DEFENCE & CONFIRMATION

Ready To Give an Answer

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Editorial

Jon Burke

Welcome to the first issue of *Defence & Confirmation.* This journal aims to provide high quality peer reviewed articles,[1] supporting the preaching of the good news in Christ, addressing challenges to our faith, encouraging deep study of the Bible, and promoting honest consideration of our beliefs whilst defending our understanding of the gospel.

Defence & Confirmation has been set up by the team at BEREA Portal.[2] The following regular columns will appear in the journal.

- Archaeology & historicity: defending the Bible's historical claims.
- Textual criticism & translation: discussion of textual issues and Bible translations.
- Prophecy: providing evidence for fulfilled biblical prophecy, and assessing interpretations.
- Doctrines & practices: defending biblical teachings and practices.
- Inspiration & authorship: discussion of biblical inspiration and the authorship of biblical books.
- Contradictions: assessing claims of contradictions in the Bible.
- Science: the relationship between science, Scripture, and scientific claims relevant to biblical interpretation.
- Ethics & morality: assessing ethical and moral issues in the light of Bible teaching.
- Prove all things: examining apologetic arguments and biblical interpretations from Christadelphians and other Christians.
- Book & article reviews: reviews of books and articles relevant to apologetic issues.
- Sound words: valuable comments from earlier Christadelphian commentators.

[1] Reviewed prior to publication by committee members with special knowledge of the article's subject.

[2] www.berea-portal.com

- Reader correspondence: questions and comments from readers.

D&C is produced by members of the Lively Stones Collective, an informal group of brethren offering knowledge and skills essential to a high standard of exegesis and apologetics. LSC contributors are deeply committed to the scholarly approach and intellectual honesty of the Christadelphian pioneers.

We promote and facilitate personal development in the fields of Bible study, research, critical thinking and debate. We practise and endorse sound principles of interpretation, such as those defined by Bro. James Foreman in 1859.

D&C welcomes regular and ad hoc contributions. We are also looking for several columnists. If you wish to submit material for publication, please contact one of the editors: jburke@berea-portal.com; dburke@berea-portal.com; kgilmore@berea-portal.com; cmatthiesen@berea-portal.com

Living on the Edge: a Christadelphian book to strengthen faith

Jon Burke

Today Christians in the Western world are typically living in a post-Christian society. Christian beliefs are met with scepticism, and people see little reason to believe. Christians are confronted with daily challenges to their faith, and often struggle to understand the relevance of Christianity to modern life. This book, written by Brother Jonathan Burke of the Taipei Ecclesia (Taiwan), addresses these concerns.

1. What is this book about?

Upholding and defending our beliefs and values, and proving they are relevant to the modern world, is very difficult without the kind of evidence which non-religious people will find convincing. This book aims to provide that evidence.

2. Could you give an overview of the book?

The main section headings are 'Living on the edge of certainty', addressing doubts about our beliefs, 'Living on the edge of credibility', addressing the challenge of defending our beliefs and preaching to other religious people and atheists, and 'Living on the edge of society', addressing the challenge of belonging to a Christian community with beliefs and values typically rejected by modern society.

3. How long is the book?

It's 587 pages long in standard US trade paperback format (6x9 inches), including a bibliography almost 100 pages long.

4. Will any of it be controversial?

The book does address issues such as the relationship of science and Scripture, the age of the universe and the earth, and whether the flood was local or global. However, I aim to minimize controversy. For example, since evolution is a highly divisive issue the book does not address it at all.

5. How can people purchase the book?

It has been printed locally in Taiwan, and can be posted internationally. The purchase price for a hard copy is US$15 per hardcopy plus postage (a free ebook version is included with every hardcopy). A discount price of US$10 is available for orders of 10 or more copies. To order, or request a sample to assess, email jburke@berea-portal.com.

Was the Genesis flood global or local?

Jon Burke

Abstract

The Genesis flood is typically considered by most Christians to have covered the earth and destroyed all but eight humans. A close examination of the text, however, identifies the flood as local. This interpretation is not new, and dates to at least as early as the first century CE.

Possible interpretations

There are three possible interpretations of the scope of the Genesis flood. It could have been anthropologically global (all humans everywhere in the earth were affected), and geographically global (the entire earth was covered with water).

Alternatively, it could have been anthropologically global (all humans on the earth affected), but geographically local (only a local area of the earth covered with water because all the humans were localized in that area).

A third possibility is that it could have been anthropologically local (only humans within the area of the flood were affected), but geographically local (and only a local area of the earth covered with water). An argument will be made here for the third of these interpretations, on the basis of the Biblical text.

The language used

The language used to describe the flood does appear to refer to a global event, but the same language is used in other passages to speak of local effects; Genesis 7:21-23 and Ezekiel 38:20 are a good example. Note the following phrases which are used in Ezekiel 38:20, and in the description of the flood in Genesis 7:21, 23.

- all/every: כל (Genesis 7:21, 23)
- birds of the sky: עוף ה שׁמים (Genesis 7:21 [birds] 23 [birds of the heavens])
- on the face of the earth: עלפנוהאדמה (Genesis 7:23)
- people: אדם (Genesis 7:21, 23)

- creeping things: רמשׂ (Genesis 7:23; 'swarming things' in Genesis 7:21, different words but the same kind of animals are referred to)
- beasts: חַיַּת (Genesis 7:21)

In Deuteronomy 2:25, the phrase 'all the people under heaven [הַשָּׁמַיִם-כָּל]' is used; הַשָּׁמַיִם-כָּל ('under heaven'), is the same term used in Genesis 6:1, 'destroy from under the sky all the living creatures', and 7:19, 'all the high mountains under the entire sky'.

But Deuteronomy 2:25 is clearly speaking of a local event.

> Deuteronomy 2:
>
> 24 Get up, make your way across Wadi Arnon. Look! I have already delivered over to you Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land. Go ahead! Take it! Engage him in war!
>
> 25 This very day I will begin to fill all the people under heaven [הַשָּׁמַיִם-כָּל] with dread and to terrify them when they hear about you. They will shiver and shake in anticipation of your approach.

So 'all the people under heaven' here means all the nations in the land of Canaan, not 'all the people on the planet'.

The word כל, 'every', used in Genesis 7:19 for 'every living substance' is the same word used in Ezekiel 38:20 for 'all creeping things' and 'all the people who are on the face of the earth', neither of which has a global referent. So as in Deuteronomy and Ezekiel, in Genesis the judgment of the flood came as a direct result of the sins of the covenant community, the people who knew God and His commandments, and who were called by His name.[3]

On the principle that God judges and punishes only those who are enlightened by His law and choose to disobey it,[4] the flood could only have destroyed those who had been enlightened by God's law and chose to

[3] Genesis 6:2, '**the sons of God** saw that the daughters of humankind were beautiful. Thus they took wives for themselves from any they chose.'.

[4] Romans 2:12, 'For all who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law'; 4:15, 'where there is no law there is no transgression either'; 5:13,'there is no accounting for sin when there is no law', 1 John 3:4, 'sin is lawlessness'.

break it. This validates the view that God destroyed only the enlightened people in the earth by means of a local flood, while unenlightened people elsewhere in the earth were unaffected by the flood.

Survival of the Nephilim

A well-known problem for the geographically and anthropologically global interpretation of the flood, is the survival of the Nephilim.[5] The flood narrative itself tells us that the Nephilim 'were on the earth in those days

[5] 'The bald allusion to the Nephilim (lit. fallen ones) in Gen 6:3 ('The Nephilim were on the earth in those days … ') **fits uneasily into a context that has always presented a challenge to exegetes**.', Coxon, 'Nephilim', in Toorn, Becking & Horst (eds.), 'Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible', p. 618 (2nd rev. ed. 1999).

(and also after this)' (Genesis 6:4). This is recognized by standard commentaries as an explicit statement that the Nephilim survived the flood.[6] [7] [8] [9] [10] [11]

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[6] 'In Genesis 6, the Nephilim are connected with the multiplication of humanity on the face of the earth (v 1) and with the evil of humanity which brings about God's judgment in the form of the flood (vv 5–7). **Verse 4 includes a reference to later (postdiluvian) Nephilim**. The majority of the spies who were sent by Joshua to spy out Canaan reported giants whom they called Nephilim, and who are designated in the account as the sons of Anak (Num 13:33).', Hess, 'Nephilim', in Freedman (ed.), 'Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary', volume 4, p. 1072 (1996).

[7] 'From Numbers 13 we learn that the Aanakites are said to be descendants of the "Nephilim." If the Nephilim of Num 13:33 and Gen 6:4 are taken as the same group, **the verse indicates that the Nephilim and their descendants survived the flood**.', Matthews, 'Genesis 1-11:26 ', New American Commentary, volume 1A, p. 336 (2001).

[8] '**It is not clear why or how the Nephilim survived the Flood to become the original Canaanites**; probably a duality of older oral traditions can be detected in the clash between these two texts.', Hendel, 'Nephilim', in Metzger & Coogan (eds.), 'The Oxford guide to people & places of the Bible', p. 217 (2001).

[9] 'The *nephilim* of Num 13.33 are the people whom the men saw when they were sent to spy out the land of Canaan while Israel was in the wilderness. These beings described as □□□□□□□□□in LXX **present the reader with the problem of how giants survived the Flood**, in contrast to the Watcher tradition that conveys that all the giants were physically killed.', Wright, 'The Origin of Evil Spirits: The Reception of Genesis 6.1-4 in Early Jewish Literature', p. 81 (2005).

[10] 'Thus, within the Flood narrative itself, the sole continuity of life between pre-Flood and post-Flood is represented by Noath and the others in the ark. Beyond the Flood narrative proper, however, there are implicit pointers in a different direction. **One issue is the presence of "the Nephilim" both before the Flood (Gen. 6:4) and subsequently in the land of Canaan as reported by Israel's spies (Num. 13:33)**. Indeed, there is a note in the text of Genesis 6:4 **which expliciitly points to the continuity of Nephilim pre-and post-Flood:** "The Nephilim were on the earth in those days - *and also afterward"*" (my italics), a note which of course poses the problem rather than resolves it.', Barton & Wilkinson, 'Reading Genesis After Darwin', p. 12 (2009).

[11] 'Although in Numbers 13 the inhabitants of Canaan are considered enemies of the Israelites, both the use and co-ordination (LXX) or derivation of the designation (MT) in an allusion to Genesis 6 **betrays an assumption that**

Description of the animals saved

Hugh Ross argues that the description of the animals aboard the Ark is a limited list of animal types. Animals designated using the Hebrew words *basar*, *behema*, *hayya*, *nephesh*, *op*, *remes*, and *sippor* are used to describe the animals which were taken aboard (the common theme is land based oxygen breathing animals with blood).[12]

Animals designated using the Hebrew words *sheres* and *yequm* (the common theme is sea creatures, swarming creatures, insects, reptiles, rodents, and amphibians), are not in the list of animals taken aboard.[13] Ross argues that this limited list of animals saved demonstrates that not all species were preserved in the Ark, which suggests a local flood and also suggests that the animals saved were only those immediately local to Noah.

The Ark running aground

After the waters had been receding for 150 days (Genesis 8:2-3), the Ark ran aground on the 17th day of the seventh month even though the tops of the mountains were not seen until much later, on the 1st day of the tenth month (Genesis 8:4-5). This proves that the floodwater was only 20 feet above the mountains (Genesis 7:20), in the area local to Noah, and could not have covered all the mountains in the earth.

The flood has historically been understood as local

Interpreting the Genesis flood as a local event is not new, nor was it invented in order to overcome conflict with scientific evidence. Two first century interpreters of the flood narrative, the Jewish Alexandrian

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one or more of the Nephilim must have escaped the great deluge.', Auffarth & Stuckenbruck, 'The Fall of the Angels', p. 92 (2004).

[12] '**All these words refer to birds and mammals**, though some can be used a little more broadly. We see a high correlation between this list **and the list of soulish animals God created on the fifth and sixth creation days**, animals that held significance in the preparation of Earth for humankind. Clearly, the survival of these creatures would be important to the restoration and survival of human society after the Flood. **Nothing in the Genesis text compels us to conclude that Noah's passengers included anything other than birds and mammals**.', Ross, 'The Genesis Question: Scientific advances and the accuracy of Genesis', p. 167 (2001).

[13] 'While *sheres* can refer to small mammals, **most often it is used for small nonsoulish animals**. Likewise, *yequm* can refer to all animals or **just those that merely subsist**.', ibid., p. 167.

philosopher Philo[14] and the Jewish historian Josephus,[15] [16] [17] both interpreted the flood as local. The same interpretation was followed by some rabbis in the next few centuries, as well as some of the early Syrian Christians.[18] [19] [20]

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[14] 'Since the deluge of that time was no trifling infliction of water, but an immense and boundless overflow, extending **almost beyond the pillars of Hercules and the great Mediterranean Sea**, since the whole earth and all the spaces of the mountains were covered with water; and it is scarcely likely that such a vast space could have been cleared by a wind, but rather, as I have said, it must have been done by some invisible and divine virtue.', Philo, 'Questions and Answers on Genesis', II.29, in Yonge, 'The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged', p. 824 (1996); Philo however seems to have believed that the flood was anthropologically universal, though not geographically universal.

[15] 'Hieronymus the Egyptian, also, who wrote the Phoenician Antiquities, and Mnaseas, and a great many more, make mention of the same. Nay, Nicolaus of Damascus, in his ninety-sixth book, hath a particular relation about them, where he speaks thus:— (95)"**There is a great mountain in Armenia, over Minyas, called Baris, upon which it is reported that many who fled at the time of the Deluge were saved**; and that one who was carried in an ark came on shore upon the top of it; and that the remains of the timber were a great while preserved. This might be the man about whom Moses, the legislator of the Jews wrote."', Josephus, 'Antiquities', 1.94-95, in Whiston, 'The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged' (updated ed. 1987).

[16] 'However, in the light of Noah's remark in the prayer, **I think Josephus takes it that there were more survivors of the Flood, namely, honest people besides Noah**, who were also judged fit to survive.', Jonquière, 'Prayer in Josephus', p. 59 (2007).

[17] 'Similarly, Josephus tells us that Noah asks God in his prayer that **the people who were rescued** may found cities and build up new lives.', p. 60.

[18] 'Debates over whether the flood reached as high as the garden of Eden are found in rabbinic literature: Gen. R. 33. 6; Lev. R. 31. 10; Cant. R. 1. 15. § 4; 4.1, § 2; cf. PRE. 23. Of the Syrian fathers, Mar Ephrem said it only reached the outer confines of Paradise; see A. Levene, op cit., p. 84.', Lewis, 'A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood in Jewish and Christian Literature', p. 39 (1968).

[19] 'Resh Lakish (PA. 2) and R. Johanan (PA. 2) **differ over whether the land of Israel was included, for JR. Johanan insisted that it was not**.1) R. Levi (PA. 3) agreed appealing to Ez. 22:23, "a land... not rained upon in the day of

The Bible is not a science textbook

Ken Gilmore

Abstract

While the evidence against special creationism and monogenism is considerable and is too often inadequately rebutted, the mechanism of creation does not impact on the authority of the Bible as the creation narratives serve as a polemic against competing creation myths, with the mechanism of creation a secondary issue at best. As monogenism is primarily advanced to support Original Sin, a view that has no Biblical support, the evidence against it is of no theological significance. Furthermore, a plain reading of Genesis 4 implies the existence of human beings other than Adam, Eve, and Cain, providing indirect Biblical support for polygenism.

Biblical authority is not contingent on special creationism

We need to acknowledge that this problem is largely one of our own making. The evidence for an ancient Earth[21] is compelling, and was recognised in the early 19th century by Christian geologists, well before Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published. Likewise, by the late 18th century at the earliest, educated Christians had come to accept the inability of a global flood to explain the geological formations seen on the Earth:

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indignation."2) **Some authorities insisted that the flood did not reach as high as the Garden of Eden.**3)', pp. 142-143; the footnotes 1, 2, and 3 say '1) T.B. Zeb. 113b. 2) Gen. R. 33. 6; PRE. 23. 3) Gen. R. 33. 6; Lev. R. 31.10; Cant R. 1.15. § 4; 4.1. § 2; cf. PRE. 23 and Nachmonides, Gen. 8:11.

Some Syrian fathers shared this view, among whom was Mar Ephrem who said it only reached the outer confines of Paradise.', ibid., p. 143 (in these footnotes, PA is the Palestinian Amora, PRE is Pirke de R. Eliezer, TB is the Talmud Babylon, and R after a book name refers to a Midrash; Genesis Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah, and Canticles/Song of Solomon Rabbah are all cited).

[20] 'The source from whence the dove obtained the olive branch brought controversy. R. Abba bar Kahana (PA. 4) insisted she brought it from the young shoots of the land of Israel. R. Levi (PA. 3) **contended for the Mt. of Olives which had not been submerged**.', ibid., p. 146.

[21] Dalrymple G Brent *The Age of the Earth* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

> For late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Christian geologists, the flood failed to explain a growing wealth of geological features. Those who wanted to maintain a literalist approach to the biblical texts increasingly found themselves on the outside of the geological community. Throughout the nineteenth century there was no lack of writing within a literalist framework, but the books of writers like Granville Penn or George Fairholme, despite some acquaintance with geology, overlooked many important details of geology. The views of literalists no longer carried weight with Christians thoroughly trained in geology.[22]

Early Christadelphians such as John Thomas, Robert Roberts, and CC Walker, far from 'compromising' in accepting an ancient Earth and rejecting a global flood, had recognised what was apparent by the first half of the 20th century, that the Earth was ancient and that the evidence from geology flatly ruled out a global flood. Sceptics who deny the authority of the Bible because a fundamentalist instantiation of our community endorses these views are correct in pointing out that the evidence refutes those views, but forget that these views were hardly normative for most of our community's existence.

While our community originally accepted an ancient Earth and a local flood, it must be acknowledged that it has never accepted evolution. However, unlike many contemporary Christadelphians, they accepted the known facts about natural history, which even then indicated that life on the Earth had progressively appeared over geological time:

> 'There can be no reasonable doubt that when the non-fossiliferous rocks were first formed the heat of the earth's matter was too intense for vegetable and animal life to exist. There can be no reasonable doubt that it was only in a later age that the lower forms of plant and animal life could exist. And there can be no reasonable doubt that the succeeding ages allowed the creation of still higher and more perfect forms, till we reach the age called the "Tertiary," and the "Post-pliocene" period of that age, when we are told remains of man are found for the first time.
>
> All of this, I say, I do not doubt. The facts of old mother earth's storehouse are too convincingly inscribed upon her crust to allow me to doubt. At the same time, and amid it all, I have the most implicit faith and unbounded trust in God and His sacred word.'[23]

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[22] Young Davis A "Scripture in the Hands of Geologists (Part One)" *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987): 25.

[23] Welch, "Knowledge.- No., 12 Geology", *The Christadelphian* 28 (1891) : 416.

In fact, CC Walker openly considered the possibility that if large-scale change in the fossil record could be proven, our community would need to alter its understanding of Genesis:

> Supposing that it were ever established that they were the actual progenitors of our smaller forms ("There were giants in the earth in those days" might apply to birds and beasts), would the credibility of the Mosaic narrative suffer? Not at all, in our estimation. We should indeed have to revise somewhat our interpretation of the brief cosmogony of Gen. 1.; but should not waver as concerning its divinity, nor await with less faith and patience the reappearance of Moses in the land of the living.[24]

Walker and his contemporaries wrote over a century ago, and since then, the scientific evidence in favour of common descent[25], and large-scale evolutionary change in the fossil record[26] has accumulated to the point that common descent not only is no longer doubted by the mainstream scientific community, but also has been accepted as such over a century ago:

> Each of thousands of peer-reviewed articles published every year in scientific journals provides further confirmation (though, as Futuyma (1998) notes, "no biologist today would think of publishing a paper on 'new evidence for evolution' ... it simply hasn't been an issue in scientific circles for more than a century"). Conversely, no reliable observation has ever been found to contradict the general notion of common descent.[27]

Denying these facts not only is counter-productive[28], but unnecessary when we recognise that Genesis was not written to provide a detailed description of how the Earth was formed, but who formed it, and why. A century ago, CC Walker remarked that:

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[24] Walker C.C., "Genesis", *The Christadelphian* 47 (1910) :501.

[25] D.L. Theobald "29+ Evidences for Macroevolution: The Scientific Case for Common Descent." [cited 22 Feb 2014]. Online http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/comdesc/

[26] Prothero Donald Evolution: What the Fossils Say and Why it Matters (xx :Columbia University Press, 2007).

[27] Gregory T Ryan "Evolution as Fact, Theory and Path" Evo Edu Outreach 1 (2008) : 49.

[28] Attacks on evolution by Christadelphians have met with withering criticism by informed observers. See Shallit, Jeffrey "An Open Letter to John C. Bilello, or More Data for the Salem Hypothesis" [cited 22 Feb 2014] http://pandasthumb.org/archives/2005/05/an-open-letter-1.html

> Moses' testimony was given to Israel in what might be called the infancy of the world, when men did not know the extent of the earth, let alone that of the sun, moon, and stars. And, as we believe, it was given (by God through Moses), not so much to instruct Israel in cosmogony in detail, as to impress upon them the idea that The Most High God is the Possessor of Heaven and Earth (Gen. 14:22). And this against the claims of the gods of the nations, as was abundantly proved in Israel's history.[29]

In Walker's observation is recognition that (a) any account of origins needs to accommodate a pre-scientific audience and (b) the issues of importance to that original audience are more of who created the universe and why. Such observations are entirely uncontroversial among even conservative Christian scholars, who see the creation narratives as a polemic[30] against competing creation myths that accommodate the pre-scientific cosmology without endorsing it, much as Jesus accommodated the belief in demon possession as a cause of disease.

Furthermore, careful study of the creation narratives against their ancient Near Eastern background suggests that an account of functional origins, rather than material origins, was of more importance to the ANE world:

> When we investigated the precosmic condition as it was portrayed in texts from the ancient Near East that reflect the ancient cognitive environment, we noted that it was characterized not as a cosmos absent of matter but a world lacking function, order, diversity, and identity. [31]

> The three functions—time, weather, and food production—are called into existence by the utterance of God and are given their functions through acts of separating and naming, with both the functions themselves and the actions that make them operational having precedents in the cognitive environment of the ancient Near East. They are evaluated and found to be perfectly functional ("good") for the human world. [32]

Reading Genesis as a polemic against ancient Near Eastern creation myths which also functions as an account of functional origins not only reads Genesis in its ANE context, as opposed through inappropriately modern

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[29] Walker CC "Is it wrong to believe that the Earth is a sphere?" The Christadelphian 50 (1913) 348.

[30] See for example Futato D "Because It Had Rained: A Study Of Gen 2:5-7 With Implications For Gen 2:4-25 And Gen 1:1-2:3" *Westminster Theological Journal* 60 (1998) 1-21.

[31] Walton J *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* , (Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns: 2011) 139.

[32] Ibid. p 170–171.

scientific and historiographical standards, but also decouples the creation narratives from the mechanics of creation, making the creation-evolution issue essentially irrelevant.

The qualification in my previous paragraph comes from the question of human origins, which unlike the broader question of how the universe was created cannot be subsumed under an explanation of the creation narratives both as apologetic against competing ANE creation mythology and as an account of functional origins.

A natural reading of Gen 2-3 would suggest that Adam and Eve are historical figures, a view which gains some credence as shown by the fact[33] that these chapters contain reliable geographical and historical information.

Conversely, the evidence against monogenism is solid. If the entire human race descended from two people living several thousand years ago, we would expect to see a sharp genetic bottleneck in the human genome, and this is simply not present. As geneticist and evangelical Christian Dennis Venema notes:

> Taken individually and collectively, population genomics studies strongly suggest that our lineage has not experienced an extreme population bottleneck in the last nine million years or more (and thus not in any hominid, nor even an australopithecine species), and that any bottlenecks our lineage did experience were a reduction only to a population of several thousand breeding individuals. As such, the hypothesis that humans are genetically derived from a single ancestral pair in the recent past has no support from a genomics perspective, and, indeed, is counter to a large body of evidence.[34]

Furthermore, the fossil evidence for human evolution is quite robust, and is definitely not a mere handful of bones. Cartmil et al point out that the creationist arguments against the fossil evidence for human evolution are based on hopelessly dated information:

> Opponents of scientific biology are fond of dismissing that record as a pathetic handful of controversial fragments. If that were so, this book would be a lot shorter. An often-repeated creationist canard insists that all known human fossils would fit on a billiard table. This was probably true in the 19th century, but it has not been true for a hundred years.

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[33] Hill C "The Garden of Eden: A Modern Landscape" *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 52 (2000): 31-46.

[34] Venema D “Genesis and the Genome: Genomics Evidence for Human-Ape Common Ancestry and Ancestral Population Sizes” Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith” (62) 2010 :175.

> Known human fossils number in the thousands and represent the remains of hundreds of individuals...Having seen most of the major collections of human fossils in the world's museums, we can assure our readers that those collections can no longer be laid out on a billiard table. It would be hard to cram them into a boxcar.[35]

A resolution to this problem that respects both the scientific and Biblical evidence comes when we recognise that Genesis 4 implicitly assumes the existence of human beings other than Adam, Eve, and Cain. The en passant references to Cain's wife and people whom he feared would kill him are readily explained if human beings outside of the covenant community. This view is hardly radical, enjoying support from theologically conservative sources:

> 'The origin of Cain's wife is an old debate, but the mark of Cain assumes the presence of other tribes that would attack Cain as he went as a vagabond through the earth. **It is little help to hear the fundamentalists explain how this would be done by his brothers and sisters** born later or his nieces and nephews.
>
> The famous four (Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel) are **only representative human beings at the dawn of civilization, not the only human beings.** There is plenty of room here for L. S. B. Leackey's discoveries in Adam's Ancestors.'[36] *(Emphasis mine).*

Claus Westermann warns against the common fundamentalist error of reading the narratives with inappropriate modern historiographical standards:

> "Even if Cain is described as the son of the first couple (and this information belongs to the genealogy, not the narrative) then the conclusion does not necessarily follow that at that time there could not have been other human beings. **One should not apply criteria belonging to historical thought patterns to the presentation of the primeval events.** When Cain presumes that there are other people "out there", he is speaking in an utterly unreflective manner."[37] *(Emphasis mine)*

Westermann's admonition to read the narratives in their context applies equally well to fundamentalists exegetes as well as the naïve critic of the Biblical text, who ironically are closer to each other than they

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[35] M Cartmil et al *The Human Lineage* (Hoboken, NJ :Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) xi.

[36] Moody D, "Tabletalk on Theology Tomorrow' *Review & Expositor* 64 (1967) : 345.

[37] Westermann, Claus. A Continental Commentary: Genesis 1–11. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994.), 311.

would suspect. The former reject modern science because it clashes with their literal reading of the narratives, while the latter dismiss the text because they read it literally and note that such a reading is rebutted by science. Both err in forgetting to read the narrative in its ancient Near Eastern context.

Conclusion

Early Christadelphians accepted an ancient Earth, and the progressive appearance of life through natural history. Although they rejected evolution, they were careful to reject the literalism and reflexive opposition to science that characterises too many Christadelphians today, and were willing to consider modifying interpretations of Genesis should the evidence demand it. This policy alone would remove many of the alleged conflicts between Bible and science, which arise from a flawed interpretation of the former.

Contemporary Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern scholarship, in showing that the creation narratives share the ANE emphasis on functional origins allow us to decouple the narratives from material origins, while a sensitive reading of Gen 4 shows that polygenism is implied by the text. Both approaches serve to show that the alleged conflict is more a function of both sides sharing the same flawed fundamentalist exegetical model.

Review: *Reasonable Faith*

Dave Burke

In *Reasonable Faith* (Crossway, 2008) William Lane Craig presents a philosophical defence of Christianity on the basis of rational argumentation.'[38] Rejecting the legacy of fundamentalism,[39] he urges Christians to take advantage of a new cultural environment[40] in which Christianity can reassert itself as a credible worldview.

Part One ('De Fide') introduces the historic development of Christian epistemology. Augustine appealed primarily (but not exclusively) to the authority of Scripture.[41] Thomas Aquinas favoured reason but exempted

[38] His approach is exemplified by the introduction, in which apologetics is defined as 'a theoretical discipline that tries to answer the question, What rational warrant can be given for the Christian faith? Craig, William Lane (2008-07-23). *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Kindle Location 151). Good News Publishers/Crossway Books. Kindle Edition.

[39] '…the great Princeton theologian J. Gresham Machen solemnly warned, "False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the Gospel. We may preach with all the fervour of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation to be controlled by ideas which prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion." Unfortunately, Machen's warning went unheeded, and biblical Christianity retreated into the intellectual closet of Fundamentalism. Anti-intellectualism and second-rate scholarship became the norm.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 190-196.

[40] 'We are living at a time when Christian philosophy is experiencing a veritable renaissance, reinvigorating natural theology, at a time when science is more open to the existence of a transcendent Creator and Designer of the cosmos than at any time in recent memory, and at a time when biblical criticism has embarked upon a renewed quest of the historical Jesus which treats the Gospels seriously as valuable historical sources for the life of Jesus and has confirmed the main lines of the portrait of Jesus painted in the Gospels.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 206-210.

[41] 'Sometimes we get the impression that he was a strict authoritarian; that is to say, he held that the ground for faith was sheer, unquestionable, divine authority. This authority might be expressed in either the Scriptures or in

certain doctrines from rational scrutiny.[42] Unitarian philosopher John Locke proposed an evidential basis for religious belief, affirming God's existence via cosmological argument and insisting no divine revelation could be contrary to reason.[43] Karl Barth was the opposite, claiming human reason has no capacity to obtain knowledge about God.[44] Alvin Plantinga rejects evidentialism[45] on the basis that we need no evidence for the gospel's truths because these are communicated through the Holy Spirit.[46]

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the church. …But certain statements of Augustine's make it clear that he was not an unqualified authoritarian. He maintained that authority and reason cooperate in bringing a person to faith.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 394-404.

[42] 'But when he comes to the fourth volume, in which he handles subjects like the Trinity, the incarnation, the sacraments, and the last things, he suddenly changes his method of approach. He states that these things are to be proved by the authority of Holy Scripture, not by natural reason. Because these doctrines surpass reason, they are properly objects of faith.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 447-449.

[43] 'When one moves beyond such matters of demonstrable reason into matters of faith, Locke insisted that revealed truths cannot contradict reason. …The revealed truths unattainable by reason cannot contradict reason, because we shall always be more certain of the truth of reason than we shall be of a purported revelation that contradicts reason. Therefore, no proposition contrary to reason can be accepted as divine revelation.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 499-503.

[44] 'According to Barth, there can be no approach to God whatsoever via human reason. Apart from God's revelation in Christ, human reason comprehends absolutely nothing about God.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 540-541. Barth precluded fideism via the proviso that if knowledge of God depends solely on His grace, then 'even the act of faith would be a sinful work were it not wholly wrought by God' (Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 558-560).

[45] 'Plantinga maintains that belief in God and in the central doctrines of Christianity is both rational and warranted wholly apart from any evidential foundations for belief. This brings him into conflict with what he calls the evidentialist objection to theistic belief.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 615-616.

[46] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 694-696.

Craig concludes that the role of the Holy Spirit[47] has primacy over argument and evidence.[48] Despite warning against the assumption that its presence precludes the need for apologetics,[49] he insists a genuine Holy Spirit experience is uniquely distinguishable and therefore provides an unmistakable witness.[50] Argument and evidence, he says, are merely supports (not proofs) of the Christian faith.[51]

Part Two ('De Homine') considers 'the significance of human life in a post-theistic universe.'[52] Here Craig draws on the work of four famous theists (Blaise Pascal, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Søren Kierkegaard, and Francis Schaeffer) to make his case that only the existence of God can offer meaning, value and purpose to human existence.

[47] 'I think that Dodwell and Plantinga are correct that, fundamentally, the way we know Christianity to be true is by the self-authenticating witness of God's Holy Spirit. Now what do I mean by that? I mean that the experience of the Holy Spirit is veridical and unmistakable (though not necessarily irresistible or indubitable) for him who has it…' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 710-711.

[48] 'Thus, although arguments and evidence may be used to support the believer's faith, they are never properly the basis of that faith. …How then does the believer know that Christianity is true? He knows because of the self-authenticating witness of God's Spirit who lives within him.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 774-776.

[49] 'Some persons might say that we should never seek to defend the faith. Just preach the gospel and let the Holy Spirit work! But this attitude is unbalanced and unscriptural, as we'll see in a moment.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 831-832.

[50] 'The Spirit-filled Christian can know immediately that his claim to the Spirit's witness is true despite the false claims made by persons adhering to other religions.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 846-848.

[51] 'But the view just expounded enables us to hold to a rational faith which is supported by argument and evidence without our making that argument and evidence the foundation of our faith.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 1072-1073.

[52] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 1219-1220.

Pascal said it is better to believe in God than not, because this offers the best chance of maximising one's happiness.[53] If God exists you win eternal life; if He does not exist, you have lost nothing. [54] Dostoyevsky addressed the problem of evil, arguing that suffering builds character while disbelief in God necessarily leads to moral relativism, which is unjustifiable on rational grounds. Even the most hardened atheist struggles to articulate the merits of a world in which there is no universal moral code.[55]

[53] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 1284-1285.

[54] The proposal has since become known as 'Pascal's Wager.' It is vulnerable to critique on the grounds of intellectual dishonesty, since a person could subscribe to the wager out of pragmatic self-interest, in the total absence of authentic belief.

[55] 'Sartre struggles vainly to elude the contradiction between his denial of divinely pre-established values and his urgent desire to affirm the value of human persons. Like Russell, he could not live with the implications of his own denial of ethical absolutes.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 1574-1576.

Kierkegaard took an existential approach, arguing that human existence cannot find meaning or authenticity in the absence of God. This necessitates a leap of faith, even if no rational basis can be given for it.[56] Schaeffer believed that in the absence of God, human life has no value. Theism therefore offers the only way to 'save the human race from itself.'[57]

Craig concludes that Christianity succeeds where atheism fails because 'it provides the two conditions necessary for a meaningful, valuable, and purposeful life for man: God and immortality',[58] and 'Because of this, we can live consistently and happily.'[59]

Part Three ('De Deo') addresses rational arguments for the existence of God. As before, Craig surveys historic approaches. First is the ontological argument, which 'attempts to prove from the very concept of God that God exists: if God is conceivable, then he must actually exist.'[60]

Next is the cosmological argument, which 'assumes that something exists and argues from the existence of that thing to the existence of a First Cause or a Sufficient Reason of the cosmos.'[61] This is followed by the teleological argument (or 'argument from design'), which 'infers an intelligent designer of the universe, just

[56] Craig, Reasonable Faith, Kindle Locations 1330-1331.

[57] Craig, Reasonable Faith, Kindle Locations 1345-1346.

[58] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 1703-1704.

[59] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Location 1704.

[60] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 1915-1916. Originally devised by Anselm of Canterbury, this argument found defenders in Descartes, Spinoza and Plantinga (among others).

[61] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 1931-1932. Proponents of the cosmological argument include Plato, Aristotle, al-Ghjazali, Aquinas, and Leibniz.

as we infer an intelligent designer for any product in which we discern evidence of purposeful adaptation of means to some end (*telos*).'[62]

Finally Craig considers the moral argument, which 'implies the existence of a Being that is the embodiment of the ultimate Good, which is the source of the objective moral values we experience in the world.'[63] While admitting bias towards the cosmological argument, Craig concludes the moral argument is most effective[64] since it reveals the inconsistency of moral relativism in theory and practice.[65]

The first half of Part Four ('De Creatione') examines historical knowledge. Here Craig asks 'how is it possible to learn anything about the human past with any degree of assurance?'[66] Implications for apologetics arise

[62] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 2022-2023. The teleological argument's most famous advocate was William Paley, who saw evidence of design in the intricate anatomy of living beings.

[63] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 2115-2116. The best case for this view was formulated by William Sorely, who believed in an 'objective moral order' discernible by humanity and reflecting the mind of God.

[64] 'I say this grudgingly because my favourite is the cosmological argument. But cosmological and teleological arguments don't really hit people where they live and so can be dismissed as curiosities. But the moral argument cannot be so brushed aside. Every day that you get up you answer the question of whether there are objective moral values and duties by how you live. It's unavoidable.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 4326-4330.

[65] 'On the one hand, [people have] been taught to believe that moral relativism is true, that moral values and duties are culturally and even personally relative and that you have no right to judge another. …On the other hand, they're steeped in political correctness and the values it entails. … If you're dealing with someone who is an honest inquirer I can guarantee that 95 percent of the time that person will agree that there are objective moral values and duties.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Location Locations 4331-4342.

[66] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Location 4745.

from Christianity's claim to historical events as the foundation of its lifesaving message. If history can be verified, Christianity can be verified via history.[67]

Postmodern historical relativism casts doubt on this proposition by questioning the very nature of historical data[68] and Craig views this as a primary obstacle to the effectiveness of Christian historical apologetics.[69] Having scrutinised and dismissed typical objections to the objectivity of history (lack of direct access and lack of neutrality) he notes that historical relativism has made little impact in the professional sphere[70] but still

[67] 'Christianity is not a code for living or a philosophy of religion; rather it is rooted in real events of history. …this makes Christianity unique because, unlike most other world religions, we now have a means of verifying its truth by historical evidence.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 4740-4744.

[68] 'Indeed, it is not clear whether there really is such a thing as the past on a thoroughgoing postmodernist view, since the multiplicity of historical reconstructions and texts seems to lead to multiple pasts, none of which is privileged. …Thus, Jenkins asserts that the idea that facts/reality can exist independently of the historian "is an implausible idea."' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 4965-4970.

[69] 'If a historical apologetic for the Christian faith is to be successful, the objections of historical relativism need to be overcome.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 4999-5000.

[70] 'It is therefore heartening to find that the community of professional historians has remained unmoved by the blandishments of postmodern relativists. Nancy Partner observes, "For all the sophistication of the theory-saturated part of the profession, scholars in all the relevant disciplines that contribute to or depend on historical information carry on in all essential ways as though nothing had changed since Ranke, or Gibbon for that matter."' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 5509-5512.

finds advocates within an everyday apologetic context.[71] The key to refuting this viewpoint, he says, is to list its concessions and demonstrate its impracticality.[72]

In the second half of Part Four Craig reviews objections to miracles[73] from Benedict de Spinoza and David Hume. The former argued that miracles are contrary to nature and insufficient evidence of God[74], while the latter claimed miracles are improvable in principle and in fact.[75] Craig cites notable theistic philosophers to show these objections are ultimately based on the unjustifiable presupposition that miracles are impossible.[76]

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[71] 'Moreover, when sharing the gospel, one does occasionally encounter nonChristians who seem very sceptical about history.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 5526-5527.

[72] 'With such persons I think it would be especially effective to share the three ways in which relativists implicitly concede the objectivity of history. If they insist on a complete historical scepticism, then we should explain to them the utter unliveability of such a view.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 5527-5528.

[73] 'Undoubtedly, one of the major stumbling blocks to becoming a Christian for many people today is that Christianity is a religion of miracles. …But the problem is that these sorts of miraculous events seem to belong to a worldview foreign to modern man—a pre-scientific, superstitious worldview belonging to the ancient and middle ages.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 5785-5789.

[74] '…Spinoza argues that nothing happens contrary to the eternal and unchangeable order of nature. …First, a miracle could not in any case prove God's existence, since a lesser being such as an angel or demon could be the cause of the event. Second, a so-called miracle is simply a work of nature not yet discovered by man.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 5829-5841.

[75] 'Now, Hume argues, even if we concede that the evidence for a particular miracle amounts to a full proof, it is still in principle impossible to identify that event as a miracle. Why? Because standing opposed to this proof is an equally full proof, namely the evidence for the unchangeable laws of nature that the event in question is not a miracle. … But in fact, says Hume, the evidence for miracles does not amount to a full proof. Indeed, the evidence is so poor, it does not even amount to a probability.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 5852-5871.

[76] '…I do think that people to whom we talk about Christ do sometimes have covert problems with miracles. They do not formulate their misgivings into an argument; they just find it hard to believe that the miraculous events of

Part Five ('De Christo') covers the quest for the historical Jesus and the nature of his self-understanding. Here Craig makes a solid case for the historicity of the biblical Jesus while engaging with the mundane historical Jesus offered by secular scholarship.

In a notable concession Craig admits the weakness of C. S. Lewis' famous 'trilemma', which states that Jesus' personal claims leave only three possibilities: he was self-deceived ('lunatic'), knowingly deceptive ('liar') or God incarnate ('Lord').[77] Despite this Craig is able to show that Jesus' self-concept uniquely corresponded to Jewish messianic prophecies,[78] while his public ministry was demonstrably miraculous[79] and unprecedentedly authoritative.[80] With a final nod to C. S. Lewis, Craig concludes it is more reasonable to accept

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the Gospels really occurred. Insofar as we sense this is the case, we need to bring this presupposition out into the open and explain why there are no good grounds for it.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 6552-6555.

[77] 'Now certainly the majority of scholars today would agree that Jesus was neither a liar nor a lunatic; but that does not mean that they acknowledge him as Lord. Rather, many would say that the Jesus who claimed to be divine is a legend, a theological product of the Christian church. Thus, the dilemma posed by traditional apologetics is undercut, for Jesus himself never claimed to be God.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 6981-6984.

[78] 'The Gospels unambiguously present Jesus as having a Messianic sense of identity.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 7051-7052.

[79] 'Moreover, the miracle stories are so widely represented in all strata of the Gospel traditions that it would be fatuous to regard them as not rooted in the life of Jesus. Thus, the consensus of New Testament scholarship agrees that Jesus did perform "miracles"—however one might want to interpret or explain these.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 7513-7516.

[80] 'The expression frequently attributed to Jesus, "Truly, truly I say to you," is historically unique and is recognized on all hands to have been used by Jesus to preface his teaching. It served to mark off his authoritative word on some subject, usually a statement about the inbreaking kingdom of God or about Jesus' own work.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 7456-7458.

Jesus' claims than to deny them.[81] The weight of evidence favours the truth of Jesus' historicity and self-identity.[82]

Craig's book is not without its weaknesses. The first is his appeal to the witness of the Holy Spirit, which he urges us to accept even when it contradicts argument and evidence.[83] Is this reasonable? Craig believes so, but his rationale[84] sounds suspiciously circular and is unlikely to convince unbelievers. If we accept the witness of the Holy Spirit in defiance of argument and evidence, can we still claim to possess a rational faith or must we admit it is purely subjective?

Craig argues that the witness of the Spirit is distinguishable from mere subjectivism, but the difference remains unclear even after his attempts to prove otherwise. This seriously undermines his claim to present a 'reasonable faith' based on rational argument, and leaves him vulnerable to charges of fideism.

[81] '…by means of these claims of Jesus, on the basis of sayings shown to be authentic, we are brought round again to the same dilemma posed by the traditional apologetic: if Jesus was not who he claimed to be, then he was either a charlatan or a madman, neither of which is plausible. Therefore, why not accept him as the divine Son of God, just as the earliest Christians did?' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 7597-7599.

[82] 'Taken in conjunction with evidence for the resurrection—and one might add, with the evidence for Jesus' miracles and with fulfiled prophecy, which I have not discussed—the radical claims of Jesus become a powerful apologetic for the Christian faith.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 7625-7626.

[83] 'Should a conflict arise between the witness of the Holy Spirit to the fundamental truth of the Christian faith and beliefs based on argument and evidence, then it is the former which must take precedence over the latter, not vice versa.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 828-831.

[84] 'If you're sincerely seeking God, then God will give you assurance that the gospel is true.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 1063-1064.

The second weakness is Craig's tendency to move on without adequately addressing stronger objections to his case. An example is found in Chapter 2, where he claims nothing can be defined as evil or good if God does not exist.[85]

Craig says a non-theistic basis for morality is 'very difficult to understand.'[86] Yet this does not make it unreasonable or impossible. *Why* can there be *no* basis for morality in the absence of God? Craig does not explain. Surely even a relativistic basis for morality is still a basis for morality? It's a question Craig neither asks nor addresses.[87]

The primary virtue of Craig's book is its scope. *Reasonable Faith* offers an apologetic for lay Christians and clergy alike. Every angle is covered, from classical arguments to mathematical probability. Historical background information provides essential context to the debate.

Craig writes confidently, cross-examining counter-claims, explaining technical terms and supporting his case with copious references. Atheists commonly claim faith is necessarily irrational, but Craig shows otherwise: Christianity is predicated on reasonable grounds, and in some cases the alternative view is manifestly *un*reasonable.

[85] 'Thus, if atheism is true, it becomes impossible to condemn war, oppression, or crime as evil. Nor can one praise brotherhood, equality, or love as good. It doesn't matter what you do—for there is no right and wrong; all things are permitted.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 3898-3899.

[86] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Location 3905. Here Craig surely commits the fallacy of the argument from incredulity.

[87] The question needs to be addressed, for he has already conceded that atheists can live moral lives: 'There's no reason to think that atheists and theists alike may not live what we normally characterize as good and decent lives.' Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Kindle Locations 3906-3907.

Alleged Scientific Inaccuracies in the Bible

Ken Gilmore

Abstract

Claims that the Bible is riddled with scientific errors are commonly made against the Bible by sceptics of its claim to be the word of God. These claims are unimpressive as they are ironically predicated on a literal reading of translations of the Bible in with no attempt made to understand Hebrew idiom or make due allowance for folk taxonomy. Furthermore, they ignore the point made by conservative scholars that inspiration does not give the writers scientific knowledge above their peers. Finally, such claims ignore evidence that the cultic aspects of the Mosaic Law have been acknowledged as providing considerable benefit from a sanitation point of view.

Scientific errors or folk taxonomy and failure to understand Hebrew idiom?

Two of the most frequently cited examples of scientific error are the references to rabbits that chew the cud in Leviticus 11:5-6 and insects with four legs in verses 20-21 of the same chapter. It is a mistake to read these verses as being modern taxonomy as the purpose of these chapters is to divide animals into clean or unclean for dietary and cultic purposes.

The former is an example of folk taxonomy, one that employs a loosely-defined term 'cud-chewing' as one of the criteria by which animals are classified. Rabbits and hyraxes are not ruminants, but as Jacob Milgrom speculates, "the sideways movement of it jaws gives [them] the appearance of [being such]." [88]

References to four-legged insects betray an ignorance of Hebrew idiom and a surface reading of an English translation; the phrase 'going on all fours' does not refer to insects being tetrapods, but is idiomatic for darting around:

> Almost all small land animals are classified as unclean. The phrase ההלך על־ארבע, "go on all fours," is an expression for darting about. E. Fink (*RÉJ* 63 [1912] 122–23) takes feet (רגלים) in v 23 as a dual,

[88] Jacob Milgrom, *A Continental Commentary: Leviticus: a Book of Ritual and Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 116.

> meaning four pairs of legs. He accounts for the four pairs by including the antennae every insect has as numbered with the feet.
>
> Unfortunately Fink's explanation does not help very much with the phrase "go on all four" in v 20. For clarity in the English translation this phrase is rendered "dart about." Four locusts are named as exceptions to flying insects' being unclean. They are clean because they have a pair of larger, jointed legs for hopping. [89]

Far from being a blunder, the reference to darting insects served its purpose of providing criteria by which the Israelites could divide animals into groups for cultic purposes. It is a mistake to judge these criteria on scientific grounds.

Accommodation and ignoring the cultural context

As Christadelphians have long argued that the references to demon possession as a cause of disease in the New Testament are an example of Jesus accommodating an existing belief without endorsing it, claims that the references to demon possession are problematic are unimpressive.

Context here is critical: Kuemmerlin-McLean notes that the OT has few overt references to demons, much less as the root cause of disease, whereas in the New Testament they are abundant, with the notable exception of John's gospel.[90]

The latter may well reflect a more developed belief in demons in Galilee as opposed to Judea, and hints strongly that far from representing a universal, and normative belief in the reality of demon possession, the NT narratives represent a pragmatic accommodation of geographically-specific views.

The idea of accommodation obliges the exegete to understand the socio-cultural and historical context of the narrative, rather than take surface readings out of context. Another classic example is the accusation that the Bible errs in claiming that one can 'prove' virginity by an intact hymen or the presence of bloodstained sheets on a wedding night.

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[89] John E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (vol. 4; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 160.

[90] Joanne K. Kuemmerlin-McLean, "Demons: Old Testament," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 140.

While it is true that a non-intact hymen or the absence of blood-stained sheets after a wedding night do not rule out a bride being a virgin, the passages in Deut 22:13-21 are not about proving virginity, but protecting a woman from false accusations of infidelity, a point which is made absolutely clear by the opening sentences of this section:

> "If any man takes a wife and goes in to her and then turns against her, and charges her with shameful deeds and publicly defames her, and says, 'I took this woman, but when I came near her, I did not find her a virgin,' then the girl's father and her mother shall take and bring out the evidence of the girl's virginity to the elders of the city at the gate."

The accuracy of the Bible has also been questioned because the requirement for a post-menstrual period of quarantine has no medical basis in fact. However, this ignores the fact that the purity code was primarily given to enforce ritual purity. It should be noted however that adherence to these ceremonial laws does have unambiguous public health benefits, which can hardly be considered accidental:

> 'The Hebrew Mosaic Law of the five Books of Moses stressed prevention of disease through regulation of personal and community hygiene, reproductive and maternal health, isolation of lepers and other "unclean conditions", and family and personal sexual conduct as part of religious practice.'
>
> 'It also laid a basis for medical and public health jurisprudence. Personal and community responsibility for health included a mandatory day of rest, limits on slavery and guarantees of the rights of slaves and workers, protection of water supplies, sanitation of communities and camps, waste disposal, and food protection, all codified in detailed religious obligations.'
>
> 'Food regulation prevented use of diseased or unclean animals, and prescribed methods of slaughter improved the possibility of preservation of the meat.'
>
> 'The Mosaic Law, which forms the basis for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, codified health laws for the individual and for society, all of which have continued into the modern era as basic concepts in environmental and social hygiene.[91]

Divine accommodation is not a novel exegetical option, but rather one that has a respectable conservative pedigree stretching back centuries. Calvin, in his commentary on Genesis observed that the idea of waters in the heavens did not make sense, and argued that this represented evidence that the Bible accommodated

[91] Thulchinsky & E Varavikova, 'The New Public Health: An Introduction for the 21st Century' (2000).

existing views on nature:

> For it appears opposed to common sense, and quite incredible, that there should be waters above the heaven. Hence some resort to allegory, and philosophize concerning angels; but quite beside the purpose. For, to my mind, this is a certain principle, that nothing is here treated of but the visible form of the world.
>
> **He who would learn astronomy, and other recondite arts, let him go elsewhere**. Here the Spirit of God would teach all men without exception; and therefore what Gregory declares falsely and in vain respecting statues and pictures is truly applicable to the history of the creation, **namely, that it is the book of the unlearned**.[92] *(Emphasis mine).*

Conclusion

Implicit in these allegations of 'scientific error' is the assumption that inspiration as a concept is nullified by the presence of scientific error. Many of these alleged errors reflect a superficial, naïve reading of the text divorced from context, but even where there are examples where the scientific knowledge of the inspired author reflects the misunderstandings of the day, what the critic is obligated to demonstrate is that the theological point is contingent on that inaccuracy. Nineteenth century theologian Charles Hodge ably notes that a high view of inspiration readily accommodates this fact:

> This of course does not imply that the sacred writers were infallible except for the special purpose for which they were employed. They were not imbued with plenary knowledge. As to all matters of science, philosophy, and history, they stood on the same level with their contemporaries.
>
> They were infallible only as teachers, and when acting as the spokesmen of God. Their inspiration no more made them astronomers than it made them agriculturists. Isaiah was infallible in his predictions, although he shared with his countrymen the views then prevalent as to the mechanism of the universe.[93]

[92] John Calvin and John King, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (vol. 1; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 79–80.

[93] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (vol. 1; Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 165.

A survey of Schürer's challenges to the Lukan census

Chris Matthiesen

Abstract

The events of Jesus birth, as told by Luke, are considered difficult to reconcile with extant historical records. The circumstances detailed in the narrative which place Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem for Jesus' birth have received a large amount of scrutiny by both advocates and adversaries of the Bible. A closer examination of the text itself shows, however, that the plausibility of such events occurring is quite strong, and that Luke may have been misunderstood regarding the relationship between the birth of Jesus and the Quirinian census.

Introduction

The 19th century theologian Emil Schürer outlined five challenges[94] to the historicity of the Lukan census which still stand as representative[95] of the ongoing controversy surrounding Luke 2:1-5.

1. There is currently no historical evidence of an empire-wide census by Augustus.
2. Joseph would not have been obligated to travel to Bethlehem for a Roman census.
3. Judaea, as a vassal kingdom, would not have been subject to a Roman census
4. Josephus doesn't mention any census before 6 CE.
5. Quirinius was not governor of Syria during the time of Jesus' birth or Herod's reign.

This article will briefly examine scholarly treatment of these challenges.[96]

[94] Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ, First Division* (2 vols; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1890; repr. Hendrickson, 1994), 2:105-43.

[95] The majority of commentators on the Lukan census since Schürer follow his listed challenges, often in the same order, even when Schürer is not named.

[96] While this article is intended to provide a broad look at the Lukan Census discussion, I hope, God willing, to treat key points featured here to further analysis in future articles.

The Five Challenges

1. An Empire-wide Census?

Schürer interprets Luke 2:1 as describing a single, empire-wide Roman census ordered by Augustus around 6 BCE. There is currently no historical evidence of any such imperial edict. Critical scholarship agrees, however, that Augustus did conduct numerous and varied census activities throughout the empire and its provinces.[97] Because of this, scholars on both sides of the discussion suggest Luke was not referring to a general, imperial census as Schürer posits, but to a currently unidentified registration activity[98] that affected Judaea in some way.

> Luke's words may intend no more than to express simply the fact that the census in Palestine took place **as part of a coordinated empire-wide policy of Augustus**.[99]
>
> Luke's description (2:1) that such an edict is empire-wide **may simply reflect the ongoing census process of this period**.[100]

The biblical scholar R. E. Brown, a noted critic of the Lukan Census, accepts this position.

[97] Scholarship is unanimous here. Schürer concurs: "The conclusion which we reach is simply this, that in the time of Augustus valuation censuses had been made in many provinces. [...] Augustus regarded it as his special task to restore matters to an orderly condition." *History*, 2:120.

[98] The Biblical scholar I. H. Marshall states that Luke is using ἀπογράφομαι, which refers to an enrolment—most likely for taxing purposes, but not an actual taxing activity—I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 98. Schürer agrees: "The verb ἀπογράφειν means first of all only 'to register,' and is therefore more general than the definite ἀποτιμᾶν, 'to value.'", *History*, 2:112.

[99] J. Nolland, *Luke 1:1–9:20 35A* (WBC; Dallas: Word Incorporated, 2002), 99. [Emphasis in all quotes in this article is my own.]

[100] D. Bock, *Luke Volume 1: 1:1–9:50* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 903.

> Did Augustus ever issue an edict that the whole world, i.e., the Roman Empire, be enrolled in a census? Certainly not in the sense in which a modern reader might interpret the Lucan statement!
>
> In the reign of Augustus there was no single census covering the Empire; and granted the different legal statuses of provinces and client kingdoms, a sweeping universal edict seems most unlikely.
>
> **But Luke may not have meant a single census.** […] what Luke may be telling us in an **oversimplified statement** is that the census conducted (in Judea) by Quirinius as governor of Syria was **in obedience to Augustus' policy of getting accurate population statistics for the whole Empire**.[101]

2. Did Joseph have to go to Bethlehem?

Schürer here argues that Roman censuses did not require travel for registration purposes, pointing out that Rome would have considered such activities 'troublesome' and 'inconvenient', as well as outside the normal structure of a Roman census.[102] There is evidence, however, that Rome did adapt its governance to local customs of vassal states, to include allowing the continuation of former regime administrative practices.[103]

These adaptive practices extended to census activities, as we have come to know from papyri discovered (c. 1905) documenting an Egyptian provincial census conducted in 104 CE that required travel to familial

[101] R. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New Updated Edition; New York; London: Yale University Press, 1993), 548-9.

[102] Schürer, *History*, 2:120.

[103] Non-Judean examples include pre-provincial Dura and Nabataea; see H. M. Cotton, W. E. H. Cockle, and F. G. B. Millar "The Papyrology of the Roman near East: A Survey" *JRS* 85 (1995): 214–35.

homes.[104] Scholars cite this as favourable for Luke, removing the logistical impracticability posed by Schürer.[105]

> **Ever since the discovery of papyri** recording house-to-house censuses at fourteen-year intervals in Egypt...**we can be sure that a hard core of historical fact lies behind the passage from Luke**, even if we cannot reconcile the time of the census with the traditional date of Jesus' birth.[106]

[104] "Gaius Vibius Maximus, the Prefect of Egypt, declares: The census by household having begun, it is essential that all those who are away from their nomes {A nome was an Egyptian administrative district -author} be summoned to return to their own hearths so that they may perform the customary business of registration and apply themselves to the cultivation which concerns them..." K. Hansen, "Census Edict for Egypt", cited http://www.kchanson.com/ancdocs/greek/census.html

[105] Even Luke's critics agree: "We do know that censuses could have such requirements for travel, not only from papyri but also from common sense: it is a well-known fact that even Roman citizens had to enroll in one of several tribes to be counted, and getting provincials to organize according to locally-established tribal associations would be practical…", R. Carrier, "The Date of the Nativity in Luke" cited http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/quirinius.html [3rd July 2012, no pagination]; "[O]ne cannot rule out the possibility that, **since the Romans often adapted their administration to local circumstances, a census conducted in Judea would respect the strong attachment of Jews to tribal and ancestral relationships**", Brown, *Messiah*, 549.

[106] H. M. Cotton, "The Roman census in the papyri from the Judaean Desert and the Egyptian katV oivki,an avpografh" in *Semitic Papyrology in Context* (ed. L. A. Schiffman; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), 105-122 (105).

2A. DID MARY HAVE TO GO TO BETHLEHEM?

Schürer contends that Roman censuses would not have required Mary to travel with Joseph, suggesting that women were not required to personally register,[107] though he does concede that in some parts of the empire women were liable for the poll-tax.[108]

However, recent discoveries[109] of registration documents from an early second century CE Arabian provincial census detail a woman traveling to her administrative district to personally register her property.[110] While some details differ between the Arabian registration and Luke 2:5, this new evidence provides a historical context for Mary's travel.[111]

[107] Schürer, *History*, 2:121.

[108] Specifically mentioned is provincial Syria. Schürer cites the Roman jurist Ulpian here, Schürer, *History,* 2:111, fn. 13. Scholarship is divided on the interpretation of Ulpian, specifically on whether or not women were required to personally register, though the requirement of their registration is undisputed. Schürer suggests the male head of the family registered the women, though he admits basing this claim on 'assumptions' of earlier scholars (2:121 and fn. 51 respectively). Others are not so convinced, suggesting women personally appeared to register—A. Tàrrech, *Jesus: An Uncommon Journey: Studies on the Historical Jesus* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 77; cf. Nolland, *Luke*, 100; Marshall, *Luke*, 102.

[109] 'Cave of Letters' discovery of 1960-61.

[110] Cotton, "The Roman census in the papyri from the Judaean Desert and the Egyptian katV oivki,an avpografh.", 112-3.

[111] Even though Luke does not go into detail, commentators do habitually ascribe legal obligations to Mary's travel. Not considered here, though worth mentioning, is that alternative explanations exist. For example, it may be as simple as Mary wishing to be with Joseph, perhaps specifically during the time of her delivery. R. H. Stein, *Luke* (NAC 24; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 105.

3. A Roman Census in Judea?

Schürer notes that a Roman census with the purpose of imposing a Roman tax would not have occurred in Judaea. For Schürer, the sovereignty extended to client kings precluded direct Roman intervention over administrative matters. [112] [113] However, a number of scholars question Schürer, pointing out that evidence from Josephus strongly suggests Augustus exercised considerable control over Judaea, displaying a personal interest in Herod's affairs and interceding when he was displeased, or concerned, about Herod's actions.[114]

For Rome, client kingdoms were clearly meant to temporarily serve as such. Primarily occupying Rome's borders in order to buffer against frontier lawlessness, once sufficiently 'Romanized' these client kingdoms were to be annexed into the Empire.[115]

While scholars are still undecided over Schürer's third challenge, conservative scholarship finds it difficult to dismiss that Rome exercised a much more restricted governance of its client kingdoms than Schürer allows.

[112] Schürer, *History*, 2:122.

[113] The Roman historian Dio Cassius wrote that "Augustus administered the subject territory {the province of Syria -author} according to the customs of the Romans, but permitted the allied nations to be governed in their own traditional manner…" *Roman History* (6 vols; trans., E. Cary; Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914-27), vol. 6, Book 54, 9, 1.

[114] Schürer himself provides a good synopsis of this view, which has changed little in the last century, *History*, 2:122-7.

[115] B. W. R. Pearson, "The Lucan Censuses, Revisited" *CBQ* 61 (1999): 262-282 (267, fn. 15; cf. E. Salmon, A *History of the Roman World from 30 B.C. to A.D. 138* (London. Routledge, 1944; repr. 2004), 104-5.

4. Josephus doesn't mention a Roman Census before 6 CE

Schürer, in his fourth challenge, rightly observes that Josephus does not mention a Roman census during Herod's reign. Moreover, Schürer points out that Josephus referred to the Quirinian census of 6-7 CE as a "new and previously unheard of" event in Judea.[116]

Some scholars suggest that Herod did conduct censuses, but according to Jewish models[117]—not Roman—to avoid upsetting Jewish religious and traditional sensibilities.[118] The elaborate taxation system under Herod is

[116] Schürer, *History*, 2:127.

[117] See Tàrrech (*Jesus: An Uncommon Journey*, 83-8) for more on 'Jewish models'. Tàrrech argues that evidence of censuses in Judaean history (e.g. Exod 30:12-15; Num 1, 26; Ezra 2; Nehemiah 7) emphasizes how the Jews considered the land of Israel theirs by decree of God, apportioned to them by divine command. This, according to Tàrrech, explains the Jews' grievance over the Quirinian census (Ant. 18:2, 9); Schürer disagrees (*History 2*: 130)—for Tàrrech's response, see *Jesus: An Uncommon Journey*, 88, fn. 54.

[118] Bock suggests, "[A] previous census **patterned after Jewish models** most likely produced no reaction and **may not have been worthy of Josephus's attention**." *Luke*, 905; Tàrrech: "Herod's census and taxation system was not an exact copy of the Roman census system nor did Herod need to fit his into this system. The Jewish sovereign had freedom to plan and act when dealing with his subjects…" *Jesus: An Uncommon Journey*, 74. Schürer agrees that Herod did in most cases attempt to respect Jewish sensibilities, though he rejects Herodian censuses (*History*, 2:42).

often referenced as support here.[119] [120] Also of interest is the annual per capita (i.e. poll) tax imposed during Archelaus' reign,[121] which strongly indicates census activities under a Herodian ruler in pre-provincial Judea.

It is currently unknown whether Archelaus' poll-tax was a continuation from his father's reign. The New Testament scholar, Armand Puig i Tàrrech, believes this to be the case, further arguing this poll-tax may have had its origin as far back as the Ptolemies.[122]

One last point of interest is the frequency of such Herodian censuses, if they did occur. Opinions range from six, seven, or fourteen years,[123] with some commentators pointing to Josephus' references of Herodian tax amnesties and required oaths as possible census dates.[124]

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[119] Pearson, "The Lucan Censuses, Revisited" 269 and Tàrrech, *Jesus: An Uncommon Journey*, 75. A good example is Josephus' reference to Herod's finance minister, Ptolemy, whose ability is seen in the up-to-date records he provided during Augustus' execution of Herod's estate. (*Ant.* 17.229) Schürer and Brown maintain that existence of such records does not have to mean censuses occurred. Pearson disagrees: "It seems implausible, therefore, to assume that Judaea had been without the practice of census taking prior to the establishment of direct Roman rule." ("The Lucan Censuses, Revisited" 266).

[120] Tàrrech, *Jesus: An Uncommon Journey*, 77, fn. 26. Cf. Pearson, who provides examples from Egyptian papyri of these scribes' duties concerning censuses, "The Lucan Censuses, Revisited", 271. Carrier rejects Pearson's position but provides little support in his counter claim, "The Date of the Nativity in Luke", sect. 3.

[121] Josephus, *Ant.* 17.308.

[122] Tàrrech, *Jesus: An Uncommon Journey*, 77. Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 12.142.

[123] Tàrrech, *Jesus: An Uncommon Journey*, 78.

[124] These dates are 20/19 BCE, 14 BCE, and 8/7 BCE. The first two dates coincide with tax amnesties granted by Herod, while the first and last with required oaths to be taken by the Jews in 20 BCE (an oath of fidelity to Herod) and 8 BCE (an oath of allegiance to Herod and Augustus). Of interest is that of these three censuses, only the 8 BCE decree was solely by Augustus. The 28 and 14 BCE censuses were jointly decreed by Augustus, Agrippa and Tiberius, respectively—Tàrrech, *Jesus: An Uncommon Journey*, 80, fn. 33. How that relates to Luke 2:1 is uncertain: 'Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus to register all the empire for taxes'. See

While Josephus does not refer to these events as censuses, it is possible that the two oaths, at a minimum, were in some way linked to census activities because of the need for personal inscriptions from the populace.[125]

4A. WHAT DID JOSEPHUS MEAN BY "NEW AND PREVIOUSLY UNHEARD OF"?

The second part of Schürer's fourth challenge argues that Josephus, in calling the Quirinian census "new and previously unheard of", was referring specifically to the assessment of a Roman tax in Judaea.[126] This makes the Lukan census—which Schürer insists was a Roman one—suspect, since it would render the Quirinian census only 12 years later neither "new" nor "previously unheard of".[127] As noted already, Schürer's insistence on the registration in Luke 2:1 being of Roman design and administration is unnecessary.

Some scholars alternatively suggest that Josephus was not referring simply to the imposition of a Roman tax, but specifically to the introduction of the tributum soli (property tax)[128] and/or the establishing of direct

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also Tàrrech, *Jesus: An Uncommon Journey*, 78-82, who gives a detailed account—drawing on other scholars—of circumstances surrounding each of the proposed censuses by Herod.

[125] Tàrrech, *Jesus: An Uncommon Journey*, 82.

[126] "The offensive thing, therefore, was not the taxing of property, **or the form in which it was carried out, but the Roman taxation as such.**" *History*, 2:131. For a short critique of Schürer on this point, see Tàrrech (*Jesus: An Uncommon Journey*, 88, fn. 54).

[127] *History*, 2:130. Schürer suggests a census—which goes hand-in-hand with a poll-tax—would have occasioned "a rebellion" as with the Quirinian census.

[128] Tàrrech suggests the key difference between Herod's and Roman censuses was the Roman imposition of the property tax: "[T]he key aspect to a fiscal policy that would not upset the Jewish sensibility would be the **equal application of a tributum capitis, instead of the tributum soli**. This is the essential difference between a Jewish census (such as Herod's) and a provincial Roman census (such as Quirinius'). […] Whilst the former is based on the registration of individuals and is designed for the collection of the per capita tax, **the latter is based on the valuation of property and introduces an element, the taxable value of land, that goes against the sensibility of the Jewish religion**." (*Studies*, 87).

Roman rule as what was new and previously unheard of.[129] [130] These would have stood in stark contrast to Herod's policy of opaque Roman rule under the guise of Jewish tradition.[131] [132]

Without more detail from Josephus, scholars admit they can only speculate on what exactly he meant. Also to be considered when dealing with Josephus, according to scholars, is the underlying motivation for his historical perspective.[133]

[129] Bock combines the two: "Josephus, Antiquities 18.1.1 §§3–4 speaks of taxation as the problem, but only as an indication of Israel's absence of liberty", *Luke*, 905, fn. 14.

[130] Bock suggests the revolt in 6/7 CE drew Josephus' attention because it openly displayed direct Roman sovereignty over the former kingdom: "Such a negative reaction to the A.D. 6 census should not be surprising if Roman authority was emphasized and the Roman model of census-taking was followed" (*Luke*, 906).

[131] Tàrrech*, Jesus: An Uncommon Journey*, 87. Cf. Schürer (*History*, 1:437-8) for examples of Herod's policy in this regard.

[132] In other words, it is not that Roman censuses and taxation did not occur prior to Quirinius, but rather that Herod shrewdly incorporated such activities into his administration.

[133] Not considered here is the historical reliability of Josephus, though much has been written on this topic. Witherington, citing other scholars, suggests, as a result of Josephus' known historical inaccuracies, that he be cited critically and with close scrutiny; at least to the measure of scrutiny given to Luke. Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 237.

5. Quirinius was not the Governor of Syria during Herod the Great's Reign

Schürer's fifth challenge is the most difficult within the current discussion.

> A census held under Quirinius could not have occurred in the time of Herod, for Quirinius was never governor of Syria during the lifetime of Herod.[134]

History knows of a single legateship of Quirinius over the province of Syria, and that in c. 6 CE. His arrival in Syria coincided with the census of Judaea mentioned by Josephus.[135] It is precisely this dating that presents the problem, since 6 CE is too late for the nativity.[136]

Over the centuries, many attempts have been made to reconcile Luke's perceived discrepancy.[137] Conservative biblical scholarship of the last 150 years has focused on a select few of the more robust explanations that do not sacrifice Luke's accuracy. The two most often discussed are

1. Two Legateships of Quirinius over Syria
2. An alternate reading of Luke 2:2, "this was the first registration…"

[134] Schürer, *History*, 2:133.

[135] See also Cotton ("The Roman census in the papyri from the Judaean Desert and the Egyptian katV oivki,an avpografh", 106-7) for the Secundus inscription validating the Qurinian census in 6 CE.

[136] Matthew and Luke agree that Jesus was born during Herod the Great's reign, which ended with Herod's death in 5/4 BCE.

[137] This is seen as early as Justin Martyr (*Apol.* 1:34; 46; *Dial.* 78) and Tertullian (*Adv. Marc.* 19).

5A. QUIRINIUS GOVERNED SYRIA TWICE?

This position argues that Quirinius held some type of governorship[138] over Syria on two separate occasions; the accepted date of 6/7 CE as well as an earlier date (either c. 3-2 or c. 9-5 BCE).[139] [140] W. M. Ramsey *et.al*, forcefully argue this position, appealing to historical records, the Lapis Tiburtinus inscription[141] and supposition, in an effort to place Quirinius in Syria prior to 6 CE.[142]

The reasons for the date of 3-2 BCE centres on scholarship's current uncertainty as to who held the Syrian legateship at this time.[143]

23-13 BCE	M. Agrippa
c. 10 BCE	M. Titius

[138] W. M. Ramsey points to Luke's usage of the word ἡγεμονεύοντος for both legati and procurators in an effort to argue a more nuanced definition within Luke-Acts, which would relieve restrictions on Quirinius being a Legate; he could have governed in some other role, perhaps in a military capacity. W. M. Ramsey, *Was Christ Born at Bethlehem? A Study on the Credibility of St. Luke* (2nd ed.; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), 245.

[139] S. Porter, "The Reasons for the Lucan Census" in *Paul, Luke And The Graeco-Roman World, The Reasons for the Lukan Census* (ed. A. Christopherson *et al*; London: Continuum, 2003), 165-188 (168).

[140] For an earlier treatment of this position in *CeJBI*, see A. Perry, "Quirinius" *CeJBI* 4:4 (2010): 26-9.

[141] This inscription partially highlights the career of an unknown Roman official who served as a Roman legate twice, at least once over Syria, as well as proconsul of Asia, during Augustus' reign. Unfortunately, the manuscript is missing the name of this Roman officer, which leaves commentators looking to other sources for clues to his identity. See Ramsey (*Bethlehem*, 273) for a treatment of the inscription, which he refers to as "The Inscription of Quirinius". Biblical scholarship is generally unsupportive of Ramsey's claims.

[142] Ramsey, *Bethlehem*, 227-48.

[143] Brown, *Messiah*, 550. Fitzmyer, Schürer, *et.al*, agree with this timeline.

9-6 BCE	S. Sentius Saturnius
6-4 BCE, or later	Quintilius Varus
3-1 BCE	?
1 BCE to c. 4 CE	Gaius Caesar
4-5 CE	L. Volusius Saturnius
6-7 CE, or later	P. Sulpicius Quirinius

As one can imagine, this has prompted much debate over Quirinius as a possibility, which would seemingly solve the dilemma presented by Schürer.[144] However, Schürer, who is familiar with the suggestion, dismisses this dating as deficient,[145] observing that these dates conflict with the accepted dates of Herod's death (5/4 BCE).[146] [147]

[144] Schürer, *History*, 2:133.

[145] Schürer, *History*, 1:352.

[146] Schürer, *History*, 2:138.

[147] While beyond the scope of this article, there is some discussion over the dating of Herod's death. Some suggest a later date, perhaps even to 1 CE, based on descriptions from Josephus. Problematic, among other issues, is how to address the time of Varus' legateship in Syria, as both Josephus and Tacitus (*Histories*, 5:9) place Herod's death during Varus' service there. For further reading, see A. Steinmann, "When did Herod the Great Reign?" *Novum Testamentum* 51 (2009): 1-29 (29).

Ramsey rejects the late dating for the same reason.[148] For Ramsey, earlier dates (c. 9-5 BCE) are more appropriate.[149] Additionally, Ramsey finds that an early dating coincides nicely with the known census decree by Augustus in 8 BCE.[150] [151]

While a popular view early on, current scholarship considers the possibility of Quirinius holding two legateships in Syria historically untenable.[152] While some discussion continues, the overall consensus has shelved it until better evidence can be presented.

5B. The Census 'Before' Quirinius

Setting aside the assumption that Quirinius served twice as legate of Syria (thus assigning him the single legateship in 6 C.E.) allows us to explore another possible solution to Schürer's fifth challenge. Briefly, that there is a possible alternate reading of Luke 2:2, from this:

> This was the first registration, taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

[148] Ramsey, *Bethlehem*, 109-10.

[149] Ramsey, *Bethlehem*, 227-48.

[150] Ramsey, *Bethlehem*, 149-73.

[151] [Ed AP]: It is the early date of 6-5 BCE favoured in the article, A. Perry, "Quirinius" *CeJBI* 4:4 (2010): 26-9.

[152] [Ed AP]: This is a nice illustration of the question: What is scholarship (as a body of people) at any one point in time? Within the academy, there are distinctions between such bodies as 'Catholic', 'Protestant' and 'Jewish' scholarship; Second Temple experts would be considered a body of scholars in their own right, as would 'Evangelical Scholarship', 'Critical Scholarship and 'Conservative Scholarship'; for this Lucan problem, specialists in the secular history Roman history of the times would also be a body of scholarship, as would be linguists; we should also distinguish between 'generalist' and 'specialist' in these groups.

To this:

> This was the first registration, before the one when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

Or variants thereof.

This alternate translation, supported by a number of scholars,[153] places the Lukan Census prior to the infamous census of 6-7 CE, with which Luke is also familiar (Acts 5:37). Certainly this is not a new argument; Schürer comments on it, going so far as to express its plausibility:

> That this translation in case of need might be justifiable may be admitted (John 1:15, 30).[154]

But then goes on to say:

> It is indeed absolutely inconceivable for what purpose Luke should have made the idle remark, that this taxing took place before Quirinius was governor of Syria. Why would he not rather name the governor under whom it did take place?[155]

Setting aside Schürer's incredulity, scholarship remains cautious, keenly aware that this position has grammatical challenges.[156]

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[153] N. T. Wright, F. F. Bruce, N. Turner, C. Evans, B. Witherington, P. Barnett, I. H. Marshall, *et.al*.

[154] Schürer, *History*, 2:135.

[155] Schürer, *History*, 2:135.

[156] Bock calls it "cumbersome at best" (*Luke*, 909); H. W. Hoehner considers it cumbersome as well in his *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 21. D. Wallace is unconvinced of its validity in his "The Problem of Luke 2:2: This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria"

> The form of the sentence is in any case odd, since it is hard to see why πρῶτος was introduced without any object of comparison, and it may be that πρῶτος should be understood as a comparative with the meaning 'before'. **Luke does write loose sentences on occasion, and this may well be an example of such.** No solution is free from difficulty, and the problem can hardly be solved without the discovery of fresh evidence.[157]

> [W]e would do better to take a plausible grammatical solution which accords with the evidence rather than to ignore the evidence on the basis of shaky grammar.[158]

Despite the general acceptance of Luke's abilities as a historian,[159] Luke 2:2 in particular continues to pose problems for the student of the Bible. Critical scholarship is divided on the solution and will undoubtedly remain so until new evidence is discovered.[160]

Conclusion

As the biblical scholar I. H. Marshall observes regarding the possible solutions scholars have posed to Schürer's challenges,

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[Cited July 2012. Online: http://bible.org/article/problem-luke-22-ithis-was-first-census-taken-when-quirinius-was-governor-syria]. For a historical overview of this argument, see Hoehner.

[157] Marshall, *Luke*, 104.

[158] Pearson, "The Lucan Censuses, Revisited", 282.

[159] See J. Burke for a detailed review of the current consensus of Luke's historiographical abilities (J. Burke, "The Historicity of Acts" *CeJBI* 5:3 (2011): 14-20.

[160] [Ed AP]: Critical scholarship may continue to remain divided and part of the reason for this is that it is part of the business of critical scholarship to seek new solutions to what are perceived to be long-standing problems; but this does not mean that the solution is not already in play amongst the arguments that have already been presented.

> These considerations show that the character of the census described by Luke is far from impossible, and hence many recent writers are prepared to admit that Luke's description of a census reflects historical reality. The major difficulty that remains is the date.[161]

This article is in agreement. As Marshall, *et.al*, have suggested, extending Luke the benefit of the doubt is not unwarranted. It seems unlikely that he would have jeopardized his own credibility with descriptions of events unknown to his immediate readers. Commentators on both sides of this discussion agree.

> By almost any reckoning, the Gospel [of Luke] would have been composed while some would have had at least some second-hand knowledge of events surrounding the birth of Jesus. **Such a glaring factual error as is suggested for the [census] passage would have been bound to arouse questions.**

> The Lukan narrative does not provide an overt theological explanation for its particular telling of the events, since the account seems to purport to be a historical account, placing specific events within the context of other events involving actual people in the ancient world, such as Augustus and Quirinius.[162]

> Even if Luke had little historical information about how the census of Quirinius had been conducted, he lived in the Roman Empire and may have undergone census enrollment himself. **It is dangerous to assume that he described a process of registration that would have been patently opposed to everything that he and his readers knew.**[163]

> Finally, even if Luke were making this up, he would sooner make something up that sounded plausible: in other words, **such procedures were probably followed in at least one**

[161] Marshall, *Luke*, 102.

[162] Porter, "The Reasons for the Lucan Census", 170.

[163] Brown, *Birth*, 549.

census within the author's memory, and we have no way to disprove the use of such a practice in previous provincial assessments.[164]

[164] See Carrier, "The Date of the Nativity in Luke".

Misquoting in Matthew

Michel Hale

Abstract

Sceptics often cite Matthew's use of Old Testament passages as evidence against the inspiration of the Bible. These arguments are invalid because they assume that when Matthew describes certain Old Testament passages as being "fulfilled" he means the fulfilment of predictive prophecy when he is actually making use of typology.

Introduction

Matthew's apparently inconsistent use of the Old Testament is used by critics of the Bible to show the Bible is not the inspired word of God.[165] For example, Matthew 2:15 says "what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet was fulfilled" followed by a quotation of Hosea 11:1. However when one turns to the passage in Hosea they find there is no prophecy there.

Another example is Matthew 27:9-10, which quotes Zechariah but attributes it to Jeremiah. This article will show that Matthew is making use of typology rather than the fulfilment of predictive prophecies. Application of the typological method to the Old Testament was common to Second Temple Judaism[166] and is found in the Old Testament itself[167].

[165] Paul Carson, "New Testament Contradictions (1995)" [cited 1 Mar 2014]. Online http://infidels.org/library/modern/paul_carlson/nt_contradictions.html

[166] Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 32–35.

[167] For example, Sodom is used as a type for unfaithful Israel in Isaiah 1:9; Jeremiah 23:14 and Ezekiel 16:44-63.

The two passages mentioned above are part of what commentators have called "Formula Quotations"[168,169]; there are ten of these quotations in Matthew (see Table 1).

Matthew	OT reference
1:23	Isaiah 7:14
2:15	Hosea 11:1
2:18	Jeremiah 31:15
2:23	Unclear
4:15-16	Isaiah 9:1-2
8:17	Isaiah 53:4
12:18-21	Isaiah 42:1-4
13:35	Psalm 78:2
21:5	Isaiah 62:11; Zechariah 9:9
27:9-10	Zechariah 11:12-13

Table 1: Formula Quotations in Matthew

All ten formula quotations use wording similar to "in order that what was said through the prophet might be fulfilled" or "then what was said through the prophet was fulfilled".[170]

Those who turn to the Old Testament references soon realise that the quotes are more likely to create problems than be a clear fulfilment of prophecy. Sometimes the Old Testament text appears to be unrelated to how it is used by Matthew, at other times it seems to contradict what is being said, and in a few cases, the quote is attributed or quoted wrongly. For this reason one or more of those passages will feature in most

[168] Nolland John, *The Gospel of Matthew: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 23–24.

[169] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2007), 11–12.

[170] For a more detailed analysis see David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 19–25.

comprehensive lists of "errors in the Bible". This is mainly because prophecy is mistakenly equated with prediction.

