



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

REASONS TO BELIEVE - SEATTLE AREA CHAPTER

NEWS AND VIEWS

MAY 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>.

Local Presentation

Chapter member, Pastor Gary Jensen, will do a free presentation at the Snohomish Public Library titled “The Prints are Everywhere: Ten Examples of God’s Revelation in Nature, Personal Experience and History.” Join him Tuesday, June 1, 7 to 8:30 p.m.

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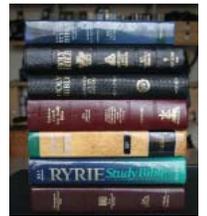
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Historic Age Debate: Dependence on Translations (Part 3)

DR. JOHN MILLAM

Culture shock adds color to any journey. Travelers abroad often return home with tales of language barriers, strange foods, and puzzling local customs. Cultural differences affect not only globe-trotting excursions, but also our views of ancient writings, including the Bible.

This series of articles has been dedicated to exploring the implications of Old Testament (OT) translation on the interpretations of the English-speaking population in particular. As noted in Part 2, ancient Hebrew is linguistically different from modern English. But language isn’t the only obstacle to consider in approaching Genesis—our own cultural perspective can play a role in distorting our understanding of ancient text. A great gulf of time, location, and history separates the modern world from Moses’ world. Thus, we must constantly guard against projecting our current conceptions onto the text.



When C. S. Lewis was learning to read the great works of ancient literature in their original languages, he recognized this important principle.

I was beginning to think in Greek. That is the great Rubicon to cross in learning any language. Those in whom the Greek word lives only while they are hunting for it in the lexicon, and who then substitute the English word for it, are not reading the Greek at all; they are only solving a puzzle. The very formula, “Naus means a ship,” is wrong. Naus and ship both mean a thing, they do not mean one another. Behind Naus, as behind navis or naca, we want to have a picture of a dark, slender mass with sail or oars, climbing the ridges, with no officious English word intruding.¹

In the same way that Lewis had to forge past simply substituting English words for foreign ones, those who wish to truly understand Genesis 1 must overcome cultural barriers that separate modern perspective from ancient thought.

EXAMPLE 1 – TIME

A particular friend of mine ardently supports the calendar-day view of creation. We

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Thinking as Christians Part 5

DAVID PETERSON

In my Sunday School class of fifth and sixth graders, we studied Old Testament history at the same time some of the students were studying ancient history in school. This was a great opportunity to help them see that the Bible “stories” they have heard all their lives are really “history,” part of the real story of the real world God created, populated by real people among whom God did real miracles. But what do you do if the history you learn disagrees with what the Bible says? We know by faith that the Bible is entirely true; but Can all the history books be wrong?

The book of Daniel provides a wonderful example of how our faith in the trustworthiness of the Bible can be confirmed by historical research, side-by-side with an opportunity to exercise that same faith without complete confirmation.

In chapter 5, we read of King Belshazzar of Babylon, who is ruling at the time Babylon falls to the Medes and Persians. If you just read the Bible without reference to outside history, you see nothing wrong here. But if you had studied ancient history 150 years or so ago, and then read this story, you would do a double-take: the king of Babylon at that time was not Belshazzar but Nabonidus, and he wasn't even in the city at the time it was conquered. Not only that that, but there was no evidence in historical records or in the science of archaeology that anyone named Belshazzar ever even existed. Was this just a made-up story?

The only way to deal with this contradiction at the time would be to exercise faith: We know for other good reasons that we can trust the Bible, and that its history is not fictional; and we know that our knowledge of history and archaeology is incomplete; so we just have to trust that the truth is hidden between the lines of history. Somehow Belshazzar was the king; we just haven't found the right evidence. That may seem like a weak argument (and plenty of opponents of the Bible said so); but it is perfectly valid, and sometimes that is the best we can do.

Then in 1853 an inscription written by Nabonidus was discovered that mentioned “Belshazzar, my first-born, favorite son.” So he did exist! That helped to support our faith in scripture; but was he ever king? Later, more tablets were found that showed that Nabonidus was in semi-retirement and had made Belshazzar his co-regent—meaning that although Nabonidus was still king, Belshazzar shared the throne with him and ran the day-to-day operations of government. He was indeed called king, and was in the city when it was overthrown.

