



# Letters

he is able to change it, but determinism holds "that nature creates the gods and, in fact, governs them. Freud correctly understood that ..." (p. 197). R. F. Paloutzian in his foreword alludes to the distinction between Greek (Athens) and Hebrew (Jerusalem) stories which illustrates why Freud chose Greek legends: "A contrast is drawn between the assumptions about human nature that come from classical Greece and those originating in biblical Israel. This is illustrated by ... a Greek tragic view of life ... versus a Hebraic view that views humans as created with the ability to act and effect change" (p. xi).

Schwartz, who specializes in Graeco-Roman and Jewish thought, teaches ancient history and literature. Kaplan, who specializes in interpersonal and international relations, teaches psychology. Both work at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, and both have written books previously. *Biblical Stories* has received pre-publication high praise from scholars who call it "brilliant," "compelling," "illuminating," and "much-needed."

This book's eleven chapters also include an introduction, epilogue, bibliography, and index; it is also available in hardcover. Haworth Press publishes all its books on paper approved by the American National Standard for Information Sciences-Permanence of Paper for Printed Material. This is worth mentioning because this standard assures that the paper is pH neutral, acid free, and intended to wear well over time. Not every publisher imbeds this assurance in their books.

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# Letters

## Is Aardsma's Flood Theory Both Scientific and Biblical?

Paul Seely recommends reconciling science with the biblical account of Noah's flood by conceding that Genesis 1-11 is scientifically and historically inaccurate. He suggests that God used fictional stories about mythical events to tutor us, "accommodating his theological lessons to the mentality and preconceptions of his young children, aware that in time they would learn better of both history and science."<sup>1</sup> In other words, "God accommodated his theological revelation in Genesis 1-11 to the now antiquated science/history of the times."<sup>2</sup> Seely contrasts his position with what he calls concordism, misrepresenting the message of the Bible to fit scientific facts, and creation science, misrepresenting facts to fit the Bible. He evidently lost all hope of finding any alternative that upholds the total historicity of Genesis while totally respecting both witnesses. Aardsma's approach may meet this higher standard.

Aardsma has found secular and scientific evidence that tends to confirm his flood theory, and no such evidence, not even the ice core evidence Seely presented, rules it out as a viable candidate.<sup>3</sup> Naturally, more extensive evaluation could expose flaws requiring theory adjustments or even replacement.

Seely charged creation science with "rejecting the overwhelming consensus of the best-trained scientists in the relevant sciences and substituting in its place private interpretations of the scientific data."<sup>4</sup> If Aardsma's ideas are dismissed, may it not be because they contradict the overwhelming consensus of experts that Genesis 1-11 is only myths of purely human origin. One does not find truth by taking a vote. Science freezes if a consensus always overwhelms new ideas while they are still unfamiliar. Think of Galileo. No consensus is fixed. Minds can be changed. What really qualifies as disrespect for the witness of science is stubbornly or dogmatically accepting a favorite interpretation of data while rejecting a better, more reasonable one.

What about respect for the witness of the Bible? Seely said, "The ocean, which is not fresh water, cannot be employed as a means of flooding the globe (or half the globe à la Godfrey/Aardsma) without doing the same thing that concordists are doing: replacing the history in Genesis 1-11 with a private interpretation."<sup>5</sup> Seely cited no other alleged conflict with the Bible in Aardsma's theory, but this is evidently all he needed to categorize it as concordist and, by his definition, unbiblical. Aardsma certainly is not "replacing the history ... with a private interpretation."

To support his questionable claim, Seely relied on Dick Fischer's interpretation of *fountains of the great deep* (Gen. 7:11). Fischer admitted that *deep* "can mean the sea," presumably, even a saltwater sea,<sup>6</sup> but concluded that it must refer to fresh water here, just because related terms in other languages suggest this.<sup>7</sup> Even if Fischer's doubtful interpretation is correct, Seely's critique may not hold water. His assuming that Genesis mentions every major floodwater source is like assuming that the ark was confined to calm seas, since we read nothing about waves.