The fact that Matthew uses a formula ten times to quote passages that are not meant to be read as predictive prophecies, or at least not for the event Matthew uses them for[171], should lead to the conclusion this is not a coincidence. What Matthew does in his gospel with these formula quotations is look at a historical event or a prophecy and sees it foreshadowing an event in the life of Christ; he interprets those quotes typologically. As a perfect example of what Israel should have been like, certain events in Jesus' life follow the same pattern as events in the Old Testament.

The Exodus for example, widely understood as a type of the future salvation of Israel in both Second Temple Judaism[172,173] and the Old Testament[174], is being used as such in Matthew 2:15 when he writes "In this way what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet was fulfilled: "I called my Son out of Egypt."", after Joseph is told to flee to Egypt with Jesus and his mother.

Emmanuel

The first passage in the list of formula quotations is in the context of the birth of Jesus, Matthew 1:22-23:

> This all happened so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled: "*Look! The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and they will call him Emmanuel,*" which means "*God with us.*"

One reason it is clear that this is not used as a predictive prophecy being fulfilled is the fact that nowhere in the New Testament is Jesus ever called Emmanuel, moreover, the verses before and after this quote emphasise that he is called Jesus, not Emmanuel.

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[171] For example, Isaiah 53:4 although a prophecy about the Messiah is one related to his suffering, not his healing ministry.

[172] Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, Mi; Eerdmans, 1982) 34–35.

[173] Hermann L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus Erläutert aus Talmud und Midrasch* (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung; Oskar Beck, 1922) 85–88.

[174] For example: Isaiah 11:12-17; Jeremiah 23:7; Hosea 2:15.

Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14 and the background for that prophecy is that Judah is threatened by Aram (Syria) and the northern kingdom of Israel. They are marching up to Jerusalem to conquer it. Isaiah is then sent to Ahaz, the king of Judah, to tell him he does not need to be afraid. God would protect Judah if they put their trust in Him. Isaiah gives him a sign to confirm that God would save Judah.

> For this reason the sovereign master himself will give you a confirming sign. Look, this young woman is about to conceive and will give birth to a son. You, young woman, will name him Immanuel. [...] Before the child knows how to reject evil and choose what is right, the land whose two kings you fear will be desolate. Isaiah 7:14-16

The conception and birth of the young woman's son is a confirming sign that God is with His people, and that He would save Judah from Syria and Israel. Only a few years after the birth of that child, Assyria invades and takes captive the northern kingdom of Israel.

When Matthew quotes that passage from Isaiah, he is not just using this as evidence that a virgin would give birth. He sees a clear confirming sign. The birth of the son is a sign that God is with his people (Emmanuel) and that He will save them. This is why the child then receives the name Jesus, "Yah saves".

Matthew is not alone in seeing salvation in the birth of Jesus; Simeon said something very similar in Luke 2:28 when Joseph and Mary bring the boy to the temple for the purification ritual:

> Simeon took him [Jesus] in his arms and blessed God, saying, "Now, according to your word, Sovereign Lord, permit your servant to depart in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples: a light, for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

Conclusion

What this consideration of the first of the formula quotations shows is that Matthew is not arbitrarily misusing the Old Testament passages. The similarities between events of the past and the life of Jesus are not purely coincidental as some would like to claim, but Matthew is using a thought-out and well-reasoned practise that was already in use by the Jews to show that these events are divinely guided. The earlier events are foreshadowing the later ones, or are a type of what was to come; in this sense Jesus is fulfilling the type.

It should be noted that Matthew is not simply using the Old Testament allegorically; he sees the hand of God in patterns in real historical events. The Apostle Paul shows that the events during the exodus were recorded

as examples for his audience.[175] The early Christians saw that certain events were recorded in history on purpose by God to show God's method of salvation and that these events were therefore to be taken typologically. God's dealings with Israel showed a pattern that was to be fulfilled in Christ and his ecclesia.

[175] These things happened to them as examples and were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come. 1 Corinthians 10:11.

The lives and times of the kings of Israel

Jon Burke

Abstract

The Bible's record of the Israelite monarchy is highly complex, containing numerous chronological references which have traditionally defied interpretation and harmonization with each other, as well as with historical sources outside the Bible. The exegetical challenge was so great that for many years the chronology was considered either a hopelessly flawed historical account, or else a literary fiction. However, a significant breakthrough in the mid-20th century enabled historians to reconcile the chronology within itself, and with external sources. This has resolved a number of apparent contradictions within the Biblical record.

Early critical views

In the late 19th century, critical scholar Julius Wellhausen claimed the Biblical chronology of the kings of Israel was a literary invention for religious purposes, which had been edited and revised several times from a variety of different sources, rather than a genuine historical record.[176] For the next 70 years, critical scholars continued to treat the chronology as historically worthless and irreconcilable.[177]

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[176] 'That a process of alteration and improvement of the chronology was busily carried on in later times, **we see from the added synchronisms of the kings of Israel and Judah**,', Wellhausen, 'Prolegomena to the History of Israel', p. 278 (1885).

[177] 'Driver remarked that, "the length of the reigns of the various kings is not the same according to the traditional and the synchronistic figures. Since, however, it is clear on various grounds that these synchronisms are not original, **any attempt to base a chronological scheme on them may be disregarded**."

Kittel stated his view that, "Wellhausen has shown, by convincing reasons, **that the synchronisms within the Book of Kings cannot possibly rest on ancient tradition**, but are on the contrary simply the products of **artificial reckoning**. . . The Israelitish numbers and the parallel numbers referring to Judah **do not agree at the points at which we are able to compare them**."

Robinson also was impressed by Wellhausen's evaluation: "Wellhausen is surely right in believing that **the synchronisms in Kings are worthless**, being merely a late compilation from the actual figures given." *

Some chronological discrepancies

In 1 Kings 15:33; 16:8, Baasha is said to have been succeeded by Omri during Asa's twenty sixth year as king. However, 1 Chronicles 16:1 says Baasha was still king in Asa's thirty sixth year.[178] In 1 Kings 16:23 Omri reigned for twelve years, starting from the thirty first year of Asa's reign.

However, 1 Chronicles 16:29 says Omri became king in the thirty eighth year of Asa's reign. In 2 Kings 8:26, Ahaziah is 22 years old when he becomes king, but in 2 Chronicles 22:2 he is 42 years old when he becomes

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R. H. Pfeiffer's opinion was that, "The chronology based on the synchronisms is of course less reliable than the one based on the regnal periods, since the synchronisms were figured from the regnal periods. **Neither chronology is wholly accurate** . . . In spite of these discrepancies, inaccuracies, and errors, the chronology of Kings is not fantastic."

J. F. McCurdy expressed himself to the effect that, "Many of the numbers given, especially the synchronisms, are erroneous, as is proved by the fact that no attempt to harmonize the two series has been successful . . . **Startling inconsistencies are also found where the several synchronisms for the same king are worked out**." K. Marti gave his observation: "The synchronistic notes betray their character as '**subjective additions of the Epitomator**.' It is clear, to begin with, that this noting of synchronisms was not in actual use during the existence of the two kingdoms. . . **Almost along the whole line, the discrepancy between synchronisms and years of reign is incurable**."

C. H. Gordon observed: "**The numerical errors in the Books of Kings have defied every attempt to ungarble them**. Those errors are largely the creation of the editors who set out to write a synchronistic history of Judah and Israel, **using as sources two sets of unrelated court chronicles**. Combining two elaborate sets of figures was not an easy task. But even with due regard for the difficulties involved, the editors did not execute the synchronisms skillfully."', Thiele, 'Synchronisms of the Hebrew Kings – A Re-evaluation: I', Andrews University Seminary Studies, pp. 14-125 (1), 1963.

[178] 'The opening chronological reference to the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign is problematic (16:1). Similarly, the mention of the thirty-fifth year in 15:19 raises difficulties in harmonizing Kings and Chronicles. 1 Kings 15:33 and 16:8 indicate that Elah succeeded Baasha in the twenty-sixth year of Asa's reign, but Chronicles speaks of Baasha making war in the thirty-sixth year (16:1).', Richard L. Pratt Jr., 1 and 2 Chronicles: A Mentor Commentary (Mentor Commentaries; Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2006), 432.

king,[179] Additionally, he is said to have reigned one year in 1 Kings 8:26, which is difficult to reconcile with other information in the record.

Edwin Thiele's breakthrough

In 1951, Biblical scholar Edwin Thiele published 'The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings', a harmonization of the Biblical record of the kings of Israel (originally as a doctoral dissertation). By the time of the second edition (slightly revised), it was recognized that Thiele's work was a significant breakthrough

[179] '**MT cannot be correct**: Ahaziah would have been two years older than his father (21:5, 20).', Raymond B. Dillard, 2 Chronicles (vol. 15; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 171; here 'MT' stands for the Masoretic Text, the Hebrew text traditionally used for the Old Testament.

in establishing the historical validity of the Biblical chronology.[180] Though criticisms have been made of Thiele's chronology,[181] [182] [183] [184] its value and general validity have been acknowledged widely.[185] [186] [187] [188] [189]

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[180] '**A marked advance in biblical scholarship was made in the publication of *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings***, U. of Chicago Press, 1951, by Dr. E. R. Thiele. In his revised edition in 1965 (Eerdmans Pub. Co., Grand Rapids, Mich.), Dr. Thiele asserts the soundness of his basic thesis and conclusions as confirmed by scholars since his first edition.', editorial, Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (9.1.60), 1966.

[181] 'Thiele's view contains positive elements, **but it also poses numerous difficulties**. He incorrectly understood the annals of Tiglath-pileser III, and his determination that Menahem died in 742 contradicts the testimonies of the contemporaneous Assyrian inscriptions.10 In his desire to resolve the discrepancies between the data in the Book of Kings, **Thiele was forced to make improbable suppositions**. He assumed that the system of counting the years of reign changed every few generations, or even after a few decades.

This is improbable, and cannot be proved. Similarly, he presumes that the Northern and Southern Kingdoms numbered their years both by the local count and by that practiced by the other kingdom, also for short periods, while this practice ceased in other periods. Thiele even went so far as to assume that while this practice had fallen into disuse, there were scribes who continued to calculate the years in accordance with it.

There is no basis for Thiele's statement that his conjectures are correct because he succeeded in reconciling most of the data in the Book of Kings, since his assumptions regarding Biblical chronological principles are derived from the chronological data themselves, whose reliability is unclear.', Galil, 'The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah', p. 4 (1996).

[182] '**but his harmonizing approach has not gone unchallenged**, especially because of the many shifts in the basis of reckoning dates that it requires (e.g., Jepsen 1968: 34–35)—shifts which were unlikely in actual practice. The numerous extrabiblical synchronisms he invokes do not always reflect the latest refinements in Assyriological research (cf. E.2.f below). **In many cases, he posits an undocumented event in order to save a biblical datum** (e.g., the circumstances surrounding the appointment of Jeroboam II as coregent; Thiele 1983: 109)', Cogan, 'Chronology (Hebrew Bible)', in Freedman, (ed.), 'The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary', volume 1, p. 1006 (1996).

[183] 'Despite that fact of scholarly dedication, neither Thiele's carefully argued University of Chicago dissertation, nor anyone else's, has achieved as yet universal acceptance.', Kaiser, 'A History of Israel: From the bronze age through the Jewish Wars', p. 293 (1998).

[184] '**Not all scholars are convinced by this solution**, and commentators on the prophetic books often accept that dates can only be approximate.', McConville, 'Exploring the Old Testament, Volume 4: The Prophets', p. viii (2002).

[185] 'The chronology most widely accepted today is one **based on the meticulous study by Thiele**.', Wiseman, '1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary', Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, p. 27 (1993).

[186] 'Increasingly his chronological scheme has come to dominate the majority of scholarly works and it is unlikely that his system can ever be overthrown without altering some well-established dates in Near Eastern history, for Thiele's chronology is now inextricably locked into the chronology of the Near East.', McFall, 'A Translation Guide to the Chronological Data in Kings and Chronicles', Bibliotheca Sacra (148.589.42-43), 1996.

[187] 'Thiele's system of chronology has been well received over the past 40 years **and is now accepted as the basis for Israel's chronology in a growing number of standard scholarly works**.', ibid., p. 42; see for example: Mitchell, 'Israel and Judah until the Revolt of Jehu (931-841 B.C.)', in Boardman (ed.), 'Cambridge Ancient History', volume 3, part 1, p. 445 (2nd ed. 1982); Finegan, 'Handbook of Biblical Chronology: principles of time reckoning in the ancient world and problems of chronology in the Bible', p. 249 (rev. ed.1998); Hess, 'Chronology (Old Testament)', in Porter (ed.), 'Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation', p. 55 (2007).

[188] '**Thiele's chronology is fast becoming the consensus view among Old Testament scholars**, if it has not already reached that point.', McFall, 'The Chronology of Saul and David', Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (53.101.215), 2010.

[189] 'Thiele's chronology (which differs from that of the present paper in only a few places) won the respect of historians because its dates agree with the following dates in Assyrian and Babylonian history: the Battle of Qarqar in 853 bc; the tribute of Jehu to Shalmaneser III in 841 bc; the capture of Samaria by Shalmaneser V in 723 bc; the invasion of Sennacherib in 701 bc; the Battle of Carchemish in 605 bc; and the first capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 bc.', Young, 'Tables of Reign Lengths From the Hebrew Court Recorders', Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (48.2.232), 2005.

Applying Thiele's chronology

Thiele's chronology has resolved virtually all of the difficulties which challenged earlier attempts to interpret the history of the kings of Israel and Judah, including the three mentioned earlier in this article; Baasha,[190] [191] Omri,[192] [193] and the apparent one year reign of Ahaziah.[194]

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[190] '**If Thiele's dating (or a textual variant) is assumed** (see introduction to 2 Chr 14), then the incursion by Baasha into Judah occurs in 894 B.C., just one year after the covenant renewal festival described in 2 Chronicles 15.', John Mark Hicks, *1 & 2 Chronicles* (The College Press NIV Commentary; Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 2001), 354.

[191] '**On the one hand, some interpreters hold that 15:19 and 16:1 date these events from the time of the schism of the North and South**. If this were so, it would bring Kings and Chronicles into harmony.', Richard L. Pratt Jr., 1 and 2 Chronicles: A Mentor Commentary (Mentor Commentaries; Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2006), 432.

[192] 'The synchronism for Omri is reckoned from his sole rule, but his total length of reign counts the years during which he contended with Tibni, designating the first part of this period as years spent in Tirzah**. The twelve and the six are accredited years, and represent an actual eleven and five, respectively**.', Simon J. DeVries, 1 Kings (vol. 12, 2nd ed.; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Inc, 2003), 202.; this is based on the work of Thiele.

[193] '**Omri's twelve-year reign must have included the period of time that he and Tibni were rival claimants to the throne of Israel**. He reigns as sole ruler of Israel for only seven years.', Jesse C. Long, 1 & 2 Kings (College Press NIV Commentary; Joplin, MO: College Press Pub., 2002), 198; a footnote reads 'See Thiele, Mysterious Numbers, pp. 85, 88–90; cf. Galil, Chronology of the Kings, p. 22'.

[194] '25–27. **The synchronism implies that he ruled for less than one year**, though the historian counts parts of a year as a whole. The 'accession year' is here counted as the first regnal year (cf. 9:29, eleventh year of Jehoram). Athaliah was the granddaughter of Omri; see on v. 18. The relation of Jehoram to Ahab's Omri dynasty was by marriage (so NIV; JB). The word used (MT ḥătan) means 'a family relative' (as Akkad. ḥătānu) and not merely 'son-in-law' (AV, RSV).', Donald J. Wiseman, 1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary (vol. 9; Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 230.

The discrepancy in Ahaziah's age at the time he began to reign is a late textual error in the medieval Hebrew text (the 'Masoretic Text'); this error is not found in the earliest copies of this passage, which are found in the Syriac and Greek translations.[195] [196]

[195] 'tc Heb "forty-two," but the parallel passage in 2 Kgs 8:26 reads "twenty-two" along with some MSS of the LXX and the Syriac.', Biblical Studies Press, The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible (Biblical Studies Press, 2006).

[196] '2.a. With 2 Kgs 8:26 and GL MT, forty-two years; Par, twenty; OL, sixteen.', Raymond B. Dillard, 2 Chronicles (vol. 15; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 171.

Thiele's chronology in current scholarship

Thiele's chronology remains the typical starting point for study of the chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah[197] [198] with few modifications,[199] [200] and has been applied successfully in other fields of Ancient Near East study, such as the chronologies of Assyria and Babylon.[201]

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[197] 'Thiele's work has become **a cornerstone of much recent chronological discussion** (cf. De Vries IDB 1: 580–99; IDBSup: 161–66);', Cogan, 'Chronology (Hebrew Bible)', in Freedman, (ed.), 'The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary', volume 1, p. 1006 (1996).

[198] 'Although some would prefer to see transmission errors where Thiele invokes the above principles**, his chronology remains the starting point for all discussions of the debate**.', Hess, 'Chronology (Old Testament)', in Porter (ed.), 'Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation', p. 55 (2007).

[199] 'After 40 years Thiele's **chronology has not been significantly altered or proved to be false in any major area** except in the matter of Hezekiah's coregency.', McFall, 'A Translation Guide to the Chronological Data in Kings and Chronicles', Bibliotheca Sacra (148.589.42), 1996.

[200] 'It remained then for others to complete the application of principles that Thiele used elsewhere, thereby providing a chronology for the eighth-century kings of Judah that is in complete harmony with the reign lengths and synchronisms given in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. The most thorough work in this regard was Leslie McFall's 1991 article in Bibliotheca Sacra.22 McFall made his way through the reign lengths and synchronisms of Kings and Chronicles, and using an exact notation that indicated whether the years were being measured according to Judah's Tishri years or Israel's Nisan years, he was able to produce a chronology for the divided monarchies that was consistent with all the scriptural texts chosen.', ibid., pp. 105-106.

[201] 'In a 1996 article, Kenneth Strand wrote, "What has generally not been given due notice is the effect that Thiele's clarification of the Hebrew chronology of this period of history has had in furnishing a corrective for various dates in ancient Assyrian and Babylonian history."

The purpose of Strand's article was to show that Thiele's methodology accomplished more than just producing a coherent chronology from scriptural data. His chronology, once produced, proved useful in settling some troublesome problems in Assyrian and Babylonian history.', Young, 'Inductive And Deductive Methods As Applied To OT Chronology', Master's Seminary Journal (18.1.112-113), 2007.

Conclusion

The reliability of the chronologies in 1-2 Kings has been supported by archaeological evidence; Grabbe notes that the chronology in these books 'agrees with what can be gleaned from extra-biblical sources', and that 'even if we had no external sources **we could have reasonable confidence in the biblical sequence**'.[202]

[202] 'Grabbe suggests that the names and sequence of kings in Israel and Judah, and their approximate chronological placement, a**grees with what can be gleaned from extra-biblical sources**. To this extent the biblical framework (meaning primarily 1 and 2 Kings) **is reliable: even if we had no external sources we could have reasonable confidence in the biblical sequence** of Jeroboam I, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Omri, Ahab, Jehu, etc. in Samaria, and David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijam, Asa, Jehoshaphat, etc. in Jerusalem, along with their interrelationships.

Beyond that it starts to get more and more tricky, with decreasing reliability in the biblical narrative as the detail increases (this is a general statement, and there are sometimes exceptions in specific instances).', Grabbe, 'Reflections on the Discussion', Grabbe (ed.), 'Ahab Agonistes: The Rise and Fall of the Omri Dynasty', p. 337 (2007).

Biblical contradictions: discordant numbers

Ken Gilmore

Abstract

Sceptics often cite contradictory numerical values in parallel passages as evidence against the inspiration of the Bible. These arguments are unimpressive as they presuppose a dictation theory of inspiration that is maintained only by the fundamentalist wing of Christianity; other models of inspiration that recognise the human element in inspiration are largely unaffected.

Furthermore, they ignore the fact that the culture in which the Biblical texts first appeared was oral-dominant rather than text-dominant. Given the existence of differing oral texts, as well as the primacy placed on preserving the essence of a message rather than the exact words, when oral texts were written down, variation such as we see in the Bible would be expected. Finally, some contradictions are functions of ignoring textual corruption, genre, and lexicography.

Introduction

Sceptics often cite discordant numbers in parallel passages and impossible high values as evidence against the authority of the Bible. The account of David's battle against the Syrians in which 40,000 soldiers, and either 700 (2 Sam 10:18) or 7000 (1 Chr 19:8) charioteers, are reported killed is one example of both discordant and unfeasibly large numbers. Another example of discordant values is the death toll of 23,000 quoted by Paul in 1 Cor 10:8 which is 1000 fewer than the value cited in Numbers 25:9.

Discordant values such as these have been advanced by non-theists as evidence against the inspiration and authority of the Bible:

> You couldn't ask for a more blatant indication that the Bible isn't inspired than the presence of numerical contradictions. The implication of such errors is inescapable. You may try to dismiss them as "just scribal errors" but if Yahweh wanted people to believe that the Bible was inspired why would he leave in such obvious indications to the contrary? [203]

[203] http://tinyurl.com/ll77d52

Implied in this criticism is the belief that the entire Bible was dictated by God, word for word, which carries with it the implication that contradictions should not exist if a single, Divine author was behind every word. However, this extreme view of inspiration is not maintained outside of an extreme fundamentalist section of Christianity. I.H. Marshall is entirely representative of contemporary theologically conservative Christianity when he asserts:

> Although the 'prophetic' or 'dictation' theory of the composition of the Bible has sometimes been held by theologians, it has no support from modern scholars. It is open to a number of cogent objections. Basically it does not correspond to the facts in the Bible itself…Paul clearly wrote his letters as spontaneous compositions, expressive of his own thoughts and ideas.
>
> Various writers are depicted as asking God questions (even the prophets do so), and it hardly seems probable that God dictated their own personal feelings and expressions to them. The whole tenor of what the biblical writers say about themselves is that they composed their books by using normal human mental processes.[204]

Before we look at the discordant numbers in parallel Bible passages, we need to understand factors that impinge on the subject, such as inspiration, ancient Near Eastern historiography and the oral textual background of the Bible.

Criticisms Contingent on an Extreme View of Inspiration

A rigid view of inspiration is implied in such attacks in that the authority of the Bible collapses if numbers in parallel accounts are discordant. Certainly, if one adheres to a view of inspiration in which every single word of the original manuscripts were dictated to the writers, then such discordant values would be problematic, as one would not unrealistically expect accuracy and precision in such values. A detailed overview of inspiration is beyond the scope of this article, but arguments against this view of inspiration include:

1. Differences in parallel passages in the synoptic gospels
2. Acknowledgements by the biblical writers of dependence of external sources
3. En passant references to mundane events, such as Paul's reminder in 2 Tim 4:13 for Timothy to collect his cloak, books and parchments.

[204] I. Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 1982), 32–33.

It is worth noting that the 19th century Reformed theologian Charles Hodge argued that plenary inspiration:

> It denies that the sacred writers were merely partially inspired; it asserts that they were fully inspired as to all that they teach, whether of doctrine or fact. This of course does not imply that the sacred writers were infallible except for the special purpose for which they were employed. They were not imbued with plenary knowledge.
>
> As to all matters of science, philosophy, and history, they stood on the same level with their contemporaries. They were infallible only as teachers, and when acting as the spokesmen of God. Their inspiration no more made them astronomers than it made them agriculturists. Isaiah was infallible in his predictions, although he shared with his countrymen the views then prevalent as to the mechanism of the universe. Paul could not err in anything he taught, although he could not recollect how many persons he had baptized in Corinth. [205]

Hodge, who could hardly be called a theological liberal nonetheless argued that the Bible was wholly inspired, but written by human beings who shared the limitations of their peers with respect to matters not directly impacting on their role. This high view of inspiration nonetheless is one that recognised that the inspired authors were infallible with respect to the theological message they were imparting.

A view of inspiration that recognises the human element has no problem in accepting that Paul, who in 1 Cor 1:16 stated that he could not remember exactly how many people he had baptised, could also fail to recall the exact number of Israelites killed as recorded in Numbers 25:9. The theological point Paul makes is entirely unaffected.

Oral Texts and Variation

While it is easy to recognise that the essence of the Biblical message is unaffected by discordant numerical values in parallel accounts, the discordant values do need explanation. Recognising the primacy of oral texts in the ancient world, and what an oral culture, as opposed to written culture was like, is critical in understanding the origins of this problem.

In an oral culture, writing existed, but the literacy required to create books was simply irrelevant for most people:

[205] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (vol. 1; Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 165.

> Literacy involved an esoteric and arcane skill set, and its advantages were not significant enough to warrant the time to achieve it. Literacy is not necessarily absent in hearing-dominant societies; it is simply nonessential.
>
> It would therefore be inaccurate to think that hearing-dominant cultures are necessarily illiterate. This designation itself has become pejorative in our usage; we should better use "non-literate." The operative contrast is not "orality versus literacy" but "hearing-dominant versus text-dominant." [206]

Furthermore, oral texts were not intrinsically inferior to written texts; as Susan Niditch notes,

> Orally composed and oral-style works can be rural or urban, unsophisticated, rustic, and parochial or sophisticated, aristocratic, and cosmopolitan, concerned with farm or court, village or city, composed by men or with farm or court, village or city, composed by men or women.
>
> There is no one oral genre or oral culture in a society but a range of sorts of compositions, styles, contexts, and composers. Orally composed and oral-style works need not be short and simple but may, like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, be lengthy and filled with complex characters and subplots.[207]

Niditch notes that while direct proof of oral composition of the Bible is lacking, that there is strong internal evidence that:

> "the written works of the Hebrew Bible evidence traits typically associated with ascertainably orally composed works. They belong somewhere in an "oral register." This phrase refers not to to modes of composition but to the style of compositions whether the works were created orally or in writing, whether they are performed or read to oneself."[208]

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[206] Walton, John H., and D Brent. Sandy. *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority*. (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2013) ,18.

[207] Niditch S. *Oral World and Written Word : Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1996), 3.

[208] Ibid., 10.

This raises the question of the process by which any oral texts were converted to written texts, with the question of whether a single approved oral text was faithfully transcribed, or whether multiple oral textual traditions existed which differed at points, but essentially agreeing on the fundamental narrative.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has provided information, which suggests that the latter is more likely to be true. While no substantive difference between the Masoretic Text and that of the Dead Sea Scrolls exists, the Dead Sea Scrolls do show the existence of multiple textual traditions, particularly in the books of Jeremiah and Samuel. Walton notes that:

> …at least in some cases, it became clear that there was not only one original form of the final literary piece. For the book of Jeremiah, for example, it appears that one group in one place compiled a collection of documents containing the prophet's oracles, while another group in another place did the same.
>
> Both groups used a core group of documents (indicated by their high degree of similarity), but made different choices in final stages about what to include and how to order the oracles. Which should be considered the "original"? Does it make any difference?[209]

The evidence would appear to suggest that it does not. As D.B. Sandy reminds us:

> It's especially important to recognize that a modern view of historiography must not be the standard by which we judge ancient practices of writing history. Again quoting Bock, "To have accurate summaries of Jesus' teaching is just as historical as to have his actual words; they are just two different perspectives to give us the same thing. All that is required is that the summaries be trustworthy.
>
> The evidence then suggests that the gospel message preserved the *essential essence* of things Jesus and the disciples said and did. If there are variations in the written Gospels, it's likely there were similar variations in the oral texts.
>
> It's safe to conclude that a precision of wording was not expected either in the oral transmission or in the written records. "There is more to history than precise chronological sequence or always relating

[209] Walton, John H., and D Brent. Sandy. *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority*. (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2013), 67.

> the exact same detail or reporting something in the same words."[210] *(Emphasis on original)*

If ancient cultures were unconcerned by the fact that oral texts could vary on details, then any arguments against the authority of the Biblical message based on variation in parallel accounts lose their power as they make the mistake of imposing a modern standard of historiography onto ancient texts, and creating problems which did not exist for the original audience.

Impossible numbers or hyperbole? The ANE background to those large numbers

Many of the contradictions are simply an artefact of failing to appreciate the oral textual background of the Bible, and imposing a modern standard of historiography onto it. This fact. This does not explain all of the contradictions however.

The difference in prices David paid to buy threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite which in 2 Sam 24:18 was fifty shekels of silver but in 1 Chr 21:25 was six hundred shekels of gold is one which cannot be explained away by textual corruption, or by blithely asserting that the oral traditions were so loose that differences in quality and quantity of payment could pass unnoticed.

The absolute values of some of the numbers involved in census counts and battle casualty figures are considerable. 1 Kings 20:29-30 is entirely representative of such problematic numbers:

> They encamped opposite one another seven days. Then on the seventh day the battle began; the Israelites killed one hundred thousand Aramean foot soldiers in one day. The rest fled into the city of Aphek; and the wall fell on twenty-seven thousand men that were left.

Certainly, it is hard to imagine how a wall collapse could kill 27,000 people, but the death of 100,000 soldiers in a single day is difficult to accept, particularly when compared with some of the bloodiest battles in ancient history. Polybius in his *Histories* gives a figure for Roman casualties during the Battle of Cannae at around 70,000:

[210] Walton, John H., and D Brent. Sandy. *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority*. (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2013), 149.

> Of the infantry ten thousand were taken prisoners in fair fight, but were not actually engaged in the battle: of those who were actually engaged only about three thousand perhaps escaped to the towns of the surrounding district; all the rest died nobly, to the number of seventy thousand…[211]

As modern historians regard his figures as an overestimate, the casualty count in 1 Kings 20 slips into the realm of the incredible; unfeasibly high numbers are arguably more of a problem than discordant numbers.

The conquest narratives in Joshua and Judges provide an insight into how to answer this problem. Joshua 10-11 describe the conquest of Canaan in terms of absolute annihilation:

> Thus Joshua struck all the land, the hill country and the Negev and the lowland and the slopes and all their kings. He left no survivor, but he utterly destroyed all who breathed, just as the Lord, the God of Israel, had commanded. Joshua struck them from Kadesh-barnea even as far as Gaza, and all the country of Goshen even as far as Gibeon. (Josh 10:40-41)

This stands in tension with the rest of the book, which describes Canaan as still being largely populated with Caananites:

> Now as for the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the sons of Judah could not drive them out; so the Jebusites live with the sons of Judah at Jerusalem until this day. (Josh 15:63)

> But they did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites live in the midst of Ephraim to this day, and they became forced laborers. (Josh 16:10)

Which is true? Actually, both are, once we recognise that Joshua 9-12 is a highly stylised account of the conquest of Canaan, which deliberately employs hyperbolic rhetoric, in accordance with standard ancient Near Eastern historiographical standards.[212] By imposing modern historiographical standards onto ancient texts, we force them to say something the original writers never intended:

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[211] Polybius, *Histories* (Medford, MA: Macmillan, 1889), 273.

[212] K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (vol. 98; Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990).

> For example, in the case of the battle of Halule, the result was, from the Babylonian point of view, a retreat by the Assyrian army. The Assyrians had, up to the battle, been marching to Babylon. After the battle, the Assyrians were no longer so marching. Thus while the Babylonian Chronicle could not record an Assyrian defeat, it could record a retreat.
>
> Apparently, 'retreat, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder'. Thus an outcome can be viewed by different spectators to mean different things, and neither is necessarily right or wrong. This is what is often called 'objectivity relative to a point of view'.[213]

The point of view that the conquest narratives in Joshua 9-12 adopt is one of total destruction, and as Younger notes, is one that was quite commonly employed in the ancient Near East:

> The concept of total war (i.e., the destruction of the population as well as the military) was a practice which one encounters on numerous occasions in the ancient Near Eastern conquest accounts. Two examples will document this:
>
> 1) Once again, the Meša Inscription:
>
> And I fought against the town;
>
> and I took it.
>
> I killed *all* the inhabitants of the town,
>
> as an offering of propitiation to Kemoš and Moab.
>
> Then Kemoš said to me:
>
> "Go, seize Nebo from Israel."
>
> So I went by night;
>
> and fought against it from the break of dawn until noon;
>
> and I took it;

[213] K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (vol. 98; Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 34.

and *I killed everyone in it*, seven thousand men and women,

both natives and aliens, and female slaves;

because *I had dedicated* (החד מתה) it to ʻAštar-Kemoš.

In this text one can clearly see that total warfare was not a concept unique to Israel. In fact, even the נקם is observable in the final line quoted.

2) The Annals of Aššur-nasir-pal II:

I crossed over to Mt. Kashiyari (and) I approached the city of Kinabu, the fortified city of Hulaya. I besieged with the mass of my troops (and) my fierce battle array; I conquered the city. I slew with the sword 800 of their combat troops; I burned 3,000 captives from them. *I did not leave one of them alive as a hostage*.

I captured Hulaya, their city ruler, alive. I made a pile of their corpses. I burned their young boys (and) girls. I flayed Hulaya, their city ruler; (and) I draped his skin over the wall of the city of Damdammusa. I razed, destroyed, (and) burned the city.

This is definitely an ideology of total war! Thus it would appear that the conquest account in Joshua 9–12 evinces the same basic ideology as one sees in other ancient Near Eastern conquest accounts.[214]

In both cases, the effect of the total war motif is to emphasise the victory by using hyperbolic language. A tolerable modern analogy would be that of the local football team declaring that they had 'annihilated' the opposing team in the match that day.

No one would think that every opposing player had been killed, but no one would be in doubt that the home team had one. The tension between Joshua 9-12 and both the rest of Joshua, and the book of Judges vanished when we recognise that the former employs hyperbolic language to describe its conquest, in accordance with ancient Near Eastern historiographical standards, while the latter reflects a more prosaic account of a victory which left Israel in Canaan, but with significant pockets of Caananite resistance.

[214] K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (vol. 98; Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 235.

Hyperbolic language in scripture extends well past inflated death tolls in conquest narratives. David Fouts has argued that this extends to pre-exilic census counts. The aim of this, as Fouts argues, is in order to praise the sovereign:

> Scripture is similar to other ancient historiography in that the ostensible purpose of this usage is to demonstrate the relative magnitude of a given leader or king: Yahweh is greater than David, who is greater than Solomon, who is greater than Rehoboam, who is greater than others. [215]

The praise lavished on David in 1 Samuel 18:7 can be seen as an example of hyperbole as praise given the unrealistic nature of the numbers attributed to both men, as well as the relative magnitude of David compared to Saul, whose fury can be seen less as an example of wounded pride and more a recognition of the potent nature of such praise with respect to his status among his subjects.

Putting it all together

Variant textual traditions and textual corruption

The above excursus has shown that many of the contradictions are essentially an artefact of an ironically fundamentalist reading of the Bible. Certainly, the parallel passages below in which the only substantive difference are numerical values:

- 1 Kgs 4:26 vs. 2 Chr 9:25 - 40,000 or 4,000 stalls.
- 1 Kgs 5:16 vs. 2 Chr 2:2 - 3,300 overseers or 3,600.
- 1 Kgs 7:15 vs. 2 Chr 3:15 - 18 cubits or 35.
- 1 Kgs 9:28 vs. 2 Chr 8:18 - 420 talents or 450.
- 1 Kgs 7:26 vs 2 Chr 4:5 - The molten sea held 2000 or 3000 baths
- 2 Sam 10:18 vs. 1 Chr 19:18 - 700 or 7000 chariots.

can be explained by textual corruption, or different traditions behind the text of Chronicles and Samuel-Kings. For example, the varying numbers in 1 Kgs 4:26 / 2 Ch 2:25 "suggests a basic difficulty in the history of transmission, such that it is not possible to speak with confidence regarding the original text."[216] Any dismissal

[215] Fouts D.M. "A Defence of the Hyperbolic Interpretation of Large Numbers in the Old Testament" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 3 (1997): 383.

[216] Raymond B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles* (vol. 15; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 74.

of the inspiration of the Bible that does not recognise at the very least problems related to textual transmission and corruption can itself be dismissed given its failure to consider such possible solutions.

The differences between the number who died in the plague recorded in Num 25:9 and Paul's recollection of the event in 1 Cor 10:8 likewise does not merit much elaboration. The values (24,000 and 23,000 respectively) are so close as to suggest that Paul has simply misremembered the value. Given Paul's inability to remember how many people he had baptised, the most parsimonious explanation is a lapse of memory.

Hyperbole

Ex 12:37 and Num 1:45-46 give the total number of adult men who had left Egypt at around 600,000. Factoring in women and children gives a figure of around 2-3 million. By contrast, 1 Kgs 20:15 states that Ahab's muster of the sons of Israel yielded 7000, with the 'young men of the rulers of provinces'. This disparity has been advanced as yet another example of the unreliability of the Bible, but it is an example both of a failure to recognise hyperbole, as well as a surface reading of the narrative.

1 Kgs 20:15 is not referring to the total male population of Israel (note here that we are not dealing with the united kingdom, but the post-division kingdom of Israel, so the numerical comparison is already invalid) but rather as Simon DeVries observes, 232 elite corpsmen and 7000 ordinary troops. [217] The mistake made here is that of confusing the total adult male population of a country with its regular armed forces.

Furthermore, this comparison fails to recognise that the value of 600,000 is clearly unrealistic. Deut 7:7 states that Israel was the 'least of all the peoples' which implies that the 'seven nations greater and mightier' than Israel numbers no less than 21 million, a figure which cannot be reconciled with what we know of the archaeology of the ancient Near East of that time.

While one should be careful not to uncritically posit hyperbole as the solution to every problem with discordant numbers, we have good grounds to do so here. Fouts reminds us that it is probable that all pre-exilic censuses in the OT may employ hyperbolic numbers,[218] while Ahab's muster of fighting men would

[217] Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings* (vol. 12, 2nd ed.; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Inc, 2003), 249.

[218] Fouts D.M. "A Defence of the Hyperbolic Interpretation of Large Numbers in the Old Testament" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 3 (1997): 386.

appear to reflect actual numbers, given that his apostasy would have made the compiler of the narrative unlikely to give him the praise of an exaggerated list.

The discordant values in David's census as recorded in 2 Sam 24:9 (800,000 in Israel and 500,000 in Judah) and 1 Chr 21:5 (1,100,000 in Israel and 470,000 in Judah) represent a problem both in the discrepancy and the absolute values.

Hubbard recognises that the values are unreasonably high, and argues that the "figures would be more reasonable if the "thousand" (אלף) designated a unit of fighting men composed of a much smaller number of men than one thousand."[219] Fouts however argues[220] that אלף in this context is better translated as 1000, and if this is accepted, the absolute value can be seen as yet another example of hyperbole.

This however leaves aside the question of resolving the discordant values. Commentators generally regard the reference to Israel in 1 Ch 21:5 as referring to Israel and Judah:

- **2 Sam**: 800,000 (Israel) + 500,000 (Judah) = 1,300,000
- **1 Chr**: 1,100,000 (Israel and Judah)

The values (1,300,000 and 1,100,000) are generally the same, and it is possible that varying textual traditions may provide an explanation for this disparity:

> Since the variations between Samuel and Chronicles in this section are more numerous than usual and often reflect no clear *Tendenz* on the part of Chronicles, scholars have suggested that the Chronicler had before him here a different text type than that reflected in Samuel (Curtis, 245–46). [221]

[219] David A. Hubbard et al., "Editorial Preface," in *2 Samuel* (vol. 11; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 11285.

[220] Fouts D.M. "A Defence of the Hyperbolic Interpretation of Large Numbers in the Old Testament" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no.3 (1997): 382.

[221] David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, et al., "Editorial Preface," in *1 Chronicles* (vol. 14; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 14216.

There is evidence for this: Josephus states that "the number of the rest of the Israelites was nine hundred thousand men, who were able to bear arms and go to war: but the tribe of Judah, by itself, was four hundred thousand men."[222] This is certainly consistent with the existence of more than one textual tradition.

Chronicles' lower value for the census count may owe its explanation to the reference in 1 Chr 21:6 that Levi and Benjamin were explicitly excluded. In order to arrive at a census figure that excluded Levi and Benjamin, the Chronicler may well have estimated each tribe to be enumerated at 100,000 (an unrealistic expectation given that Benjamin was numerically a small tribe, but consistent with a non-literal use of numbers), and arrived a number that was 200,000 lower than the figure in Kings.

Complicating this is the reference to 470,000 men in Judah, which would push the total to 1,570,000. However, scholarly consensus argues[223] that this is a later addition to the text. One can speculate as to how this total was obtained. One suggestion is that the author subtracted 30,000 from the figure in Kings to take into account the population of Benjamin; of course if the 470,000 is an addition to the original text, then recognising this fact and deleting it simplifies the problem.

Another discordant value occurs later in the narrative, with 2 Sam 24:24 stating that David purchased Araunah's threshing floor for 50 shekels of silver, while 1 Chr 21:25 states that the figure was 600 gold shekels. Explaining this away by postulating textual corruption or varying textual traditions will not solve this problem as it is scarcely credible that textual corruption would change the Hebrew for silver to the Hebrew for gold, or that textual traditions would vary that greatly.

Ad hoc explanations have been posited such as Chronicles referring to the purchase of the area surrounding the threshing floor which would come at a higher price, but recognising the fact that hyperbole can be used to praise a sovereign or a deity allows a far easier explanation: the Chronicler inflated the purchase price to glorify Yahweh:

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[222] Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987).

[223] "This phrase is commonly considered a later addition in view of Chronicles' treatment of Israel and Judah as a unity;" in David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, et al., "Editorial Preface," in *1 Chronicles* (vol. 14; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 14214.

> To glorify the temple was to glorify God, and one way to glorify the temple was to escalate the cost of the site upon which it was built.[224]

Seven or eight sons of Jesse?

Varying textual traditions used by the compilers of Samuel and Chronicles have been postulated to explain the fact that 1 Sam 16:10-11 and 1 Chr 2:13-15 differ in how many sons they state Jesse had (eight and seven, respectively). Another explanations is the speculation that one of Jesse's sons was ignored, as he died childless, though evidence for this is hardly conclusive, to say the least.

Another possibility is that the compiler of Chronicles deliberately changed his source material to make David the seventh son, though evidence for the symbolic use of seven in Chronicles appears to be lacking.[225] Irrespective of the answer, it hardly affects any fundamental doctrine, and its citation as evidence against the inspiration of the Bible is unimpressive.

Conclusion

Discordant values in parallel narratives are readily explained when one recognises:

- the reality that more than one textual tradition lies behind these narratives
- textual corruption
- an oral culture that accepted minor variations in details provided the essence of an oral text remained unchanged

Some of these discordant values are frankly large, but recognising that ancient Near Eastern narrative employed hyperbole to praise the sovereign or deity and that the Biblical narratives utilised this narrative form defuses this problem. Critics of the Bible who claim that discordant – or elevated – values diminish the value of the Bible demonstrate rather their ignorance of these facts, and their arguments are frankly unimpressive.

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[224] David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, et al., "Editorial Preface," in *1 Chronicles* (vol. 14; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 14217.

[225] David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, et al., "Editorial Preface," in *1 Chronicles* (vol. 14; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1434.

Weak apologetics

Jon Burke

Abstract

Modern Christians frequently appeal to arguments in defence of Christianity which are neither logically coherent nor intellectually honest. It is significant that these arguments are not found in the Bible itself. We should avoid using such arguments. This article assesses several commonly used arguments, and demonstrates which are actually Biblically founded and have genuine apologetic value.

Common weak apologetic arguments

The following is a list of arguments often used by Christians in an attempt to defend Christianity and argue for validity and unique value.

- What about the good things Christians have done?
- What about the resurrection/miraculous growth of the early church?
- What about the evidence for creationism/flood geology/cosmological argument?
- Don't you want eternal life?
- How can you be good without God?
- But Christianity brings so much happiness and hope to so many people!
- But I've seen God working in my life!

Almost none of these arguments have any genuine value, and only two of them are used in Scripture as evidence for God and the truth of the gospel message.

Arguments which are logically incoherent

The following arguments used are logically incoherent; in logical terms they are non sequiturs, the conclusion does not proceed logically from the premise.

- What about the good things Christians have done?
- What about the miraculous growth of the early church?
- But Christianity brings so much happiness and hope to so many people!

- But I've seen God working in my life!

It should be noted that none of these arguments is used in the Bible as evidence for the existence of God or the truth of the gospel message.

The good things Christians have done should be expected of those who truly believe the Christian faith. But these acts are not evidence for the truth of the Bible or the gospel message, any more than good deeds by Muslims are evidence for the truth of Islam.

The growth of the early church is a testament to the social and ethical value of the Christian message, which sociologists have acknowledged was a significant contributing factor to its early success.[226] [227] The same is true for the fact that Christianity has brought happiness and hope to so many people. These facts are evidence for the value of the Christian message, but they are not evidence for its supernatural claims, nor are they entirely unique to Christianity.

The perception of 'God working in my life' is the same argument made by believers of other religions. Such claims are highly subjective, and have no apologetic value unless they are substantiated by independent evidence observable by third parties. Just because Christians interpret events as God working in their lives, does not mean He is, or that He even exists; the same applies to Muslims who believe Allah is working in their lives.

[226] Stark, 'The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries' (1997).

[227] 'Stark offers several other intriguing arguments **that help explain the phenomenal success of Christianity** including correlating the Christian ethic of nursing the sick with higher-than-average survival rates for Christians during times of plague - Christian care-givers who exposed themselves and survived developed greater immunity, while those who were nursed were more likely to survive (pagan doctors, by contrast, often fled the city during such dangerous times).', Eisenbaum, 'Review: The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History', Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Vol. 66, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), 471.

Arguments which are ethically unsound

The following arguments used are ethically unsound; they rely on invalid appeals to emotion or ethics.

- Don't you want eternal life?

Wanting X is not a valid reason to believe in Y. Our beliefs should be based on evidence, not on what we want. Wanting eternal life is not a reason to believe in the gospel message, and although the Bible offers it as an encouragement and reward for believers, Scripture never tells us we should believe in the Bible because we want eternal life.

It is unethical to use the temptation of a reward to entice someone to place their faith in beliefs without evidence; the Bible never does this.

- How can you be good without God?

This question makes the false assumption that it is not possible to be good without God. The Bible never says this; on the contrary, the Bible makes it clear that even people completely ignorant of God can behave according to the laws of God.[228] [229]

> Romans 2:
> 14 For whenever the Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature the things required by the law, these who do not have the law are a law to themselves.

Arguments which are contradicted by evidence

The following arguments used are contradicted by evidence.

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[228] 'He means there are times when the Gentiles acknowledge the moral duties revealed in Moses' law, and there are times **when they even live up to them** (see Dunn, I:98; Hendriksen, I:97; Moo, I:145–146).', Jack Cottrell, Romans (vol. 1; The College Press NIV Commentary; Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 1996), Ro 2:14.

[229] 'He does not, it should be noted, envisage some Gentiles as always "doing what the law requires," but simply the fact that **there are Gentiles who for some of the time at least live as the law lays down** (cf. Bassler, Divine Impartiality, 146, and those cited by her).', James D. G. Dunn, Romans 1–8 (vol. 38A; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 98.

- What about the evidence for creationism/flood geology?

The claims by Young Earth Creationists and 'Creation Scientists' that the earth is less than 10,000 years old, that 'Intelligent Design' is a sound explanation for the diversity of species, and that geological evidence demonstrates the Genesis flood was global, are all clearly contradicted by all available scientific evidence.

This was already recognized by the earliest Christadelphian expositors, who accepted the great age of the earth,[230] [231] [232] [233] [234] recognized that life appeared on earth in increasing stages of complexity over great ages

[230] 'The duration of the earth's revolutions round the sun previous to the work of the first day is not revealed: **but the evidences produced by the strata of our globe show that the period was long continued**.', Thomas, 'Elpis Israel', p. 10 (1990 ed.).

[231] '**It is a demonstrable fact that the earth has existed for ages**. To adopt a view that appears to make it begin only 6,000 years ago would create a difficulty. **There is no need for adopting such a view**.', Roberts, 'In the Beginning', The Christadelphian (32.370.141), 1885.

[232] '**Geology teaches us much**; it speaks of a time and creation on this earth when animal life, if not totally, was nearly unknown, **and only the lower order of vegetable life covering its face, and this must have existed many thousands of years**; and during the whole of that long period, the earth was undergoing **wonderful and necessary changes to fit it for a creation of a higher order**, and evidently with the creature man in view.', Simons, 'Why Man was not at once made Perfect', The Christadelphian (21.238.177), 1884.

[233] '**I have not the slightest doubt concerning the truths revealed in the strata of the earth's crust.** There can be **no reasonable doubt** that long ages have passed away since the matter of the earth first took existences by the fiat of its Almighty Creator.', Welch., 'Knowledge.- No., 12 Geology', The Christadelphian (28.329.416), 1891.

[234] '**Ten years ago the average scientist would have asserted that our habitable globe had not existed for more than a hundred million years. Now it would be hard to find a competent physical specialist who would fix a definite maximum below a thousand million years**:', Walker, 'The Age of the Earth', The Christadelphian (48.568.450), 1911.

of time,[235] recognized that rational beings existed before Adam,[236] [237] [238] [239] and that the Genesis flood was local.[240] [241]

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[235] '**Geology teaches us much**; it speaks of a time and creation on this earth when animal life, if not totally, was nearly unknown, **and only the lower order of vegetable life covering its face, and this must have existed many thousands of years**; and during the whole of that long period, the earth was undergoing **wonderful and necessary changes to fit it for a creation of a higher order**, and evidently with the creature man in view. There are evidences to show that when this early period had done its work, **it was replaced by a creation of a higher order**, when animal and vegetable forms **of a far more wonderful structure were brought into existence** and most admirably adopted to the atmosphere, climate, and peculiarities of that creation; and this, again, **must have lasted for many thousands of years**, and in its turn been swept away, **and a grander creation built on its ruins**. And so on, **stage after stage**.', Simons, 'Why Man was not at once made Perfect', The Christadelphian (21.238.177), 1884.

[236] 'There are indeed hints, casually dropped in the scriptures, which would seem to indicate **that our planet was inhabited by a race of beings anterior to the formation of man**.', Thomas, 'Elpis Israel', p. 10 (1990 ed.).

[237] '**Neither was the human the first rational race on its surface**, if we are to attach the same sense to the words addressed to Adam as they possessed when addressed to Noah. "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish (fill again) the earth." **There may have been a previous race, swept away after the manner of the flood**, the catastrophe leaving the earth in the state in which the six days' work found it.', Roberts, 'A Brush with Modern Scepticism', The Christadelphian (10.106.163), 1873.

[238] 'From this point of view therefore the geologist is free from coming into collision with scripture. **He may come to discover traces of a race of beings similar to man, but not of Adam's posterity**, but whether he does or not, there is another point of view from which we have an approach to certainty, that **a race of beings similar to man did exist prior to Adam** and a constitution of things likewise similar to what now obtains, **and all this we have from scripture itself**.', Jardine, 'The Bible as a Law of Life and Immortality', The Ambassador of the Coming Age (2.8.127), 1865.

[239] 'Among the alluvial deposits of this age (either recent or post-pliocene) a**re found the remains of man for the first time**. These remains belong to a drift age. Was that drift age the Noahic deluge or a previous and longer and more overwhelming deluge? If the former, then the remains belong to **those of the Adamic race**. If the latter,

Arguments which are valid

Of the arguments in the original list, two are valid; the appeal to the resurrection, and the appeal to the cosmological argument. Both are cited explicitly in the Bible, the Old Testament appealing directly to God as the creator of the universe in order to assert His existence and to assert that He is the only God which exists, and the New Testament appealing directly to the resurrection as evidence for the existence of God and the validity of the gospel message.

The basis of the resurrection narrative in historical fact (at minimum, the fact of the empty tomb), has been acknowledged even by some secular commentators.[242] There is strong historical evidence that Jesus' tomb was found empty.[243] Although denying the empty tomb, atheist Lüdemann acknowledges the historicity of

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then they do not. It is, however, possible that **they belong to a pre-Adamic race in part, and to the Adamic race in part**;', Welch., 'Knowledge.- No., 12 Geology', The Christadelphian (28.329.417), 1891.

[240] 'Considering the comparatively limited extent of the human family at the time, and that it was confined to one small district of the globe, it would seem reasonable to conclude from the principle already looked at – the divine sparingness of means – that **the flood was co-extensive only with the Adamically-inhabited portion of the globe**.', Roberts, 'The Visible Hand of God', The Christadelphian (18.205.308), 1881.

[241] 'there is sufficient reason to believe the flood was of no greater extent, and the people who were swept away by it were those **only who constituted the antagonistic force in rendering Noah and his family worthy the ark**. It was all the earth to both, and all the family of Adam and all the living creatures and **all the earth as related to the purposes of God in view of the future**.', Jardine, 'The Bible as a Law of Life and Immortality', The Ambassador of the Coming Age (2.7.115), 1865.

[242] 'To quote the biblical critic Klaus Berger, "The reports about the empty tomb are related by all four Gospels (and other writings of early Christianity) in a form independent of one another.… **We have a great abundance of reports, which have been separately handed down**."', William Lane Craig, Gerd Lüdemann, et al., Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment?: a Debate Between William Lane Craig & Gerd Lüdemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 35.

[243] '**There is extremely important historical evidence for the empty tomb**, which has not received sufficient attention from either Christian or secular historians. Christianity began in the city of Jerusalem - the very last place it could have started if Jesus' tomb had remained occupied. **Evidence deriving from purely Jewish and**

Christ's post-resurrection appearances.[244]

The cosmological argument has particular force. When the Big Bang model was first proposed it shocked many atheists and was resisted throughout the 20th century because of the unavoidable comparison with Genesis. When the model started to gain support, some thought it would be seen as doing away with God, and consequently opposed strongly by Christians. In fact the opposite was the case.

'But this apparent godlessness did not necessarily deter religious people, as Gold commented: ...we had intensely religious people very much for us - others were much against us. The biblical religious people wanted a moment of creation, and obviously the big bang was their stuff.'[245]

Astrophysicist Arthur Eddington pointed out the problem; 'The beginning seems to present insuperable difficulties unless we agree to look on it as frankly supernatural'.246 Astronomer Fred Hoyle (an atheist), rejected the Big Bang because it looked indisputably like divine creation; 'Hoyle did not hide his disdain for organized religion, and suggested that there existed an unholy alliance between Christianity and the Big Bang

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Roman sources and tradition, ranging from Josephus to the 5th cent. Toledoth Jeshu, **also admits an empty tomb**, and stands as what historians term `positive evidence from a hostile source,' **the strongest kind of historical evidence**. Well into the 2nd cent. AD, **the Jerusalem authorities continued to admit an empty tomb** by ascribing it to the disciples' stealing the body. **An empty tomb does not prove a resurrection**, although the reverse is true: a resurrection would require an empty tomb.', William Sailer, J. Creighton Christman, et al., Religious and Theological Abstracts (Myerstown, PA: Religious and Theological Abstracts, 2012).

[244] '"**There were in fact appearances of the heavenly Jesus in Jerusalem** (after those in Galilee)" (ibid., 29-30)"', Lüdemann quoted by Matthews, 'Acts and the History of the Earliest Jerusalem Church', in Cameron & Miller (eds.), 'Redescribing Christian origins', p. 164 (2004); he attributes the appearances to hallucination; note however 'although Dr. Lüdemann acknowledges the appearances and the origin of the disciples' belief, he disputes the burial and the empty tomb.', William Lane Craig, Gerd Lüdemann, et al., Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment?: a Debate Between William Lane Craig & Gerd Lüdemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 34.

[245] Astrophysicist Thomas Gold, quoted in Gregory, 'Fred Hoyle's Universe', p. 71 (2005).

[246] Kragh, 'Conceptions of Cosmos From Myths to the Accelerating Universe: A History of Cosmology', p. 157 (2007); Eddington held an unorthodox belief which was similar to deism, rather than typical Christianity.

theory'.[247]

In response, a counter-theory was proposed; the 'steady state' model. Theoretical physicist and atheist Stephen Weinberg stated bluntly that some cosmologists preferred this and other similar models, because it 'nicely avoids the problem of Genesis'. [248]

But despite all efforts to maintain the 'steady state' theory, it was repeatedly contradicted by all available scientific evidence. One of the most significant contributions was made by George Gamow, an atheist whose work increasingly supported the Big Bang; despite his rejection of religion, he described the event as 'the first days of creation', in a book entitled 'The Creation of the Universe'.[249]

Nevertheless, the question may legitimately be asked 'Why does this provide evidence for the God of the Bible, rather than the god of any other religion?'. It is a demonstrable fact that the Bible teaches the universe had a starting point in time, and the human species is completely mortal.

Virtually no other religion teaches that human consciousness does not survive death; virtually all of them claim it does survive death, and the believe in an 'immortal soul' and disembodied life after death is found in all Ancient Near East and European religions with the exception of Judaism. This is almost a universal teaching among religions of recorded human history.

Additionally, the earliest Ancient Near East religions held that the universe already existed by the time the gods shaped it. Additionally, they typically teach that the universe and its contents were created using recycled body parts of other gods, or from substances such as clay, dirt, water, and fire), and practically all religions in recorded human history hold this view. Many ancient religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism also believe the universe is endlessly cyclic without any beginning in time. All of these ideas are demonstrably false, and any religion asserting them can be dismissed as non-divine in origin.

Notably, no other religious text asserts both of these demonstrable scientific facts together; that humans are completely mortal and that the universe had a starting point in time. The Bible stands unique in its assertion

[247] Ibid., p. 195.

[248] 'As physicist Stephen Weinberg later wrote, 'the steady state model... **nicely avoids the problem of Genesis**.'', ibid., p. 71.

[249] Gamow, 'The Creation of the Universe', p. 78 (rev. ed. 1961).

of both these facts. This does not prove the Bible is divine in origin, but it does make it more rational to accept the Bible as divine revelation than any other religion.

Conclusion

As followers of Christ, we should be intellectually honest and exercise discernment when assessing arguments which seek to defend the Christian faith. We must have a faith which is based on evidence, and which has withstood analysis from independent critical sources. Honest Christadelphians will avoid arguments which have no ethical and intellectual merit, and which are contradicted both by available evidence as well as Biblical statements.

Failed prophecies?

Jon Burke

Abstract

Claims that certain Biblical prophecies failed are a common criticism raised by atheists and sceptics. This article addresses passages typically advanced as examples of failed prophecies, demonstrating some are passages which are not formal predictive prophecies in the manner claimed, some are misinterpreted by the critic, and some were fulfilled in contradiction to the critic's claims.

Introduction

Prophecies are consistently appealed to in the Bible as evidence of its divine origin. Several passages claimed by sceptics and atheists as examples of failed prophecies are examined here. They fall into the following categories: passages which are not formal predictive prophecies in the manner claimed, passages which are misinterpreted by the critic, and passages which were fulfilled in contradiction to the critic's claims.

Passages which are applied typologically

Several passages in the Old Testament which have traditionally been understood as prophetic of Christ, are objected to by critics as inapplicable or unfulfilled.

1. How can 'When he sins, I will correct him with the rod of men and with wounds inflicted by human beings' in 2 Samuel 7:14 apply to Christ, when Christ never sinned?

2. How can the servant of Isaiah 49 refer to Christ, when the context indicates it speaks explicitly of Israel?

A traditional answer has been that these prophecies have 'dual fulfilments', that they were prophecies fulfilled in part by Solomon or Israel, and fulfilled in part later in the life of Christ. This is actually only half true. In reality the prophecies had direct and full application to their immediate referent, and are applied typologically to Christ. That is, they are formal predictive prophecies about Solomon and Israel respectively, but parts of them find echoes in the life of Christ, the 'son of God' in a greater sense than both Solomon and Israel.

Their application to Christ is not a claim to direct fulfilment of a formal prediction, but an illustration that certain promises made by God in earlier times have a relevance to the greater work of Christ which they foreshadow. Refer back to the article 'Misquoting Matthew' on page 45 for details.

Passages which are misinterpreted

Certain prophecies criticised as unfulfilled have actually been misinterpreted.

1. How can God's words 'I, the LORD, promise: "David will never lack a successor to occupy the throne over the nation of Israel' in Jeremiah 33:17 be said to have been fulfilled, when the Davidic monarchy ended with the Babylonian captivity?

The answer is that this prophecy was conditional, as was made clear to Solomon before Jeremiah's time.

> 1 Kings 9:
> 4 You must serve me with integrity and sincerity, just as your father David did. Do everything I commanded and obey my rules and regulations.
> 5 Then I will allow your dynasty to rule over Israel permanently, just as I promised your father David, 'You will not fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.'

Solomon and his descendants failed to keep this covenant, and the Davidic monarchy consequently came to an end;[250] the New Testament writers identify Christ as its true successor.

2. How can Jesus' words 'I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes' in Matthew 10:23 and 'this generation will not pass away until all these things take place' in Matthew 24:34 be considered anything but failed prophecies, when he

[250] 'But perhaps the promise to the house of David is not all that unilaterally unconditional, and perhaps the dynastic oracle here is firmly set in the Sinaitic covenant (Eslinger 1994). We can agree with Brueggemann (1990: 259) when he says, "**While the covenantal 'if' is silenced in this theology, it has not been nullified**." This is particularly true when the Lord speaks of David's son: "**When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use**, with blows inflicted by human beings" (v. 14b).', Victor P. Hamilton, Handbook on the Historical Books (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 317–318.

did not return before the apostles had finished preaching to the towns of Israel, or before the generation of his time had passed away?

These passages do not speak of the return of Christ, but of the end which would come with the destruction of Jerusalem in the war of 66-70 CE.[251] [252]

3. In Mark 8:38 Jesus says 'there are some standing here who will not experience death before they see the kingdom of God come with power', and in Matthew 16:28 Jesus says 'there are some standing here who will not experience death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom', Jesus failed to return before his disciples died, making these false prophecies.

[251] '**Now that we have seen that the reference is to the destruction of the temple**, which did as a matter of fact take place some 40 years later while many of Jesus' contemporaries must have been still alive, all such contrived renderings may be laid to rest. This verse refers to the same time-scale as 16:28 (which was also concerned with the fulfilment of Dan 7:13–14): "some of those standing here will certainly not taste death before …" (cf. also 10:23, with the same Daniel reference: "you will not go through all the towns of Israel before …").', R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 930.

[252] '**34** The πάντα ταῦτα, "all these things," of this verse **can include no more than the same phrase in the preceding verse and thus cannot include the coming of the Son of Man** (so too Blomberg). The phrase refers not only to general marks of the interim period such as tribulation, distress, pseudo-messiahs, and false prophets but specifically, and dramatically, **to the desecration of the temple and the destruction of Jerusalem** (cf. vv 15–22). As in the other imminence sayings (cf. 16:28; 10:23; 23:36), all of which like the present logion are prefaced by the emphatic ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, "truly I tell you," formula, **the main point is that the fall of Jerusalem was to be experienced by *that* generation** (pace Kidder), those listening there and then to the teaching of Jesus (ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη, "this generation," is used consistently in the Gospel to refer to Jesus' contemporaries; cf. 11:16; 12:41–42, 45; 23:36).' Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* (vol. 33B; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 715.

These passages refer to the transfiguration (a vision of Jesus 'coming in his kingdom'), which is described in both gospels as occurring shortly after Jesus spoke these words. Early Christians almost universally understood these passages as a reference to the transfiguration.[253]

It should be noted that these words of Jesus were transmitted by the gospel writers decades after Jesus' ministry and after the disciples had died, indicating that they them as fulfilled prophecy. If these predictions had been understood as Jesus saying he would return before the disciples died, they would have been more likely to omit them completely.

4. In 1 Corinthians 7:31 Paul says 'the present shape of this world is passing away', indicating that he, like other New Testament writers, believed they would see the return of Christ in their lifetime, but it never happened.

These words are not written as formal predictive prophecy, and as much as Paul may have believed at one time that Christ would return while he was still alive, it is clear he and other writers such as Peter gradually understood that this would not be the case. In fact both Paul and Peter prepare other Christians for a lengthy wait before Jesus' return. In 2 Thessalonians Paul makes it clear that Christ's return is not imminent, and that it will not happen before certain specific events have taken place.[254]

> 2 Thessalonians 2:
> 1 Now regarding the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to be with him, we ask you, brothers and sisters,

[253] 'The most widespread interpretation in the Eastern and Western church related the saying to the transfiguration whereby then "some" referred to Peter, James, and John.', Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: a Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 386; Luz disagrees with this interpretation, but acknowledges it was the most common in the early church.

[254] 'Mearns ("Development") also takes the reference to be to 1 Thessalonians, but argues that Paul had changed his mind about the suddenness of the Day of the Lord since writing that letter **and is now correcting** perfectly reasonable inferences that the readers might have drawn from it.', F. F. Bruce, 1 and 2 Thessalonians (vol. 45; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 164.

2 not to be easily shaken from your composure or disturbed by any kind of spirit or message or letter allegedly from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here.
3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not arrive until the rebellion comes and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.

Peter likewise prepares his readers for a lengthy wait, speaking of the 'last days' in the future, and warning believers they will be mocked for their patience at that time.

2 Peter 3:
3 Above all, understand this: In the last days blatant scoffers will come, being propelled by their own evil urges
4 and saying, "Where is his promised return? For ever since our ancestors died, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation."

Passages which were fulfilled

Certain prophecies have actually been fulfilled, despite claims to the contrary.

1. The prophecy of Isaiah 17 claims Damascus would be 'a heap of ruins (verse 1), and that 'Damascus will lose its kingdom' (verse 23), but Damascus is a thriving city today.

This prophecy made by Isaiah sometime around 740 BCE, was fulfilled when the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III destroyed Damascus, which was at that time not a mere city but a thriving Aramean kingdom.[255]

[255] 'The Assyrian invaded northern Israel (2 K. 15:29) **and then besieged and destroyed Damascus as an Aramean kingdom in 732**, killing Rezin (2 K. 16:9). Assyrian records tell of 591 towns of the "16 districts of Aram" destroyed "like mounds left by a flood" (ARAB, I § 777).', M. F. Unger, "Damascus," ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 854.

Isaiah prophesied Damascus would be a 'heap of ruins', and Tiglath-pileser III's own record of his conquest proves this is what happened, boasting of his extensive destruction of Damascus; '591 cities of the 16 districts of Damascus I destroyed like mounds of ruins after the Deluge'. [256]

Isaiah's prediction that 'Damascus will lose its kingdom' was fulfilled by Tiglath-pileser III's annexation of Damascus and all its territories, and the deportation of many of its inhabitants.[257] [258]

2. The prophecy of Tyre's destruction in Ezekiel 26 failed to come true, and Ezekiel's own words in Ezekiel 29:18-19 (especially that Nebuchadnezzar II and his army 'received no wages from Tyre for the work he carried out against it' , verse 28), prove he knew the prophecy failed.

This criticism overlooks the fact that Ezekiel's commentary in Ezekiel 29:18-19 is certainly in response to criticisms that his earlier prophecy was not completely successful; in other words, it proves at minimum that

[256] '12' […] **orchards without number I cut down; I did not leave a single one**. 13' … the town of …]hadara, the home of the dynasty of Rezin of Damascus, 14' [the pl]ace where he was born, I surrounded and captured. 800 people with their possessions 15' their cattle (and) their sheep I took as spoil. 750 captives from the cities of Kuruṣṣa 16' (and) Sama, 550 captives from Metuna I took, **591 cities 17' of the 16 districts of Damascus I destroyed like mounds of ruins after the Deluge**.', Lester L. Grabbe, "The Kingdom of Israel from Omri to the Fall of Samaria: If We Only Had the Bible …," in *Ahab Agonistes: The Rise and Fall of the Omri Dynasty* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 79.

[257] 'Finally, the Assyrians had had enough of the rebellious behaviour of Damascus, the last Aramaean stronghold in Hatti. **Damascus and its cities were conquered and turned into Assyrian provinces** (Tadmor 1994: 79–81). **A part of the population was deported** (Grayson 1991/2000: 77–8; Dion 1997: 215–16; Sader 1987: 250–1; Weippert 1987: 99).', Hans M. Barstad, "Can Prophetic Texts Be Dated? Amos 1–2 as an Example," in *Ahab Agonistes: The Rise and Fall of the Omri Dynasty* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 33.

[258] 'At the close of the Syro-Ephraimitic War, Tiglath-pileser took several actions that form the background of this text. He killed Rezin, **destroyed Damascus, and annexed all territory controlled by Damascus into the Assyrian provincial system.**', Brad E. Kelle, "What's in a Name? Neo-Assyrian Designations for the Northern Kingdom and Their Implications for Israelite History and Biblical Interpretation," ed. Gail R. O'Day, Journal of Biblical Literature 121 (2002): 639., Gail R. O'Day, ed., *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121 (2002): 659.

Ezekiel's earlier prediction that Nebuchadnezzar II would attack Tyre was not only made before the event, but also came true. This is not a good start for a critic of prophetic fulfilment.

Subsequent to Ezekiel's successful prediction, his political enemies attempted to discredit him by claiming Nebuchadnezzar's army had failed to vindicate the prophecy.[259] Such claims were unwarranted, for 'the siege was successful and Tyre did pass into Babylonian control'.[260]

Since Nebuchadnezzar II failed to destroy Tyre utterly, some commentators state that since Ezekiel's original prophecy had predicted 'many nations' would be brought against Tyre ('I will bring up many nations against you', Ezekiel 26:3), of which Nebuchadnezzar II's campaign was only the first. It is claimed that this is supported by the alternating statements of what 'he' (Nebuchadnezzar II), and 'they' (subsequent nations), would do to Tyre, especially Alexander the Great.

However, this view has been criticized as an improbable reading of the Hebrew text.[261] Instead it should be recognized that the first section of the prophecy (verses 1-6), is a self-contained unit predicting the coming of

[259] 'The objective reason for the oracle is supplied in v 18. However, the more immediate agenda is implied by v 21ab: **Ezekiel was being criticised by his Jewish contemporaries for the lack of precise fulfilment of his oracles against Tyre**.'. Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48* (vol. 29; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 109.

[260] 'It was to some extent a carping criticism: the siege was successful and Tyre did pass into Babylonian control. In a list of royal hostages at Nebuchadnezzar's court, to be dated about 570 B.C., the king of Tyre has the initial place (ANET 308a; Katzenstein, History of Tyre 326). About 564 B.C. Baal, Ethbaal's successor as king of Tyre, was replaced by a Babylonian High Commissioner (Katzenstein, History 332–33; cf. Unger, ZAW 44 [1926] 314–17). Any prophet might have been glad to chalk it up as a vindication of his or her prediction, despite Nebuchadnezzar's non-destruction of Tyre.', ibid., p. 109.

[261] 'However, the proposed distinction between the "many nations" of verse 3 and Nebuchadnezzar's army **seems overly subtle**, in light of the reference to Nebuchadnezzar as "king of kings" (v. 7) and the multiethnic nature of his army. Nebuchadnezzar is the focal point of verses 7–11, but the actions described are those of an army. **The subject of the plural forms in verse 12 is most naturally understood as the collective "army" (Heb. 'am) of verse 7**, which in turn can be seen as comprised of the "many nations" mentioned in verse 3 (see also the reference to

'many nations' against Tyre, and thus not restricted to Nebuchadnezzar II (whose campaign is described from verses 7-13);[262] the complete destruction of the city as predicted by Ezekiel was fulfilled by Alexander.

The objection that the prophecy's description of an attack against a mainland city (which Nebuchadnezzar attacked), and therefore does not describe the destruction of the island (which Alexander attacked), is misguided.[263] The prophecy uses the standard conquest language of the Ancient Near East; when Esarhaddon of Assyria attacked the island city he still described it in terms of a land battle, even to the point of describing trenches being dug (impossible in an island siege).[264]

3. The prophecies against Egypt in Ezekiel 30 and Isaiah 19 failed to come true; Nebuchadnezzar did not invade and conquer Egypt as predicted.

"nations" in v. 5).', Robert B. Chisholm Jr., Handbook on the Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Minor Prophets (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 268.

[262] '**Tyre's fall appears in the first two prophecies**, the second picking up phrases from the first and adding further details, and the remaining two prophecies describe the bewailing and then the entombment of the fallen one.', Ronald M. Hals, Ezekiel (vol. 19; The Forms of the Old Testament Literature; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 188.

[263] '**Taking the standard siege imagery too literally**, some scholars have concluded that the passage must come out of a setting different from Nebuchadrezzar's time, seeing in vv. 9–11 a battle song about Alexander's conquest of Tyre, or supposing that the actual reference of the passage was to a conquest of "old Tyre" on the adjacent mainland. (See the references in Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, 37.) **The proper recognition of the typicality of the imagery involved renders such literalistic hypotheses unnecessary**.', Ronald M. Hals, Ezekiel (vol. 19; The Forms of the Old Testament Literature; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 189.

[264] 'The infiltration of characteristics typical of a description of a mainland siege into the description of the siege of the island city of Tyre **can already be observed in the Assyrian royal inscriptions**, when Esarhaddon there reports of **the construction of trenches (ḫalṣē) against Tyre**.', Walther Zimmerli, Frank Moore Cross, and Klaus Baltzer, Ezekiel: a Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel (Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979–), 37; a footnote adds 'This also disposes of Wiener's theory that this passage **deals solely with the conquest of the mainland city of old Tyre**'.

First it should be noted that it is acknowledged even by modern critics that the prophecy was given before the event it describes took place.[265] Consequently, attempts to reduce the accuracy of the prediction by claiming it was insufficiently fulfilled are demonstrably motivated by the desire to avoid the fact that a successful prophecy actually happened.

The best a critic can do in the face of the fact that the text contains a prophecy indisputably before the event to which it obviously refers, is to claim that the prophecy wasn't fulfilled sufficiently to be considered accurate. This is not intellectually honest.

In fact, the prophecy was fulfilled by Nebuchadnezzar II's war against Egypt in 586 BCE, recorded in a fragmentary Babylonian text.

> '. . . [in] the 37th year, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Bab[ylon] mar[ched against] Egypt (Mi-sir) to deliver a battle. [Ama]sis (text: [. . .]-a(?)-su)y of Egypt, [called up his a]rm[y] . . . [. . .]\u from the town Pufu-Iaman . . . distant regions which (are situated on islands) amidst the sea . . . many . . . which/who (are) in Egypt . . . [car]rying weapons, horses and [chariot]s . . . he called up to assist him and . . . did [. . .] in front of him . . . he put his trust. . . (only the first signs at the beginning and the end of the following 7 or 8 lines are legible).'[266]

The success of Nebuchadnezzar's campaign is acknowledged by secular historians, on the basis of several lines of evidence.[267] Firstly, and rather ironically, some historians believe the prophecy of Ezekiel was written after the event, precisely because it is so accurate.

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[265] 'The prophecy against Egypt does not seem to have come to pass in every detail either, but **the book was probably completed and its authority established** by the time this became clear.', Thomas Renz, The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 98.

[266] J. B. Pritchard (ed.), Ancient Near Eastern Texts (3rd ed. with supplement. Princeton: Princeton UP, rev. 1969), 308.

[267] 'That Nebuchadrezzar actually conquered Egypt is suggested by a number of very powerful pieces of evidence', Emmet John Sweeney, The Ramessides, Medes, and Persians, *Ages In Alignment Series*, volume 4 (Algora Publishing, 2008), 153; 'Nebuchadrezzar' is the more accurate transliteration of the name 'Nebuchadnezzar'.

> 'First of all, both Ezekiel and Jeremiah prophesied that he would do so; and since most of these "prophecies" were written in retrospect, or at least gained popular currency only after having been proved correct, we may be fairly certain that the prophesied invasion and defeat of Egypt actually took place.'[268]

Two other sources are the Biblical text describing Jewish refugees moved from Egypt to Babylon, and the record of Josephus indicating Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt.

> 'Secondly, the biblical sources say that Nebuchadrezzar was able to remove the Jewish refugees in Egypt to Babylon. He could not of course have done so unless he had entered and subjugated the country. Thirdly, Josephus tells us that he conquered Egypt. We are informed that four years after the fall of Tyre, Nebuchadrezzar invaded the country and put its King Uaphris to death, installing a creature of his own upon the vacant throne.'[269]

Another source is the presence in Egypt of artifacts belonging to Nebuchadnezzar II, demonstrating he invaded and established himself there.

> 'Fourthly, and most importantly, artifacts of Nebuchadrezzar have actually been discovered in Egypt. These are "three cylinders of terra-cotta bearing an inscription of Nebuchadnezzar, an ordinary text referring to his constructions in Babylon ...
>
> These were said to come from the Isthmus of Suez, and they apparently belong to some place where Nebuchadrezzar had 'set up his throne' and 'spread his royal pavilion.' As he only passed along the Syrian road, and Daphnae would be the only stopping place on that road in the region of the isthmus, all the inferences point to these having come from Defenneh, and being the memorials of establishment there."'[270]

[268] Ibid., p. 153.

[269] Ibid., p. 153.

[270] Ibid., p. 153.

This also fulfils the prophecy of Jeremiah 43:10 that Nebuchadnezzar would 'pitch his royal tent' in Tahpanhes in Egypt.[271] [272] The scholarly conclusion from these sources is 'There can be little doubt; Nebuchadrezzar entered and conquered Egypt.'[273]

4. Although Joshua 3:10 says God would 'truly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusite', 1 Kings 9:20 says 'several non-Israelite peoples were left in the land after the conquest of Joshua'.

Joshua's words are a repetition of the words of Moses, which made it clear that God's driving out of the inhabitants of Canaan was conditional on the Hebrews maintaining their obedience to God.

> Deuteronomy 4:
>
> 1 Now, Israel, pay attention to the statutes and ordinances I am about to teach you, so that you might live and go on to enter and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you.
>
> Deuteronomy 7:
>
> 12 If you obey these ordinances and are careful to do them, the LORD your God will faithfully keep covenant with you as he promised your ancestors.
>
> Deuteronomy 8:
>
> 1 You must keep carefully all these commandments I am giving you today so that you may live, increase in number, and go in and occupy the land that the LORD promised to your ancestors.

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[271] Jeremiah 43: 8 **At Tahpanhes** the LORD spoke to Jeremiah. 9 "Take some large stones and bury them in the mortar of the clay pavement **at the entrance of Pharaoh's residence here in Tahpanhes**. Do it while the people of Judah present there are watching. 10 Then tell them, 'The LORD God of Israel who rules over all says, "I will bring my servant King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. I will set his throne over these stones which I have buried. **He will pitch his royal tent over them**.

[272] 'In short, **the prophecy of Jeremiah** that the king of Babylon would spread his royal pavilion at the entrance of the pharaoh's house in Tahpanheth (Daphnae) **was fulfiled**.', ibid., p. 153.

[273] Ibid., p. 153.

5. The gospels describe Jesus predicting the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, but this is not an accurate prediction because the gospels were written after the event; even if they had been written before the event, such a war was obviously going to happen anyway, so it is not evidence of an accurate prophecy.

The first point to note about this objection (which can be found made by a range of atheists and sceptics), is that it is intellectually dishonest; it tries to argue that the prophecy isn't true because it was written after the event, but also argues that even if it had been made before the event it still wouldn't count as a fulfilled prophecy. Such an argument is not evidence based, and demonstrates that the person making the argument is not really interested in the facts.

The second point to note about this objection is that although the date of Mark's gospel is still an open question in current scholarship, dates proposed typically fall between 65 and 75 CE.[274] In fact recently strong arguments have been made for a much earlier date. The Christian scholar Mark Crossley argues for a date 'before the late forties',[275] at least 20 years before the destruction of Jerusalem, and the secular scholar Maurice Crossley argues 'a date c. 40 CE must be regarded as highly probable'.[276]

It is clear that many scholars (even non-religious scholars), are prepared to accept that Mark's gospel (which contains a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple), was indeed written before the events its predicts. Rejecting this possibility out of hand is therefore intellectually dishonest, especially when no attempt is made to address the significant body of evidence indicating that Jesus' prediction in Mark was indeed made before the event.

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[274] 'While scholars differ over the precise year, **a date between 65 and 75 CE is accepted by a wide variety of scholars** of very different ideological persuasions.', James G. Crossley, The Date of Mark's Gospel: Insight from the Law in Earliest Christianity (vol. 266; Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 1.

[275] 'This now becomes an argument of powerful collective weight **for Mark to have been written before the late forties** and if this is combined with the analysis of Mark 13 in Chapter 2 it is unlikely that it was written no earlier than the mid to late thirties.', ibid., p. 208.

[276] Maurice Casey, Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel (vol. 102; Society for New Testament Studies; Cambridge University Press, 1998), 260.

The third point to note is that there is no evidence at all to suggest that the possibility of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans was so probable that it would have appeared obvious to people in Jesus' own day, or even 30 years later (63-65 CE). In fact construction on the Temple had already been carried out for nearly 50 years by the time of Jesus' ministry (John 2:20), and it was not even completed until shortly before the Romans destroyed it.[277] [278]

It is difficult to demonstrate that anyone seeing the ongoing construction of the Temple in Jesus' day would have concluded that the Romans would destroy it over 30 years later. It is likewise difficult to demonstrate that anyone seeing the construction continuing in 63 CE would have concluded that the Romans would destroy both the Temple and the entire city in just a few more years.

The fact is that the explosive events which led to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE were not predicted by anyone outside the gospels, and even Jesus' own words make it clear he expects scepticism on the part of his audience. There is no evidence in any of the relevant Roman historical sources who wrote on events of the first century (such as Suetonius, Tacitus, Appian), nor in Josephus (who was both a historian, and a general on the Jewish side of the war), that anyone was expecting such a war before it took place, still less the complete destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

There is excellent evidence therefore that Jesus' prophecy was made well before the events they predicted successfully, and it is indisputable that these events were not foreseen or expected by anyone else.

Conclusion

Sceptical claims that Bible prophecies have not been fulfilled should be taken seriously; it is a fact that some Bible prophecies are impossible to verify due to a lack of available information, even if there is no evidence proving they did not come to pass.

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[277] 'According to Josephus,17 the Herodian temple was begun in 20/19 BCE; i**t was completed shortly before the war with Rome**.18 If this scene may be used to date the events,19 it would have taken place on Passover of the year 28.', Ernst Haenchen, Robert Walter Funk, and Ulrich Busse, John: a Commentary on the Gospel of John (Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 184.