Not only did this discovery answer all the challenges that had been made against this chapter, but it explained something that had not been clear previously: When Belshazzar offered to make Daniel “the third ruler in the kingdom,” it seems likely that this simply meant “first Nabonidus, then Belshazzar, and then Daniel.” The first two positions were already taken!

But now move on to the last verse of this chapter, and into chapter 6. Here we meet Darius the Mede, who took over the kingdom, appointed administrators under him, and eventually was tricked into throwing Daniel to the lions. Again we have a problem. If you vaguely remember your ancient history, you may assume that this

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In the NEWS...

[Religion and Mental Health](#)

This RTB article discusses a study by two psychologists that looked at the relationship between church attendance and mood disorders (depression). In summary, they found regular church attendance helped protect against depression. Go to <http://www.reasons.org/religion-and-mental-health-going-church-good-you>.

[Nice to Puppies](#)

This *tothesource* article by Wesley Smith examines the question of what is the proper Christian view toward animals? According to Smith, Christians need to understand the difference between animal “welfare” and animal “rights.” Go to: <http://www.tothesource.org/4-7-2010/4-7-2010htm>.

[Constant Physics](#)

This RTB article by Hugh Ross discusses how scientists can measure the values of several fundamental constants of physics in the past history of universe to confirm their constancy and thereby confirming the Bible's reliability. Go to <http://www.reasons.org/testing-biblical-claim-constant-physics>.

[Genetics & Homosexuality](#)

This article by RTB apologist Rich Deem examines the proposition that people are born gay, looking at the research in this area. According to Deem, the scientific findings are not as clear as some claim. Go to http://www.godandscience.org/evolution/genetics_of_homosexuality.html.

[Chimps Support RTB Model](#)

In this article, Fuz Rana discusses previously unobserved chimpanzee behaviors—like hunting with spears and making tools—and how they support RTB's creation model for humanity's origin. Go to: <http://www.reasons.org/chimpanzee-behavior-supports-rtbs-model-humanitys-origin>.

had a discussion one day that brought home for me how easy it is to unknowingly read our contemporary assumptions into Scripture.

My friend understood the Sun, Moon, and stars as being created on the fourth creation day (Genesis 1:14-19), so I asked him how the first three creation days could be ordinary solar days without the Sun.² He replied that the alternation of the light and darkness (from the first creation day) could occur in a cycle of 24-hours, thus these first three days could still be 24-hour periods. Seeming to resolve the problem, he unknowingly revealed a subtle error in his understanding of Genesis 1. Though he didn't realize it his entire argument rested on thinking of "day" as a fixed period of time independent of the presence of the Sun. While we are conditioned to think this way today because of the widespread use of watches and clocks, that concept would have been completely foreign to the ancient Hebrews. Therefore, that couldn't have been Moses' intended meaning for the text.

EXAMPLE 2 – GENEALOGICAL TERMS

Interpreting genealogies represents another dramatic cultural difference. We understand them today as being detailed statements intended to communicate specific relationships between individuals. Naturally, we tend to treat biblical genealogies as if they function the same way, but even a fairly simple investigation shows they do not.

As mentioned in Part 2, one of the primary differences is Hebrew genealogies were almost always telescoped (abridged by leaving out less important names). The genealogy of Moses, which appears four separate times in Scripture (Exodus 6:16-20, Numbers 26:57-59; and 1 Chronicles 6:1-3; 23:6, 12-13), provides an excellent example of this. In these passages, his genealogy is given as Levi (the patriarch) to Kohath to Amram (and his wife Jochebed) to Moses. As straightforward as this seems, we can use other Bible passages to demonstrate at least six names were likely skipped between Amram and Moses.³ Despite the biblical evidence, some continue to try to explain away this gap because it seems unnatural to modern readers.⁴

Ancient Hebrew genealogies were primarily concerned with lineage and (in general) don't communicate the actual number of generations spanned. This includes the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11. Many assume that these records can be used to build an exact chronology from Adam to Abraham. Given that they are almost certainly abridged, attempts to use them to date the age of the Earth to around 6,000 years old are critically flawed.

EXAMPLE 3 – GEOGRAPHICAL TERMS

A third case to consider involves the extensiveness of geographical terms in Genesis. In our modern global society, we are constantly surrounded by globes and world maps. It is almost impossible for us not to think in global terms, but this perspective would've been foreign to Moses and his contemporaries. Nowhere is this issue more evident than in the account of Noah's flood. We find it difficult to read "the whole earth" (kol ha'erezt) and "under the entire heavens" (tachat kol

hashamayim) as referring to anything other than the entire planet. Yet when these expressions are used elsewhere in the OT they clearly refer to a local region.⁵ So, the phrase "the whole earth" in Scripture is approximately equivalent to "the known world" (from the viewpoint of the original readers).

