



# SEATTLE AREA CHAPTER

"THE HEAVENS DECLARE  
THE GLORY OF GOD"  
PSALM 19:1

NEWS AND VIEWS

APRIL 2012

## What's Happening?

Our next chapter event is scheduled for the morning of Saturday, June 9, at Highlands Community Church in Renton. The topic will be "World View, Truth and the Feeling of Certainty." The presenters will discuss the importance and impact of world view on beliefs, and conclude with a discussion of how we can help prepare students for the world view challenges they will face. More information to come...

On Monday, May 14, Chapter member, Pastor Gary Jensen will debate Robert Ray, president of the Humanists of North Puget Sound. The topic is "Does God Exist: Where do the Facts of Science and History and the Insights of Human Experience Point?" The event will be held 7-9 p.m. at Snohomish High School Performing Arts Centers. There is a small admission fee.

Reasons To Believe is at the forefront of trying to reach unbelievers by using science to remove the obstacles to faith in Jesus Christ. Over the past years we have sponsored many outreach events and we plan to continue that effort. The harvest is great, but the workers are few. We ask you to think prayerfully about how you might contribute to our local ministry.

As always, we welcome your questions and comments. Contact us at [seattle@reasons.org](mailto:seattle@reasons.org) or via our facebook page,  RTB Puget Sound.

### In This Issue

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## When Beliefs Become Blinders (Part 2 of 4)

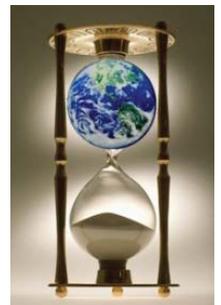
By Greg Moore

This series of articles critiques, "Systematic Theology Texts and the Age of the Earth," by young-earth creationist Terry Mortenson. In Part 1, we examined the claim that pre-Fall animal death contradicts God's proclamation that the creation was "very good." Here we examine Mortenson's second argument against pre-Fall animal death.

### *Pre-Fall Animal Death Destroys Christ's Redemptive Work*

Mortenson claims animal death before the Fall destroys the basis of Christ's atonement, because if there was death before sin, death could not be used to atone for sin. He states:

To accept millions of years of animal death before the creation and fall of man contradicts and destroys not only the Bible's teaching on death but also undermines its teaching on the full redemptive work of Christ.<sup>32</sup>



To address this issue, we must examine how Mortenson defines these two teachings. Let's begin with the biblical teaching on death.

Mortenson takes the young-earth view that all death—both human and animal—is the result of Adam and Eve's sin. Typically this is argued on the basis of the Apostle Paul's statement in Romans 5:12 that death entered the world through sin. However, a full reading of that passage paints a different picture.

Paul completes verse 12 by saying, "and so death came to *all men* because all sinned." "Men" (*anthropos*) always refers to human beings. In verse 13, he states sin was in the "world" (*kosmos*) before the Law. Since animals do not sin, this restricts the meaning to the world of humanity. In verse 14, he concludes by speaking of death's reign over humanity because of Adam's offense. So, the death Paul speaks of in this passage is human death which entered the world of humanity through Adam's sin.<sup>33</sup>

Surprising (and to his credit) Mortenson concedes that point:

But they [Adam and Eve] also began to die physically and Paul clearly had physical death in mind in Romans 5:12 ... when he says that death came into the human race through Adam's sin.<sup>34</sup>

For this reason, Mortenson uses another common argument that focuses on Paul's statement in Romans 8:20-21 that the creation was subjected to futility and will be set free from its bondage to corruption. Young-earth creationists contend that what Paul is saying is that God's curse on the ground (Genesis 3:17) was a judgment on the creation that changed the natural order and initiated animal death. Although Mortenson doesn't explicitly state this, it is apparent from his line of reasoning:

Adam and Eve sinned, resulting in the judgment of God on the whole creation. ... The whole creation now groans in bondage to corruption (because of the Genesis 3 curse) waiting for the final act in the redemption of Christians... When that redemptive event happens, we will see the restoration and redemption of all things... similar to the pre-Fall world. ... Then there will be no more carnivorous behavior and no disease, suffering or death because there will be no more curse.<sup>35</sup>

Let's begin with what occurred at the Fall. The Bible tells us the Fall resulted from a deliberate transgression by two parties—Satan and man. First, Satan was condemned as the instigator (Genesis 3:14-15), then God passed sentence on Adam and Eve as his willful accomplices (v. 16-19). There were no other judicial decrees because all of the guilty parties were punished. In no case does Scripture state that God passed judgment on the non-human creation.

What then was the nature of God's curse on the ground (Genesis 3:17)? The answer lies in the Hebrew word meanings. God says to Adam, "cursed is the ground because of you." The word translated "curse" (*arar*) is a declaration of punishment and connotes the absence or removal of blessing.<sup>36</sup> The word translated "ground" (*adama*) refers to the soil or land.<sup>37</sup> So, the curse was a pronouncement of punishment on Adam—not the non-human creation. Because of his sin, God withdrew the blessing of the *adama*.

The Bible makes much of the relationship between man and the *adama*. As long as Adam and Eve were obedient, God caused the *adama* be fruitful. When they sinned, God withdrew that blessing and they were driven from Garden of Eden. From that point onward, the ground brought forth thorn and thistles (Genesis 3:18) rather than the abundant harvest they had enjoyed. This pattern is repeated throughout the Old Testament. When God's people are obedient, he causes the *adama* to be a blessing. When they are disobedient, he withdraws that blessing.<sup>38</sup>

This is the backdrop of Paul's statement in Romans 8:20-21. Paul says that the creation was subjected to futility and will be set free from its bondage to corruption into the glory of the freedom of the children of God. "Futility" comes from the Greek word *mataiotēs* which is linked to human depravity.<sup>39</sup> "Bondage to corruption" parallels "subjected to futility" and carries the same meaning. "Glory of the freedom of the children of God" refers to our future glorification and deliverance from sin. Taken together, it is clear that the futility and corruption Paul speaks of is human sin.<sup>40</sup>

Notice that Paul goes on to say that the creation now groans and suffers the pains of childbirth (v. 22). The birth Paul speaks of is our new birth. The creation is in a sense birthing us and groaning as it anxiously awaits the future age when human sin is eliminated.<sup>41</sup> When that occurs, the creation will be set free from the bondage to our corruption and God will restore the divinely-intended blessing of the *adama*. Those who argue otherwise and contend that Romans 8:20-21 refers to a fall-induced change of the natural order take Paul's statements out of context and ignore the theme of Romans 8 which is the sin man experiences in the present age.

## Bible & Science In the News

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### ■ Combating Climate and the Oceans

This RTB article by Dr. Kevin Birdwell discusses how most of the global warming debate focuses on atmospheric conditions, while research shows attention should also be paid to the impact the Earth's oceans have on climate change. This is because the vast majority of the heat from solar energy is retained by the oceans. Go to [www.reasons.org/article/combating-climate-change](http://www.reasons.org/article/combating-climate-change).

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### ■ God Spot in the Brain

Some claim the belief in God comes from a brain abnormality or "god gene." This *Science Daily* article discusses how research shows that spirituality is a complex phenomenon and multiple areas of the brain are responsible. This seems to support the idea that our brains are wired for a belief in God. Go to [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/04/120419091223.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/04/120419091223.htm).

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### ■ Are Babies People Too?

This *tothesource* article by Wesley Smith discusses how some bioethicists are arguing that parents should be able to have their newborn babies killed because the moral status of an infant is equivalent to that of a fetus. This he explains is wrong and part of the philosophical war against Judeo/Christian morality. Go to [www.tothesource.org/3\\_7\\_2012/3\\_7\\_2012.htm](http://www.tothesource.org/3_7_2012/3_7_2012.htm).