[278] 'Work was still going on at his [Herod's] death, and for that matter, for long after. **The Temple was not completed until A.D. 63**.', Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 176.

However, when such criticisms are made it is important to identify whether or not the arguments made are evidence based, demonstrate a knowledge of and engagement with the relevant scholarly literature, and are intellectually honest.

In particular, such arguments must prove that they have interpreted the prophecy as it was originally intended, and must provide substantial objections to the relevant counter-arguments by scholars who make the case that the prophecy was in fact fulfilled. In turn, defences of these prophecies must exercise intellectual honesty in acknowledging problems where they genuinely exist, and must cite, discuss, and be supported by the relevant scholarly literature, in order to be credible.

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Editorial

Dave Burke

As this is a new journal readers may be interested to know how the editors decide what goes into an issue of *Defence & Confirmation*.

The first criterion is **relevance.** *D&C*'s principal focus is apologetics, so the content of the article must fall within this remit. Some latitude may be exercised for material which is not strictly apologetic but still relevant to this field.

The second criterion is **orthodoxy.** While we will occasionally allow space for heterodox opinions (provided they are competently argued) *D&C* remains committed to essential Christadelphian doctrine and praxis. It is not a clearing house for heresy and idle speculation.

The third criterion is **quality.** Articles are required to meet basic standards of research, writing, and referencing.[279] All submissions to *D&C* are subjected to **peer review**, including those written by the editors. What is peer review, and why should we bother with it?

Peer review is a process by which articles are assessed for publication. Its most important function is quality control.[280] While the exact process varies between academic disciplines, peer review typically involves the following steps:

- A paper is submitted for review

[279] Submissions should follow the SBL referencing guide, available here: http://1drv.ms/1ggqLpO

[280] 'The peer review process has been discussed at length in most of the established texts on the scholarly communication process, such as Ziman (1968), Ravetz (1973) and Meadows (1974). These authors agree that the four main functions of the scholarly literature are dissemination of current knowledge, archiving of the canonical knowledge base, quality control of published information, and assignment of priority and credit for their work to authors. The key position of peer review in fulfilling all four of these functions, but especially of course quality control, is acknowledged by these authorities.' F. Rowland, 'The Peer Review Process' [cited 11 May 2014]. Online: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/rowland.pdf

- The paper is reviewed by one or more of the author's peers (people of similar or equal competence to the author)
- The paper is returned to the author with feedback from the peers (e.g. corrections, suggestions, questions)
- The paper is redrafted in light of feedback
- The paper is resubmitted
- The paper is accepted for publication

Steps 3-5 may be repeated until the paper is deemed acceptable.

Ideally the peers will have experience and/or qualifications in the author's field of study. Their participation ensures that the paper is evaluated objectively by a new set of eyes, with the aim of capturing any errors overlooked by the author. If a paper fails peer review it will not be published unless the necessary corrections are made.

The benefits of peer review have been summarised as follows:

'* The author receives detailed and constructive feedback from experts in the field.
* The process can alert authors to errors or gaps in literature they may have overlooked.
* It can assist with making the paper more applicable to the journal readership.
* It may enable a discussion (between the author, reviewers, and editor) around a research field or topic.
* Readers can be assured that the research they are reading has been verified by subject experts.'[281]

Some may question the need for peer review, arguing that Christadelphian magazines already vet submissions prior to publication. While this is true, such vetting processes are not standardised and too often reliant on arbitrary metrics (with predictably subjective results). Sometimes a submission is merely skimmed by a columnist sympathetic to the author's views. At other times it may be rejected for no good reason.[282] This is not peer review, and helps to explain the broad variation in quality between issues.

[281] 'What is peer review?' (n.r.) [cited 11 May 2014]. Online: http://journalauthors.tandf.co.uk/review/peer.asp

[282] Of even greater concern is the fact that papers are not always reviewed by brethren with relevant knowledge and/or expertise. Consequently basic errors are missed, and even blatant plagiarism may be overlooked or indulged.

The use of genuine peer review in Christadelphia is a relatively new development[283] but its advantages are increasingly recognised. Christadelphian publications produced using peer review include the following books and journals:

- *Christadelphian eJournal of Biblical Interpretation*[284]
- *Reasons*[285]
- *More Reasons*[286]
- *One God, the Father*[287]
- *Living on the Edge: a Christadelphian book to strengthen faith*[288]
- *Defence & Confirmation*

All submissions to *D&C* (including those written by staff) are reviewed by one or more of the *D&C* editors.[289] Where necessary we consult third parties with knowledge and expertise in a relevant field (e.g. Hebrew, Koine Greek, ANE culture, archaeology, etc.)

Articles which pass peer review on the first submission are published. Articles which fail peer review are returned to the author for editing, with a list of recommendations. The author is invited to address these and resubmit the article for review.

[283] Christadelphian magazines usually vet submissions prior to publication, but the process is not standardised. As a result the quality of each issue tends to vary considerably. Vetting is too often reliant on arbitrary metrics, with predictably subjective results. Sometimes material is merely skimmed by a columnist sympathetic to the author's views, while at other times it may be rejected for no good reason.

[284] www.christadelphian-ejbi.org

[285] http://www.lulu.com/au/en/shop/thomas-e-gaston-ed/reasons/paperback/product-16531421.html

[286] http://www.lulu.com/shop/tom-gaston-ed/more-reasons/paperback/product-21687363.html

[287] http://www.lulu.com/au/en/shop/tom-gaston-ed/one-god-the-father/paperback/product-20732579.html

[288] https://www.facebook.com/LOTE.book

[289] J. Burke, D. Burke, Chris Matthiesen, and K. Gilmore.

Peer review does not guarantee perfection, nor does it imply that the reviewers agree with the conclusions of the paper they have scrutinised. However, it does mean the paper has passed independent examination and satisfied all the criteria of a particular standard.[290] This gives readers greater confidence in the quality and objectivity of the author's work, and the publication which carries it.

[290] 'Being peer reviewed doesn't mean your results are accurate. Not being peer reviewed doesn't mean you're a crank. But the fact that peer review exists does weed out a lot of cranks, simply by saying, "There is a standard." Journals that don't have peer review do tend to be ones with an obvious agenda. White papers, which are not peer reviewed, do tend to contain more bias and self-promotion than peer-reviewed journal articles. You should think critically and skeptically about any paper—peer reviewed or otherwise—but the ones that haven't been submitted to peer review do tend to have more wrong with them.' Maggie Koeth-Baker, 'Meet Science: What is "peer review"?' [cited 11 May 2014]. Online: http://boingboing.net/2011/04/22/meet-science-what-is.html

The Raising of the Saints in Matthew 27

Chris Matthiesen

Abstract

Matthew's lone account of the raising of the saints at Jesus' crucifixion is well known for its peculiar literary construct and questioned historical credibility. Considered awkwardly phrased and outside of Matthew's usual style, this briefly mentioned event is often included within the larger discussion contesting biblical inspiration. Many commentators, however, posit that Matthew did consider this unique narrative to be a factual record and that its inclusion in his gospel account reflects the broader sociocultural world wherein he wrote.

Introduction

The historical veracity of Matthew 27:51b-53[291] (hereafter referred to as "SM") is widely questioned today, from biblical scholars[292] to biblical skeptics.[293] The primary objection to SM is its absence from any other extant documents of the period. Matthew's critics find it difficult to accept the silence of such a spectacular event from both the NT canon (sans Matthew) and non-biblical sources. Matthew's defenders, in turn, consider the objection little more than an argument from silence.[294]

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[291] 'Just then the temple curtain was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks were split apart. And tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had died were raised. (They came out of the tombs after his resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.)' New English Translation (2006).

[292] Even among those professing Biblical inerrancy. Some of the more notable scholars who have recently faced scrutiny from the evangelical community for accommodating a more nuanced definition of 'Biblical Inerrancy', at least partly because of difficulty with Mathew 27:51-53, are Michael Licona, D.A. Carson, and Leon Morris. See http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/09/14/the-devil-is-in-the-details-biblical-inerrancy-and-the-licona-controversy/ and http://www.considerthereasons.com/2014/01/da-carson-leon-morris-and-matthew-2752.html.

[293] See for example Robby Berry's "The Fivefold Challenge". (Cited 16 Mar 2014 online http://www.theskepticalreview.com/tsrmag/4five95.html) where Matt 27 is listed as one of five biblical events unsatisfactorily answered by archaeology.

[294] Ibid.

Both sides have a point. Often, challenges to SM are poor examples of an argument from silence.[295] However, a response is warranted given the amount of attention afforded the issue.

This article will attempt a brief treatment of two concerns identified from the stated objection above:

- Is it plausible that such an event could indeed be absent from non-biblical documents?
- Would the other NT authors have included SM in their writings had they known of it?

No record from non-biblical sources?

It is from Matthew alone we learn of the following phenomena occurring after Jesus' death:

- A shaking of the earth
- A splitting of rocks
- An opening of tombs
- A raising of many holy ones
- An entry into the holy city by these holy ones

A chief component of the criticism levelled at SM is the supposed magnitude of the events; especially 4 and 5. Setting aside the timing issue between verses 52b-53[296], many find it hard to accept that a group of

[295] The quality of an argument from silence lies in the strength of the inference. Within historiographical methodology, a strong inference considers certain criteria to establish the plausibility of events in question as having occurred or not. The University of Massachusetts' History Department, on their website, expresses it in this way, *"The strength of that inference in a given case will depend on (1) how many documents there are, or in statistical terms how large the sample is, and, in literary terms, (2) how likely the thing is to have been mentioned in documents of that type in the first place."* "Arguments from Silence", (2006). Cited 16 Mar 2014. Online: https://www.umass.edu/wsp/history/outline/silence.html.

[296] The timing in Matthew 27:52b-53 troubles many scholars because of the length of time between the saints' raising until they leave the tombs and enter Jerusalem (~3 days). Posited by some is that the parenthetical (v.53) is an awkward attempt by Matthew to reconcile this event, generally agreed to be from an earlier Christian tradition.

recently reanimated bodies entering a major city during one of its busiest religious festivals would fail to draw sufficient attention to warrant some type of historical mention.

Such scrutiny, however, raises concerns from a historiographical perspective[297]. Specifically:

- The scarcity of ancient sources wherein one would expect to find reference to events such as described in SM.[298]
- That oral tradition dominated this period, not written records.[299] [300] It is believed around 85-90% were too illiterate to pen down a written narrative.[301] Aside from Jesus' followers, it is unlikely

[297] Cf. Tekton Apologetics article by JP Harding, "Signficiant [*sic*] "Silences" in the Gospels". Cited 16 Mar 2014. Online: http://www.tektonics.org/af/asilent.php.

[298] The key point here is identifying from the available extant sources those likely to have mentioned the event in question, yet do not. Historian John Lange offers the following criteria for establishing this conclusion: (1) There is a document D, extant, in which the event, E, is not mentioned. (2) It was the intention of the author of D to enumerate exhaustively all members of the class of events of which E is supposed to be a member. (3) The author of D was acquainted with all members of the class in question. (4) E must be such that, if it had occurred, the author of D could not have overlooked it. ", "The Argument from Silence", *History and Theory* 5, no. 3 (1966): 290.

[299] Craig Keener, citing the late biblical scholar Martin Hengel, writes that even the highly literate Papias (early 2nd century) "preferred oral tradition", Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 38.

[300] Many scholars suggest SM may have very well began as an oral tradition. R.E. Brown: "The style of the quatrain in 27:51b–52b is not typically Matthean; and the vivid, imaginative character of the phenomena suggests a preMatthean poetic piece circulating in popular circles." *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave, a Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* 1 (New York: Yale University Press, 1994), 1138.

[301] "The prevailing opinion suggests that 10 percent of the Mediterranean population could read with any proficiency. Literacy was not, though, evenly distributed across the empire. Moreover, in the NT a literate person might read Aramaic fluently, Hebrew slowly, and Greek with difficulty and be unable to read Latin at all.

While Millard may be correct that Jewish men had a higher literacy rate, we would not want to suggest that more than 15 percent could read, and even that percentage is probably too high. Although we may be discouraged by

> others would have considered the movement important enough to include in their own oral traditions. The possibility that some degree of "snubbing" occurred in an effort to stifle attempts at preserving Jesus' memory.[302]

For modern readers, momentous events in a major city going unreported is unlikely. To expect this of first century Jerusalem, however, is anachronistic. It also assumes, uncritically, the events in SM occurred in a manner that drew large public attention. A closer look, however, reveals little detail regarding the event as a whole, or its constituent parts.

What Matthew does—and does not—tell us

The earthquake, rocks, and tombs, certainly regarded as significant by those aware of divine causality, may likely have been considered little more than natural occurrences to others.[303] Additionally, though not

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such a low number, it does indicate that the ability to read was not uncommon. Thus, Millard (Reading, 158) is likely correct that it is significant that Jesus introduces Scripture with the words "Have you not read?" when speaking to Pharisees (Matt. 12:3), to Sadducees (Matt. 22:31), to scribes (Matt. 21:16), or to a lawyer (Luke 10:26), but says to the crowd, "You have heard that it was said" (Matt. 5:21)." Richards E., "Reading, Writing, and Manuscripts." Pages 348-49 in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*. Edited by J. B. Green and L. M. McDonald. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.

[302] See for example JP Harding, "Snubbing and Silence as a Biblical Topic". Online: http://www.tektonics.org/qt/"snubby.php. Cf. the University of Massachusetts history webpage section on "Social Silence". Online: https://www.umass.edu/wsp/history/outline/silence.html.

[303] The severity of the earthquake is unknown and could have easily been a minor quake felt only by those in the immediate area of the centurion. That the earthquake frightened the centurion does not mean it was large; only that he attributed it with some divine act (Brown, *Death*, 1122). As for the rocks splitting and tombs opening: location, severity, and, in the case of the tombs, number, are all unknown.

discussed here, is the strong agreement among commentators of the apocalyptic significance attached to these particular signs[304].

It is the raising of the dead saints and their entry into Jerusalem that are the central concern. Left unanswered by Matthew, though, is how many were raised. Within the context of this event, ten might be considered many, maybe more, though there is nothing to suggest it was a large horde that was raised. Neither is it obvious they presented themselves to Jerusalem in any spectacular fashion.

Further, Matthew gives no clue as to their identities[305], to whom they appeared[306], or their subsequent fate[307]; only that they were raised and entered into the holy city, appearing to many (again, unquantified) there.

This causes little concern for Biblical scholar R.E. Brown, who notes that SM "is deliberately vague", as its "forte is atmosphere, not details."[308] The thrust of Matthew's pericope was not to testify to its historical detail, but of its theological significance; something that would've been familiar and more important to Matthew's initial audience.

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[304] See, for example, Daniel Gunter's treatment of this topic in "Interpreting Apocalyptic Symbolism in the Gospel of Matthew" (DRAFT). Cited 16 Mar 2014. Online: https://www.academia.edu/2039865/Interpreting_Apocalyptic_Symbolism_in_the_Gospel_of_Matthew.

[305] R.E. Brown provides a summary on the wide range of opinion here (*Death*, 1126).

[306] It is not implausible that those to whom they appeared were believing Jews, perhaps family and/or friends. Certainly they appeared to those who recognized them, in similar fashion to Jesus after his resurrection (cf. Acts 10:40-41).

[307] Commentators differ here, positing a range of possibilities, from glorified bodies to post-mortem revivifications. The earliest commentators considered the saints to have been simply resuscitated, later dying again. (For example, Eusebius quotes the early 2nd century Christian apologist, Quadratus concerning these saints: "[T]hey were alive for quite a while, so that some of them lived even to our day." (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.3.2).

[308] Brown, *Death*, 1126.

Why are Mark, Luke, and John silent on this?

Often suggested as an explanation of SM's omission from the other gospels is the literary purpose and literary limitations[309] of the gospels themselves.

Scholars agree that the four gospels emphasized different aspects of Jesus' ministry, with Matthew considered to have been written primarily for a Jewish audience intimately familiar with the Jewish worldview.[310] [311]

Also agreed upon is that the gospel writers did not intend to include all of the events surrounding Jesus' life and ministry[312], but tailored their accounts to their particular audiences.[313]

'….each Gospel's Jesus stories are calculated to meet the needs of its respective audience. There is overall continuity in the Synoptic Gospels' accounts, but there is a great deal of individual freedom as the authors tailor their traditions for their respective communities.

If John 20:30–31 provides a model, the theological purposes of the evangelists guided their editing of tradition, leading to literary narratives, not historical chronicles.

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[309] For a treatment of scroll size limitations, see G. Miller, http://www.christianthinktank.com/quietonUFO.html and J.P. Holding, http://www.tektonics.org/af/asilent.php.

[310] "Matthew writes for Jewish Christians who are very conscious of their Jewish identity." Nolland John, "Preface" *The Gospel of Matthew: a Commentary on the Greek Text.* New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster Press, 2005: 18.

[311] "Mark seems to have been written with non-Jews in mind, but all the features in Mark that point to a non-Jewish readership disappear in Matthew's editing. Matthew promotes mission to all peoples, but he promotes it to Jewish Christians and to a constituency that appears not to have had any significant Gentile membership and seems not to have much natural social interaction with non-Jews." Ibid, 17.

[312] John 20:30-31 and 21:25 are typically cited here.

[313] Turner, David L. *Matthew*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008: 5.

Their purpose was not to satisfy intellectual curiosity by compiling historical data but to disciple their respective communities by bringing selected episodes from the life of Jesus to bear on the communities' needs.'

The exclusion of shared events in the gospels extends to the miraculous. Bible apologist Glenn Miller provides a useful comparison of the miracles of Jesus to illustrate this point.[314] Of the 36 miracles identified by Miller, only the feeding of the 5,000 appears in all four gospels. As Miller points out:

> 'The only miracle considered 'too incredible to pass up' by all four gospel authors is the feeding of the 5000. Three post-mortem revivifications, the feeding of the 4,000 (!), walking on water, calming a violent storm with a two-word phrase, and turning water into wine didn't make the cut…'[315]

Examples of this could be multiplied, and even expanded to consider the larger synoptic problem, though this is outside the scope of the present article. It is sufficient at the moment to understand that any argument on the historicity of a particular event contained in the four gospels must consider the literary purposes of each.

Looking again at Matthew

Scholars note the brisk treatment Matthew gives SM, suggesting it is intentional.[316] Aside from the parenthetical in verse 53, Matthew provides no narrative insight for the phenomena. For his primary audience, what was included seems sufficient.

Scholars have posited this may be because it is an earlier oral tradition already familiar to Matthew's primary audience.[317] If that is the case, then Matthew may have simply inserted the oral tradition into the text at the appropriate place. This would explain its presence and brevity, as well as the use of specific

[314] "Great Pushback on the Omission-for-literary-purpose-reasons:" (Correspondence dated July 2010). Cited 16 Mar 2014. Online: http://www.christianthinktank.com/quietonUFO.html.

[315] Ibid.

[316] See Gunter, *Symbolism*, fn115, for example.

[317] Brown, et al. *Messiah*, 1138.

terms, and possible apocalyptic language; all evidence of a Jewish readership[318], which is in line with the accepted purpose of Matthew's gospel.[319]

It is short-sighted to object to SM's credibility based in its lack of mention in the other gospels, or even other New Testament letters. To do so naturally leads to questions about why the gospels do not mention the 500-plus to whom Jesus appeared[320]; or why the synoptic witnesses fail to mention Lazarus[321]; or Matthew, Mark and John fail to mention the widow's son.[322] To properly assess this point necessitates an understanding of the intent of each of those authors within their respective documents.

Conclusion

New Testament scholar David L. Turner expresses the issue appropriately within the larger context of the Passion Narrative:

[318] I.e., those connected to Jerusalem and Judea, who were intimately familiar with the Jewish worldview.

[319] R.E. Brown describes SM's construction as a "small poetic quatrain", stylistic of writing attested in other NT documents: *"Poetic refrains are often a part of the popular presentation of an event, and are attested in NT references to the aftermath of the death of Jesus."* He goes on, in a related footnote (fn50) to describe these poetic refrains as sharing a common eschatological tone: "*1 Pet 3:18–19, consisting of five or six poetic lines, has an eschatological tone: The one who died in the flesh and was made alive in the spirit goes and preaches to the spirits in prison. Eph 4:8, consisting of three lines, portrays Christ ascending on high, leading a host of captives. Perhaps the NT analogue closest in form to Matt 27:51b–52b is 1 Tim 3:16, composed of six lines (short main clauses) in a pattern of three couplets: Christ is the unnamed subject and all the verbs are in the aorist passive. Frequently this poem is interpreted as ranging from the incarnation to the ascension, but the whole could refer to the death of Jesus and its aftermath. See (p. 1115 above) the Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions 1.41.3, which has a stylized pattern; it is not clear whether this is derivative from Matt or from an independent variant tradition of signs accompanying the death of Jesus."*

[320] 1 Cor 15:6.

[321] Only John records the events surrounding, and including, Lazarus' raising, Jn 11:1-44.

[322] Only Luke mentions this event, Luke 7:11-17.

> 'There are many difficulties concerning the nature and sequence of events in this extremely unusual pericope (Hagner 1995a: 849–52), **but it is not helpful to take it as a nonhistorical literary-theological creation.**
>
> If this resurrection is intended to preview the ultimate resurrection of humanity (Gundry 1994: 577), it is important that it be as genuine as that of Jesus. Only a historical resurrection can be an effect of Jesus's resurrection and an omen of the final resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20–28).
>
> For Matthew, the association of the saints' resurrection with that of Jesus marks the decisive turning of the ages. Jesus's resurrection means that the gates of hades cannot prevail against Jesus's church (Matt. 16:18) and that his enemies will answer to his authority (26:64).'[323]

While Matthew's pericope does indeed present some difficulty, a plausible explanation for its inclusion as a historical reality in the gospel narrative exists.

[323] Turner, *Matthew*, 670–671.

The Historicity of the Exodus (Part 1)

Jon Burke

Abstract:

The absence of indisputable direct evidence for the Exodus has led many scholars to deny its historicity. However, although the archaeological record represents an undeniable challenge to traditional interpretations of the Biblical record, there is sufficient evidence to convince even skeptical archaeologists that the Scriptural account describes a genuine historical exodus event.

The scholarly consensus

Although it is overwhelmingly agreed that there is clear evidence the Hebrews were already well established and known in Canaan by the mid-13th century BCE, many archaeologists believe they emerged from within the existing Canaanite population, rather than emigrating from Egypt.

Modern archaeologists and Bible scholars typically express skepticism of the Exodus, claiming there is insufficient evidence to establish its historicity. Such comments are usually cited as the scholarly consensus.

'Putting aside the possibility of divinely inspired miracles, one can hardly accept the idea of a flight of a large group of slaves from Egypt through the heavily guarded border fortifications into the desert and then into Canaan in the time of such a formidable Egyptian presence.'[324]

'There is simply no such evidence at the supposed time of the Exodus in the thirteenth century BCE.'[325]

'Nothing in the archaeological record of Egypt directly substantiates the Biblical story of the Exodus.'[326]

'But it is most unlikely that a group of some three million people—or even 80,000, which is Manetho's figure—left Egypt down the Wadi Tumilat in the reign of Ramesses or Merneptah. It is completely

[324] Finkelstein & Silberman, 'The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Sacred Texts' (2001), 61.

[325] Ibid., p. 63.

[326] Malamat, 'Let My People Go and Go and Go and Go', in Ancient Israel in Egypt and the Exodus (2012), 17.

unthinkable that any group of any related size went rattling around in the Sinai Peninsula or the Negev for any length of time thereafter.'[327]

Accounting for the absence of evidence

It is a fact that there is no direct archaeological evidence for the Exodus. This is acknowledged even by professional archaeologists who believe the Exodus happened, such as James Hoffmeier.

'Despite over a century of archaeological excavations in Egypt, proof of the dramatic Exodus has not been found.'[328]

Is the absence of direct evidence only explicable if the Exodus never happened, or could there be alternative explanations? The following list assess alternative explanations for the lack of various forms of evidence.

1. How did a large Hebrew population live in Egypt without leaving direct archaeological evidence?

The areas in which the Bible says the Hebrews were settled are still largely unexamined by archaeologists,[329] due to environmental conditions making excavation dificult.[330] Even in well examined archaeological sites, physical evidence for large groups of people who were there for some time may still be completely absent.

Several major ancient Egyptian military campaigns have failed to leave any direct archaeological evidence at all, despite involving tens of thousands of soldiers, and thousands of chariots and horses. The greatest battle ever fought by Egypt was the Battle of Kadesh, against the Hittites. Yet the Egyptian army of 20,000 soldiers

[327] Halpern, 'The Exodus from Egypt: Myth or Reality?', in The Rise of Ancient Israel (2004).

[328] Hoffmeier, 'Out of Egypt: The Archaeological Context of the Exodus', in Ancient Israel in Egypt and the Exodus (2012), 2.

[329] 'The Bible locates the Hebrews in Egypt's northeastern Delta, called the Land of Ra'amses (Genesis 47:11) and Goshen (Genesis 45:10, 47:4, 6; Exodus 8:22; 9:26). Although the Delta contains hundreds of archaeological sites, comparatively they have not received as much attention as sites on the Nile from Cairo south to Aswan.', ibid., p. 3.

[330] 'The picture has improved somewhat since 1980 but the fact remains that high water tables in the **Delta make excavating to early levels difficult and expensive**.', ibid., p. 4.

and 2,000 chariots left no archaeological record of their march from Memphis in Egypt to the river Orontes in Kadesh, a journey of approximately 1,600 kilometres which would have taken weeks.[331]

The combined numbers of the Egyptian and Hittite armies amount to around 50,000 soldiers and around 5,000 chariots, but no direct archaeological evidence has ever been found of the battle. Historians attribute this lack of evidence to the terrain, rather than dismissing the event as fictional.

'The textual and iconographic evidence points toward an open-terrain battle. Such a battle would leave little preserved in archaeological contexts.'[332]

This demonstrates that even very large groups of people in the Ancient Near East could move, settle, and fight on a massive scale, without leaving any direct physical evidence of their presence in the archaeological record.

2. Why are there no Egyptian written records of the Hebrews?

Egyptian written records for the Northern Delta and Goshen (where the Hebrews settled), were kept in military and administrative buildings in this area,. However, the wet environment has resulted in the

[331] Even if the army could have maintained an average marching speed of six kilometers an hour for twelve hours each day, it would take them three weeks to travel 1,600 kilometers.

[332] Hasel, 'Domination and Resistance: Egyptian Military Activity in the Southern Levant, Ca. 1300-1185 B.C.' (1999), 176.

destruction of almost all such written records.[333] In fact no written records have been found in this area which provide useful historical information from any period, not just the time of the Exodus.[334]

There is direct evidence that this area was settled by people the Egyptians called 'Asiatics' (Semitic people, of which the Hebrews were a sub-group),[335] and Goshen itself was referred to by the counsellors of the 16th century Pharoah Kamose as 'the land of the Asiatics'.[336]

But the Egyptians did not distinguish between one group of Asiatics and another at this time, so they had no word to describe the Hebrews specifically, even in their written records.

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[333] 'Moreover, in the moist environment of the Delta, **surviving papyri are rare**.6 The excavation at Tell el-Dab'a (ancient Avaris, the Hyksos capital), directed by Manfred Bietak of Vienna University, uses a pump and an elaborate network of pipes in order to remove water from the ground to allow diggers to reach New Kingdom levels. During a visit in 2002, I saw the scribes' quarter of the early-18th-Dynasty palace (c. 1500–1450 B.C.) that was being exposed from the moist mud of the Delta. A number of inscribed clay seals and seal impressions were found, some of which date to the 12th Dynasty (c. 1900 B.C.), but no papyrus had survived.**7 Indeed, after more than 35 years, Bietak's team has not discovered any papyri**.', Hoffmeier, 'Out of Egypt: The Archaeological Context of the Exodus', in Ancient Israel in Egypt and the Exodus (2012), 5.

[334] 'In short, the Nile Delta where the Bible says the ancient Israelites lived has produced **no historical or administrative documents** that might shed light *on any period*.', ibid., p. 5.

[335] 'Thus both **texts from Egypt and archaeological evidence** from the second millennium B.C. **agree that Semites entered Egypt with flocks and herds**, especially in times of drought in Canaan**. This is precisely the picture portrayed in Genesis regarding Jacob and his family**. Drought and famine in Canaan prompted the patriarch to send his sons to Egypt where there was grain, which eventually led them to settle in Egypt with their flocks and herds (Genesis 43:1–15).', ibid., p. 7.

[336] 'He [the Hyksos king] holds **the land of the Asiatics**; we hold **Egypt**', Pritchard, 'Ancient Near Eastern Texts' (1969), 323.

3. Why are there no Egyptian texts, inscriptions, or monuments recording the plagues and the events of the Exodus?

Archaeologists such as Hoffmeir and Kitchen argue that such records are not found because the Eygptians chose to conceal defeats rather than recording them, especially when the Pharaoh was involved.[337]

Assessing the available evidence

Whilst skepticism of the historicity of the Exodus is certainly the scholarly norm, there is a great deal of indirect archaeological evidence which gives good reason to accept the Biblical account.

'While there is no direct extra-biblical source on the Exodus (or Conquest) or on the Israelite servitude in Egypt, we do possess several significant *indirect* sources—a sort of circumstantial evidence that lends greater authority to the biblical account.'[338]

Consequently, even archaeologists who do not believe the Exodus occurred as described in the Bible still agree there is plenty of archaeological evidence supporting the historical background of the event, even if not the event itself.

'One thing is certain. The basic situation described in the Exodus saga - the phenomenon of immigrants coming down to Egypt from Canaan and settling in the eastern border regions of the delta - is abundantly verified in the archaeological finds and historical texts.'[339]

'There were Semites there, there was forced labor, there was brickmaking, there was intense building activity under Ramesses II, including of the city of Ramses. The list could easily be extended—Moses' name

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[337] 'Moreover, the types of royal inscriptions found on stelae and **temples never include any negative reports about Pharaoh and his armies**. Rather, they speak of his triumphs and deeds of valor, and even distort set-backs such as the near disaster to Ramesses II's army at the battle of Kadesh, about which we know from other sources. Consequently, no one will ever find a stela commemorating the humiliation of Pharaoh as a result of the plagues or the defeat of the Egyptian forces dispatched to bring the fleeing Hebrews back to Egypt.', Hoffmeier, 'Out of Egypt: The Archaeological Context of the Exodus', in Ancient Israel in Egypt and the Exodus (2012), 5.

[338] Malamat, 'History of Biblical Israel: major problems and minor issues' (2001), 59.

[339] Finkelstein & Silberman, 'The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Sacred Texts' (2001), 52.

is clearly Egyptian,† the story of Moses growing up in the court mirrors the practice of Egyptian kings raising the children of their Semitic vassals as hostages in the court.'[340]

Although this does not prove the Exodus did happen, it does prove that the Bible's description of the Exodus is not a literary fiction of later centuries; it contains accurate knowledge of the geographical and socio-cultural background in which such an event would have occurred, proving it is grounded in authentic historical records and events.

The following is a list of indirect evidence supporting the Biblical Exodus.

1. Semites and Canaanites typically moved down to Egypt with their flocks in times of drought and famine, and settled in Egypt as Jacob did.
   'The universal experience of Canaanites, in other words, was that in times of famine, Canaanites were sent down to Egypt. And when the Canaanites were pastoralists, it was to the land of Goshen they went—the area where the Israelites settled.' [341]
2. Foreigners such as Semites and Canaanites could become appointed to high government positions, as Joseph was.
   'In the wider population of the whole Theban region, however, both in the government and in the administration of the great funerary temples, one finds Canaanites in very responsible positions, such as the Semite Zabu, a Scribe of the Vizier (also in no. 35) who penned one of the Deir el Medina papyri.'[342]
   'Sometimes these slaves rose to positions of considerable prominence in Egypt, often to major power.'[343]
3. Many personal names of people born in Egypt (according to the Exodus record), are genuine Egyptian names of the era.
   'The presence of such Egyptian personal names as Hophni, Phinehas, and Merari among members of the house of Levi would argue for the assumption that members of this group were also in Egypt.

[340] Halpern, 'The Exodus from Egypt: Myth or Reality?', in The Rise of Ancient Israel (2004).

[341] Ibid.

[342] Lesko, 'Pharaoh's workers: the villagers of Deir el Medina', p. 68 (1994).

[343] Halpern, 'The Exodus from Egypt: Myth or Reality?', in The Rise of Ancient Israel (2004)/

Moses, also a Levite, bore an Egyptian name (from a verb meaning "to beget") which appears as an element in such Egyptian names as Thutmosis and Ramesses.'[344]

4. Egyptian records describe people called 'Apiru, a term used by Egyptians to describe certain Semitic groups. Although this term does not refer exclusively or specifically to the Hebrews, it was the word which the Egyptians would have used to refer to them.

   'The Bible places this event overtly under Merneptah (c. 1237–1227 B.C.E.), and the oppression under Ramesses II (c. 1304–1238). And there are convincing details: Texts of Ramesses II even refer to construction by captive 'Apiru,* an Egyptian term for a type of Semite sometimes encountered in small numbers on military campaigns. This term is probably related to the later Israelite word, "Hebrew" ('ivri), used in the Bible to describe Israelite ethnicity to foreigners, and used frequently in the Book of Exodus.'

   This word fell out of use a couple of hundred years after the Exodus, [345] so its use in the Exodus account shows the record was written with accurate historical information of the era in which it is set. If the Exodus account had been written after the 10th century, the writer would not have known this word.

5. Archaeologists acknowledge there is abundant evidence for Semitic people (such as the Hebrews), living in Egypt and its surrounding areas at this time.

   'There is no doubt that there was a significant Semitic population throughout Egypt during the New Kingdom (see chap. 3). Because of the preponderance of epigraphic evidence for a Syro-Palestinian presence in Egypt from the mid to late second millennium B.C., even the most skeptical historian cannot dismiss the fact that both the Bible and Egyptian sources agree on this situation.'[346]

6. References in the Exodus account to brickmaking by foreign laborers, brick tallies, and shortage of bricks resulting from inadequate supplies of straw, all show accurate historical knowledge of the era in which it was set.

   'The brickmaking, too, described as part of the oppression, reflects close knowledge of conditions in Egypt. A 15th-century tomb painting depicts Canaanite and Nubian captives making bricks at

[344] Hayes, 'Introduction to the Bible', p. 64 (1971).

[345] 'But the Egyptian term, "'Apiru," **lost its currency by the tenth century**.', Halpern, 'The Exodus from Egypt: Myth or Reality?', in The Rise of Ancient Israel (2004).

[346] Hoffmeier.' Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition' (1996), 112.

Thebes. One text even complains about a dearth of straw for brickmaking—a situation encountered by Israel in Egypt.* In Canaan, by contrast, straw was not typically an ingredient of mudbrick. Almost every detail in the tradition mirrors conditions under the XIXth Dynasty.* Especially, the idea of a sudden rise in forced labor around the time of Ramesses II is entirely consonant with historical reality.*'[347]

7. Using the term 'Pharaoh' without a specific name, was common in Egypt at the era of the Exodus, but not earlier or later.

   'By the Ramesside period (1300- I 100 B.C.), "Pharaoh" is widely used and continued popular in the late period. 114 From its inception until the tenth century, the term "Pharaoh" stood alone, without juxtaposed personal name. In subsequent periods, the name of the monarch was generally added on.

   This precise practice is found in the Old Testament; in the period covered from Genesis and Exodus to Solomon and Rehoboam, the terns "pharaoh" occurs alone, while after Shishak (ca. 925 B.C.), the title and name appear together (e.g., Pharaoh Neco, Pharaoh Hophra). Thus, the usage of "pharaoh" in Genesis and Exodus does accord well with the Egyptian practice from the fifteenth through the tenth centuries.'[348]

Conclusion

Despite a lack of indisputable hard evidence for the exodus as commonly understood from the Biblical text, here is sufficient archaeological evidence to convince even skeptical archaeologists that the Scriptural account describes a genuine historical exodus event.

The next section of this study will review and address typical arguments made against the historicity of the Exodus.

[347] Halpern, 'The Exodus from Egypt: Myth or Reality?', in The Rise of Ancient Israel (2004).

[348] Hoffmeier.' Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition' (1996), 87-88.

Review: The Ark Before Noah[349]

Ken Gilmore

The announcement early this year by British Museum Assyriologist Irving Finkel of the discovery of a second millennium BCE cuneiform tablet detailing another version of the Mesopotamian flood story has attracted considerable interest. This is due both to the intrinsic appeal of discovering a cuneiform text outlining the flood narrative, as well as for the news that it states how animals entered a *round* ark 'two by two' a detail that previously was found only in the Genesis narrative.

Since George Smith's 1872 discovery of a cuneiform text detailing a Babylonian flood narrative with strong points of similarity with the Genesis flood story, there has been considerable debate about the relationship between the two flood traditions. Irving, currently Assistant Keeper of Ancient Mesopotamian Script, Languages, and Cultures at the British Museum's Department of Middle East has written in *"The Ark Before Noah: Decoding the Story of the Flood"* yet another instalment in this debate, in which he aims to outline what the 'Ark Tablet' says, its relationship to the existing cuneiform traditions, and how in his opinion the cuneiform tradition became part of the Hebrew Bible.

Inevitably this means the scope of *The Ark Before Noah* extends well beyond the story of its discovery and translation. The early chapters provide an overview of Mesopotamian language, history and culture, cuneiform literature, scribal culture and literacy, and the cross-cultural links between Mesopotamia and Greece. Finkel also provides a brief autobiographical sketch, which includes details of his studies of Assyriology and cuneiform under the legendary Assyriologist Wilfred Lambert at the University of Birmingham.

Prior to the discovery of the Ark Tablet,[350] the Babylonian flood story was represented by three cuneiform versions in two languages (Sumerian and Akkadian) across nine tablets, dating from the Old Babylonian

[349] Hodder & Stoughton, 2014.

[350] Finkel first encountered the Ark Tablet in 1985 when Douglas Simmonds, its original owner brought it in for identification. Simmonds had inherited the Ark Tablet, along with other near Eastern antiquities from his father who had obtained them when stationed in the near East at the end of the Second World War. Simmonds was reluctant to leave it with Finkel for analysis, and it was only a chance encounter with Simmonds in 2009 that allowed Finkel to obtain the Ark Tablet on a long-term basis for deciphering.

period (1900 – 1600 BCE), the Middle Babylonian (1600 – 1200 BCE), the Late Assyrian (800 – 600 BCE) and the late Babylonian (600 – 500 BCE):

- The Sumerian Flood story
- Atrahasis
- The Epic of Gilgamesh

The Ark Tablet belongs to the Old Babylonian era, dating at around 1750 BCE, making it one of the oldest flood texts in existence. What distinguishes it from the other tablets is that there is no narrative. Rather, it consists of nine speeches. Finkel's speculates that it may be a 'note of the essential spoken parts for the role of Enki - one voice - and Atra-hasis - the other - which, rationally speaking, can hardly derive from any other use than some kind of public performance.'[351]

What the Ark Tablet lacks in narrative it makes up for in its description of the Ark, which Finkel states was a large rope coracle covered with bitumen approximately 70 metres in diameter. Intriguingly, when Finkel re-examined two other cuneiform flood tablets he asserts that:

"The crucial cuneiform signs were in one case damaged and in the other without good context, but in both cases the key word kippatu, 'circle', was there in the clay."[352]

Against this is the fact that the Ark in Gilgamesh is cuboid. Finkel not unreasonably points out that as the text of Gilgamesh we have dates from the 1st millennium, it is likely that some editorial revision may have occurred. Furthermore, the passage of time would have made the older texts lying behind Gilgamesh obscure or damaged. Finkel however argues that in Gilgamesh XI line 58, the word kippatu (circle) is found, though not written in simple signs but with a Sumerian ideogram that has been translated as 'area':

> *Ark Tablet 9*: Let her floor area be one 'acre', let her sides be one rod (high).
>
> *Gilgamesh XI 58*: One 'acre' was her circle, ten rods each her sides stood high
>
> "In *Gilgamesh XI* the statement in lines 29-30 that the boat's *dimensions should all correspond* and her *length and breadth should be the same* have become divorced from the crucial issue of her *roundness*,

[351] Irving Finkel, The Ark Before Noah (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2014), Kindle Location 1737

[352] Finkel, Kindle Location 1990

> for this is only referred to further on (and non-explicitly) in line 58. This separation within the text of features that belonged together imposed the unfounded idea of a 'square' boat, far from the original meaning. This had the effect of displacing the original circular ground plan idea, enabling the very improbable *cube* to come into existence."[353]

The paucity of references to coracles in Mesopotamian literature on boats and the lack of a specific word for coracle in Akkadian is a strong counterargument to the coracle hypothesis which Finkel counters by referring to the 1st millennium BCE Legend of Sargon, which describes how he was found as a child after being placed in a bitumen-coated reed basket on the Euphrates:

> She placed me in a reed *quppu* and made its opening watertight with bitumen.[354]

Finkel notes that the semantic range of *quppu* according to modern Assyrian dictionaries includes wicker basket, box, and wooden chest. The Arabic word word for oracle is *quffa* (primarily, it means basket). His argument that as *quffu* is cognate with *quppu*, it shows that *quppu* could mean coracle is certainly plausible.[355] Finkel's assertion that the reference to sealing the opening of Sargon's basket is a direct textual parallel to the Babylonian flood story is intriguing, and does suggest a connection between the two narratives.

One of Finkel's goals in *writing "The Ark Before Noah"* was to show how he believes the ancient Hebrews adapted the Mesopotamian Flood tradition. As part of his case, he observes that:

1. The Hebrew word for ark – *tēvāh* – occurs only in in the flood narrative and in Ex 2:2-6 to describe the ark in which Noah was found
2. The Hebrew word for 'gopher wood' occurs nowhere else in the OT
3. The words for bitumen and smear (*kopher* and *kāphar*, respectively) are Akkadian loan words (*kupru* and *kapāru*, respectively).
4. Both arks were coated with bitumen

[353] Finkel, Kindle Location 2068

[354] Finkel, Kindle Location 2105

[355] Finkel does admit that the Ark Tablet uses the word *eleppu*, rather than *quppu*, and nots that there is minimal cuneiform textual evidence for *eleppu* being used or coracle elsewhere.

The Akkadian background for *kopher* and *kāphar* suggest to Finkel that *tēvāh* and gopher are also Akkadian loanwords, though he admits that there is no evidence of this to date.

Finkel refers to a 500 BCE cuneiform text that refers to a *ṭubbû* boat:

> "a boat (*eleppu*) which is six cubits wide at the beam, a *ṭubbû* which is at the crossing, and a boat (*eleppu*) five and a half cubits wide at the beam which is at the bridge, they exchanged for (?) one boat which is five cubits wide at the beam."[356]

Etymologically, it is impossible for *tēvāh* to derive from *ṭubbû*, as Finkel acknowledges. In postulating a Babylonian origin for *tēvāh*, Finkel speculates that it is either a Hebraisation of *ṭubbû*, or a Wanderwort. Both arguments strike me as being less than convincing, though given Finkel's background it would be premature to completely dismiss either option.

The reference in the Ark Tablet to animals entering the ark 'two by two' has attracted some attention given that prior to this discovery, only the Biblical flood narrative had this detail:

> But the wild animals from the steppe […] …
>
> Two by two …did [they enter the ark.] 51-52

The implication of a 2nd millennium cuneiform tablet describing animals entering the ark two by two promoted Finkel to look again at OId Babylonian Atrahasis as "there is a broken line in exactly this spot where only the traces of the first sign survive: 'x […] .. he put on board', and previously there had been no way of identifying this sign for certain."[357]

He states that when looking at the original OBA tablet in the British museum, one can positively identify it as the first part of the word for two each or two by two, meaning that the OBA can be reconstructed: Two by two he brought on board the boat.

FInkel accepts the hypothesis that the Genesis flood narrative is compiled from two sources:

> Gen 6:19-22 refers to two of every kind of animal to preserve life

[356] Finkel, Kindle Location 2292

[357] Finkel, Kindle Location 3023

> Gen 7:2-3 refers to 7 pairs of clean animals, a pair of unclean animals, and seven pairs of birds of the air.

En passant, his claim that "the Hebrew flood tradition - like the Sumerian and Babylonian that preceded it - could only have in mind the range of species that *prevailed locally*. All the animals, birds, and insects, in other words, meant only *all that they were familiar with*"[358] can be added to the body of evidence that argues against a geographically universal flood. Finkel, who does not believe the Ark actually existed, can hardly be accused of having a theological agenda on this point.

Apart from making a case for textual dependence of the Genesis narrative on the cuneiform tradition, Finkel recognises the need to construct a plausible mechanism for how the Judean exiles could have obtained access to the cuneiform tablets.[359] For Finkel, the bird motif in Gilgamesh and Genesis argue decisively in favour of Genesis being dependent on the cuneiform tradition:

> "Here particularly, it seems to me, the parallels between the two traditions are overwhelming, and can only be explained by literary borrowing. Differences in detail - such as the species or order of the birds - are of an altogether different order: it is the whole literary episode which is so telling."[360]

While the parallels between Genesis and the Mesopotamian tradition at the very least reflect a shared cognitive environment,[361] there are strong arguments against direct literary borrowing, if only as Wenham points out, because of differences in narrative detail and emphasis.[362] Cassuto's observation on the

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[358] Finkel, Kindle Location 3167

[359] Interestingly, as the Ark Tablet ends just as the flood begins arrive; Finkel is relying on the existing texts – mainly Gilgamesh – to argue his case.

[360] Finkel, Kindle Location 3570

[361] "There is really little question among scholars of Scripture and the ancient Near East that the Hebrew version is later and owes its existence to its Akkadian predecessors, in terms of shared cultural and literary motifs if not actual retellings of those Akkadian precursors." Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012), 47.

[362] "A stronger case can be made for asserting a relationship between Genesis and Atrahasis in that Atrahasis also presents primeval history as a sequence of creation-divine displeasure-flood. In other words this, the standard Babylonian account of creation, sees creation as a prelude to the flood, just as Gen 1–11 does. Nevertheless, it is still quite improbable that there is direct literary dependence of Genesis on Atrahasis. The general thrust and the various details of the narrative are too different

differences between Genesis and Gilgamesh on their use of the bird motif alone is reason to regard claims of direct literary borrowing with reserve.[363]

Having rejected the conservative argument that Judean and Babylonian flood narratives were independent traditions sharing a common ancestor, Finkel surprisingly rejects the 'literary osmosis' model:

> "Leaving aside the intrinsic improbability, such undemonstrable processes likewise would not produce Hebrew narrative that would parallel the carefully structures literary account that we know from Gilgamesh XI."[364]

Finkel is surely correct here. Even if his assertion of direct literary borrowing is overstated, the parallels between Atrahasis and Genesis 1-11 imply direct familiarity with the cuneiform text, not just a familiarity with an oral tradition. That requires both literacy in Akkadian, Sumerian, and the cuneiform text, as well as access to the texts.

The question of what motivation the exiled Judeans would have to frame the Genesis narrative from creation to Babel with close parallels to the cuneiform text is one that Finkel – to his credit – takes very seriously. Successive shocks of defeat, exile, and loss of cultic centre would strike to the very core of their identity, particularly given their aniconic tradition:

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to make this probable. The similarities can be explained by the origin of both accounts in neighboring countries in roughly the same chronological period." [362] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (vol. 1; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 8–9.

[363] The Gilgameš Epic speaks also of the putting forth of a swallow, but in the Scriptural story there is no mention of this bird. Whether the sending of the swallow was part of the ancient tradition and the Torah omitted it for some reason, or on the contrary it is an addition of the Babylonian poet, it is not possible to decide. Furthermore, according to the Babylonian Epic the dove was sent forth only once, but in the Torah account three times. And again, the order in which the two birds are mentioned is different in the Bible from that of the Gilgameš Epic, which speaks of the dove first and of the raven last. The Pentateuchal order is more in keeping with the general character of the Scriptural narrative, which is wholly based on an ethical interpretation of the story. Cassuto, U. *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part II, From Noah to Abraham*. (Translated by Israel Abrahams. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1997), 109

[364] Finkel, Kindle Location 3658

> "No other religion of antiquity could have survived focused exclusively on one god who could not be seen. Once they arrived in Babylon the Judaeans had little beyond this highly elusive abstraction to exemplify their belief or give structure to their displaced identity."[365]

Furthermore, Finkel argues that there is evidence that during the middle of the 1st millennium BCE, a 'monotheistic framework' was evolving around Marduk, god of the city of Babylon and the hero of the creation epic Enuma Elish:

> Consider the message of this innocent-looking little theological text:
>
> *Urash is Marduk of planting*
> *Lugalakia is Marduk of ground water*
> *Ninurta is Marduk of the hoe*
> *Nergal is Marduk of war*
> *Zababa is Marduk of battle*
> *Enlil is Marduk of lordship and deliberation*
> *Sin is Marduk as illuminator of night*
> *Shamash is Marduk of justice*
> *Adad is Marduk of rain*
> *Tishpak is Marduk of hosts*
> *Ishtaran is Marduk of …*
> *Shuqamunu is Marduk of the trough*
> *Mami is Marduk of potter's clay*
>
> This is a truly remarkable document, for in it we witness theological innovation in process, fixed in time. A theologian is speculating that Marduk is 'really' the only god, expressing this by the proposition that fourteen major and ancient gods, independent deities with their own temples, cult and followers, are but aspects of Marduk, his offices, so to speak. This text does not stand in isolation. There are similar 'syncretisms' laid out for Zarpanitu, Marduk's wife, and their son Nabu, making

[365] Finkel, Kindle Location 3901

> what in other contexts might be called a divine trinity, and there are longer theological disquisitions in the same vein.[366]
>
> The Judaeans were thus to encounter a native religious system more akin to their own than would have been the case at an earlier date. Babylonian monotheism, whether a matter of wider state policy or closed theology within the colleges (let alone debated loose on the streets), must have offered a threatening backdrop to Judaeans with their own belief in a single god and responsibility to preserve that belief from contamination. It is also worth pointing out that the epithets of praise that were heaped on Marduk (shepherd, champion of the poor and weak, protector of widows and children, fighter for justice and truth) would not have sounded strange to Judaean ears brought up in their own tradition. [367]

Again, Finkel's thesis surely is correct. If maintaining theological orthodoxy in their own country had been difficult, the more perceptive members of the Judean community in exile would have recognised that the presence of a competing monolatrous theology espoused by their captors would present the biggest threat to their continued existence as a religious and national group they had faced.

Finkel's argument that this threat to the survival of the Judeans both as a religious and a national entity spurred the creation of the Bible is hardly news to Old Testament scholars. Brueggemann notes:

> It is now increasingly agreed that *the Old Testament in its final form is a product of and response to the Babylonian Exile.* This premise needs to be stated more precisely. The Torah (Pentateuch) was likely completed in response to the exile, and the subsequent formation of the prophetic corpus and the "writings" as bodies of religious literature (canon) is to be understood as a product of Second Temple Judaism. This suggests that by their intention, these materials are not to be understood in their final form diachronically…but more as an intentional and coherent response to a particular circumstance of crisis…Whatever older materials may have been utilized (and the use of old materials can hardly be doubted), the exilic and/or postexilic location of the final form of the text suggests that the Old

[366] Finkel, Kindle Location 3910

[367] Finkel, Kindle Location 3929

> Testament materials, understood normatively, are to be taken precisely in an acute crisis of displacement, when old certitudes—sociopolitical as well as theological—had failed.[368]

What is fascinating is his recognition that osmosis is unlikely to have allowed specific details of the cuneiform tradition to become known to the Judeans, as well as his willingness to recognise the book of Daniel as providing evidence showing how the Judeaan community were able to access these texts:

> The Hebrew Bible tells us in so many words that a hand-picked group of Judaean intelligentsia were inducted into the mysteries of cuneiform at the capital, and I see absolutely no reason not to take this statement at face value:
>
> *3 Then the king commanded his palace master Ashpenaz to bring some of the Israelites of the royal family and of the nobility, 4 young men without physical defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight, and competent to serve in the king's palace; they were to be taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans. 5 The king assigned them a daily portion of the royal rations of food and wine. They were to be educated for three years, so that at the end of that time they could be stationed in the king's court.* Daniel 1:3-5
>
> The Book of Daniel is composed of tales about the Babylonian court interspersed with great visions, set in the time of the Exile, under the Neo-Babylonian kings and their Persian successors. Whereas it was once believed that the book dated to the sixth century BC, scholars now consider the editing of the whole, which incorporates older, traditional material, to date to the second century BC, just four hundred years after the Exile. This verdict may be true in general but to my mind the opening chapters of the book give, just for a moment, an oddly convincing flavour of Nebuchadnezzar's court, and with regard to particularly the reference to learning the literature and language of the Chaldeans cuneiform classes, which are given such pointed attention right at the beginning of the book, I follow the text resolutely.
>
> There can be no doubt that what is meant, by this, is instruction in the cuneiform writing system and the Babylonian language. The Judaeans spoke Hebrew; the educated among them knew Aramaic. The programme was evidently part of Babylonian state policy to avoid long-term difficulty with imported

[368] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 74–75.

> populations: the cream would be acculturated to Babylonian life and ways, and the most effective and lasting way to achieve this was through reading and writing. We are told that Daniel and his intimates went on to become judges: all legal matters were conducted in Babylonian and recorded in cuneiform for a long time to come.
>
> As far as I know, my idea that this three-year teaching programme must refer to cuneiform has neither been proposed nor defended before, largely due perhaps to the absurd dismissal of the Book of Daniel as a reputable witness, but it is easy to show that, from the point of view of the humanities, this is one of the most significant passages in the Hebrew Bible. It allows us to make sense of many matters that are both unexplained and often left unconnected with one another.[369]

His willingness to reject the hermeneutic of suspicion when it comes to reading the historical section of Daniel is needless to say a welcome change.

Finkel needless to say argues that as the Judeans inherited the Ark tradition from the Babylonians, 'Biblical Ararat corresponds to the ancient name Urartu, which was the ancient political and geographical entity due north of the Mesopotamian heartland included in the Map of the World.'[370]

Although ostensibly a popular-level text, The Ark Before Noah contains four appendices covering

1. Mesopotamian views on ghosts, the soul and reincarnation,
2. Gilgamesh and the Ark Tablet, with emphasis on how the shape of the Ark changed in the cuneiform traditions
3. A detailed examination of how to build the coracle in the Ark Tablet
4. A line-by-line examination of the Ark Tablet

One can safely skip them without missing out on any substantive points, but for those interested in the ancient Near Eastern background of the OT, they repay close reading.

The Ark Before Noah is recommended if only for the fact that it an account of how a newly-translated cuneiform text has expanded our understanding of the Mesopotamian flood tradition written by the respected Assyriologist responsible for its translation.

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[369] Finkel, Kindle Location 4017

[370] Finkel, Kindle Location 4400

The scope of Finkel's book however extends well beyond this. It provides an excellent lay-level introduction into cuneiform literature by an acknowledged expert whose love of the subject suffuses every paragraph. His thesis that the Genesis flood narrative was adapted from cuneiform originals by Judean exiles is one that I regard with caution if only because the case for direct literary copying is one for which strong counter-arguments exist.

Needless to say, it is a position to which any apologist will need to offer a rebuttal, and Finkel's presentation of this position is an informed and well-reasoned one. His argument that incipient Babylonian monolatry may have been one of the main spurs leading to the formation of the Old Testament is fascinating, and coupled with his thesis that the three year training program referred to in Daniel 1:3-5 included cuneiform, allowing the trainees access to the cuneiform accounts of the flood is reason enough to recommend the book.

Review: Aaronofsky's Noah

Dave Burke

Background Information

Darren Aronofsky, the Jewish director of Hollywood blockbuster *Noah* (2014) has described his movie as 'the least biblical biblical movie ever made.' While somewhat exaggerated, this deliberately provocative statement confirmed what everyone should already have known: that the script of *Noah* would not be faithful to Scripture.[371]

Any further doubt was removed by the trailers,[372] which show God communicating with Noah through troubling dreams, Methuselah wielding a flaming sword, and a raging battle in front of the ark—to name just a few of the many unbiblical elements.

No-one entering the theatre should be under any illusion that *Noah* offered a strictly biblical narrative. Despite this, many Christians have complained that *Noah* wasn't as accurate as they'd expected it to be.[373] Don't be one of those Christians. Inform yourself before watching the film, and you won't be disappointed.

Aronofsky has told interviewers that the story of Noah is a personal favourite, and its themes have fascinated him since childhood. Although a weak atheist/borderline agnostic today, he was raised in a religious Jewish household, remains a cultural Jew, and retains respect for Jewish theological traditions.

[371] Paramount (the film studio responsible for producing *Noah*) has issued the following disclaimer: 'The film is **inspired by** the story of Noah. While **artistic licence has been taken**, we believe that this film is true to the essence, values, and integrity of a story that is a cornerstone of faith for millions of people worldwide. The biblical story of Noah can be found in the book of Genesis.' The key words here are 'inspired by' and 'artistic licence has been taken.'

[372] See here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qmj5mhDwJQ

[373] Noah is rated PG-13, which means it contains themes unsuitable for children under the age of 13. Incredibly, I have read a review from one person who complained because his seven year old child was bewildered and upset by the film's depiction of Noah. I take the view that if a parent insists on bringing a seven year old child into a PG-13 movie they only have themselves to blame when the child responds badly. Don't be that parent.

Aronofsky's research for *Noah* included extensive reading from ancient Jewish commentaries, and consultation with rabbis from several different Jewish organisations. His source material includes the Bible, Jewish rabbinic tradition, early Christian theological speculation, and the Kabbalah.

While it may seem strange to us, some rabbis have said that Aronofsky's version of Noah's story is easily accommodated among the plurality of views which comprise the Midrash tradition (an ancient homiletical commentary). In other words it is 'kosher' from a rabbinic perspective. Thus Aronofsky's interpretation operates within the context of Midrash, and must be assessed on that basis.

Anyone going into the movie without awareness of these facts is likely to be confused and disappointed.

To ensure that my review is as objective and well informed as possible I have spent the past few days researching and reading the extra biblical Jewish texts upon which Aronofsky's interpretation is based, including Midrash and the Zohar. It has been a helpful and enlightening process.

While this review does contain spoilers it neither comprises nor includes a detailed plot summary.

God

Some reviewers have claimed God is never mentioned in *Noah.* The opposite is true: God is referred to at least twenty times as 'the Creator', and twice as 'God.'[374]

This is consistent with the Jewish aversion to using God's name and remains faithful to the biblical record, which tells us that God's name was not revealed until He spoke with Moses.[375] 'Creator' is an Old Testament title for God, and Jesus refers to Him as 'the Creator' in Matthew 19:4.[376]

[374] Ironically, nobody uses the word 'God' in the biblical account of Noah's story (except God Himself; Genesis 9:6, 16). In fact God is the only one who says anything throughout the entire narrative. Additionally, God is not mentioned anywhere in the book of Esther. So I'm not sure what all the fuss is about.

[375] Exodus 6:3, 'I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name "the Lord" [Yahweh] I was not known to them.'

[376] 'He answered, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female?"'

In Aronofsky's film God never speaks to Noah verbally, instead communicating by dreams which Noah struggles to comprehend. This is the opposite of the biblical account, in which God speaks verbally but we have no words from Noah.

Creation

Creation is depicted as occurring *ex nihilo*[377] within **6 literal days**; this is explicitly stated by Noah, who correctly describes the work of each day in turn, as recorded in Scripture (which he quotes).

Contrary to some reviews there is no 'evolution sequence.' Instead we see a rapid montage of different animals as the camera pans from sea to land. This sequence does not follow the order of evolution; instead it follows the order of creation in Genesis 1.

The movie does not depict any animal evolving from any other (Noah specifically informs his sons that all animals were created 'according to their kinds') and there is no suggestion that humans evolved from apes or ape-like beings.

Adam & Eve

Adam and Eve are depicted as humans covered in a bright golden glow. This idea is taken from the Genesis Rabba (a Midrash composed between AD 400-600) which teaches that the first couple were 'clothed with light' until the Fall, after which they were 'clothed with skins.'[378]

When Noah recounts Adam and Eve's story to his children he warns them that 'Temptation led to sin.' This leads to a silhouetted depiction of Cain slaying Abel, which becomes a rapid montage of human violence throughout history.

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[377] Latin: 'from nothing.' Aronofsky's Noah commences his account of creation with the words 'In the beginning there was nothing.' Note that *creatio ex nihilo* has been a standard view within Jewish and Christian theological traditions for more than 2,000 years, and typically presupposes the existence of a divine Creator. When Noah says 'there was nothing' he is not denying the presence of God.

[378] Some rabbis took this to mean that Adam and Eve's literal skin was composed of pure light and only became flesh after the Fall. Others believed they wore garments of light which were subsequently replaced by the divinely provided coats of skin in Genesis 3:21. Aronofsky seems to have chosen the former interpretation.

Each image is superimposed over the last one, with Cain and Abel replaced by a swift succession of soldiers from many different cultures and eras, including our own. This same technique is later used to great effect in the creation sequence.

Noah

In Aronofsky's movie Noah is a vegetarian (this is biblical; the sanction to eat meat was only given after the flood[379]) but contrary to some reviews he is **not** a vegan.

When Ham asks why the family doesn't kill animals for food, Noah simply replies 'We take only what we need, only what we can use.' This explains Noah's leather boots, which are clearly visible in several scenes. While he may not eat meat, he has no qualms about using animal skins for clothing.

Similarly, Abel's animal sacrifice was acceptable to God even though meat-eating itself was not yet approved. In *Noah*, as in Scripture, faithful believers of the antediluvian era ate no meat and did not kill animals wantonly.

Noah maintains a sustainable semi-agrarian existence, but contrary to some reviews he is **not** a radical tree-hugging pacifist. Throughout the course of the movie he slaughters an unspecified number of Cainites with ruthless brutality (three in the first 10 minutes!) and cuts down an entire forest. Many conservative Christian viewers have actually complained that Aronofsky's Noah is not peaceful enough.

In an early scene Noah finds a dying animal hunted by the Cainites for food. Minutes later he is confronted by angry Cainites and kills them all in self-defence. Rather than burying the dead animal he wraps it in cloth and cremates it on an altar of stones, silently and reverently raising his eyes to heaven in the manner of a prayer. If this is not a burnt offering, I don't know what else it could be.

[379] Genesis 9:3.

In Aronofsky's movie Noah does not preach to the wicked and is not mocked by doubters.[380] This is faithful to the OT account, which never says Noah preached to those around him[381] and neither states or implies that he was mocked for building the ark.[382]

In Scripture Noah is never described as speaking, consulting God, or praying. We don't even have any record of him offering sacrifices until after the flood.[383] By contrast, Aronofsky's Noah seeks God's guidance on several occasions and presents a burnt offering in the first 20 minutes of the film.[384]

The most confronting part of the film occurs in the final act. Noah and his family have been afloat for an unspecified period, without any message from God. Their uncertain fate breeds doubt in Noah's mind. Having reflected upon the violence and depravity of the Cainites' last days he becomes convinced that humanity is irredeemable.

Noah despairs, believing God's plan to renew creation cannot be achieved as long while sin is perpetuated. He shares these thoughts with his family, voicing his belief that Japheth will outlive them all and die alone as the last human on Earth. This, he says, is the only way the world can revert to its Edenic state. The animals are innocent and must be preserved but humans must not survive, lest their propensity to sin result in a fresh cycle of corruption and violence.

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[380] Even Tubal-Cain does not deny that the flood will eventuate; instead he boasts 'I am not afraid of miracles' and plans to take the ark for himself by killing Noah and his family.

[381] II Peter 2:5 refers to Noah as 'a herald of righteousness.' Is this a reference to literal preaching about the coming flood, or does it simply mean Noah proclaimed the ways of God to those around him? I am unsure. Notice also the lack of any reference to mockery from unbelievers. These are ideas we traditionally bring to the text (mainly via inference and speculation). They *may* be correct, but they are not found in Scripture.

[382] However, *Babylonian Talmud: Sanhedrin* 108a, b, *Genesis Rabba* 30:7 and *Leviticus Rabba* 27:5 all claim that Noah was mocked and persecuted by unbelievers.

[383] The first recorded sacrifice by Noah is in Genesis 8:20, after he has emerged from the ark.

[384] This is my interpretation of the scene. I am open to alternative views which explain the presence of a stone altar, ritual preparation of an animal corpse, and Noah's silent, heavenward gaze as the fire consumes it.

Soon afterwards Noah learns from Shem that Ila is pregnant.[385] At the height of a furious argument he accuses them both of undermining God by choosing to procreate, in open defiance of the Creator's will. Overcome by grief he tells Ila that if the child is a boy he will replace Japheth as the last man to die; if a girl she will be slain to ensure the end of humanity. This has a predictable effect on the family dynamic.

As the months drag on, Noah is racked with guilt and uncertainty. He goes to the roof of the ark and pleads with God, begging for an alternative to his own bloody solution.[386] But there is no reply, so he steels himself for the hideous task and resolves to carry it through.

I saw this as a deliberate parallel with Abraham, who was also prepared to kill his own child in obedience to God. The crucial difference between these two men is that Abraham correctly understood God's command but was spared from carrying it out, whereas Aronofsky's Noah is wrong and must choose to stop himself.[387]

It strikes me as odd that some Christians have condemned Aronofsky for portraying Noah as a man prepared to commit infanticide when Abraham was ready to kill Isaac. Surely the only valid criticism here is narrative inaccuracy, since the idea that a patriarch was willing to kill his own flesh and blood is entirely biblical.

Ila gives birth to twin girls and Noah pursues her to the upper deck. At the last moment he experiences an epiphany and spares the babies.[388] Yet Noah still seems troubled as they start a new life on dry land. In his heart he is wondering: have I obeyed or betrayed the Creator?

The scenes which follow imply he seeks solace in wine. True to Scripture, Noah becomes drunk and is discovered naked by Ham. The episode is tastefully depicted with a long shot of Noah face down on the ground.

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[385] Ila was originally barren, but unknown to Noah she was healed by Methuselah before boarding the ark.

[386] 'I cannot do this! Have I not done everything else you asked of me? Is that not enough?' Noah in Aronofsky's *Noah* (2014).

[387] I wonder if Abraham offered a final agonised prayer—perhaps akin to Christ's in Gethsemane—before leading Isaac to Mt Moriah.

[388] 'All I had in my heart was love.' Noah in Aronofsky's *Noah* (2014).

Shem arrives shortly with Japheth, and together they drag a blanket over their father, walking carefully backwards while averting their eyes (another point of accuracy typically ignored by negative reviews). There is no explicit cursing of Ham, but it's obvious he won't be hanging around for long (and he doesn't).

In the closing moments of the film Noah witnesses a rainbow in the sky[389] and correctly recognises this as God's covenant with man. The rainbow pulses outward from the sun in a perfect, ever-expanding circle as Noah blesses his family with the words of Genesis 1:28, 'Be fruitful and multiply!'

Aronofsky's depiction of Noah is a disturbing one for Christians, but Jewish viewers will recognise the darker portrait which emerges from Midrash. In rabbinic tradition the statement 'Noah was blameless in his generations'[390] merely refers to the fact that he was more righteous than anyone else by the standards of his day, and does not imply he was above reproach.

[389] Several, in fact.

[390] Genesis 6:9.

On the contrary, some ancient rabbis appear to have seen Noah as more of an antihero. According to them, Noah might not have been considered righteous in the days of Moses or Samuel.

The Zohar claims Noah challenged God's judgement, only to receive a stinging rebuke:

> 'How did God answer Noah when he came out of the ark? Noah saw the whole world destroyed. He began to cry for the world and said, **"Master of the world, You are called Compassionate! You should have shown compassion for Your creatures!"**
>
> The Holy One answered him, "Foolish shepherd! **Now you say this**, but not when I spoke to you tenderly, saying 'Make yourself an ark of gopher wood…' [Genesis 6:14]. Because I saw that you were righteous before me, **I lingered with you and spoke to you at length so that you would ask for mercy for the world!**
>
> But as soon as you heard that you would be safe in the ark, the evil of the world did not touch your heart. You built the ark and saved yourself. Now that the world has been destroyed you utter questions and pleas?"[391]

Notice that in this story the warning of the flood was intended to test Noah's concern for the rest of creation. God is angry that Noah failed to plea for humanity while there was still time, and openly accuses him of selfishness. The moment his safety was assured, Noah had no thought for anyone else.

Midrash traditionally contrasts Noah against Abraham, who pleaded for Sodom and Gomorrah on the grounds that a few innocent should not perish with them. It is implied that this act of mercy uniquely qualified Abraham rather than Noah as the father of Israel.

Other Jewish assessments of Noah are equally sobering:

> '**Three men craved for things of earth**, and none of them made a success of his occupation. Cain was a tiller of the ground; we know his sad history. **Noah attempted to become a husbandman, and he became a drunkard.** Uzziah became a leper [II Chronicles 26:10-20].[392]

[391] *Zohar Midrash Hane'elam.*

[392] *Genesis Rabba* 22.

> Even Noah, however, was left **not because he deserved it**, but because he found grace.[393]
>
> Noah **began** by being righteous in his generation, **but fell back and became a man of earth** [Genesis 9:20].'[394]

It is texts such as these which informed and inspired Aronofsky's interpretation of Noah. If we wish to judge the movie objectively we must familiarise ourselves with the source material and learn what Aronofsky saw in the Jews' own interpretations of this story.

Noah's Family

Scripture does not record the name of Noah's wife or daughters-in-law. The *Book of Jubilees* says Noah's wife's name was 'Emzârâ.[395] Genesis Rabba says she was called Naamah.[396]
In Aronofsky's film her name is Naameh.

The *Book of Jubilees* says Shem's wife was called Sedeqetelebab, Ham's wife was Ne'elatama'uk, and Japheth's wife was 'Adataneses.[397] In the movie Noah only has one daughter-in-law: Shem's wife, Ila.

Noah's sons receive little characterisation (Japheth least of all). Shem is portrayed as highly moral, while Ham is the brooding black sheep. It is established early in the film that he will be a problem. His resentment

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[393] *Genesis Rabba* 29.

[394] *Genesis Rabba* 36.

[395] 'And in the twenty-fifth jubilee Noah took to himself a wife, and her name was `Emzârâ, the daughter of Râkê'êl, the daughter of his father's brother, in the first year in the fifth week: and in the third year thereof she bare him Shem, in the fifth year thereof she bare him Ham, and in the first year in the sixth week she bare him Japheth.' *Jubilees* 4:33.

[396] 'Naamah, daughter of Lemech and sister to Tubalcain, was Noah's wife.' *Genesis Rabba* 23.

[397] 'And Ham …parted from his father, he and his sons with him, Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan. And he built for himself a city and called its name after the name of his wife Ne'elatama'uk. And Japheth saw it, and became envious of his brother, and he too built for himself a city, and he called its name after the name of his wife 'Adataneses. And Shem dwelt with his father Noah, and he built a city close to his father on the mountain, and he too called its name after the name of his wife Sedeqetelebab.' *Jubilees* 7:13-16.

of Noah is motivated by a tragic incident in which he loses woman he loves. This strikes me as an unnecessary attempt to mitigate—or at least rationalise—his later betrayal.

Ila conceives before the flood commences, and starts to experience morning sickness just as the rain stops. This is a timeframe of ~40 days, consistent with the typical emergence of morning sickness at ~6 weeks.

Aronofsky's Methuselah has been unfairly misrepresented by reviewers[398] as everything from 'a sort of witch doctor with mental health issues' to 'a crazed warlock.' None of these ridiculous caricatures are even remotely close to the truth.

The film portrays Methuselah as a wise, ancient patriarch of great courage and virtue. In a disappointingly brief flashback he singlehandedly destroys an entire army of Cainites with a flaming sword.[399] Methuselah is said to have lived with the earthbound Watchers and imbibed much of their wisdom. He also possesses a supernatural ability to heal.

Noah visits Methuselah seeking advice about his apocalyptic dreams,[400] and Methuselah confirms that the dreams are prophetic.[401] Contrary to some of the more bizarre negative reviews, Methuselah does not live on a diet of mind-altering berries and does not provide Noah with a hallucinogenic drug. Instead he

[398] Mainly American fundamentalist Christian reviewers, it must be said. One went so far as to say 'We might consider burning at the stake any Christian leader who endorses this movie.'

[399] This obvious wink to Genesis 3:24 is adapted from rabbinic tradition. In Louis Ginsberg's *Legends of the Jews* (1909) he relates the tale of Methuselah slaying 940,000 demons in a single minute with a mighty sword upon which the ineffable Tetragrammaton was inscribed. The full text of Ginsburg's book is available online (here: http://sacred-texts.com/jud/loj/loj105.htm).

[400] 'He speaks to you. You must trust that He speaks in a way that you can understand.' Methuselah in Aronofsky's *Noah* (2014).

[401] 'My father said that one day, if man continued in his ways, the Creator would annihilate this world.' Methuselah in Aronofsky's *Noah* (2014).

provides a soporific which sends Noah to sleep, during which he experiences his troubling dream again, with some variations.[402] This time he wakes with greater insight.

According to the dates and ages given in the Masoretic text and Samaritan Pentateuch, Methuselah died in the year of the flood; possibly just a few weeks before it arrived.[403] According to rabbinic tradition he died 7 days before the flood.[404]

Calculated by the dates and ages given in Septuagint Alexandrius, Methuselah died six years before the flood. Calculated by the dates and ages given in Septuagint Vaticanus, he died fourteen years *after* the flood.

Aronofsky's movie shows Methuselah choosing to die in the flood. This is an unnecessary departure from the biblical account for no other purpose than dramatic effect.

Tubal-Cain

Ray Winstone plays Tubal-Cain, hamming up his role with such enthusiasm that in some scenes it is more accurate to say Tubal-Cain is playing Ray Winstone. Aronofsky portrays Tubal-Cain as the leader of the Cainites. In the opening scene he is shown murdering Noah's father Lamech.

Unlike the rest of the Cainites Tubal-Cain does not die in the flood. Instead he successfully reaches the ark, climbs up the scaffolding, chops a hole in the top storey and hides among the sleeping animals, where he negotiates an uneasy truce with Ham and waits for a chance to murder Noah.

This is a gross departure from Scripture but it does have a precedent in rabbinic literature. The aggadic-midrashic work *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* contains the story of a famous stowaway who survived the flood:

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[402] The repetition of the dream in this scene confirms it was not caused by the soporific. This is an important point because it shows the director wants us to understand that the origin of Noah's dreams is divine.

[403] This is deduced by calculating the ages of Noah's ancestors and comparing them with the age of Noah himself at the time of the flood.

[404] 'And it came to pass, after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth. What was the nature of these seven days? —Rab said: These were the days of mourning for Methuselah, thus teaching that the lamenting for the righteous postpones retribution.' *Babylonian Talumd: Sanhedrin* 108b.

> 'As the floodwaters swelled, Og, king of Bashan, sat himself on one of the rungs of the ark's ladders and swore to Noah and to his sons that he would be their slave forever.

What did Noah do? He punched a hole in the ark, and through it he handed out food to Og every day. Og's survival is hinted at in the verse "Only Og remained of the remnant of the Rephaim" [Deuteronomy 3:11].'[405]

Aronofsky has used this tale as the inspiration for his own subplot, in which Tubal-Cain replaces Og and brings violence rather than offering peace.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the rabbinic legend is Noah's resolution of a moral dilemma. He is not at liberty to take Og on board the ark (Og is a sinner, and God has already established that only Noah and his family will be saved) yet he is loath to be merciless since God has shown mercy to him.

But if Og can be spared while remaining outside the ark, Noah can claim he has kept the letter of God's command in good conscience (if not the spirit). This is typical of the moral conundrums posed by rabbinic literature and the clever solutions devised to address them.

The Watchers

In Aronofsky's movie Noah is aided by a group of supernatural beings known as the Watchers. The depiction of these creatures is inspired partly by rabbinic tradition and partly by biblical elements. Scripture also mentions the Watchers—albeit not in the context of Noah's story (see Daniel 4:13, 17, 23)—but provides no details about their origin, purpose, or physical appearance.

The most we can glean is that they are angelic guardians of some kind (the NET Bible calls them 'Sentinels'); thus Aronofsky is free to portray them as he likes. In *Noah* they have six wings (inspired by the seraphim[406]) which become arms when their bodies are encased in stone.[407]

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[405] *Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* 23.

[406] This has been confirmed by Aronofsky.

[407] It's amazing how many reviewers get this wrong. I have seen some claim the Watchers have three arms, others say four, and still others don't even seem to realise they have more than two.

In the *Book of Jubilees* and the *Books of Enoch* some of the Watchers breed with mortal women,[408] thereby producing the Nephilim. When Nephilim are killed, evil spirits emerge from their bodies. These become 'demons' ('*daimon*' in the New Testament). Aronofsky's film makes no reference to this aspect of the Enochic/Jubilean tradition, and it is important to understand that the Watchers in *Noah* are **not** Nephilim.

In *Noah* the leader of the Watchers is called 'Samyaza.' This is taken from *1 Enoch.*[409] Aronofsky depicts the Watchers as 'fallen angels', cursed to remain on Earth as punishment for defying God's will by teaching humanity advanced technologies after the Fall (metalworking, weaponry, etc.).

This is faithful to *1 Enoch*, where the Watchers and the Nephilim also pass on forbidden knowledge ('the instruments of death, the coat of mail, the shield, and the sword for slaughter… the use of ink and paper… every wicked stroke of spirits and of demons') which humanity employs for evil purposes.[410] The *Books of Enoch* and the *Book of Jubilees* also state that the Watchers were punished for their disobedience.

In Scripture the ark was built entirely by Noah.[411] In *1 Enoch* the ark was built entirely by the Watchers.[412] Aronofsky combines the two accounts by depicting the Watchers as Noah's assistants, using their great strength to hasten construction. Noah's family also joins in the work.

[408] *Jubilees* 5:22; *1 Enoch* 7:1-2, 10-12; 9:7-9.

[409] *1 Enoch* 6:7, '…and these are the names of their leaders: Samlazaz, their leader, Araklba, Rameel, Kokablel, Tamlel, Ramlel, Danel, Ezeqeel, Baraqijal.' Samlazaz is one of many variations on the name of the Watchers' leader; others include Semihazah, Shemyazaz, Shemyaza, Sêmîazâz, Semjâzâ, Samjâzâ, Semyaza, and Shemhazai. Aronofsky has chosen to use the Aramaic variant (Samyaza).

[410] *1 Enoch* 8:1-9; 68:6-18.

[411] In the biblical account Noah is the only person given credit for the ark's construction. We typically infer that his family helped him build it, even though the Bible neither states nor implies any such thing. This is an example of the unconscious interpretation we practice when reading Scripture.

[412] *1 Enoch* 57:1-2.

In yet another scene borrowed from Midrash, Tubal-Cain attacks the ark with an army of thousands.[413] The Watchers defend it with their lives, a self-sacrificial act which earns them divine absolution. As they fall in battle the Watchers are released from stone and return to heaven in spirit form.

Zohar

Noah's land is rich in 'zohar', a combustible, highly unstable, brightly glowing ore. It can be ignited by fire or compression, with explosive results. 'Zohar' (more accurately '*tzohar*') is a Hebrew word meaning 'radiance' or 'illuminate', and also the name of an extra biblical canon upon which the teachings of the Kabbalah are based. This is a very obvious reference to the movie's source material.

The use of 'zohar' also invokes another Jewish tradition. In Midrash the *tzohar* was a glowing stone which contained light from the first day of creation.[414] According to Jewish legend the *tzohar* was originally given to Adam and Eve, and later used by Noah to illuminate the ark.

The Cainites mine zohar on an industrial scale with no regard for the surrounding area, which is rapidly destroyed by pollution and strip mining. Noah also collects zohar but takes care not to damage his environment in the process.

Morality

In one scene Noah says: 'For 10 generations since Adam, sin has walked within us. Brother against brother, nation against nation, man against creation. We murdered each other. We broke the world.' This is biblical.

Aronofsky shows the primary sins of humanity to be murder, slavery, debauchery, destruction of God's creation, general disobedience to His commands, rape, and cannibalism.

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[413] 'When Noah and his family and everything that he had taken with him were inside the ark, the people left outside asked him to admit them too, promising repentance. Noah refused to admit them, objecting that he had exhorted them to repent many years before the Flood. The people then assembled in great numbers around the ark in order to break into it; but they were destroyed by the lions and other wild animals which also surrounded it (Tan., Noaḥ, 10; Gen. R. xxxii. 14; "Sefer ha-Yashar," l.c.).' *Jewish Encyclopaedia* (1906). The text is available online (here: http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11571-noah#anchor6). Note that in the movie Tubal-Cain and his followers are unrepentant, and motivated entirely by self-preservation.

[414] This explains why zohar glows in Aronofsky's film.

All of these activities are present in the movie (though the sexual violence is implied rather than depicted) and consistent with the biblical account of extreme human vice during Noah's era. The *Book of Jubilees* provides a similar account, with particular reference to sins against creation.[415]

The Flood

Many critics of the Bible claim the story of Noah's flood was simply borrowed from other cultures.[416]

In Aronofsky's movie Noah correctly refers to 'the waters above the earth' which will be released during the flood; this is biblical (Genesis 1:6-7). The movie depicts huge torrents of water surging up from deep within the earth; this is biblical (Genesis 8:11).