Seely also criticized creation science for "find[ing] evidence in Scripture for items which Old Testament scholars do not find there, like multiple volcanoes exploding at the time of the flood." If speculation or theories about volcanoes misrepresent the Bible message, then similar criticism also applies to Aardsma's theories. Creationists, however, do not claim that Genesis explicitly states that volcanoes erupted. Neither does Aardsma find any statement that the southern oceans shifted to the north. These are theories considered consistent with what the Bible does say.<sup>8</sup>

We may agree with Seely that "the accuracy of the historical books in Scripture is contingent upon the quality of the [human] sources employed,"<sup>9</sup> but while he considers chapters 1-11 to be "of rather poor historical worth," we can in good faith accept Noah and New Testament apostles as equally credible eyewitnesses to real history.<sup>10</sup> If these "historical" chapters are actually fiction, given to teach "theological lessons," has our Tutor ever explained their mystical meaning? If Seely's accommodationism is rejected, may it not be because it contradicts some overwhelming consensus but rather because we share a reasonable faith in the historicity of even Genesis 1-11.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Paul H. Seely, "Beyond the Hills of Concordism and Creation Science," *PSCF* 55, no. 2 (2003): 138-9.

<sup>2</sup>Paul H. Seely, "Concordism's Illusion That It Is Upholding the Historicity of Genesis 1-11," *PSCF* 56, no. 1 (2004): 75. His objection in

note 1 to calling the stories in Genesis *fiction* or *myth* applies only if one treats Genesis as just another theory about what might have happened, not as eyewitness accounts.

<sup>3</sup>Paul H. Seely, "The GISP2 Ice Core: Ultimate Proof that Noah's Flood Was Not Global," *PSCF* 55, no. 4 (2003): 252–60. Although he argued convincingly against the idea that the Greenland ice sheet formed after the flood, Seely may have overstated his case against global flood theories in general and Aardsma's in particular, as explained in my letter, "Do Ice Cores Disprove Aardsma's Flood Theory?" *PSCF* 56, no. 1 (2004): 76–7. See my first letter, "On the Hills of Concordism and Creation Science," *PSCF* 55, no. 4 (2003): 278, for a brief introduction to Gerald E. Aardsma's flood theory, or visit [www.biblicalchronologist.org](http://www.biblicalchronologist.org) to begin a detailed study of his scientific claims.

<sup>4</sup>Paul H. Seely, "Concordism's Illusion," *PSCF* 56, no. 1 (2004): 76. Seely apparently prefers a private definition of the word *private*, since the interpretations he described as private have been well publicized and widely debated for years, and everybody is welcome to accept them. Whatever he meant, we should agree that every interpretation, whether public or private, implies faith in some expert, authority, or one's own ability to approach or recognize the truth. It is seldom a matter of discovering consensus.

<sup>5</sup>Paul H. Seely, "Concordism's Illusion," *PSCF* 56, no. 1 (2004): 76. Aardsma deserves full credit for his own theory, so the Godfrey name does not belong on it.

<sup>6</sup>Dick Fischer, "Young-Earth Creationism: A Literal Mistake," *PSCF* 55, no. 4 (2003): 227.

<sup>7</sup>Fischer and Seely apparently agree that those other flood stories are older, but even this idea loses credibility if Aardsma is correct in making a 1000-year correction in biblical chronology, also explained in my letter, "On the Hills," *PSCF* 55, no. 4 (2003): 278.

<sup>8</sup>See Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, (San Diego, CA: Creation-Life Publishers, 1976), 195–7, for one example of a creationist discussion of the flood and volcanoes. Morris concluded, "This entire phenomenon merits much further research and analysis, but ... the simple statement of [Gen 7] verse 11 provides the basic information needed to explain the physical cause of the great Flood ..." (p. 197). Morris and Aardsma disagree dramatically on what they think the physical cause was, but each one believes his own theory is compatible with the Bible.

