions or challenges, and we can't ignore their issues; we are to be prepared as well as we can, and to be honest with them in facing their questions. This is a way to honor God.

Secondly, we've seen that Jesus and Paul, among others, give us examples of apologetic reasoning, which was deliberately suited to its target—to the Jews, they reasoned as a Jew (from the Bible), and to the Greeks, they reasoned as a Greek (from common knowledge). Paul, in particular, knew both ways of thinking well, having studied enough to quote both. Understanding another person's thinking, and responding appropriately, is an essential part of good communication.

But still ... why do we need apologetics? We could just trust God and do it, but we'd like to really understand what God is doing in giving us this hard task. And that's the answer in itself: The reason we need to reason is that we are designed to need reasons! The mind is part of God's image in us, and He wants us to use it for Him.

In my experience, faith always starts with some sort of evidence. Before I step onto an ice-covered pond, I will check it out; and I will not trust someone who tells me it's safe unless experience or reliable testimony shows he can be trusted. Likewise, we need a reason to trust Christ. That may just be the life of a Christian, or the "ring of truth" in the Bible; not all of us care about science or philosophy. But for those who do, we owe them an answer (even if it is just a promise to look into their question and get back to them, or a reference to a good book).

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In the NEWS...

[Discrimination Lawsuit](#)

This Discovery Institute article discusses a lawsuit filed by a high-level computer administrator at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory who claim he was harrassed and demoted for publicly stating his support of intelligent design. Go to <http://www.discovery.org/a/14501>.

[Universe Hyperinflation](#)

This article by Hugh Ross discusses how scientists are using a special telescope at the at the south pole, a bolometric polarimeter, to test inflation (the yet to be proven beyond a shadow of doubt prediction of the big bang model). Go to: <http://www.reasons.org/did-universe-hyperinflate>.

[Politics and Truth](#)

This Breakpoint article contends that we have given up truth as the guide for our political processes. This, according to the author, is the slow poison that kills liberty from within because, without truth, the political process is ruled by power. Go to <http://www.breakpoint.org/features-columns/articles/entry/12/14199>

[Explanations for Religion](#)

This article examines the attempts of the new atheist movement to explain the origin/ reason for religious beliefs. Four popular academic rationales for religious belief are critiqued. Go to <http://www.salvomag.com/new/articles/salvo12/12oleary.php>.

[Old Tree Evidence for OEC](#)

This RTB article discusses a specimen of Palmer's oak in the Jurupa Hills of Rubindoux, California, that holds the distinction of being the oldest living plant in the world. At 13,000 years old it presents problems for the young-earth model. Go to: <http://www.reasons.org/old-tree-gives-new-evidence-oec>.

substituting their English equivalents. Two consequences should be considered. First, translators must carefully consider a term's context to determine the correct meaning. In most cases a match can be unambiguously determined, but sometimes the choice is unclear. In such situations, interpretation may depend on how that particular translator understands the passage, thus introducing assumptions into the text. Second, based on the English translation, readers may assume the text is narrower and more specific than is actually true in the original Hebrew.

A classic example of this disparity involves genealogical terms, such as "son" (ben), "father" (ab), and "begat" (yalad). These words are central to our understanding of the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 (and also carry implications for the age-of-the-earth issue). While English contains a plethora of different genealogical terms, Hebrew has very few. For example, the latter doesn't have separate words for "son," "grandson," "great-grandson," and "descendent." All of these English terms are covered by the Hebrew word ben. Similarly, ab means "father," but also "grandfather" and even "ancestor." God refers to Abraham as Jacob's "father" (ab) in Genesis 28:13, when of course, he is Jacob's grandfather. In English, this would be considered an error, but it is perfectly accurate and literal in Hebrew grammar. Hebrew genealogical terms are well suited for communicating ancestry, but, unlike English, remain ambiguous about the number of generations spanned. Consequently, Hebrew genealogies are typically telescoped (shortened by leaving out less important individuals). This is very different from English family trees, which generally provide exact genealogical relationships. English readers of Genesis 5 and 11 can easily assume they are complete (no generations skipped).²

NO VERB TENSES

In English, verb tenses serve to communicate the "when" of the action, including information about sequence or duration. English speakers can choose from a wide range of verb tenses to describe an action. For example, "walk" in the past tense is "walked," the past perfect is "had walked," and so forth.

In contrast, verbs in ancient Hebrew don't have tense. Its verb forms primarily report the state of the action as being perfect (finished) or imperfect (unfinished).³ Because of this, a Hebrew word may correspond to multiple English verb tenses. For example, when in the first person singular and completed form, the Hebrew verb with the root meaning "to learn" or "to study" has 10 possible translations: I learned, I have learned, I had learned, I had been learning, I did learn, plus a parallel set based on "study." From this, we see that the location in time of the action of learning/studying is left unspecified.