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### ■ What's at Stake

This *tothesource* article by Benjamin Wiker contends that Obamacare's mandate that Catholic hospitals and universities supply birth control and abortion to employees is more than an issue of religious liberty—It is an attempt to remake the Church according to the desires of the state. Go to [www.tothesource.org/2\\_15\\_2012/2\\_15\\_2012.htm](http://www.tothesource.org/2_15_2012/2_15_2012.htm)

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### ■ A Universe from Nothing?

This two-part RTB article by Hugh Ross critiques Lawrence Krauss' recent book *A Universe from Nothing*. Part 1 evaluates Krauss' arguments for a natural cause for the universe's beginning. Part 2 examines how the universe fits a theistic explanation. Go to: [www.reasons.org/articles/universe-from-nothing-a-critique-of-lawrence-krause-book-part-1-or-2](http://www.reasons.org/articles/universe-from-nothing-a-critique-of-lawrence-krause-book-part-1-or-2).

Mortenson supports his view of the Genesis 3 curse by saying:

And the ground itself was cursed (Genesis 3:17-19), a fact which was still on the minds of people 1,000 years later when Noah was born (Genesis 5:29). The whole earth was cursed again at Noah's Flood (Genesis 8:22) [sic].<sup>42</sup>

Genesis 5 sets the stage for the Flood by tracing the lineage from Adam to Noah. In Genesis 5:29 we are told that Lamech (Noah's father) called his son Noah saying, "This one shall give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed." From this it seems clear that Lamech is speaking about the fruitfulness of the ground. He believes God has made the ground unproductive as a punishment for their sin and hopes Noah's righteousness will bring a blessing to the ground that will ease their burden.

Nothing suggests that Lamech believes their predicament is due to a Fall-induced change of the natural order. If that were the case, why would he believe that God would retract that curse? How was Noah going to bring about that retraction? And, what would have been the relief that was expected—that God would reverse the changes he made to the natural order? So, it is simply not reasonable to claim that this passage supports the young-earth view of the Genesis 3 curse.

Mortenson does not explain how the curse at the Flood validates the young-earth view of the Genesis 3 curse. However, in order to make that case, the curse at the Flood must have involved a permanent alteration of the creation. Let's examine the Flood narrative in Genesis 7 and 8 to better understand the nature of that curse.

The Bible tells us how God intervened at the Flood. It tells us that he opened the fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky until water prevailed on the earth (Genesis 7:11); then, after the Flood, he closed them and the water receded (Genesis 8:2-3). In no aspect of the Flood narrative does it say that God made other modifications to the natural order. So, from this we can conclude that the Flood involved a temporary, miraculous adjustment to the fountains and floodgates—not a permanent change of the natural order.

The reference to God cursing the ground at the Flood is found in Genesis 8:21. This takes place after the Flood when Noah and his family have departed the ark. It tells us that Noah built an altar and offered burnt offerings to God. Then, God smelled the aroma of the offerings and said to himself, "I will never again curse (*qalal*) the ground (*adama*) on account of man." The meaning of this statement lies in the Hebrew word meanings.

"Curse" in this verse is the Hebrew word *qalal* which connotes a lowering to a state that is less than divinely intended.<sup>43</sup> It is different than the word used in God's curse on the ground in Genesis 3:17 (*arar*), but carries the same basic meaning. In fact, the words are used interchangeably in Scripture.<sup>44</sup> The Hebrew word for ground, *adama*, was defined earlier and refers to the soil or land. So, like the Genesis 3 curse, this curse was on the land—not the entire creation—and lowered the state of the

*adama* because of man's disobedience.

Notice also God's concluding statement in Genesis 8:21 to "never again destroy every living thing, as I have done." This clarifies the meaning of his pledge to "never again curse the ground." The promise refers solely to the visitation of another deluge to destroy human wickedness.<sup>44</sup> From this context it seems clear that the curse on the ground at the Flood lends no support to the young-earth view of the Genesis 3 curse. The Hebrew words in the pronouncements are the same, or carry the same meaning, yet there is no indication it involved a fundamental change in law-order of the creation.

