



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

REASONS TO BELIEVE - SEATTLE AREA CHAPTER

NEWS AND VIEWS

JULY 2010

What's Happening?

Introducing Sound Reasons!

The Seattle-Puget Sound chapter of Reasons to Believe is excited to announce a number of special events coming up. We plan to have three scheduled indoor events; one in the Fall, one in the Winter and one in the Spring. They will occur on Saturday mornings and at Highlands Community Church in Renton. We will have fellowship and food (a delicious continental breakfast) from 8:30-9:00. From 9-11 there will be a meeting and special presentation, followed by a time to peruse educational materials and speak with the presenter(s) from 11-11:30.

The first Sound Reasons titled "RTB Resources" will be October 16 and will provide a comprehensive introduction to all the resources available from RTB, plus a guided tour of the website. We will also address resources available through our chapter.

We will be providing you more information as each event approaches. If you have a question or a suggestion concerning Sound Reasons, contact Mike Brown at apologist2@comcast.

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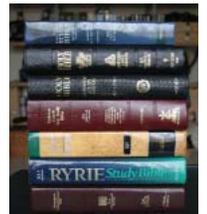
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Historic Age Debate: Dependence on Translations (Part 5)

DR. JOHN MILLAM

Most Christians favor one Bible translation over others. Some prefer the formal sound of the King James Version, whereas others find the casual language of The Message. Either way, each translation influences our understanding of the Bible.

The previous four parts of this series laid out the case that much of the controversy and confusion over Genesis 1-11 stems from the fact that theologians—going all of the way back to the earliest days of the church—have relied on Old Testament translations rather than the original Hebrew. This misplaced dependence impacts interpretations in at least three distinct ways: linguistic differences (part 2), cultural factors (part 3), and issues in specific translations (part 4). For many people, this brings up an uncomfortable question, "So, does that mean that I can't trust my Bible?"



THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE

The doctrine of the clarity of Scripture (also known as the perspicuity of Scripture) sits at the heart of this question. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) defines it as follows:

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them. (1.7)¹

Essentially, this means that the key points of Scripture must be understandable by even ordinary people and not limited to just religious experts. This belief was central to the Protestant Reformation, which emphasized that all believers should read the Bible for themselves. Of course, most people aren't fluent in Hebrew and Greek and must read the Bible in a language they can understand. So, what does this mean for interpreting Genesis?

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Thinking as Christians Part 7

DAVID PETERSON

My last two articles looked at cases where the Bible appears to disagree with evidence of history and science. We saw a number of principles for dealing with such apparent discrepancies: recognize the data is always incomplete, allow for alternative interpretations of both scriptural and external data, and don't let assumptions or biases determine your interpretation.

In particular, we saw that “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence”: Belshazzar could exist though no records say so. Also, we must not jump to conclusions: Darius the Mede was not the ruler of Persia. Further, we may be making unnoticed assumptions even as we read a passage in what seems to be the only reasonable way: the Bible does not teach that the earth is at the center of the universe. Finally, we must not read Biblical language as if it were the language of modern science or history; it uses ordinary language, in which the sun “moves through the sky,” regardless of whether it is actually moving!

The same sorts of things can happen when the apparent contradiction is not between the Bible and some other source, but between one scripture and another. Such internal contradictions are often cited as reasons not to believe the Bible. In many cases, however, they turn out to be powerful evidence that the Bible is true!

Let's imagine a courtroom scene where a young man is on trial for robbery. He testifies about what he was doing at the time of the crime. His lawyer brings in several witnesses who agree that he was not there; but there are little differences in their testimony, and it is not obvious that they fit together. We might think that the defense is lying, because their witnesses disagree. But consider the alternative. If the witnesses came in telling exactly the same story, we would wonder if they had all been told what to say, and were in fact all just repeating what they had been told by the lawyer! Genuine witnesses will tell the story from different perspectives. They will not all have seen everything, nor will they think the same things are important. They will not use the same words even when they describe the same event. But these variations are the mark of genuine witnesses. Our job as judge or jury is to put the stories together into a more complete picture.

