

The heavens are still telling the glory of God! (Ps. 19:1).
So is the earth beneath our feet.

Carl Drews
5419 Omaha Place
Boulder, CO 80303
jambo789@hotmail.com
www.theistic-evolution.com/

Newman's Reply to Drews

I have no particular objections to Carl Drews' letter, as he does not deny the historicity of the account. I affirm that God often uses symbolic actions (which, however, are real actions). I would not weight the talking snake as counting against historicity, given the similar Balaam incident in Numbers 22. The phenomenon of prophecy spoken to people directly but applied to their descendants has precedent in Genesis 49.

Robert C. Newman
ASA Fellow
Biblical Theological Seminary
200 N. Main Street
Hatfield, PA 19440
rcnewman@erols.com

"The House of Elijah"

In reviewing Repcheck's *The Man Who Found Time* in the September 2003 issue of *PSCF* (p. 196), Robert Rogland quoted from it: "... the prophecy ... of Elijah ... proclaimed that the last two thousand years of the total six thousand would be the Age of the Messiah." Rogland then commented: "That is not in my Bible." However, the "House of Elijah" is connected with similar information on "the age of the Messiah" in the Talmud, as cited in a scholarly critique by James Barr: "Why the World was Created in 4004 BC: Archbishop Ussher and Biblical Chronology" in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 67 (pp. 575-608). Barr, Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford, writes:

In placing creation around 4000 years before Christ, Ussher had ... predecessors. The Talmud itself had spoken to the same effect: B. Abodah Zarah 9a (Soncino, ed., p. 43) ... reported the Tanna of the House of Elijah as saying "The world is to exist 6000 years. The first 2000 years are to be void (Hebrew *tohu*); the next 2000 years are the period of the Torah; ... the following 2000 years are the period of the Messiah."

Barr's article came from his lecture at Rylands University in May 1984, and Stephen J. Gould cited Barr in "Fall in the House of Ussher" (*Natural History* [11/91]: 16).

ASA member Davis Young also wrote about this matter in his book, *Christianity & the Age of the Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan [1982], 20):

(A) widespread conviction existed that the present world order would last for six thousand years ... (then) ... Christ would return to establish His kingdom. ... the church fathers regarded the days of creation as ordinary days ... Yet they (also regarded)

the days in a more figurative sense. Virtually all of them were struck by Psalm 90:4, "For a thousand years in your sight are like a day" and by 2 Peter 3:8, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years ..." They had no difficulty in transferring the days of creation into thousand-year periods on (this) basis. They did not believe that the creation had taken place over six millennia but that ... human history would occupy six thousand years, a millennium of history for each of the six days of creation ... Why this connection was made is obscure. No reason for it is given by the fathers; it was simply assumed and taught.

An explanation for this enigma may be that the church fathers knew of the information reported by the Tanna (House of Elijah) in the Talmud, described above in Barr's quote.

William H. Gilbert
ASA Member
Professor Emeritus
Simpson College
Indianola, IA 50125
gilbert@storm.simpson.edu

Randomness and Divine Agency

In their article "Random Worms: Evidence of Random and Nonrandom Processes in the Chromosomal Structure of Archaea, Bacteria and Eukaryotes" (*PSCF* 55, no. 3 [September 2003]: 175-84), Glenn Morton and Gordon Simons make a valuable contribution to the design debate. However, a couple of comments might be in order.

First, I am not sure they have correctly applied biblical references to the Urim and Thrummim or to casting lots. In those examples, the point is not that God used randomness, the point is that when instruments of chance were employed to seek the divine will, the outcome was not random at all. As the authors themselves say, "God predetermined the result" (p. 176, bottom of the left hand column). A predetermined result is not an expression of chance. That makes the application of those examples to processes in nature problematic. If "humans are not able to distinguish between the appearance of chance and the actuality of chance" (p. 176, top of the first full paragraph in the right hand column), and if "randomness is something that cannot be proven" (p. 178, top of the first full paragraph of the right hand column), then it is not clear why "Christian apologists need to incorporate chance and randomness into their world views" (p. 183, bottom of the right hand column). After all, we can neither distinguish it nor prove it, and it does not exist from God's point of view.

Second, the authors claim that "Dembski's model is inadequate to the task he intends" (p. 183, middle of the second full paragraph in the left hand column). But if randomness cannot be distinguished or proved, if, as the authors maintain, it is an illusion created by human perspective, and if higher information content creates the appearance of randomness (p. 183, top of the left hand column), then it seems to me that the "bar" for Dembski is lowered, not raised. Under such circumstances, all Dembski must do is provide a plausible alternative to the randomness claim.