The events of the fourth creation day (Genesis 1:14-19) provide one of the most striking illustrations of the effect of verb tense. Verse 16 declares that the Sun, Moon, and stars were "made" (Hebrew *asa*) by God. This leads many interpreters to believe these bodies came into existence for the first time on that creation day. If that were true, then

how could the first three creation "days" be simple solar days if the Sun was not yet present?

This apparent conflict has provoked attacks on the Bible's validity by pagan critics in ancient times, as well as by skeptics in our own day. For the early church (90-476 AD), this question generated more commentary than any other passage in Genesis 1-3.4 The controversy was unnecessary. *Asa*, as used in verse 16, is in the perfect form, indicating a completed action though it does not specify precisely when the action happened.⁵ In other words, the act of making the heavenly bodies could have occurred at any time up to the fourth "day." Genesis 1:16 does not require the Sun, Moon, and stars to be formed on the fourth day; they could, in fact, have been created as far back as "in the beginning" (Genesis 1:1). The Hebrew of verse 16 simply teaches by whom the heavenly bodies were made rather than when they were made (as implied by the English).⁶

As these examples illustrate, the "lens" of language affects Bible interpretation. Part 3 will continue our exploration by looking at how our cultural perspective also affects how we read the text.

ENDNOTES:

1. Rodney Whitefield, *Reading Genesis One*, (San Jose, CA: R. Whitefield Publisher, 2003), 2-15.
2. John Millam, "The Genesis Genealogies," *Reasons To Believe*, <http://www.reasons.org/resources/non-staff-papers/the-genesis-genealogies?main> (accessed May 18, 2009).
3. Rodney Whitefield, *Reading Genesis One*, 2-15. In certain cases, word order is used to help communicate time ordering of events. Modern Hebrew differs from ancient Hebrew in that it does use verb tense and so behaves similar to other modern languages.
4. The early church fathers (since they didn't know Hebrew) associated the creation of the Sun, Moon, and stars with the fourth day but were sharply divided over how it affected the debate over the age of the Earth. Some (e.g., Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine) saw this as clear evidence against a calendar-day interpretation (since there can't be a "day" without the Sun). Others (e.g., Theophilus of Antioch and Basil) defended a calendar-day view and gave various explanations to reconcile it with the fourth day.
5. Rodney Whitefield, *Reading Genesis One*, 102-9.
6. Typically, interpreters focus on "made" in verse 16, but this overlooks the preceding two verses, which are the ones that primarily describe God's work on that day. Verse 14 reads "let there be" (*haya*) and can be understood simply as "appear." Looking at the full context, we find that the fourth creation day concentrates on the heavenly bodies being clearly visible on Earth and on God assigning them their roles as markers of time. Thus, verse 16 only serves to remind the readers that God is the one who made them and is not a statement about when God made them.

No one should feel that he has to leave his mind behind in order to become a believer, because God wants our minds as well as our hearts. Intellectual integrity demands that we not change our minds, or demand it of others, without a reason. Not that we must have all the answers; that will never happen. But a mature Christian will seek to grow more and more in his ability to explain and defend his faith, as well as in the depth of his faith and his obedience to God. In the beginning, simple faith and a simple gospel presentation are enough, but we should be able to do more and more as we grow. God can use any of us as His tools; but He tends to use the sharper tools more effectively! While we work on the intellectual side, explaining and removing barriers to faith, the Holy Spirit is unveiling the truth we express, and drawing them to God. Apologetics is never just a matter of arguing someone into the kingdom, but of making an entry for God's Word, through which God's Spirit can work.

A major reason apologetics is important is that it makes it clear to the world (and to us) that our message is about truth. It is not, as so many today think, just a personal preference based on what makes us feel good. We preach the gospel because it is true! And therefore we should encourage others to relate the Bible's message to the truth they already know, so that it will challenge, and then change, their thinking. If we avoid the question whether it is true or not, and keep our discussion on an emotional level, then we are missing the target. Even among Christians today, faith is too often thought of as subjective and personal, rather than as objective truth; no wonder, in a world where truth itself is questioned and personal fulfillment is god, the gospel seems irrelevant.

Finally, apologetics is essential for training our children. Sooner or later they either face someone who asks the hard questions—a classmate, or a professor, or a TV narrator—or else start wondering on their own: Why should I believe what my parents have told me? And we owe them the preparation needed to face those questions.

I myself did not need extensive apologetics to become a Christian; having been raised in a nominally Christian home, I had a vague respect for the Bible, but no knowledge of its real message. Hearing the message itself (and seeing it in the Bible) was enough to get me started. But my mind came along with me into faith, and kept asking questions that needed to be asked, because truth is important to me. Apologetics helped to build my faith and give me greater confidence, which is the final reason apologetics is important to all of us. Knowing the truth—and being sure that it is the truth—sets us free to declare it accurately and forcefully to others.



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.