The film incorrectly depicts Noah's flood as global, with a long shot 'from space' showing heavy storm clouds all over the entire earth. By contrast, biblical evidence tells us that the flood was local[417] and rabbinic tradition concurs.[418]

[415] 'And every one sold himself to work iniquity and to shed much blood, and the earth was filled with iniquity. And after this they sinned against the beasts and birds, and all that moves and walks on the earth: and much blood was shed on the earth, and every imagination and desire of men imagined vanity and evil continually. And the Lord destroyed everything from off the face of the earth; because of the wickedness of their deeds, and because of the blood which they had shed in the midst of the earth He destroyed everything.' *Jubilees* 7:23-25.

[416] For a refutation of this claim see the article here: http://bibleapologetics.wordpress.com/the-genesis-flood-24

[417] See the article here: http://bibleapologetics.wordpress.com/the-genesis-flood-14

[418] 'The deluge in the time of Noah was by no means the only flood with which this earth was visited. The first flood did its work of destruction as far as Jaffé, **and the one of Noah's days extended to Barbary.'** *Genesis Rabba* 23.

Cultural & Geographical Setting

Noah lived in the Mesopotamian Basin and was most likely Sumerian (the Hebrews did not exist yet). Unfortunately all of the actors in Aronofsky's movie appear as white Europeans,[419] which is obviously unbiblical and ahistorical. On the plus side, they all speak with British accents.[420]

Instead of the hot, dry climate we would expect for the setting of Noah's story, Aronofsky's Noah lives in a cold, damp region where the hills are covered with lush green grass[421] and several layers of robust clothing are essential (including stout leather boots).[422]

We can read this discrepancy in two different ways: either it reflects the fact that Aronofsky felt no obligation to follow Scriptural details and relocated the story to suit himself, or it is intended to imply that the climate of Mesopotamia was very different before the flood, when God made drastic changes to the weather system (as Scripture implies).

Whatever the case, it refutes the claim made by some reviewers that Aronofsky's movie carries an explicit message about global warming.[423] There is not a single hint of this throughout the entire film, and no suggestion that the planet is overheating in Noah's time. Frankly it is difficult to see how such a message could be delivered through an interpretation that situates Noah's story within the rugged terrain of a chilling Nordic landscape.[424]

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[419] Having said this, Naameh and Ham are played by Jewish actors.

[420] I don't know why, but biblical movies always seem far more credible when the prevailing accent is British. I couldn't take Noah seriously with an American accent.

[421] At least, those hills as yet untouched by the rapacious Cainites, whose settlements are responsible for entire wastelands of scorched earth and blackened destruction.

[422] This is hardly surprising since the movie was filmed in the verdant, windswept countryside of Iceland.

[423] Some reviewers have alleged that the movie also contains a message about overpopulation. This too is false; the place where Noah lives is sparsely populated. Even the Cainite settlements give no indication that resources are scares and space is limited.

[424] A less appropriate place to showcase the effects of global warming is difficult to imagine.

Clothes in *Noah* are realistically portrayed in dull earth tones with an occasional hint of blue suggesting an era in which dyes were largely unknown. They are also quite sophisticated (e.g. trousers, primitive shirts, basic 'jackets') and distinctly Western rather than Mesopotamian.

However, since we don't know how advanced civilisation had become before the flood 'reset' everything, I am willing to let this slide. The main point is that Noah's clothes are appropriate to his surroundings, and that's a mark of consistency.

Ark

The ark is depicted as rough yet sturdy, and its exterior is at least partly real; Aronofsky spent six months building one third of the ark using the precise measurements given in Scripture. Digital imagery was used to complete the rest.[425] It's one of the most biblically faithful aspects of the entire movie.

Many critics of the Bible assert that a seaworthy vessel of such magnitude could not have been built with the technology available to Noah. An article refuting this claim can be found here: http://bibleapologetics.wordpress.com/the-genesis-flood-34

Sin

The movie shows that Adam and Eve brought sin into the world by succumbing to the temptation of the forbidden fruit when prompted by the serpent; this is biblical (Genesis 3:1-6).[426] Aronofsky has been quoted as saying that the movie is about 'family and survival', and 'how we all have original sin[427] in us and what

[425] See the featurette here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebaiadxQZEE

[426] Refreshingly, the fruit is not an apple but instead resembles a cross between a large peach and a pomegranate. It pulsates enticingly until plucked from the tree.

[427] Aronofsky uses this term in a fluid sense which does not strictly correspond to the mainstream Christian definition. In one interview he has said 'The idea of original sin is a really interesting story to help us all think about what goes on inside of us, that we all kind of have a sense of the right thing to do, and we all understand what the wrong thing to do is. And we understand that there's a decision in front of us.' (Source: http://www.religionnews.com/2014/03/24/interview-director-darren-aronofsky-on-justice-vs-mercy-in-noah). This is perspective is more philosophical than theological.

we're going to do with this second chance that we've been given.'[428] This is a central theme and it comes through very strongly.

Imago Dei

There are many references to man being made in the image of God (which even Tubal-Cain admits). This is biblical (Genesis 1:26-27). There are regular references to the sin and curses of Adam & Cain; this too is biblical (Genesis 3:17-19; 4:8-12).

Cities

Cities are described as creations of the Cainites (this is biblical; see Genesis 4:17) in which evil is concentrated and indulged. As the movie progresses these cities collapse under the self-destructive influences of immorality and unsustainability.

God's sovereignty

Throughout the film we are constantly reminded that God is in control. The Watchers testify to the futility of resisting His will and the necessity of divine forgiveness. Noah recognises the unstoppable purpose of God in the message of his dreams.[429] Methuselah affirms the certainty of judgement.[430]

By contrast, Tubal-Cain—a self-appointed king—acknowledges the inevitability of the flood[431] but remains defiant even as the rain starts to fall.[432] In a tense standoff with Ham he snarls, 'You don't know your king!' Ham brilliantly replies, 'My father says there can be no king. The Creator is God!'

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[428] Source: http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/darren-aronofsky-interpreting-noah-does-691892

[429] 'Our family has a great task. A great flood is coming. It cannot be stopped but it can be survived.' Noah in Aronofsky's *Noah* (2014).

[430] 'Man corrupted this world and filled it with violence, so we must be destroyed.' Methuselah in Aronofsky's *Noah* (2014).

[431] 'When I heard talk of miracles, I dismissed them. But then I saw the birds with my own eyes and I had to come.' Tubal-Cain in Aronofsky's *Noah* (2014).

[432] 'A man isn't ruled by the heavens, a man is ruled by his will!' Tubal-Cain in Aronofsky's *Noah* (2014).

Tubal-Cain's eventual death has a fatalistic air which implies that however long it might be delayed, God's judgement is inescapable.

God's silence

The absence of verbal communication from God presents Noah with the challenge of interpreting dreams that nobody understands any better than he does.[433] The dreams cease when he starts building the ark, and there is no sign from heaven until he reaches dry land.

Tubal-Cain exploits this by challenging Noah's claim to divine guidance, saying God has not spoken for generations and is unlikely to start now. Yet it seems this taunt masks a deep rooted insecurity, for Tubal-Cain cries to God just before the flood, demanding 'Why won't you speak to *me?!*' Is he desperately hoping to supplant Noah at the eleventh hour?

God's lengthy silence between the building of the ark and the film's final scene contributes to Noah's spiritual breakdown in the third act, where he begs God for an answer that will relieve the moral burden thrust upon him by his own misinterpretation of the Creator's intentions. Here we might reflect upon similar moments in our own lives.

Justice & mercy

At times I felt Aronofsky's Noah resembled Jonah: a flawed man with a misguided passion for justice, grappling with the demands of an apocalyptic mission. He is merciless with the Cainites but spares Ila's daughters even though part of him believes they must die.

Aronofsky explains his motivation for this theme as follows:

> 'We started to realize these big ideas about justice and mercy in the film. It started with Noah being called righteous in his generation, and we tried to figure out what that meant.
>
> What we've discovered is that people who are a lot smarter than us and who study theology talk about righteousness as having a balance of justice and mercy. As a parent, you understand that if you're too just, you can destroy your child with strictness, and if you're too merciful you can destroy them with leniency. Finding that balance makes you a great parent.

[433] This is a particularly weak point in the plot, because it's already established that Methuselah is the wisest man alive and yet he tells Noah that he can't interpret the dreams for him. Either Methuselah just didn't get around to specialising in dreams, or he simply wants Noah to work it out himself. At any rate, Noah does work it out which makes Methuselah look redundant after all.

> For us, since Noah is called righteous, we asked, "OK, what is his balance of justice and mercy?" So at the beginning of the film, he clearly wants justice, very much like God. By the end, when the rainbow happens, he has learned mercy, forgiveness and grace.'[434]

Ila encapsulates these sentiments when she tells Noah 'He [God] chose you because you saw the wickedness of man and knew you wouldn't look away. But there is goodness too.' In reference to the sparing of her daughters, Ila says to Noah 'You chose mercy. You chose love.'

Ila's words are particularly poignant in the light of the earlier exchange between Noah and Ham:

> Ham: 'I thought you were good. I thought that's why He [God] chose you.'
> Noah: 'He chose me because he knew I would finish the job, nothing more.'

This brooding, pragmatic Noah weathers a perfect storm of spiritual challenges and emerges a better man for the experience.

Locating Land & Leaving the Ark

In Aronofsky's interpretation the raven is sent out by Japheth instead of Noah, while the dove is not sent out at all. Nevertheless I was pleased that this was correctly shown as an act of initiative by Noah's family, as we find in Scripture.

The Bible tells us that God called Noah out of the ark when it was safe to leave. In the movie Noah and his family simply leave the ark when it runs aground on dry land.

Jewish Perspectives

Jewish reviews will greatly inform your understanding of *Noah*, even if you do not see it yourself. Here is an excerpt from one Jewish viewer's response to the film:

> 'One of Aronofksy's stated central interests in the film was to explore the biblical notion of righteousness. He determined, after a lot of study, that righteousness in the Bible refers to a perfect balance of justice and mercy, and that is what he primarily explored in the character of Noah.

[434] Source: http://www.religionnews.com/2014/03/24/interview-director-darren-aronofsky-on-justice-vs-mercy-in-noah

> …For me, Noah was truly great biblical art. I cried through at least a solid third of the film, moved by everything from the aesthetic beauty onscreen to the human tragedy of the deluge. So many moments of this film felt uncomfortably recognisable.
>
> I know what it's like to follow a path through the murk of my own imperfectly heard communication with G-d, and I know what it's like to overshoot the messages I've actually heard. I know what it's like to be bound in a state like the Watchers are in. What greater metaphor is there for being caught in one's own sinful decisions than being bound up in twisted rock when you were created to fly free?
>
> I am growing in an increasingly desperate need to care for a hurting earth, particularly endangered species, and often feel powerless to stop the exploitative machine around me, but I must learn to do something concrete about it. And some corner within me, no matter how infinitesimal, remembers what it was like to be in the Garden, wrapped in a garment of light.
>
> And that remembrance is, at least in great part, what brings me forward into G-d's redemption as a Prodigal journeying back to the love that bore me in the first place. This is especially poignant to me as Passover approaches, because the blessing of G-d is irrevocable—in every human being, in every dog and fish and elephant, in every blade of grass.'[435]

I encourage you to read the full text, which contains many additional insights.

Jewish studies PhD candidate Krista Dalton has written a good article on *Noah* as Midrash.[436] Dr Eric A. Goldman—adjunct associate professor of film studies at Yeshiva University, New York City—has written about his experience at a special screening of Aronofsky's film.[437]

[435] Source: http://www.patheos.com/blogs/filmchat/2014/04/no-noah-is-not-gnostic-say-that-ten-times-fast.html#comment-1317355313

[436] Here: http://kristadalton.com/aronofsky-and-noah-as-midrash-or-what-does-that-even-mean

[437] Here: http://jstandard.com/content/item/noah_and_the_jews/30296

Goldman's article includes references to the movie's use of rabbinic literature. He observes that Jewish audiences are better prepared for *Noah* than Christians and Muslims[438] because they have been raised in a theological culture which sanctions and encourages the reinterpretation of biblical stories.

Other Perspectives

I have now read almost four dozen reviews of *Noah* from commentators, bloggers, professional reviewers, and regular members of the public. Some praise the movie, some denounce it as a tool of Satan, and others are quite ambivalent. Opinion remains divided over the question of whether it functions better as pure entertainment or a biblically inspired story.

The following articles—nearly all of which are written by Christians—may be helpful:

Justin Chang: http://variety.com/2014/film/news/noah-is-the-biblical-epic-that-christians-deserve-1201150333
Brett McCracken: http://convergemagazine.com/noah-film-12561
Steven D. Greydanus: http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/noah-controversy
Annette Yoshiko Reed:
http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/atheologies/7741/who_gets_to_decide_if_noah_is_biblical
Phil Cooke: http://philcooke.com/christians-should-see-noah
Peter T. Chattaway: http://www.patheos.com/blogs/filmchat/2014/03/the-jewish-roots-of-and-responses-to-noah.html
Peter T. Chattaway: http://www.patheos.com/blogs/filmchat/2014/04/no-noah-is-not-gnostic-say-that-ten-times-fast.html
Peter T. Chattaway: http://www.patheos.com/blogs/filmchat/2014/02/the-righteousness-of-noah-what-did-the-rabbis-say.html
George Fike: http://pastor-george.com/2014/03/31/swimming-against
iPreacher: http://316apps.com/ipreachersblog/2014/03/31/noah

[438] 'Jewish tradition has a long history of encouraging interpretation of the "p'shat," the literal text. Mr. Aronofsky and Mr. Handel have done so, drawing from a rich mix of rabbinic literature. In contrast, some Christian and Muslim scholars and clergy have had trouble with the film, because it changes the Noah story's fixed literal reading.'

Chattaway's analysis is particularly focused on the Jewishness of Aronofsky's interpretation, and engages well with its rabbinic source material. He also defends the film against false accusations of Gnosticism, and addresses its uncomfortable portrait of Noah's character.

Concluding Thoughts

Aronofsky's *Noah* is not a faithful reproduction of the Old Testament story. I wish the movie had been far more biblically accurate than it is. Some of the changes were pointless and unjustifiable, even allowing for artistic licence.

For example, retaining all eight members of Noah's family would have expanded the central cast and provided room for deeper characterisation. Reducing Noah's daughters-in-law from three to one simply made it easier for Aronofsky to fabricate a moral dilemma which exists solely to add drama—as if the story of Noah needed any more!—and drive the plot forward on his terms.

Although utterly disposable the stowaway subplot was forgivable, considering the pedigree of its rabbinic precedent and Aronofsky's desire to incorporate traditional Jewish interpretations.

The exploration of Noah's character was unnecessarily overwrought. I felt the parallel to Abraham was merely latent where it should have been explicit. This might have gone a long way towards reassuring Christian audiences that the film was not a hatchet job on one of their favourite Bible stories.

However, the more I researched for this review the more I realised just how **little** Aronofsky had tinkered with Noah's story. Almost every embellishment—whether addition or omission—was drawn directly from Jewish exegesis, some of it very ancient. Aronofsky contributed very few ideas of his own. Most of the work was already done by long dead rabbis.

This was not a case of Hollywood grabbing the Bible and haphazardly twisting it into a few random shapes. Aronofsky deliberately chose his Jewish theological heritage as the basis for a dramatic re-envisioning of Genesis 6-9 which brings out speculative subplots and scholarly interpretations well known to Jewish audiences but far less familiar to Christians.

Above all, Aronofsky is sympathetic to Noah and depicts him realistically. Some of us may feel Aronofsky's Noah is a far cry from the one we learned about in Sunday School, but in my view he is no more a villain than Samson or King David.

While watching the movie I detected an underlying tension which I've found difficult to articulate. The best way I can put it is to say that *Noah* falls between two stools: a secular interpretation, and a supernatural epic visualised through the prism of Midrash.

On one hand we get an angsty Noah who believes God is speaking to him but doesn't fully understand what He's saying (the secular perspective). On the other hand we get visions, miracles, the Watchers, and other elements drawn from ancient Jewish writings (the supernatural perspective).

I believe Aronofsky should have chosen one or the other. If a secular interpretation, the film should have had no supernatural elements. If a supernatural epic, the film should have stayed much closer to the biblical text and Jewish traditions.

Aronofsky's *Noah* is not faithful to Scripture but it **is** faithful to Judaism. I believe this approach is legitimate and laudable insofar as it provides an authentically Jewish interpretation of Noah's story, deeply rooted in rabbinic exegesis.

It's refreshing to see this powerful narrative brought to life without the influence of Christian anachronisms. Perhaps for the first time in history Hollywood has presented a biblically inspired Old Testament movie with a genuinely Jewish voice.

Sound Words

'The truths revealed in the strata of the earth's crust'

Bro. Welch

'**I have not the slightest doubt concerning the truths revealed in the strata of the earth's crust.** There can be **no reasonable doubt** that long ages have passed away since the matter of the earth first took existences by the fiat of its Almighty Creator.

There can be no reasonable doubt that when the non-fossiliferous rocks were first formed **the heat of the earth's matter was too intense for vegetable and animal life to exist**.

There can be no reasonable doubt that **it was only in a later age that the lower forms of plant and animal life could exist**.

And there can be no reasonable doubt **that the succeeding ages allowed the creation of still higher and more perfect forms**, till we reach the age called the "Tertiary," and the "Post-pliocene" period of that age, **when we are told remains of man are found for the first time**.

All of this, I say, I do not doubt. **The facts of old mother earth's storehouse are too convincingly inscribed upon her crust to allow me to doubt**. At the same time, and amid it all, I have the most implicit faith and unbounded trust **in God and His sacred word**.'[439]

[439] Welch, 'Knowledge.- No., 12 Geology', The Christadelphian (28.329.416), 1891.

Prove All Things

'The Day of Adam's Transgression'

Bro. Thirtle

Contrary to traditional teaching, the Hebrew phrase translated 'dying thou shalt die' in the KJV does not refer to a gradual process of decay resulting in eventual death.

Writing in 1880, brother Thirtle explained that the Hebrew simply did not support this view, which he noted at the time as only being held by 'some'.

> 'We will first consider the second clause, "dying thou shalt die." Some consider these words to have found verification on the day Adam sinned, **by his becoming a corruptible creature, and ultimately dying.**
>
> **This, however, is not so**. We have the Hebrew word "to die" repeated in two moods: the infinitive (moth) and the indicative (tamuth); moth, to die—dying; tamuth—thou shalt die. **As the words stand, certainty is implied, and nothing more**; so the authorised version is not far wrong in rendering the words, "thou shalt surely die."
>
> **It is out of the question to suppose that a process of decay is implied in the words**, for they were afterwards used to one of the descendants of Adam—Shimei (1 Kings 2:37, 42), and we have no record of Shimei having occupied a similar relation to life and death to that which Adam sustained before the fall.
>
> **If it had been intended to express a continued or lasting process, the order of the Hebrew words would have been reversed**.'[440]

[440] Thirtle, 'The Day of Adam's Transgression', *The Christadelphian* (17.187.26-27), 1880.

Ehrman Vs Carrier: Disputing the Evidence for Christ's Existence

Jon Burke

Abstract

In 2012 there was a confrontation between New Testament scholar Professor Bart Ehrman, and historian Dr Richard Carrier (currently without an academic post), concerning the evidence for the historical existence of Jesus. An article in the Huffington Post by Ehrman (preceding the publication of his book 'Did Jesus Exist?'), was criticized heavily by Carrier. After the book was published, Carrier subjected it to a critical review. This article examines Carrier's claims and finds them insubstantial.

After Ehrman's book was published, Carrier posted a critical review, to which Ehrman made two replies, which Carrier criticized in turn. Various other commentators (professional and amateur), entered the dispute on either side. This article examines some of the claims and counter-claims by both Erhman and Carrier. For reference, the term 'Mythicist' is being used here to describe those who believe in the 'Christ myth 'theory' that Jesus was not a historical person but a religious myth.

Carrier's review: how substantial are the criticisms?

Carrier's review of Ehrman's book listed several main criticisms, but they are mitigated by Carrier himself, diminishing their importance.

1. Carrier objects that Ehrman doesn't spend enough time criticizing the 'bad' mythicist arguments: 'Almost none of this 361 page book is a critique of the "bad" mythicists. He barely even mentions most of them'; 'for the few authors he spends any time discussing (mainly Murdock and Freke & Gandy), he is largely dismissive and careless (indeed, his only real refutation of them amounts to little more than nine pages, pp. 21-30)'.

However, Carrier acknowledges 'That alone I could live with (although I would have rather he not addressed them at all if he wasn't going to address them competently)'. In fact Ehrman spends about as much time dismissing these 'bad' Mythicists as Carrier himself has in his own works.

2. Carrier objects that Ehrman was wrong to say (or at least imply strongly), that the statue claimed by Mythicist Dorothy Murdock (pseudonym 'Acharya S'), to be a symbol of 'the cock, symbol of St. Peter' ('The Christ Conspiracy: The Greatest Story Ever Sold', 1999), does not exist : 'Ehrman says that "there is no penis-nosed statue of Peter the cock in the Vatican or anywhere else except in books like this, which love to make things up" (p. 24)'.

However, Carrier acknowledges 'I do not assume Murdock's interpretation of the object is correct (there is no clear evidence it has anything to do with Christianity, much less Peter)'. Thus Ehrman's error does not invalidate the point he is making, that Murdock was wrong to claim the statue has anything to do with Christianity or with Peter (a point with which Carrier agrees). See additional comments here.

3. Carrier objects that Ehrman was wrong to say that the law concerning fire brigades in letter 33 of Pliny's correspondence with the emperor Trajan was the same law referred to in Pliny's letter 96 to Trajan: 'He made two astonishing errors here that are indicative of his incompetence with ancient source materials', 'In fact, Pliny never once discusses the decree against fire brigades in his letter about Christians, nor connects the two cases in any way'.

However, Carrier acknowledges 'modern scholars conclude, the same law is probably what was being applied in both cases (prosecuting Christians and banning firefighting associations). And that's kind of what Ehrman confusingly says'. Ehrman was therefore not in error here; he drew the same conclusion concerning the relationship of these two letters, as standard scholarship, a position with which Carrier himself agrees.

Carrier was right to point out that Ehrman wrongly referred to two different letters of Pliny as 'letter 10', when the correct citation should have been 'book 10, letter 33' and 'book 10, letter 96' respectively. But this error is hardly 'indicative of his incompetence with ancient source materials' nor 'demonstrates that Ehrman never actually read Pliny's letter, and doesn't even know how to cite it correctly', two hyperbolic claims made by Carrier.

4. Carrier objects that Ehrman was wrong to say 'We simply don't have birth notices, trial records, death certificates—or other standard kinds of records that one has today' for people living in the first century: 'Ehrman declares (again with that same suicidally hyperbolic certitude) that "we simply don't have birth notices, trial records, death certificates—or other kinds of records that one has today" (p. 29)'.

However, Carrier acknowledges 'his conclusion is correct (we should not expect to have any such records for Jesus or early Christianity)'. Thus Ehrman's error does not invalidate the point he is making, that we should not expect to find the kinds of records of Jesus that Mythicists such as Freke and Gandy claim should exist. See additional comments here.

5. Carrier objects to Ehrman's comment concerning the authenticity of a comment by Tacitus (Roman historian), about Christians: 'Ehrman says "I don't know of any trained classicists or scholars of ancient Rome who think" the passage about Christians in Tacitus is a forgery (p. 55)'.

However, Carrier acknowledges 'That the overall consensus of scholarship, myself included, sides with Ehrman on the conclusion is true'. Therefore, the fact that Ehrman doesn't know of 'know of any trained classicists or scholars of ancient Rome' who think this passage is a forgery, does not affect his argument that the passage is not a forgery; Carrier even agrees with Ehrman's argument himself. See additional comments here.

6. Carrier objects to Ehrman's claim that "the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were recent events" is "the view of all of our sources that deal with the matter at all" (p. 251): 'This is false. And it's astonishing that he would not know this, since several other scholars have discussed the sources that place Jesus in the reign of Jannaeus in the 70s B.C'.

However, Carrier acknowledges 'These are all arguably "fringe" scholars, and they may well be as wrong as Wells or even more so. I am not defending anything they argue (I do not believe Christianity originated in the 70s B.C.) '.

Therefore, the fact that Ehrman did not know of these other scholars does not affect his argument that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were recent events according to what Ehrman describes as 'all of our sources that deal with the matter at all'.

Carrier even acknowledges that the scholars to which he refers are all arguably "fringe', and may well be wrong anyway.

Conclusion

None of Carrier's objections actually affect Ehrman's overall case in any way. Even if Ehrman was wrong on every one of these points, it would not have affected his case. These are not substantive criticisms of Ehrman's case (in fact none of them address his case), and are a mere distraction from the real issues involved. For further commentary, see this article at Labarum.

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Editorial

Jon Burke

Intellectual honesty

> "In my early days those with whom we came in contact, if they claimed to be Christians at all, accepted the Bible as their rule of faith. Often in the stress of discussion the words of Scripture **were tortured in a manner quite inconsistent with intellectual honesty**."[441]

Moral honesty is the practice of adhering to codes of moral behaviour. Intellectual honesty is the acknowledgment of what we might call inconvenient facts; weaknesses in our personal views and opinions, evidence against our own arguments, strengths in an opponent's case. Practicing intellectual honesty helps us avoid errors caused by concealing or ignoring facts.

Intellectual honesty is an approach which seeks to ensure our thoughts and arguments are as objective and balanced as possible. Being intellectually honest requires us to present our views without concealing or avoiding facts or arguments against them, and to acknowledge weaknesses in our arguments. As members of a community seeking to follow Christ, we must maintain the highest standard of intellectual honesty, which also requires us to examine and critique each other's work.

Here are some examples of intellectual dishonesty which are sadly common in our community.

- Using a concordance to look up the root meanings of a word in the Bible, then selecting the meaning which supports our interpretation of the passage, without checking to see if that is the correct meaning in this context

- Looking through half a dozen Bible translations, then selecting the translation of a passage which supports our personal view of what it means, even if the majority of translations all agree it means something else

[441] Collyer, "As We Grow Older; Letters to Middle Age and Beyond – 42", The Christadelphian 83, no. 984 (Birmingham: Christadelphian Magazine & Publishing Association, 1946), 88.

- Quoting an academic source in support of our views, whilst concealing from our audience or readers that the source quoted is insufficiently qualified or holds views which have been rejected by the consensus of qualified commentators

- Supporting our personal opinion by quoting from a biased source, without telling our audience or readers that the source is biased

We are typically on the watch for intellectual dishonesty in sources outside our community. In 1997 brother Michael Ashton reviewed Michael Dronin's book 'The Bible Code' (1997), which claimed to be a revelation of secret messages encoded mathematically into the Bible, which could not have been put there by humans and which suggested a divine origin. Brother Ashton demonstrated admirable intellectual honesty in acknowledging that the book's premise was attractive to Bible believers such as ourselves,[442] but still advised caution in accepting its conclusions,[443] and subjected it to critical review.

Among many problems with the book (including concealing or ignoring evidence against the theory), the author resorted to unconventional translations of the Bible by a colleague of his (Dr Rips), which differed significantly from those given by the consensus of translation professionals.

It was clear to brother Michael that such translations had been chosen by the author simply because they supported his views, which was not intellectually honest.

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[442] "We are naturally predisposed towards anything which seeks to uphold the authority, veracity and divine origins of the scriptures.", Ashton, "Book Review: The Bible Code", The Christadelphian 134, no. 1597 (Birmingham: Christadelphian Magazine & Publishing Association, 1997), 256.

[443] "There has always been a fascination for mankind in the supernatural, the hidden, and the occult. The scriptures clearly warn against being involved or drawn into such practices. **And there is a sense in which the Bible Code can be viewed in this way**. The wise man in Proverbs said that, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter" (Proverbs 25:2). How this works out in practice was revealed by Jesus when he spoke to his disciples in parables. His message was not in some hidden code to be discovered in a future age by one touch of a computer key, but by diligent meditation, and by comparing scripture with scripture.", Ashton, "Book Review: The Bible Code", The Christadelphian 134, no. 1597 (Birmingham: Christadelphian Magazine & Publishing Association, 1997), 257.

> "But, as the book itself explains (but only in an appendix at the end of the book), the so-called "hidden text" is simply an alternative translation of the plain text of Numbers 3:24. **As it stands in our Bibles**, the phrase reads "the chief of the house of the father of the Gershonites". **This has been retranslated by Dr. Rips** as "President (Chief of the house), but he (of the) was kicked out (Gershonites—where Gershon means 'exile')". **We may well question the intellectual honesty of this approach**." [444]

As much as we should be wary of intellectual dishonesty outside our community, we should be even more cautious and critical of works produced by other Christadelphians; not because we expect Christadelphians to be less intellectually honest, but because we are naturally biased to believe each other and less inclined to test Christadelphian material for accuracy.

In the interest of intellectual honesty and the concern that our brothers and sisters are not misled by inaccurate information, the following Facebook pages have been established to provide objective information on specific topics, and to examine critically the claims made in several prominent Christadelphian periodicals.

- Biblical Historical Context
- Science & Scripture
- The Christadelphian Magazine reviewed
- The Lampstand reviewed
- The Testimony Magazine reviewed
- The Bible Magazine reviewed
- Christadelphian - Origins Discussion
- Evolutionary Creationism - A Christadelphian Perspective

These pages are updated regularly, and all of them welcome comments and feedback from readers.

> "How much firmer grounds of the only worthwhile poise and social ease are **true humility, intellectual honesty and sincere regard for others**."[445]

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[444] Ashton, "Book Review: The Bible Code", The Christadelphian 134, no. 1597 (Birmingham: Christadelphian Magazine & Publishing Association, 1997), 258.

[445] Twelves, ""Delivered From This Present Evil World" (6) Smoking", The Christadelphian 89, no. 1056 (Birmingham: Christadelphian Magazine & Publishing Association, 191952), 163.

Historicity and Authenticity: Definitions and Methods

Jon Burke

Abstract

Two issues are central to the historical study of Jesus. One is the examination of evidence for his existence; historicity. The other is the examination of evidence for what he said and did; authenticity. Both of these examinations are typically carried out by applying specific criteria to the available evidence. This article explains the difference between historicity and authenticity, describes the criteria and their application, and assesses strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

Criteria of historicity and authenticity

Historical examination of the life of Jesus is referred to as the 'Quest for the Historical Jesus'. The aim of the Quest is not to prove the historicity of Jesus; that is the work of professional historians. The aim of the Jesus quest is to reach a conclusion on who Jesus was, and what his aims were.

The historicity of Jesus is not questioned by the Jesus Quest, because the historicity of Jesus has already been established and accepted by the scholarly consensus of professional historians, according to criteria of historicity applied within professional histiography. New Testament scholars are in no position to dispute such a scholarly consensus, and there is no reason for them to do so. New Testament scholars should accept the historicity of Jesus as established by professional historians, just as philosophers accept the historicity of Socrates and Plato as established by professional historians, and do not start their books on philosophy with chapter after chapter assessing the historical evidence for these men.

While historians apply criteria of historicity to assess the probability of Jesus' existence (and conclude that he did exist), scholars of the historical Jesus apply the criteria of authenticity to determine what he said and did, and why. It must be understood that the aim of the criteria of authenticity is not to establish the historicity of Jesus; that is not what the criteria were created for. They were created to assess the authenticity of the Jesus tradition, namely the texts and underlying sources of the earliest Christian movement, which is why they are called criteria of authenticity. They were not created to assess the historicity of Jesus.

The criteria of authenticity assess the authenticity of the Jesus tradition, consisting almost entirely of the gospels, Acts, and the letters and epistle. That is, they assess the probability of sayings and events recorded in the Jesus tradition, as authentic; what Jesus really said or did. Because they are sometimes used to assess

the probability of events in the life of Jesus, they are sometimes referred to (though uncommonly), as criteria of historicity.

However, this usage is very rare; they are referred to overwhelmingly as criteria of authenticity. But even when the term 'criteria of historicity' is used, the term does not mean 'historicity of Jesus'; it means the 'historicity of the event' is under examination. Mythicists sometimes claim these criteria are never used in standard professional historiographical research. This is untrue. Here is a list of criteria of authenticity with counterparts in professional historiography; the criterion are enumerated differently by various scholars, but this list covers the eight most commonly used (in some cases more than one criterion is conflated under one heading).

1. **Multiple attestation.**

Multiple independent sources are typically understood as strengthening the case for authenticity and historicity. This criterion is absolutely fundamental to professional historiography in any field.

2. **Embarrassment.**

Efforts to mask, explain away, or otherwise mitigate damaging historical information, can identify historical facts. It should be noted that this criterion is never used on its own in Jesus studies, and it is used in other historical studies. See for example Baruch Halpern's work 'David's Secret Demons' (2001), in which he compares how two different sources treat an event in the life of David (page 295), actually using the very word 'embarrassment' to explain why one source attempts to disassociate David from the event altogether, while the other source uses it to exculpate David from involvement in a battle against his arch-enemy. Halpern concludes the event really happened, and that since it was damaging to David's monarchy but was too widely known to be denied, both sources attempted to mitigate it in their own way when writing a historical record validating the Davidic dynasty.

3. **Historico-contextual plausibility.**

This assesses whether or not the event fits its purported socio-historical context; a story of a man driving a tractor in first century Judea is clearly a fabrication, since it does not fit the socio-historical context. This is a standard criterion of professional historiography in any field, and is also used to detect interpolations by later editors of a text. Many classical texts have been examined using this criterion (including the Illiad, in attempts to date the text), and it has been used in particular to identify forgeries, pseudepigrapha, or interpolations. Reference to the consulate of Gallicanus in the Donation of Constantine (a document claiming to have been

written while Constantine was consul), proves this document is a forgery; it could not have been written in Constantine's day.

4. **Natural probability.**

That non-supernatural events in a record are more likely to be historical, and supernatural events are less likely. This is such a well established criterion of historiography it hardly needs mention. For example, Egyptologists strip the Egyptian record of the Battle of Qadesh of all its supernatural elements, and reconstruct the battle without them. Classical historians do the same with the records of Greek and Roman historians.

5. **Style and language.**

In the study of the historical Jesus, this is typically separated into two criteria, 'Criterion of Palestinian/Aramaic phenomena' (or similarly phrased), and 'Criterion of Style'. The linguistic style fits the historical context of the purported events, and the language itself (Aramaic in the case of Jesus studies), indicates the earliest form of Christian tradition (since Jesus and the earliest disciples spoke Aramaic, and did not write in Greek).

Again, this is used in standard historical critical treatments of other texts. To take the Donation of Constantine as an example once more, anachronistic stylistic features and language proved that the document was written far later than the era of Constantine; it used some post-imperial formulas, and some medieval Latinisms which did not exist in the time of Constantine.

Use of historical controls

Controls typically used in the study of the historical Jesus include Paul's letters, Jewish historical sources such as Philo, Josephus, and the rabbinical literature, and Roman records such as inscriptions (the Pilate inscription is an example), histories (primarily Tacitus), and government literature (such as legislation and taxation records). These sources, without providing direct controls concerning events in the life of Jesus (except for Josephus and Tacitus, who do provide direct controls for parts of Jesus' life), do provide controls for testing the historicity, and the probability, of events recorded in the gospels.

Standard scholarly commentaries make reference to this use of such controls, which are applied to the gospel accounts in both historical and literary analysis.

> 'When the canonical Gospels are compared with the apocryphal gospels, one of the most impressive differences is how restrained the former are. **There are historical controls at work** in the canonical

Gospels that were not present in the composition of the apocryphal gospels, which abound in extravagant miracles recorded mainly for effect and to impress the readers. The controlling element in the canonical Gospels is found particularly in the very important continuing availability of eyewitnesses.'[446]

'Hence, there is a real sense in which Acts and the Pauline epistles are independent sources for our knowledge of Paul, and consequently we have **an historical control** which validates the three essentials for the argument.'[447]

'An investigation into Galatians is particularly important since it is the earliest New Testament document dealing with the subject81 and it forms **an invaluable historical control** for distinguishing between history and authorial interpretation in Luke-Acts.'[448]

'In these twelve points one can use Matthew as a check **or an historical control** on Luke and vice versa, since this is an instance of multiple, independent attestation. Both Matthew and Luke have inherited common earlier traditions about the infancy of Jesus. Each of them has adopted such details, which may be regarded as the historical nucleus, and incorporated them into his own structured literary composition. As for the other details in the two infancy narratives, beyond these twelve that have been inherited in common, they may have come from the private sources that both Matthew and Luke have used, from "M" or "L".

But no one can be sure about the use of "M" and "L" in this part of the gospel tradition; one cannot exclude the likelihood that both Matthew and Luke have freely composed their narratives, while making use of these twelve points. If so, then one has to allow for doubts and hesitation about the historical character of the rest (e.g. in the Matthean narrative, about the visit of the magi, the flight to

[446] Donald Alfred Hagner, The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2012), 63.

[447] Richard Peace, Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1999), 64.

[448] Philip Francis Esler, Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts : The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology (Monograph series (Society for New Testament Studies) 57; Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 86-87.

> Egypt, the massacre of the innocents, the return to Nazareth; similarly in the Lucan narrative, the visit of the shepherds, the presentation in the temple, the finding of the twelve year old Jesus in the temple). Such details have no counterpart in the other infancy narrative, and **there is nothing like an historical control for them**. Yet the historical kernel (the twelve points) prevents one from writing off the infancy narratives as mere fabrications out of whole cloth.'[449]
>
> 'This inquiry responds to the objection that "unity is in the eye of the beholder" by demonstrating the correspondence throughout this argument with contemporary Greco-Roman texts, **thus providing an historical control** for the literary analysis.'[450]
>
> 'Support for the OT story behind the text derived from step one of the methodology is much more likely to have been behind Matthew's OT quotations if this same story can be found in other Jewish and Christian works, such as Philo, Josephus, the DSS, and other portions of the NT. The inclusion of these extra-biblical sources in this work **provides a hsistorical control** for how the OT story is understood and where the OT story is found by establishing a first-century perspective for understanding the texts.'[451]

Taking the trial and sentencing of Jesus by Pilate as an example, direct sources on Pilate such as Tacitus and the Pilate inscription allow us to answer questions such as 'Did Pilate exist?', 'Was he a governor at the time claimed by the gospels?', 'Did he have the authority to command executions?', 'Was he in Judea at the time the gospels said he tried and sentenced Jesus?', and ultimately 'Did he sentence Jesus to crucifixion?'.

Sources such as Philo and Josephus (direct sources on Pilate, and therefore indirect controls for the trial and sentencing of Jesus), help us answer more difficult questions about the specific details given in the gospels, such as 'Was Pilate likely to be influenced by a Jewish crowd?', 'Is it likely he would have wanted to release Jesus?', 'Would he have been influenced by a bad dream his wife had?', 'Would he have been likely to have seen Jesus as a threat?' and 'Would he have permitted Jesus' body to have been taken down from the cross

[449] Joseph A Fitzmyer, A Christological Catechism: New Testament Answers (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 31.

[450] Margaret Mary Mitchell, Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians (Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 2.

[451] Charles A Ray, "The Story behind the Story: The Use of the Old Testament in Matthew's Birth Narrative," (2008), 32.

and buried by a stranger?'. The answers to these questions are not decisive; they are matters of probability. Any indirect sources demonstrating agreement between the events in the gospels and the socio-historical context in which they took place, contributes to our assessment of the probability of their historicity.

Controversy over criteria

The criteria of authenticity have been criticized by a range of scholars; in fact every one of the criteria has been criticized. This criticism has been exaggerated greatly by those who do not accept that Jesus existed, or who believe there is insufficient evidence to warrant the conclusion that he did exist. In some cases the scholarly dispute over the criteria of authenticity and their application, has been represented as evidence that none of the criteria are valid for the investigation of the historical Jesus.

Richard Carrier (a professional historian skeptical of the historicity of Jesus), has claimed that the wide range of conclusions about Jesus personal identity and mission demonstrate the failure of the criteria of authenticity. He has also claimed that when so many different portraits of a historical figure emerge from study of the evidence, it casts doubt on the methods used. On this basis, he argues that differences in interpretations of Jesus resulting from the use of the criteria of authenticity proves that the criteria are useless (claiming that if they were valid they would result in only one interpretation of Jesus), and that these differences also casts doubt on Jesus' existence.

This is invalid for several reasons. Firstly, it confuses the criteria of authenticity with the criteria of historicity. Scholarly criticisms of the criteria of authenticity are not the same as scholarly criticisms of the criteria of historicity, and the criteria of historicity are not in dispute; all the scholars applying the criteria of historicity have arrived at the same conclusion, that Jesus really existed. Secondly, scholarly dispute over whether Jesus is best characterized as an independent rural rabbi, or an apocalyptic wonderworker, or a travelling healer, does not cast any doubt on his historicity. Thirdly, such disputes do not cast any doubt on the criteria of authenticity; they are simply disputes over the interpretation of the body of historical data about Jesus' life on which scholars have already come to an agreement.

Fourthly it understates the level of agreement between scholars as to the historicity of events in Jesus' life as recorded by the available sources (such as the gospels). There is a sholarly consensus that reliable historical information about Jesus does exist, contained in both the New Testament and non-biblical historical sources. Although details of the life of Jesus are still hotly disputed, there is still a very broad agreement on the key events of his life. The following statements are all agreed on by the overwhelming consensus of peer reviewed professional scholarship on the historicity of Jesus, from those as conservative as Witherington, Blomberg

and Habemas, through those less conservative such as Theissen,[452] and Sanders,[453] to those as skeptical as Vermès (Jew),[454] [455] [456] Ehrman (agnostic),[457] and Lüdemann (atheist).[458] [459]

1. Jesus was born to a woman named Mary, during the reign of Herod the Great.

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[452] Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 569, 571-572.

[453] 'Sanders offered a more concise sketch in The Historical Figure of Jesus (1993). - Jesus was born c. 4 BCE, near the time of the death of Herod the Great; - he spent his childhood and early adult years in Nazareth, a Galilean village; - he was baptized by John the Baptist; - he called disciples; - he taught in the towns, villages and countryside of Galilee (apparently not the cities); - he preached "the kingdom of God"; - about the year 30 he went to Jerusalem for Passover; - he created a disturbance in the Temple area; - he had a final meal with the disciples; - he was arrested and interrogated by Jewish authorities, specifically the high priest; - he was executed on the orders of the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate.', Edwin Keith Broadhead, *Jewish Ways of Following Jesus: Redrawing the Religious Map of Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 64-65.

[454] Géza Vermès, *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 11-12.

[455] 'Why, then, was Jesus crucified? In Vermes's subsequent volume, 'The Religion of Jesus the Jew', he succinctly summarizes his conclusion: "The arrest and execution of Jesus were due, not directly to his words and deeds, but to their possible insurrectionary consequences feared by the nervous authorities in charge of law and order in that powder-keg of first-century Jerusalem... He died on the cross for having done the wrong thing (caused a commotion) in the wrong place (the Temple) at the wrong time (just before Passover)" (x).' Leander E Keck, *Who Is Jesus? History in Perfect Tense* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 41.

[456] '"The Synoptists are unanimous in presenting him as an exorcist, healer and teacher. They also emphasize that the deepest impression made by Jesus on his contemporaries resulted from his mastery over devils and disease, and the magnetic power of his preaching."', Vermès quoted by Bernard Brandon Scott, "New Options in An Old Quest," in *The Historical Jesus Through Catholic and Jewish Eyes* (ed. Leonard J Greenspoon, M. Dennis Hamm, and Bryan F LeBeau; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 7-8.

[457] Bart D Ehrman, Jesus, *Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

2. He had a father (biological or not), called Joseph.
3. He was baptized in Galilee.
4. He became an itinerant teacher.
5. He proclaimed the kingdom of God.
6. He conducted a healing ministry which involved certain genuine acts of healing.
7. He taught a subversive and counter-cultural socio-religious ethic expressed in wisdom sayings and parables; Mark 2:19; 3:27; 4:21; 10:25; 12:17, Matthew 5:38-48; 6:9-23; 7:7-8; 11:7-8; 18:12-14; 18:23-25; 20:1-15, Luke 6:20-21; 6:41-42; 9:58; 9:59-60; 10:30-35; 11:24-26; 12:22-31; 13:6-9; 13:20-21; 14:16-24; 15:11-32; 16:1-8a; 17:33; 18:1-8; 20:46 are all considered authentic sayings of Jesus by the Jesus Seminar.
8. He associated and identified with social outcasts.
9. He criticized the established Jewish religious elite.
10. He was arrested and crucified during the prefecture of Pontius Pilate, for being a public nuisance and social threat.
11. He died at around 30 years of age.

Conclusion

The scholarly consensus that Jesus existed is based on the application of criteria of historicity belonging to standard professional historiography. There is no dispute among professional historians that Jesus existed.

[458] Gerd Lüdemann, *The Great Deception: And What Jesus Really Said and Did* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1999), 77, 83, 96-97; Gerd Lüdemann, J*esus After Two Thousand Years: What He Really Said and Did* (Prometheus Books, Publishers, 2001), 689-690.

[459] 'Lüdemann even concludes that 'the activity of Jesus in driving out demons is one of the most certain historical facts about his life' (Jesus 13).', James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003) 677.

Additionally, the criteria of authenticity (disputed though they are), are largely borrowed from the criteria of professional historiography, and have not been invented by New Testament scholars to create data about Jesus which does not exist. Application of the criteria of authenticity (disputed as they are), to the available historical sources, has resulted in significant scholarly agreement on the key events in Jesus' life, and the reason for and manner of his death.

The Historicity of Jesus: A Guide to Proponents and Skeptics

Jon Burke

Abstract

Discussion of the historical existence of Jesus has become widespread on the internet, with commentators on the subject ranging from well-respected and highly qualified academics, to uneducated and virtually unknown conspiracy theorists. This article provides a definition of mythicism and a brief guide to the individuals commonly seen or cited online in discussion of the topic.

The Scholarly Consensus

Mythicism is a view encompassing the belief that Jesus did not exist as a historical person (strong mythicism), or that even if he did exist, reliable historical information about him exists (weak mythicism). The term 'mythicism' is most commonly seen being used to refer to the former of these positions. Both views are rejected by the overwhelming number of qualified academics. Jesus' existence is considered well established by professional historiography, and the idea that he did not exist is typically not taken seriously.

> "The theory of Jesus' nonexistence is now effectively **dead as a scholarly question**." [460]

Why pay attention to mythicism?

Given the fact that mythicism is a fringe view held by virtually no qualified academic and is overwhelmingly rejected by the professional scholarly consensus, why pay any attention to it at all?

In truth, we do not really need to be concerned with mythicism, which historians do not take seriously and which is typically treated as having the same lack of credibility as alien abductions, conspiracy theories about Atlantis, and astrology. However, it is common to encounter non-Christians who believe mythicism is valid and has some evidential basis, so it is worth our time to educate ourselves about the subject in order to give an informed answer.

[460] Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 14.

Mythicism in scholarship

In order to speak authoritatively on the subject, a scholar should have postgraduate qualifications in a relevant field (history or New Testament studies), and should preferably have published academic work and hold or have held an academic teaching position.

Although virtually no academically qualified professional scholars hold to either strong or weak mythicism, certain scholars are frequently cited in an attempt to support the case. Ironically, not all of them are convinced of the mythicist argument and some of them are not relevantly qualified. The following is a list of scholars typically cited by mythicists in support of their arguments.

Professor Richard Carrier is a historian, though he has never held a teaching position. Carrier is qualified to write on the historicity of Jesus. However, he often attempts to supplement his case with arguments from mathematics, philosophy, early Jewish and Christian texts, despite being unqualified to do so; these efforts have been criticized heavily by scholars well qualified in these areas. Additionally, Carrier denies being a mythicist, though he argues there is good evidence for the strong mythicist case.

Professor George Albert Wells is a professor of German, and consequently unqualified in any relevant field. Mythicists cite him because he has written several books questioning the historicity of Jesus,[461] and originally made the case that Jesus did not exist. However, Wells' current position is soft mythicism; that Jesus did exist, but that there is little or no evidence for him.[462]

Professor Robert Price is a professor of New Testament studies, and is well qualified to discuss Jesus' historicity from the point of view of the New Testament texts and later Christian writings. However, his

[461] George Albert Wells, *The Jesus of the Early Christians: A Study in Christian Origins* (London: Pemberton, 1971); *The Historical Evidence for Jesus* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1982); *The Jesus Legend* (Chicago: Open Court, 1996); *The Jesus Myth* (Chicago, Ill.: Open Court, 1999); *Can We Trust the New Testament?: Thoughts on the Reliability of Early Christian Testimony* (Chicago: Open Court, 2004); *Cutting Jesus down to Size: What Higher Criticism Has Achieved and Where It Leaves Christianity* (Chicago, Ill.: Open Court, 2009).

[462] George Albert Wells, "Jesus, Historicity of," in *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief* (ed. Tom Flynn; Prometheus Books, 2007).

writings on this subject[463] have not gained scholarly support, and remain on the fringe. A contributing factor was the fact that he published with two non-scholarly publishing houses (Prometheus Books and American Atheist Press), which are dedicated to generating secular and atheist literature.

Neither of these companies has any significant standing in academic publishing, and they typically produce populist works for a non-scholarly audience, which have not been reviewed and assessed by professional scholars before publication. Additionally, Price himself is agnostic on the subject of Jesus, and does not hold a mythicist view.

Thomas Brodie is a Roman Catholic theologian and Dominican priest, well qualified to assess the New Testament evidence for the existence of Jesus. His strong mythicist views are set out in an academic level work published in 2012.[464] The book has made little impact on the field, since it relies almost entirely on the argument that if parallels for New Testament passages describing Jesus can be found in the Old Testament, it is more probable that the New Testament writers simply invented Jesus by patching together numerous Old Testament themes, characters, and concepts from a range of different books, to create a single composite literary character (Jesus), who was made to look like a real person even though he never existed.

[463] Robert M Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2000); Robert M Price and Lowder, *The Empty Tomb: Jesus beyond the Grave* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2005); Robert M Price, *The Reason-Driven Life: What Am I Here on Earth For?* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2006); *Jesus Is Dead* (Cranford, N.J.: American Atheist Press, 2007); *The Case against the Case for Christ: A New Testament Scholar Refutes Lee Strobel* (Cranford, N.J.: American Atheist Press, 2010).

[464] Thomas L Brodie, *Beyond the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Memoir of a* Discovery (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012).

Brodie's method of identifying parallels has been criticized strongly even by some reviewers sympathetic to mythicism,[465] and the lack of evidence for his argument has also been noted.[466]

In addition, Brodie's attempt to dismiss all the historical sources for Jesus outside the New Testament, and his denial of any oral tradition as a historical witness to Jesus, has failed to find support within the broader scholarly community. Brodie's theory requires that all of the New Testament books are simply literary creations written to give the false appearance of a man who never lived and numerous events which never took place (including the entire book of Acts).

The sheer scale of this literary fiction, the unprecedented coordination of writing required, the lack of any historical evidence, the failure to dislodge the scholarly consensus on the historical sources outside the New

[465] Richard Carrier's review was scathing; "This book is as the subtitle says: a memoir**. It isn't really a good book for arguing his case. In fact, it's terrible at that. Consequently, I cannot recommend this book to anyone who wants to see a good case for Jesus not existing. You simply will not be convinced by his treatment of that here**. All it does do is explain, autobiographically, the steps that took him to this conclusion, with some brief outlines of the kind of arguments he could perhaps gin up if he were to do a full-force defense of the thesis. However, even were he to write that hypothetical book, **I still don't think he'd have a case**. Not that there isn't a good case for the conclusion (that Jesus probably did not really exist historically as the Gospels claim). **Rather, I think Brodie has come to that conclusion invalidly, from a rather weak series of arguments**.", Richard Carrier, "Brodie on Jesus," Richard Carrier Blogs, n.d., n.p. [cited 18 August 2014].

[466] Again, Richard Carrier has been unrelentingly dismissive of Brodie's efforts; "Meanwhile, the false premise has to do with his treatment of the Pauline epistles. Really the only evidence for historicity there is is [sic] a scant few obscure passages in the Pauline epistles (e.g. references to "brothers of the Lord"), **so they are really the most important evidence to deal with, and he deals with them almost not at all**. In fact, his answer to them is to declare them all forgeries, and Paul himself a fiction. **Brodie makes no clear case for this conclusion, and what arguments he does have are fallacious** (e.g. the letters have certain features that forged letters sometimes share–except, so do authentic letters), and the position as a whole is **too radical to be useful**. Not that it hasn't had serious defenders before this. **But it constitutes a whole additional fringe thesis one must defend successfully first**, before one can use it as a premise in an argument for the ahistoricity of Jesus. **And I am skeptical that that can really be done** (see my comments here and here). Certainly **none of his arguments in *Beyond* are convincing on this subject**.", Richard Carrier, "Brodie on Jesus," Richard Carrier Blogs, n.d., n.p. [cited 18 August 2014].

Testament which contain authentic references to Jesus, it's lack of explanation for the available evidence, and the enormously complex nature of Brodie's case (requiring far more evidence than he has provided), has resulted in its rejection by the scholarly community.[467]

Professor Hector Avalos is an ex-Christian atheist, and professor of religious studies. He is highly qualified in Biblical studies, with several relevant post-graduate degrees and a wide range of academic publications. However, although Avalos is strongly against religion in general and theism in particular, he is not a mythicist; whilst believing the case has merit, he does not commit to it. He has not published any work on the historicity of Jesus.

Professor Thomas L. Thompson is a highly qualified and respected Old Testament scholar. However, he has been criticized strongly by other professionals for his comments on subjects outside his area of expertise,

[467] "Brodie's response to Jesus' historicity runs into two problems. First, he seems to create a false dichotomy between history and literature**. If a narrative is literary, or borrows a literary strategy from an earlier source, and is historically inaccurate, then Brodie questions its historicity altogether**. Yet all history is literary. It is not surprising that Jewish Christians related their story by recasting national stories that brought them hope. **The sheer volume of both Christian and non-Christian references to Jesus suggest the opposite conclusion, that Jesus existed**. Even though historians lack details about Jesus' life, it does not require us to conclude that Jesus was a wholesale creation. **Second, Brodie's solution cannot adequately account for Christian origins**. Why would the church create such a literary invention? What was the basis for early Christian theology? If they based this literary invention on an actual person, would it not be easier to conclude that person actually be Jesus? Brodie himself concedes: "Christianity emerged from Judaism, but if Jesus and Paul are essentially literary or symbolic rather than historical, **it is not clear how that emergence happened**" (177). Later he writes: "It is not clear what sparked this development—what inspired those at the origins of Christianity" (182). **The existence of Jesus presents the most historically plausible conclusion**.", Benjamin I Simpson, "Review: Beyond the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Memoir of a Discovery," *Review of Biblical Literature* (July 2007).

such as archaeology[468] [469] and New Testament studies. His comparison of king David and Jesus[470] has been interpreted as presenting a mythical case for Jesus, but he has denied strongly that this was his intention.[471] Whilst claiming the gospels cannot be used to establish the historicity of Jesus, Thompson said he was not attempting to argue for mythicism;[472] he has not committed to the mythicist case.

Professor Richard Dawkins is a biologist with no formal qualifications relevant to the historicity of Jesus. Although aware of the mythicist case he has not committed to it, saying only that such a case is possible, and stating in his book 'The God Delusion' (2006), that Jesus "probably existed".[473]

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[468] Commenting on Thompson's claims concerning the history of ancient Israel, archaeologist Kenneth Kitchen says 'As a professional Qrientalist of long standing (of Egyptology and Near Eastern texts and civilizations), I hardly know where to begin with all this rollicking, silly nonsense!', Kenneth Anderson Kitchen, On the Reliability of the Old Testament (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 456.

[469] Commenting on Thompson's book 'Early History of the Israelite People from the Written and Archaeological Sources' (1992), archaeologist William Dever said "Unfortunately, it was a caricature, not a history that any archaeologist would have even recognized.", William G Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites? And Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2003), 141.

[470] Thomas L Thompson, *The Messiah Myth: The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

[471] "Rather than dealing with the historicity of the figure of Jesus, **my book had argued a considerably different issue**, which, however, might well raise problems for many American New Testament scholars who historicize what was better understood as allegorical. **Rather than a book on historicity**, my The Messiah Myth offered an analysis of the thematic elements and motifs of a particular myth, which had a history of at least 2000 years.", Thomas L Thompson, "The Bible and Interpretation - Is This Not the Carpenter's Son?", n.d., n.p. [cited 18 August 2014].

[472] "Here I argue that the synoptic gospels can hardly be used to establish the historicity of the figure of Jesus; for both the episodes and sayings with which the figure of Jesus is presented are stereotypical and have a history that reaches centuries earlier. **I have hardly shown that Jesus did not exist and did not claim to**.", Thomas L Thompson, "The Bible and Interpretation - Is This Not the Carpenter's Son?", July 2012., n.p. [cited 18 August 2014].

[473] Richard Dawkins, The God Delusion (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006), 122.

Proponents most commonly seen online

1. Professor James F. McGrath:[474] Professor in New Testament Language and Literature at Butler University. James is a Christian, and often discusses the subject of Jesus' historicity on his blog, and has written many critical reviews of mythicist writings, as well as engaging in online exchanges with mythicists. Two of his works are relevant to the historicity of Jesus.[475]

2. Professor Larry Hurtado:[476] Professor of New Testament Language, Literature and Theology at the University of Edinburgh, and historian of early Christianity. His work has focused on the process by which Jesus became known as God.[477] As a Trinitarian Christian, Hurtado believes Jesus was regarded as a divine being by some of his followers (and some New Testament writers), at a very early date, a view not held by many scholars.
3. Professor Bart D. Ehrman:[478] Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, and highly regarded scholar of New Testament textual criticism. Ehrman is an ex-Christian agnostic, who has written several books relevant to the subject of Jesus' historicity.[479]

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[474] http://www.patheos.com/blogs/exploringourmatrix/about.

[475] James F McGrath, *The Burial of Jesus: History & Faith* ([Charleston, SC]: BookSurge Publishing, 2008); James F McGrath, *The Only True God Early Christian Monotheism in Its Jewish Context* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

[476] http://larryhurtado.wordpress.com.

[477] Larry W Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988); Larry W Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?: Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005).

[478] http://www.bartdehrman.com.

[479] Bart D Ehrman, *Jesus, Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Bart D Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (HarperCollins, 2012); Bart D Ehrman, *The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot: A New Look at Betrayer and Betrayed* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Bart D Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (Harper Collins, 2014).

4. Professor Maurice Casey: Professor at the University of Nottingham, scholar of the New Testament and early Christianity. Casey was an atheist whose work focused on the significance of Aramaic to New Testament research. Two of his books addressed Jesus' historicity.[480] [481]

5. Doctor Raymond Joseph Hoffmann:[482] Historian focusing early Christianity. Hoffman is an atheist who has taken an interest in the historicity of Jesus. He has affirmed the historicity of Jesus in two published works,[483] and continues to criticize mythicism strongly online.[484]

Skeptics most commonly seen online

1. Doctor Richard Carrier:[485] A historian qualified in ancient Greek and Roman history (though currently unemployed having never held an academic position), Carrier says he is not a mythicist,[486] insisting his claim is that the existence of Jesus is sufficiently improbable that his historicity cannot be considered certain, validating mythicism as a proposal at least.

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[480] Maurice Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth an Independent Historian's Account of His Life and Teaching* (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2010); Maurice Casey, *Jesus: Evidence and Argument or Mythicist Myths?* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014).

[481] Casey died in 2014.

[482] 1. rjosephhoffmann, "The New Oxonian," The New Oxonian, n.d., n.p. [cited 16 August 2014]. Online: http://rjosephhoffmann.wordpress.com/2012/05/22/4915.

[483] R. Joseph Hoffmann, *Jesus Outside the Gospels* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1984); R. Joseph Hoffmann, *Sources of the Jesus Tradition: Separating History from Myth* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2010).

[484] rjosephhoffmann, "Mythicism: Anything Goes?," The New Oxonian, n.d., n.p. [cited 16 August 2014]. Online: http://rjosephhoffmann.wordpress.com/2013/01/29/mythicism-anything-goes.

[485] http://www.richardcarrier.info.

[486] Though he is represented online by various sources as the world's leading proponent of mythicism, or the world's leading mythicist, Carrier himself avoids making the positive argument that Jesus did not exist, since that would place the burden of evidence on him, and he has no such evidence.

He has published two books arguing his case;[487] the vast majority of his written material is online in the form of arguments with proponents of Jesus historicity and critiques of their publications. He has become estranged from populist online mythicists such as Earl Doherty,[488] Dorothy Murdock, and Neil Godfrey,[489] as a result of his scathing critiques of their work and his insistence that his is the only work in the field which can be trusted.[490] All Carriers arguments have been contradicted by qualified scholars in the relevant fields, and his books have failed to shift the scholarly consensus on the historicity of Jesus, despite his claims that the first book (now two years old), would have a massive influence on Jesus studies and overturn the case for historicity. Carrier is the only online skeptic of Jesus' historicity worth taking seriously.

2. Earl Doherty:[491] An amateur commentator with a bachelor degree in ancient history and classical languages (Greek and Latin). Doherty is an atheist who has written three books making the mythicist

[487] Richard Carrier, *Proving History: Bayes's Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2012); Richard Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014).

[488] Doherty has remarked that Carrier "has an ego the size of a bus".

[489] Godfrey has said "Carrier has not made any positive contribution towards opening up a serious discussion of mythicism to a wider public".

[490] "The first thing to know is, forget about all the other mythicist theories ... so, I say, if you want a simple rule, basically, if you don't hear it from me be skeptical of it.", Carrier, "The Historicity of Jesus", statement starting at 3m 10s of a public address on 2 July 2012.

[491] "Historical Jesus or Jesus Myth: The Jesus Puzzle", n.d., n.p. [cited 16 August 2014]. Online: http://www.jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/home.htm.

case.[492] Despite some favourable comments by two mythicsts with academic qualifications,[493] none of Doherty's books have been taken seriously by the broader scholarly community, and Doherty's own mythicist views occupy the fringe of the mythicist community, which frustrates him.

3. Neil Godfrey:[494] A librarian with postgraduate qualifications in education and information science, Godfrey is an ex-fundamentalist Christian turned atheist. Despite describing himself as agnostic to the historicity of Jesus, Godfrey only ever presents arguments against Jesus' existence.

   Godfrey is mentioned here only because he has been involved in online correspondence with scholarly proponents of historicity such as James McGrath,[495] Larry Hurtado,[496] Maurice Casey,[497] and R. Joseph Hoffmann.[498] Godfrey has been criticized strongly by Doherty and Carrier, who have objected to his comments on their arguments, and has also been criticized repeatedly on his own blog by other mythicists noting weaknesses, inconsistencies, and double standards in his arguments.

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[492] Earl Doherty, *The Jesus Puzzle: Did Christianity Begin with a Mythical Christ?* (Ottawa: Canadian Humanist Publications, 1999); Earl Doherty, *Challenging the Verdict: A Cross-Examination of Lee Strobel's "The Case for Christ"* (Ottawa, Canada: Age of Reason Publications, 2001); Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man : The Case for a Mythical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009).

[493] Robert Price and Richard Carrier.

[494] "Vridar," Vridar, n.d., n.p. [cited 16 August 2014]. Online: http://vridar.org.

[495] James F. McGrath, "Funny Mythicist Quote of the Day (Neil Godfrey)," Exploring Our Matrix, n.d., n.p. [cited 16 August 2014].

[496] "On Dating NT Manuscripts and the Codex," Larry Hurtado's Blog, n.d., n.p. [cited 16 August 2014]. Online: http://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2013/03/13/on-dating-nt-manuscripts-and-the-codex.

[497] rjosephhoffmann, "The Jesus Process: Maurice Casey," The New Oxonian, n.d., n.p. [cited 16 August 2014]. Online: http://rjosephhoffmann.wordpress.com/2012/05/22/the-jesus-process-maurice-casey/.

[498] rjosephhoffmann, "The Passion of the Christ-Deniers," The New Oxonian, n.d., n.p. [cited 16 August 2014]; be advised that Hoffmann's language is generally intemperate and sometimes coarse, containing occasional obscenities.

Several critiques of Godfrey's articles are provided later in this edition of Defence & Confirmation, as examples of his method of argument.

4. Dorothy Murdock:[499] An atheist conspiracy theorist with mystical beliefs (using the pseudonym 'Acharya S' for spurious reasons[500]), and a bachelor degree in classics. Combining pseudo-history about Atlantis and aliens[501] with ignorance about the Bible, her claims are so dislocated from reality that most prominent mythicists disown her.[502] Rejected by mainstream scholars,[503] [504] ridiculed by other mythicists and their sympathizers,[505] Murdock prints her own books and posts on her own

[499] "Truth Be Known | Acharya S | D.M. Murdock", n.d., n.p. [cited 16 August 2014]. Online: http://www.truthbeknown.com.

[500] "D. M. Murdock and 'Dorothy,'" Labarum, 24 February, 2014, n.p. [cited 16 August 2014]. Online: http://labarum.net/d-m-murdock-and-dorothy.

[501] Acharya S, *The Christ Conspiracy: The Greatest Story Ever Sold* (Kempton, Ill.: Adventures Unlimited, 1999); *Christ in Egypt: The Horus-Jesus Connection* ([Seattle, WA]: Stellar House Pub., 2009).

[502] In particular, both Richard Carrier and Neil Godfrey have distanced themselves from her after writing extremely strongly worded rejections of her claims.

[503] "Mythicists of this ilk should not be surprised that their views are not taken seriously by real scholars, that their books are not reviewed in scholarly journals, mentioned by experts in the field, or even read by them. **The book is filled with so many factual errors and outlandish assertions that it is hard to believe that the author is serious**. If she is serious, it is hard to believe that she has ever encountered anything resembling historical scholarship. Her "research" appears to have involved **reading a number of nonscholarly books that say the same thing she is about to say and then quoting them**. One looks in vain for the citation of a primary ancient source, and quotations from real experts (Elaine Pagels, chiefly) are ripped from their context and misconstrued.", Bart D Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012).

[504] http://www.risenjesus.com/a-refutation-of-acharya-ss-book-the-christ-conspiracy.

[505] "The more I have read of the works of Acharya S (aka D.M. Murdock) and the more engagement I have had with those who fervently advocate her views **the more I have suspected that some form of cult-like belief system lies beneath their surface appearances**. Part of the reason for my suspicions has been the vitriolic reactions on their part against any attempt to honestly critique their views and engage them in argument that consistently follows

website and forums, from which she excludes her critics whilst commenting on them unfavourably. A critique of an article by Murdock is provided later in this edition of Defence & Confirmation, as an example Murdock's method of argument.

Conclusion

Proponents of mythicism commonly encountered online typically lack any relevant scholarly qualifications, and have no academic standing whatsoever. Despite the efforts of its proponents, mythicism remains a fringe view held by virtually no qualified academic, due to weaknesses in the case.

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the norms of scholarly or "scientific" reasoning.", Neil Godfrey, "Astrotheology, A Religious Belief System (as per D.M. Murdock/Acharya S)," Text, Vridar, 28 March, 2014, n.p. [cited 16 August 2014].

The Historical Jesus: Recommended Reading

Jon Burke

Abstract

With the rise of interest in studies of the historical Jesus and the increasing presence of mythicism on the internet, Bible believers are advised to be well informed on the subject of Jesus historicity. This article provides a balanced reading list of resources presenting the evidence for Jesus' historicity and the authenticity of the Jesus tradition, and addressing mythicist claims.

Works by Christians

This is a select list of recommended works on the historical Jesus by Christian scholars. There are too many to describe in detail, but it is worth noting the authors who are considered most useful and authoritative in the field; Craig Blomberg, William Lane Craig, James Dunn, Craig Evans, Gary Habermas, Craig Keener, John Meier, Stanley Porter, and Robert Van Voorst.

1. Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997).
2. Darrell L Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Leicester, England: Baker Academic ; Apollos, 2002).
3. Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus according to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002).
4. Ronald K. Craig, William Lane; Lüdemann, Gerd; Copan, Paul; Tacelli, *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment?: A Debate between William Lane Craig & Gerd Lüdemann* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).
5. Tom Evans, Craig A. Wright, *Jesus, the Final Days* (ed. Troy A. Miller; London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008).
6. Bruce David Chilton and Craig A. Evans, *Authenticating the Words of Jesus* (Brill, 1999).
7. Michael R. Cosby, *Portraits of Jesus: An Inductive Approach to the Gospels* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1999).
8. Pieter F. Craffert, *The Life of a Galilean Shaman: Jesus of Nazareth in Anthropological-Historical Perspective* (vol. 3; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008).
9. Markus Cromhout, *Jesus and Identity: Reconstructing Judean Ethnicity in Q* (vol. 2; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007).

10. Donald L. Denton, *Historiography and Hermeneutics in Jesus Studies: An Examination of the Work of John Dominic Crossan and Ben F. Meyer* (vol. 262; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004).
11. John P. Dickson, *The Christ Files: How Historians Know What They Know about Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).
12. James D. G Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2003).
13. James D. G. Dunn and Scot McKnight, *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research* (Eisenbrauns, 2005).
14. James D. G. Dunn, *A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).
15. Craig A Evans, *"Jesus in Non-Christian Sources," in Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (ed. Bruce David Chilton and Craig Alan Evans; Brill, 1998), 443–78.
16. David Flusser and R. Steven Notley, *Jesus* (The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2001).
17. Joel B. Green and Max Turner, *Jesus of Nazareth Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus And New Testament Christology* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994).
18. I. Howard Green, Joel B.; McKnight, Scot; Marshall, ed., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).
19. Leonard J Greenspoon, M. Dennis Hamm, and Bryan F LeBeau, *The Historical Jesus Through Catholic and Jewish Eyes* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000).
20. Brian Han Gregg, *The Historical Jesus and the Final Judgment Sayings in Q* (Mohr Siebeck, 2006).
21. Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1996).
22. Tom Holmén and Stanley E Porter, *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011).
23. Leander E Keck, *Who Is Jesus? History in Perfect Tense* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2000).
24. Craig S Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009).
25. John S. Kloppenborg and John W. Marshall, *Apocalypticism, Anti-Semitism and the Historical Jesus: Subtexts in Criticism* (vol. 275; Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series; T&T Clark International, 2005).
26. Leif E. Kloppenborg, John S.;Vaage, ed., *Early Christianity, Q and Jesus* (vol. 55; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1992).

27. J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss the Real Jesus and Mislead Popular Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006).
28. Clive Marsh and Steve Moyise, *Jesus and the Gospels: 2nd Edition* (Continuum, 2006). Criteria of authenticity.
29. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew, Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1991-2009). Published in four volumes, criteria of historicity and authenticity.
30. Stanley E. Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004).
31. Mark Allan Powell, J*esus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).
32. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (trans. W. Montgomery; 2d ed.; London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911).
33. Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).
34. Robert E Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2000).
35. Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (2nd ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).
36. Ben Witherington III, *What Have They Done with Jesus?: Beyond Strange Theories and Bad History—Why We Can Trust the Bible* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006).
37. Thomas R Yoder Neufeld, *Recovering Jesus: The Witness of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2007).

Works by non-Christians

These works are useful because they provide non-Christian scholarly perspectives of the historical Jesus, and cannot be dismissed by non-Christians as biased in favour of Christian beliefs. Naturally these works give no credence to the gospels' accounts of supernatural events such as Jesus' miracles and his resurrection, and their assessments of how Jesus was viewed by his disciples does not always agree with our own. Nevertheless, they are important witnesses to the extent to which Jesus' historicity is well established within mainstream secular scholarship, proving it is not merely a fringe view confined to Christians.

1. **Bart D Ehrman, *Jesus, Apocalyptic Prophet of the New* Millennium (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999)**. Assesses the New Testament evidence for the life and work of Jesus, applying criteria of authenticity. This book is useful for learning how the criteria of authenticity are applied, and for understanding the historical evidence for the existence of Jesus.

2. **Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (HarperCollins, 2012)**. Describes the historical evidence confirming the existence of Jesus, and addresses a range of mythicist arguments and books, from the scholarly to the populist. This book is useful for learning how the criteria of historicity are applied, understanding the historical evidence for the existence of Jesus, and understanding and answering standard mythicist arguments.

3. **Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (Harper Collins, 2014)**. Explains the process by which Jesus became known as God. Whilst agreeing with the scholarly consensus that Jesus did not consider himself divine or teach his followers that he was divine, Ehrman believes that at least some of the early first century Christians (including those who contributed to the New Testament), were already starting to see Jesus as a divine being in some way. This book is useful for learning how later Christians developed the doctrine of the Trinity, and provides excellent evidence that neither Jesus nor his disciples considered him to be divine.

4. **Michael Grant, *Jesus*. (New York NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977)**. Very useful as an account of Jesus by a secular professional historian, and still considered a standard work in the field.

5. **Maurice Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth an Independent Historian's Account of His Life and Teaching* (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2010).** Focuses on the language of the gospels to reconstruct the historical Jesus in the context of 1st century Judaism, with a particular emphasis on identifying authentic Aramaic sayings of Jesus behind the Greek text of the gospels. On the basis of this approach, Casey dates Mark's gospel extremely early (c. 40 CE), earlier than the earliest of Paul's letters (1 Thessalonians, c. 51 CE). Casey's Aramaic reconstructions have been recognized as shedding important light on the historical Jesus, even though they have not all been accepted. His very early date for Mark has not been widely accepted, but is considered possible by mainstream scholarship.

6. **Maurice Casey, *Jesus: Evidence and Argument or Mythicist Myths?* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014).** Casey's last work on the historical Jesus (Casey died in May 2014), addressing

specifically the typical mythicist arguments. A strongly worded book, Casey identifies numerous weaknesses in the mythicst case, which he characterizes as a fringe view held almost exclusively by non-scholars, or by a very small number of scholars without directly relevant professional qualifications. This work is useful as a resource for a scholarly consideration of recent mythicist arguments typically found online rather than in print publications.

7. **James G. Crossley, *Reading the New Testament: Contemporary Approaches* (Routledge, 2010).** A valuable work explaining how standard professional historical methodology is applied to New Testament research and the subject of the historical Jesus. Crossley describes the various forms of historical analysis applied to the gospels, and explains in detail the criteria of authenticity used in the Quest for the Historical Jesus. Crossley dates Mark's gospel to around 35 CE, even earlier than the date proposed by Casey, but although his case for this date has not been accepted, it is still taken seriously by mainstream scholarship and is considered within the bounds of possibility.

8. **R. Joseph Hoffmann, *Jesus Outside the Gospels* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1984).** Hoffman's early work on the historical Jesus concluded that very little could be verified about his life, and cast doubt on the authenticity and accuracy of the gospel records. Nevertheless, he concluded in favour of the historicity of Jesus. This book is mainly useful as a contrast to his late work, demonstrating how his views shifted over time.

9. **R. Joseph Hoffmann, *Sources of the Jesus Tradition: Separating History from Myth* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2010).** Edited by Hoffman (who wrote most of the chapters), this book contains essays from atheist members of The Jesus Project, a secular investigation of the historical Jesus which started in 2008 and was terminated in 2009 (despite having been planned to run for five years). The book received mixed reviews from atheists, and even from members of The Jesus Project itself. It is useful as an introduction to typical arguments made against the historicity of Jesus by writers such as Robert Price, Richard Carrier, Frank Zindler, and Robert Eisenman.

Unreliable Sources: An Early Warning System

Jon Burke

Abstract

Encountering a massive range of online sources discussing the historicity of Jesus, with a wide variety of claims and assertions being made, the average reader may feel overwhelmed at the numerous conflicting arguments, and wish to know how they can differentiate reliably between fact and fiction. This article provides an 'early warning system' by identifying features typical of unreliable sources. The article also provides examples of these features in mythicist writings.

Detecting unreliable sources

Differentiating between reliable and unreliable sources often requires specific knowledge of the subject area under discussion. For example, if we want to know about the life of Julius Caesar, we will typically look for scholarly historical books to guide us. When we're reading books, it's usually relatively easy to tell if we're reading a reliable source. We can usually tell from the publisher, or from the location in which we find the book; a book found in a library or the non-fiction section of a book shop has usually passed some kind of reliability check by an informed professional.

However, online sources of information are often much more difficult to evaluate. If we find two online sources with incompatible information on the life of Caesar, which should we trust? Checking them against books or other online sources we know to be reliable, may not always be practical. The author or the website on which we find the source may provide some useful information, but may not always be useful or accurate.

Typical features of an unreliable source

What we can to do to evaluate a source, is examine how its case is presented. Unreliable sources typically contain features indicating the author is misrepresenting the facts.

1. Avoiding scholarly consensus

Failing to seek out (or avoiding), the established scholarly consensus on an issue, or concealing this information from readers, or arguing that scholarly consensus is meaningless.

2. Artificial levels of credulity

Accepting sympathetic sources[506] uncritically despite their lack of scholarly standing, whilst rejecting more scholarly and authoritative sources which are antagonistic,[507] claiming they are insufficiently convincing.

3. Confirmation bias

Overwhelmingly selecting sources sympathetic to the view already held, whilst ignoring or dismissing antagonistic sources.

4. Factual errors

Making factually inaccurate statements.

5. False neutrality

Observing correctly that a particular argument is inconclusive due to inadequate or ambiguous evidence, and then appealing to it later as if it had been decisively proven.

6. Inflating authority

Exaggerating the value or authority of a particular source.

7. Deflating authority

Arguing that scholarly sources which disagree with the argument being made, have little or no authority.

8. Inflating evidence

Exaggerating the amount or quality of evidence for a given argument.

9. Manufacturing controversy

[506] A sympathetic source is a source which supports or acknowledges evidence for the case being made.

[507] An antagonistic source is a source which rejects or denies evidence for the case being made.

Presenting the appearance of scholarly controversy despite scholarly consensus.

10. Selective tolerance

Tolerating a perceived fault in a sympathetic source, but claiming the same fault is a critical flaw in an antagonistic source.

A baloney detection kit

In the Scientific American (November and December 2001), science historian Michael Shermer (founder of the Skeptics Society and well known atheist), published a list of ten questions to ask when testing claims.[508]

1. How reliable is the source of the claim?
2. Does this source often make similar claims?
3. Have the claims been verified by another source?
4. How does the claim fit with what we know about how the world works?
5. Has anyone gone out of the way to disprove the claim, or has only supportive evidence been sought?
6. Does the preponderance of evidence point to the claimant's conclusion or to a different one?
7. Is the claimant employing the accepted rules of reason and tools of research, or have these been abandoned in favor of others that lead to the desired conclusion?
8. Is the claimant providing an explanation for the observed phenomena or merely denying the existing explanation?
9. If the claimant proffers a new explanation, does it account for as many phenomena as the old explanation did?
10. Do the claimant's personal beliefs and biases drive the conclusions, or vice versa?

[508] Michael Shermer, "Baloney Detection Kit", n.d., n.p. [cited 20 August 2014]. Online: http://homepages.wmich.edu/~korista/baloney.html.

This is a valuable list of questions to ask when attempting to assess the accuracy of any truth claims. Shermer refers to his list as a 'Baloney Detection Kit', out of respect for astronomer and skeptic Carl Sagan (an agnostic), who coined the term in his book 'The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark' (1996).[509]

Let's apply the baloney detection kit to the work of mythicist Earl Doherty.

1. **How reliable is the source of the claim?** Not very reliable; Doherty has no relevant formal qualifications.

2. **Does this source often make similar claims?** Yes, Doherty is known for making wild unsubstantiated claims which are contradicted by the majority of trained professionals.

3. **Have the claims been verified by another source?** No, Doherty's claims are comprehensively rejected by the overwhelming scholarly consensus of qualified academics.

4. **How does the claim fit with what we know about how the world works**? It does not fit what we know about history according to professional historiography.

5. **Has anyone gone out of the way to disprove the claim, or has only supportive evidence been sought?** Yes, Doherty's claims have been disproved by many scholars; Doherty himself does not attempt to test his claims against standard scholarly metrics.

6. **Does the preponderance of evidence point to the claimant's conclusion or to a different one?** The preponderance of evidence does not point to Doherty's conclusion; it points in the opposite direction.

[509] Ironically the work of atheist Shermer and agnostic Sagan shares an intellectual heritage with Christian skepticism, and even the title of Sagan's book borrowed from a work by Christian physician Thomas Ady, 'A Candle in the Dark: or, A Treatise Concerning the Nature of Witches and Witchcraft' (1656), which dismissed popular beliefs in witches and witchcraft as unbiblical fiction which had no supporting evidence.; 'His Candle in the Dark was **a well-constructed and fluent book**, showing an unrelentingly **skeptical line against witchcraft**.', Richard M. Golden, *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*, volume 1 (ABC-CLIO, 2006), 10.

7. **Is the claimant employing the accepted rules of reason and tools of research, or have these been abandoned in favor of others that lead to the desired conclusion?** Doherty abandons standard historiographical methodology, and fails to apply standard principles of lexicography and textual criticism. He misapplies, or fails to use, standard tools of research.

8. **Is the claimant providing an explanation for the observed phenomena or merely denying the existing explanation?** Doherty has provided an explanation, but it fails.

9. **If the claimant proffers a new explanation, does it account for as many phenomena as the old explanation did?** No, Doherty's explanation fails to account for all the evidence, and is a far more complex explanation.

10. **Do the claimant's personal beliefs and biases drive the conclusions, or vice versa?** Doherty's claims are transparently driven by his personal beliefs and biases.

Conclusion

Mythicist arguments typically rely on flawed arguments and misrepresentation of sources. Their weaknesses are exposed when standard tests for logical coherence and critical thinking are applied. It is useful to demonstrate that the mythicist case fails to meet secular criteria for credibility.

The Dunning-Kruger Effect: A Common Feature of Mythicism

Jon Burke

Abstract

Online discussion of the historical Jesus, and the topic of mythicism, is dominated by amateur commentators, many with a hyper-inflated assessment of their own knowledge intelligence, and understanding of the topic. A common feature of mythicist writings in particular, is disdain for well educated and professionally qualified scholars and a preference for works by people with no relevant academic training at all. This article explains why such an attitude is symptomatic of incompetence, and identifies sources which should not be trusted.