CONCLUSION

Many more examples exist, but these sufficiently illustrate the challenge to interpretation based on translations. The points given here correspond to the three most controversial creation issues: the length of the creation "days", the Genesis genealogies, and the extent of Noah's flood. Much of the debate, therefore, derives from our tendency to impose our cultural perspective and assumptions onto the text. The key to resolving these long-standing issues is to study how words and phrases are used throughout Scripture—a time-intensive but rewarding exercise.

ENDNOTES

1. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1995), 141.
2. I discussed this issue surrounding the events on the fourth creation day in Part 2.
3. A detailed discussion of why Mosaic genealogies must be telescoped is given my paper, "The Genesis Genealogies." A few key points are summarized here. (1) The names of Moses' parents are conspicuously absent in Exodus 2 where they are only referred to as being Levites. (2) Kohath was born before the Israelites entered Egypt (Gen. 46:5-27; Exod. 1:1-4). The exodus out of Egypt took place 430 years later (Exod. 12:40-41; Acts 7:6). Since Moses was 80 years old at the time of the exodus, that means that from Kohath to Amram to Moses spanned at least 350 years. (3) Jochebed, Amram's wife, is described as a daughter of Levi (Num. 26:59) and as Amram's father's sister (Exod. 6:20). This means that she would have been born along with Kohath some 350 years before Moses. (4) The descendents of Kohath at the time of Moses numbered 8,600 men (Num. 3:27-28) of which 2,750 were between the ages of 30 and 50 (Num. 4:30). (5) Moses is not listed among the descendents of Amram (1 Chron. 24:20). (6) There were 12 generations connecting the patriarch Ephraim to Joshua, son of Nun (
4. See discussion by William Henry Green, "Primeval Chronology: Are there Gaps in the Biblical Genealogies?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 47, (April 1890), 285-303.
5. James Brendan Slagle, "How Far Did the Flood Waters Flow? Exegetical and Scientific Considerations on the Geographical Extent of the Biblical Deluge," (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Northwest chapter of the Evangelical Theological Society, March 1, 2003), <http://www.geocities.com/jnkslagle/floodwater.htm>.

Darius was the famous Darius I of Persia. But look again: He came 18 years later! Babylon was conquered by Cyrus of Persia; there is no record of any Darius before or during his time. The Bible must be wrong, right?

No! We know by now that we can trust that the Bible is right even when our history does not show it. We can do two things: (1) correct our understanding of the Bible based on what we really know from history; and (2) look for possible explanations to show that the conflict is not proof of an error in the Bible.

How can we correct the Bible using fallible history? We can't—but we can correct the misunderstandings that many of us have when we just read the Bible and stop with our first impressions. There is no question that Cyrus came before, not after, Darius I, and that he was the ruler of Persia at the time of the conquest; so we know that Darius the Mede in the story is not the ruler of all Persia, whatever our first impression might have been. We must distinguish what the Bible says from what we think it says, and be willing to change the latter.

By the way, another common misreading is found in children's versions of this story, which often depict Daniel in the lion's den as a young man (or cucumber). The time between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar tells us that Daniel was 80 or go by this time. The Bible never says how old he is; does this fact from history change your image of the story? History can correct false impressions.

Can we offer an explanation? When we look more carefully at the Bible, we notice it does not say that Darius the Mede was ruler of Persia, only that he "took," or "received," the kingdom of Babylon—possibly put in charge by someone higher, namely Cyrus. So the only real problem is that the man Cyrus set over Babylon as governor was called Gobryas (or Gubaru), not Darius. Many people (like Daniel himself, called Belteshazzar) had more than one name, so perhaps this name just wasn't recorded in any inscriptions or histories. We can't prove that this is the correct explanation, and perhaps we will never know the whole truth; but we see that it is possible, which is enough to hold us for now. The final answer can wait.

Where the Bible intersects with history, we may be left with unanswerable questions due to our limited knowledge, but we will never have an outright contradiction. What we lose in simplicity by going beyond first impressions, we gain in the accuracy of our understanding of God's Word. When we allow faith and reason to meet, both benefit.



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.