Mortenson also states:

If God cursed the earth with thorns after Adam sinned (as Genesis 3:18 says, "both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you"), then why do we find fossil thorns in rocks that the evolutionists claim are about 350 million years old ...? If the millions of years are true, then God lied. If Genesis 3:18 is true, then the millions of years are a lie.<sup>46</sup>

The context of this passage is that Adam and Eve must leave the Garden of Eden and procuring food will be difficult. Notice that God does not say *now* the ground shall grow thorns and thistles, but now the ground shall grow thorns and thistles *for you* (Genesis 3:18). Adam is the object of the curse, not the ground. Rather than eating the abundant fruit of the Garden, he must now toil and sweat (v.17) to eat from the plants of the field (v. 18). The point is that Adam's efforts will no longer bring forth a plentiful harvest because God's curse on the ground withdrew the blessing of the *adama*.

Notice also the work God instructs Adam to perform. Before the Fall, he is to cultivate the ground (Genesis 2:15)—after the Fall, his task is still to cultivate the ground (Genesis 3:23). The Hebrew word translated cultivated (*abad*) means to labor to till a field. This implies that Adam is probably familiar with weeds. Therefore, what happened at the Fall was likely a change in degree. Now there would be more weeds and Adam would have to put out more effort for his food.<sup>47</sup>

So nothing in the text suggests that thorns and thistles first appeared at the Fall. God's statement in Genesis 3:18 is not a creative command, but an explanation to Adam of the new situation he will face because of his sin. Such a contention also violates the well-accepted principle that nothing has been created since the end of the creation "week."

There is one last point to consider regarding the nature of the Genesis 3 curse. If the biblical author (Moses) intended for God's statement in Genesis 3:17 to be understood as applying to the entire creation, there are other Hebrews words he could have used to express that meaning. We see this for example in Genesis 1:9-10, where he uses "earth" (*eres*) to indicate that he is referring to the whole earth or "world" in a cosmological sense.<sup>48</sup> So, the fact that he chose to use *adama* must be an important clue to the concept he was trying to convey.

Now let's turn to Mortenson's view of the biblical teaching on Christ's redemptive work. This builds on the premise that

God judged the creation at the Fall and reasons that Christ's redemptive work must extend to the creation to rectify that judgment. He states:

...When that redemptive event happens [Christ's return and the resurrection of believers], we will see the restoration and redemption of all things [*italics added*] to a state similar to the pre-Fall world.<sup>49</sup>

God's plan as revealed in Scripture focuses exclusively on mankind. God offered man the opportunity to fellowship with him, it was lost by Adam and Eve, it was regained by Christ and it will be realized in the future age.<sup>50</sup> The non-human creation is merely the scene of man's activity. Man alone is responsible for his decisions, man alone determines his destiny by volitional choice and only man is judged as righteous or sinful by God's law.<sup>51</sup> So, only man is in need of redemption and a restoration of relationship with God.

In Revelation 5:9, we see the climax of God's redemptive purpose declared in song: "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou was slain and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and Thou has made them to be kingdom and priests to our God..." What does it say was the effect of Christ's sacrifice? People of all nations were purchased for God. Nothing even hints at the redemption of *all things*.

Mortenson contends that the old-earth view undermines God's judgment on man:

If this was the way the creation was for millions of years [animal death], then what impact on the creation did the Fall have? None. Contrary to what the Bible says, the Fall would have only caused spiritual death in man.<sup>52</sup>

The Bible clearly establishes that the Fall brought physical death to man. In Genesis 2:17, God warns Adam not to eat from the tree of knowledge "lest you die." The Hebrew word translated die (*mût*) refers to death by natural or violent causes.<sup>53</sup> After the Fall, God bars Adam and Eve from the tree of life "lest they eat and live forever" (Genesis 3:22). Adam and Eve did not experience immediate physical death, but the Fall brought a corruption to their bodies that led to their eventual demise. So, animal death has no bearing on the judgment God pronounced on Adam and Eve.