The Dunning-Kruger effect

In 1999, David Dunning and Justin Kruger published a journal article entitled 'Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments'.[510] Their research indicated that people who are unskilled, or lacking academic or professional qualifications in a particular field, have a tendency to estimate their knowledge and skills in that field unrealistically highly.

Citing the observation of Charles Darwin that 'ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge',[511] Dunning and Kruger explained the cognitive process by which people over-estimate their competence in fields concerning which they are unskilled or uninformed. In agreement with the popular saying 'a little learning is a dangerous thing',[512] Dunning and Kruger noted 'in order for the incompetent to overestimate themselves, they must satisfy a minimal threshold of knowledge, theory, or experience that suggests to themselves that they can generate correct answers'.[513]

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[510] Kruger & Dunning, 'Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments', Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (77.6.1121-1134), 1999.

[511] Darwin, 'The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex' volume 1, p. 4 (1871).

[512] Commonly misquoted as 'A little knowledge is a dangerous thing', this phrase is a line from English poet Alexander Pope's poem 'An Essay on Criticism' (1709).

[513] Kruger & Dunning, 'Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments', Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (77.6.1121-1132), 1999.

Accordingly, we ought to refrain from commenting authoritatively on subjects concerning which we are not academically informed or professionally qualified, and should instead seek to understand the subject from the relevant professional literature, instead of from non-professionals and those who are insufficiently qualified.

Additionally, we should be prepared to accept that our non-professional personal views (and the views of others who are similarly unqualified in the field), are of considerably less value than the existing scholarly literature and consensus, and we should be prepared to accept that the consensus is most likely to be correct, even if it contradicts views or sources which we would prefer to believe are more accurate.

Here is a list of indicators of the Dunning-Kruger effect, based on the reasons given by Dunning and Kruger as to why individuals succumb to the effect, and why they 'fail, through life experience, to learn that they are unskilled'.[514] The more indicators are present in a specific case, the more likely it is that the individual in question is experiencing the effect.

1. Skill-boundary transgression

The individual is seeking to operate as an authority or qualified individual, in a field beyond their personal level of academic and professional qualification.[515]

2. Self-identified authority

The individual makes a personal claim (unsubstantiated by facts), that they are sufficiently competent to comment authoritatively on the subject.[516]

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[514] Kruger & Dunning, 'Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments', Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (77.6.1121-1131), 1999.

[515] 'Incompetent individuals, compared with their more competent peers, **will dramatically overestimate their ability and performance relative to objective criteria**.', ibid., p. 1122; the importance of formal academic and professional qualifications is that they constitute objective criteria by which competency can be assessed, so we should place less trust in those lacking such qualifications.

[516] 'These findings suggest that **unaccomplished individuals** do not possess the degree of metacognitive skills necessary for accurate self-assessment **that their more accomplished counterparts possess**.', ibid.,

3. Unrecognized competence

The individual's self-assessed competence is not recognized by those who are academically and professional competent; no one who is properly qualified, actually thinks this person is sufficiently competent.[517]

4. False peers

The individual believes that the favourable commentary of other unskilled and non-professional individuals, indicates they themselves are sufficiently qualified.[518]

5. Scrutiny avoidance

The individual fails to submit their work for professional scrutiny (such as in the relevant scholarly literature), for review by those genuinely qualified.[519]

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p. 1122; we cannot rely on those who are not academically and professionally qualified in a particular field, to assess accurately their own authority and competence in that field.

[517] 'We propose that **those with limited knowledge in a domain** suffer a dual burden: Not only do they reach mistaken conclusions and make regrettable errors, **but their incompetence robs them of the ability to recognize it**.', p. 1132;. it is far more likely that an unqualified non-professional will be wrong in a given field of specialization, than a qualified professional whose competency has been recognized formally by their equally qualified peers.

[518] 'Second, the bungled robbery attempt of McArthur Wheeler not withstanding, some tasks and settings **preclude people from receiving self-correcting information that would reveal the suboptimal nature of their decisions** (Einhorn, 1982).', ibid., p. 1131; by keeping themselves predominantly in the intellectual company of those who agree with them, individuals experiencing the Dunning-Kruger effect place themselves in a setting which typically prevents their errors being exposed, instead keeping them in a kind of intellectual echo chamber in which their views are reinforced by being repeated back to them with approval by those unqualified to assess them competently.

[519] 'One reason is that people **seldom receive negative feedback about their skills and abilities from others in everyday life** (Blumberg, 1972; Darley & Fazio, 1980; Goffman, 1955; Matlin & Stang, 1978; Tesser & Rosen, 1975)', ibid., p. 1131; avoidance of scrutiny by professionals enhances this effect, keeping the

6. Pioneer complex

The individual self-identifies as a pioneer uncovering truth; a Copernicus or Galileo.[520]

7. Conspiracy claims

The individual explains opposition by qualified professionals, as suppression of truth in order to defend the existing scholarly consensus.[521]

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unqualified away from those who are best able to expose their errors, and preserving their self-delusion that they are correct.

[520] This is a self-delusional identification since neither Copernicus nor Galileo were 'gifted amateurs' opposing a body of professionals (both men were professionals, holding formal teaching positions), and Galileo in particular knew that the subject should be decided by professional astronomers, placing no value whatsoever on the opinions of the unqualified; writing against the papal edict silencing publications on heliocentrism in the preface of his 'Dialogue' (1632), Galileo scorned the unqualified amateur: 'Complaints were to be heard that **advisors who were totally unskilled in astronomical observations ought not to clip the wings of reflective intellects** by means of rash prohibitions.', Galileo, quoted in Næss, 'Galileo Galilei: When the Earth Stood Still', p. 131 (2005).

[521] 'Third, even if people receive negative feedback, they still must come to an accurate understanding of why that failure has occurred. The problem with failure is that it is subject to more attritional ambiguity to success. For success to occur, many things must go right: The person must be skilled, apply effort, and perhaps be a bit lucky. For failure to occur, the lack of any one of these components is sufficient. **Because of this, even if people receive feedback that points to a lack of skill, they may attribute it to some other factor** (Snyder, Higgins, & Stucky, 1983; Snyder, Shenkel, & Lowry, 1977).', ibid., p. 1131; when an unqualified non-professional attributes opposition to or dismissal of their theories by qualified professionals as a conspiracy to maintain the intellectual status quo, the Dunning-Kruger effect is very likely responsible: an example is the Science and Public Policy Institute (a non-profit group in the US which opposes the scientific consensus on global warming), '**People who are not scientists, or even experts on the subjects they write about** often write the SPPI reports, and many convey **conspiratorial themes**. For example, an SPPI publication by Joanne

Nova, who describes herself as a "freelance science presenter, writer, & former TV host", **exemplifies not only the 'Dunning-Kruger' effect** (Dunning et.al. 2003), but also the inactivist movement's frustration with mainstream climate science **and its inflated sense of victimhood**.', Elshof, 'Can Education Overcome Climate Change Inactivism?', Journal for Activism in Science and Technology Education (3.1.25), 2011.

Strong Mythicism: Strategies of Denial

Jon Burke

Abstract

In order to make a credible case, mythicists must address in some way the historical evidence for the existence of Jesus. This article explains the strategies typically used by mythicists to respond to that evidence, and demonstrates why these strategies are flawed.

Strategies of strong mythicism

Proponents of strong mythicism use a variety of approaches to address the biblical and historical evidence for the existence of Jesus.

1. **Claim: the earliest New Testament writings describe Jesus as a non-human being who never walked the earth**

Paul's letters are the earliest New Testament writings, so they offer the earliest Christian witness to Jesus and his life. It is claimed Paul never spoke of a Jesus who was actually human, lived on the earth, and experienced the events described in the gospels. Rather, it is claimed, Paul spoke of Jesus as a non-human spirit being who took on a spirit body (or a body of flesh), in the unseen spirit realm below the moon (the 'sub-lunar realm'), and was crucified by demons. It is further claimed that any reference to Paul or anyone else seeing or speaking with Jesus, is a reference to a vision or spiritual experience rather than a meeting with Jesus on earth as a real human being. Passages clearly indicating Jesus' life was on earth, are typically construed as saying something different, or dismissed as later forgeries.

Response

The major weakness in this argument is the sheer number of passages which must be interpreted as saying something they clearly do not say. Paul's writings about Jesus, like those of the gospels, read naturally as referring to events on earth involving a human being who was a literal historical figure, had a physical body of flesh and blood, and was seen physically by many people, with whom he interacted personally. There is nothing in the text which suggests, or even requires, all Paul's references to be interpreted as referring to a supernatural being who never set foot on earth.

The following are several key passage in Paul's writings, with edits to show how they must be read in order to agree with the mythicist case.

Romans 1:

2 This gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, 3 concerning his Son who was a descendant of David ~~with reference to the flesh~~, **[in the lower celestial realm]**
4 who was appointed the Son-of-God-in-power according to the Holy Spirit ~~by the resurrection from the dead~~, **[by being given a new spirit body in the sub-lunar realm]** Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:
23 but we preach about ~~a crucified Christ~~, **[a Christ whose body was crucified by demons in the sub-lunar realm]** a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

1 Corinthians 2:
8 None of the ~~rulers of this age~~ **[demons in the sub-lunar realm]** understood it. If they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory **[in the sub-lunar realm]**.

1 Corinthians 11:
23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed **[to demons]** took bread, **[in the sub-lunar realm]**

1 Corinthians 15:
3 For I passed on to you as of first importance what I also received—that Christ died **[at the hands of demons in the sub-lunar realm]** for our sins according to the scriptures,
4 and that he was buried **[in the firmament of the sub-lunar realm]**, and that he was ~~raised~~ **[given a new spirit body within the sub-lunar realm]** on the third day according to the scriptures,
5 and that he appeared **[not physically, but in a vision]** to Cephas, then to the twelve.
6 Then he appeared **[not physically, but in a vision]** to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep
7 Then he appeared **[not physically, but in a vision]** to James, then to all the apostles.
8 Last of all, as though to one born at the wrong time, he appeared **[not physically, but in a vision]** to me also.

Galatians 1:
19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James ~~the Lord's brother~~. **[a brother in Christ]**
Galatians 3:

> 13 Christ paid the price to free us from the curse that God's laws bring by becoming cursed instead of us. Scripture says, "Everyone who is hung on a tree **[in the spiritual realm]** is cursed."
>
> Galatians 4:
> 4 But when the appropriate time had come, God sent out his Son, ~~born of a woman~~, **[in a spirit body in the sub-lunar realm]** born under the law

In every case it is clear that the mythicist reading is completely unnatural. There is nothing in the text to indicate we should be reading it in this way, nor does reading them at face value create any problems, nor can mythicists cite any evidence that the early Christians read the texts this way. The only reason to read these passages in such a way is to support the mythicist claim; this is clearly a motivated reading rather than a natural reading.

Claim: key New Testament texts have been interpolated

Another mythicist response to the New Testament texts demonstrating that the earliest Christians believed Jesus was a human being who lived on the earth, is to suggest these texts have been interpolated, that later Christian scribes changed the texts to refer to a historical Jesus. This has the appearance of an argument of convenience, and the more frequently it is appealed to, the greater that appearance becomes.

However, in defence of mythcist use of the interpolation argument, Neil Godfrey has claimed mythicists only assert the interpolation of texts which have already come under suspicion by mainstream scholarship for other reasons.

> "**The only interpolations singled out in Paul's letters by anyone who advances a mythical Jesus** (at least from my readings) are those that are **strongly argued to be interpolations by scholars who have expressed no interest in mythicism**, and who almost certainly would accept a "historical Jesus"."[522]
>
> Note in particular the statements I have placed in bold.

[522] Neil Godfrey, "Do Mythicists Read Paul's References to Jesus' Humanity as Interpolations or Metaphors?," Text, Vridar, 13 August, 2010, n.p. [cited 22 August 2014].

Response

To test the accuracy of Godfrey's claim that the only interpolations in Paul's letters which mythicists argue for, are "strongly argued to be interpolations by scholars who have expressed no interest in mythicism", let's see how many times prominent mythicist Earl Doherty introduces the interpolation argument with reference to passages describing Jesus as a human being on earth.[523]

1. Galatians 1:19; reference to James, the brother of Jesus.[524]
2. Galatians 4:4; description of Jesus as "born of a woman".[525]
3. 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16; Jewish involvement in Jesus' death.[526]
4. 1 Timothy 6:3; reference to the 'teachings of Jesus Christ'.[527]
5. 1 Timothy 6:13; a reference to Pilate.[528]

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[523] This list was adapted from the article by Layman, "CADRE Comments: Does Neilgodfrey Understate Mythicist Reliance on Interpolations?", 27 September, 2010, n.p. [cited 22 August 2014].

[524] 'All of this having been said, we cannot rule out an even simpler explanation, despite the lack of manuscript evidence to support it. **The phrase may have begun as an interpolation or marginal gloss**.', Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man : The Case for a Mythical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), 62.

[525] 'Taken together with the alternative possibility that these phrases, if by Paul, reflect a metaphysical view of Jesus determined by scripture (**although I now lean more toward the interpolation option**), I regard this as an effective neutering of perhaps the most significant argument on the historicist side that the epistles stand in the tradition of an historical Jesus.', Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man : The Case for a Mythical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), 212.

[526] 'For these reasons, many scholars have judged **those verses to be an interpolation**, something inserted into the text at a later date.', Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man : The Case for a Mythical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), 18.

[527] '**Thus we have here a very likely interpolation** made some time after the letter was written, and it occurs just a few verses before another phrase, the one about Pilate, which seems similarly out of place.', Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man : The Case for a Mythical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), 662.

[528] '**It is admittedly in my own interest** to regard the reference to Pontius Pilate in 1 Timothy 6:13 **as an interpolation**, but there are clearly good reasons for doing so.', Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man : The Case*

6. Hebrews 13:20; reference to Jesus' resurrection.[529]

These six passages describe Jesus as born of a woman, who had biological brothers, taught people, was tried by Pilate, put to death with the involvement of the Jews, and was physically raised from the dead. This collection of statements about Jesus agrees with the gospel accounts, disproving the mythicist claim that the Christian writers of these earliest texts believed Jesus was a supernatural being who never came to earth, and who was instead put to death by demons in a 'sub-lunar realm'.

It is clearly not coincidence that in each case Doherty at least makes the suggestion that each passage has been interpolated. He does not always appeal simply to interpolation; sometimes he makes other arguments against a passage as well. But the more arguments he makes, the more apparent it is that the elimination of these passages is highly convenient for his argument, and that he arguing against them as evidence for the historicity of Jesus. The motivation for his arguments is transparent.

At least three of these references do not fit Godfrey's description as passages in Paul's letters, at least from his and Doherty's point of view (1 Timothy 6:3, 13, Hebrews 13:20). Neither Godfrey nor Doherty believe 1 Timothy was written by Paul (his authorship of this letter is doubted by many scholars today), and the book of Hebrews makes no claim to be one of Paul's letters in any case. Nevertheless, in each case Doherty appeals to interpolation to remove them from consideration as evidence for the historical Jesus, showing how frequently he uses this tactic.

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for a Mythical Jesus (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), 662; note Doherty acknowledges the claim of an interpolation is in his own interest, and does not cite any scholars who consider this verse an interpolation.

[529] 'Verses 20-21 constitute a benediction concluded by a doxology. **Authenticity for these verses has been questioned**, including in association with various amounts of the preceding text, sometimes encompassing the whole of chapter 13. It is uncertain that we need to go that far back, and few scholars do. But while verses 17-19 may seem a little out of character with the body of the work, that issue is not important here. **The question of authenticity in the other direction, however, is definitely so**.', Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man : The Case for a Mythical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), 670; note Doherty does not cite any scholars who consider this verse an interpolation.

However, even after removing these passages we are still left with three passages in Paul's letters which Doherty suggests have been interpolated. Is it true (as Godfrey claims), that each of these verses are "strongly argued to be interpolations by scholars who have expressed no interest in mythicism"?

1. Galatians 1:19: Doherty introduces the interpolation argument, without citing any scholars at all, and whilst acknowledging there is no manuscript evidence to support the case. [530] His acknowledgement of the lack of manuscript evidence to support this proposal demonstrates his conclusion is not based on scholarly principles of textual criticism.

2. Galatians 4:4: Doherty does not cite any scholars who regard this passage or the relevant phrase in it, as an interpolation.[531]

3. 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16: Doherty lists just seven scholars who regard the passage as an interpolation, [532] but does not tell readers that the standard professional critical text of the New Testament, The Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament (27th ed. 1993), regards both versus as authentic.

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[530] 'All of this having been said, we cannot rule out an even simpler explanation, **despite the lack of manuscript evidence to support it**. The phrase may have begun **as an interpolation or marginal gloss**., Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man : The Case for a Mythical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), 62; Doherty's acknowledgement of the lack of manuscript evidence to support this proposal demonstrates his conclusion is not based on scholarly principles of textual criticism.

[531] 'Taken together with the alternative possibility that these phrases, if by Paul, reflect a metaphysical view of Jesus determined by scripture (**although I now lean more toward the interpolation option**), I regard this as an effective neutering of perhaps the most significant argument on the historicist side that the epistles stand in the tradition of an historical Jesus.', Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man : The Case for a Mythical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), 212.

[532] 'These are some of the scholars who regard the passage as an interpolation: • Birger A. Pearson: "1 Thessalonians 2:13-16: A Deutero-Pauline Interpolation," Harvard Theological Review 64 (1971) p.79-94. • Burton Mack: Who Wrote the New Testament? p. 113 • Wayne Meeks: The First Urban Christians, p.9, n.l 17 • Helmut Koester: Introduction to the New Testament, vol.11, p. 113 • Pheme Perkins: Harper's Bible Commentary, p. 1230, 1231 -2 • S. G. F. Brandon: The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church, p.92-93 • Paula Fredricksen: From Jesus

This examination demonstrates that Godfrey's claim that the only interpolations in Paul's letters which mythicists argue for, are "strongly argued to be interpolations by scholars who have expressed no interest in mythicism", suffers from a lack of evidence. At least in mythicist Earl Doherty's writings, the evidence contradicts Godfrey's claim; out of the three passages for Doherty introduces the argument for interpolation, he cites scholarship only once, and even then there is no strong argument for interpolation.

3. Claim: the gospel accounts were written after Christians changed their views

Since it is undeniable that the gospels speaks of a historical Jesus who lived on the earth, it is argued that these writings were written after some Christians had invented a new idea, that Jesus was a genuine historical figure who did live on the earth.

Response

This claim fails since there is no evidence for such a change. As has been demonstrated, Paul's own letters (the earliest Christian writings), describe a Jesus who was a literal human being who walked the earth, was seen by many, interacted with other people, was put to death by crucifixion, and was raised from the dead. The gospels and acts provide the same information about Jesus as Paul does.

Additionally, there are no texts between the dating of Paul's writings and the dating of the gospels, which show any sign of a change of view, or a controversy over whether or not Jesus was literally on the earth. The evidence simply does not exist.

4. Claim: none of the non-biblical historical sources are reliable

It is argued that there are no non-biblical historical sources providing an independent witness to Jesus as a historical figure. It is claimed the references to Jesus by the Jewish historian Josephus (c. 90 CE), the Roman historian Tacitus (c. 116 CE), and the Syrian writer Mara Bar Serapion (c. 73-150 CE),[533] are all forgeries by later Christian scribes, or refer to an individual who was not the Jesus of the New Testament.

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to Christ, p. 122', Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man : The Case for a Mythical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), 659.

[533] Not to be confused with the Christian bishop Serapion of Antioch.

Response

These historical sources are acknowledged by the overwhelming majority of professional historians as providing evidence sufficient to establish the existence of Jesus as a historical figure. Josephus refers to Jesus twice, and although one of those references is recognized as having been added to by later Christian scribes,

the scholarly consensus agrees both references contain historical references to Jesus.[534] [535] [536] [537] [538] [539] Likewise, scholars are in almost universal agreement that a genuine historical witness to Jesus is contained in Tacitus,[540] and Serapion's witness is typically considered valid also.[541] [542]

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[534] '**That, indeed, Josephus did say something about Jesus** is indicated, above all, by the passage — **the authenticity of which has been almost universally acknowledged** — about James, who is termed (A XX, 200) the brother of "the aforementioned Christ."', Louis H Feldman and Gōhei Hata, *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 56.

[535] 'Hence the most that can be claimed is that **Josephus here made some reference to Jesus**, which has been retouched by a Christian hand. **This is the view argued by Meier as by most scholars today**, particularly since S. Pines drew attention to a less obviously Christian version of the 'Testimonium' which is quoted in Arabic translation in a tenth-century Christian work.', George Albert Wells, *The Jesus Legend* (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 28.

[536] '**The overwhelming majority of scholars holds that the words "the brother of Jesus called Christ" are authentic, as is the entire passage in which it is found**.25 The passage fits its context well. As for its content, a Christian interpolator would have used laudatory language to describe James and especially Jesus, calling him "the Lord" or something similar. At least, as in the passage to be considered next, he would have used the term "Christ" in an absolute way. Josephus's words "called Christ" are neutral and descriptive, intended neither to confess nor deny Jesus as the "Christ." Thus Josephus distinguishes this Jesus from the many others he mentions who had this common name.', Robert E Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2000), 83-84.

[537] '**Most scholars are confident that Josephus wrote something like this** because the later mention of the Christ in the James citation from Antiquities 20.200 assumes a previous mention of this figure.', Darrell L Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Leicester, England: Baker Academic ; Apollos, 2002), 55.

[538] '**Most scholars today consider the passage authentic**, but think it has been extensively altered to reflect core Christian beliefs (italic type in the quotation above indicates those parts of the Testimonium that are usually considered obvious additions by a Christian hand).', Thomas R Yoder Neufeld, *Recovering Jesus: The Witness of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2007).

The main weakness of the claim that these sources are all Christian forgeries or interpolations, is the fact that there is no evidence for this. A forgery claim must be based on evidence; firstly a problem must be identified in the text which provides sufficient grounds to suspect forgery, and secondly it must be demonstrated that forgery is the best explanation for the problem in the text. The greater the claim of forgery, the larger the body of evidence is required to support it.

In the case of one of the references in Josephus, there is good reason to suspect Christians have added to the text: the paragraph contains reference to Jesus as the messiah, but we know Josephus did not believe Jesus was the messiah; the paragraph presents Josephus wondering if Jesus was even a man, but we know Josephus refers elsewhere to Jesus as just a man; the paragraph contains words and phrases which are very different to Josephus' personal style. These are all good reasons to suspect the passage has been edited by later

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[539] 'Yet there is, Price says, a "**unanimous scholarly consensus**" for the authenticity of the Book 20 reference.', H. Wayne House, *The Jesus Who Never Lived* (Eugene, Or.: Harvest House Publishers, 2008).

[540] '**The textual integrity of this section has on occasion been doubted**. The text has some significant problems, as attested by the standard critical editions.59 These and other difficulties in interpreting the text have also led to a few claims that all of it, or key portions of it, has been interpolated by later hands.**60 But there are good reasons for concluding with the vast majority of scholars that this passage is fundamentally sound**, despite difficulties which result in no small measure from Tacitus's own compressed style. The overall style and content of this chapter are typically Tacitean. The passage fits well in its context and is the necessary conclusion to the entire discussion of the burning of Rome. Sulpicius Severus's Chronicle 2.29 attests to much of it in the early fifth century, **so most suggested interpolations would have to have come in the second through fourth centuries.**', Robert E Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2000), 42-43.

[541] 'The text contains no specific Christian ideas — except for the expression "the wise king of the Jews," **which may refer to Jesus**127 — and therefore is presumably of pagan authorship.', Ute Possekel, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian* (vol. 580; Corpus scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium Subsidia 102; Lovanii: In Aedibus Peeters, 1999), 29

[542] 'The value of this curious comment lies in the apparent fact that by the end of the first century **Jesus was regarded in at least some non-Christian circles as the Jews' "wise king."**', Craig A. Evans, "Jesus in Non-Christian Sources," in *Authenticating the Words of Jesus* (ed. Bruce David Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Brill, 1999), 456.

Christian scribes, and the fact that other copies of this passage of Josephus have been found which do not contain these words, gives rational grounds to believe they were forged.

However, there is no such evidence in the rest of the passage by Josephus, nor in the other passage in which he refers to Jesus. Likewise, there are no stylistic or textual indications that the references in Tacitus and Serapion have been forged or interpolated by Christian scribes.

So the forgery theory claims that the references to Jesus in these three historical sources are all forgeries, despite the fact that they are in three independent witnesses, there is no 'problem' in the texts which suggests a forgery, and the fact that no manuscripts or fragments of these texts has ever been found which omits these references.

Conclusion

Proponents of strong mythicism rely largely on an argument from silence, pointing to early Jewish, Greek, and Roman sources which do not refer to Jesus, or to the fact that Paul's writings say very little about Jesus' early life and ministry. Their readings of New Testament passages are motivated only by their preconception, and are completely unnatural. Their treatment of historical sources with claims of widespread forgery is an argument without evidence, contradicted by the overwhelming majority of scholars.

The Myth of a Borrowed Jesus: Pagan Parallelomania

Jon Burke

Abstract

It is sometimes claimed that the New Testament writers, instead of writing from first hand experience and historical sources, created stories of Jesus by borrowing from earlier pagan writings, especially those referring to gods and demigods. However, this claim that the New Testament Jesus is a composite of figures in earlier pagan stories, is based on faulty premises and has been rejected comprehensively by mainstream scholarship.

The error of parallelomania

> 'It is easy to fall into traps of parallelomania and equivocation as one expects analyses of form and vocabulary to yield highly specific determination of content.'[543]

Apparently first coined in 1961,[544] the term parallelomania refers to a particular error in assembling background sources for a particular text, whereby the interpreter reads 'parallels' into the text from historical sources, simply on the basis of isolated similarities of words, phrases, or concepts.[545]

The error is typically committed when a word found in a Biblical book is interpreted as having the same meaning in its context as the same word found in an extra-Biblical source in a different context. A well known

[543] Cheung, review of 'Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Social-Rhetorical Reconsideration of 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1.', Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, (47.3.540), 2004

[544] 'Nearly forty years ago, Samuel Sandmel published his SBL presidential address for 1961 under the title "Parallelomania," which he defined as "that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction" (p. 1). His article remains very useful but I think the discussion can be carried further today.', Davila, 'The Perils of Parallels', lecture at the University of St Andrews (April 2001)

[545] This does not mean that all parallels are necessarily invalid; 'I am not denying that literary parallels and literary influence, in the form of source and derivation, exist.', Sandmel, 'Parallelomania', Journal of Biblical Literature (81.1), 1962

error is the interpretation of the Greek word *gnōsis* in 1 Timothy 6:20[546] as a reference to Gnostic teaching. Having decided that the word here was a reference to *gnōsis* as used by the Gnostics, expositors then went back through the rest of the letter and attempted to find evidence that the Gnostics were the specific false teachers against which Paul was warning Timothy. Efforts were made to find additional parallels between the heresies described by Paul, and Gnostic teaching.

The conclusion that Paul was warning against Gnostics was then transferred wrongly to Paul's other letters. [547] The result was a false interpretation which took no notice whatever of the actual historical evidence that Gnosticism did not exist in the 1st century, and was certainly never a challenge to Paul.

New findings typically provoke new errors in this area. Both the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Qumran and the Nag Hammadi library in Egypt, inspired Bible commentators to rummage hastily through the New Testament looking for similar words to those used in these texts, assuming identical thoughts, concepts, and backgrounds on the basis of mere similarity of vocabulary. Though corrected repeatedly in the relevant scholarly literature, this error continues in populist, and even academic works. [548]

A typical fallacy accompanying this error is the selective fallacy whereby 'parallels' are drawn only from those sources which the interpreter has previously determined are relevant. This is the opposite of what should take place. When searching for true parallels, all possible sources should be evaluated, and criteria established for assessing which of the sources contains genuine parallels to the text under study. Instead,

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[546] 1 Timothy 6:20, 'O Timothy, protect what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the profane chatter and absurdities of so-called "**knowledge**."'

[547] '**We must beware of imposing an outside situation upon the letters**. For instance, in previous generations some scholars read Gnosticism from the second and third centuries A.D. into the New Testament letters, so that the opponents in almost every Pauline letter were identified as Gnostics. Virtually no one advocates the Gnostic hypothesis today, for it is illegitimate to read later church history into first century documents. **The Gnostic detour could have been avoided if scholars had read the Pauline letters themselves more carefully**, for evidence for full-fledged Gnosticism cannot be read out of his letters.', Thomas R. Steiner, "Interpreting the Pauline Epistles." *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3, no. 3 (1999): 9.

[548] 'Scholars are prone to engage in "parallelomania" where information from the Dead Sea Scrolls or Nag Hammadi or the Church Fathers is imposed upon the New Testament documents.', ibid., p. 9

interpreters falling into this fallacy choose their source on the basis that they already believe it is the source of the parallels they expect to find.[549]

[549] 'An excellent article by Robert Kysar (1970:250–55) shows that Rudolf Bultmann and C. H. Dodd in their commentaries on John (specifically the prologue) used entirely different sources of evidence to "prove" their respective theories. Rarely did either consider the parallels adduced by the other. **In other words, they chose only those parallels that would support their preconceived notions**. This happens all too often in scholarly circles. Instead of a comprehensive study of all possible parallels in order to discover which best fits the context, scholars will select only those most favorable to the thesis and ignore the others. Further, they will often accumulate numerous examples in order to overwhelm the reader with volume. Carson calls this "verbal parallelomania, … the listing of verbal parallels in some body of literature as if those bare phenomena demonstrate conceptual links or even dependency" (1984c:43–44).', Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral : A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Rev. and expanded, 2nd ed.; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 91.

False pagan parallels for Jesus

This is precisely the error which results in the claim that Jesus was just a copy of various earlier 'pagan saviours' or gods. Various attempts have been made to make this case, all of them failing on the basis of lack of genuine historical evidence. The entire thesis emerged from the now long outdated 'history of religions' approach.[550] Mainstream scholarship typically dismisses claims that the new Testament text and its gospel narratives derive from pagan sources, noting 'most of the parallels are tenuous',[551] 'the parallels cited are vastly different in content',[552] 'the differences between the pagan and Christian forms are too great', [553] and

[550] 'The history of religions school was extremely popular in academic circles for several decades, **but owing to trenchant critiques** by such scholars as Samuel Cheetham, H.A.A. Kennedy, J. Gresham Machen, A.D. Nock, Bruce Metzger, and Gunter Wagner, **it eventually fell out of fashion**.', 1. Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Baker Books, 2007), 136.

[551] 'Acceptance of the view that mystery religions and Gnostic myths were a molding factor in early Christian doctrine disposes the exegete **to search for pagan parallels to account for the form, if not the content, of some of the gospel materials**. Careful examination, however, shows that **most of the parallels are tenuous**. Can it be accepted as a legitimate method of exegesis to attribute anything remotely resembling a pagan parallel to such a source? Reitzenstein's evidence is drawn from a much later period, which makes it difficult to place any reliance upon it.', Donald Guthrie, "Jesus," in *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible* (ed. Merrill C Tenney and Moisés Silva; vol. 3, 5 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2009), 582-583.

[552] 'Bultmann cites many supposed parallels from pagan sources which relate wonder stories 2 and supposes that these justify his conclusion that many of the miracle stories in the gospels are of the same type and must therefore be regarded as legendary. **Yet the parallels cited are vastly different in content**.', Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (4th rev. ed.; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 217-218.

[553] 'Those who follow this theory argue that the early church first propounded the belief that Jesus was the Son of God and then proved it by using Hellenistic parallels. In Greek mythology Zeus as well as the other gods bore many children by human mothers, including Perseus and Hercules. These offspring were also men of heroic proportion. In addition, there were tales of the miraculous births of great historical figures, such as Plato (whose father was Apollo) or Alexander the Great (whose father, Philip of Macedon, was kept from consummating his marriage until the child, conceived of Zeus, was born). Interestingly, the church fathers often used these stories in their polemic against their Greek opponents to show that the idea of the virgin

'The pagan parallels claimed by earlier scholarship fail by date and by dissimilarity of language and concept'. [554]

> 'Even though specialists in biblical and classical studies **know how weak the old case for Christian dependence was**, these old arguments continue to circulate in the publications of scholars in such other fields as history and philosophy.'[555]

Biblical scholar John Meier identifies several weaknesses of this approach. Firstly the materials appealed to as 'pagan parallels' typically date to **after** the New Testament documents were written, not before. [556] Secondly, the alleged parallels typically fail to be precise; on examination they aren't genuine parallels at

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birth was not really so incredible to the Greek mind. **However, the differences between the pagan and Christian forms are too great**. For one thing, the lustful promiscuity of the gods starkly contrasts with the spiritual simplicity of the NT. Also, the concept of "virgin" hardly has any stress. **In all cases, it is a physical union between god and human versus the spiritual conception of Jesus**.', Grant Osborne, "Virgin Birth of Jesus," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (ed. Barry J. Elwell, Walter A.; Beitzel; vol. 2; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 2124.

[554] 'As often noted, the background of the image of birth from above is notoriously elusive. **The pagan parallels claimed by earlier scholarship fail by date and by dissimilarity of language and concept**. It might be better, therefore, to start not from the composite "birth from above" but from "birth" (cf. 1:13), and not from the pagan world but from the Hebrew scriptures, which inform so much of John's thought.', 1. Judith M. Lieu, "The Mother of the Son in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117, no. 1 (1998): 76.

[555] Ronald H. Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks: Did the New Testament Borrow from Pagan Thought?* (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1984), 10.

[556] 'With respect to the dating of the documents containing miracle stories, **many of the pagan and Jewish parallels** (e.g., Philostratus' Life of Apollonius of Tyana or the rabbinic material) **come from centuries after the Four Gospels**.', John P. Meier, A Marginal Jew, *Rethinking the Historical Jesus: Volume Two, Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1994), 536.

all.[557] Thirdly, the mere presence of similarities and parallels does not demonstrate copying.[558] There is no evidence that the early Christians in Palestine ever came into contact with the pagan 'mystery religions'.[559] Those claiming parallels typically read later pagan texts and sources, and uncritically assume they are an accurate representation of earlier times, [560] when the evidence points in the other direction; the mystery

[557] 'Sometimes the "parallel" material fails to parallel the Gospels at a key point: namely, Jesus in the Gospels is presented as a *miracle-worker*, *performing miracles* by his own power. Both Josephus and the rabbinic material will at times present pious figures whose prayers for special favors (rain, healing) are answered in speedy, spectacular, or superhuman ways, or who receive miraculous protection from God, or who promise miracles at a future date. **Stories of this type cannot in the strict sense be called the stories of *miracle-workers***.', ibid., p. 536.

[558] 'That is to say, **from the mere fact of form-critical parallels** one cannot immediately conclude that most or all of the traditions about Jesus' miracles **do not go back to the historical Jesus**, but were inserted instead into the Jesus tradition by the early church because it was competing with other religious traditions that extolled miracle-workers.', ibid., p. 536.

[559] 'First, there is so far **no archaeological evidence today** of mystery religions in Palestine in the early part of the first century.', 1. J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss the Real Jesus and Mislead Popular Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), 231.

[560] 'Far too many writers on this subject use the available sources to form the plausible reconstructions of the third-century mystery experience **and then uncritically reason back to what they think must have been the earlier nature of the cults**.', Ronald H. Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks: Did the New Testament Borrow from Pagan Thought?* (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1984), 38.

religions evolved and changed rapidly over time, most significantly in response to Christianity.[561] There are no 'dying and rising gods' from which Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were borrowed.[562] [563] [564]

[561] '**In competing with Christianity**, which promised eternal life to its adherents, the cult of Cybele officially or unofficially raised the efficacy of the blood bath from twenty years to eternity.', 1. Bruce Manning Metzger, Historical and Literary Studies: Pagan, Jewish, and Christian (Brill, 1969), 11.

[562] 'The category of dying and rising gods, once a major topic of scholarly investigation, must now be understood to have been largely a misnomer based on **imaginative reconstructions and exceedingly late or highly ambiguous texts**.', Jonathan Smith, "Dying and Rising Gods", in Lindsay Jones, Mircea Eliade, and Charles J Adams, *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 2535.

[563] 'Anyone who thinks that Jesus was modeled on such deities needs to cite some evidence—any evidence at all—that Jews in Palestine at the alleged time of Jesus's life were influenced by anyone who held such views. One reason that scholars do not think that Jesus was invented as one of these deities is precisely that we have no evidence that any of his followers knew of such deities in the time and place where Jesus was allegedly invented.', Bart D Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (HarperCollins, 2012), 230.

[564] '**There is now what amounts to a scholarly consensus against the appropriateness of the concept**. Those who still think differently are looked upon as residual members of **an almost extinct species**.', Mettinger, 'The Riddle of Resurrection: Dying and Rising Gods in the Ancient Near East', p. 7 (2001); Mettinger attempts to defend parts of the original thesis, but recognizes the overall case is weak and does not claim Jesus was based on such gods, 'Moreover, as Mettinger himself acknowledges, the differences between the dying and rising gods (**which he has reconstructed on slim evidence**) and Jesus **show that Jesus was not modeled on them, even if such gods were talked about during Jesus's time**.', Bart D Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (HarperCollins, 2012), 230.

Ehrman Vs Carrier: Records in First Century Roman Palestine

Jon Burke

Abstract

In 2012 there was a confrontation between New Testament scholar Professor Bart Ehrman, and historian Dr Richard Carrier (currently without an academic post), concerning the evidence for the historical existence of Jesus. An article in the Huffington Post by Ehrman (preceding the publication of his book 'Did Jesus Exist?'), was criticized heavily by Carrier. After the book was published, Carrier subjected it to a critical review. This article examines Carrier's claims and finds them insubstantial.

Records in First Century Roman Palestine

Carrier objects that Ehrman was wrong to say 'We simply don't have birth notices, trial records, death certificates—or other standard kinds of records that one has today' for people living in the first century.

> "Ehrman declares (again with that same suicidally hyperbolic certitude) that "we simply don't have birth notices, trial records, death certificates—or other kinds of records that one has today" (p. 29). Although his conclusion is correct (we should not expect to have any such records for Jesus or early Christianity), his premise is false. In fact, I cannot believe he said this. How can he not know that we have thousands of these kinds of records? Yes, predominantly from the sands of Egypt, but even in some cases beyond."[565]

The first point to note is that Carrier acknowledges that Ehrman's conclusion is completely unaffected by this issue, and agrees with Ehrman that 'we should not expect to have any such records for Jesus or early Christianity'. Ehrman's responded by saying Carrier had taken his words out of context.

> "When I denied that we had Roman records of much of anything, or any indication that there ever were Roman records of anything, I was thinking of Palestine. That becomes clear in my other later reference to the matter where I explain in detail what I was thinking, and that Carrier, understandably, chose not to quote in full: "I should reiterate that it is a complete "myth" (in the mythicist sense) that Romans kept detailed records of everything and that as a result we are

[565] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman on Jesus: A Failure of Facts and Logic," Richard Carrier Blogs, 19 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

> inordinately well informed about the world of Roman Palestine [Note: I'm talking about Palestine] and should expect then to hear about Jesus if he really lived.
>
> If Romans kept such records, where are they? We certainly don't have any. Think of everything we do not know about the reign of Pontius Pilate as governor of Judea…" (p. 44)"[566]

Carrier also noted that such records as are available are 'predominantly from the sands of Egypt, but even in some cases beyond'. Ehrman himself made the same point, saying 'What Carrier is referring to is principally the documentary papyri discovered in Egypt', and 'We do indeed have many thousands of such documents – wills, land deeds, birth records, divorce certificates, and on and on — from Egypt'.

Carrier then responded by criticizing Ehrman, despite the fact that Ehrman had just made exactly the same point as Carrier himself.

> "Ehrman now says that (at least in Egypt) such records existed and were kept (something he definitely does not tell his readers in his book), but "most of these are not in fact records of Roman officials, but made by indigenous Egyptian writers / scribes." This is twice fallacious (even setting aside his strange assumption that "indigenous Egyptians" could not be Roman officials or in their employ): first, "most" is not "all" (so his point is moot…formally, we call this a non sequitur); second, what he doesn't tell you is that even the private records are frequently the personal copies of government records (e.g. the tax receipts I once translated would be a private citizen's copy of the very same receipt that would enter the government archives)."[567]

Carrier errs here. Ehrman did not say that indigenous Egyptians could not be Roman officials, he was simply differentiating between private and official records. Carrier's reference to the fact that such private records were 'frequently the personal copies of government records' is irrelevant to the point Ehrman is making, that regardless of the fact that private records often copies of official records, the majority of the records found are the private copies, not the official records.

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[566] Bart D Erhman, "Fuller Reply to Richard Carrier « Christianity in Antiquity (CIA): The Bart Ehrman Blog", 25 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[567] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman on Jesus: A Failure of Facts and Logic," Richard Carrier Blogs, 19 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

Carrier then made another mistake, attributing to Ehrman a statement he had never made.

> "Ehrman then says he only meant that Romans kept no such records in Palestine."[568]

Ehrman did not say that he only meant the Romans kept no such records in Palestine.

Here are his words.

> "When I denied that we had Roman records of much of anything, or any indication that there ever were Roman records of anything, I was thinking of Palestine. [569]

Ehrman is speaking explicitly of the Roman records which are currently extant, 'I denied that **we had** Roman records of much of anything' (emphasis mine).

A final misrepresentation of Ehrman by Carrier is this.

> "Did Ehrman Tell Everyone the Romans Kept No Records That Would Have Been Relevant to Studying Jesus? Yes."[570]

In fact Ehrman did not say that the Romans kept no records that would have been relevant to studying Jesus, and this was not even the original issue on which Carrier faulted Ehrman. Here is Carrier's original objection.

> "Ehrman declares (again with that same suicidally hyperbolic certitude) that "we simply don't have birth notices, trial records, death certificates—or other kinds of records that one has today" (p. 29). Although his conclusion is correct (we should not expect to have any such records for Jesus or early Christianity), his premise is false. In fact, I cannot believe he said this. How can he not know that we

[568] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman on Jesus: A Failure of Facts and Logic," Richard Carrier Blogs, 19 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[569] Bart D Erhman, "Fuller Reply to Richard Carrier « Christianity in Antiquity (CIA): The Bart Ehrman Blog", 25 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[570] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman's Dubious Replies (Round Two)," Richard Carrier Blogs, 29 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

> have thousands of these kinds of records? Yes, predominantly from the sands of Egypt, but even in some cases beyond."[571]

Note that the original objection looks nothing like the new claim, that Ehrman said the Romans kept no records that would have been relevant to studying Jesus. Carrier is not only over-stating his case, he is introducing a new objection and claiming it was his original objection.

Conclusion

Carrier failed to substantiate his accusation that Ehrman misrepresented the availability of relevant Roman historical records for Jesus. Given the other historical sources in which Jesus is recorded, this argument was a waste of time in any case.

[571] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman on Jesus: A Failure of Facts and Logic," Richard Carrier Blogs, 19 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

Ehrman Vs Carrier: Forgery in Tacitus

Jon Burke

Abstract

In 2012 there was a confrontation between New Testament scholar Professor Bart Ehrman, and historian Dr Richard Carrier (currently without an academic post), concerning the evidence for the historical existence of Jesus. An article in the Huffington Post by Ehrman (preceding the publication of his book 'Did Jesus Exist?'), was criticized heavily by Carrier. After the book was published, Carrier subjected it to a critical review. This article examines Carrier's claims and finds them insubstantial.

Forgery in Tacitus

This issue concerns the authenticity of a comment by the Roman historian Tacitus, about Christians. In his response to Ehrman's book, Carrier wrote the following.

> "Ehrman says "I don't know of any trained classicists or scholars of ancient Rome who think" the passage about Christians in Tacitus is a forgery (p. 55)."[572]

Carrier truncates Ehrman's sentence, so we should check to see what Ehrman actually said in his book (emphasis mine).

> "Some mythicists argue that this reference in Tacitus **was not actually written by him**—they claim the same thing for Pliny and Suetonius, where the references are less important—**but were inserted into his writings (interpolated) by Christians** who copied them, producing the manuscripts of Tacitus we have today. (We have no originals, only later copies.) I don't know of any trained classicists or scholars of ancient Rome who think this, and it seems highly unlikely. **The mythicists certainly have a reason for arguing this:** they do not want to think there are any references to Jesus in our early sources outside the New Testament, and so when they find any such reference, they claim the reference was not original but was inserted by Christians."[573]

[572] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman on Jesus: A Failure of Facts and Logic," Richard Carrier Blogs, 19 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[573] Bart D Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (HarperCollins, 2012)

Carrier omitted a key word at the end of Ehrman's sentence, 'this'. The word 'this' in that sentence referred specifically to the claim that 'this reference in Tacitus was not actually written by him', and that instead it was 'inserted into his writings (interpolated) by Christians'.

This is very different to what Carrier claims Erhman said. Ehrman was not saying he did not know of any trained Classicists or scholars of ancient Rome who think that 'the passage about Christians in Tacitus is a forgery' (Carrier's representation of Ehrman's words).

Carrier then went on to address this misrepresentation of what Erhman had said, rather than what Erhman had actually written.

> "Now, I agree with Ehrman that it's "highly unlikely" this passage wasn't what Tacitus wrote; but the fact that he doesn't know of the many classical scholars who have questioned it suggests he didn't check. See Herbert W. Benario, "Recent Work on Tacitus (1964–68)," The Classical World 63.8 (April 1970), pp. 253-66 [and in 80.2 (Nov.–Dec. 1986)], who identifies no less than six classical scholars who have questioned its authenticity, three arguing it's an outright interpolation and three arguing it has been altered or tampered with [correction: he names five scholars, one of them arguing in part for both--ed.]. This is important, because part of Ehrman's argument is that mythicists are defying all established scholarship in suggesting this is an interpolation, so the fact that there is a lot of established scholarship supporting them undermines Ehrman's argument and makes him look irresponsible."[574]

Note here that Carrier is addressing the idea that Ehrman 'doesn't know of the *many classical scholars* who have questioned' the passage, just as he had claimed previously Ehrman said he didn't know any classicists or scholars of ancient Rome who think 'the passage about Christians in Tacitus is a forgery'. Ehrman did not make either of those statements, yet Carrier's response is written as if he had; Carrier is objecting to an imaginary statement.

Furthermore, Carrier's own response shows evidence of weakness when scrutinized. Carrier makes three key claims here: that there are 'many classical scholars who have questioned it', that Herbert Benario identifies 'no less than six classical scholars who have questioned its authenticity, three arguing it's an outright

[574] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman on Jesus: A Failure of Facts and Logic," Richard Carrier Blogs, 19 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

interpolation and three arguing it has been altered or tampered with' (he later edited his post to say 'correction: he names five scholars, one of them arguing in part for both–ed.'), and that Mythicists have 'a lot of established scholarship supporting them' in 'suggesting this is an interpolation'.

However, the evidence cited by Carrier does not substantiate his claims. Instead of 'many classical scholars' and 'a lot of established scholarship', Carrier cites a scholar writing 40 years ago, who lists only five classical scholars who have questioned the authenticity of this passage.

Ehrman's reply to Carrier on this point provided information which Carrier had not supplied. According to James Rives (whom Ehrman consulted), one of the scholars Carrier cited (Saumagne), believed the reference to Christians was not a forgery by a third party interpolater; rather, he believed Tacitus had written the reference in another part of his works, and that the text had been transposed to its current position. Rives also says that another scholar cited by Carrier (Koestermann), 'doesn't say anything about the reference to Christ not having been written by Tacitus himself'.

Out of the original list of six scholars to whom Carrier made reference, if Rives is correct we are left with four scholars suggesting the passage is an interpolation, and two scholars misrepresented by Carrier. At best we are left with three 'arguing it's an outright interpolation', one arguing it has been 'altered or tampered with', and one 'arguing in part for both', even if we are to accept Carrier's assessment uncritically.

Readers may consider for themselves whether four or five scholars cited in an article written 40 years ago is evidence that there are 'many classical scholars who have questioned it', and that Mythicists have 'a lot of established scholarship supporting them' in 'suggesting this is an interpolation'.

Conclusion

Carrier failed to substantiate his accusation that Tacitus' writings do not contain a genuine reference to Jesus as a historical figure. Additionally, his claim that many classical scholars have questioned the passage in Tacitus was found to be false. The overwhelming majority of scholars accept the reference in Tacitus as evidence for the historicity of Jesus.

Ehrman Vs Carrier: Sources for the Life of Jesus

Jon Burke

Abstract

In 2012 there was a confrontation between New Testament scholar Professor Bart Ehrman, and historian Dr Richard Carrier (currently without an academic post), concerning the evidence for the historical existence of Jesus. An article in the Huffington Post by Ehrman (preceding the publication of his book 'Did Jesus Exist?'), was criticized heavily by Carrier. After the book was published, Carrier subjected it to a critical review. This article examines Carrier's claims and finds them insubstantial.

Sources for the Life of Jesus

Carrier objects to Ehrman's claim that 'the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were recent events' is 'the view of all of our sources that deal with the matter at all' (p. 251).

> "This is false. And it's astonishing that he would not know this, since several other scholars have discussed the sources that place Jesus in the reign of Jannaeus in the 70s B.C. Ehrman seems to think (and represents to his readers) that G.A. Wells just made this up (pp. 247-51). In fact, Wells is discussing a theory defended by others, and based in actual sources: Epiphanius, in Panarion 29, says there was a sect of still-Torah-observant Christians who taught that Jesus lived and died in the time of Jannaeus, and all the Jewish sources on Christianity that we have (from the Talmud to the Toledot Yeshu) report no other view than that Jesus lived during the time of Jannaeus. Though these are all early medieval sources, it nevertheless means there were actual Christians teaching this and that the Jews who composed the Babylonian Talmud knew of no other version of Christianity."[575]

Let's refer to what Erhman actually wrote in his book (emphasis mine).

> "And so both the literary character of 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 and the logic of Paul's understanding of the resurrection show that he thought that **the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were recent events**. I should stress that this is the view of **all of our sources that deal with the matter at all**. It is hard to believe that Paul would have such a radically different view from every other Christian of his day, as Wells suggests. That Jesus **lived recently** is affirmed not only in **all four of our canonical**

[575] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman on Jesus: A Failure of Facts and Logic," Richard Carrier Blogs, 19 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

> **Gospels** (where, for example, he is associated with John the Baptist and is said to have been born during the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus, under the rulership of the Jewish king Herod, and so on); it is also the view **of all of the Gospel sources**—Q (which associates Jesus with John the Baptist), M, L—**and of the non-Christian sources such as Josephus and Tacitus** (who both mention Pilate).
>
> These sources, I should stress, are all independent of one another; some of them go back to Palestinian traditions that can readily be dated to 31 or 32 CE, just a year or so after the traditional date of Jesus's death." [576]

We see here that Ehrman was referring to the idea that 'the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were recent events', a view he says 'is the view of all of our sources that deal with the matter at all'. He then goes on to list exactly which sources he is referring to; the four canonical gospels, the gospel sources, and the non-Christian sources such as Josephus and Tacitus. Ehrman was referring to the sources he was about to enumerate in the same paragraph as this sentence.

But why does Ehrman confine himself to these sources? Why does he not refer to Epiphanius and the Jewish sources to which Carrier refers? The simple reason for this is that these are not typically considered genuine and reliable sources for the historicity of Jesus. Epiphanius was writing over three hundred years after the time of Jesus, and the Jewish sources referred to by Carrier are even later. Carrier treats these sources uncritically, drawing the conclusion that 'there were actual Christians teaching this', but standard scholarship is dismissive of Epiphanius' claims.

> "Nevertheless, there is no lack of modern attempts to uncover an ancient core in that report that identifies Jesus of Nazareth with Joshua b. Perahia's pupil, relying on the support of Epiphanius, who sets the birth of Jesus in the reign of Alexander (Jannaeus), and Alexandra, that is, in the time of Ben Perahia or Ben Tabai. All these attempts, however, are based on pure delusion."[577]

Efron continues, explaining that (contrary to Carrier's claim), there is no trace of any genuine tradition in Epiphanius.

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[576] Bart D Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (HarperCollins, 2012)

[577] Joshua Efron, *Studies on the Hasmonean period* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1987), 158.

> "His entire exegesis contains no trace of a tradition, Jewish or Christian, regarding an unknown Jesus at the time of Joshua b. Perahia."[578]

The early medieval Jewish sources are equally problematic. Firstly there is the difficulty of identifying which passages actually refer to Jesus at all.

> "But scholars (Christian as well as Jewish), cannot agree on the degree to which the rabbis even cared to allude to Jesus, let alone on which passages were framed with him in mind."[579]

Secondly, there is the fact that as with Epiphanius, these Jewish sources are considered useless for any genuine historical information about the life of Jesus.

> "In any event, rabbinic texts that do refer to Jesus (however many or few), convey nothing credible about him but do convey a flavor of how Jews in this third period viewed him." [580]

To refer to these as sources for the historical Jesus would be highly misleading; they aren't. The only scholars Carrier cites who treat these sources as valid sources for the historicity and history of Jesus, are those Carrier acknowledges himself are 'fringe'. It is hardly surprising therefore that Ehrman (who is anything but a fringe scholar), likewise omits them in his treatment of the commonly recognized sources for the historical Jesus.

Carrier's claim that 'all the Jewish sources on Christianity that we have (from the Talmud to the Toledot Yeshu) report no other view than that Jesus lived during the time of Jannaeus' is simply wrong. The Jewish sources identify Jesus with several different individuals, living at different times.

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[578] Joshua Efron, *Studies on the Hasmonean period* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1987), 159.

[579] Michael Cook J, "Jewish Perspectives On Jesus," in *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus* (ed. Delbert Royce Burkett; Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 220.

[580] Michael Cook J, "Jewish Perspectives On Jesus," in *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus* (ed. Delbert Royce Burkett; Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 220.

> "The rabbis mentioned Jesus in connection with various figures whose time frames, when combined, spanned at least two centuries."[581]

Where is the evidence that 'there were actual Christians teaching' that Jesus lived during the reign of Jannaeus, and that 'the Jews who composed the Babylonian Talmud knew of no other version of Christianity'? Carrier does not provide any. Where are the reputable, non-fringe scholars who believe 'there were actual Christians teaching this and that the Jews who composed the Babylonian Talmud knew of no other version of Christianity'? Carrier does not cite any.

Conclusion

Carrier failed to substantiate his accusation that Erhman had misrepresented early sources for the historicity of Jesus. Ironically, Carrier also cited several sources as records of Jesus, which mainstream scholarship argues are not genuine sources for Jesus at all.

[581] Michael Cook J, "Jewish Perspectives On Jesus," in *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus* (ed. Delbert Royce Burkett; Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 219.

Ehrman Vs Carrier: Pilate's Office

Jon Burke

Abstract

In 2012 there was a confrontation between New Testament scholar Professor Bart Ehrman, and historian Dr Richard Carrier (currently without an academic post), concerning the evidence for the historical existence of Jesus. An article in the Huffington Post by Ehrman (preceding the publication of his book 'Did Jesus Exist?'), was criticized heavily by Carrier. After the book was published, Carrier subjected it to a critical review. This article examines Carrier's claims and finds them insubstantial.

Pilate's Office

Carrier claims Ehrman was wrong to say Roman historian Tacitus committed an error by referring to Pontius Pilate as a procurator, instead of a prefect.

> "This betrays ignorance of the fact that provincial prefects were often also imperial procurators, and from his treatment of the scandal of this fact throughout the Annals Tacitus has a particular motive to emphasize that fact here (see my discussion in Herod the Procurator, particularly the section "So Was Pontius Pilate a Prefect or a Procurator?"). In other words, Pontius Pilate was both a procurator and a prefect. And the recent literature on the subject confirms this, as would any consultation with an expert in Tacitus or Roman imperial administration."[582]

In Carrier's paper (to which he linked), there is a single brief section covering a few pages (pages 33-36), in which he discusses whether procurators could be appointed prefects simultaneously. This does not address directly the question of whether or not Pilate was a prefect who was also appointed procurator. Responding to Ehrman, Carrier claimed 'The view that Claudius changed the title of Judaean governors from prefect to procurator has long since been refuted (most conclusively by the work of Fergus Millar'. [583]

[582] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman on Jesus: A Failure of Facts and Logic," Richard Carrier Blogs, 19 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[583] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman's Dubious Replies (Round Two)," Richard Carrier Blogs, 29 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

Reading Carrier's paper, we find reference to two papers by Millar, one published in 1964, the other published in 1965. Did Millar indeed refuted conclusively the view that Claudius changed the title of Judaean governors from 'prefect' to 'procurator', as Carrier claims?

One commentator has examined Carrier's claim by reading Millar's work. He concludes that Carrier has misread Millar.

> "In Millar 1964, he says plainly on p. 181: "It is clear that such procurators [sc. governing small provinces], originally called praefecti, exercised a criminal and civil jurisdiction in their areas, which was equivalent to that of senatorial governors, except in that it was only in special cases that they possessed the ius gladii." (Millar 1964: 181).
>
> He is clear that procurators who were governors of minor provinces were originally called prefects (praefecti in Latin), and Millar (1964: 181, n. 9) cites A. H. M. Jones's Studies in Roman Government and Law (Oxford, 1960), and does not engage in any refutation of this idea. The rest of the article is an interpretation of Tacitus, Annales 12.60, and Millar argues that it refers to Claudius's granting of increased jurisdictional power to those procurators who managed imperial properties, a different type of procurator from the type who governed small provinces.
>
> In addition, Millar (1965) simply adds more evidence to the case that Tacitus, Annales 12.60 refers to the authority of procurators of imperial properties: there is no refutation of the view that Claudius changed the official titles of the minor equestrian or freedmen provincial governors from prefect to procurator."[584]

Not only does Carrier fail to demonstrate that Millar refuted conclusively the view that Claudius changed the title of Judaean governors from 'prefect' to 'procurator', he has failed to realise that Millar never says anything against the view. On the contrary, Millar states specifically that the procurators to which he refers were 'originally called praefecti', and attributes the change of authority to Claudius, the very opposite of what Carrier says.

[584] LK, "To Live Is to Think: Thoughts on Philosophy, Culture and Politics: Carrier versus Ehrman on Procurators and Prefects", 1 May, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

Carrier's statement that 'view that Claudius changed the title of Judaean governors from prefect to procurator has long since been refuted' rests on his citation of a single author writing over 50 years ago (Millar), who did not say what Carrier claims; in fact Millar said the opposite.

When this evidence from Millar's own work was presented to Carrier on his blog, he gave the following enigmatic reply.

> "Millar 1965, pp. 364-65: "The legal evidence shows clearly that procurators never had a recognised right to exercise criminal jurisdiction."
>
> See also P. A. Brunt, "Procuratorial Jurisdiction," Latomus 25.3 (July-September 1966): 461-89, with my analysis in Herod, pp. 34-35 (and in context, pp. 29-36." [585]

This fails completely to address any of the points raised; it certainly presents no evidence that Millar conclusively refuted the 'view that Claudius changed the title of Judaean governors from prefect to procurator'.

In response to Carrier, Ehrman commented that he had subsequently consulted a scholar of Roman history who indicated that Carrier was wrong, quoting 'Prosopography of the Roman Empire' as evidence ('PP' in the following quotation refers to 'Pontius Pilate').

> "PP could just as well have had the title procurator, but evidently he didn't … PIR (ed. 2, 1998) P 815 sums it up neatly: "praeses Iudaeae ordinis equestris usque ad Claudii tempora non procurator, sed praefectus fuit…." [This comes from the Prosopographia Imperii Romani (i.e., The Prosopography of the Roman Empire); I translate the Latin as follows: "Up until the time of Claudius [i.e., 41-54 CE], the provincial governor of Judea, a man of the equestrian order, was not a procurator but a prefect."[586]

Carrier replied with the assertion that this source was outdated.

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[585] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman's Dubious Replies (Round Two)," Richard Carrier Blogs, 29 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[586] Bart Ehrman, Bart D Erhman, "Fuller Reply to Richard Carrier « Christianity in Antiquity (CIA): The Bart Ehrman Blog", 25 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

> "The view that Claudius changed the title of Judaean governors from prefect to procurator has long since been refuted (most conclusively by the work of Fergus Millar; contrary to what Ehrman's quotation might seem to suggest, the PIR his colleague translates the Latin of on this point is a modern source, not an ancient one, and thus represents an outdated scholarly assumption and not what anyone in antiquity actually said)."[587]
>
> The commentator I quoted previously corrects Carrier on this point.
>
> "The most recent edition of Prosopographia Imperii Romani saec. I. II. III. (2nd edn. part 6; eds. Leiva Petersen and Klaus Wachtel; De Gruyter, Berlin, 1998), revised in the 1990s, is quite clear that Pilate carried the title praefectus (PIR [2nd ed.] part. 6, no. 815, p. 348), on the basis of the Pilate inscription (see Année Epigraphique 1963 no. 104)." [588]

This source is not "outdated," but represents the opinion of scholars from the 1990s, who had updated an earlier edition of the work.

[587] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman's Dubious Replies (Round Two)," Richard Carrier Blogs, 29 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[588] LK, "To Live Is to Think: Thoughts on Philosophy, Culture and Politics: Carrier versus Ehrman on Procurators and Prefects", 1 May, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

Indeed, scholarly works written as recently as 2008 say either Tacitus made a mistake, or he was speaking proleptically.[589] [590] [591] [592] As the commentator quoted previously notes, this does not appear to be an outdated view 'long since refuted' as Carrier claimed.

> "In short, I see no evidence at all that the "view that Claudius changed the title of Judaean governors from prefect to procurator has long since been refuted.""[593]

Rather, the view that, from the reign of Claudius, the equestrian governors who were called prefects (or praefecti in Latin) were now called procurators appears to be the common opinion: it is held by Syme (1962: 92), Jones (1960: 124), Weaver (1972: 267-268), Garnsey and Saller (1987: 23), B. Levick (Levick 2001: 48) in her biography of the emperor Claudius, and Schäfer (2003: 105).

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[589] 'Certain minor imperial provinces had equestrian governors, who were known first as prefects but from the time of Claudius as procurators (e.g., Pontius Pilate in Judaea; 15.44.3). Claudius evidently assigned certain judicial functions too to procurators, but T.'s report is unclear (12.60).', Cornelius Tacitus and A. J Woodman, *The Annals* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004), 359-360.

[590] 'Pilate was appointed under Tiberius, and an inscription from Caesarea mentions his activities in regard to a Tiberieion (or imperial cult sanctuary to Tiberius). The text also gives his correct title as praefectus rather than procurator.', Karl Galinsky, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 378.

[591] 'Since Coponius was apparently dispatched as a prefect (praefectus, eparxos), Josephus' nomenclature here seems incorrect, though the same problem is found in Tacitus (e.g. Ann. 15.44 on Pilate).', Flavius Josephus et al., *Flavius Josephus Translation and Commentary*. Vol. 1b, Vol. 1b, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 80.

[592] 'Pilate actually held the lesser rank of prefect in Judea, something that Tacitus, who had access to the official records at Rome's Tabularium and frequently quoted from them in his Annals, should have known.', Stephen Dando-Collins, *The Great Fire of Rome: The Fall of the Emperor Nero and His City* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2010), 8.

[593] LK, "To Live Is to Think: Thoughts on Philosophy, Culture and Politics: Carrier versus Ehrman on Procurators and Prefects", 1 May, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

In his paper, Carrier makes the argument that Tacitus didn't make a mistake, but that Pilate was a procurator as well as a prefect. In support, Carrier cites Philo and Josephus referring to Pilate as a procurator (neither of them refer to him as a prefect).

However, standard scholarship on the subject understands Philo, Josephus, and Tacitus as adopting the new terminology established during the reign of Claudius after 41 CE, since all of them were writing after this date and since the only epigraphical evidence for Pilate (dated no later than 36 CE, before Claudius), identifies him as a prefect, but not as a procurator.[594] [595]

Carrier does not mention any of this scholarship. Nor does he cite any scholars saying that Tacitus didn't make a mistake and wasn't writing proleptically, except for himself.

Conclusion

Carrier failed to substantiate his accusation that Erhman wrong to say Roman historian Tacitus committed an error by referring to Pontius Pilate as a procurator, instead of a prefect. Additionally, Carrier failed to substantiate his claim that this view is outdated and has been rejected by mainstream scholarship. On the contrary, it is still the majority view of mainstream scholarship.

[594] 'However, a fragment of a Latin inscription found in Caesarea gives Pilate the title "prefect". This supports the deduction made from other evidence, most of it epigraphic, that up to the reign of Claudius, though the terminology was still fluid, the normal title for an equestrian provincial governor was "prefect", and "procurator" must now be reserved for the governors of Judaea after 44.', E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian : A Study in Political Relations* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 145.

[595] 'This change in title under Claudius goes a long way in explaining the confusion of the principal literary texts here. Philo, Josephus, the NT and Tacitus refer to various governors as επαρξος (praefectus), επιτροπος (procurator), and ηεγεμων (governor), apparently indiscriminately.', 1. Helen K Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 12.

Ehrman Vs Carrier: Dying and Rising Gods

Jon Burke

Abstract

In 2012 there was a confrontation between New Testament scholar Professor Bart Ehrman, and historian Dr Richard Carrier (currently without an academic post), concerning the evidence for the historical existence of Jesus. An article in the Huffington Post by Ehrman (preceding the publication of his book 'Did Jesus Exist?'), was criticized heavily by Carrier. After the book was published, Carrier subjected it to a critical review. This article examines Carrier's claims and finds them insubstantial.

Dying and Rising Gods

Carrier objected to Ehrman saying that the Egyptian god Osiris died and was raised from the dead, an issue related to Ehrman's dismissal of claims that the gospel records of Jesus' resurrection were literary creations based on previous myths of dying and rising pagan gods.

> "Regarding the claim that Osiris "returned to life on earth by being raised from the dead," Ehrman insists that in fact "no ancient source says any such thing about Osiris (or about the other gods)" (p. 26). He relies solely on Jonathan Z. Smith, and fails to check whether anything Smith says is even correct. If Ehrman had acted like a real scholar and actually gone to the sources, and read more widely in the scholarship (instead of incompetently reading just one author–the kind of hack mistake we would expect from an incompetent myther), he would have discovered that almost everything Smith claims about this is false. In fact, Plutarch attests that Osiris was believed to have died and been returned to life (literally: he uses the words anabiôsis and paliggenesis, which are very specific on this point, see my discussion in The Empty Tomb, pp. 154-55), and that in the public myths he did indeed return to earth in his resurrected body (Plutarch, On Isis and Osiris 19.358b)."[596]

Note the following claims made by Carrier.

1. "He relies solely on Jonathan Z. Smith": in fact Ehrman cites Jonathan Smith and Mark Smith (perhaps Carrier failed to differentiate between the two because they have the same surname), and in his reply to Carrier he demonstrates use of the relevant primary sources.

[596] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman on Jesus: A Failure of Facts and Logic," Richard Carrier Blogs, 19 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

2. "almost everything Smith claims about this is false": Carrier provides no evidence for this claim.

3. "in the public myths he [Plutarch] did indeed return to earth in his resurrected body": as we shall see, Carrier later completely abandons this claim once Ehrman challenges it.

Ehrman responded by proving Carrier wrong; Osiris did not return to earth in his resurrected body.

> "Literally, he [Osiris] came "from Hades." But this is not a resurrection of his body. His body is still dead. He himself is down in Hades, and can come back up to make an appearance on earth on occasion. This is not like Jesus coming back from the dead, in his body; it is like Samuel in the story of the Witch of Endor, where King Saul brings his shade back to the world of the living temporarily (1 Samuel 28). How do we know Osiris is not raised physically? His body is still a corpse, in a tomb."[597]

Carrier's original claim was made with regard to the gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection, claiming that the Osiris myth was a counterpart of the gospel resurrection accounts, which describe Jesus as rising with the same body which was crucified. Carrier's claim was that likewise, 'Plutarch attests that Osiris was believed to have died and had been returned to earth', specifically 'he did indeed return to earth in his resurrected body'. Ehrman disproved this; Osiris did not return to earth 'in his resurrected body'. Osiris' body was dismembered and remained in pieces, while his disembodied soul sometimes came to earth.

Carrier's response was to change his argument; abandoning the clam that Osiris 'did indeed return to earth in his resurrected body', he accepted that Osiris had not returned to earth in his resurrected body, and started to argue that Jesus had not done so either. In order to continue to appeal to Osiris as a parallel, Carrier changed what he had previously said about Jesus and Osiris, and started to argue that neither had returned to earth in their resurrected body, so the comparison was still valid.

> "Of course the same is most likely true of Jesus (as I and several scholars have argued: see my Empty Tomb FAQ; even conservative scholar N.T. Wright has suggested the possibility), and obviously this

[597] Bart Ehrman, Bart D Erhman, "Fuller Reply to Richard Carrier « Christianity in Antiquity (CIA): The Bart Ehrman Blog", 25 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

> is in fact how Jesus was originally believed to have appeared (in visions, not a walking reanimated corpse), so there is no clear difference from the Osiris case even as Ehrman describes it."[598]

Note the complete change of argument. First Carrier claimed Osiris is a legitimate parallel to Jesus because they both returned to earth in their resurrected body (emphasis mine).

- "he [Osiris] did indeed return to earth **in his resurrected body**"

Having been proved wrong on the claim that Osiris returned to earth in his resurrected body, Carrier then claimed Osiris is a legitimate parallel to Jesus because neither of them returned to earth in their resurrected body (emphasis mine).

- "Jesus was originally believed to have appeared (**in visions, not a walking reanimated corpse**), so there is no clear difference from the Osiris case even as Ehrman describes it"

In all this, Carrier never acknowledged he was wrong in the first place; he simply abandoned his original argument, makes a new argument, and claims he is still correct. Carrier then went on to claim that the difference between these two forms of returning to life wasn't relevant anyway, despite the fact that he had originally based his entire argument on the difference between them.

> "But even granting the difference, this is precisely the kind of distinction that isn't relevant to the point: Osiris is a dead god who still "lives again" and visits and converses with the living."[599]

Once Ehrman proved him wrong, Carrier retreated to more vague language, saying 'Osiris is a dead god who still "lives again" and visits and converses with the living'. But he abandoned his original claim, no longer defending the statement that 'Osiris was believed to have died and had been returned to earth', or that 'he did indeed return to earth in his resurrected body'. In fact he started explicitly contradicting his original claim, saying that neither Jesus nor Osiris returned to life in a resurrected body.

Carrier also claimed to have greater scholarly support for his position than Ehrman.

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[598] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman's Dubious Replies (Round Two)," Richard Carrier Blogs, 29 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[599] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman's Dubious Replies (Round Two)," Richard Carrier Blogs, 29 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

> "On all of this take note: Ehrman says his views are the standard in the field, but in defense of the claim he still only names one advocate (Smith). In the link above, in support of my view, I name eight. And in my chapter on resurrection bodies in The Empty Tomb I cite more, including abundant primary evidence. So you decide who to follow on this point."[600]

The link Carrier cited is this section of an FAQ he wrote. It does not actually address what Ehrman says about Osiris (emphasis mine):

> "Q: Is it true that many other scholars agree with you that the earliest Christians believed **Jesus rose from the dead by switching to a new body and leaving the old one behind?**
>
> A: Yes. These include: James Tabor, "Leaving the Bones Behind: A Resurrected Jesus Tradition with an Intact Tomb" in Sources of the Jesus Tradition: An Inquiry (forthcoming); Bruce Chilton, Rabbi Paul: An Intellectual Biography (2005), pp. 57-58; Peter Lampe, "Paul's Concept of a Spiritual Body" in Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments (2002), edited by Ted Peters et al.: pp. 103-14; Gregory Riley, Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy (1995); Dale Martin, The Corinthian Body (1995); Adela Collins, "The Empty Tomb in the Gospel According to Mark" in Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology (1993), edited by Eleonore Stump & Thomas Flint: pp. 107-40; and C.F. Moule, "St. Paul and Dualism: The Pauline Conception of the Resurrection," New Testament Studies 12 (1966): 106-23. Many others think it's likely or at least possible (e.g. see answer to previous question)."[601]

This is talking about the view that 'the earliest Christians believed Jesus rose from the dead by switching to a new body and leaving the old one behind'. Ehrman was talking about a completely different subject (emphasis mine).

> "Carrier and I could no doubt argue day and night about how to interpret Plutarch. But my views do not rest on having read a single article by Jonathan Z. Smith and a refusal to read the primary sources.

[600] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman's Dubious Replies (Round Two)," Richard Carrier Blogs, 29 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[601] Richard Carrier, "Spiritual Body FAQ", n.d., n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

> As I read them, **there is no resurrection of the body of Osiris**. And that is the standard view among experts in the field."[602]

The 'standard view' to which Ehrman referred is that there is 'no resurrection of Osiris'. Carrier responded saying 'Ehrman says his views are the standard in the field, but in defense of the claim he still only names one advocate (Smith). In the link above, in support of my view, I name eight', and linked to a list of scholars addressing the resurrection of Jesus, not the resurrection of Osiris. Carrier's response was irrelevant to what Ehrman wrote.

Conclusion

Carrier failed to substantiate his accusation that Erhman wrong to say Osiris did not return to life on earth by being raised from the dead. Additionally, Carrier changed his own argument completely when Ehrman proved him wrong. Finally, Carrier cited as evidence for his argument, a document on a completely different subject, containing no support for his case.

[602] Bart Ehrman, Bart D Erhman, "Fuller Reply to Richard Carrier « Christianity in Antiquity (CIA): The Bart Ehrman Blog", 25 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

Ehrman Vs Carrier: The New Testament Canon

Jon Burke

Abstract

In 2012 there was a confrontation between New Testament scholar Professor Bart Ehrman, and historian Dr Richard Carrier (currently without an academic post), concerning the evidence for the historical existence of Jesus. An article in the Huffington Post by Ehrman (preceding the publication of his book 'Did Jesus Exist?'), was criticized heavily by Carrier. After the book was published, Carrier subjected it to a critical review. This article examines Carrier's claims and finds them insubstantial.

The New Testament Canon

On page 24 of his book, Ehrman made the following response to a claim by DM Murdock (writing under the pseudonym 'Archarya S'), concerning the canon of the New Testament (Murdock's claim is in quotation marks, "" and Ehrman's comments follow in square brackets, []).

> ""It took well over a thousand years to canonize the New Testament," and —"many councils" were needed to differentiate the inspired from the spurious books (31). [Actually, the first author to list our canon of the New Testament was the church father Athanasius in the year 367; the comment about —many councils‖ is simply made up.]" [603]

Carrier objected to Ehrman's statement, charging him with error.

> "(1) Ehrman's statement that there weren't "many councils" to decide the NT canon is, read literally, false. There were in fact several councils ruling on the canon, and indeed the canon was never truly settled until the 16th century. Someone who tutored under Metzger, who extensively documented these facts, should know that. I can only assume he meant to say that the canon proposed by Athanasius in 367 (in a letter, not a council ruling) was repeatedly affirmed by every subsequent council convened to decide on the canon (although the fact that they had to keep meeting to do that means there were repeated attempts to change it). Acharya's own characterization of the matter might also be accused of being misleading. But Ehrman's wording is going to seriously mislead and

[603] Bart D Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (HarperCollins, 2012)

> misinform the public even more, not only as to the actual history of the canon, but also as to Acharya's knowledge of the facts."[604]

Carrier's claim that 'the fact that they had to keep meeting to do that means there were repeated attempts to change it' is a non sequitur; the conclusion does not follow logically from the premise. He failed to take into account the fact that church councils often re-affirmed the decisions of previous councils regardless of whether the points affirmed were under challenge. He provided no evidence for his claim, and the facts are to the contrary. When challenged on this point by a respondent on his blog, Carrier gave a response including the following claim.

> "Your facts also don't quite agree with what is stated in Metzger's Formation of the New Testament Canon. You might want to do more homework on this."[605]

This response appears authoritative on the surface, but on closer inspection it is a bluff. Carrier made a vague reference to Metzger (a recognized scholar on the history of the New Testament text), but failed to actually address any of the points raised by the respondent, and does not cite or quote any specific statements by Metzger relevant to the point under discussion. The reality is that Carrier had no answer to the challenge raised by his respondent, and was hoping that a casual reference to Metzger would convince them that they are wrong. This attempt at evasion is not the response of someone with a facts a knowledge of the facts.

Additionally, Carrier's reference to the work 'Formation of the New Testament Canon' is problematic, since he attributes this work to Metzger. There is a book entitled 'The Formation of the New Testament Canon: an ecumenical approach' (1983), by Farmer and Farkasfalvy, and another book by entitled 'Formation of the New Testament Canon' (1965), by Robert Grant, but Metzger did not make any contributions to either book. Carrier did not provide any details which would help identify specifically the work to which he was referring.

Metzger's own work on the formation of the New Testament canon is entitled 'The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance' (1997). It contains nothing supportive of Carrier's claims. Metzger does not say that numerous councils were held to decide on the canon. On the contrary, he

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[604] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman's Dubious Replies (Round One)," Richard Carrier Blogs, 27 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[605] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman's Dubious Replies (Round One)," Richard Carrier Blogs, 27 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

notes that the canon suggested by Athanasius was promoted by Augustine in three provincial synods, all of which re-affirmed the canon of Athanasius.

> "It was Augustine who, in three provincial synods, cast his weight for the twenty-seven books which we know as the Christian Scriptures. These synods were held, one of them in Hippo in A.D. 393, one in Carthage in 397, and the last of them again in Carthage in 419. The opening words of the statute on the canon are straightforward and forthright: 'Besides the canonical Scriptures, nothing shall be read in church under the name of the divine Scriptures.' Then there follows an enumeration of the canonical Scriptures.
>
> The order of the New Testament books is Gospels, Acts, Pauline Epistles, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, James, Jude, the Revelation of John. The only difference to be noted in the reiteration of the statute is that, in the synods of 393 and 397, the phrase runs, 'Thirteen Epistles of Paul, and the Epistle to the Hebrews, by the same', whereas the statute of 419 reads, 'Fourteen Epistles of Paul'. (See Appendix IV. 12 below.). Twenty-seven books, no more, and no less, is henceforth the watchword throughout the Latin Church."[606]

None of the councils cited here by Metzger were held to determine the canon, they simply re-affirmed the canon as they addressed other issues. The 393 CE synod of Hippo was a general annual synod, the 397 CE synod of Carthage was a general synod addressing issues from the transfer of clerics between churches to the reconciliation of repentant actors (it states explicitly that it is simply confirming the canon already received), and the 419 CE synod of Carthage was held specifically to address appeals to Rome. Metztger does note that this did not settle the issue of the canon once and for all in every Christian community, and does note that differences over the canon continued to be raised occasionally.

> "Yet it would be a mistake to represent the question of the canon as finally settled in all Christian communities by the beginning of the fifth century."[607]

[606] Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 238.

[607] Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 238.

> "Thus, despite the influence of Jerome and Augustine and the pronouncements of three provincial synods, more than once in the following centuries we come upon evidence of divergences in the canon, either by way of addition or subtraction."[608]

Nevertheless, Metzger provides no support for Carrier's defense of Murdock's claim that there were 'many councils' held to decide the New Testament canon.

Conclusion

Carrier failed to substantiate his accusation that Erhman was wrong to say Murdock's claim concerning the canon was simply made up. Additionally, the one scholarly source he cited actually contradicted him.

[608] Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 238.

Godfrey On Nazareth: Defending Salim Against The Archaeologists

Jon Burke

Abstract

Skeptical blogger Tim O'Neill criticized claims by piano teacher Rene Salm that the town of Nazareth did not exist at the time when Jesus is typically understood to have lived. In turn, Neil Godfrey, described O'Neill's criticism as 'ignorant anti-rationalist nonsense', and written a response to O'Neill. This article examines Godfrey's response to O'Neill.

Godfrey On Nazareth: Defending Salim Against The Archaeologists

In 2007 the article 'Surveys and Excavations at the Nazareth Village Farm (1997–2002): Final Report'[609] was published in the Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society by Stephen Pfann, Ross Voss, and Yehudah Rapuano. This article is also known as the 'Nazarath Village Farm Report'. In 2008 the Bulletin published Rene Salm's 'A Response to 'Surveys and Excavations at the Nazareth Village Farm (1997–2002): Final Report', which criticized the report of Pfann, Voss, and Rapuano.

Salm's article was accompanied by the article 'Nazareth Village Farm: A Reply to Salm' by Ken Dark, 'On the Nazareth Village Farm Report: A Reply to Salm' by Pfann and Rapuano, and a review by Ken Dark of Salm's book 'The Myth of Nazareth. The Invented Town of Jesus. Scholar's Edition' (2008). Also published in the same edition of the Bulletin was 'The Nazareth Village Farm Project Pottery (1997–2002): Amendment', by Rapuano, in which he re-presented the diagrams in the original article, correcting three cases in which diagrams had been misnumbered in the original article. However, Rapuano did not withdraw or alter any of the conclusions he had made in the original report.

Godfrey's claims: "the very worst practices found among the most culpable of researchers"

Godfrey's response to O'Neill opens with this claim.

[609] Stephen Pfann, Ross Voss, and Yehudah Rapuano, "Surveys and Excavations at the Nazareth Village Farm (1997–2002): Final Report," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 25 (2007): 11–71.

> "What Tim O'Neill has done in his attacks on René Salm earlier this year over his claims that there was no village of Nazareth at the time of Jesus is defend the very worst practices found among the most culpable of researchers."[610]

On what basis does Godfrey make this claim? In his criticism of Salm, O'Neill makes the following statement.