<sup>9</sup>Paul H. Seely, "Concordism's Illusion," *PSCF* 56, no. 1 (2004): 75. We can agree that the historical accuracy of the Bible is not "provable from Scripture" alone, but agreement with secular history strengthens belief in it, and several passages suggest that God knows the tutorial value of true history (Gen. 9:12–17; Ex. 13:1–16, 20:11, 31:17; Deut. 6:20–25; Josh. 4:1–7; Ps. 111:4; Jer. 2:1–7; Mic. 6:3–5; Rev. 14:7).

<sup>10</sup>See the letter by Henry F. Blank, "On the Structure of Genesis," *PSCF* 56, no. 1 (2004): 74–5, for support of the idea that Genesis combines accounts originally "written by the patriarchs who were intimately concerned with the events related." See Morris, *The Genesis Record*, pp. 26–30, for a fuller discussion of the same point.

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## Accommodationism's Illusion of Solving Biblical Problems

In his *PSCF* letter, "Concordism's Illusion That It Is Upholding the Historicity of Genesis 1–11,"<sup>1</sup> Paul Seely claims that God accommodated his revelation to ancient cultural concepts which contradict historical/scientific facts. He even claims that "Jesus showed that he believed Scripture is sometimes accommodated to ingrained cultural concepts which are not merely scientifically defective, but which are morally defective (Matt.19:8/Mark 10:5)."

Seely charges creation science with "rejecting the overwhelming consensus of the best-trained scientists in the relevant sciences and substituting in its place private interpretations of the scientific data." In this I fully agree with him. But then he parallels that with charging "concordism ... [with] rejecting the overwhelming consensus of the best-trained Old Testament scholars and substituting in its place private interpretations of the biblical data." Here he leaves objectivity behind.

He calls "concordists" those who try to understand the biblical texts in a way which concords with reality, respecting scientific facts and biblical texts as they stand, being hesitant to jump to conclusions of contradictions. Seely bases his unproven assumption of accommodation on his conviction that a biblical text allows for only one correct interpretation. He appeals to the authority of the majority (90% in his argument) of "commentaries on Genesis by qualified Old Testament biblical scholars." Science no longer appeals to authorities, but discusses problems explicitly, until there is unanimity.

One commentary Seely recommended is Alexander Rofé's *Introduction to the Composition of the Pentateuch*.<sup>2</sup> Rofé's approach is typical of source criticism, dissecting the texts into many fragments and completely rewriting Israel's history. Early Genesis chapters are claimed to be late copies of Mesopotamian myths. But making myths—even theologically refined—out of apparently historical narrative does not solve problems of interpretation, but sidesteps them. Many Old Testament scholars disagree with this approach.

We know ancient Hebrew from virtually nothing but the biblical texts themselves. A Hebrew concordance allows an inspection of all known usages of a given expression in all available contexts. But with rare expressions, it may become difficult to be sure about a "correct" interpretation, no matter how many commentaries agree. We may have to remain undecided between several possible interpretations—and they may not even be mutually exclusive.

This openness is what characterizes the harmonizing approach—vilified as "concordism." In fact it "allows both the Bible and the scientific data to freely say what they say"—a praise Seely bestows on his accommodationism only. Are Rofé and other source critics, in the tradition of Wellhausen, Bultmann etc., really allowing the Bible to freely say what it says? Are they not often pressing the text into the Procrustean bed of their own preconceptions?

Seely's caricature of "concordism" incorrectly assumes that the Bible is made to "teach science," even "modern science." But the only claim that is in fact made is the feasibility of an interpretation compatible with reality—although a text may allow other interpretations, as well. Why should a theory of biblical inspiration not allow for the possibility of God gently directing his prophets' thinking to choose formulations he—not they—knew are compatible with reality? Even if this reality covers scientific facts unknown to the prophets, the resulting texts would not explicitly teach such unknowables—or any science at all. It is not claimed, either, that the Bible provides accurate history in the modern sense, since its indications are manifestly incomplete. Compatibility with reality is sufficient. I agree with Seely that God delegated the discovery of science and history to humankind.