Mortenson claims the old-earth allows human death and disease before the Fall:

There is also considerable evidence of rickets, syphilis, dental disease, etc., in human fossil bones that evolutionists date to be tens or hundreds of thousands of years before any biblically plausible date for Adam. If the Bible is true, then those dates are false and there was no pre-Fall death and disease.<sup>54</sup>

Adam and Eve were not subject to death before the Fall because God gave them immortality by eating from the tree of life. When they violated God's command, God withdrew that gift and their bodies became subject to disease and death. This

was the condition that was inherited by humanity after Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden and the earth became filled with their descendents. So, any disease in human fossil remains must have originated after the Fall, whether we believe those fossils are thousands or tens of thousands of years old.

Mortenson argues the old-earth view violates God promises about the future:

And if these millions of years of death really occurred, then God's curse on creation really did nothing to the nonhuman creation, and His promises about the future cannot be trusted. In fact, in this case none of His Word can be trusted.<sup>55</sup>

One place where God's promises are enumerated is in the Book of Revelation. To overcomers—those who belong to Christ—God promises eternal life (2:7), spiritual food and favor (2:17), to be holy and blameless (3:5), to dwell in His presence (3:12), to sit with Christ on his throne (3:21), to be His people (21:3) and to no longer experience death, mourning, crying or pain (21:4). For the remainder of humanity, God promises the lake of fire, which is hell (21:8).

The major motif of Scripture concerning the non-human creation is that it is transitory and will pass away. Jesus states this in Matthew 24:35. Numerous prophecies also speak of the non-human creation being destroyed and replaced with a new heaven and new earth (2 Peter 3:10-13; Isaiah 65:17, 66:22, 102:25-26; Revelation 21:1). So, claiming pre-Fall animal death diminishes God's promises about the future is puzzling because it has no bearing on God's pledge to mankind or the nature of the new creation.

And elsewhere Mortenson states:

So, if the Bible's teaching on death, the curse and the final redemptive work of Christ is true, then the millions-of-years idea must be a grand myth, really a lie. Conversely, if the millions of years really happened, then the Bible's teaching on these subjects must be utterly false, which is devastating for the gospel.<sup>56</sup>

Whether we believe that the earth is young or old, the Gospel is the same—Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he was raised on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Through this we know that Jesus was God in flesh and bore the penalty for our sin on the cross. And because of this we attest that it is only through Christ that we can escape the penalty of sin and that salvation is free gift that is received by putting our personal faith in him.

Also implicit in the Gospel are the five doctrines that are essential to the Christian faith. These are monotheism and doctrine of the Trinity; the deity of Christ; Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead; Christ's vicarious, substitutionary atonement; and salvation by grace through faith alone. While there are other important doctrines, these are the only ones the Bible declares are necessary for salvation.<sup>57</sup> So, it is misleading to suggest that believers have no choice but to

accept young-earth view.

What is devastating for the Gospel is adding theological views that give unbelievers a reason to reject the good news of Jesus Christ. Young-earth creationists distrust modern science, but most people do not. This makes the young-earth view hard to swallow for many unbelievers, thus hindering the Great Commission. The Gospel is better served by focusing unbelievers on the essential doctrines and allowing them to explore the age of the earth and other nonessential issues on an individual basis.

#### SYNOPSIS

Genesis 1 sets forth God's preparation of the earth as a habitat for man. When God completed his work and declared his creation was "very good" he meant that it fulfilled His divine purpose.<sup>58</sup> That purpose becomes apparent in Genesis 2 and 3 where Adam and Eve are placed in the Garden of Eden and given the opportunity to determine their destiny by volitional choice. When they sin, God promises to bring forth a redeemer, which is the theme of the rest of the Old Testament.