> "Okay, then let's actually look at the evidence of archaeologists, then consider the armchair objections of the piano teacher from Oregon named Rene Salm and let objective sceptics decide who is more likely to be correct." [611]

It is O'Neill's view that professional archaeologists are more likely to be correct in their assessment of archaeological evidence, than a piano teacher. In his criticism of O'Neill, Godfrey mischaracterizes this as "defending the right of academics to make pronouncements of breakthroughs and new discoveries and then say, "Nope, you can't examine all the details of the data for yourself. I'm a professional! How dare you question my judgements!"". In fact O'Neill never says anything like this.

Godfrey's claims: "Only one of them, Rapuano, is a trained archaeologist"

Godfrey claims that only one of the authors of the Nazareth Village Farm report "is a trained archaeologist".

> "The Nazareth Village Farm report was the work of three persons. Only one of them, Rapuano, is a trained archaeologist who, however, customarily works in Judea far to the south."[612]

[610] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O' Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[611] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O'Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[612] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O'Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

> There is only one archaeologist (Rapuano) whose evidence Salm questions. Later O'Neill will refer to all three authors of the report as "three qualified archaeologists" — unaware, it seems, that only one of the authors has qualifications in archaeology!"[613]

One of the authors, Ross Voss, is an archaeologist with "Thirty eight years of archaeological excavation experience". The other author is Stephen Pfann, whose academic title is "Researcher/Archaeologist University of the Holy Land". When presented with these facts, Godfrey explained what he had meant.

> "I made it very clear that there are three archaeologists who wrote the report but that only one of these has formal qualifications in archaeology. The other two are not qualified. They have experience, yes, but not qualifications."[614]

This is not what Godfrey said originally. His original claim was that the article was authored by "three persons", not "three archaeologists", and he originally said "Only one of them, Rapuano, is a trained archaeologist", not "only one of these has formal qualifications in archaeology".

Godfrey further claimed that the experience of the other two authors did not qualify them as archaeologists, and described them as "Religious nutters without qualifications going out there to find proof the Bible is true".

> "That is exactly the point being addressed by Salm in his SBL paper, isn't it. Religious nutters without qualifications going out there to find proof the Bible is true and calling themselves archaeologists because they do it all the time — "field experience". That's yours and O'Neill's definition of "qualified archaeologists"???? You are a bunch of clowns!" [615]

Godfrey was asked the following questions.

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[613] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O'Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[614] Neil Godfrey, "Nazareth: The Piano Teacher vs the Archaeology | The Quodlibeta Forum", n.d., n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[615] Neil Godfrey, "Nazareth: The Piano Teacher vs the Archaeology | The Quodlibeta Forum", n.d., n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

1. Could I be clear however on the fact that you are now saying you believe all three authors are archaeologists?

2. On what basis did you make your claim that they are not qualified simply because they 'have experience, yes, but not qualifications'?

3. Can you provide any evidence that the scholarly community considers either Pfann or Voss to be 'unqualified'? Do you consider them insufficiently qualified to comment and publish on the subject? If so, please provide your evidence.

Godfrey did not answer. He was also asked these questions.

1. Does the scholarly community only accept as qualified, those with formal qualifications in archaeology?

2. Does the scholarly community not accept as qualified, those with no formal qualifications in archaeology but decades of field experience, and/or formal teaching positions in the field?

Again Godfrey did not answer, nor did he provide any evidence for his claim that Pfann and Ross are "Religious nutters without qualifications going out there to find proof the Bible is true".

Godfrey's claims: "he only vaguely recalls what Salm himself wrote"

Godfrey wrote the following (O'Neill's quoted words in italics).

> "O'Neill then demonstrates that, though he only vaguely recalls what Salm himself wrote, he does not know the basic facts at the heart of the debates.
>
> *I recalled that [Salm] had actually accepted the dating of some of the agricultural terraces at Nazareth and of the recently excavated house there. I was wrong – Salm is much more intransigent than that."*[616]

[616] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O'Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

In this quotation from O'Neill, he does not say or demonstrate that he "only vaguely recalls what Salm himself wrote"; he corrects a previous recollection he had. Nor does this statement demonstrate that O'Neill "does not know the basic facts at the heart of the debates". Godfrey then claimed O'Neill had misunderstood the site of the Nazareth Farm.

> "He says here that the recently excavated house (of Jesus' time!) was "there" at the site of the agricultural terraces at Nazareth. And this is from one who is trying to make fun of someone he wants to portray as "an armchair hobbyist". A simple web search will inform O'Neill that that house is not "there" at the site of the agricultural terraces at all. Look on Google maps to see for yourself. For convenience, here is a snapshot from Google Maps where I have pinpointed the approximate areas of the sites under discussion. (Go to "32°42'04.28" N 35°17'33.78" E" in Google Maps to explore the area yourself.) O'Neill has confused the NVF (where no house was excavated) with Yardena Alexandre's excavation in the immediate area of the Church of the Annunciation."[617]

But O'Neill said no such thing. He said "I recalled that had actually accepted the dating of some of the agricultural terraces at Nazareth and of the recently excavated house there". To what does the word "there" refer? It refers to Nazareth, which is precisely where the recently excavated "Jesus-era house" is located, near the Church of the Annunciation.

Godfrey's claims: "fabricated fancy"

O'Neill made the observation that "Reading Salm on this subject reminds me of the days, many years ago, when I actually used to bother reading Creationist material so I could debate Creationists".

> "Salm's book, The Myth of Nazareth: The Invented Town of Jesus, bears many similarities to Creationist classics like Duane Gish's Evolution? The Fossils Say No!. You have an amateur with no training in the relevant field. You have them desperately trying to critique published work by actual specialists and experts and nitpick at it to find reasons for doubt. You have triumphant leaping on the smallest error (eg a mislabeled diagram) as evidence of incompetence if not outright fraud. You have an assumption that the experts secretly know they are wrong and are trying to deceive

[617] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O'Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

> laypeople for nefarious reasons. And you have a driving ideological bias motivating all of the above, but masquerading as objective critical analysis for the public good. The resemblance is uncanny."[618]

Godfrey responded that "O'Neill's assertion that Salm's book has an uncanny resemblance to creationist literature is fabricated fancy. It is a falsehood", making the following critique of O'Neill's assertion.

> "Creationists dispute the interpretation of all the scientists and the science itself. Salm in fact is quoting the archaeological reports and defending published scholarly findings against popular press releases that have overtaken the imaginations of the likes of even Bart Ehrman. Creationists do not publish in scientific journals and prompt amendments to scientific reports. Salm has done exactly that. Salm is not disputing the science or the findings. He is, in fact, sifting the actual data reported and evaluating it against incautious claims and conclusions and pointing to the self-confessed religious and financial biases of some of those responsible for the archaeological reports and popular press releases. He is holding religiously motivated scholars to account for making announcements that go way beyond the actual data published in their reports."[619]

Godfrey's response here does not address any of the points O'Neill actually raised. Instead of addressing the points of similarity between Creationists and Salm identified by O'Neill, Godfrey lists a series of points of difference. But O'Neill never disputed these points of difference; he identified points of similarity, points which Godfrey never addresses. Here are the similarities O'Neill raised.

1. "You have an amateur with no training in the relevant field."

2. "You have them desperately trying to critique published work by actual specialists and experts and nitpick at it to find reasons for doubt."
3. "You have triumphant leaping on the smallest error (eg a mislabeled diagram) as evidence of incompetence if not outright fraud."

[618] Tim O' Neill, "Nazareth: The Piano Teacher vs the Archaeology | The Quodlibeta Forum", 24 August, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[619] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O'Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

4. "You have an assumption that the experts secretly know they are wrong and are trying to deceive laypeople for nefarious reasons."

5. "And you have a driving ideological bias motivating all of the above, but masquerading as objective critical analysis for the public good."

Godfrey did not address any of these five points raised by O'Neill. This fact was pointed out to Godfrey in discussion; he did not respond.

Godfrey's claims: "Tim's mind"

Godfrey quoted the following statement from O'Neill.

> "Rapuano expresses himself with the usual caution required of a professional archaeologist, while at the same time giving his trained assessment of their dating provenance."[620]

Godfrey then claimed to know that O'Neill actually meant something completely different to what he wrote.

> "This translates in Tim's mind into:
>
> When Rapuano says a fragment "could possibly" be from the Hellenistic or early Roman eras, then unless you treat the Hellenistic to early Roman periods as an established fact for that fragment you are being "ludicrous"."[621]

Godfrey's claim to know O'Neill's mind in this way is unpersuasive, especially unaccompanied by any evidence. In reality, O'Neill never makes any such statement, or any statement like it.

Godfrey's claims: "he has had to depart from the standard reference"

Godfrey represented Salm's argument thus.

[620] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O'Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[621] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O'Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

> "What Salm argues is that where Rapuano provides external support for his assessment the fragments can as well be dated to after 70 CE (the fall of Jerusalem) as before it."[622]

He then claimed Rapuano "attempted to correct that deficiency in his Amended report subsequently".

> "Rapuano clearly did not dismiss this criticism as easily as O'Neill did, since he attempted to correct that deficiency in his Amended report subsequently. New parallel comparisons are introduced to support some of the claims, but to do so he has had to depart from the standard reference, Adan Bayewitz, for Galilean pottery dating and resort to less relevant (often quite different) Jericho and Judean sources. He has also turned to Fernandez who, Salm shows in his book, consistently dates objects much earlier than other authorities without clear rationale. Tim O'Neill does not question any of this. Rapuano has spoken: pottery "may be", "could be" Hellenistic or Early Roman (compare Fernandez!), so O'Neill throws all caution to the wind and demands we all accept on authority of one scholar that it is Hellenistic or Early Roman."[623]

There are several problems with this paragraph of Godfrey's. Firstly, Godfrey provided no evidence that any such "deficiency" actually existed, still less that Rapuano "attempted to correct" it; no evidence was provided for Salm's assertion. Secondly, Godfrey provided no evidence for the claim that in introducing "New parallel comparisons" Rapuano had to "depart from the standard reference, Adan Bayewitz, for Galilean pottery dating" or that Rapuano had to "resort to less relevant (often quite different) Jericho and Judean sources". Thirdly, Godfrey repeated (without substantiation), Salm's claim that Fernandez (a source cited by Rapuano), "consistently dates objects much earlier than other authorities without clear rationale". Although Godfrey gave the impression Rapauno relied significantly on Fernandez, in fact Rapuano only cited Fernandez with

[622] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O'Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[623] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O'Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

regard to ten artefacts out of a total of 77,[624] and only on five of those occasions is Fernandez the only source cited.[625]

Six out of the ten date ranges cited from Fernandez start within the first century,[626] but in only three of those cases did Fernandez give a date range which ends inside the first century.[627] On two occasions the date range given by Fernandez was within the same range given by another source,[628] [629] and on one occasion the date range given by Fernandez was later than the date given by another source.[630] There is certainly no evidence here that Fernandez "consistently dates objects much earlier than other authorities without clear rationale". Finally, Godfrey provided no evidence for his claim that O'Neill "O'Neill throws all caution to the wind and

[624] Yehudah Rapuano, "The Nazareth Village Farm Project Pottery (1997–2002): Amendment," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 26 (2008): 113–35; once on pages 114, 116, twice on page 118, once on pages 120 and 121, three times on 122, once on page 123.

[625] Yehudah Rapuano, "The Nazareth Village Farm Project Pottery (1997–2002): Amendment *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 26 (2008): 113–35; once on pages 118, 120, 121, twice on page 122.

[626] Yehudah Rapuano, "The Nazareth Village Farm Project Pottery (1997–2002): Amendment," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 26 (2008): 114, 116, 118, 120, 121, 122.

[627] Yehudah Rapuano, "The Nazareth Village Farm Project Pottery (1997–2002): Amendment," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 26 (2008): 114, 120, 121.

[628] "Diez-Fernandez T 1.3 dated 45 BCE – 48 CE; Stepanski Romana 2002: 112, Fig. 7:11, dated mid 1st cent. BCE to mid 1st cent. CE", Yehudah Rapuano, "The Nazareth Village Farm Project Pottery (1997–2002): Amendment," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 26 (2008): 114.

[629] "Meyers, Kraabel and Strange 1976: 220-222, jars Form T1 Pl. 7.20:15, dated 3rd cent. to early 5th cent. CE; Diez-Fernandez 1985, T 1.7:77 dated 212-240 CE", Yehudah Rapuano, "The Nazareth Village Farm Project Pottery (1997–2002): Amendment," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 26 (2008): 118.

[630] "possibly Stepanski Romana 2002:111, Fig. 6:16, dated end of 1st cent. to mid first 3rd. cent. CE, possibly Meyers Kraabel and Strange 1976: 205-207, Fig. 18, 4th-early 5th; Diez-Fernandez 1985, T.21.3 (175-300 CE)", Yehudah Rapuano, "The Nazareth Village Farm Project Pottery (1997–2002): Amendment," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 26 (2008): 123.

demands we all accept on authority of one scholar that it is Hellenistic or Early Roman". O'Neill never said any such thing, or anything like it.

Godfrey's claims: "a misreading of much of Salm's original article"

Godfrey objected to Ken Dark's review of Salm's critique of the Nazareth Farm Report as 'a misreading of much of Salm's original article', but did not provide evidence for this claim. He represented Dark as saying "Now it's your job to ignore those words of caution and defer to his other words as dogma! And no, you can't examine the evidence more closely for yourself",[631] but does not provide any evidence for this either. Dark did not actually say any such thing.

Godfrey's claims: "absence of evidence is evidence"

Returning to O'Neill's response, Godfrey made the following claim.

> "O'Neill then repeats Bart Ehrman's argument that absence of evidence is evidence that there were poor people burying their dead in shallow graves. (He makes up an imaginative scenario to account for this — a very poor city gradually grew richer and richer till there were rich people's tombs there.)"[632]

O'Neill did not argue that "absence of evidence is evidence that there were poor people burying their dead in shallow graves". What O'Neill said was this.

> "As I note above, settlements established enough to sustain families who can have rock-cut kokhim built for them don't pop up out of nothing. They grow from smaller, poorer, earlier settlements. So the kokhim on their own imply a smaller, poorer, earlier settlement on the site.
>
> And that's precisely what the other archaeological evidence from the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods indicate, both by their nature (low status items, roughly made), their distribution and their number. We know there was a larger, richer town there later, the evidence indicates that clearly too."

[631] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O'Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[632] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O'Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

This is not an argument based on the absence of evidence, it is an argument based on evidence, specifically "rock-cut kokhim" (a tomb cut out of the rock). O'Neill's argument was that the presence of these tombs is evidence that there were families wealthy enough to sustain them. Additionally he points out that such wealthy families "don't pop up out of nothing", but are the result of "smaller, poorer, earlier settlements" developing. He does not basis this on the absence of evidence either, but states specifically "that's precisely what the other archaeological evidence from the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods indicate". O'Neill's argument was based firmly on the archaeological record.

Godfrey's claims: "Presumably O'Neill concludes"

Godfrey made another assertion about O'Neill's argument, without actually quoting O'Neill.

> "O'Neill then claims that the abundance of springs in the region is evidence that it must have been settled. People would loved to have set up home around springs. Presumably O'Neill concludes that every spring in the Levant was the site of a village for 2000 years before Christ."[633]

Turning to what O'Neill actually wrote, we find that it was not what Godfrey claimed.

> "Zvi Gal's Lower Galilee in the Iron Age (Eisenbrauns, 1992) notes that the site would have been attractive precisely because of its abundance of springs:The area around the city (of Nazareth) consists of limestone formation. There are several springs within this small Nazareth valley. The topography of the area and the fact it has many surrounding springs, proves that it was occupied during ancient periods.(Z. Gal, p. 15)"[634]

It can be seen that O'Neill did not present an argument he has made himself. On the contrary, he quoted archaeologist Zvi Gal saying "The topography of the area and the fact it has many surrounding springs, proves that it was occupied during ancient periods". Godfrey's claim that "Presumably O'Neill concludes that every spring in the Levant was the site of a village for 2000 years before Christ" is completely baseless; O'Neill never said anything like this.

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[633] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O'Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[634] Tim O' Neill, "Nazareth: The Piano Teacher vs the Archaeology | The Quodlibeta Forum", 24 August, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

Godfrey's claims: "O'Neill uncritically parrots"

Godfrey misrepresented O'Neill again in his next paragraph.

> "Finally, O'Neill uncritically parrots the popular press reports of Yardenna Alexandre claiming that archaeologists have uncovered tombs in Nazareth from the time of Jesus. He needs to read a bit more widely, including Salm's book (that he claims to have read). He would know of a work that has apparently been gaining in influence in recent years, Palästina in griechisch-römischer Zeit by Hans-Peter Kuhnen.
>
> He would know (does Alexandre know?) the persuasive evidence that the kokh tombs in question here almost certainly did not appear in Galilee as early as they did in Jerusalem."[635]

Leaving aside the fact that O'Neill was not actually parroting a news report (he did not quote from any news report at all, but from a report by the Israeli Antiquities Authority), Godfrey did not say why he uses the phrase "uncritically parrots" to describe O'Neill citing an event which has actually taken place; the popular press did report what Yardenna Alexandre said. Citing an event which has actually taken place by referring to news reports which describe the event taking place, is not uncritical parroting; it is simply mentioning an event which has happened, and citing the source which reported the event happening.

The news report to which Godfrey linked opens with the words "Archaeologists in Israel say they have discovered the remains of a home from the time of Jesus in the heart of Nazareth", and contains a statement from Yardenne Alexandre saying "Until now a number of tombs from the time of Jesus were found in Nazareth; however, no settlement remains have been discovered that are attributed to this period".

In criticism of Alexandre's statement, Godfrey cited what he claimed is "a work that has apparently been gaining in influence in recent years, Palästina in griechisch-römischer Zeit by Hans-Peter Kuhnen". This work is actually a volume in the series Vorderasien ('Western Asia"); the title translated into English is "Palestine in Greek and Roman Times". It is also entirely in German. It is unclear whether or not Godfrey had ever actually read this work, or whether or not he can even read German. He provided no evidence for his claim that this work "has apparently been gaining in influence in recent years", nor does he provide any evidence for what he says is "the persuasive evidence that the kokh tombs in question here almost certainly did not

[635] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O'Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

appear in Galilee as early as they did in Jerusalem". Although he implied such evidence is in the German book he cites, he is not explicit on this point.

Although he seems to want to give the impression that "Palästina in griechisch-römischer Zeit" contains "persuasive evidence" that the tombs did not appear in Galilee as early as in Jerusalem, and that this has become an influential position, he did not actually explain precisely what he does mean, nor did he present any evidence for his statements. It is possible he had borrowed information from another source which he did not identify, and either cited it uncritically without verification, or used it to make an argument of his own. He certainly did not present any evidence that this book published in 1990 disproves Alexandre's statement that "Until now a number of tombs from the time of Jesus were found in Nazareth".

Godfrey's claims: "How it works"

At the end of his article Godfrey claimed "the authors of the Nazareth Farm Report do not yield sufficient information for anyone to assess their conclusions critically".[636] He presented no evidence for this claim. He also said "to say someone is a lunatic for not deferring to the authority of a researcher until that researcher makes the evidence available for checking is simply trying to intimidate and shut down questioning through intellectual bullying", but never identifies anyone who has actually ever said such a thing.

Godfrey concluded thus.

> "Oh yes, there are about ten pottery fragments that Rapuano's amended report that to the time of "Jesus" (Hellenistic to first century CE). Salm points out that Rapuano uses early, inapplicable Judean parallels for these. No doubt when Rapuano publishes a more detailed book explaining the data in detail people who like to understand the evidence (who are not satisfied simply to defer to academic authority without any thought that they should demonstrate accountability) will be keen to study the details of these ten fragments."[637]

[636] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O'Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[637] Neil Godfrey, "More Nazareth Nonsense from Tim O'Neill," Text, Vridar, 29 December, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

Godfrey gave the impression that it was only in Rapuano's "amended report" that he cited any pottery fragments dating to "the time of "Jesus"". However, the original Nazareth Farm Report says clearly that in Area A-2 "many potsherds with the typical ribbing of the Early to Late Roman Period were found" (page 28). Salm made note of this in his reply (page 97), specifically because he wished to challenge the Early Roman Period dating (which overlaps with the time of Jesus).

Godfrey overlooked Salm's own count of eleven fragments in the original Nazareth Farm Report which are presented as dating to the time of Jesus; "the totality of the NVFR evidence for a pre-70CE Nazareth rests on eleven small pottery sherds" (page 101). If Godfrey had read Rapuano's amendment (I asked him if he had read it, but he did not reply), he would have seen Raupano "explaining the data in detail", just as he required.

Conclusion

Godfrey failed to substantiate any of his accusations that O'Neill was in error. Additionally, he appealed to sources he apparently has not even read, and which contradict his own claims.

Godfrey On Ehrman: Claims of Misrepresentation

Jon Burke

Abstract

Neil Godfrey charged Bart Ehrman with misrepresenting the views of Earl Doherty and George Albert Wells. Godfrey made this the basis of his claim that Ehrman's work on the historicity of Jesus is fundamentally unreliable. This article examines Godfrey's claims.

Godfrey on Ehrman: misrepresenting Doherty?

Neil Godfrey claimed Ehrman made a 'hostile error' in stating that Earl Doherty 'speaks of a single ancient view of the universe' in Doherty's book 'Jesus – Neither God Nor Man: The Case for a Mythical Jesus' (2009).

> "Either way, Ehrman has clearly done nothing better than skim Doherty's book(s) and demonstrated he has not read the arguments he claims to be reviewing. Otherwise there is no way he could have made such a hostile error as to claim Doherty speaks of a single ancient view of the universe."[638]

Contrast Godfrey's claim with the following statements made by Doherty in his book.

1. "So much of **the ancient view** of things was determined by myth because that was essentially all they had."[639]

2. "Part Four, "A World of Myth and Savior Gods" (chapters 10 to 14), **enters the multi-layered universe of the ancients**. It will examine **their view** that a vast unseen dimension lay above the earth, where all sorts of supernatural proceedings took place among gods and spirits."[640]

[638] Neil Godfrey, "Bart Ehrman's False or Careless Assertions and Quotations Concerning Earl Doherty," Text, Vridar, 28 March, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[639] Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man : The Case for a Mythical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), 11.

[640] Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man : The Case for a Mythical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), 14.

3. "**Ancient philosophy as a whole, its view of the universe** and of God, was the product of purely intellectual contemplation."[641]

4. "We will address the specific point about "being in the flesh" in a separate chapter to follow. But the question of heavenly trees and ground gets to the heart of the present matter, as an expression of modern literality and the inability to comprehend **the ancient mind's view of the universe**."[642]

Godfrey claimed it was a 'hostile error' to claim Doherty speaks of a single ancient view of the universe, yet there are four clear statements in Doherty's book in which he does exactly that; 'the ancient view [singular] of things' (p. 11), their view [singular] that' (p. 14), 'view [singular] of the universe' (p. 83), 'the ancient mind's view [singular] of the universe' (p. 150).

Godfrey on Ehrman: misrepresenting Wells?

Godfrey charged Ehrman with misrepresenting the views of Wells so completely that it is not possible that Ehrman has even read the pages of Wells' work that he cites.

> "Bart Ehrman has indignantly declared he read all of the books he discusses in his book Did Jesus Exist? How, then, could he possibly have confused the mythicist argument of Wells with that of Doherty. The two are opposed to each other. But Ehrman appears to have picked up a garbled account and attributed half of Doherty's argument to Wells!"[643]
>
> "Ehrman is writing outright disinformation about Wells' argument. Ehrman cannot possibly have read the pages in Wells' book that he cites."[644]

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[641] Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man : The Case for a Mythical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), 83.

[642] Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man : The Case for a Mythical Jesus* (Ottawa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009), 150.

[643] Neil Godfrey, "How Could Ehrman Possibly Have Read the Books He Cites?," Text, Vridar, 28 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[644] Neil Godfrey, "How Could Ehrman Possibly Have Read the Books He Cites?," Text, Vridar, 28 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

Godfrey's claim was directed very specifically towards this paragraph by Ehrman.

> "Instead, Wells contends, Paul understood Jesus to have been a supernatural being who lived in utter obscurity some 150 years or so earlier, who was crucified not by the Romans but by the demonic forces in the world."

Let's put this paragraph of Ehrman's next to Wells' own words, as quoted by Godfrey himself.

- Ehrman: 'Wells contends Paul understood **Jesus to have been a supernatural being**'
- Wells: 'Paul believed in **a supernatural Jesus**'
- Ehrman: 'who lived in **utter obscurity**'
- Wells: 'he was convinced that Jesus lived **an obscure life** on earth'
- Ehrman: 'who was crucified not by the Romans **but by the demonic forces in the world**.'
- Wells: 'who assumed human flesh and was crucified on earth **at the instigation of supernatural powers**'

Godfrey claimed that Ehrman 'is writing outright disinformation about Wells' argument", and 'cannot possibly have read the pages in Wells' book that he cites'. Readers may decide for themselves if the evidence supports Godfrey's claims.

Conclusion

Godfrey failed to substantiate any of his accusations that Ehrman misrepresented Doherty or Wells. On the contrary, their works contain the very arguments (and phrases), which Godfrey characterized as misrepresentations of their arguments.

Godfrey On Historiography: Polybius and Livy

Jon Burke

Abstract

Classicist and historian Michael Grant is known for his popularization of Greek and Roman history. Neil Godfrey has criticized one of Grant's works in particular, 'Jesus: An Historian's Review of the Gospels' (1992), in two articles (here and here), accusing Grant of 'talking through his hat', 'unprofessional nonsense', and 'imaginative fantasies'. This article will focus on one of Godfrey's objections to Grant, specifically Grant's comparison of the gospels to the historical works of the Greek historian Polybius and the Roman historian Livy.

Godfrey's objection

Godfrey quotes the following statement from 'Jesus: An Historian's Review of the Gospels' (page 200), in which Grant states that discrepancies between historical accounts of an event do not mean that the event they are both describing never actually took place. Citing the differences in the gospel accounts, Grant cites discrepancies in the histories of Polybius and Livy when describing the same events.

> "Certainly, there are all those discrepancies between one Gospel and another. But we do not deny that an event even took place just because pagan historians such as, for example, Livy and Polybius, happen to have described it in differing terms. That there was a growth of legend around Jesus cannot be denied, and it arose very quickly. But there had also been a rapid growth of legend round pagan figures like Alexander the Great; and yet nobody regards him as wholly mythical and fictitious."[645]

Godfrey objects to this comparison on the following grounds.

> "Of course no-one disputes events if Livy and Polybius describe them differently. Firstly, look at the different ways Livy and Polybius describe Hannibal's crossing of the Alps. The facts are not in dispute. One does not say Hannibal crossed the Alps after he invaded Italy and another before; one does not say he crossed with his army while another says the army crossed without him. These would be the sorts of differences we would expect if Livy's and Polybius's accounts are comparable to what we find in the Gospels. Rather, most of the differences are perceptions of the character of Hannibal: the patriotic Livy hates him while Polybius, a Greek historian, is more neutral.

[645] Michael Grant, *Jesus* (New York NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977), 200.

> Yes, the Gospels also contain different attitudes towards the disciples, towards Jews and Romans. But they also contain much more significant contradictions that really do undermine their credibility as accounts ultimately derived from singular noteworthy events."[646]

Godfrey links to the site of John D Clare, a professional historian. The specific page to which Godfrey links, provides an English translation of both Polybius and Livy's account of the Carthaginian military leader Hannibal, crossing the European Alps during his invasion of Italy. Godfrey offers this page in support of his claim although Polybius and Livy describe Hannibal's crossing of the Alps differently, 'most of the differences are perceptions of the character of Hannibal', and none of the differences are equivalent to the differences found between the gospel descriptions of certain events.

Clare's page contains a large number of detailed notes on the historical accounts of Polybius and Livy. It is unclear whether Godfrey has read these notes, which provide a useful way of comparing Godfrey's assessment of these historical sources, with the assessment of a professional historian. Unlike Godfrey, Clare notes a large number of substantive discrepancies between Polybius and Livy, as well as a number of historical ambiguities which are impossible to settle given the lack of information given by either historian, or by their misuse of their sources.

The historical sources for Hannibal

Polybius was contemporary with Hannibal, whereas Livy was writing over 100 years after Hannibal had died. These two historians are relied on as providing the most detailed historical accounts, having drawn from earlier sources (Polybius knew eyewitnesses of the war with Hannibal); Roman biographer Cornelius Nepos, and Greek historian Arrian of Nicomedia, are two additional sources on the life of Hannibal, though Nepos was writing over 200 years after Hannibal had died, and Arrian was writing around 100 years after Nepos.

Yet despite the wealth of historical sources for Hannibal, and the close proximity of his earliest biographers, considerable uncertainty remains about his early life, character, and motivation.

> "The true character of Hannibal eludes us. None of our sources provide the equivalent of the anecdotes told about the childhood and family life of the important Greek and Roman politicians of the era, many of whom were the subject of detailed biographies. We can say a good deal about what

[646] Neil Godfrey, "The Historical Jesus and the Demise of History, 3b: How One Popular Historian Follows Jesus to Historiographical Perdition (Part 2)," Text, Vridar, 28 February, 2013, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

> Hannibal did during his career, and often understand how he did it, but we can say virtually nothing with any certainty about what sort of man he was. As with so much else about Carthage and its leaders, there are so many things that we simply do not know, that even our sources probably did not understand. Was Hannibal for instance a Hellenized aristocrat who dreamed of copying and surpassing the great expeditions of Alexander or Pyrrhus, or did he remain very much the Punic nobleman with a very different set of beliefs and ambitions? Much as we try to understand Hannibal, he will always remain an enigma."[647]

As we shall see, there is also considerable uncertainty about his famous crossing of the Alps. Historian Dexter Hoyos notes that reconstruction of any topic concerning the history of the Punic Wars itself is contentious, specifically due to the discrepancies and contradictions between the available sources.

> "Predictably, there are enough discrepancies and sometimes contradictions between accounts to make the task of establishing a reasonably true picture of any topic a contentious one."[648]

Polybius & Livy as historians

Both Polybius and Livy have their strengths and weaknesses as historians of the life of Hannibal, but Godfrey does not mention any of their weaknesses in his description of them; instead he assures us that 'Their works find independent support in other sources'.

> "We know who Polybius and Livy were, when they were born, where they lived, whom they knew and met, their political and social status, where they traveled, and why they wrote their respective histories of Rome. That is, we understand their interests and reasons for writing, and their interest and ability in writing a generally factual history. Their works find independent support in other sources."[649]

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[647] Adrian Goldsworthy, *The Fall of Carthage: The Punic Wars 265 - 146 BC* (London: Cassell Military, 2004), 157-158.

[648] B. D Hoyos, *A Companion to the Punic Wars* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 2.

[649] Neil Godfrey, "The Historical Jesus and the Demise of History, 3b: How One Popular Historian Follows Jesus to Historiographical Perdition (Part 2)," Text, Vridar, 28 February, 2013, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

Polybius is considered the better historian of Hannibal, given that he was a contemporary and was able to consult eyewitness accounts.

Yet although Polybius identifies his two Roman sources for his description of the First Punic War, he casts doubt on their reliability.[650] When describing the Second Punic War, Polybius rarely mentions his sources, and typically does not identify them by name.[651]

Historians identify Polybius' Roman sources for the Second Punic War by a process of informed guesswork. In his entire description of Hannibal's crossing of the Alps (book 3, chapters 49-56), Polybius does not name or even cite a single identifiable source, and his account contains almost no geographically identifiable place names. Hoyos has noted that Polybius 'can be vague or simply wrong at times: as in his narrative, almost place-name free, of Hannibal's passage over the Alps and his implausible account of Scipo's early political career'. [652] Nevertheless, Polybius is generally considered the most reliable historian on the Punic Wars, and one of the best historians of ancient Rome.

John Clare's assessment of Livy is highly critical, citing Livy's inability to reconcile contradictions between his sources, failing to identify biases in his sources, carelessness in copying or translating sources, misdating events, and his ignorance of geographical, military, and political details he is attempting to record.[653]

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[650] 'Meanwhile, for the First Punic War Polybius' two principal sources were Q. Fabius Pictor (FGrH 809) and Philinus of Agbrigentum (FGrH 174). **He found both to be deficient in historical method**.', Bernard Mineo, "Principal Literary Sources for the Punic Wars (apart from Polybius)," in *A Companion to the Punic Wars* (ed. Dexter Hoyos; John Wiley & Sons, 2011).

[651] 'Polybius also mentions some other Greek sources, many of whom seem to have been pro-Carthaginian. **Most such are left unnamed**.', Bernard Mineo, "Principal Literary Sources for the Punic Wars (apart from Polybius)," in *A Companion to the Punic Wars* (ed. Dexter Hoyos; John Wiley & Sons, 2011).

[652] B. D Hoyos, *A Companion to the Punic Wars* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 2.

[653] 'Instead of synthesising all his sources, Livy uses first one, then another, almost fact-for-fact (this theory, is named Nissen's Law after its inventor, the 19th century German classicist Heinrich Nissen); **this methodology leads to all kinds of confusion** as Livy repeats events, contradicts himself or, worse, **tries to cover up errors he realises he has made earlier**. 2. Where he is aware of contradictions in his sources, he often simply gives both; sometimes he says which he prefers, but he seems to use no methodology to evaluate his sources (as Polybius did) – he simply

Historians have noted in particular Livy's poor handling of his sources;[654] although he made some attempt to determine which of his conflicting sources were most reliable, his method of doing so was inadequate and his conclusions unreliable.[655]

chooses the figure in the middle, **or chooses the figure which suits his biases**. 3. He seems to have **failed to take account of the biases in the sources he was using** – e.g. when criticising or praising Roman generals. 4. Carelessness in copying sources – historians have found evidence of mis-copying and mistranslations. **He frequently gets dates wrong**. 5. 'Blind patriotism' towards the Romans, and biases for (e.g. the Scipio family) and against (e.g. the Claudians) certain noble families … which sometimes leads him to distort or blatantly falsify the truth. 6. He often gets his geography wrong … which again sometimes leads to whole stories being repeated. 7. **He was woefully ignorant in military matters**, yet sometimes chose to contradict Polybius! He tried to simplify battles for his general audience**, but made mistakes in doing so because he did not fully understand what was going on**. Most of his battles simply recount an orthodox clash of infantry centre and cavalry wings and are describe in traditional/formulaic terms of shouting and slaughter … which Livy then livens up with peripheral details and anecdotes. 8. **He had no experience of politics**, so 'the Senate' occasionally turns up in a stereotyped manner to decide this or enact that, and 'the People' react in predictable ways to events; you get no satisfactory analysis of the workings of public opinion or politics from Livy.', Clare, 'Hannibal_Livy.doc'.

[654] 'Apart from the rare outburst such as 2.21.3-4, 6.1.1-3, and 8.40 where the historian seems to call into question the overall framework and evidentiary basis of Roman history, **Livy invariably accepts rather uncritically the fictitiously detailed narratives of his sources**, and erects his own probabilistic conclusions upon their unstable foundations.', Gary Forsythe, *Livy and Early Rome: A Study in Historical Method and Judgment*, Historia, Einzelschriften, Heft 132 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999), 53-54.

[655] 'A careful examination of the relevant data clearly demonstrates that **Livy's use of historical probability is in general quite inadequate** for the difficult task of critically analyzing the historical traditions of early Rome. On the few occasions on which it is correctly employed, it never goes beyond the application of common sense. Far more frequently, however, **Livy erects his conclusions upon dubious premises**.', Gary Forsythe, *Livy and Early Rome: A Study in Historical Method and Judgment*, Historia, Einzelschriften, Heft 132 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999), 53-54.

Discrepancies between Polybius & Livy

Unlike professional historians, Godfrey does not inform readers of the significant discrepancies between the accounts of Polybius and Livy in their description of the Punic Wars. Polybius describes how the first peace treaty between Rome and Carthage was ratified, whereas Livy claims it was rejected; yet forgetting what he said earlier, later in Livy's history he assumes the treaty was ratified after all.[656] Likewise, the description Livy gives of the Battle of Zama, is 'bizarrely at odds with Polybius".[657]

Since Godfrey has pointed to Hannibal's crossing of the Alps as an example of agreement between Polybius and Livy (acknowledging differences between their accounts but claiming 'most of the differences are perceptions of the character of Hannibal'), this section of their works will be examined, to see if Godfrey's claim withstands scrutiny.

Discrepancy 1: encouraging or berating the troops?

At the beginning of their descriptions of Hannibal crossing of the Alps, Polybius claims Hannibal gave a speech encouraging his men 'by reminding them of their achievements in the past', whilst Livy claims he 'called his troops together and harangued them with a mixture of withering scorn and general encouragement', accusing them of cowardice.

Clare notes that there is a discrepancy between Polybius and Livy as to the timing of the event; 'in Polybius, Hannibal was trying to encourage his men after the defeat by Scipio's scouting party; Livy makes it a Hortatio speech before the ascent of the Alps'. This is a significant discrepancy; it is impossible for both historians to

[656] 'Reporting how Scipio Africanus' first peace treaty with Carthage, in 203, was received by the Senate at Rome, Livy supplies participants with plenty of oratory while insisting that the treaty was rejected, a striking contrast to Polybius' evidence of ratification – which Livy himself soon afterwards assumes to have happened.', B. D Hoyos, *A Companion to the Punic Wars* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 2.

[657] 'His account of the climactic battle of Zama, in turn, is bizarrely at odds with Polybius' which he seems not to understand fully (a Livian hazard also found elsewhere in his work); though it is not as bizarre as that of Appian, who like the epic poet Silius was determined to insert a hand-to-hand joust between the two great generals.', B. D Hoyos, *A Companion to the Punic Wars* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 2.

be correct. Clare concludes 'Given the fact that the army was still only at the Rhone, hundreds of miles from the Alps, one has to question Livy's account'.

Clare also notes that Livy has written Hannibal's speech in 'a form of oration called a Horatio (= Exhortation)', noting 'this was a Greek form of oration'. Noting 'there are other examples in Livy and throughout Greek literature' of this oratorical form, Clare asks his reader 'does the fact that this speech follows this form PROVE that Livy made it up?'. Clare's question is rhetorical, his point being that just because a historical source records a speech in a particular well used literary form, does not mean the speech itself never took place or that the content is fictional; this is how professional historians treat historical accounts which use literary forms.

Discrepancy 2: a prayer to the gods?

Polybius says that after Hannibal's speech to his troops he offered 'a prayer to the gods', but Livy does not mention this. Clare notes 'This act – a standard example of Virtus Romana – is deliberately omitted by Livy; what different impression to Polybius's impression of Hannibal was Livy thereby trying to create?'. Typical of Clare's professional method, discrepancies between Polybius and Livy are not treated as indications that an event did not take place.

When an event is present in one account but not in another, Clare harmonizes the accounts by proposing one of the historians lacked a source available to the other, or that one of the historians deliberately omitted the event for personal reasons. When both historians give differing accounts of the same event, Clare concludes that they are using different, independent sources, rather than concluding that the event did not take place.

Discrepancy 3: where is the Iskaras?

Identifying a geographical location apparently known as 'the Island', both Polybius and Livy refer to it as the place where two rivers meet'; the Rhone, and the 'Iskaras' (Polybius), or 'Sara' (Livy). This is the first of a number of significant geographical discrepancies in the accounts of Polybius and Livy. Clare notes that historians still cannot agree on the identity of this river, and consequently cannot agree on the route taken by Hannibal over the Alps, despite all the details given by Polybius and Livy.

> "Firstly, the river given in your set-text as the 'Isère' is actually in Polybius 'Iskaras' – since the 16th century historians have identified this as the Isère, but the British historian De Beer (1969) did not agree; he identified it as the Aigues (a river MUCH further south). Historians disagree about the route taken by Hannibal over the Alps.

> The suggestion that Hannibal turned east up the Isère would favour a route which took him over the Col du Mont Cenis or the Col de Clapier. The account in Livy, who states that Hannibal turned east up the Druentia (Durance), would suggest a southerly route over Mount Genèvre or the Col de la Traversette. We will never be sure."[658]

This is an irreconcilable discrepancy between the geography of the Alps, and the geographical descriptions given by Polybius and Livy; the river is not identifiable with any certainty. Either Hannibal went east up the Isère or east up the Durentia, but it is not possible to be certain and his route over the Alps remains unknown.

Discrepancy 4: mediator or partisan?

Polybius and Livy both describe Hannibal encountering two brothers disputing the leadership of their tribe. Polybius says Hannibal favoured one of them, ad 'united with him therefore to attack and expel the other', whereas Livy on the contrary says Hannibal acted as a peaceful arbitrator between the two. Clare concludes the discrepancy is the result of the historians using different sources.

> "Although this story is paralleled in Livy, there are significant differences which suggest that Livy did NOT take the story from Polybius."[659]

> "Where Livy says that Hannibal was invited to arbitrate, Polybius just states that he supported the elder brother; another sign that Livy here was following an alternative source to Polybius."[660]

Discrepancy 5: Allobroges or not?

Livy says the two brothers belonged to the Allobroges, a tribal group in Gaul; Clare notes that Polybius 'infers the opposite'.

> "Where Livy states that the brothers were Allobroges, Polybius does not do so, and rather infers the opposite, since here he has the brother protecting Hannibal against the Allobroges. This shows that

[658] Clare, 'Hannibal_Livy.doc'.

[659] Clare, 'Hannibal_Livy.doc'.

[660] Clare, 'Hannibal_Livy.doc'.

> Livy did not base his account here on Polybius. Given that the Allobroges later attacked Hannibal, you have to say that Polybous sounds the more convincing account here."[661]

Again, Clare understands this as an indication of different sources used by Polybius and Livy, rather than dismissing the event as fictional.

Discrepancy 6: allies or enemies?

Clare notes Polybius and Livy differ completely in their description of Hannibal's experience with the naive tribes during his initial advance through the Alps, and again proposes two alternative sources as the origin of the contradiction.

> "Notice, yet again, how Polybius and Livy reverse the role of the Gauls and the Allobroges. Polybius has Hannibal escorted by 'Barbarians' safely through the Allobroges; Livy has Hannibal helped by Allobroges and unmolested by 'the local Gallic inhabitants'. It shows that Livy was using a different source to Polybius here."[662]

Discrepancy 7: the enemy slipped away, or the attacks were renewed?

Polybius claims that the day after an initial attack on Hannibal's force, the local enemies 'slipped away', leaving Hannibal's army uncontested.

> "53.6. The next day the enemy slipped away and Hannibal was able to rejoin the cavalry and the baggage train and lead them to the highest points of the Alpine passes."[663]

In contrast, Livy says the enemies remained and continued their attacks the next day, though with reduced force; Livy specifically mentions further losses to Hannibal's army at this time, completely contradicting Polybius.

> "35.1. However, on the next day, the barbarian attacks grew less intense and the two parts of his army were reunited. They cleared the pass successfully, but with some losses, mainly of baggage

[661] Clare, 'Hannibal_Livy.doc'.

[662] Clare, 'Hannibal_Livy.doc'.

[663] Clare, 'Hannibal_Livy.doc'.

> animals rather than soldiers. 35.2. The numbers of tribesmen was now considerably reduced, though their attacks continued, sometimes on the vanguard, sometimes on the rear."[664]

It is not possible for both of these descriptions to be correct; either the enemy 'slipped away' the next day, or they continued to attack the next day and Hannibal's army sustained further losses.

Discrepancy 8: the sight of Italy?

Polybius and Livy both claim that after nine days of travel Hannibal came to a vantage point from which he could look down on Italy, and encouraged his troops with their close proximity to their goal.

> "54.2. So he called them all together and tried to boost their morale. He had only one source of encouragement, and that was the sight of Italy, clearly spread out below. It lies so close up under these mountains that anyone gazing on both together would imagine that the Alps towered above Italy like an acropolis above its city." (Polybius)[665]

> "35.8. Fully aware of this, Hannibal rode out ahead and found a vantage point with a panoramic view across the whole landscape below. Here he ordered the army to halt and pointed out to them the view of Italy and the plains of the Po valley spread out at the foot of the Alps," (Livy)[666]

Clare points out that this is completely irreconcilable with the accounts given by Polybius and Livy themselves; it is geographically impossible for Hannibal to have seen such a view if he was in the position they claimed; either he could see the view because he was not in the position they claimed, or they were simply making use of a dramatic story about the event.

> "This is a wonderful story, which both Livy and Polybius tell … the only problem being that such a view exists ONLY on the Mont Cenis or the Col-de-Clapier passes. So either Hannibal used one of

[664] Clare, 'Hannibal_Livy.doc'.

[665] Clare, 'Hannibal_Livy.doc'.

[666] Clare, 'Hannibal_Livy.doc'.

> those two routes, or both Polybius and Livy were retailing a myth that was just too good not to use!"[667]

Discrepancy 9: five months to reach Italy?

Both Polybius and Livy claim Hannibal took five months to reach Italy, fifteen days of which were spent crossing the Alps. However, this is irreconcilable with their clam that Hannibal left Carthage in early spring.

> "Polybius and Livy agree on five months (they perhaps took the figure from a primary source – presumably Silenus/Sosylus). But an arrival in early November would imply a departure in June, which contradicts utterly the statement in both Polybius and Livy that Hannibal set off in 'early spring' – Livy emphasises 'right at the beginning of spring' (i.e. early March in Spain).
>
> Yet a departure in early spring would put Hannibal over the Alps in August. There is clearly an error somewhere."[668]

Here the discrepancy is internal; both Polybius and Livy agree with each other but contradict their own accounts. It is notable that when faced with Polybius and Livy using a figure which contradicts their own accounts Clare actually suggest the figure was taken from a primary source which neither historian cites, rather than dismissing the figure itself.

Discrepancy 10: fifteen days to cross the Alps?

Both Polybius and Livy say Hannibal took fifteen days to cross the Alps. However, Clare notes that their own accounts of the number of days Hannibal spent in the crossing, add up to 18 or 19; they contradict themselves.

> "Amusingly, when you add up the days in both Polybius's and Livy's accounts they come to 18 or 19! Both of them appear to have accepted a figure – presumably from Silenus/Sosylus – without checking it!"[669]

[667] Clare, 'Hannibal_Livy.doc'.

[668] Clare, 'Hannibal_Livy.doc'.

[669] Clare, 'Hannibal_Livy.doc'.

Again Clare reconciles the history by treating the figure as accurate and the historians as inaccurate, suggesting the figure of fifteen days is correct and that it derives from a primary source.

Discrepancy 11: how many men?

Livy notes the historical sources available to him are 'hopelessly at variance' with regard to how many soldiers Hannibal accompanied Hannibal into Italy.

> "38.2 The authorities are hopelessly at variance as to the number of the troops with which Hannibal entered Italy. The highest estimate assigns him 100,000 infantry and 20,000 cavalry; the lowest puts his strength at 20,000 infantry and 6000 cavalry. 38.3 L. Cincius Alimentus tells us that he was taken prisoner by Hannibal, and I should be most inclined to accept his authority if he had not confused the numbers by adding in the Gauls and Ligurians; if these are included there were 80,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry. 38.4 It is, however, more probable that these joined Hannibal in Italy, and some authorities actually assert this. 38.5 Cincius also states that he had heard Hannibal say that subsequently to his passage of the Rhone he lost 36,000 men and a vast number of horse and other animals."[670]

Livy again contradicts Polybius, and Clare notes Livy has made the wrong choice.

> "This section illustrates Livy's poor handling of numbers. Although he acknowledges the great variation of numbers, he seems to be prepared to accept Cincius's hearsay, despite being aware of significant problems with his calculations. And although he actually quotes Polybius's numbers (without crediting him)he utterly ignores the greater authority of Polybius's source (the column at Lacinium)."[671]

Although Livy claims L. Cincinius Alimentus as a reliable eyewitness source (having been taken prisoner by Hannibal), Clare notes that this is not true; Alimentus was not an eyewitness to these events.

> "A Roman annalist from the time of the Second Punic War, who really did spend years as a prisoner of Hannibal, and whose account of that time was praised by Polybius for its lack of bias. HOWEVER,

[670] Clare, 'Hannibal_Livy.doc'.

[671] Clare, 'Hannibal_Livy.doc'.

> although he was captured early in the war, he was NOT a prisoner when Hannibal crossed the Alps, and was not an eyewitness."[672]

Discrepancy 12: living off the land?

The accounts Polybius and Livy give of how Hannibal's army sustained itself once in Italy, are completely contradictory on three points. Firstly, Polybius claims Hannibal's army gathered plenty of supplies, while Livy claims the opposite.

> "Polybius emphasizes the abundance of supplies gathered by the Punic army, but again Livy claims the opposite. He even alleges that Campania was inadequate to support Hannibal's army, which was therefore threatened with hunger. Most importantly, the Roman troops successfully hindered Hannibal's food supply."[673]

Secondly, Polybius and Livy give different accounts of how the Romans responded at this time.

> "Quite revealing is the following difference in Polybius' and Livy's accounts. While Polybius has Flaminius' officers advise their commander to hold back and be on his guard against the superior numbers of Hannibal's cavalry, Livy has the officers tell Flaminius to use his cavalry and light-armed troops to keep the enemy's forces in check (Pol. 2.82.4; Livy 22.3.9)."[674]

Thirdly, Livy claims Hannibal's supplies were exhausted by spring, unlike Polybius.

[672] Clare, 'Hannibal_Livy.doc'.

[673] Paul Erdkamp, "Manpower and Food Supply in the First and Second Punic Wars," in *A Companion to the Punic Wars* (ed. Dexter Hoyos; John Wiley & Sons, 2011).

[674] Paul Erdkamp, "Manpower and Food Supply in the First and Second Punic Wars," in *A Companion to the Punic Wars* (ed. Dexter Hoyos; John Wiley & Sons, 2011).

> "Finally, Livy claims that in the spring of 216 Hannibal's stores were exhausted and that he contemplated withdrawing into Gaul (22.23.3). Polybius, who noted that Hannibal's army had been able to prepare their winter quarters near Gerunium unhindered, says nothing of the sort."[675]

Professional treatments of the sources

Despite the numerous sources used by Polybius and Livy (some of them primary sources, and eyewitnesses), professional historians are still unable to reconstruct precise details of Hannibal's journey across the Alps; the sources are too contradictory. Focusing only on twelve of the most glaring discrepancies, from Polybius and Livy we learn the following.

1. Hannibal started by encouraging his troops, or perhaps he started by berating them.

2. He then gave a prayer to the gods, or perhaps he didn't.

3. A key point of his travel took place at a river with a disputed name, which is geographically unidentifiable.

4. His path through the Alps took him over the Col du Mont Cenis, or perhaps the Col de Clapier, or perhaps Mount Genèvre, or perhaps the Col de la Traversette; his route is impossible to reconstruct with certainty, and historians still debate it.

5. He acted as mediator to two brothers, or perhaps he fought and defeated one of them as a partisan supporter of the other.

6. He was allied with the Gauls and fought the Allobroges, or perhaps he was allied with the Allobroges and fought with the Gauls.

7. After an initial attack on his forces the enemy slipped away the next day, or perhaps the next day they resumed fighting with reduced intensity but still inflicted further losses.

8. After nine days of travel he came to a vantage point at which he could see all of Italy, or perhaps he didn't.

[675] Paul Erdkamp, "Manpower and Food Supply in the First and Second Punic Wars," in *A Companion to the Punic Wars* (ed. Dexter Hoyos; John Wiley & Sons, 2011).

9. He arrived in Italy after five months, having started in early spring or perhaps not starting in early spring (or perhaps not taking five months at all).

10. He took 15 days to cross the Alps, or perhaps 18 days, or perhaps 19 days.

11. He arrived in Italy with 100,000 infantry and 20,000 cavalry, or 20,000 infantry and 6,000 cavalry, or any number in between.

12. When he arrived in Italy his army was able to sustain itself easily by living off the land, or perhaps it wasn't and it actually ran out of food.

Professional historians address the discrepancies between Polybius and Livy in a variety of ways. Some of those methods involve attributing the contradiction to differing sources, or to an accurate source which both Polybius and Livy cited but did not realise they were contradicting, or to the deliberate suppression of information by one of the historians for their own agenda, or to translation error (typically to Livy mistranslating a Greek source), or to a chronological re-organization of the events for purposes of dramatization.

Occasionally the discrepancies are explained by mismanagement of sources by Polybius or Livy (more commonly the latter), and various mathematical calculations are made in order to maintain the credibility of certain dates and time periods described by Polybius and Livy, whilst reconciling their inconsistencies and contradictions.

Professional historians do not dismiss Livy's record as inaccurate or unreliable on account of his credulous citation of supernatural events, nor do they dismiss as unhistorical events which are described using common Greek and Roman literary conventions used in fictional works. They seek harmonization where possible, even to the extent of attributing information to primary sources uncited by either Polybius or Livy.

Conclusion

Godfrey failed to substantiate any of his claims that the only differences between Polybius' record of Hannibal's Roman campaign and Livy's record, are 'perceptions on the character of Hannibal'. On the contrary, professional historians note significant conflicts in matters of fact. Additionally, Godfrey demonstrated an ignorance of standard historiographical method.

The Errors of Dorothy Murdock

Jon Burke

Abstract

Mythicist Dorothy Murdock (pseudonym 'Acharya S'), displayed in one of her books a drawing of a bronze statue she claimed to be a symbol of 'the cock, symbol of St. Peter' ('The Christ Conspiracy: The Greatest Story Ever Sold', 1999). Ehrman disputed this claim in his book, stating 'there is no penis-nosed statue of Peter the cock in the Vatican or anywhere else except in books like this, which love to make things up' (p. 24). This article examines Murdock's counter-claims, and finds them in error.

The bronze statue of 'the cock, symbol of St. Peter'

Richard Carrier responded to Erhman's rebuttal of Murdock by saying 'Ehrman evidently did no research on this and did not check this claim at all',[676] claiming that 'Murdock quickly exposed this by providing numerous scholarly references, including actual photographs of the object'.[677]

Defending his original statement, Ehrman replied to Carrier that 'my offhand statement about this particular one was that the Vatican does not have a statue of Peter as rooster with a hard cock for his nose'.[678] Carrier responded 'I believe there is reason to suspect he is lying about the Priapus statue'.[679]

Despite Ehrman's claim that his original statement was intended to mean that the statue was not of Peter, it does read naturally as a claim that the statue does not exist at all. I believe Carrier's criticism of Ehrman's original statement is valid, and Ehrman is requesting an unreasonably generous interpretation of that statement. However, whilst agreeing with Ehrman that the statue has nothing to do with Peter (contrary to

[676] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman on Jesus: A Failure of Facts and Logic," Richard Carrier Blogs, 19 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[677] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman on Jesus: A Failure of Facts and Logic," Richard Carrier Blogs, 19 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[678] Bart Erhman, "Acharya S, Richard Carrier, and a Cocky Peter (Or: 'A Cock and Bull Story') « Christianity in Antiquity (CIA): The Bart Ehrman Blog", 22 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[679] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman's Dubious Replies (Round One)," Richard Carrier Blogs, 27 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

Murdock's claims), Carrier went further. Saying 'At the very least I would expect Ehrman to have called the Vatican museum about this, and to have checked the literature on it, before arrogantly declaring no such object existed and implying Murdock made this up', [680] he defended Murdock's claim that the statue was at the Vatican using these words.

> "Some commentators on his [sic, for 'this'] site have also tried claiming the statue was never at the Vatican, but their misinformation and mishandling of the sources is thoroughly exposed in an extensive comment by an observer at Murdock's site."[681]

Impressed with what he referred to as 'numerous scholarly references' provided by Murdock, Carrier ironically decided to trust Murdock's claims, and the claims of one of her supporters, without checking them. He certainly did not contact the Vatican himself. In fact he did not even check her references at all. An examination of them shows that Murdock failed to provide 'numerous scholarly references', contrary to Carrier's claim.

Murdock's misrepresented sources

1. Walker, 'The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects' (1988): This is not a scholarly work at all. Walker is not even a scholar; her academic qualifications are in journalism, and the only subject in which she is recognized as an expert is knitting. Walker's book is full of unsubstantiated personal claims deriving largely from her own imagination. Walker cites a 1972 reprint of a work by Knight, 'An Account Of The Remains Of The Worship Of Priapus : Lately Existing At Isernia in the Kingdom of Naples: In Two Letters' (1786). Knight is a witness to the existence of the statue, but unlike Murdock he says absolutely nothing about it being anything to do with Peter.

2. Knight, 'An Account Of The Remains Of The Worship Of Priapus: Lately Existing At Isernia in the Kingdom of Naples: In Two Letters' (1786): Since Murdock had already cited a work citing Knight, listing Knight independently was redundant. Murdock was inflating artificially the number of works

[680] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman on Jesus: A Failure of Facts and Logic," Richard Carrier Blogs, 19 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

[681] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman's Dubious Replies (Round One)," Richard Carrier Blogs, 27 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

she cited, a fact which Carrier appears to have overlooked. Knight was tutored at home and was never awarded a university degree, so he was not a scholar. However, his wide experience with antiquities as a collector of ancient coins and bronze statues at least means he was more educated on the subject than Walker the knitting expert.

3. Williams, 'A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature' (1994). This is a scholarly work on a completely different subject. It refers to the existence of the statue, citing a work by Fuchs, 'Geschichte der Erotischen Kunst' (1908), so it is not an independent source.

4. Fuchs, 'Geschichte der Erotischen Kunst' (1908). Murdock had already cited a work citing Fuchs, so listing Fuchs independently is redundant; Carrier again overlooked the fact that Murdock was inflating artificially the number of works she cited.

   Additionally, Fuchs had a law degree, no qualifications in the field in which he was writing, and never held an academic appointment, so this is not a scholarly source.

5. Erlach, Reisenleitner & Vocelka, 'Privatisierung der Triebe?' Sexualitat in der Fruhen Neuzeit' (1994): This work cites an unidentified '18th C. engraving' (p. 206, mistakenly referred to by Murdock as p. 203), which is almost certainly Knight, so this is not an independent source. Published in 1994, this source says that the statue is 'still housed in the Vatican's secret collection' (p. 206), but as we shall see there is no evidence it was ever in the Vatican 'secret collection'. Murdock has clearly never read this book herself, and failed completely to identify it properly; she wrongly attributes authorship to 'Peter Lang'. In fact, Peter Lang is the name of the publisher. This is another error in Murdock's list of what Carrier referred to as 'numerous scholarly sources' which Carrier failed to identify. It is clear he hasn't read the book either, and neglected to check any of Murdock's references.

6. Jones, 'The Secret Middle Ages' (2002): Murdock quotes Jones referring to the 'notorious Albani bronze said to be held in the Vatican Museum' (p. 75), emphasis mine. Here is a scholarly work striking a note of caution concerning the popular story of the statue being held at the Vatican, and now the story is that it is said to be held in the 'Vatican Museum', not in a 'secret collection'. Jones provides no source for the story, and says nothing about the statue having anything to do with Peter.

7. Stephens, 'Public Characters of 1803-1804' (1804): Murdock quotes text from this book referring to a print of the statue in question in 'De la Chaussee's Museum Romanum, printed at Rome, in folio, in 1692' (p. 127). This text quoted by Murdock was contained in an letter printed several times previously, originally written by John Almon and published in his book 'A Letter to J. Kidgell, Containing a Full Answer to His Narrative' (1763). The book by Stephens which Murdock quotes is not a scholarly work, and nor is the letter by Almon (who was a journalist). Almon says nothing about the statue ever being in the Vatican and nothing about it having anything to do with Peter.

8. De la Chausse 'Museum Romanum' (1692): Murdock provides an image of the text on page 75 (volume 1), describing the statue in question. However, De la Chausse was not a scholar, he was a collector and cataloger of antiquities; furthermore, he does not say anything at all about the statue ever being in the Vatican.

9. Middleton, 'The Miscellaneous Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Conyers Middleton' (1752): Middleton was a clergyman, this is not a scholarly work, and it says nothing about the statue ever being in the Vatican and nothing about it having anything to do with Peter. His only source for the statue is De la Chausse, whom he cites (volume 4, p. 51).

10. Carlobelli, 'The Image of Priapus' (1996): Murdock quotes Carlobelli citing De la Chausse as an early source for the illustration of the statue (p. 67). However, apart from the fact that this is not an independent source (again we find De la Chausse is the source), Carlobelli says nothing about the statue ever being in the Vatican, and nothing about it having anything to do with Peter.

11. Wall, 'Sex and Sex Worship (phallic Worship): A Scientific Treatise on Sex, Its Nature and Function, and Its Influence on Art, Science, Architecture, and Religion-with Special Reference to Sex Worship and Symbolism' (1922): Murdock quotes Wall referring to 'the representation of a bronze figure of Priapus which was found in an ancient Greek temple' (p. 438), a photograph of which is shown in the book. Wall says nothing about the statue having ever been in the Vatican, and nothing about it having anything to do with Peter. The image in the photograph differs from the sketch in De la Chausse's work, prompting Murdock to comment that this is 'a photograph of what appears to be the original bronze statue (or at least its twin)'. Wall was a pharmacist with no scholarly qualifications; this is not a scholarly source. Carrier claimed Murdock presented 'actual photographs of the object', but this is

actually the only photograph Murdock shows, and even she expresses uncertainty that it is a photograph of the actual statue to which she is referring.

12. A source is cited by Murdock as 'Studies in Iconography (7-8:94), published by Northern Kentucky University': The work is a journal to which Murdock clearly had no access, since she omits the name of the author and title of the article in the journal, whilst linking to the snippet view of the work available on Google Books. Murdock quotes text saying 'This object was published under papal and royal authority, exhibited for a time in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and is now said to be held inaccessible in the secret collections of the Vatican', but without broader context it is impossible to see if the author cited any source for the claim. Nevertheless, again we find scholarly caution; the statue is '**said to be** held inaccessible in the secret collections of the Vatican'.

Assessing Carrier's claim

Examining what Carrier referred to as 'numerous scholarly sources', we find the following.

1. Half of them are not scholarly sources at all: Walker, Knight, Fuchs, Stephens, De la Chausse, Middleton, Wall.

2. Only two are independent sources: De la Chausse, Knight (and Knight is dependent on De la Chausse for the illustration he presents his own book); the other sources either cite one of these two, or cite no source at all.

Carrier was wrong to say Murdock cited 'numerous scholarly sources', an error he made because he failed to check the facts. Murdock's work itself was anything but scholarly, and Carrier (with academic qualifications Murdock lacks), should at the very least have checked Murdock's sources before describing them so enthusiastically. If he had checked them, he would have realized how wildly inaccurate her claims were, and how poor her research was. This failure of Carrier's was unfortunate in the context of him criticizing Ehrman for neglecting to check sources and verify claims.

Murdock's key source contradicts Murdock's claim

If Carrier had taken the time to check Murdock's claims against her own sources, he would have discovered that they contradict her. Murdock claimed that the statue is a 'Bronze sculpture hidden in the Vatican treasury of the Cock, symbol of St. Peter'. But in a book which Murdock does not quote, Knight (the only original source

cited for the claim that the statue was ever in the Vatican), states explicitly that the sculpture was displayed publicly in the Vatican palace, not 'hidden in the Vatican treasury'.

Speaking of the illustration in De la Chausse, Knight says 'The original, from which it is taken, is an antique bronze, preserved in the Vatican palace, where it has been publicly exhibited for near a century, without corrupting any one's morals or religion, that I have heard of')'; 'The Progress of Civil Society: A Didactic Poem' , p. xxi (1796), emphasis mine. Knight is the only independent source for this claim; there appears to be no earlier source, and all later sources cite Knight.

Regardless of whether or not his claim is correct, the fact is that he contradicts Murdock completely, leaving her without any independent source for her claim that the statue is a 'Bronze sculpture hidden in the Vatican treasury of the Cock, symbol of St. Peter'. However, there is further evidence that the statue is not in the Vatican, contrary to Murdock's claims.

One reference Murdock did not cite is Panzanelli & Scholosser, 'Ephemeral bodies: wax sculpture and the human figure' (2008). This book refers explicitly to the 'notorious "Vatican Bronze"' (p. 121), and the image shown is the very image cited by Murdock (p. 122), yet when we turn to the page on which the statue is described we find the image which Murdock claims is hidden in the 'Vatican Treasury' is in fact, 'a phallic monument in the Gabinetto Segreto, Museo Archeologico Nazionale Napoli, supposedly recovered at Pompeii/Herculaneum' (p. 122). Not only is there no reference to Peter, but we finally find that the image is not hidden in the 'Vatican Treasury', but is in the Gabinetto Segreto in Naples, the collection of sexual and erotic artefacts found in Pompeii.

Although the authors express scholarly caution as to whether the artefact was recovered among the ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum, there is no doubt about their identification of its current location; the Gabinetto Segreto, not hidden in the 'Vatican Treasury'. Murdock was not only wrong to claim it is 'hidden in the Vatican treasury', she was wrong to claim it is in the Vatican at all. This is another error which Carrier failed to identify when endorsing Murdock's reply to Ehrman, and proves that despite saying 'At the very least I would expect Ehrman to have called the Vatican museum about this, and to have checked the literature on it', he did not carry out either of these checks himself.

Right or wrong?

Defending Murdock's reply to Ehrman concerning the existence and location of the statue, Carrier made this additional claim concerning my own comments about the statue on his blog.

> "Some commentators on his [sic, for 'this'] site have also tried claiming the statue was never at the Vatican, but their misinformation and mishandling of the sources is thoroughly exposed in an extensive comment by an observer at Murdock's site."[682]

In fact I neither misrepresented nor mishandled the sources I cited. Carrier did not tell readers that the 'observer' on Murdock's forum agreed with all of the key points in my argument (all emphasis mine).

1. They agreed with me that the statue is not hidden in the Vatican treasury: '**Mr. Burke was correct** when he wrote "the image is not hidden in the 'Vatican Treasury"', '**And with this we are agreed**, for I have demonstrated Knight attesting to as much'.

2. They agreed with me that Knight is the only independent source that it was ever at the Vatican: 'this leaves us with only one independent source affirming the fact that the statue was once located at the Vatican', '**most likely that would be correct**, as the later scholars stating as much do appear to be dependent on Knight'.

3. They agreed with me that Murdock is wrong about it being currently hidden in the Vatican treasury, and her own source is evidence that she's wrong about it ever being in the Vatican treasury, hidden or otherwise: '**I agree with Burke'**, I even explicitly **agreed with him** on that', 'I have already **agreed more than once**'.

The disagreements they had with what I wrote had no impact at all on my argument. The facts are that contrary to Murdock's claims.

1. There is no statue of 'the Cock, symbol of St. Peter', either 'hidden in the Vatican treasury' or anywhere else.

2. The statue to which Murdock appeals for this claim does exist, but is not of 'the Cock, symbol of St. Peter', and is not 'hidden in the Vatican treasury'.

3. There's no evidence that this statue was ever 'hidden in the Vatican treasury'.

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[682] Richard Carrier, "Ehrman's Dubious Replies (Round One)," Richard Carrier Blogs, 27 April, 2012, n.p. [cited 17 August 2014].

4. The only source which says anything about it being anywhere in the Vatican says it was displayed publicly, not hidden.

5. The statue is nowhere in the Vatican, it is in the Segreto Gabinetto in Naples.

Conclusion

Murdock failed to substantiate her original claim, which was demonstrably based on a combination of unreliable sources, misrepresented sources, and misunderstood sources. It was discovered that the facts are almost the complete opposite of what she claimed.

Sound Words

'Geology teaches us much'

Bro. Simons

'**Geology teaches us much**; it speaks of a time and creation on this earth when animal life, if not totally, was nearly unknown, **and only the lower order of vegetable life covering its face, and this must have existed many thousands of years**; and during the whole of that long period, the earth was undergoing **wonderful and necessary changes to fit it for a creation of a higher order**, and evidently with the creature man in view.

There are evidences to show that when this early period had done its work, **it was replaced by a creation of a higher order**, when animal and vegetable forms **of a far more wonderful structure were brought into existence** and most admirably adopted to the atmosphere, climate, and peculiarities of that creation; and this, again, **must have lasted for many thousands of years**, and in its turn been swept away, **and a grander creation built on its ruins**. And so on, **stage after stage**.'[683]

[683] Robert Simons, "Why Man Was Not at Once Made Perfect," *The Christadelphian* 21, no. 238 (1884): 177.

Prove All Things

'The New Life'

Bro. Marshall

Contrary to traditional teaching, the Hebrew word *elohim* is not a plural word meaning 'mighty ones', and almost never refers to the angels. It is a word which only has one grammatical form, though it can refer to a singular or plural subject. In this way it is similar to the English words 'fish' and 'sheep', which can refer to one fish or many fish, one sheep or many sheep, depending on context and the accompanying verb. For example, when we speak of '**many** fish', it is the word 'many' which tells us the word 'fish' is plural in this case, and when we say 'The sheep **were** sleeping', it is the plural form of the verb, 'were', which tells us the word 'sheep' is plural in this case (the verb form 'was' would indicate only one sheep is referred to).

> "The word elohim is plural in form, but is used for Israel's singular God over two thousand times in the Old Testament. **It's sort of like our English word 'deer' - you can't tell if it's singular or plural in meaning until you see it in context**."[684]

In the case of Genesis 1:26, we have a passage which has puzzled many Bible students.

> Genesis 1:
> 26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth."

The word translated 'God' here is *elohim*. Trinitarians traditionally interpreted the word as plural in form, referring to the three persons of the Trinity. Christadelphians have traditionally interpreted the word as plural in form, referring to the angels. Both of these interpretations are wrong. The word here is singular, and refers to God alone. When we look at the very next verse, we find the word *elohim* with the singular form of the verb 'made'.

> Genesis 1:
> 27 **God** [*Elohim*] **created** [singular verb, one person] humankind in **his** [singular pronoun, one person]own image, in the image of God **he** [singular pronoun, one person] **created** [singular verb,

[684] Michael S Heiser, *The Facade* ([Sl.]: Acid Test Press, 2007), 128.

> one person] them, male and female **he** [singular pronoun, one person]**created** [singular verb, one person] them.

Repeatedly in this verse we find the word *elohim* used with the singular pronoun and the singular form of the verb, confirming that only one person (God), is being referred to. Writing in 1970, brother Marshall explained it in this way.

> 'At a distance in time that is beyond human thought, God once existed alone: that is the sense of Genesis 1:1. "In the beginning God (Elohim) created the heavens and the earth." Whilst Elohim is a plural form it can, **depending on its context or the verb that goes with it**, be understood as singular. Thus "**The Hebrew word 'created' is in the singular and precludes any idea that its subject Elohim is to be understood in a plural sense**". [brother Marshall gives the source of the quotation in a footnote, "The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, Dr. J. H. Hertz, page 2"]'[685]

So why does Genesis 1:26 say God said 'Let **us** make'? In this case, this is God speaking to the angels, even though they are not actually going to be involved in the creative work. We know it is only God speaking, because the form of the verb 'said' is singular, indicating only one person (not the angels). The footnote in the New English Translation Bible explains it this way.

> "In 2 Sam 24:14 David uses the plural as representative of all Israel, and in Isa 6:8 the LORD speaks on behalf of his heavenly court. In its ancient Israelite context the plural is most naturally understood as referring to God and his heavenly court (see 1 Kgs 22:19–22; Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6; Isa 6:1–8). (The most well-known members of this court are God's messengers, or angels. In Gen 3:5 the serpent may refer to this group as "gods/divine beings." See the note on the word "evil" in 3:5.) If this is the case, God invites the heavenly court to participate in the creation of humankind (perhaps in the role of offering praise, see Job 38:7), but he himself is the one who does the actual creative work (v. 27)."

[685] John Marshall, "The New Life: 22. Our God and Father," *The Christadelphian* 107, no. 1268 (1970): 55.

Review: Living On The Edge (LOTE)

"Living On the Edge" (LOTE)

Russell Downs

The Christadelphian community faces some daunting challenges in the 21st century. Many of these we share with other Christian groups. The explosion of readily available information resulting from the rise of the Internet means that we can no longer live a "safe" sheltered life. We face challenges from science and modern society, disruptive criticisms from atheists, and disturbing comments from scholars that modern archaeology is overturning the Bible's historical record. Brother Jonathan Burke (Taipei Ecclesia, Taiwan), has written a book addressing these challenges, entitled 'Living On The Edge' (LOTE).

The thesis of LOTE is that we must face these challenges honestly, and this book provides the resources to do so. Christadelphians are in a far better position than mainstream Christians because we are not burdened by poorly supported and irrational doctrines such as the Trinity, a supernatural personal Devil, the immortality of the souls, and original sin. Additionally, LOTE shows examples of how modern theological scholarship increasingly supports our original Christadelphian opposition to these false teachings.

The engagement with scholarship exhibited by our pioneers could have helped our community to face 21st century challenges more confidently. Unfortunately, these opportunities slipped through our fingers during the 20th century, as we became cocooned within an increasingly inward looking and anti-intellectual outlook. LOTE attempts to help reverse this trend, and to return to making use of modern knowledge to defend truth and overcome those who resist the Bible.

Although aimed primarily at young and not-so-young people brought up within the Christadelphian tradition, LOTE could also be useful within other faith traditions and amongst non-theists. LOTE covers a large range of questions that are often stumbling blocks to the seeker of truth. For example, it suggests a bold approach to the arguments of the "new atheists" by challenging them on their own ground, citing scholarly sources to demonstrate the weakness of new atheist assumptions.

The shallow arguments of the Jesus myth hypothesis need to be called out, and LOTE shows how this can be done effectively. Similarly, LOTE deals with claims that religion is an evil at the root of much of the world's problems. When addressing the difficult topic of science, LOTE applies the "two books" concept of God's Work and his Word used by brother Thomas and brother Roberts. This concept is also foundational to the LOTE approach to science-based challenges to the Bible.

LOTE discusses a wide range of topics, including the text and canon of Scripture, translations, and difficult issues relating to archaeology. Numerous questions are asked and answered, of which the following list is a mere sample.

1. Are there any good modern Bible translations, and which ancient manuscripts are the most reliable?
2. Was the Genesis flood local, and could the Ark have been built with Bronze Age technology?
3. What is the best archaeological evidence for the historicity of key events and people in the Bible?
4. Is the Bible compatible with science, and if so how should we interpret Genesis 1?
5. How can we be sure we have the original Bible text, and what about the other 'gospels' of Thomas and Judas?
6. Does the presence of evil disprove the existence of God, and if not why does God allow natural disasters?
7. Does the Bible say anything positive about environmental care, and is Christianity responsible for the current ecological crisis?
8. Why does the Law of Moses condone slavery?
9. How can we answer atheist challenges effectively?
10. What are the effects of modern media, de facto relationships and divorce?
11. Are the Bible's moral teachings still of any value in a modern world?
12. How can we show atheists that the Bible teaches the right way to live?

The book deals with personal faith issues such as certainty, credibility, and doubt, and with societal and practical issues such as suffering, marriage, homosexuality, and gender roles. Such issues are not normally dealt with (or not dealt with well), in earlier Christadelphian works, and there is still a pressing need in our community for credible answers to the problems these topics raise.

An unusual feature of the book is the extensive use of footnotes. These are designed to be actually read, and provide extensive evidence from a range of scholarly sources, supporting the main text. This is vital when engaging non-Christians, or when challenging Christians to rethink their doctrinal convictions.

LOTE can be read cover-to-cover, but it is also a useful reference source of material for public lectures, preaching material, and Bible Classes. It is a wide-ranging long work, covering many topics over about 600 pages (including a 100 page bibliography). It does omit certain important issues (such as evolution), which some people may regret. However, coverage of those subjects would have required an even larger work, and would have distracted from its purpose.

Is LOTE the last word on these important subjects? No, and it would not claim to be, but it has the potential to lead the way to further useful work, and provides a wealth of useful resources from which others can draw.

If you are completely happy with your faith and are not prepared to consider challenges to faith then you might consider this book unnecessary. However if you would like to do a better job of helping someone, perhaps even yourself, who suffers doubts, or has not been prepared to commit to a life in Christ because they have had unanswered questions, or if you are looking for a new way to preach, then this book could be a valuable tool for you. Living On The Edge is an important book that any serious Christadelphian would be well-advised to read.

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Editorial

Jon Burke

Restoration: a Biblical value

Restoration is one of the core values of the Bible. The concept is principally represented in the form of the restoration of our relationship with God, but is also represented in the form of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, and the restoration of the earth's environment at the return of Christ.

Restoration has always been the rallying cry of our community. Every generation has heard the call to 'build again the ruins', 'ask for the old paths', 'remove not the ancient landmark', and 'strengthen the things which remain'. Our community emerged as part of the Restoration Movement, and scholarly literature classifies us as a Restorationist group within the Radical Reformation tradition, the Christians who sought a return to the Scriptures and dismissed the authority of all the traditional creeds. Brother Thomas understood his own work to be a restoration of the true gospel.

Our community is rightly characterized by a strong desire to restore the understanding of the gospel as originally preached by Christ and the apostles, and to follow their example. Our pioneers, brother Thomas and brother Roberts, are typically held up as role models, and many of their personal views on Scripture and other subjects are valued highly. We should be aware of their contributions, and treat them with thoughtful, careful, and prayerful examination.

It is unfortunate when we venerate the pioneers, and treat them as nearly inspired. It is even more unfortunate when we repeat their errors, and maintain wrong opinions of theirs simply out of tradition, or a misplaced respect. They would not wish this, and would be appalled at the way in which many of us view them today.

Yet neither should we dismiss them out of hand as outdated, error-ridden, and irrelevant; though mortal and fallible as we are, they left a legacy of valuable exposition and an intellectually honest approach to faith, which dealt frankly and openly with challenges to Scripture and belief in God. The restoration of that approach is one of the aims of Defence & Confirmation.

Reformation: valuable self-examination

While restoration is the recovery of what has been lost, reformation is the process of change by which individuals and communities are returned to the original ideal. There is a regular need for reformation, as we

all naturally incline to our own path and stray. Reformation is the process of refocusing on the ideal, and changing ourselves so we imitate it more closely. So it is that in Romans 12:3 Paul advises us 'Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed [changed, re-formed] by the renewing of your mind'.

This applies not only to our walk in Christ, but also to our understanding of Scripture. Brother Thomas himself is an excellent case in point. When challenged by a Christian congregation which expressed its great disappointment that he had changed his theological views, he responded to them with some incredulity, amazed that they saw his willingness to change as a weakness.

> 'Must a man never progress? **If he discovers an error in his premises, must he for ever hold to it for the sake of consistency?** May such a calamity never befall me! **Rather let me change every day, till I get it right at last**.'[686]

While we can be confident in our community's understanding of the gospel, which has been tested and tried and found reliable for over 150 years, all of us should be open to review and revision of our understanding of other passages of Scripture, in the same spirit as brother Thomas. Reformation may involve development leading to innovation, to the introduction and adoption of new ideas, but it will be aimed directly at maintaining what has been restored, and will demonstrate continuity with what has gone before.

Revolution: the change which neither restores nor reforms

Revolution is the deliberate abandonment of an existing order, for the introduction of a new order. It is neither restoration nor reformation, and is characterized by a rejection of what has gone before; continuity with the past is broken, and the new ideas introduced are incompatible with what was held previously. Our community has experienced many revolutions in its history.

These have almost always been the product of influence from apostate communities outside our own; examples include false views on the Holy Spirit, on satan and demons, on the atonement, on the role of sisters in the ecclesia, and on fellowship with other Christian groups.

For the most part these views have been opposed strongly, though not without cost; in each generation we have lost some who left our community over these issues, or who were withdrawn from when reconciliation became impossible. Yet our community has suffered a more dangerous revolution which has left us divided

[686] Brother John Thomas, letter to the congregation assembled at Barker Gate Meeting house, 14 July, 1848.

over our approach to the Bible, and has resulted in significant damage to our witness to the gospel. That revolution has involved a rejection of the pioneer approaches to science and Scripture, Bible texts and translations, and Biblical scholarship.

Columns in Defence& Confirmation

Jon Burke

For those who have only recently started reading Defence& Confirmation, here is a list of the columns which appear regularly in the journal.

1. Archaeology: Up to date commentary on archaeological issues relevant to the Bible; defending the Bible's historical claims. Current editor, Jon Burke.
2. Textual criticism & translation: Discussion of and reliable commentary on Bible texts and translations. Current editor, Jon Burke.
3. Prophecy: Commentary on evidence for fulfilled biblical prophecy, and assessing interpretations, including addressing 'failed' prophecies. Current editor, Jon Burke.
4. Doctrines & practices: Discussion and examination of Christadelphian beliefs (fundamental and otherwise), and practices; defending Biblical teachings and practices. Open to contributions.
5. Inspiration & authorship: Discussion of Biblical inspiration and who wrote different parts of the Bible. Open to contributions.
6. Contradictions: Assessing specific Biblical 'contradictions', and methods of resolving them honestly. Open to contributions.
7. Science: The relationship between science, Scripture, and scientific claims relevant to biblical interpretation. Current editors, Ken Gilmore and Jon Burke.
8. Ethics & morality: Discussion of ethical and moral topics, which may support or challenge Biblical teachings, and commentary defending the Biblical position. Open to contributions.
9. Prove all things: Examining apologetic arguments and biblical interpretations from Christadelphians and other Christians. Open to contributions.
10. Book & article reviews: Reviews of books and articles relevant to apologetic issues. Open to contributions.
11. Sound words: Valuable comments from earlier Christadelphian commentators, and commentary from modern Christadelphians. Open to contributions.
12. Reader correspondence: Questions and comments from readers. Open to contributions.

When submitting contributions to this journal, please follow this basic style guide.

- Write an abstract (a brief summary of your article), at the start of your contribution
- Use the New English Translation when providing Bible quotations[687]
- Use the Society for Biblical Literature citation method for footnotes[688]

[687] Available online for free; https://net.bible.org.

[688] https://www.jbu.edu/assets/library/resource/file/SBLQuickReference.pdf.