We have four “witnesses” to the life of Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Sometimes they just report different stories; often they tell the same story and agree on all the main facts (even using the same words at times, probably because they used the same sources in their research). But sometimes they give details that do not appear to fit together at all. The differences, as in our examples from history and science, do not generally concern the main teaching of a passage, which will be clear from every report, but the incidental facts: who did what, and in what order? Yet they can make readers wonder if the Bible can be trusted.

Let's look at one brief example that illustrates several useful points. Compare these three passages:

[Matt 20:29-30](#) As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard

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In the NEWS...

[What Comes After Postmodernism?](#)

This *Breakpoint* article discusses how the postmodernism has been replaced by a new cultural philosophy called “pseudo modernism” that demands the individual's active involvement through through the internet and other things. Go to <http://www.breakpoint.org/features-columns/articles/entry/12/14560>.

[Dark Side of Darwinism](#)

This article by David Klinghoffer linked to on the Discovery Institute site, discusses how Darwinism contributed to the eugenic program in Nazi Germany that sterilized people deemed unfit to reproduce. And, Darwin inspired eugenics also had an impact here. Go to: <http://discovery.org/a/14921>.

[Pornography & Brain Changes](#)

This Salvo Magazine article discusses how the brain is affected biologically by pornography and other sexual addictions. It also addresses the societal impact of such addictions. Go to <http://www.salvomag.com/new/articles/salvo13/13hilton.php>.

[Testing Flood Geology](#)

In this article, RTB's Jeff Zweerink discusses a study that examined the canyon-forming mechanisms of floods, by looking at the 2002 flooding in Texas that carved the Canyon Lake Gorge. Their findings can be used to assess the young-earth model for the carving of the Grand Canyon. Go to <http://www.reasons.org/testing-flood-geology>.

[The Celebrity of Artificial Life](#)

In this article, Fuz Rana discusses the claim that researchers production of a synthetic genome in the lab eliminates the need for a Creator and supports a natural origin of life. According to Rana, it shows just the opposite, that life on Earth required the work of an Intelligent Agent. Go to: www.reasons.org/celebrity-artificial-life.

In looking at the above definition, we see that not everything in Scripture is easily understood. Secondary issues, such as the age of the earth, needn't be readily accessible to the laymen. Philosopher Kenneth Samples writes:

Its [Scripture's] perspicuity [or clarity] does not mean that every passage is equally clear, nor that scholarly study is not needed, but this quality does signify that the essential message of salvation is plainly revealed within its pages.²

In other words, the clarity of Scripture doesn't excuse us from making a careful study of its meaning. Certainly some details (such as how to align Bible events with external history) require the abilities of trained scholars to fully sort out.

PRIMARY POINTS VS. SECONDARY DETAILS

In recognizing we may not readily understand everything in Scripture, it is good to remember an important principle of interpretation, highlighted by Samples:

And because not all Scripture is equally clear, hermeneutically speaking the less clear parts are meant to be interpreted in light of the clearer parts (Scripture interprets Scripture).³

Interpretation should begin with identifying the most clear statements before moving to the obscure. One method includes focusing on the primary point (or points) of a passage before tackling the secondary details. The primary point is the "big picture." It represents the author's most important message. As such, it is woven into every part of the passage and usually stated in multiple ways. Therefore, it should be comprehensible, even if we rely on translations or even paraphrases. Understanding key doctrine does not require knowledge of the original languages of the Bible.

Once we understand the primary point of the passage, we can then move on to the secondary details. Authors use fewer pieces of information to communicate secondary details, so they require extra attention from readers. Consulting multiple translations and examining other relevant passages can shed additional light on the subject. In some cases, it may be helpful to study commentaries, Hebrew/Greek dictionaries, and historical references. Most importantly, we must avoid becoming dogmatic when dealing with interpretations of secondary details, including information that affects the age-of-the-earth debate.