Adam and Eve were given dominion over the lower creation. As long as they obeyed God's ordinances, God caused the ground (*adama*) to be a blessing to them. When they sinned, God withdrew the blessing and they received a curse from the ground. It was not the natural order of the creation that changed, but the fruitfulness of the *adama*. The creation is now in bondage to our sin. At the end of the age when sin is eliminated, God will restore that blessing.

There are several problems with the young-earth position on animal death. First, Scripture teaches human death—not all death—is the result of sin. Second, only man sins and is in need of redemption. Third, while the remission of sin required the shedding blood—Christ's blood—that does not rule out animal bloodshed before sin.<sup>59</sup> Adam's sin brought condemnation to men and Christ's act of righteousness brought justification to men (Romans 5:18). Whether animal death came with creation or arose at the Fall is really beside the point.

Lastly, it is important to keep animal death in perspective. The Bible tells us that God upholds all things by his power (Hebrews 1:3), in him all things hold together (Colossians 1:17) and that his will is good and perfect (Romans 12:2). The point is that God's providence lies behind everything and whatever he wills is good in that sense that it furthers his holy purposes. So, we really cannot protest if animal death was part of the created order. If God ordained it, we have no right to question its goodness.

The next article, which will appear in the May newsletter, will discuss the claim that old-earth creationism is contrary to God's nature.

*Greg Moore is a trained RTB apologist and works for the City of Everett. He is active in the Seattle Chapter and publishes the chapter newsletter.*

#### ENDNOTES

32. Mortenson, "Systematic Theology..." 178.
33. Irons, "Animal Death Before the Fall: What Does the Bible Say?"; Rodney Whitefield, "Sin, Death, and Redemption as it relates to the Age of the Earth," <http://www.creationingenesis.com/SinDeathandRedemption.pdf>.
34. Mortenson, "Systematic Theology..." 178.
35. Ibid.
36. Harris, Archer, Waltke, *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament*, 75, 801.
37. Ibid., 10-11.
38. Ibid.
39. Strong's number 3153, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* online, <http://strongnumbers.com/greek/3153>.
40. Munday, "Creature Mortality: From Creation or The Fall?"; Irons, "Animal Death Before the Fall: What Does the Bible Say?"
41. Ibid.
42. Mortenson, "Systematic Theology..." 178.
43. Ibid., 800-801.
44. Munday, "Creature Mortality: From Creation or The Fall?"
45. Ibid.
46. Mortenson, "Systematic Theology..." 178.
47. Daniel J. Dyke, Dr. Hugh Henry, "What Does a 'Very Good World' Look Like?" <http://www.reasons.org/age-earth/animal-death-before-adam/what-does-very-good-world-look-part-2>.
48. Harris, Archer, Waltke, *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament*, 74-75.
49. Mortenson, "Systematic Theology..." 178.
50. Rusbult, "Animal Death before Human Sin."
51. Harris, Archer, Waltke, *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament*, 10.
52. Mortenson, "Systematic Theology..." 179.
53. Harris, Archer, Waltke, *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament*, 496.
54. Mortenson, "Systematic Theology..." 179.
55. Ibid., 181.

56. Mortenson, "Systematic Theology..." 179.
57. Craig Hawkins, "Essential Doctrines of Christian Faith," <http://thecollegeoftheology.com/essentials-of-the-christian-faith/>
58. Gary Emberger, "Theological Analysis of Selected Recent Creationist Assertions Concerning the Occurrence of Death Before Sin," <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2000/PSCF9-00Emberger.html>.
59. Ibid.



## 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 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, God's 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 and the Bible.
- Building alliances with local churches, ministries and groups to maximize the exposure of RTB.
- Reaching out to unbelievers with gentleness and respect, to expose them to God's word.

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

### Questions? Get Answers.

If you're looking for scientific support for your faith or answers to questions about God, the Bible, and science, contact us at [seattle@reasons.org](mailto:seattle@reasons.org). Or call the RTB hotline seven days a week, 5:00 to 7:00 PM at 626-335-5282.