The Decline and Fall of Christadelphian Exegesis

Dave Burke

Abstract: Our community was founded on a high respect for God's Word, and a deep desire to study it with the best tools available. Early Christadelphian commentators applied sophisticated methods of Bible study, following and using relevant mainstream Biblical scholarship. This high standard of Bible study declined in the 1940s, and was replaced in the 1960s with more simplistic methods, together with theology borrowed from Evangelical Christianity. This article calls for a return to our community's intellectual roots, and a repudiation of Evangelical teachings.

Eighteen months ago a brother sent me an anonymous comment posted on his blog:

> 'In the late 1960s, as a convert to the Christadelphian brotherhood from the authoritarianism of Roman Catholicism, I was drawn by the scholarly and academic nature of the early Christadelphian writings and the sound reasoning associated with them.'

'Scholarly and academic… sound reasoning.' This is the legacy of the pioneers. We have a duty to uphold it.

The Legacy

Articles in the *Christadelphian* Magazine from the late 19th to early 20th Century generally reflect the following characteristics:

1. Extensive knowledge of (and respect for) professional scholarship
2. Sound knowledge of ancient Hebrew and Koine Greek
3. Familiarity with the latest discoveries in archaeology, palaeography, textual criticism, and other Bible-related discipline
4. Familiarity with past and current trends in biblical scholarship, textual problems, different textual streams, and higher criticism[689]
5. Use of the latest and most advanced Bible translations

[689] An article entitled *'The Gospels' Independent, Historic Witnesses'* in Volume 12 of *The Christadelphian* (1875) approvingly refers to *Godet's Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (newly published that year) as a sound refutation of criticisms advanced by the Tübingen School, birthplace of German higher criticism.

6. High standards of literary composition and intellectual honesty

These virtues are increasingly difficult to find in our community's publications.

The Decline and its Causes

Christadelphian exegesis fell into decline during the 1940s and '50s, as the conservative Christian backlash against evolution sparked a 'culture war' between Christianity and secularism. North America, Australia and the UK were the chief battlegrounds for this ideological conflict.

In response to the threat of evolution Christadelphia borrowed creationist apologetics from Christian fundamentalists. One such import was Young Earth Creationism (newly revived by the Seventh Day Adventists) which teaches that Earth has only existed for 6,000 years. This idea fitted neatly into the '7,000 year plan'[690] Christadelphia was now upholding as *de facto* orthodoxy.

Originally the product of rabbinic speculation during the intertestamental period,[691] the 7kP had few supporters during the early Christian era[692] but enjoyed a resurgence during the Second Great Awakening[693] thanks to the endorsement of William Miller.[694] When Miller's predictions about the Second Advent failed, his followers split into three rival groups. In time, one of these became known as the Seventh Day Adventists.[695]

The collapse of the Millerites did nothing to reduce the popularity of the 7kP, which continued to flourish among Restorationist sects throughout the Third Great Awakening.[696] Bro. Thomas embraced it

[690] Hereafter '7kP.'

[691] The roots of the 7kP are found in the Jewish apocryphal *Book of Jubilees* (2nd Century BC).

[692] The earliest Christian document with an explicit reference to the 7kP is the apocryphal *Epistle of Barnabas* (2nd Century AD).

[693] A period of religious revival in the USA, roughly covering the first half of the 19th Century.

[694] Founder of the Millerites, an Adventist Restorationist sect.

[695] See 'The Seventh Day Adventists' Transition to Mainstream Christianity' on page 79 of this issue.

[696] A period of religious revival in the USA, roughly covering the second half of the 19th Century.

enthusiastically. In *Chronikon Hebraikon* he presented his own understanding of the doctrine, 'correcting' the errors of Miller and R. C. Shimeall.[697]

Bro. Thomas' imprimatur lent the 7kP an air of credibility it never deserved, and even though the passage of time has rendered it insupportable the perceived connection between this doctrine and special creation[698] means it is not often challenged in any serious way.

Another teaching imported from the SDA church was 'flood geology', a concept developed by George McCready Price.[699] Flood geology is the theory that certain geological features of the Earth were formed by a global Noahic flood. This idea satisfied Christadelphian YECs[700] and OEYCCs[701] because it seemed to provide a plausible alternative explanation for evidence which secular science uses to support evolution.

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[697] 'MILLER staked his whole theory upon the notion that the world was 6,000 years old in 1843. But time has proved his computation, and therefore his theory, to be utterly erroneous. In 1859, SHIMEALL, in "Our Bible Chronology," p.182, announced that the world will be 6,000 years old in 1868, and that the "year A.M. 6001 will be the ushering in of the Great Sabbatism spoken of in Rev. 20:1-6." Thus, he fixes the commencement of the Millennium to the A.D. 1869; which he assigns as the limit of the "unparalleled 'tribulation' predicted by our Lord." But the current three years will not afford scope for such a tribulation. Mr. Shimeall has made a mistake. His chronological speculations have misled him. The world will not be 6,000 years old until A.D. 1910, which is 44 years from 1866. But there is reason to believe that the Millennium will commence a few years before the world attains to 6,000 years. It is apocalyptically revealed, that it will end at the "LITTLE SEASON," which comes within the limit of the Millenary Week of 7,000 years from the Creation -- "*after the* 1,000 *years are fulfilled*, Satan must be loosed a little season" (Rev. 20:3, 7).' John Thomas. *Chronikon Hebraicon*, 1865 [cited 5 January 2015 2014]. Online: http://www.christadelphia.org/books/chronikon.htm

[698] Though not necessarily Young Earth Creationism; note that Bro. Thomas and Bro. Roberts both endorsed the 7kP.

[699] Price was a creationist author and amateur geologist.

[700] Young Earth Creationists.

[701] 'Old Earth Young Creation Creationists.' OEYCCs believe that although Earth is very ancient (millions, or even billions of years old) the present creation has only existed for 6,000 years. This position is common to many if not

Flood geology initially proved popular with mainstream Christians, but by the 1950s most evangelical scientists had rejected it and by the 1960s it was relegated to the fundamentalist fringe. These developments were largely ignored by our community, which continued to perpetuate the error.

When fundamentalist YECs Whitcomb and Morris published *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and its Scientific Implications*[702] senior brethren uncritically endorsed their interpretations, although some—such as prominent OEC Bro. Alan Hayward—publicly rejected it. *The Genesis Flood* was stocked by Christadelphian ecclesial libraries, and sold by the Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association[703] alongside similar works of equally dubious value.

The Fundamentalist Infection

In 1964 Bro. Ralph Lovelock—while still a member of the CMPA—presented a series of talks affirming the existence of pre-Adamic manlike creatures from which Adam was eventually formed, and with which his descendants intermarried. This sparked a controversy over evolution which caused uproar in Australia and the UK. Ironically, Bro. Lovelock's model is one few today would recognise as having merit on Scriptural or scientific grounds, even among those of our community who accept evolution.

Two years later Bro. Lovelock was disfellowshipped but the fallout took more than a decade to settle, during which time YEC literature remained in high demand. Retreating from evolution—whether theistic or materialistic—Christadelphians increasingly embraced the opposite extreme: fundamentalism. This toxic ideology had already crippled intellectual endeavour within evangelical Christianity.

> 'In his article "Christianity and Culture," on the eve of the Fundamentalist Controversy, the great Princeton theologian J. Gresham Machen solemnly warned,
>
> "False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the Gospel. We may preach with all the fervour of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the

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most Christadelphian Old Earth Creationists today. By contrast, our community's earliest Old Earth Creationists believed that Earth and creation are both of great antiquity (though they differed on the details of the process).

[702] A book arguing for YEC, a global flood, *and* flood geology.

[703] Hereafter 'CMPA.'

> whole collective thought of the nation to be controlled by ideas which prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion."
>
> Unfortunately, Machen's warning went unheeded, and biblical Christianity retreated into the intellectual closet of Fundamentalism. Anti-intellectualism and second-rate scholarship became the norm.'[704]

The experience of the evangelical community should have served as a warning to our own, but the danger was ignored and the lesson went unlearned. Brethren began describing themselves as 'fundamentalists', and wrote letters to the *Christadelphian* magazine recommending the use of fundamentalist literature. Calvinist theologian J. I. Packer's *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* was favourably reviewed in the *Christadelphian* magazine, sold by the CMPA, and repeatedly promoted from 1968 to the mid-1990s.

[704] William Lane Craig (2008-07-23). *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (17). Good News Publishers/Crossway Books. Kindle Edition.

Wiser brethren protested against this development. Letters to *The Christadelphian* in 1984 and 1996 from Islip Collyer,[705] Eric Draper[706] and John Alfree[707] urged our community to reject the fundamentalist label and avoid fundamentalist literature. Their calls were largely unheeded.

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[705] 'According to the New International Dictionary of Christian Churches (Paternoster Press): "Fundamentalism is a conservative theological movement in American Protestantism, which arose in the 1920s in opposition to modernism." The five doctrines of Fundamentalism are stated as: (1) The Virgin Birth; (2) The Resurrection and Deity of Christ; (3) Christ's Substitutionary Atonement; (4) Christ's Second Coming; (5) The Authority and Inerrancy of the Bible. But in the 1950s Fundamentalism was stereotyped as being a close-minded, belligerent and separatist movement, and was superseded by the term "New Evangelical", a movement that is heir to the spirit and purpose of the original Fundamentalists. Since we Christadelphians cannot subscribe to what is meant by doctrines 2 and 3 of Fundamentalism, **it might be as well if we did not give the impression that we are fundamentalists, even though in the true sense of the word, we are!**' John V. Collyer, 'Are Christadelphians Fundamentalists?', *The Christadelphian* (121.1435.28), 1984.

[706] 'I appreciated Brother Collyer's letter (January, p. 28) on "Fundamentalism", **as for a long time I have been disturbed when often we have been described as "fundamentalists"**. This term arose between 1909 and 1915, when a series of 12 booklets entitled "The Fundamentals" was issued by The Testimony Publishing Co., Chicago. …It was a move to counter the Biblical criticism and rationalism of that time. **These booklets contained many expositions of orthodox Christian faith in the traditional manner later associated with the "Evangelicals"**, as Brother Collyer pointed out. Recently, however, the term has been used in a derogatory way to describe an excessive literalist interpretation of Scripture. **It is this aspect that has led many to rank us as Fundamentalists. In many ways we have only ourselves to blame for such misrepresentation if we profess to subscribe to the literal interpretation and inerrancy of the Bible without any clear qualification**. Yet, in practice, we do nothing of the sort, as is obvious from almost every exposition we give.' Eric W. Draper, 'Fundamentalism', *The Christadelphian* (121.1437.109), 1984.

[707] '**The recent article in the January issue, for example, gives an unqualified recommendation to two works by the evangelical writer, J. I. Packer**. There can be no doubt that Packer does argue well that the Bible is the Word of God—the reason for its recommendation by Brother Vincent. **However, Packer's Fundamentalism and the Word of God is a veritable minefield for the unwary**. …His whole approach to Scripture is that whilst it is God-given **we cannot begin to understand it without the direct action of the spirit upon our mind**: "Without the Spirit's help

The Rise of the Anti-Intellectuals

By the mid-1970s scepticism toward science and mistrust of professional biblical scholarship were normative among Christadelphians. This radical departure from the pioneers' ethos led to the institutionalisation of a virulent anti-intellectualism, which had severe consequences for our community's exegetical approach. Brethren convinced themselves that with the help of just a few basic aids (an outdated concordance, an equally outdated Bible dictionary, Wilson's *Diaglott*, and perhaps a 19th Century commentary) they could match or even beat professional scholars at their own game.

The pursuit of higher education (especially university) was widely discouraged. In Western and South Australia particularly, Christadelphian young men were encouraged to become apprentices and learn a trade. This trend ensured that most of them would never be exposed to high quality exegetical literature or mental training of any kind, and pushed a large number of impressionable junior brethren into ungodly, anti-intellectual environments rife with immorality, misogyny, and vice. Meanwhile, members of the previous generation openly enjoyed the benefits of the tertiary qualifications they had acquired earlier in their lives and were now denying to others.

In the absence of a sound, well established, systematic exegetical method Christadelphia fell victim to folk theology and languished for decades under the 'verse-by-verse'[708] hermeneutic championed by Bro. Perce Mansfield and his followers. The near-universal acceptance of this technique in Australia (with little or no recognition of its weaknesses) reversed much of the progress our community had previously achieved in the field of biblical interpretation, and cemented a narrow tradition based on predominantly internal resources.

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there can be no grasp of the message of Scripture, no conviction of the truth of Scripture and no faith in the God of Scripture." **This dangerous doctrine which undermines the inherent saving power of the Word of God itself, when received into a "good and honest heart", is fundamental to Packer's approach to the Bible and is not always so easily recognisable**.' John Alfree, 'A Christadelphian's Bookshelf', *The Christadelphian* (133.1580.68), 1996.

[708] Hereafter 'VBV.'

One Australian brother raised during the era of Mansfield dominance has described his feelings while training his eldest child in the use of superior study methods and resources:

> '[It] made me realise how woefully inadequate my induction was: 'Look up every word in Strong's, look at each verse in Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge; [for] keywords go to Vine's.'

A direct consequence of VBV ascendency was the rise of word studies. These have a legitimate place in exegesis when correctly handled, but under the influence of the Mansfieldite error (which promoted them as the core of our community's default exegetical method) their role was misunderstood and the techniques misapplied.

The combination of VBV exposition, botched word studies and a slavish and uncritical adherence to obsolete resources such as Strong's *Concordance* resulted in an *ad hoc* approach which was more a hindrance than a help. Its characteristics are instantly recognisable. The exegete typically builds an entire interpretation upon the meaning of a single word (seemingly chosen at whim) without any reference to context. He does this with every word he considers significant, isolating them from their original context even if they're all in the same verse.

The aim is to derive a spiritual point from every allegedly significant word (though the process by which a word is deemed significant appears entirely arbitrary, as is the interpretation which follows). Such is the method found in Perce Mansfield's *Expositor* series, which set the standard now followed by the adherents of his tradition.

As a result we are regularly treated to the unedifying spectacle of brethren standing on the platform and regaling us quite unnecessarily with the semantic range of Greek words (e.g. 'The Greek word translated "law" here means "a rule", "a standard", or "a law".')[709] Nine times out of ten we find the word was translated correctly in the first place, so there was no need to check the Greek at all and the audience has learned nothing.

The Dilemma

Today Christadelphian exegesis is under threat from two competing schools of thought. Both are subjective, anti-intellectual, and opposed to the practices of our pioneers. The first is distinctly fideistic: its advocates claim that simply opening the Bible and praying for guidance is sufficient to guarantee good results.

[709] This is an actual example from a real life exhortation.

The second school of thought encourages deep exegesis but recommends poor methods. Its advocates prefer Christadelphian commentary over professional academic scholarship, and the works they rely on are typically archaic.

These two approaches are the direct product of our community's consistent failure to teach and apply high quality hermeneutics. They remain a polarising and damaging influence, but very little effort has been made to find a profitable 'third way.' Concerns and complaints about the lack of knowledge and experience among young and old brethren now are commonplace. Some examples follow:

> 'I lament the knowledge gap that many have, even on things we once took for granted such as history, Israel, doctrines and basic bible study.'
>
> '[There is] an unrecognised but growing demand in our community.'
>
> 'The issue you raise about an increasing lack of knowledge and skills amongst our young baptised people, and indeed a complete lack of confidence amongst some, is a deeply worrying one. The more general problem of sloppy research and a shallow grasp of subject matter has bothered me for years.'
>
> 'There are a limited number of brethren that put themselves up for speaking, and frankly the skills shown in research, study, thinking are not coming through in any material delivered. So, poor role modelling exists, and there are a number of younger brethren i.e. 40 and under who have no idea how to study or speak, and there is no learning and development methodology to bring them on.'[710]

The Heritage

Volume 18 of *The Christadelphian* (1881) contains a 3,800-word article by Bro. Thirtle[711] in which he casually refers to the Alexandrian, Ephraem, Vatican, Sinaitic and Beza manuscripts, the KJV, the Revised Version, Rotherham's Emphasised Bible, and the works of highly regarded scholars such as McClellan, Griesbach, Tischendorf, Scrivener, Green, Alford, Tregelles, and Lachmann. He makes use of Westcott and Hort's critical

[710] These are unsolicited quotes from a number of brethren across the Christadelphian spectrum.

[711] 'Remarks by Brother Thirtle.'

Greek text and the ASV New Testament (both newly published that year) and demonstrates a thorough grasp of Koine Greek grammar.

Bro. Thirtle's article reflects an assumption that the reader will comprehend these academic references. Our pioneers were well-informed Bible scholars and wrote for a well-informed audience, but in many parts of Christadelphia this is no longer the case. Alarmingly, among those who claim they follow the pioneers' approach, surprising few demonstrate familiarity with it. As a community we have a rich heritage of careful study of the Word. With the wealth of resources from within and without Christadelphia, surely it is time to go back to the roots which sustained us.

The Abandonment of a Valuable Pioneer Legacy

Jon Burke

Abstract: Our earliest commentators, starting with Brother Thomas and brother Roberts, had approaches to science, textual criticism and Bible translations, and the authorship of parts of the Bible, which were very sound, and which are extremely valuable to us today. Unfortunately many modern Christadelphians are unaware of these earlier views, and many Christadelphians reject much of what was typically taught on a range of subjects for the first 100 years of our community. This article examines the differences between earlier Christadelphian teaching and modern teaching, and encourages a return to the pioneer legacy.

Brother Thomas and brother Roberts used science and Biblical scholarship to combat doctrinal error, [712] believing scientific facts always supports the Bible.[713] They accepted the scientific evidence for the age of the

[712] 'to prop up his unattested theory, he throws overboard the narratives of Matthew and Luke, **which, if one or two scholars opine to reject, an overwhelming majority consider genuine**,', Robert Roberts, "Who Was the Father of Jesus Christ?," *The Christadelphian* 5, no. 50 (1868): 44–52.

[713] 'There can be no conflict between the genuine sense of God's messages to mankind **and the real facts and authentic conclusions of science**.', Robert Roberts, "The Uncertainties of Modern Science," *The Christadelphian* 14, no. 161 (1877): 499.

earth[714] [715] [716] and pre-Adamic human beings, [717] [718] despite rejecting evolution in the strongest possible terms.[719] Brother Roberts argued the Genesis flood was not global, [720] [721] and that Moses did not write the

[714] 'The duration of the earth's revolutions round the sun previous to the work of the first day is not revealed: **but the evidences produced by the strata of our globe show that the period was long continued**.', John Thomas, *Elpis Israel: An Exposition of the Kingdom of God* (electronic ed.; Birmingham, UK: The Christadelphian, 1990), 10.

[715] 'Geologists have endeavoured to extend the six days into six thousand years. But this, with the scriptural data we have adduced, is quite unnecessary. **Instead of six thousand, they can avail themselves of sixty thousand; for the scriptures reveal no length of time during which the terrene angels dwelt upon our globe**.', ibid., p. 11.

[716] '**It is a demonstrable fact that the earth has existed for ages**. To adopt a view that appears to make it begin only 6,000 years ago would create a difficulty. **There is no need for adopting such a view**.', Robert Roberts, "In the Beginning," *The Christadelphian* 37, no. 370 (1885): 141.

[717] 'There are indeed hints, casually dropped in the scriptures, which would seem to indicate **that our planet was inhabited by a race of beings anterior to the formation of man**.', John Thomas, *Elpis Israel: An Exposition of the Kingdom of God* (electronic ed.; Birmingham, UK: The Christadelphian, 1990), 10.

[718] '**Neither was the human the first rational race on its surface**, if we are to attach the same sense to the words addressed to Adam as they possessed when addressed to Noah. "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish (fill again) the earth."', Robert Simons, "A Brush with Modern Scepticism," *The Christadelphian* 21, no. 238 (1884): 163.

[719] 'IF this theory were true, the hope of the gospel **would never be anything more than a beautiful fancy**.', Robert Roberts, "The Darwinian Theory of Evolution," *The Christadelphian* 12, no. 137 (1874): 489.

[720] 'Considering the comparatively limited extent of the human family at the time, and that it was confined to one small district of the globe, it would seem reasonable to conclude from the principle already looked at – the divine sparingness of means – that **the flood was co-extensive only with the Adamically-inhabited portion of the globe**.', Robert Roberts, "The Visible Hand of God," *The Christadelphian* 18, no. 205 (1881): 308.

[721] So did brother Jardine, who went further and interpreted the flood as having an impact only on a local population enlightened by God's law, not even on all human beings on the earth; 'there is sufficient reason to

Pentateuch.[722] He also promoted Tischendorf's edition of the Greek New Testament (published in his day), based on Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus, which he regarded as 'the three most ancient original' manuscripts.[723] These views remained dominant in the writings of Christadelphian commentators for at least the first 100 years of our community.

The following table shows how far some modern Christadelphians have moved away from the pioneers.

Christadelphians who have abandoned the pioneer legacy					
Topic	**Original view**	**Bible Magazine**	**Christadelphian**	**Lampstand**	**Testimony**
Creation	Old Earth Creation	Young Earth Creation	Young Earth Creation	Old Earth Creation	Old Earth Creation
Flood	Local flood	Global flood	Global flood	Global flood	Global flood

believe the flood was of no greater extent, and the people who were swept away by it were those **only who constituted the antagonistic force in rendering Noah and his family worthy the ark**. It was all the earth to both, and all the family of Adam and all the living creatures and **all the earth as related to the purposes of God in view of the future**.', W Jardine, "The Bible as a Law of Life and Immortality," *The Ambassador of the Coming Age* 2, no. 316 (1865): 115.

[722] '**Besides the use of pre-Mosaic documents in the composition of the writings of Moses**, there are at least two cases where **matter written after his death** (**in one case centuries afterwards**) **is inserted**. The one is chap. 36:3143, where the genealogy of Esau is completed **by an addition concerning later times from 1 Chron. 1:43**, and the other is the account of the death of Moses, **probably inserted by Eleazar by the direction of Joshua**.', Robert Roberts, "Saturday Evening Scripture Studies," *The Christadelphian* 12, no. 128 (1875): 82.

[723] 'TISCHENDORF'S NEW TESTAMENT.—(Containing footnote emendations on the basis of t**he three most ancient original M.SS.: The VATICAN, ALEXANDRINE, and SINAITIC**—the last but recently discovered by Tischendorf himself.). Brother Ellis writes to say he can supply the brethren with this free through the post, at 1s.10d.', Robert Roberts, "Intelligence: Tischendorf's New Tesatment," *The Christadelphian* 6, no. 66 (1869): 432.

Pentateuch	Multiple authors	Moses wrote it all	Moses wrote it all	Moses wrote it all	Moses wrote it all

Christadelphians who have abandoned the pioneer legacy					
Topic	**Original view**	**Bible Magazine**	**Christadelphian**	**Lampstand**	**Testimony**
Bible texts	Alexandrian texts are best	Alexandrian texts are the worst	Alexandrian texts are the worst	Alexandrian texts are the worst	Alexandrian texts are the worst
Bible translations	The Revised Version is better than the KJV	The KJV is still the best English translation	The KJV is still the best English translation	The KJV is still the best English translation	The KJV is still the best English translation

Original Christadelphian view

1. Geological evidence proves the earth is millions of years old.[724] [725]

2. Animal and vegetable life on earth appeared gradually over a very long time, as God created and destroyed many times in succession, creating animals and plants of increasing complexity.[726]

[724] 'I have not the slightest doubt concerning the truths revealed in the strata of the earth's crust. **There can be no reasonable doubt that long ages have passed away** since the matter of the earth first took existences [sic] by the fiat of its Almighty Creator.', L Welch, "Knowledge.- No. 12 Geology," *The Christadelphian* 28, no. 329 (1891): 416.

[725] 'Ten years ago the average scientist would have asserted that our habitable globe had not existed for more than a hundred million years. Now it would be hard to find a competent physical specialist who would fix a definite maximum **below a thousand million years**:', Charles C Walker, "The Age of the Earth," *The Christadelphian* 46, no. 568 (1911): 450.

[726] '**Geology teaches us much**; it speaks of a time and creation on this earth when animal life, if not totally, **was nearly unknown**, and only the lower order of vegetable life covering its face, and this must have existed many thousands of years;', Robert Simons, "Why Man Was Not at Once Made Perfect," *The Christadelphian* 21, no. 238 (1884): 177.

3. The Pentateuch and books such as Daniel could have been written by more than one author, not necessarily by Moses and Daniel.[727] [728]

4. The Alexandrian manuscripts of the New Testament[729] are the most accurate manuscripts. [730]

New modern view

1. Geological evidence proves the earth is around 6,000 years old.[731]

2. All animal and vegetable life on earth appeared instantly, completely formed, around 6,000 years ago; life did not appear on earth in successive stages of development. [732]

3. Multiple authorship is denied; Moses wrote the Pentateuch, and Daniel wrote the book of Daniel, etc.[733]

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[727] 'Fully aware of the conclusions drawn by modern critics, I had introduced this sketch with the observation that **it matters nothing whether the regulations respecting the land were written by Moses or compiled by a later author** whether divinely inspired or the result of human sagacity.', quotation from one of the writers of The Encyclopaedia Britannica, quoted approvingly by brother Hawkins in his article 'Superiority of the Mosaic Land Code', The Christadelphian (19.220.438), 1882.

[728] **'What matters it whether Moses or Joshua or some other person wrote the Pentateuch**, whether Daniel or some other person wrote Daniel, or whether Paul or some other person wrote Hebrews?', John Hawkins, "Superiority of the Mosaic Land Code," *The Christadelphian* 19, no. 220 (1882): 292.

[729] The three most famous and significant are Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, and Codex Alexandrinus.

[730] 'TISCHENDORF'S NEW TESTAMENT.—(Containing footnote emendations on the basis of **the three most ancient original M.SS.: The VATICAN, ALEXANDRINE, and SINAITIC**—the last but recently discovered by Tischendorf himself.). Brother Ellis writes to say he can supply the brethren with this free through the post, at 1s.10d.', Robert Roberts, "Intelligence," *The Christadelphian* 6, no. 66 (1869): 432.

[731] Don Pearce and Nigel Bernard, "Surtsey: A Pattern for Creation?," *The Christadelphian* 150 (2013): 497.

[732] John Nicholls, "What Happened to the Dinosaurs?," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2001): 186–91.

[733] Rob Thiele, "Did Moses Write the Pentateuch, the First Five Books of the Bible?," *The Lampstand* 20, no. 1 (2014): 186–91.

4. The Alexandrian manuscripts of the New Testament are the least accurate manuscripts.[734]

This dramatic shift of views is not restoration, nor is it reformation; it is revolution. Such views represent an abandonment of an extremely valuable legacy. This revolution (which occurred largely in the 1960s), was not unnoticed at the time, and was identified and warned against by several well respected brothers such as Alan Hayward.

> 'There are already several widespread misconceptions in the Brotherhood concerning the work and views of H. M. Morris and J. C. Whitcomb. It is a pity that the review of The World that Perished in your April issue is likely to lend support to some of those misconceptions, since the reviewer was not quite right in certain of his statements.'[735]
>
> 'To sum up, it seems that Flood Geology creates far more difficulties than it solves. The reasons that caused Brother Thomas and Brother Roberts to reject it are still valid today. When Dr. Peter Moore reviewed The World that Perished for a journal published by the Bible-believing Inter-Varsity Fellowship, he concluded:
> "I feel that a book such as this one ... can do a great deal of harm in alienating from the Christian faith those who have some knowledge of and respect for the natural sciences."
>
> There are many brethren, Brother Editor, who share his fears.'[736]

Being honest about where we stand

There are Christadelphians who have accepted evolution as a mechanism used by God, and they are honest about the fact that they have moved away from the pioneer view on this issue (that evolution is false and incompatible with Scripture). However, on all these other issues (the flood, the authorship of the Pentateuch, Bible texts, and Bible translations), those Christadelphians who have accepted evolution typically agree with

[734] John Thorpe, "Unrevised for Centuries: The Remarkable Longevity of the King James Version," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 174–78.

[735] Alan Hayward, ""Flood Geology" - A Note of Caution," *The Christadelphian* 114, no. 1357 (1977): 268.

[736] Alan Hayward, ""Flood Geology" - A Note of Caution," *The Christadelphian* 114, no. 1357 (1977): 269.

the pioneer position. This means they are still far closer to the pioneers than the modern Christadelphians who reject evolution but who have also rejected the pioneer views on these issues.

It is not necessarily wrong for modern Christadelphians to disagree with views of earlier Christadelphians, and if we find their views were wrong we should certainly disagree with them. But it is ironic that some of the most conservative modern Christadelphians, who claim to be upholding original Christadelphian teachings, are in fact typically very much in disagreement with the writings of the earliest Christadelphians, especially brother Thomas and brother Roberts.

> 'Recently I have met a surprising number of brethren and sisters who imagined that our pioneer brethren believed in "Flood Geology" and a six-thousand-year-old universe. Such ignorance of the views of our pioneers needs correcting.' [737]
>
> 'Brethren who prefer to believe in "Flood Geology" [global flood view] and a young universe are entitled to do so. But they should not delude themselves that such views are a part of historical Christadelphianism.
>
> They only sprang up in the 'sixties and 'seventies as part and parcel of the evangelical revival. This does not necessarily mean they are false, since it is possible for a good horse to come out of a poor stable. But it does mean that such views should be treated with caution, and not swallowed uncritically.'[738]

[737] Alan Hayward, "Our Pioneers' Views on Geology," *The Christadelphian* 120, no. 1433 (1983): 429.

[738] Alan Hayward, "Our Pioneers' Views on Geology," *The Christadelphian* 120, no. 1433 (1983): 429.

Promoting Bad Science & Misrepresenting Scripture

Jon Burke

Abstract: Since the fifth century, false claims made by Christians about science have been damaging to the gospel. Unfortunately our own community has been guilty of this more than once. Even worse, public presentations by Christadelphians which make false claims about science are now being targeted for public criticism by atheists and skeptics, bringing not only the gospel but also our community into disrepute. It is important that we are very sure of our facts when making public presentations on science. The negative impact of presentations making easily disproved claims, affects us all.

As early as the fifth century, the Christian leader Augustine was complaining about other Christians making false claims about science, which they wrongly attributed to Scripture, bringing the gospel into disrepute when their errors were discovered. [739]

The Catholic Church's opposition to Galileo is one of the most famous examples; Cardinal Bellarmine warned that Galileo's conclusion was 'a very dangerous thing' which could 'harm the Holy Faith by rending Holy Scripture false'. [740]

[739] 'Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel **to hear a Christian**, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, **talking nonsense on these topics**; and we should take all **means to prevent such an embarrassing situation**, in which people show up **vast ignorance** in a Christian and **laugh it to scorn**.', Augustine, 'The Literal Meaning of Genesis: An Unfinished Book', (19.39), 5th century.

[740] 'However, it is different to want to affirm that **in reality the sun is at the center of the world and only turns on itself**, without moving from east to west, and the earth is in the third heaven and revolves with great speed around the sun; **this is a very dangerous thing**, likely not only to irritate all scholastic philosophers and theologians, **but also to harm the Holy Faith by rendering Holy Scripture false**.', Finocchiaro, 'The Galileo affair: a documentary history', p. 67 (1989).

Brother Roberts claimed man made machines could never fly, and 'Air ships are a dream', [741] and brother Griffith claimed the earth is flat and does not orbit the sun.[742] Modern Christadelphians would rightly consider these to be ridiculous opinions, yet both Brother Roberts and Brother Griffith insisted they were Biblical and that the science was wrong.

In our approach to both science and Scripture, we should do our best to ensure our interpretation is correct, and if we oppose science on the basis of our own interpretation of Scripture, we must prove we are not making fools of ourselves as earlier men did.

Christadelphian presentations bringing us into disrepute

Unfortunately we are still making the same kind of mistake today as Brother Roberts and Brother Griffith did; we are bringing disrespect to the gospel by teaching error about science. The following Christadelphian presentations have embarrassed our community, and have been targeted for public criticism by critics.[743]

Presentation: 'Darwin vs Genesis', 30 April, 2005.
Presenter: Brother John Billelo.
Critic: Jeremy Shallit.[744]
Critical comments:
1. 'I'm not a biologist, but even with my amateur's understanding of biology I could tell it was **the usual nonsense, consisting of misinformation, misconceptions, and quote mining**.'

[741] 'The air can be navigated: here is the proof. But by what kind of machinery? **Here is the secret. It requires living machinery** of a most complex and subdivided character, and all under the command, to its minutest fibre, of a will acting with lightning speed and with knowledge of the motions wanted. **This can never be done by lifeless mechanism. Air ships are a dream**.', Roberts, 'A Voyage to Australia, New Zealand, and other Lands', The Christadelphian (32.377.413), 1895.

[742] 'Is it wrong to believe that the earth is a sphere?', The Christadelphian (50.590.346-348), 1913.

[743] Each presenter has previously been contacted about these critiques, sometimes by more than once brother or sister.

[744] http://pandasthumb.org/archives/2005/05/an-open-letter-1.html.

2. 'I have phrased my description of his talk as an open letter **I have sent to Dr. Bilello. Let's see if he replies**.'
3. 'You claimed that scientists do not know the mechanism of how DNA changes. **This is simply false**.'
4. 'You claimed that changes to the genome do not result in new species**. Again, this is simply false**.'
5. '**You seem to not understand** what "neo-Darwinism" is.'
6. 'You then presented a number of "arguments against evolution". These arguments, although frequently presented in creationist literature, are not taken seriously **because they have been refuted again and again by genuine scientists**.'
7. 'You claimed that only one intermediate was known, and even that was under dispute. **This is an outrageous misrepresentation. Literally thousands of intermediates are known**,'
8. 'Second, **it is simply a lie** to claim that there is a "virtual absence" of "fossil remains". I would like you to take a trip to Hungry Hollow at Arkona in Ontario. There are so many fossils you can literally just pick them off the ground.'

Presentation: 'Darwin vs Genesis', 12 September, 2008.

Presenter: Brother John Billelo.

Critic: 'TheSquire'. [745]

Critical comments:

1. 'I'm not about to document **all the atrocities against science and informed thought** at the Creationist talk I attended this past Friday.'
2. 'He then proceeded to **misrepresent natural selection, classical Darwinism, and the Modern Synthesis**, all the while referring to the field as "Darwinism".'
3. 'He brought up Panspermia and some crackpots **to muddy the waters further**, and disparaged the entire field of Geochronology'
4. 'He then trotted out a long list of "problems" with evolution, **most of which are not problems at all**,'
5. 'In all, the talk served to **confuse the issue of what evolution really is about, what it actually says, and its history**, as well as to construe it as a threat to theism in general when such is not the case.'
6. 'If I wanted, I could reply to the whole thing with a string of citations of **the Index to Creationist Claims**.'
7. 'Question time was limited, supposedly because he gets tired of talking, but **more likely because he is unwilling to deal with critical questions from the audience for an extended period of time**.'

[745] http://speaklib.blogspot.tw/2008/09/creationist-shindig-postgame-report.html.

Presentation: 'Darwin Delusion', 25 November, 2009.

Presenter: brother John Hellawell.

Critic: British Centre for Science Education.[746]

Critical comments:

1. 'Dr Hellawell said the title of the talk was a counter to Dawkins book The God Delusion (which isn't specifically about evolution **so I felt that was a dishonest start**)'
2. 'He said that after 150 years, evolution is still a bone of contention within the scientific community, **which is simply untrue**.'
3. '**Then he told his first obvious** (as opposed to merely dishonest or misleading) **lie.** He said the problem is there is no such thing as a beneficial mutation, most are harmful,'
4. 'He repeated again and again that there were no transition fossils (**untrue - and this I could and did challenge in the Q & A**)'
5. 'For further support he quoted Gould and Eldridge. **This is even more outrageous than his distortion of Darwin's own words**.'
6. 'He claimed that rocks were dated by the characteristic fossils found in them which made their dating a bit of a circular argument. **This is disingenuous to say the least**.'
7. 'Hellawell went on to claim that as rocks advance therefore we should see evolutionary change-we don't (**Untrue again**).'
8. 'So he seems to be implying that mainstream science expects to see a gradual, linear progression to modern horses. **This isn't true**.'
9. 'The last question was about what he'd say to the many devout Christians who believed in evolution and felt creationism brought their faith into disrepute. But by now he'd sat down**. I get the impression he was not accustomed to very many questions and was not used to an audience with scientific knowledge**.'

Inaccurate teachings about science

Many articles have appeared in our community's magazines, making bad mistakes about science. On some occasions readers have written in with objections, but in almost every case their criticisms are not published, and the articles are subsequently put online in full public view without any reference to any criticism made (where they can still be viewed today). In some cases, articles with errors have been published more than

[746] http://bcseweb.blogspot.com.au/2009/12/creation-watch-report-from-redditch.html.

once in magazines such as The Christadelphian, without even being revised, edited, or updated. The following articles are examples of this unfortunate trend.[747]

1. Brother John Watts, 'Calibrated radiocarbon dating'.[748]

Claim: Scientists thought Carbon 14 dating 'would once and for all allow precise dating of the past'. [749]

Fact: It was only proposed for the dating of organic matter through a specific range of time, and it was recognized that additional calibration would be needed.

Claim: Calculation of C14 dates is 'part of a speculative rather than a scientific process'. [750]

Fact: No speculation is involved, and C14 dates are calibrated and confirmed with multiple independent methods.

Claim: Variations in atmospheric C14 over time 'destroy the whole rationale of the method'. [751]

Fact: Changes in atmospheric C14 have negligible impact on the C14 of fossilized organic materials, and the impact of such changes is recognized and adjusted for, keeping measurements accurate.

Claim: 'it seems probable that there are substantial uncertainties in the tree ring matches and hence in the calibrated radiocarbon dates derived from them'. [752]

Fact: No evidence is cited for this claim, and the article's criticism of tree ring dating misrepresents the process (referring only to matching of tree ring samples from different trees), making no mention of the various methods used to validate tree ring dates independently such as ice core samples and sediment layers (varves).

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[747] Editors have been contacted about these articles.

[748] John Watts, "Calibrated Radiocarbon Dating," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2001): 206–9.

[749] John Watts, "Calibrated Radiocarbon Dating," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2001): 206.

[750] John Watts, "Calibrated Radiocarbon Dating," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2001): 207.

[751] John Watts, "Calibrated Radiocarbon Dating," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2001): 208.

[752] John Watts, "Calibrated Radiocarbon Dating," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2001): 209.

Claim: 'both the archaeologist and the historian feel justified in suspecting that there are underlying flaws in the basic assumptions'. [753]

Fact: Only one archaeologist is cited in support of this claim; professional historians and archaeologists overwhelmingly support tree ring dating.

Claim: 'The greatest weakness of both dendrochronology and radiocarbon dating is that they ignore or contradict Biblical chronology'. [754]

Fact: These dating methods only contradict **false interpretations of** Biblical chronology.

Claim: 'God created the earth with an appearance of age'. [755]

Fact: No Biblical or scientific evidence supports the idea that God created a world with a deceptive fake history.

Claim: Differences between C14 dates and apparent Biblical dates are 'a reflection of changes subsequent to Creation and the Flood'. [756]

Fact: No Biblical or scientific evidence supports this claim, and there is overwhelming evidence from Scripture and science to contradict it.[757]

2. **Brother David Burges, 'Galaxy red shifts and the origin of the universe'**;[758] this article was first published in 1987, and was not revised before republication.

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[753] John Watts, "Calibrated Radiocarbon Dating," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2001): 209.

[754] John Watts, "Calibrated Radiocarbon Dating," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2001): 209.

[755] John Watts, "Calibrated Radiocarbon Dating," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2001): 209.

[756] John Watts, "Calibrated Radiocarbon Dating," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2001): 209.

[757] For example, the Biblical description of Eden before the flood, was written after the flood, and describes the Mesopotamian region after the flood as unchanged from its pre-flood state.

[758] David Burges, "Galaxy Red Shifts and the Origin of the Universe," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2011): 227–28.

Claim: Job 9:10, 'he [God] does great and unsearchable things', is speaking of the facts of cosmology, claiming 'The world of science does not accept the notion that these things are "past finding out"'. [759]

Fact: This passage in Job is not saying the facts of cosmology are unknowable.

Claim: Work on 'red shift' (changes in galaxy light wavelengths over time), are inexplicable by the Big Bang theory, which must therefore be doubted.

Fact: This article was originally written in 1987 and was not updated before being republished in 2001; it cites only one article on the red shift issue (published in 1985), and fails to refer to over 20 years of scientific work since then, which has established that the red shift issue is compatible with the Big Bang.

Claim: Describes red shift as 'the cornerstone' of the Big Bang theory, without which it would collapse.[760]

Fact: The Big Bang model is based on several independent lines of verifiable evidence, including red shift, cosmic background radiation, evidence for galaxy formation over time, and large-scale cosmological structure distribution,

Claim: Describes scientific theories such as evolution and the Big Bang as 'little more than speculations'.[761]

Fact: These scientific theories are nothing like speculations; they are well tested systematic explanations for available evidence.

3. Brother John Nicholls, 'What happened to the dinosaurs?'.[762]

Claim: Fossils apparently millions of years old 'could be quite recent'. [763]

Fact: Brother Nicholls acknowledges the reliability of numerous methods used to date the earth, and these also establish the age of fossils reliably; they are millions of years old, not 'quite recent'.

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[759] David Burges, "Galaxy Red Shifts and the Origin of the Universe," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2011): 227.

[760] David Burges, "Galaxy Red Shifts and the Origin of the Universe," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2011): 228.

[761] David Burges, "Galaxy Red Shifts and the Origin of the Universe," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2011): 228.

[762] John Nicholls, "What Happened to the Dinosaurs?," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2001): 191.

[763] John Nicholls, "What Happened to the Dinosaurs?," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2001): 191.

Claim: Dinosaurs 'could have been drowned in the Flood', and rapidly fossilized. [764]

Fact: No dinosaur fossils are found in the rocks which date to the time of the flood, around 2,900 years before Christ.

Claim: Dinosaurs could have lived at the same time as humans.

Fact: Our own Christadelphian pioneers knew this was impossible; none of the thousands of dinosaur fossils and remains were left in any rock layer contemporary with humans.

Claim: Behemoth in the book of Job could be 'a plant-eating dinosaur'. [765]

Fact: No dinosaur remains have been found anywhere near contemporary with Job, and why would only one reference to dinosaurs appear in the Bible?

Claim: Human footprints contemporary with dinosaurs were found at Paluxy River in Texas.

Fact: the allegedly human footprints have long been debunked as mis-read animal prints.[766] If humans were contemporary with dinosaurs, there would be a huge body of evidence, not a single set of footprints.

4. Brother Shaun Maher, 'Babel and the post-Flood world'.[767]

Claim: Suggests the division in the days of Peleg refers to the confusion at Babel, or 'massive seismic events that occurred early in the post-Flood world'.[768]

Fact: the Hebrew cannot support either conclusion.[769]

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[764] John Nicholls, "What Happened to the Dinosaurs?," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2001): 191.

[765] John Nicholls, "What Happened to the Dinosaurs?," *The Testimony* 71, no. 845 (2001): 191.

[766] Even Ken Ham, the famous Fundamentalist Young Earth Creationist, warns Christians not to appeal to these debunked 'footprints'.

[767] Shaun Maher, "Babel and the Post-Flood World," *The Testimony* 83, no. 983 (2013): 190–93.

[768] Shaun Maher, "Babel and the Post-Flood World," *The Testimony* 83, no. 983 (2013): 191.

[769] The latter idea only emerged in the 19th century, and was rejected virtually immediately by leading commentators of the time; brother Carter cited this view, only to comment 'But all this is **merely ingenious**

Claim: Scientists believe 'mankind has been around for a million years'. [770]

Fact: Scientists say only 200,000 years.

Claim: DNA studies support the idea of Shem, Ham and Japheth populating the earth 'around the end of the last Ice Age'. [771]

Fact: the Flood was around 8,000 years after the last Ice Age, and DNA studies show three main human groups in Africa long before the flood, then two groups entering the Middle East, splitting into four groups (not three groups), before leaving.

Conclusion

Many years ago brother Alfred Norris gave this wise advice:

> 'Most of us are not scientific specialists, nor are ever likely to be. We can deal with what needs to be dealt with without becoming such specialists, either. **But we can make the most alarming blunders** if we take it upon ourselves to do battle with unfamiliar weapons on a ground where our opponent is the expert, and it is **far more honourable and faithful to God to admit our ignorance**, whatever steps we propose to take to extend our knowledge, than it is with half-learning, or by mere bluff, **to attempt to meet a situation for which we are unfitted**.'[772]

We would do well to take his warning to heart.

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theorising and speculation', and observed that the Hebrew cannot support it; John Carter, "Peleg," *The Christadelphian* 74, no. 876 (1937): 261–62.

[770] Shaun Maher, "Babel and the Post-Flood World," *The Testimony* 83, no. 983 (2013): 193.

[771] Shaun Maher, "Babel and the Post-Flood World," *The Testimony* 83, no. 983 (2013): 193.

[772] Norris A.D. "The Gospel and Evolutionary Theory (1)" *The Christadelphian* (1960) 97:505.

Facts & Fallacies About Bible Texts & Translations

Jon Burke

Abstract

The King James Version of the Bible is still promoted heavily in our community, despite the fact that the Revised Version was considered superior by our earliest commentators over 100 years ago. Many articles supporting the KJV continue to be published in our community's magazines. The articles all suffer from various inaccuracies and unsubstantiated claims. Reliable information about the history of the KJV, the texts it used, and the translation method it applied, is typically not presented in our community's major publications. This article provides important facts correcting longstanding misconceptions about the KJV.

The translation history of the "King James" Bible

Although it became the most influential English Bible translation in history, the Authorized Version was by no means the first English Bible translation, nor even the first to be used widely by the common people. The history of complete Bible translations in English actually starts some 220 years before the AV was printed.

Wycliffe's translation (1380-1388), is almost as famous as the AV itself, as the first complete English Bible translation. It is also famous for Wycliffe's determined efforts to render the text of the Latin Vulgate accessible to the common English reader.[773] The 1395 Purvey Bible was a revision of Wycliffe's translation by his secretary John Purvey, which aimed at rendering Wycliffe's very literal translation of the Latin into more idiomatic English. This produced readings differing from the Catholic Church liturgy, and gave English readers a distinctive translation of their own. William Tyndale's translation (1534), was famous not only for the

[773] 'In translating from the Vulgate, Wycliffe has most faithfully adhered to that version; he seems to have adopted Hampole's principle: In this work y seke no straunge englishe, bot esieste and communeste, and siche that is moost luche to the latyne, so that thei that knoweth not the latyne by the englishe may come to many latyne words.', J. Martin Augustin Scholz et al., *The English Hexapla: Exhibiting the Six Important English Translations of the New Testament Scriptures, Wyclif, M.CCC.LXXX.; Tyndale, M.D.XXXIV; Cranmer, M.D.XXXIX; Genevan, M.D.LVII; Anglo-Rhemish, M.D.LXXXII; Authorised, M.DC.XI.; the Original Greek Text after Scholz, with the Various Readings of the Textus Receptus and the Principal Constantinopolitan and Alexandrine Manuscripts, and a Complete Collation of Scholz's Text with Griesbach's Edition of M.DCCC.V; Preceded by an Historical Account of the English Translations.* (London: S. Bagster, 1841), 8.

resistance it met from the Church and Tyndale's ultimate execution as a result, but also because of Tyndale's determination to improve Bible knowledge among the common people.[774] The AV is heavily dependent on Tyndale's phrasing and wording.

The Coverdale Bible (1535), by Myles Coverdale (Tyndale's proof reader and assistant), was the first complete printed English Bible. Coverdale's Bible was a revision of Tyndale's, using the Latin Vulgate, the Pagini Latin Bible (1528), Luther's German translation (1534), the Greek/Latin New Testament diglot of Erasmus (1516), and the Zurich Bible (1531 and 1534), a German translation by Huldrych Zwingli.

In 1537 John Rogers, another of Tyndale's assistants, printed a translation consisting of Tyndale and Coverdale's Old Testaments, together with the 1535 edition of Tyndale's New Testament. This Bible is known for the pseudonym which Rogers used to disguise his involvement, 'Thomas Matthew'. The 1539 Taverner Bible was a revision of the Matthew Bible by Richard Taverner. This version is significant mainly because Taverner was a layman, unlike previous Bible translators, who used his knowledge of Greek to correct and improve the English translation of the New Testament inherited from Tyndale.

The Great Bible of 1539 was the first English translation which may rightly be called an 'authorized version', as it was produced with the approval of Henry VIII and was 'appointed to be read in churches' (the same authorization later carried by the KJV). Thomas Cromwell (Vicar General and the king's secretary), announced in 1538 that its purpose was to provide the public with a reading Bible in their own language, which would be made accessible in all churches.[775] As a translation it was not revolutionary, nor a significant improvement, being merely a revision of John Rogers' previous revision of Tyndale's Bible.

Produced by English Protestants in Geneva during the Catholic reign of Mary Tudor, the Geneva Bible (1557-1560), was not only an improvement on previous English translations in terms of accuracy, but also introduced several features useful to the reader. The pages were reduced to quarto size (making the Bible

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[774] 'He told a Gloucestershire priest that "if God spare my life, ere many years pass, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scriptures than thou dost."', Ryken, 'Worldly Saints; The Puritans As They Really Were', p. 138 (1990 ed.).

[775] 'That ye shall provide, on this side the feast of All Saints next coming, one book of the Bible of the largest volume in English, and the same set up in some convenient place within the said church that ye have cure [care] of, whereas your parishioners may most commodiously resort to the same and read it;', Bruce, 'History of the Bible in English', p. 68 (2002 ed.).

more portable and easily read), a Roman style font was used instead of the heavy Gothic black letter (improving readability), italics were used to indicate English words with no original language equivalent (added to improve the sense of the translation), and the text was divided into verses, which no complete English Bible had done before.

A revision of the Great Bible, the Bishop's Bible (1569), was adapted by the Anglican Church as a replacement of the Great Bible and in opposition to the Protestant biased Geneva Bible. Its name was taken from the group of Anglican bishops who worked on the text. They were better educated in Greek and Hebrew than some of their predecessors, and their improvements were incorporated into the KJV.

Like modern Bible translators, the KJV translators used several existing critical New Testament texts; the 'Textus Receptus' of Robert Estienne (Latin name 'Stephanus'), the critical text of Theodore Beza (a revised version of the Textus Receptus), and the third edition of the 'Novum Instrumentum omne' by Desidirius Erasmus, a Catholic priest. The relationship of these sources is complex.

The text edited by Robert Etienne, known as the 'Textus Receptus', was an eclectic critical text known originally as the 'Editio Regia' (the 'Royal edition'). He used the Complutensian Polyglot, and a range of Greek texts. The following table shows that the earliest Greek texts available in the time of the KJV translators were very mixed in both age and quality, demonstrating just how little of the Greek New Testament was available to 17th century translators in the form of early texts.

Greek texts used by the 'Editio Regia' (or 'Textus Receptus')		
Date	**Text**	**Details**
C. 5th	Codex Bezae	Mainly Western text type, many omissions, interpolations, and false readings, four gospels (only Luke is complete), some of Acts, and sections of 3 John.
C. 11th	Min. 2298	Contains Acts and the letters of Paul.

C. 8th	Codex Regius	Alexandrian text type, various omissions and interpolations, many readings of the Byzantine text type; almost all of the four gospels.
C. 11th	Min. 237	Byzantine text type, complete text of the four gospels.
C. 11th	Min. 8	Byzantine text type, complete text of Acts, Paul's letters, the general letters, and Revelation.
C. 11th	Min. 42	Byzantine text type, complete text of the four gospels.

Greek texts used by the 'Editio Regia' (or 'Textus Receptus')		
Date	**Date**	**Date**
C. 12th	Min. 38	Byzantine text type, complete text of the four gospels, as well as Acts and Paul's letters.
C. 12th	Min. 2817	Byzantine text type, almost the complete text of Paul's letters, ending at Hebrews 12:18.
C. 12th	Min. 9	Byzantine text type, complete text of the four gospels.
C. 12th	Min. 111	Byzantine text type, complete text of the four gospels.
C. 12th-13th	Min. 120	Byzantine text type, complete text of the four gospels.
C. 13th	Min. 4	Mixed text type but dependent on the Byzantine, almost the complete text of the four gospels, with various gaps in the text (Matthew 2:9-20, Mark 15:42-16:14, John 1:1-13, 49-3:11).
C. 13th	Min. 5	Mixed text type but dependent on the Byzantine, the entire New Testament except for Revelation.
C. 13th	Min. 6	Mix of the Alexandrian and Byzantine text types, the entire New Testament except for Revelation.
C. 14th	Min. 393	Byzantine text type, the entire New Testament except for Revelation.

It was not until 1633 that the name 'Textus Receptus' came to be associated with the various editions of Etienne's text. Publishers Bonaventura and Abraham Elzevir included in their preface the Latin phrase[776] meaning 'So [the reader] has the text which is now received by all, in which nothing is correct', as an advertising gimmick trading off the popularity of the Erasmian text (which has also, though wrongly, become known as the 'Textus Receptus'), and its use in the 1611 AV.

This was misleading because there was no text which had been 'received by all'. Both the texts of Etienne and of Erasmus had been edited, revised, and republished many times since their first editions, and textual critics such as Theodore Beza had already been correcting them with older manuscripts from other text types,[777] as their deficiencies and inaccuracies became increasingly recognized and as older Greek texts became available.

Another Greek source text used by the KJV translators was Theodore Beza's revision of the third edition of Estienne's text. Beza edited Estienne's text using Codex Claramontanus, a 6th century Western text type manuscript containing Paul's letters and Hebrews. The use of Claramontanus gave Beza access to earlier and more accurate readings of some passages.

The KJV translators also used the text of Erasmus. In 1516, Erasmus produced a Greek New Testament text based this on just three manuscripts,[778] and consulted three others for corroboration, [779] as well as the Latin Vulgate. Of these six texts, five belonged to the Byzantine text type[780] and none of them were dated any earlier than the 11th century.

[776] 'Textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum in quo nihil immulatum aut corruptum damus'.

[777] Beza used Codex Claromontanus (6th century), and Codex Bezae (5th century), both of the Western text type.

[778] Manuscripts 2^{e} (12th-13th centuries), 2^{ap} (12th century), and 1^{r} (12th century).

[779] Manuscripts 1^{eap} (12th century), 4^{ap} (15th century), and 7^{p} (11th-12th centuries).

[780] Manuscript 1^{eap} did not, but Erasmus considered it corrupt and did not use it very much.

One of these texts proved difficult to use,[781] since it was not entirely Byzantine, and contained a commentary which Erasmus could not always distinguish from the text itself. This text was also missing the last six verses of Revelation, so Erasmus translated these verses from the Latin Vulgate into Greek, as he did with various other passages where the Greek texts he had were unclear.[782]

The Greek text of Erasmus became extremely popular, and many different editions were published over the next 80 years, differing from each other in 100-200 places. The infamous forgery in 1 John 5:7 was not included until the 3rd edition of 1522, Erasmus having previously omitted it on the basis that it had no support from earlier Greek texts.[783] The Erasmus text was one of the Greek sources of the 1611 AV.

The result of the translators' use of these three Greek textual sources was an English translation based on a collection of texts which, though largely Byzantine, also included eclectic readings from the Alexandrian, Caesarean, and Western text types, as well as some readings not found in any Greek manuscripts since Erasmus had created these readings by translating passages from the Latin Vulgate into Greek.

The text used for the 1611 therefore differs from the 'Majority Text' in around 1,838 places.[784] A range of other English Bible translations were used as points of comparison, and the committees were instructed to use phrases from these translations when they were closer to the original language text than the Bishop's Bible.

Certain readings of Wycliffe's translation were included in the AV, and the AV is also heavily dependent on Tyndale's phrasing and wording; translation improvements of the Bishop's Bible were also added to the AV, and it also adopted some layout and formatting decisions of the Geneva Bible such as chapters divided into

[781] Manuscript 1r.

[782] The result was that Erasmus' text contained some readings not found in any Greek manuscript at all, they were his own creation from the Latin; later scholars noted that some of these renderings were not even correct Greek.

[783] He finally included it after being presented with a single Greek text which included the verse (though there is evidence that the text was prepared specifically for this purpose).

[784] According to Daniel Wallace, "Some Second Thoughts on the Majority Text," *Bibliotheca Sacra.* 146, no. 583 (1981): 269–90.; readers should note that the 'Majority Text' is not the same as the 'Textus Receptus', it is a 20th century reconstruction of the Byzantine text type.

verses, and italic text used for English words added to the translation for which no original equivalent existed in the original text.

The Latin Vulgate was also used as a point of comparison, and the Vulgate reading 'Lucifer' in Isaiah 14:12 was included in the AV as it had been in English Bible translations since Wycliffe. However, the AV also added a marginal note identifying the alternative reading 'Day Star'. A good example of the extent to which the KJV translators incorporated texts from earlier translations is their rendering of 1 Corinthians 1:11. Here it is annotated with the words borrowed from previous English translations, with the original spelling ('vs' for 'us', 'meanes' for 'means', etc.).

> 'You are also helping [Bishop's Bible] together [Geneva 1557] by [Bishop's] prayer for vs [Tyndale], that [Tyndale] for the [Geneva 1560] gift [Great] bestowed vpon vs [Geneva 1557] by the meanes of many [Tyndale] persons [Great], thankes may bee giuen [Tyndale] by [Geneva 1557] many on our behalf [Tyndale].'[785]

Over time the 1611 AV was also revised. Minor revisions took place in 1629, 1638, 1653, and 1701, which changed little. Major revisions in 1762 and 1769 were made to standardize spelling and remove archaic words such as 'sith', resulting in some 75,000 changes.[786] The 1769 edition is that which is printed today.

Claims and facts about the "King James" Bible

The June 2011 Special Edition of the Testimony Magazine, '1611-2011 Four hundred years of the King James Bible', contained a number of misleading articles.[787]

1. Brother Andrew Perry, 'A Reliable Translation? For and against the Accuracy of the KJV'.[788]

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[785] Norman L Geisler and William E Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 586.

[786] Adam Nicolson, *Power and Glory: Jacobean England and the Making of the King James Bible* (Harper Perennial, 2003),. 239.

[787] These comments have been sent to the editors or writers responsible.

[788] Andrew Perry, "A Reliable Translation? For and against the Accuracy of the KJV," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 179–84.

Claim: 'It is sufficiently accurate'[789]

Fact: It is less accurate than modern translations such as the NET, [790] and more biased by error.[791]

Claim: 'it translates mainly from the Byzantine (Majority) text and a standard Hebrew consonantal text'[792]

Fact: The Byzantine is the least reliable text type, and the article acknowledges modern translations use a better Hebrew text.[793]

Claim: 'it has useful features such as its italics and marginal notes'[794]

Fact: The New English Translation has far more such notes (more detailed and more accurate).

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[789] Andrew Perry, "A Reliable Translation? For and against the Accuracy of the KJV," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 184.

[790] For example, Genesis 12:6; 36:24; 37:3; Exodus 34:13, Numbers 21:14; 23:22, Judges 5:2; 15:8, 19; 20:26, Job 26:13; 40:19, 2 Kings 22:14, Psalm 71:22; Song of Solomon 7:5, Isaiah 5:2; 13:21-22; 18:1, 2, 7, Jeremiah 39:3, 13; 13:10-11, 18, 20, Daniel 7:9, Hosea 3:1, Nahum 2:3, Matthew 6:12, Mark 10:23, Romans 4:19, 1 John 5:7, all contain significant errors in the KJV; the New English Translation Is accurate in each passage.

[791] In particular numerous use of the words satan, devil, soul, bishop, deacon, and hell.

[792] Andrew Perry, "A Reliable Translation? For and against the Accuracy of the KJV," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 184.

[793] Andrew Perry, "A Reliable Translation? For and against the Accuracy of the KJV," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 181; the article claims without evidence that 'the differences have little practical effect for the native English speaker who has no Hebrew or Aramaic'.

[794] 'the Hebrew text used by modern versions is *better* than that used by the KJV translators', i Andrew Perry, "A Reliable Translation? For and against the Accuracy of the KJV," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 184.

In favour of the KJV brother Perry cites the capitalization of the divine name[795] and the KJV's literal translations.[796] Yet he acknowledges the KJV's poor translation of Hebrew[797] and Greek,[798] misleading text

[795] The NET uses a similar convention, and has notes providing a reliable explanation of the meaning.

[796] The article says 'The KJV is a literal translation in this sense' (p. 182), as opposed to a dynamic equivalence translation saying this is an advantage, then contradicts this completely by saying, 'The KJV is therefore not a 'same-word-for-the-same-word' (literal) translation' (p. 183), saying this is an advantage; the truth is that the KJV was a dynamic translation but not as dynamic as modern translations, dynamic translation is more reliably accurate than literal 'word for word' translation, and modern dynamic translations are superior to the KJV as a result.

[797] 'One area in which the KJV is **lexically weak** is in its understanding of **difficult Hebrew words**.', Andrew Perry, "A Reliable Translation? For and against the Accuracy of the KJV," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 182.

[798] 'In this regard the KJV is **less accurate than modern versions**; but the Bible student can make use of lexicons to spot errors and make corrections to the King James translation where appropriate.', Andrew Perry, "A Reliable Translation? For and against the Accuracy of the KJV," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 181; a good Bible translation does not require the reader to identify and correct errors using lexicons.

layout,[799] archaic style,[800] and inadequacy for non-native English speaker[801] or for preaching even in English speaking countries.[802]

2. Brother David Burges 'Upstaged by Modernity? The Value of the King James Version in the Twenty-First Century'.[803]

Claim: 'the KJV still has an unexcelled value for public reading'[804]

Fact: No, its language is inaccessible to the public.

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[799] 'Nevertheless, the KJV did not lay out poetry in verse form in the printed edition, and it chose to retain the verse and chapter divisions of the Bishops' Bible. **This constraint introduced inaccuracy into the translation**,', Andrew Perry, "A Reliable Translation? For and against the Accuracy of the KJV," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 183.

[800] 'the style and tone of the KJV is **probably too literary and too elevated** compared with the common language of the market-place and the ordinary letters that we have in the Bible.', Andrew Perry, "A Reliable Translation? For and against the Accuracy of the KJV," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 183.

[801] 'The KJV is obviously not a version for use with speakers and readers for whom English is a second language.', Andrew Perry, "A Reliable Translation? For and against the Accuracy of the KJV," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 184.

[802] 'the English is old and **not of a suitable grade22 for preaching**.', Andrew Perry, "A Reliable Translation? For and against the Accuracy of the KJV," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 184.

[803] David Burges, "Upstaged by Modernity? The Value of the King James Version in the Twenty-First Century," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 184–87.

[804] 'In the first place, the KJV still has an unexcelled value for public reading. As discussed elsewhere in this issue, it is a product of 'the golden age' of English literature5 **and was specifically designed in translation for reading aloud in churches**.', David Burges, "Upstaged by Modernity? The Value of the King James Version in the Twenty-First Century," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 186.

Claim: 'Alec McCowan performed the KJV of the Gospel of Mark as a stage monologue, to packed houses… an eloquent answer to those who claim that the language of the KJV is too difficult'[805]

Fact: Like applause at a reading of Shakespeare, this proves nothing about audience comprehension of the text.

Claim: 'the KJV remains the primary English translation for serious Bible study'[806]

Fact: No, a translation requiring constant correction by study aids is not useful; serious Bible study uses a reliable translation.

Claim: 'the range of study aids available for the KJV far exceeds that for any other version'[807]

Fact: No, KJV study aids are a small handful of outdated and biased works; modern translations have a wider range of the best modern lexicographical and translation aids.

Here is a list of Old Testament lexicons and dictionaries which can be used with modern Bible translations.

1. Johann Jakob Koehler, Ludwig; Baumgartner, Walter; Richardson, M. E. J.; Stamm, The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (electronic ed.; Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999).

2. Bruce K. Harris, R. Laird; Archer, Gleason L., Jr.; Waltke, ed., Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (electronic ed.; Chicago: Moody Press, 1999).

3. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004).

[805] David Burges, "Upstaged by Modernity? The Value of the King James Version in the Twenty-First Century," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 186.

[806] David Burges, "Upstaged by Modernity? The Value of the King James Version in the Twenty-First Century," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 186.

[807] David Burges, "Upstaged by Modernity? The Value of the King James Version in the Twenty-First Century," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 186.

4. Charles Augustus Brown, Francis; Driver, Samuel Rolles; Briggs, Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (electronic ed.; Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000).

5. James Swanson, Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament) (electronic ed.; Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

6. James Swanson, Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Aramaic (Old Testament) (electronic ed.; Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

7. Stephen A Kaufman, Joseph A Fitzmyer, The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College, 1986-).

8. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997).

Here is a list of New Testament lexicons and dictionaries which can be used with modern Bible translations.

1. Walter Arndt, William; Danker, Frederick W.; Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (3rd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

2. Roderick Liddell, Henry George; Scott, Robert; Jones, Henry Stuart; McKenzie, A Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

3. Neva F. Friberg, Timothy; Friberg, Barbara; Miller, Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000).

4. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard; Bromiley, Geoffrey W.; Friedrich, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (electronic ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964).

5. James Swanson, Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament) (electronic ed.; Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

6. James D. Spicq, Ceslas; Ernest, Theological Lexicon of the New Testament (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994).

7. Eugene Albert Louw, Johannes P.; Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

8. Gerhard Balz, Horst Robert; Schneider, Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990).

9. Spiros Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament (electronic ed.; Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

Look at the wealth of modern lexical tools available to us. Yet so many Christadelphians ignore all this, and use Gesenius, or Strong's, or Young's, or Vine's, tools which are massively out of date, sometimes wildly inaccurate, and theologically biased. Here's just one example. Let's look at the Hebrew word 'sheol' (grave), typically rendered 'hell' by the KJV (one of many reasons why it's such a bad translation). Here's what those old lexicons have to say.

1. Gesenius: "a subterranean place, full of thick darkness (Job 10:21, 22), in which the shades of the dead are gathered together"

2. Strong: "underworld, grave, hell, pit. 1A the underworld. 1B Sheol—the OT designation for the abode of the dead. 1B1 place of no return. 1B2 without praise of God. 1B3 wicked sent there for punishment"

3. Vine: "Second, “Sheol” is used of a place of conscious existence after death"

Totally inaccurate, full of theological falsehood. And these are the tools trusted by so many Christadelphians. Now let's look at two modern lexicons. What do they say about 'sheol'?

1. TWOT: "The word does not occur outside of the OT, except once in the Jewish Elephantine papyri, where it means “grave”"

2. HALOT: "As for the latter what is supposed to correspond to Hebrew שְׁאוֹל is a Sumerian-Akkadian šuʾāru, yet even Baumgartner ThZ 2 (1946) 233-235 does not produce any clear instance of this word with the meaning “underworld”"

What a refreshing change; now we're reading truth. See how the etymology from a word meaning 'underworld' is rejected, and it is proved that the only use of the word outside the Old Testament is in the Elephantine Papyri, 'where it means grave'. This is a great example of modern lexicons settling conclusively the meaning of a word in its socio-historical context, and proving that the traditional translations 'hell' and 'underworld' are completely wrong (it is used of the 'underworld' of pagan theology in a couple of places in the Old Testament, but this is not the use by the Hebrew writers themselves).

We always try to use the best tools for our regular day work, so why do so many Christadelphians think it's OK to use bad tools for the important work of Bible study? Would anyone of us decide to throw away the computer at their workplace, and swap it for a 19th century typewriter? Of course we wouldn't. So why do Christadelphians do this when it comes to Bible study?

Claim: 'use of these aids, combined with the fact that the KJV approximates to a 'word-for-word' translation, allows the student to gain closer access to the meaning'[808] [809]

Fact, No, KJV study aids are typically antiquated and require specialized knowledge to use reliably, thus fooling the average reader into thinking they can translate better than professionals, but getting them no closer to the original meaning (and sometimes further away).

Claim: 'concordances exist for some modern versions, few of these are exhaustive'[810]

Fact: Many exhaustive tools exist for modern versions, of far higher quality than those typically used with the KJV.

Claim: 'those versions using the 'dynamic equivalence' approach to translation, their usefulness is necessarily limited by the freer use of language'[811]

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[808] David Burges, "Upstaged by Modernity? The Value of the King James Version in the Twenty-First Century," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 186.

[809] Contradicted by brother Perry's article in this same issue of The Testimony; 'The KJV is therefore **not a 'same-word-for-the-same-word' (literal) translation**'. Andrew Perry, "A Reliable Translation? For and against the Accuracy of the KJV," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 183.

[810] 'In the first place, the KJV still has an unexcelled value for public reading. As discussed elsewhere in this issue, it is a product of 'the golden age' of English literature5 **and was specifically designed in translation for reading aloud in churches**.', David Burges, "Upstaged by Modernity? The Value of the King James Version in the Twenty-First Century," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 186.

[811] David Burges, "Upstaged by Modernity? The Value of the King James Version in the Twenty-First Century," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 186.

Fact: Dynamic equivalence is more accurate than literal translation, a point brother Perry's article actually made. It is ironic that the translators of the KJV argued they were **not** making a literal translation. On the contrary, in their preface they defend their decision not to do so.

> '**we have not tied ourselves to an uniformity of phrasing, or to an identity of words**, as some peradventure would wish that we had done'
>
> 'if the word signified that same in both places (for there be some words that be not the same sense everywhere) we were especially careful'
>
> 'why should we be in bondage to them if we may be free, **use one precisely when we may use another no less fit**, as commodiously?'

Variety in the KJV's translation of the Hebrew is rightly very broad; *davar* (84 different English words), *panim* (34 words), *sim* (59 words), *nasah* (46 words), *avar* (48 words).

Likewise, the Greek *kataergo* is translated with 17 different words, and the Greek *logizomai* has three appearances in Romans 4, all of which are translated differently.

This is valid translation methodology. A literal translation would in many cases make nonsense of the text. When the Hebrew literally says 'long of nose', and 'his nose was hot', the text isn't talking about noses at all, so the KJV translators intelligently rendered the text according to its underlying sense, translating 'sense for sense' rather than 'word for word'. The first phrase is an idiom which means 'longsuffering' (KJV 'longsuffering'), and the second phrase is an idiom which means 'he became angry' (KJV 'his wrath was kindled').

3. **Brother John Thorpe, 'Unrevised For Centuries'**.[812]

Claim: 'the assumption that the Alexandrian text exists and that it is 'better' than the Byzantine text'[813]

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[812] John Thorpe, "Unrevised for Centuries: The Remarkable Longevity of the King James Version," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 174–78.

[813] John Thorpe, "Unrevised for Centuries: The Remarkable Longevity of the King James Version," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 175.

Fact: This is not an assumption, it is a fact. Over 100 years ago brother Roberts knew the Alexandrian text indisputably exists, and is superior to the later Byzantine text; he called Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus 'the three most ancient original'[814] manuscripts. This was accepted by all of our community's earliest and most knowledgeable Bible students.

Claim: 'the differences between the text used in the seventeenth century and that used in the modern day are very slight'[815]

Fact: No, there are hundreds of differences, many significant.

Claim: 'More modern versions tend to be slanted by modern theological and critical concerns'[816]

Fact: They are far less slanted by theological concerns than the KJV, and the critical issues are irrelevant to their translation accuracy.

Claim: 'The KJV is part of a long-standing tradition of Bible translation (at one time known as 'the English tradition'), which is under attack. It is a tradition which does not seek to interpret the text (although some interpretation is always unavoidable) but to give as accurate a translation as possible of the best text available so that students of the Bible can analyse it and come up with their own conclusions.'[817]

Fact: This is very far from the truth. Hundreds of verses in the KJV contain theologically motivated interpretations and paraphrases by the translators; 'gave up the ghost', 'Holy Ghost', 'soul', 'hell', 'devil',

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[814] 'TISCHENDORF'S NEW TESTAMENT.—(Containing footnote emendations on the basis of **the three most ancient original M.SS.: The VATICAN, ALEXANDRINE, and SINAITIC**—the last but recently discovered by Tischendorf himself.). Brother Ellis writes to say he can supply the brethren with this free through the post, at 1s.10d.', Robert Roberts, "Intelligence: Tischendorf's New Tesatment," *The Christadelphian* 6, no. 66 (1869): 432.

[815] John Thorpe, "Unrevised for Centuries: The Remarkable Longevity of the King James Version," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 178.

[816] John Thorpe, "Unrevised for Centuries: The Remarkable Longevity of the King James Version," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 178.

[817] John Thorpe, "Unrevised for Centuries: The Remarkable Longevity of the King James Version," *The Testimony* 81, no. 961 (2011): 178.

'devils', 'church', 'bishop', 'deacon', and 'Satan' are just a few examples. This is not literal translation or a translation attempting to 'give as accurate a translation as possible', much less intended 'so that students of the Bible can analyse it and come up with their own conclusions'. On the contrary, it shows the translators of the KJV felt completely free to make their translation fit their beliefs. Ironically, modern dynamic translations are a lot more accurate, reducing the use of these theological terms dramatically, or even abandoning them completely.

Comments from our earliest commentators

The Revised Version of 1881-85 was a great improvement on the many inaccuracies of the KJV, and was consequently welcomed enthusiastically by our earliest brothers.

> 'Many words and phrases are more accurately rendered.'[818]

> 'Taking it altogether it is calculated to promote enlightenment, and to confirm believers of the Bible in the credibility of these Divine records.'[819]

They were also pleased that the language had been brought up to date, and commented that it hadn't been done enough. Brother Shutttleworth called for 'the complete expurgation of obsolete and antiquated words'.

> 'There were two things, however, which every one might have reasonably expected, viz., the complete expurgation of obsolete and antiquated words, and the removal of questionable grammar from every part: this has only been partially done, whereas it might just as well have been perfect in these particulars as not; and we should then have been excused such ungrammatical phrases as, "Do thy diligence" (2 Tim, 3:9) and again "Which they have ungodly wrought" (Jude, 15)—a literal enough rendering of the Greek no doubt, but at the same time the sense of the original and the grammar of the English might both have been preserved by substituting "impiously" for ungodly; or if the strictly literal counterpart were important, then what should have hindered the giving effect to it by the lengthening of the term ungodly into ungodlily; in the same way as in another instance (1 Thes. 2:10),

[818] Robert Roberts, "The Revised Version of the New Testament," *The Christadelphian* 18, no. 205 (1881): 289.

[819] F.R. Shuttleworth, "Remarks by Brother Shuttleworth," *The Christadelphian* 18, no. 205 (1881): 301.

> we have the word holy lengthened into holily. No better opportunity could have occurred for the coining of a few fresh words where required as the exact equivalent of the Greek text.'[820]

It is ironic (and baffling), that our earliest commentators over 100 years ago were praising the Revised Version for being a more accurate translation than the KJV, and for removing outdated language, whereas so many modern Christadelphians claim the KJV is more accurate and wish to retain the outdated language.

Conclusion

When using a modern translation, even though it uses an eclectic text we know which text was used; the translation tells you in the forward, and in almost every case it is the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS), for the Old Testament, and the Nestle-Aland New Testament (27th edition), for the New Testament. Both these texts are readily available, and study aids are also available to tell us which manuscripts were used and how reliable they are. In contrast, readers of the KJV (based on an eclectic text), do not even know which manuscripts and texts it was translated from, and even if they do find out they will very likely not have access to it.

The KJV Old Testament was translated from the 16th century Mikraot Gedolot of Jaakov Ben Hayyim, a Masoretic text. It was known even at the time for its numerous errors and misreadings. The KJV New Testament was translated from the 1633 edition of Theodore Beza's eclectic text, which had been edited nine times previously by Beza. This text relied heavily on half a dozen manuscripts no earlier than the 10th century, and contains many errors.

Users of modern Bible translations have a formidable array of modern scholarly lexicons and Bible dictionaries at their disposal for the study of both the Old and New Testaments. In contrast, users of the KJV have a tiny handful of grossly out of date works crammed with theologically biased entries, typically recycling each others' errors, and little to no knowledge of how to use them or verify what they say. It is in this area (among other areas), that the KJV fails dismally and modern translations excel.

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The Original Christadelphian Approach to Science

Jon Burke

Abstract: The Christadelphian community originally had a high respect for science, and believed science and Scripture would always be in harmony. The way in which they dealt with apparent contradictions between science and Scripture, as well as claims that science proves the Bible wrong, is highly instructive.

In the early Christadelphian community, the principle of the 'two books' was used as the reason for interpreting Scripture using scientific knowledge. Brother John Thomas described his magazine 'The Advocate' as a Defence of the testimony of God through the two books. [821] Brother Jardine insisted that

[821] 'The Advocate: For the Testimony of God **as it is Written in the Books of Nature and Revelation CONDUCTED BY JOHN THOMAS, M.D.** The invisible attributes of God, even his eternal power and divinity, since the creation of the world, **are very evident; being known by his works**.—PAUL. **All scripture given by divine inspiration, is profitable for doctrine, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness**: that the man of God may be perfect—completely fitted for every good work.—PAUL. Such is the title, by which this work will be designated, on the publication of the Fourth Volume. "The Advocate" is its present name, and will continue so to be. The rest of its title is expletive of the subject-matter for which it pleads, viz. THE TESTIMONY OF GOD. **The grand divisions of this testimony are twofold**—first the evidence he has given of his Eternal Power, and **Divinity in what is termed Nature**; and, secondly, that which is contained in **the Historical Books and the Law of Moses, the Prophets, the Psalms, and the Apostolic Writings**. The First, or Natural division of the Testimony of God**, contains all, and infinitely more, than can be found in the Encyclopædia of human discoveries**:—hence, the principles and facts, which have resulted from the observations and experiments of accurate observers, will arrest the attention of THE ADVOCATE from time to time. Our design in doing this, is, **that the works of God may be brought to bear illustratively on his word**; for, we are convinced, that **nothing is better calculated to break the shackles of prejudice and superstition, than an enlightened acquaintance with the objects and "laws of Nature," as God's natural institutions are termed**. The second division of the Testimony of God, relates equally to Man and the External World of Nature, only that it reveals the ultimate destiny of both; and the extraordinary arrangements, by which they are to be carried onward to that glorious result; which the inaudible, though expressive, (see. ps. 19.) works of God do not.—THE ADVOCATE will, therefore, exercise himself to the best of his ability and judgment, **in setting forth the manifold wisdom of God as inscribed on the brilliant pages**

Scripture and the creation formed a consistently harmonious witness, and that any apparent contradictions were due to misinterpretation of the Bible or the creation. [822] [823]

He characterized science which derives knowledge from God's creation as an 'inspiration of God's spirit', [824] so there is no competition of authority between science and Scripture; both are ultimately derived from God Himself, both reveal truths which He communicates through His two books. Brother Robert Roberts, considered the established science of his day to be sufficiently reliable on which to base a non-Biblical case for the existence of God as the creator of the universe. In 1885 he wrote a hypothetical dialogue between a Christadelphian and an 'Interested Stranger' who was not a believer in God.

Starting with the topic of the beginning of the universe, Roberts appealed repeatedly to the evidence of science in order to demonstrate that the universe had a beginning in time and must have had a cause, and that both the universe and the earth had passed through immense ages of time during which they had developed and changed gradually in order to be made fit for human habitation. His key points were as follows.

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of those two interesting volumes.', John Thomas, "The Advocate: For the Testimony of God as It Is Written in the Books of Nature and Revelation," *The Apostolic Advocate.* 3, no. 260-261 (1838).

[822] '**NATURE makes no false impressions**, and just so the Bible.', W Jardine, "The Bible as a Law of Life and Immortality," *Ambassador of the Coming Age* 1, no. 6 (1864): 93.

[823] 'The inconsistency spoken of between nature and scripture, arises not from antagonism, but from the misinterpretations of both. It is man's interpretation of the one set against man's interpretations of the other. It is not nature versus scripture, but false science against true theology, or false theology against scientific fact.', W Jardine, "The Bible as a Law of Life and Immortality," *Ambassador of the Coming Age* 1, no. 6 (1864): 93.

[824] 'Every thing in art and science are but copies of the workings of God's spirit in nature. And it is by the study of nature and by meditation, on the discoveries which have been made as communicated to him through books, that man acquires his knowledge in the science of life, and so inhales this inspiration of God's spirit.', W Jardine, "The Bible as a Law of Life and Immortality," *Ambassador of the Coming Age* 1, no. 6 (1864): 93-4.

1. There was 'a time when the earth was a molten mass, incapable of sustaining life, either vegetable or animal'.[825]

2. 'the starry heavens show us (through the telescope) bodies in various stages of development'.[826]

3. These are 'stages through which it is probable the earth has come'.[827]

4. That 'if the universe has been a progressive development, there must have been a time - inconceivably remote truly - but still a time when it began to travel from its invisible state of abstract power to its present state of concrete form and glory'.[828]

Brother Roberts' approach here to the non-Christian 'Interested Stranger' was based completely on the science of his day; geology, astronomy, cosmology, and chemistry. Realizing that science provided him with reliable evidence to support a non-Bible based argument for a creator, he used that evidence in the full confidence that the science was accurate, confident that it was in no way contradictory to the Biblical account, despite the fact that none of the physical facts about the universe and the earth which he cited, could be found in Scripture. These early commentators also used the scientific findings of their day to make sense of apparent contradictions between the description of creation in Genesis, and scientific knowledge. In 1884, Roberts

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[825] 'are we not justified in saying that if we go far enough back in the record of the earth's physical history, as written in the rocks, we come to a time when the earth was a molten mass, incapable of sustaining life, either vegetable or animal?', Robert Roberts, "A Page for the Interested Stranger – No. 2," *The Christadelphian* 22, no. 255 (1885): 405.

[826] 'We cannot ascertain the physical history of the earth further back than the fire period from the earth itself**: but the starry heavens show us (through the telescope)** bodies in various stages of development, **and therefore stages through which it is probable the earth has come**. The nebulous matter in the milky way **is very instructive on this point**.', Robert Roberts, "A Page for the Interested Stranger – No. 2," *The Christadelphian* 22, no. 255 (1885): 405.