We tend to read Genesis in light of the questions we want answered. For example, if we approach Genesis 1 with the goal of resolving the nature of the creation days, we naturally gravitate toward those few secondary details that might address it. This puts the spotlight chiefly on three words—"evening," "morning," and "day." The danger is that Hebrew nouns are generally far broader and less specific than their English counterparts (part 2). In this way, our questions drive the interpretation of the text (by focusing our attention on certain details) rather than letting the text drive our interpretation. Instead, we should

focus first on the primary point of Genesis 1, which is that God is Creator; the second point is the Sabbath principle.⁴ Moses highlights these points at the beginning, and conclusion of the chapter, respectively.

ESSENTIALS VS. NON-ESSENTIALS

Last and most importantly, readers of the Bible must remember the distinction between issues of orthodoxy and debatable concerns. Issues of orthodoxy encompass those subjects that form the foundation of Christianity and that are clearly laid out in Scripture (e.g., the Trinity, the deity of Jesus Christ, etc.) Such topics are typically included in church creeds, confessions of faith, and similar doctrinal statements that are accepted by large portions of the church (although debatable concerns can sometimes also be found in such documents).

The church must unite on essentials, but on issues where the Bible doesn't speak decisively, we must show charity and understanding toward varying interpretations (1 Thessalonians 5:21; Titus 3:9-10). With regard to the historic age debate, only the doctrine of creation ex nihilo has been traditionally considered as an issue of orthodoxy. In contrast, the nature and length of the creation days, the age of the earth, and similar topics have been treated as debatable concerns and weren't included in key doctrinal statements. Though they have provoked discussion over the last two millennia, not until the last few decades did they produce a rancorous argument.

The only way to make progress in the modern dispute over the age of the Earth is to treat it as healthy debate. Every side needs to remain open to dialogue with each other and to learn from other perspectives.

ENDNOTES

1. "The Westminster Confession of Faith," The Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics. <http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcfwithproofs/>, (accessed May 25, 2009)
2. Kenneth Richard Samples, *A World of Difference* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 119.
3. Ibid.
4. This was discussed in more detail in part 1.

that Jesus was going by, they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”

Mark 10:46-47 As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving Jericho, a blind man, Bartimaeus, was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Luke 18:35-38 As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” He called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Where did this happen? Matthew and Mark agree it was leaving Jericho, but Luke says they were approaching the city. How many blind men were there? Mark and Luke agree there was one; but Matthew says there were two. What did he/they say? Mark and Luke again agree on “Jesus,” but Matthew says “Lord.” In Matthew, since two men are speaking, they ask for mercy “on us,” not “on me”.

The variation in numbers is a problem only if we read the language as if it were technically precise: saying there was “a blind man” does not mean “exactly one”. Clearly Mark was focused on an individual; perhaps he knew him personally, or he was just the bolder of the two. Likewise, the variation in quotations is no problem if we have reasonable expectations. Quotations in ancient records were not intended to be word-for-word and complete, but were often summaries or paraphrases of longer speeches. As for the location, there are several possible explanations. Perhaps there were two separate events, one before Jericho, and one on the way out. Or perhaps Bartimaeus first called out to Jesus when He was approaching, but only got His attention as He came back out (by which time another blind man had joined him).

Or what about this: maybe there were two cities called Jericho, which we might call Old Jericho and New Jericho, close enough together that an event that happened as Jesus left Old Jericho would happen as He approached New Jericho. As contrived as that might sound, it has been found that this was true! We can't be sure this is the correct explanation, but we see that an answer is possible, even if it seems absurd at first glance.

We don't need to have a complete answer. It is the nature of truth that we will never know all of it, but that if we knew all, stories that seemed irreconcilable would turn out to be perfectly consistent. The clear fact that the gospels are independent witnesses to the truth of Jesus' power and love overshadows our lack of certainty about unimportant details.



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.