[827] Robert Roberts, "A Page for the Interested Stranger – No. 2," *The Christadelphian* 22, no. 255 (1885): 405.

[828] 'Here is the point: if the universe has been a progressive development, there must have been a time—inconceivably remote truly—**but still a time when it began to travel from its invisible state of abstract power to its present state of concrete form and glory**.', Robert Roberts, "A Page for the Interested Stranger – No. 2," *The Christadelphian* 22, no. 255 (1885): 405.

commented enthusiastically on correspondence received by 'Brother Simons, of Outram'.[829] Brother Simons, in answer to a question he had read in the Ecclesial Visitor ('Why God did not make everybody perfect at once, if He had the power to do so, &c., &c.?'), directed the questioner to the natural creation, as interpreted by geology, making the following arguments.

1. Geology teaches us that there was a time on earth 'when animal life, if not totally, was nearly unknown, and only the lower order of vegetable life covering its face'.[830]

2. This lasted 'many thousands of years', during which 'the earth was undergoing wonderful and necessary changes to fit it for a creation of a higher order'.[831]

3. When this stage was over 'it was replaced by a creation of a higher order, when animal and vegetable forms of a far more wonderful structure were brought into existence and most admirably adopted to the atmosphere, climate, and peculiarities of that creation'.[832]

4. This also lasted 'many thousands of years, before it was 'swept away, and a grander creation built on its ruins', and 'so on, stage after stage'.[833]

Brother Simons was interpreting Scripture in such a way as to incorporate and harmonize with, the scientific discoveries which in his day were well established and which were being used to support the theory of evolution; the great age of the earth, the numerous geological changes through which it had passed, the physical evidence of numerous species emerging and passing away (each more complex than the former), and the increasing habitation of the earth by animals better and better adapted to the environment.

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[829] '**Brother Simons, of Outram, writes thus excellently** on a subject which has perplexed many only because they do not take all the elements of the case into account.', Robert Simons, "Why Man Was Not at Once Made Perfect," *The Christadelphian* 21, no. 238 (1884): 177.

[830] Robert Simons, "Why Man Was Not at Once Made Perfect," *The Christadelphian* 21, no. 238 (1884): 177.

[831] Robert Simons, "Why Man Was Not at Once Made Perfect," *The Christadelphian* 21, no. 238 (1884): 177.

[832] Robert Simons, "Why Man Was Not at Once Made Perfect," *The Christadelphian* 21, no. 238 (1884): 177.

[833] Robert Simons, "Why Man Was Not at Once Made Perfect," *The Christadelphian* 21, no. 238 (1884): 177.

Similarly, Brother Roberts interpreted Genesis in such a way as to harmonize with the established scientific evidence that the earth was of great age, and had a history prior to the six days of creation in Genesis 1 (though he did not believe humans had existed for more than 6,000 years).[834] Whilst both brothers Simons and Roberts denied evolution as an explanation for the diversity of species, they did not deny the scientific evidence on which the theory was based.

Instead, they both chose to read the Scriptural record in a way which harmonized with the evidence, suggesting a series of creations involving more and more complex life forms, each one extinguished from the earth before the next was introduced. Other issues in Genesis were treated in the same way. Roberts interpreted the Genesis flood as local, harmonizing his understanding of the text with the geological, archaeological, and biological evidence.[835]

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[834] 'That the earth had a history anterior to the six days' work, is certain, from both scripture and nature. Geology proves the existence of forms of life long before the Mosaic creation; and the Bible tacitly affirms a pre-Adamite order of things,', Robert Roberts, "Were There Human Beings Before Adam?," *The Ambassador of the Coming Age* 48, no. 5 (1868): 172.

[835] 'Considering the comparatively limited extent of the human family at the time, and that it was confined to one small district of the globe, it would seem reasonable to conclude from the principle already looked at-the divine sparingness of means-that the flood was co-extensive only with the Adamically-inhabited portion of the globe. **There are facts that compel such a conclusion: and as all facts are of God, they must be in agreement**. The animals of New Zealand are different front those of Australia. The animals of Australia, again, are different from those of Asia and Europe. These again differ entirely from those of the American continent: **All differ from one another : and the fossil remains on all the continents show that this difference has always prevailed**. Now if the flood were universal in the absolute sense, **it is manifest that these facts could not be explained**, for if the animals all over the earth were drowned, and the devastated countries were afterwards replenished from a Noachic centre, the animals of all countries would now show some similarity, instead of consisting of totally different species. **The animals taken into the ark in that case would be the animals of the humanly populated district. Only a comparatively small district in relation to the face of the world at large**.', Robert Roberts, "The Visible Hand of God," *The Christadelphian* 18, no. 205 (1881): 308.

Brother Jardine, writing on the scientific implications of Joshua's 'long day', are another example of harmonizing Biblical interpretation to scientific facts.[836]

These earlier Christadelphian approaches to issues in Genesis reveal a strong preference for accepting established scientific facts, and interpreting Scripture in harmony with them. It was understood that both the Scriptures and the natural creation are works of God by which He has revealed Himself reliably, and that the two will always be in harmony when interpreted correctly. Most importantly, these earlier commentators saw no struggle for authority between science and scripture; 'Every thing in art and science are but copies of the workings of God's spirit in nature', as Jardine wrote.[837]

It was also understood that truths revealed by the natural creation are as much God's message as truths revealed by Scripture; though both require interpretation, in both cases it is ultimately God speaking, and these commentators considered the revelations of the book of God's Work (the natural creation), to be just as authoritative as the revelations of the book of God's Word (the Bible).

Is the earth a sphere?

A highly significant early example of interpreting Scripture harmoniously with established scientific facts, can be found in the curious case of brother Charles Walker's answer to the question 'Is it wrong to believe that

[836] 'In the one case, the standing of the sun was but an illusion of which we have a demonstration of a similar kind every day in the rising and setting of it. And not only did the sun stand still, but the moon too, which if Moses had not recorded it would have been added in this our day as the fact as well. The sun could not appear to stand still without the moon appearing to do so also, and we may add the stars besides. Neither are we to suppose that on that notable day the earth—this globe—stood still, as had that occurred it would inevitably have been destroyed, as illustrated in the law of motion in the sudden stoppage of a railway train. The laws of motion and gravitation forbid us to presume that scripture speaks scientific truth in recording that the sun stood still, and that the moon stood still; or, that in believing that they both stood still, we are to scientifically infer that the earth stood that they might appear to do so, that the illusion they stood might be produced, but they cannot forbid us believing the truth of the record for all that.', W Jardine, "The Bible as a Law of Life and Immortality," *Ambassador of the Coming Age* 1, no. 6 (1864): 94.

[837] Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 346.

the earth is a sphere?'.[838] As much as we may consider this question completely absurd, it was clearly of immense importance to brother Griffiths, who wrote to The Christadelphian magazine expressing his concerns on the matter.

Brother Griffiths claimed the scientific conclusion that the earth was a revolving sphere denied the inspiration of Scripture,[839] that the idea was 'pagan in origin',[840] and that it was not possible to harmonize it with Scripture.[841]

He associated it with Roman Catholic apostasy,[842] denounced it as failing to follow 'the plainly worded inspired narrative of creation',[843] and leading to people discovering 'that the Bible and modern science are at variance'.[844]

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[838] Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 346–48.

[839] 'The veracity and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures **are denied by many on the basis of the revolving globe-earth theory**', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 346.

[840] 'The globe-earth theory **is essentially pagan in its origin**', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 346.

[841] 'no amount of ingenuity has yet succeeded in harmonizing it with the cosmogony of the Bible.', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 346.

[842] 'Through Copernicus and Galileo the theory has acquired a distinct Romish taint. We may blame the author of "Lead Kindly Light" for following the glimmer of Rome's magic lantern,[1] instead of bringing his mental difficulties to be solved in the light of the word of God;' , Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 346.

[843] 'what about those who allow themselves to be led by the vapourings of scientific theorists while pondering over **the plainly worded inspired narrative of creation**?', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 346.

[844] 'The wrong is there all the same, and its effects become manifest when he who has swallowed the morsel finds, as the logical outcome of an adopted bastard theory, **that the Bible and modern science are at**

Brother Griffith quoted a professor who apparently claimed the sphericity of the earth could never be decisively proved,[845] dismissed an astronomer supporting it as 'an evolutionist of the first order',[846] and made repeated appeals to passages of Scripture which he believed contradicted the conclusion that the earth was a sphere rotating in space.[847] [848] [849]

Brother Walker's reply is highly instructive as a model for addressing such controversies. He first objected to Griffiths' accusation that those brothers holding the scientific view in question were unfaithful to the Word of God, observing that the spherical shape of the earth was readily available by simple observation and that many other Christians had found no difficulty in reconciling the view with Scripture.[850]Brother Walker

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variance, and verbal inspiration a farce. . . .', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 346.

[845] 'The late Prof. Woodhouse, of Cambridge University, once wrote, in reference to the globe-earth theory**— "We shall never arrive at a time when we shall be able to pronounce it absolutely proved to be true**. The nature of the subject excludes such a possibility" (Astronomy, Vol. 1, p. 13).', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 346.

[846] 'The "great astronomer," Sir Robert Ball — wherein does his greatness lie? Certainly not in his discovery or advocacy of scientific truth. **He is an evolutionist of the first order, and a pronounced anti-creationist**.', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 346.

[847] 'Is it not a fact that the Bible teaches that there are but two great lights and but one sun?', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 346.

[848] 'Is it not **the teaching of Scripture that the earth, that is, the dry land, is a stationary body**, founded upon the seas, and established upon the floods, and with its foundations in the deep?', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 346.

[849] 'Is it not **the plain testimony of Moses** that sun, moon, and stars, were made and set in the heavens on the fourth day of Creation week?', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 347.

[850] 'We would not discuss this matter were it not that **our brother does himself and others an injustice** in proclaiming the well settled belief of so many of his brethren a "wrong" and "bastard theory" and so forth; and quite unfaithful to the Word of God. This is not the case at all. Speaking for ourselves: before we learned

likewise dismissed as irrelevant the 'pagan' origin of the view, and its support by Roman Catholic astronomers,[851] pointed out that brother Griffith's out of context citing of a single professor who supported brother Griffiths' view failed address the fact that he was contradicted by the scholarly consensus,[852] and observed that the vast majority of Bible believing astronomers held that the earth was spherical.[853]

Addressing the Scriptural record, brother Walker denied that it should be interpreted as Griffith claimed,[854] noted that the Genesis account of creation was sufficiently ambiguous that it could be misinterpreted or

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"the truth" we were quite well convinced of the spherical figure of the earth from perfectly candid study of natural phenomena, and of navigation, which certainly "works" on the spherical basis. And we have found nothing in the Scriptures to unsettle this conviction in the least. Quite the contrary. In fact, the "enormous distances and magnitudes" which appear to be a stumbling block to our brother, are to us only the fitting suggestions of the Infinite and Eternal. And this is the impression of many of the brethren, as it was of the late Dr. Thomas and brother Roberts.', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 347.

[851] 'Admitted that "the globe-earth theory" is of "pagan" origin, **it is not therefore untrue. Much natural truth is of "pagan" discovery**. We do not reject it on that account; and as to Galileo and the "Romish taint," we have always understood that the whole weight of Papal authority was thrown *against* "the globe-earth theory," which it has since been compelled to accept as true.', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 347.

[852] With regard to the remarks of Professor Woodhouse, we are inclined to think a great many of his brother professors would have differed from his conclusion. It would largely depend upon just what he meant by "absolutely proved;" and as he is dead we cannot ask him.', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 347.

[853] So far as we understand, the prevailing type of "Scripture-revering Astronomers" **is that of believers in the spherical earth**.', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 347.

[854] 'No; the Bible does not *absolutely limit* the number of "great lights" to *two*; nor does it affirm that there is *absolutely* only one sun in the universe. It tells us that this is so *with reference to the earth* (which is obvious enough to the most elementary observation), but it also tells us that God made "the stars also," without telling us what the stars are. Later, an apostle speaks of "one star differing from another star in glory," without

misunderstood,[855] observed that the purpose of the creation account was not to teach astronomy to the Hebrews (who did not know even the extent of the earth), but to reveal to them the true creator in contradiction to the claims made for the pagan gods around them.[856]

He also noted the problems caused by interpreting the Genesis 1 creation record literally.[857] Showing his trust in the consensus of scientific findings, brother Walker denied strongly the claim that the issue under

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defining the extent of the "glory" of any.', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 347-8.

[855] 'Moses' testimony is not so "plain" **that it cannot be misinterpreted or misunderstood**.', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 348.

[856] Moses' testimony was given to Israel in what might be called the infancy of the world, **when men did not know the extent of the earth, let alone that of the sun, moon, and stars**. And, as we believe, it was given (by God through Moses), **not so much to instruct Israel in cosmogony in detail, as to impress upon them the idea that The Most High God is the Possessor of Heaven and Earth** (Gen. 14:22). And this **against the claims of the gods of the nations**, as was abundantly proved in Israel's history.', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 348.

[857] 'As to "the fourth day," we do not know of any "day" in the literal sense apart from the sun and its motion. And, therefore, if the "days" of Genesis 1. are to be taken as literal days, we feel bound to admit the sun as the origin of the "light," and "*evening* and *morning*" that were the characteristics of "the first day." How can you have "evening and morning" without the sun? We must settle up "the plain testimony" of verse 5 with that of verses 14–19. As we said before (*The Christadelphion*, 1910, p. 269), "If we understand Moses as saying that the sun came into existence on 'the fourth day,' we make him contradict himself; we make him present us with day and night, evening and morning, without the sun upon which these things depend."', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 348.

discussion was based on mere speculation, or that it was an 'unproved assumption', by appealing to standard scientific textbooks and established observable facts.[858] [859]

Conclusion

It is remarkable that both the forums of argument made by Brother Griffiths, and the answers supplied by brother Walker, are virtually the same as those in the disputes over other scientific theories, later in the 20th century. We have much to learn from our past.

[858] '**No; there are "natural facts" underlying the "speculation**." Such are the ascertained velocity of light, the eclipses of Jupiter's moons, the fact that the best telescopes will not resolve the stars into discs as in the case of the planets; the fact of the existence of the planet Neptune as simultaneously discovered by Adams and Le Verrier; the facts of parallax and spectrum analysis. "**Natural facts" are the essence of modern astronomy**.', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 348.

[859] 'Without committing ourselves exactly to the figures named, we may say that what our brother calls an "unproved assumption" **is with us a well-settled conviction, for reasons which may be found in any good work on astronomy**, Sir Robert Ball's "Story of the Heavens," for example.', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 348.

Prove All Things

'agapaō and phileō: Use and abuse in the Gospels'

Phil Evans

Abstract

It is commonly believed that the Greek words agapaō and phileō refer to two different qualities of love, the former self-sacrificial and divinely oriented love, the latter fraternal and familial love. This article finds that lexical evidence from the New Testament contradicts such a distinction.

Introduction

Love is one of the central themes of the holy Scriptures. The glorious hope of everlasting life that we share is a gift from our Heavenly Father, whose love was the prime motivation in sacrificing His Son for us (John 3:16). A recognition of this fact naturally leads us to demonstrate love to one another. The Apostle John says as much in his First Epistle:

> "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

(1 John 4:10-11)

Many of us have a passing familiarity with two of the common Greek words behind our English term "love" in the New Testament: agapaō and phileō. [860] Common wisdom is that two different kinds of love are intended whenever these words appear:

- agapaō denotes a divine, self-sacrificial love, exemplified in God's offering of his Son
- phileō denotes an 'inferior' human love, more akin to a warm, friendly affection

[860] A third word is *storgē.* Although it does not appear in the New Testament, we find a related adjective, *philostorgos*, in Romans 12:10 where it refers to a kind affection.

Our Lord's threefold questioning of Peter in John 21:15-19 is frequently appealed to as the 'proof-text' supporting this distinction. [861] Armed with this, the temptation then is to assume that every New Testament occurrence of "love" neatly conforms to one of these definitions. It is not uncommon, for example, to hear exhortations to 'move on' from a phileō love in order that we might agape one another, with the assumption that this is the 'preferred' love that God wishes us to show.

The aim of this study is to demonstrate that:

1. These common characterisations of agapaō as 'divine love' and phileō as 'human love' are not so clearly delineated in the Biblical text as is often assumed.

2. The ideas expressed by the two terms enjoy substantial overlap (especially in John's gospel), and in many instances are virtually synonymous.

3. John's usage of agapaō and phileō in the 21st chapter of his gospel can more likely be attributed to stylistic reasons rather than any real distinction in meaning.

Human or Divine?

If we insist that agape always refers to divine love, we start to encounter problems as soon as Matthew Chapter 5, where Jesus says:

> "For if you love (agapaō) those who love (agapaō) you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?"
>
> (Matthew 5:46)

The context of this passage is the exhortation to love one's enemies. Jesus explains that this requires an attitude that goes beyond mere reciprocation, and uses the hated tax collectors as an example of how not to

[861] "Jesus uses the word for love which is characteristic, in the New Testament, of the highest love there is, the love with which God loved the world, the love which prompts a man to lay down his life for his friends." Norris, Alfred. *Peter Fisher of Men*. The Christadelphian, 1982.

demonstrate this. Yet the word for "love" used in both instances is agapaō, which in this context can hardly refer to the love of God. [862]

The following passages show the other six instances where agapaō is used in a negative sense:

"Woe to you Pharisees! For you love (agapaō) the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces."

(Luke 11:43)

"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved (agapaō) the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."

(John 3:19)

"…for they [the Pharisees] loved (agapaō) the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God."

(John 12:43)

"For Demas, in love (agapaō) with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica…"

(2 Timothy 4:10)

"Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved (agapaō) gain from wrongdoing."

(2 Peter 2:15)

"Do not love (agapaō) the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves (agapaō) the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

(1 John 2:15)

[862] The parallel account can be found in Luke 6:32, where "tax collectors" has been replaced by "sinners". This strengthens the argument that *agapaō* is not always divine love.

Each of these examples demonstrates the difficulty in restricting the Greek word agapaō to a "good" love or a sacrificial love or a divine love.

John's usage

In considering the theme of love in the New Testament, the Apostle John tends to become a focus, and for good reason. Considering agapaō alone, John's writings include one-third (68) of the total occurrences, 37 of which appear in his gospel. Phileō likewise receives the most generous usage by John, occurring 13 times in his gospel (more than the three synoptic gospels together). We have already seen that the commonly-assumed distinction between the two words cannot always be upheld across the gospels as a whole. But what of John's writings specifically? The following table surveys the various ways in which he uses both words:

	phileō	*agapaō*
The Father's love for the Son	John 5:20	John 3:35
Jesus' love for his friends	John 11:3	John 11:5
The love of God for men	John 16:27	John 17:23
The love of men for Jesus	John 16:27	John 8:42
Jesus' love for John	John 20:2	John 21:7

These examples show that John uses both words more-or-less synonymously, a point agreed on by virtually all modern commentators. [863] [864] [865] [866] [867] [868] [869] [870] [871] To insist upon a rigid definition for either term is an over-simplification, and often cannot be supported by the text.

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[863] "To make firm distinctions between *phileō* love and *agapaō* love is incorrect, for the meanings of the two words overlap…In Jn 21:15–27, some people make a distinction between the two words for love, *agapaō* and *phileō*. But these words do not have distinctly separate meanings, and John is famous for using virtual synonyms without any difference in meaning; he often switches between words merely for the sake of variety." Mounce, William D. *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006.

[864] "A basic error of many exegetes is to emphasize the differences of meaning between synonymous terms found in a list; for instance, the terms for "love" in John 21:15–17, the types of sacrifice in Hebrews 10:8 or the terms for prayer in Philippians 4:6. We must at all times be aware of the possibility that the reason for the employment of different terms or phrases may be stylistic rather than theological; repetition may have been used for emphasis, and the differences between the terms should not be stressed." Osborne, Grant R. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006.

[865] "Sometimes a lot has been made of these differences, but the fact is that *agapaō* and *phileō* are used synonymously in the Fourth Gospel." Kruse, Colin G. *John: An Introduction and Commentary*. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity, 2003.

[866] "There is no reason, on the grounds of Johannine usage, for seeing a difference in meaning between the two verbs." Morris, Leon. *The Gospel according to John*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995.

[867] "Many scholars, however, including J. H. Bernard, J. Moffatt, C. K. Barrett, L. Morris, and G. Stählin, have doubted whether any distinction is intended in such places as Jn. 21:15–17, where Jesus used both terms while questioning Peter about his loyalty. Morris demonstrated convincingly that such variation is a consistent feature of John's style (Studies in the Fourth Gospel [1969], pp. 293–319)." Bromiley, Geoffrey William. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.b. Eerdmans, 1979.

[868] "It is difficult to see why a writer of such simple Greek as John should have used the two words in this context unless he intended a distinction to be drawn between their meanings. The existence of any clear

This is not to say that both words are completely synonymous in every instance, but rather that their meanings substantially overlap. The point is that simply appealing to the underlying Greek word in order to determine meaning is fallacious. Meaning is determined by context, which should be uppermost in our minds when studying any word. [872]

distinction, here or elsewhere, is, however, seriously disputed by scholars, and is not noticed by ancient commentators…" Wood, D. R. W., and I. Howard Marshall. *New Bible Dictionary*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.

[869] "The suggestion that a distinction in meaning should be seen comes primarily from a number of British scholars of the 19th century, especially Trench, Westcott, and Plummer. It has been picked up by others such as Spicq, Lenski, and Hendriksen. But most modern scholars decline to see a real difference in the meaning of the two words in this context" Biblical Studies Press. *The NET Bible First Edition Notes.* Biblical Studies Press, 2006.

[870] "It is difficult to find any significance in the pattern of theses words' usages. Some scholars, having drawn hard and fast differences between the words, have imposed these differences upon various texts of Scripture and thereby produced strained and awkward interpretations. Only on occasion do these words bear particular meanings distinct from one another." Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN, U.S.A.: AMG Publishers, 1993.

[871] "Though some persons have tried to assign certain significant differences of meaning between ἀγαπάωα, ἀγάπηα and φιλέωα, φιλία, it does not seem possible to insist upon a contrast of meaning in any and all contexts. For example, the usage in Jn 21:15–17 seems to reflect simply a rhetorical alternation designed to avoid undue repetition." Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996.

[872] "The best English example is simply the verb *love*. One may use it for sexual intercourse, platonic love, emotional love, the love of God, and more. The context defines and delimits the word, precisely as it does the verbs for love in the pages of holy Scripture." Carson, D. A. *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000.

"Do you love me?"

This leads us finally to a consideration of the well-known exchange between the Apostle Peter and Jesus in John 21:15-19. The relevant verses are as follows:

" 15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."

16 He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."

17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." "

The pattern of Greek words is shown in the table below:

Jesus' question	**Peter's response**
agapaō	phileō
agapaō	phileō
phileō	phileō

A great deal has been made of John's usage of these words here. Those who note the shift and assume it to be theologically significant usually interpret the passage in a way similar to the following:

Jesus asks Peter if he loves him unreservedly with a divine, self-sacrificing love. Peter replies that he does love his Master, but only with a natural, human affection. Jesus asks the question again, with Peter's response remaining the same. By the third time, Jesus has realised that Peter is not ready to commit to the divine standard of love that he desires, and so he relents and agrees to a compromise with Peter, recognising that his disciple, whilst faithful, is still a 'work in progress'. [873]

[873] "[Peter] will keep his profession of loyalty at the lowest level a man can claim, but the highest of which he can be sure." Norris, Alfred. *Peter Fisher of Men*. The Christadelphian, 1982.

This interpretation should be rejected on a number of grounds:

1. It relies on the assumption that agapaō and phileō are intended to convey different meanings which, as demonstrated, is not correct in the context of John's gospel.

2. It does not propose any reason for Jesus questioning Peter three times. If Jesus' intention was simply to force Peter to capitulate and profess the 'correct' kind of love, then he has failed without comment.

3. The conversation most likely took place in Aramaic, not Greek. Therefore the choice of words here are John's rather than those of the original participants in the conversation. [874]

4. John uses three other pairs of words in this passage: boskō and poimainō ('feed' and 'take care of' the sheep), arnia and probata ('lambs' and 'sheep'), and oida and ginōskō (both rendered 'you know' in v. 17). These other pairs are rarely the subject of detailed theological exposition, so it is curious why agapaō and phileō should be. [875]

[874] The objection is sometimes raised that *every* word in scripture must be significant (the 'verbal plenary' model of inspiration). Sometimes this can cause more harm than good, causing us to look for special meanings in every word, and read into the text ideas which were never intended. Certainly the scriptures are divinely-inspired, but they were also written by *human* authors. Whatever our view of inspiration, we must recognise that scripture was not written in a vacuum. It was written by authors who used different vocabulary, syntax and style to convey one inspired message. Osborne (2006) echoes this: "The Bible was not revealed via "the tongues of angels." Though inspired of God, it was written in human language and within human cultures."

[875] "But in this context, it is difficult to see a fundamental theological or linguistic or syntactical reason for the changes. We seem to be in the realm of slight variation for the sake of vague things like "feel" or "style." In any case, my point is that it is rather strange to insist on a semantic distinction between the two words for "to love" in this context, and not on small distinctions between other pairs of words in the same context." Carson, D. A. *Exegetical Fallacies*. Carlisle, U.K.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Paternoster ; Baker Books, 1996.

5. The claim is sometimes made that the Biblical writers invested agapaō with special theological meaning, because no other term existed to adequately express the love of God. [876] However, diachronic[877] study has disproved this, showing that the word was in common usage in Greek literature from the 4th century CE onwards. [878] [879]

6. John's very own summary in verse 17 discounts the possibility of a variance in meaning. "Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love (phileō) me?"" This is technically untrue - Jesus had only used this word once, not three times, giving further evidence for John's synonymous usage of the terms.

Conclusion

If we accept that John's usage of agapaō and phileō in this chapter are not intended to impart some deep theological insight into the love of God, how then are we to understand the passage?

[876] "Moreover, it was argued, the reason the [agapaō] word group became extremely popular in the Septuagint and subsequently in the New Testament is that writers in the biblical tradition realized they needed some word other than those currently available to convey the glorious substance of the love of the God of Judeo-Christian revelation; so they deployed this extremely rare word group and filled it with the content just described, until it triumphed in frequency as well as in substance." Carson, D. A. *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000.

[877] Diachronic study is the study of how languages change over time. Its 'opposite' is synchronic study, which examines a language at a particular point in time.

[878] Joly, Robert. *Le vocabulaire chrétien de l'amour est-il original? Philein et agapan dans le grec antique*. Bruxelles: Presses universitaires de Bruxelles, 1968.

[879] "Agape describes many types of love, having a range of meaning similar to that of the English word "love," so one should not place exegetical weight on an author's use of agape/agapao as opposed to other words available to him—it was simply the general, all-encompassing word for love." Pratt, Richard L., Jr. *I & II Corinthians*. Vol. 7. Holman New Testament Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000.

Perhaps an historical over-emphasis on word meanings in this instance has blinded us to a simple explanation.

As many commentators note, the incident is a parallel of Peter's earlier threefold denial of his Lord, even down to some of the finer narrative details. [880] Having bravely followed Jesus on that fateful night (when all others had fled), Peter's lapse in faith must have left a mark on his conscience that is difficult to for us to fathom. Matthew and Luke both record that he "wept bitterly". [881] John's own emphasis in verse 17 is not on the shift in words used, but rather the number of times Jesus asked Peter the same question. He appears to be deliberately mirroring Peter's earlier failure. [882] By the third question, Peter would doubtless have recognised the connection.

Bro. Whittaker (1984) rejects this view, seeing it as inconceivable that "Jesus would torture his apostle in this fashion", adding that "this is not the Jesus of the gospels". [883] However, far from seeing this as "torture", could it not equally demonstrate the gentle compassion of Jesus in allowing Peter to make amends for his past failings? Here is an opportunity for him to confess a love for his Lord not once, but three times. And in so doing, Peter is given the opportunity to 'undo' the guilt and shame which must have been his companions for many restless nights after the betrayal.

In conclusion, none of this is to say that there is nothing special about the love of God. On the contrary, scripture teaches us that there is great deal that is special about it. But to appeal to a single word as exclusively expressing all the qualities of divine love is illegitimate, and should be avoided in our study of scripture.

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[880] For example, the charcoal fire in John 18:18.

[881] Matthew 26:75; Luke 22:62

[882] "Imagine again the scene as the evangelist framed it: a charcoal fire and three questions about Peter's relationship to Jesus. It hardly takes a genius to relate this event to that of the denial. Facing up to oneself is a traumatic experience." Borchert, Gerald L. *The New American Commentary Volume 25 B - John 12-21*. Nashville: B & H Pub. Group, 2002.

[883] Whittaker, Harry. *Studies in the Gospels.* Biblia, 1984.

Review: Who Needs Theology?

Dave Burke

What is theology, why do we need it, and how should we practise it? These are the key questions addressed by Grenz and Olson's *Who Needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God.*

The authors explain their motivation by observing that 'Many Christians today not only are uninformed about basic theology but even seem hostile to it.'[884] They believe this is largely the result of '*popular and pervasive misunderstandings* of theology',[885] and express their desire for 'a revival of sound theological interest and reflection among God's people'[886] in 'a world that desperately needs bright, articulate Christians.'[887]

This article will review the themes, methods and sources presented in the book, and conclude with some thoughts about their implications for Christian living and evangelism.

Grenz and Olson note that theological illiteracy leaves the church vulnerable to heresy and secular attack,[888] but because so many Christians assume theology is the sole responsibility of pastors and professional scholars they rarely see the need for personal theological engagement. The authors hope to counter this trend by demystifying theology in a way that demonstrates its relevance and practical application for the layman.

The message of *Who Needs Theology* is predicated on two basic tenets: (1) everyone is a theologian, and (2) not all theologies are equal.[889] While recognising that theology is the study of God and its purpose is to develop

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[884] Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Who Needs Theology? An Introduction to the Study of God.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996, Kindle Location 27.

[885] Grenz and Olson, *Who Needs Theology*, Kindle Location 27.

[886] Grenz and Olson, *Who Needs Theology*, Kindle Location 27.

[887] Grenz and Olson, *Who Needs Theology*, Kindle Location 27.

[888] 'We are also concerned that individual Christians who lack theological literacy and acumen will be tossed about by every wind of doctrine that comes sweeping through our media-dominated culture.' Grenz and Olson, *Who Needs Theology*, Kindle Location 27.

[889] 'So when we say "not all theologies are equal," we do not mean that professional theology is better than ministerial theology or that ministerial theology is better than lay theology. What we do mean is that those three are preferable to folk theology. And among themselves they are equally valuable even though they involve different

a greater understanding of Him, Grenz and Olson also define theology as 'faith seeking understanding' through a process of reflection.[890] Since everyone is capable of theological reflection, anyone can be a theologian. Qualitative differences between theologies arise from varying levels of reflection. The authors illustrate this in an early chapter with a 'spectrum of reflection'[891], as follows:[892]

← folk theology lay theology ministerial theology professional theology academic theology →

The rest of the book is devoted to methods and tools with which theology can be defended and applied.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide a justification for theology, explaining what it is and why we should defend it. This is necessary because theology is often poorly understood by the layman.[893] Grenz and Olson show that

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levels of skill in reflection on Christian faith and its meaning.' Grenz and Olson, *Who Needs Theology*, Kindle Location 285.

[890] 'Earlier we defined theology as faith seeking understanding. By reflection we mean the seeking with the mind that begins with a certitude about God and God's Word and attempts to discover what truly is implied there about believing and living. It does include a recognition of the possibility that we may have been believing wrongly or incompletely.' Grenz and Olson, *Who Needs Theology*, Kindle Locations 193-194.

[891] 'Theologies, then, lie along a spectrum of reflection. At one extreme end is what we will call "folk theology," while at the other end lies its opposite, "academic theology." Between these lie various levels of theology—some less and some more reflective in their approaches to understanding Christian faith.' Grenz and Olson, *Who Needs Theology*, Kindle Location 194. Note that folk theology is considered the lowest on this scale.

[892] Christadelphian theology is typically lay theology with a smattering of folk theology. Occasionally it reaches the level of ministerial theology, but not often.

[893] 'For some, theology consists in dry debates about unimportant, unknowable or nonsensical points of doctrine. Theologians wonder about useless matters such as: Can God make a rock so heavy that he himself cannot lift it? Or, How many angels can stand on the head of a pin? They squabble with each other about potentially dangerous points of doctrine such as, Did God predestine the elect to salvation and the reprobate to condemnation before creating the world? To many Christians, such theological debate—and therefore theology and theologians in general—can only hinder their more important task, namely, sharing the gospel with the lost.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 368-372). Kindle Edition.

theology is as ancient as the gospel itself, and was practised by the earliest believers.[894] Theology is an aspect of discipleship and a form of spiritual discipline,[895] shaping every facet of Christian life.[896]

So why does theology need defending? Because it is controversial, the authors say.[897] Why is it controversial? Partly because it gives rise to a clash of theological cultures[898] but primarily because it involves the detailed

[894] 'Jesus himself invited his disciples to engage in theology. He reminded his disciples of the ancient commandment to love God with their minds (Mt 22:37; Mk 12:30; Lk 10:27). And Paul reiterated the Lord's admonition. He spoke about the importance of taking "captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor 10:5). These biblical statements make clear that the life of discipleship is all-encompassing.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 431-433). Kindle Edition.

[895] 'Individual thoughts are merely the symptoms of a deeper reality. Lying beneath them are the core convictions-the belief structure, the worldview-that govern not only thoughts but also entire lives. Discipleship means allowing Christ to be Lord of these. …Theological reflection is a crucial aspect of disciplining the mind. As people seek answers to the great questions about the Christian belief system, they engage in the task of bringing their convictions into conformity with God's own truth.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 437-441). Kindle Edition.

[896] 'Theology doesn't only enhance personal glorifying of God, however. It functions in the Christian community in the same manner, coming to expression in every aspect of community life. Most significantly, theology shapes corporate worship. …Good theology leads to good worship, and good worship glorifies God.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 446-449). Kindle Edition.

[897] 'When Bethany College in West Virginia began as a Christian educational institution in the nineteenth century, its revivalist founder wrote into its charter that it would never have a professorship of theology and that its main textbook would always be the Bible. Whether they have gone so far as to ban theology in the charter or not, numerous other Bible colleges and Christian institutions of higher learning have also shunned serious, reflective study of theology in their curricula.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 457-460). Kindle Edition.

[898] 'The controversy arises when laypeople and pastors encounter professional theologians practicing the theology described and defined in the previous chapters—with a few added dimensions. We are not changing the definition developed in chapter three; rather, we are now suggesting that the definition itself implies some activities to which

scrutiny—and even criticism—of long-established doctrines.[899] Grenz and Olson list four main arguments raised by those who typically object to theology:

(1) The killjoy objection[900]
(2) The divisiveness charge[901]
(3) The speculation accusation[902]

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many "ordinary" Christians and pastors object.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 469-471). Kindle Edition.

[899] 'Theology, whether lay, ministerial or professional, always begins with some body of beliefs and focuses on them in a critical and constructive way, examining their validity and attempting to articulate them in an intelligible manner to contemporary culture. …It is especially the job of professional theologians to examine critically and to articulate anew already accepted beliefs-and this is what gets them in trouble with many good Christian people. …[T]heology has played a controversial role because of its tasks of critical reflection and constructive articulation of fundamental beliefs.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 482-493). Kindle Edition.

[900] 'Every theologian is familiar with versions of the Killjoy Objection. Among them are statements or questions such as: "Aren't God and his Word meant to be enjoyed? And doesn't theology just examine them to death and take all the life out of the Christian's relationship with God?"' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 511-513). Kindle Edition.

[901] 'The truth in the objection does not make the objection completely valid, however. While it is true that "Jesus unites," it is also true that "Jesus divides." Jesus himself said, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Mt 10:34). … The main answer to the Divisiveness Charge against theology is that the primary purpose of theology is neither to divide nor to unite, but to discover and protect truth. Martin Luther once declared, "Peace if possible, but truth at any cost!" and that must be theology's motto.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 571-578). Kindle Edition.

[902] 'Unfortunately, many Christians have the impression that the main occupation of theologians is useless speculation. This accusation has two prongs. On the one side it charges that theology delves too deeply into mysteries that are simply beyond human understanding. On the other side it charges that in this preoccupation with the unknowable, theology loses touch with practical, everyday reality.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 578-580). Kindle Edition.

(4) The stalemate indictment[903]

While sympathising with some of the underlying concerns, the authors show that these objections are unwarranted. Good theology does not rob believers of their joy in the Word, it unites more than it divides, it is not based on mere speculation, and it helps the church to progress and mature.[904]

Chapters 5 and 6 address the tasks, traditions and tools of theology. Here Grenz and Olson discuss the origins of Christian theology and its underlying belief system. In the early years of the church theology was used primarily as a means of defining orthodoxy and refuting heresy.[905] This is the critical task of theology. Alongside it runs the constructive task: systematising Christian belief in the light of Scripture.[906]

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[903] 'Specifically, this complaint argues that after the formative stages of Christian theology in the first few centuries, the discipline of theology became mainly critical and has failed to achieve progress through constructive solutions to problems. To this way of thinking, theologians are very adept at criticizing Christian beliefs but hardly ever go beyond that to providing helpful new solutions to old theological dilemmas in such a way that these solutions become the consensus within the churches.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 601-603). Kindle Edition.

[904] 'But we don't wish to leave the impression that we would defend every theologian or way in which theology past or present goes about its tasks. That would be entirely wrong. All we want to defend here-and throughout the book-is the discipline and practice of theology itself. We do object to specific theologians and their ways of doing theology. …But we object just as strongly to any suggestion that theology itself—when rightly practiced—is spiritually deadening, unnecessarily divisive, merely speculative or ineffective.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 647-651). Kindle Edition.

[905] 'Theology's critical task, then, includes examining Christian teachings and beliefs for consistency with authentic Christian sources of truth. …Ever since Clement and Irenaeus, toward the end of the first and second centuries respectively, the church has found it necessary to train people to inspect Christian teachings and ideas and decide whether they are sound or not. These are theologians.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 676-696). Kindle Edition.

[906] 'The second major task of theology, the constructive task, is to set forth the unity and coherence of the biblical teaching about God, ourselves and the world in the context in which God calls us to be disciples. This goes well

The tools of theology are defined by Grenz and Olson as follows: (a) biblical message, (b) theological heritage, and (c) thought-forms of contemporary culture. Together they comprise a continuum of knowledge and experience spanning the entire history of the church.

We interpret the biblical message in light of theological heritage,[907] articulating it in the language of our time[908] and employing it to set the agenda for our modern society.[909] Thus theology remains rooted in the past without losing relevance to the present.[910]

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beyond critically examining and categorizing Christian beliefs to attempting to construct and unify Christian doctrines and relate them faithfully and relevantly to contemporary culture.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 755-757). Kindle Edition.

[907] 'Our heritage is a reference point in that it contains examples of previous attempts to fulfill the theological mandate from which we today can learn. Looking at the past alerts us to some of the pitfalls we should avoid, some of the land mines that could trip us up, and some of the cul-de-sacs or blind alleys that are not worth our exploration.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 961-963). Kindle Edition..

[908] 'Theology seeks to assist the people of God in a type of translation task. We attempt to set forth Christian beliefs in language that people today can understand. Theology asks, "What concepts in contemporary culture form appropriate vehicles to express the biblical truth that the church has always sought to pass from generation to generation and from location to location?"' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 999-1002). Kindle Edition.

[909] 'Second, a relevant theology speaks to the problems, longings and ethos of contemporary culture. The social context in which we live presses upon us certain specific issues, which at their core are theological. We avoid grappling with these only to our peril. Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1003-1005). Kindle Edition.

[910] 'Who needs theology? The contemporary church does. Why? So that we can indeed be God's people in our world. What kind of theology do we need? One that is truly scriptural, completely Christian and totally relevant. One that embodies the biblical message as proclaimed by the one people of God in a manner that interfaces with life in our specific context. Only this kind of a theology can provide us the intellectual resources we need to live out our calling as Christ's disciples in our world.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1025-1028). Kindle Edition.

Chapter 7 looks at contextualisation and method. Contextualisation is necessary for constructive theology because we are bringing an ancient message to a modern world. This necessitates engagement with contemporary language, culture, and social context.[911] As a result, theology cannot be said to arise solely from Scripture; it is the product of a synthesis between the Word and our conceptual world.[912] This is not mere syncretism, for the process of contextualisation remains firmly grounded in the unchanging truths of the biblical witness.[913]

It is wrong to assume from this that the Bible contains a standalone systematic theology.[914] We require a more nuanced approach. If we focus on the message of Scripture to the exclusion of our own world we risk losing

[911] 'While necessarily biblical, theology is also never the product of Scripture alone. The goal of theological construction is not merely to say what the Bible says. Rather, our task is to construct biblical truth in a specific context. This leads us to an additional feature of the theology we need: Our theology must be contextually constructive.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1059-1060). Kindle Edition.

[912] 'We don't simply lift statements out of Joshua, Jeremiah, John and James, thinking this is the end of theology. Rather, we seek to understand the revelation of God mediated through the biblical writers for our context and our world. Indeed, try as we will, there is no alternative. We can't avoid living in the contemporary context; we can't shed the thought-forms, concepts, questions and aspirations of our world.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1074-1076). Kindle Edition.

[913] '*Should we start with the Bible?* The answer to "Where do we begin?" can only be "With the Bible." Indeed, the Bible-centered method seems correct. After all, as theologians we should always begin with Scripture.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1091-1092). Kindle Edition.

[914] 'Consider this: What do we find when we read the Bible? A book of doctrine, a discourse outlining one single, timeless doctrinal system? Hardly! Scripture consists of narratives, pithy sayings, poetic reflections. Even the teaching sections, such as Paul's letters, while not devoid of doctrinal content, are more concerned with applying belief to life than with providing a lengthy expose of Christian doctrine.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1095-1097). Kindle Edition.

sight of its application to contemporary life.[915] On the other hand, if we start with culture we risk importing a focal point which has little to do with the biblical world.[916]

To avoid these extremes Grenz and Olson propose a 'trialogue' in which Scripture, heritage and culture all intersect.[917] At the heart of this trialogue lies a 'scarlet thread'[918] which binds the three together by means of

[915] 'Going to the Bible first is a helpful proposal, yet it poses one grave danger. In our quest to read and be faithful to Scripture, we may overlook our culture. We may not give sufficient attention to the questions people today are asking. As a result, our doctrine—as biblical as it may appear to be—may in the end be irrelevant to the world in which God calls us to live as disciples.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1106-1108). Kindle Edition.

[916] 'We don't want to rush headlong into the culture-first approach, for it too poses a grave danger. It can lead us into the error of giving too much weight to the questions and concerns of contemporary men and women. …[F]ocusing too closely on our culture may lead us to take our theological agenda from our world rather than from the Bible. …[T]he focus on culture may blind us to places where our society and the Bible are at odds. We may fail to bring a thoroughly biblical critique to our culture. …We may fall into the trap of "cultural accommodation." In the attempt to be relevant we may lose the gospel.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1121-1126). Kindle Edition.

[917] 'How do we construct a contextual theology? Our answer is: By bringing our understanding of Scripture, our cognisance of our heritage and our reading of our cultural context into a creative trialogue.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1135-1136). Kindle Edition.

[918] 'What transforms our theology from a juxtaposing of loosely related doctrines into a systematic theology for our times is an organizing theme, a scarlet thread that runs through all of Christian doctrine. Theology becomes systematic by means of what we might call its "integrative motif."' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1169-1170). Kindle Edition.

an 'integrative motif.'[919] The authors identify this thread as the concept of community,[920] which they find central to the biblically-informed categories of theology, anthropology, Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.

The last two chapters (8 and 9) reflect upon the application of theology to the believer's life and the experience of becoming a reflective Christian. Grenz and Olson reiterate that theology is not a purely intellectual discipline, nor a mere collection of truths.

Instead it is a process of engagement that organises doctrine and integrates it with our modern experience.[921] This process is accessible to all believers. Anyone can become a theologian provided they possess—or strive to attain—the following prerequisites:

(a) knowledge of God[922]

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[919] 'What is an integrative moth Systematic theologians ideally order their presentation of the Christian faith around one specific concept. This concept acts as the central organizational feature of the systematic theology. It is the theme around which the various doctrines are structured.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1170-1172). Kindle Edition.

[920] 'As modernity with its focus on radical individualism wanes, contemporary thinkers are rediscovering community. Indeed, the central goal of culture is the attempt to construct and sustain bonds of commonality among individual members of that society. Therefore community offers a promising central theme around which to understand the seemingly disparate doctrines of our faith.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1191-1192). Kindle Edition.

[921] '*…The Christian theological task is to use the tools of the craft (the biblical message, our theological heritage and contemporary culture) to construct an interpretive framework that views all reality from the perspective that God has encountered us in Jesus of Nazareth.* Our goal in engaging in this task is to see the world through "Christian" eyes. We desire to understand and experience all reality in accordance with solid Christian beliefs.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1272-1274). Kindle Edition.

[922] 'First, being a Christian theologian at any level requires that a person be more interested in knowing God than in amassing ideas about God. ...The first and most basic prerequisite to being a theologian at any level, then, is a heart for God.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1377-1380). Kindle Edition.

(b) a keen desire for greater understanding[923]

(c) application and discipline[924]

The authors recommend a list of resources covering the three sources (or 'tools') of theology: Scripture, the theological heritage of the church, and contemporary culture. They urge an approach grounded in critical, constructive thinking, with a strong focus on objectivity.[925] The unspoken message is that good theology requires intellectual honesty.

[923] 'Second, being a theologian requires that you become dissatisfied with your present level of understanding. You must desire to deepen your comprehension of the Christian faith and be committed to growing toward mature thinking about God, yourself and the world.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1385-1386). Kindle Edition.

[924] 'Third, becoming a theologian requires that you be willing to work. Theology is not easy. Indeed, as with any endeavour undertaken with a goal of enrichment, "no pain, no gain!" Not only will engagement in theology sometimes lead you to leave behind comfortable but inadequate answers, it will also lead you through challenging reading, thinking and application.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1405-1406). Kindle Edition.

[925] 'As you concentrate on which beliefs are essential and which are not, begin to reflect on the criteria you are using. Are you applying merely subjective tests, such as what beliefs you find comfortable or familiar? Or are your criteria more objective? That is, are you evaluating beliefs on the basis of their connection to the biblical message—the gospel itself, the theological heritage of Christianity and their ability to speak to people today? Various criteria may have a proper place, but the more sophisticated levels of theological reflection rely on the latter (the objective) more than the former (the subjective).' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1495-1498). Kindle Edition.

In conclusion Grenz and Olson encourage the pursuit of theology *in community*,[926] a recommendation which harks back to the 'scarlet thread' of their creative trialogue. It is a poignant reminder that theology cannot be separated from our daily life in Christ.[927]

[926] 'One final note: Do not try to engage in theological reflection alone. Converse with other concerned Christians and leaders about your discoveries. We learn from each other. And others can caution us away from potentially dangerous paths.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1512-1513). Kindle Edition.

[927] 'Theology is crucial to the entire task of living Christianly in both church and world. Living Christianly involves asking and attempting to answer questions about God and the world. Thus living Christianly involves theology.' Grenz and Olson. *Who Needs Theology?* (Kindle Locations 1520-1521). Kindle Edition.

Review: How To Read Genesis

"How To Read Genesis", Tremper Longman III.

Russell Downs

Tremper Longman III (author of *How to Read Genesis*) is both an evangelical Christian and a scholar in Biblical studies. Tensions inevitably arise between his critical scholarly examination of the text, and his personal commitment to specific theological preconceptions. From a Christadelphian perspective this is interesting, because we face a similar challenge when engaging scholarship.

The book is an informal introduction to Genesis and does not delve into enough detail to be really satisfying. Although evolution is typically at the forefront of modern considerations of Genesis, it does not take a prominent place in the book and is mentioned only in passing.

Longman makes the point that Genesis was not written to take sides in any 21st century dispute. The ancient context was a controversy between the monotheism of Israel and the universal paganism of the surrounding nations, and the primeval history of Genesis was a polemic against those religions. This understanding is common to modern scholarship, and it is worth noting that it was proposed in our community by Brother Charles Walker, as early as 1910.[928]

Longman disagrees both with the Documentary Hypothesis and the traditional idea that Moses was the single author of the Pentateuch. Nevertheless, he is undecided on both the authorship and dating of the Pentateuch, beyond suggesting that Moses was the primary contributor. He suggests some parts of the Pentateuch pre-dated Moses, while others were redacted much later. However he considers Genesis as a literary whole, comprising three sections:

1. Primeval history, Genesis 1-11.
2. The patriarchal narratives, Genesis 12-36.

[928] 'Moses' testimony was given to Israel in what might be called the infancy of the world, when **men did not know the extent of the earth, let alone that of the sun, moon, and stars**. And, as we believe, it was given (by God through Moses), **not so much to instruct Israel in cosmogony in detail**, as to impress upon them the idea that The Most High God is the Possessor of Heaven and Earth (Gen. 14:22). **And this against the claims of the gods of the nations**, as was abundantly proved in Israel's history.', Charles C Walker, "Is It Wrong to Believe That the Earth Is a Sphere?," *The Christadelphian* 50, no. 590 (1913): 348.

3. The Joseph story, Genesis 37-50.

The most useful parts of his book are on primeval history, in particular his perspective on the similarities and differences between the early Genesis stories and ancient creation myths and the flood, as well as his summary of the light shone on the patriarchs by the Nuzi documents.

He does not attempt an answer of whether the actual flood was global or local, but suggests the flood as a historical event (global or local), was the source of both the ancient non-Hebrew accounts such as that found in the Atrahasis Epic, and the Biblical record itself, since there are common features that cannot be denied. However, he notes the non-Hebrew accounts, although much earlier, reflected the polytheistic religion that developed in Mesopotamia, while the later inspired Hebrew account is a historically authentic record of the flood.

With refreshing honesty he admits that the early ambitious claim of support for the Bible narrative by the Nuzi documents have been tempered by closer examination. This makes more credible his claim that the Nuzi documents still offer some support for the Biblical record.

It would have been better if he had called his book "How to read the primeval history of Genesis", and not attempted to cover the other sections, since his sections on the patriarchs and Joseph are brief and offer little insight beyond what an attentive Sunday School student already knows. Alternatively, he may have greatly expanded those two sections and written what would have been a very different book.

I initially excused his use of the New Living Translation as being consistent with his light approach. If no doctrinal points were to be built on it then no harm would be done, and it would render the book more readable. However I was disappointed to see citation of Hebrews 2:14-15 "... and only by dying could he break the power of the devil ..." used to support the evangelical Devil. Admittedly he was writing for evangelicals who are already committed to that view. But it was not good enough I think.

I very much looked forward to his final chapter "The Christological Difference". What he said was sound enough, but was too shallow to satisfy my questions. It would have been better to have either treated the topic at greater depth, or simply not included it at all.

Despite its weaknesses I enjoyed the book, and the perspectives that he offered. A more detailed analysis may have been more useful, but his work does allow a look at the forest without the distraction of too many trees.

The Seventh Day Adventists' Transition to Mainstream Christianity

Dave Burke

The Seventh Day Adventists (hereafter SDAs) are a Restorationist Christian sect with a membership of ~16 million worldwide.[929] From its beginnings during the Second Great Awakening, the SDA church upheld doctrines and practices at odds with Christian orthodoxy, tolerating doctrinal pluralism while claiming a prophetic ministry and defining themselves as God's faithful remnant in opposition to the apostasy of Christendom.[930] These characteristics led mainstream Christians to brand the sect heretical and cultic. Today, however, SDAs are widely considered evangelical and criticism is largely restricted to the fundamentalist fringe.[931]

BeVier (1992, pp. 80-95) claims, 'The Seventh-day Adventists have long sought acceptance by Evangelical Christianity.'[932] Yet the reality is very different. Rather than moving towards evangelical Christianity, SDAs found evangelicals reaching out to them as it became clear that SDA theology was not strictly monolithic.

[929] *Seventh-day Adventist World Church Statistics.* Retrieved October 12, 2011, from: http://www.adventist.org/world-church/facts-and-figures

[930] 'A few faithful men arose from time to time to proclaim new truth and expose long-cherished error, but the majority, like the Jews in Christ's day, or the papists in the time of Luther, were content to believe as their fathers believed, and to live as they lived.' White, E. G. 1947. *The Story of Redemption.* (354). Review and Herald Publishing Association: Hagerstown, MD.

[931] 'Seventh-day Adventists quite naturally become annoyed at being branded a cult when they believe in the Trinity, the full divinity of Christ, his incarnation and resurrection, the need for salvation, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and so on. Unlike many other Christian offshoots, they have not redefined these terms in their own way and their theology, on the whole, is straightforward mainstream Christian.' Barrett, D. V. 1996. *Sects, 'Cults' and Alternative Religions.* (72). Cassell PLC: London.

[932] BeVier, W. 1992, 'Current Trends of the Everchanging Cults', *Michigan Theological Journal*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 80–95.

Seventh Day Adventism remains one of very few heterodox sects to be successfully 'rehabilitated' into mainstream Christianity.[933]

This article will examine the causes of the SDAs' advancement from fringe sect to mainstream denomination, showing that the transition was not facilitated by explicit theological changes but by the longstanding breadth of the SDAs' doctrinal spectrum.

To understand how and why SDAs achieved rapprochement with evangelicals it is necessary to review their history. Officially founded as a distinct body in 1863, SDAs originated as an offshoot of William Miller's Adventist group (known as the Millerites) which collapsed into schism when a date predicted for the Second Advent passed without incident.[934]

The resulting pool of disillusioned believers finally coalesced into three rival groups; the smallest led by Hiram Edson, who claimed to have received a vision which at least partly vindicated Miller's prophecy.[935] This was quickly taken up by the community's more adaptable scholars. Sabbath observance was adopted during the final year of the Millerite movement, shortly before or after the Great Disappointment or concurrently with Edson's vision (depending on the source).[936] Edson retained it and formed alliances with similarly

[933] Others include the Campbellites (now known as Churches of Christ) and Herbert W. Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God (now known as Grace Communion International).

[934] 'William Miller (1782–1849), a lay Bible student (later a Baptist preacher), predicted that Christ would return to earth some time between 21 March 1843 and 21 March 1844. One of Miller's followers postponed the date to 22 October 1844. When Christ did not return on that day, however, there was 'great disappointment'.' Ferguson, S. B., & Packer, J. 2000. *New dictionary of theology* (electronic ed.) (637). InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL.

[935] 'A few, however, continued to believe that the end was near. One of these, Hiram Edson, saw a vision of Christ entering the second compartment of heaven. This proved to Edson that Miller's prophetic calculations were correct, though the event foretold was not the Second Advent, but the opening of an investigative judgment in heaven to determine who among the dead are worthy of resurrection.' Douglas, J. D., Cairns, E. E., & Ruark, J. E. 1978. *The new international dictionary of the Christian church.* (899). Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids.

[936] 'About the time that Edson gained this new view of the sanctuary cleansing, an important theological change was taking place in a company of Adventists in Washington, New Hampshire. A number of them, under the endeavors of Rachel Oakes, a Seventh Day Baptist, began to keep the seventh-day Sabbath.' Nichol, F. D. 1951. *Ellen*

minded post-Millerite groups at a series of conferences held between 1848-50. It was from his faction that the church now known as Seventh Day Adventists emerged.

Edson's contribution notwithstanding, the name most commonly associated with Seventh Day Adventism is that of Ellen Gould White, who claimed to receive divine visions and was largely responsible for refining the church's distinctive features.[937] Historically female Christian leaders have tended to emerge within the context of a charismatic theology and an egalitarian ethos.[938] White's experience was the exact opposite.

Born to Methodist parents and raised within a strictly patriarchal society she founded a conservative, non-charismatic church which upheld traditional Protestant views on the involvement of women in ministry. Despite never possessing an official title or role, White's spiritual authority and exhaustive literary output transformed her into a *de facto* leader, with an influence that was overwhelming and permanent. Under her guidance the church began to formalise its theology. White's prophetic gift empowered her to make *ex cathedra* statements, but the relationship between her visions and the Bible required constant justification.[939]

G. White and her critics: An answer to the major charges that critics have brought against Mrs. Ellen G. White. (172). Review and Herald Publishing Association: Washington, D.C.

[937] 'Miller's preaching and Mrs. White's testimony of her own revelations formed the beginning of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which stresses a strong prophetic and eschatological note and health reform.' Douglas, J. D., Cairns, E. E., & Ruark, J. E. 1978. *The new international dictionary of the Christian church.* (1043). Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids.

[938] Examples include the Montanist sect of the late 2nd Century, charismatic groups within the Swiss Anabaptist communities of the 16th Century, and the modern Holiness Pentecostal movement, which began in the late 19th Century.

[939] 'She ever pointed to the Scriptures as the one source of truth and light, the Book that should be the Christian's first and chiefest source of spiritual instruction."...If the Bible should show the visions were not in harmony with it, the Bible would stand and the visions would be given up."' Nichol, F. D. 1951. *Ellen G. White and her critics: An answer to the major charges that critics have brought against Mrs. Ellen G. White.* (pp. 87-88). Review and Herald Publishing Association: Washington, D.C.

The SDAs' antipathy towards organised religion precluded the use of creeds,[940] a prejudice which also reflected the fear that any catechistic document restricted future guidance via divine revelation. It was exemplified by Ellen White's husband James, who declared his opposition to creedal theology at the Michigan Conference of 1861.[941] He spoke for the majority, and their voices carried the day. Thus, when an official ecclesiology was adopted at the General Conference of 1863 it did not result in an SDA creed, leaving SDAs with the problem of defining orthodoxy without a written rule of faith. The solution was to accept Ellen White's visions as uniquely authoritative and her writings as *de facto* canon law, thereby sidestepping the dispute over creeds while acknowledging a body of literature that could largely perform the same function. The full implications of this approach would not be appreciated until 1955.

Towards the late 1860s SDAs were united on four points which distinguished them from evangelicals: (a) the authenticity of Ellen White's prophetic gift, (b) observance of the Sabbath (a perpetual institution), (c) a spiritual 'investigative judgement' prior to the Second Advent,[942] and (d) perception of themselves as God's faithful remnant. Relations with other churches were poor to non-existent.

However, in 1871 the SDAs entered communion with the Seventh Day Baptists (hereafter SDBs), a Sabbath-observant group which was doctrinally mainstream in every other way. This was the Seventh Day Adventists' first serious interfaith dialogue.

The SDAs and SDBs held a series of meetings over five years, and in 1876 James White reported a positive outcome:

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[940] 'J. N. Loughborough declared that “the first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth is to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And fifth, to commence persecution against such.”' Douglass, H. E. 1998. *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White.* (426). Pacific Press Publishing Association: Nampa, ID.

[941] '“But suppose the Lord, through the gifts, should give us some new light that did not harmonize with our creed; then, if we remain true to the gifts, it knocks our creed all over at once. Making a creed is setting the stakes, and barring up the way to all future advancement... A creed and the gifts thus stand in direct opposition to each other. Now what is our position as a people? The Bible is our creed.”' Ibid. (427).

[942] Derived from Hiram Edson's vision of 1844.

(a) the two churches agreed on the atoning life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

(b) they disagreed on immortal soulism (SDAs rejected it; SDBs accepted it)

(c) they agreed on the continuation of Holy Spirit gifts within the church

(d) there was tension between the SDBs' strict Trinitarianism and the SDAs' fluid Christology, but this could be negotiated

United on essentials, the two groups enjoyed full communion for an indeterminate period.[943] Little known and largely overlooked, these events prove SDAs were sharing ecumenical fellowship without any doctrinal amendments at least 80 years before evangelicals made their first overtures.[944]

Near the turn of the century, outsiders' perceptions of Seventh Day Adventism were still negative or ambivalent at best. Many SDAs had come from unconventional churches and imported their personal beliefs to White's new movement. Christology was a case in point, with Trinitarianism, Arianism, semi-Arianism and Unitarianism all tolerated under a broad doctrinal umbrella.

White never used the word 'Trinity' and her writings lack any technical expression of the triune relationship. This ambiguity invited reinterpretation. Depending on the reader's preference White could be defended as Trinitarian, Arian, or even semi-Arian (at least until 1899). Modern SDA scholars describe her Christology as

[943] 'We recommend, however, that there be no controversy between the two bodies. The differences between us are of such a nature, and we have in common so broad a field of labor with those who differ with us respecting the fundamentals, upon which hangs the destiny of a world lying in wickedness, that Seventh-day Adventists and Seventh-day Baptists cannot afford a controversy on doctrines which neither regard as tests of Christian character.' White, J. 1876, 'The Two Bodies: the relation which the S. D. Baptists and the S. D. Adventists sustain to each other.' *Review and Herald*, vol. 48, no. 15, p. 116. Retrieved October 12, 2011, from: http://www.adventistarchives.org/docs/RH/RH18761012-V48-15__B.pdf

[944] The SDAs' doctrine of a 'faithful remnant' was never as exclusive as it is commonly portrayed; SDBs were considered part of the remnant despite their theological differences.

a work in progress.[945] By contrast many other prominent leaders of the original SDA church were unequivocally non-Trinitarian,[946] including White's husband.

Evangelicals seized upon this as evidence that Adventists were heretical. But since the SDA church had no formal creed during the heterodox years while White's own views were still in flux, can any Christology from this period be regarded as definitive? Today SDA historians accept that Adventist Christology was never homogeneous[947] but gradually evolved into a Trinitarian consensus.[948]

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[945] 'Her mature view developed through a 40-year process that can be extensively documented.' Moon, J. A. 2003. 'The Adventist Trinity Debate. Part 2: The Role of Ellen G. White', *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp 275-292.

[946] 'The evidence as presented here indicates that prior to 1898 the prevailing opinion in the Seventh-day Adventist Church on the nature of God was anti-Trinitarian. It has been shown that a whole series of writers took this position. Those early Adventist writers who expressed themselves on the subject agreed on certain fundamental issues. Christ was consistently regarded as subordinate to the Father and the Holy Spirit as a mere influence.' Gane, E. R. *The Arian or Anti-Trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-day Adventist Literature and the Ellen G. White Answer*. 1963. Retrieved October 12, 2011, from: http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/gane-thesis/e-gane16.htm

[947] 'In 1846 James White dismissed the doctrine of the Trinity as "the old unscriptural trinitarian creed." A century later, the denomination he co-founded voted its first official endorsement of a statement of "Fundamental Beliefs" that included reference to the Trinity. That a major theological shift occurred is no longer subject to debate.' Moon, J. A. 2003. 'The Adventist Trinity Debate. Part 2: The Role of Ellen G. White', *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp 275-292.

[948] 'The development of the doctrine of the Godhead in Seventh-day Adventism may be divided into six periods: (1) Antitrinitarian Dominance, 1846-1888; (2) Dissatisfaction with Antitrinitarianism, 1888-1898; (3) Paradigm Shift, 1898-1913; (4) Decline of Antitrinitarianism, 1913-1946; (5) Trinitarian Dominance, 1946-1980; and (6) Renewed Tensions, 1980 to the Present.' Moon, J. A. 2003.'The Adventist Trinity Debate. Part 1: Historical Overview', *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1, pp 113-129.

Remarkably the process was triggered by Ellen White herself, independent of her peers and against the popular mood.[949] In 1899 Adventist publishers released White's latest book, *Desire of Ages.* Church leaders were stunned to find it replete with overtly Trinitarian statements.[950] Her references to the deity of the Holy Spirit were particularly challenging and prompted a backlash among conservative SDAs, but once started there was no stopping the trend.[951] Trinitarianism gained ground because White endorsed it and Adventists trusted her judgement.

Around the same time, a radical new Christian movement arose from the ranks of Baptist and Presbyterian clergy. Its adherents would later call themselves Fundamentalists;[952] they sought to turn the tide of

[949] '...it is quite remarkable to observe the rich and profound anti-Arian Christology issuing forth from her pen starting as a gentle flow in the 1870's, becoming stronger in the 1880's and swelling to a torrent in the 1890's when all around her were influential men with differing views.' Webster, C. 1984. C*rosscurrents in Adventist Christology.* Retrieved October 12, 2011, from: http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/books/webster

[950] 'M. L. Andreasen, who had become an Adventist just four years earlier at the age of eighteen, and who would eventually teach at the church's North American seminary, claimed that the new concept was so different from the previous understanding that some prominent leaders doubted whether Ellen White had really written it.' Moon, J. A. 2003.'The Adventist Trinity Debate. Part 1: Historical Overview', *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1, pp 113-129. Andreasen correctly observed her Christology had been modified, though his account overstates the case. White's simplistic articulation in *Desire of Ages* is imprecise, reflecting limited knowledge. ('Ellen White was not a trained theologian and, therefore, we cannot look for systematic treatment of spiritual truth.' (Webster, 1984)). It is likely she never fully understood creedal Trinitarianism but merely expressed what she believed it to be.

[951] 'These and similar statements drove some to a fresh examination of the biblical evidence about the Godhead. Others, disbelieving that they could have been wrong for so many years, studied to bolster the old arguments. Ellen White's testimony, however, by calling attention to Scriptures whose significance had been overlooked, created a paradigm shift that could not be reversed.' Ibid.

[952] 'By 1918 the term “fundamentals” had become common usage, but “fundamentalist” and “fundamentalism” were coined in 1920 by Curtis Lee Laws, Baptist editor of the Watchman-Examiner... During a conference in Buffalo, New York, in 1920, Laws and his associates accepted the title.' Douglas, J. D., Cairns, E. E., & Ruark, J. E. 1978. *The new international dictionary of the Christian church.* (396). Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids.

modernism, higher criticism, and liberal Christianity.[953] Originally amillennial, the movement became overwhelmingly premillennial after two World Wars and the rebirth of the Jewish state, widely interpreted as fulfilling Bible prophecy. Key features included Young Earth Creationism, anti-evolutionism, Biblical inerrancy, strict morality, and a disdain for higher education.

The SDA Church proved an indispensable ally in the war against secularism. Ellen White had expounded a theory of Christian education, instituted charitable sanatoriums, and urged the benefits of healthy living through a strict regime of exercise and diet which prohibited popular stimulants.[954] Adventists supported Prohibition,[955] confessed Biblical inerrancy, practised Biblical literalism, and maintained international charity networks.[956] Fundamentalists shared the same values.[957]

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[953] 'The roots of fundamentalism go back into the nineteenth century when evolution, biblical criticism, and the study of comparative religions began to challenge old assumptions about the authority of the biblical revelation.' Ibid.

[954] 'From the very inception of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, temperance has been a major focus and the Church has played a key role in struggling against the inroads of alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and other drugs.' *Historic Stand for Temperance Principles and Acceptance of Donations Statement Impacts Social Change.* Retrieved on October 14, 2011, from: http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat26.html

[955] 'In 1909 a General Conference Bulletin recommended that "our ministers, teachers, physicians, nurses, and people generally, engage in a vigorous campaign in behalf of total abstinence, by means of lectures, demonstrations, and the distribution of health and temperance literature, and that whenever consistent our people, by voice, pen, and vote, place themselves on record as favorable to its restriction and entire prohibition."' Miller, J. 2011. 'Adventists, Prohibition, and Political Movement.' *Liberty*, November/December. Retrieved on October 15, 2011, from: http://www.libertymagazine.org/index.php?id=1791

[956] 'For example, during the relief services needed at the end of World War II, between 1946 and 1949, the General Conference relief organizations "provided more than 3,300,000 pounds of food and 1,100,000 pounds of clothing" to Europe alone.' Douglass, H. E. 1998. *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White.* (367). Pacific Press Publishing Association: Nampa, ID.

[957] The resemblance between Fundamentalists and Seventh Day Adventists was more than superficial. Secular and religious began describing SDAs as a Fundamentalist sect, and this label is still applied by some today.

In at least two key contexts Fundamentalist apologists reached for Adventist literature without hesitation and consequently absorbed some aspects of SDA theology. Against evolution they brandished the work of SDA scholar and amateur geologist George McCready Price, modern pioneer of Young Earth Creationism and 'flood geology.'[958]

Price was a leading influence on Henry Madison Morris,[959] founder of the Creation Research Society and Institute for Creation Research. In defence of premillennialism Fundamentalists relied on Le Roy Edwin Froom, an SDA historian of prodigious ability. Froom's *magnum opus* was *The Historic Faith of Our Fathers* (1950), a four-volume study of eschatology defending the historicist model of prophetic interpretation as the original Christian prophetic paradigm.[960]

Seventh Day Adventism became increasingly institutionalised in the post-war era, a development which brought many benefits. Bradford (2006, p. 176) argues that the founding of Adventist colleges during the 1940s steered the church away from Fundamentalism,[961] facilitated the training of professionally qualified

[958] 'During the first two thirds of the twentieth century, during which most Christian fundamentalists accepted the existence of long geological ages, the leading voice arguing for the recent creation of life on earth in six literal days was George McCready Price (1870-1963), a scientifically self-taught creationist and teacher.' *George McCready Price and 'Flood Geology'.* Retrieved on October 14, 2011, from: http://www.counterbalance.org/history/floodgeo-frame.html

[959] 'From the early 1960s through the 1990s the most influential voice in creationist circles was that of Henry M. Morris (b. 1918), a Baptist civil engineer from Texas... At first, he remained undecided about whether to attribute the fossil record to pre-Edenic activities or, following Price, to Noah's flood. Eventually he settled on the latter—and devoted the rest of his life to promoting flood geology, which about 1970 he renamed creation science.' *Creation Science - Henry M. Morris.* Retrieved on October 14, 2011, from: http://www.counterbalance.org/history/morris-body.html

[960] Sixty-one years later, Froom's work still commands respect among mainstream Christians and secular scholars.

[961] 'The accreditation of Seventh-day Adventist educational institutions became a powerful influence in extricating the church out of its Fundamentalist mould.' Bradford, G. (2006). *More Than a Prophet*. (176). Biblical Perspectives: Berrien Springs, Michigan.

clergy, and offered new opportunities for evangelism.[962] This may have increased the perception of legitimacy.

In 1949 Adventist elder Tobias Edgar Unruh was moved by a radio program featuring evangelical pastor Donald Grey Barnhouse and sent him a copy of Ellen White's book, *Steps to Christ.* Barnhouse published a brutally negative review and the two men corresponded until 1955, when Barnhouse commissioned evangelical apologist Walter R. Martin to write a book about Adventism. Martin had denounced SDAs as heretical with a single terse paragraph in his popular polemic *The Rise of the Cults* (1955) but agreed to confer with Adventist elders before delivering his next broadside.

Meetings took place between 1955-56. Martin, Unruh and Froom were the principal attendees; Barnhouse attended later, along with Walter E. Read and Roy A. Anderson (both highly placed members of SDA leadership).[963] All were aware their dialogue would prove controversial, but none could have predicted the outcome: in response to more than forty questions posed by their evangelical counterparts the SDA leaders consistently gave answers which fell within the parameters of traditional Christian orthodoxy. When Barnhouse and Martin suggested this was an idiosyncratic rendition of SDA theology the Adventists conceded some differences of opinion within their church, yet still insisted they spoke for the overwhelming majority. It was a gross exaggeration, but the evangelicals did not press further.[964]

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[962] 'Once it was agreed that the college would seek accreditation, it followed that they needed to have students from other accredited church institutions. These students in turn would have to be taught by well-qualified teachers. The door was opened for higher education and the Seventh-day Adventist church began to make contact with the wider world of learning. The founding of The Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary meant that the church would have better academic education for its ministry.' Ibid.

[963] '...Walter E. Read, Seventh-day Adventist General Conference field secretary and chairman of the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference Biblical Research Committee; and Roy A. Anderson, an experienced evangelist and the director of the Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial Association, and editor of Ministry magazine.' Ibid. (185).

[964] 'Martin and Barnhouse noted that there were some Adventist books still being sold in Seventh-day Adventist book shops that were saying some things different to what they were being told. Froom, Anderson, and Read replied that this was because the church does give some measure of freedom of expression and that what they had shared was held by all except a "lunatic fringe". This was a serious misrepresentation, although the answers given

In 1956 Barnhouse published an article in *Eternity* magazine, which declared Seventh Day Adventists orthodox by evangelical standards. Evangelical responses were broadly divided along soteriological lines: since SDA is Arminian, Arminians tended to agree with Barnhouse while Calvinists did not. But the long term impact was favourable and confirmed the opinions of evangelicals who already saw SDAs as fellow believers.[965]

Though not overwhelmingly negative, the Adventist reaction was strong enough to divide conservatives (who opposed communion with evangelicals) and progressives (who supported it). Froom and his colleagues were widely accused of selling out.[966] Yet they had answered in good faith and could show that the theology presented to Barnhouse and Martin was generally consistent with SDA teaching.

In any case, since the church had no written creed and Ellen White was now dead, who had the authority to say their theology was heretical – or not? SDAs universally regarded White's exegesis as the benchmark of orthodoxy, but as factional lines were drawn they discovered her writings could be invoked to support a range of views.

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were generally held by Seventh-day Adventists. Yet there were a significant number of Seventh-day Adventists who did not hold to the positions that were presented.' Ibid. (186).

[965] In a review of Froom's eschatological masterpiece three years prior to the Barnhouse/Unruh meetings, Baptist historian Robert T. Handy had described Froom as, 'an evangelical Christian, a Protestant conservative.' (Handy 1952, pp. 551-553). This demonstrates the respect already commanded by SDA scholarship among evangelicals, but more importantly the recognition of SDAs *as* evangelicals on the basis of common theology.

[966] SDAs had apparently forgotten their church's communion with the Seventh Day Baptists, who were distinguished only from mainstream Christians by their Sabbath observance. Barnhouse and Froom were not doing anything that had not already been done with Ellen White's approval in 1876, yet their contemporaries found it shocking. Perhaps SDAs had unwittingly imbibed the Fundamentalists' intolerance of ecumenism, even as the Fundamentalists imbibed the SDAs' Young Earth Creationism, 'flood geology' and premillennialism.

In 1957 Froom, Read and Anderson produced a book entitled *Questions on Doctrine* (hereafter *QOD*), an expanded version of their answers to Barnhouse and Martin,[967] intended for a wider evangelical audience.[968] It contained an 'official statement of fundamental beliefs' and a proviso emphasising the authority of General Conferences.[969] Taken together they gave the impression that SDAs possessed a formal creed ratified by church councils. This may have been intentional. Strictly speaking, however, there was no 'official statement of fundamental beliefs' until the '27 Fundamentals' drafted by the General Conference of 1980. The 'official statement' provided in *QOD* was a list of acceptable parameters from the standard SDA church manual[970] which had never been treated as a creedal document.[971]

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[967] Despite strong opposition from some evangelical leaders, Martin supported Barnhouse's conclusion that SDAs were mainstream. He later replied to his critics in *The Truth About Seventh Day Adventists* (1960), reiterating his belief in the SDAs' orthodoxy on the proviso that they subscribed to the doctrines presented in *QOD.* This approach was well received and proved a tipping point for large numbers of undecided evangelicals. When Billy Graham invited SDAs to his preaching crusades, it was official: SDAs had come in from the cold.

[968] It also served as an apologetic to conservative SDAs outraged by their negotiation with evangelicals. But although nominally sanctioned by the SDA General Conference, *QOD* proved so controversial it was withdrawn from print in 1963. Formal approval of *QOD* was granted in 1983 by W. Richard Lesher, vice-president of the General Conference, and in 2003 it was finally republished by Andrews University, an SDA college.

[969] '...because of the very nature of the Seventh-day Adventist Church organization no statement of Seventh-day Adventist belief can be considered official unless it is adopted by the General Conference in quadrennial session, when accredited delegates from the whole world field are present. The answers in this volume are an expansion of our doctrinal positions contained in the official statement of Fundamental Beliefs already referred to. Hence this volume can be viewed as truly representative of the faith and beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.' *Questions On Doctrine*, 1957. (pp. 8-9). Review and Herald Publishing Association: Washington, D.C.

[970] The authors were open about the source of the list, but their description made it sound more authoritative than it really was.

[971] At the 1980 General Conference a genuinely official list of '27 Fundamentals' was finally drafted (a 28th point was added in 2005). SDAs consider the '28 Fundamentals' a descriptive document rather than a prescriptive creed. The preamble states, 'Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures... Revision of these statements may be expected at a General

Despite widespread acceptance, *QOD* was bitterly opposed by influential SDA theologian M. L. Andreasen, who tried to prevent its publication and sparked an internecine war between conservatives and progressives which raged for decades.[972]

The acceptance of SDAs by evangelicals was never a foregone conclusion and benefited from some timely coincidences. Beginning with Unruh's chance hearing of Barnhouse's radio presentation; facilitated by the unexpected dominance of progressives within SDA leadership; made easier by the SDAs' lack of a formal creed; legitimised by the involvement of highly influential evangelicals. Put simply, it happened at a time when circumstances were ideal for success.

Conference Session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word.' *Fundamental Beliefs*. Retrieved on October 16, 2011, from: http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html

[972] 'The church is still divided and the theology mapped out by M. L. Andreasen is a good example of the improper use of [White's] writings. Many of the ideas of Andreasen were later taken to their logical conclusion by an Australian, Robert Brinsmead, who caused havoc and division in the church during the 1960s... Both sides assumed you could do your theology through [White's] writings and that she would always be found to be consistent in her theological expressions... The frustrating fact was that both sides found powerful quotes to confront the opposition.' Bradford, G. (2006). *More Than a Prophet*. (pp. 187-189). Biblical Perspectives: Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Progressive SDAs, pro-SDA evangelicals, and anti-SDA evangelicals all agree (albeit for different reasons)[973] that core SDA theology[974] has remained unchanged since the early years of the church. This can be demonstrated from *QOD*, conservative evangelical critiques of SDA theology,[975] and progressive evangelical justifications for regarding SDAs as Christian.[976]

[973] Progressive SDAs needed to prove they had not changed doctrines to suit evangelicals. Pro-SDA evangelicals needed to explain why they had accepted SDAs without insisting on change. This was not difficult, as some of the SDAs' distinctive doctrines were gaining acceptance within mainstream Christianity (e.g. conditional mortality, later endorsed by Anglican scholars John Stott and Philip Hughes, among others), and Ellen White was neither the first nor the last modern Christian to claim some form of Spirit guidance. Anti-SDA evangelicals needed to show SDAs were still unorthodox *because* they had not changed their doctrines. The only dissenters were conservative SDAs, who insisted their version of orthodoxy had always been normative but was now being abandoned. Yet all the evidence was against them.

[974] Including conditional immortality, Sabbath observance and the prophetic inspiration of Ellen White. But evangelicals now took a more lenient attitude toward these teachings.

[975] 'Many Adventists today would like to be thought of as evangelical Christians, and in recent years there has been considerable internal discussion on central doctrinal issues. But the doctrine of the remnant church, still official Adventist teaching, would seem to make identification with main-stream evangelicalism impossible.' Ferguson, S. B., & Packer, J. 2000. *New dictionary of theology* (electronic ed.) (637). InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL. But although the 'remnant' doctrine is still current it has not prevented communion with evangelicals, as noted earlier in this paper.

[976] 'Since SDA does accept the foundational doctrines of historic Christianity (the Trinity, Christ's true deity, His bodily resurrection, etc.) we do not believe that it should be classified as a non-Christian cult. ...a portion of it is definitely out of the mainstream of historic Christian theology (e.g., Sabbatarianism, conditional immortality or soul sleep, annihilation of the wicked). Though we would adamantly disagree with Adventists regarding these above mentioned doctrines, it should be added that one could hold these views and remain a believing Christian.' Christian Research Institute, *Seventh Day Adventism*. Retrieved on October 17, 2011, from: http://www.equip.org/articles/seventh-day-adventism

Where apparent ideological shifts had occurred, internal factors were invariably responsible: (a) lack of a formal creed, (b) toleration of heterodoxy,[977] (c) the evolution of Ellen White's own interpretations,[978] and (d) official adoption of teachings with significant apologetic value,[979] at a time when Adventists needed them most.

Notwithstanding the many competing interpretations of SDA history, careful consideration leads to the conclusion that their transition from fringe sect to mainstream denomination was primarily the result of *defining* orthodoxy rather than changing it, with evangelical encouragement playing a later, supportive role as the influence of Ellen White seemed to recede and a more nuanced reading of SDA theology came to the fore.

In the end, ecumenical fellowship between evangelicals and Adventists was not driven by doctrinal modification, but by a mutual desire for common understanding. Christadelphia can profit by reflecting on the SDAs' experience and acting upon its lessons—not by pursuing fellowship with mainstream Christianity, as the SDAs did, but by strengthening and revitalising our community through a formal recognition of legitimate diversity.

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[977] This frequently resulted in schism when doctrine was formalised, giving the appearance of theological innovation. But in such cases the church was simply granting special status to one of several widely accepted views, not replacing old theology with new.

[978] The emergence of White's explicit Trinitarianism in 1899 was only controversial because SDAs had consistently read their own Christology into her admittedly ambiguous writings, always assuming she believed as they did.

[979] E.g. Young Earth Creationism, which became a mark of orthodoxy equal to Sabbath observance and remains current despite attempts by progressive SDAs to accommodate evolution. In 2004 an SDA committee set up to examine the relationship between Scripture and science affirmed, 'We affirm the historic Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Genesis 1 that life on earth was created in six literal days and is of recent origin.' ('An Affirmation of Creation', *The International Faith & Science Conferences 2002-2004 report of the Organizing Committee to the General Conference Executive Committee through the office of the General Conference President, September 10, 2004.* Retrieved on October 17, 2011, from: http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat54.html).