

be hopelessly inconsistent. Then Edwin Thiele solved the puzzle, and the accuracy of this part of the Bible has been firmly established ever since.² The period in question began in 931 BC, but unfortunately, clear synchronizations with Old Testament stories about earlier periods have been difficult to find and defend, suggesting that something may be seriously wrong with one or more of the chronologies being compared. Many scholars, evidently including Seely, have concluded instead that we should not regard the older stories as real history after all.

Gerald Aardsma has recently published theories that arguably solve the Old Testament chronology problem all the way back to creation. His key claim is that 1 Kings 6:1 ought to be emended to restore one digit dropped through an early scribal error.³ It should read the 1480th year, not the 480th year. This one simple correction shifts the chronology of all events before the time of the judges back a full millennium.

Better evidence for synchronizations with secular data in the earlier periods of interest suggests that Aardsma really is onto something exciting, at least for those of us who rejoice to find the Bible vindicated. This evidence points to a flood in 3520–21 BC that was by no means merely local.⁴ The challenge for Seely is to prove his own claim “that no global flood has occurred in the last 10,000 years and more.” We should be skeptical, because negatives are notoriously difficult to prove. Even if Aardsma’s unconventional flood theory later proves to be false, his idea about a chronological correction may well remain valid regardless.

According to Aardsma, the flood was the result of water from the southern oceans moving north to cover most of the northern hemisphere,⁵ leaving some areas dry: Antarctica, Australia, the southern parts of Africa and America, as well as northern lands at low latitudes or high altitudes. Aardsma believes the event was too tranquil to have deposited all the global sedimentary rock that most creationists attribute to the flood, but the flooded populations were destroyed. Aardsma has also proposed a physical cause for this flood. Some may prematurely dismiss his suggestion, but people who give it a fair hearing should find it reasonable and promising on closer examination.

If Aardsma’s theories prevail, we should agree with the claim by Art Hill, Paul Seely, and the creationists that the flood was not merely local, and with the claim by Carol Hill and Seely that geological data may cast doubt on some aspects of the flood model popular among creationists. We should also agree with both Hills that God gave us factual narratives, even in Genesis 1–11. The prospects for corroborating this point are too good to recommend joining Seely’s desperate expedition beyond the “Hills” of concordism and creation science.

Notes

¹“Beyond the Hills of Concordism and Creation Science” in *PSCF* (June 2003): 138–9. The title alludes to earlier *PSCF* letters by Art Hill and Carol Hill.

²Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, new revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1983).

³Gerald E. Aardsma, *A New Approach to the Chronology of Biblical History from Abraham to Samuel*, 2d ed. (Loda, IL: Aardsma Research & Publishing, 1995); Gerald E. Aardsma, “New Radiocarbon Dates for the Reed Mat from the Cave of the Treasure, Israel,” *Radiocarbon*

43:3 (2001): 1247–54; and H. J. Bruins, I. Carmi, and E. Boaretto, eds., *Proceedings of the 17th International ¹⁴C Conference*.

⁴Gerald E. Aardsma, “Noah’s Flood: The Irish Evidence,” *The Biblical Chronologist* 5.3 (1999): 1–7.

⁵Gerald E. Aardsma, “The Origin and Antiquity of the Biblical Text,” *The Biblical Chronologist* 8.6 (2002): 2–3.

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Reflections on Newman’s “Problems for Theistic Evolution”

I am writing in response to the article by Robert Newman, “Some Problems for Theistic Evolution,” that appeared in the June 2003 issue of *PSCF*. I will address the theological issues that he raises, since the scientific ones are covered elsewhere.

I favor the view that Adam and Eve are historical individuals who underwent the Fall as described in Genesis 3. However, the fundamental Christian doctrine here is that all humankind is sinful and in need of God’s forgiveness, not exactly how we came to be in that unhappy state. The Bible contains plenty of evidence for our fallen state, even if the book of Genesis were to disappear tomorrow without a trace (see Rom. 3:23).

The text of Genesis 2–3 does indeed contain indications that it is in part a symbolic account. We have:

1. A snake that can talk. Most readers assume that the serpent is Satan.
2. Trees of Life and the Knowledge of Good and Evil. These are not ordinary trees.
3. Adam and Eve, who stand in spiritually for the entire human race.
4. Curses given and received. These fall upon all descendants of the primary character.
5. A messianic prophecy given in Gen. 3:15. Note that an event can be both historical and symbolic, as when Pontius Pilate washed his hands before the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Glenn Morton and I both affirm an interventionist view of human origins, where God stepped into a biological line of succession and made something spiritually special happen. God did something similar with Moses in selecting him to receive his covenant, and later became incarnate in the second Adam, Jesus Christ (see 1 Cor. 15:45). If Jesus was willing to come into this world through an ordinary family in Bethlehem, why should we object to our origins from a bipedal primate in a corner of Africa? God is in the business of exalting the lowly and raising up the humble.

God somehow “sustains” the world by natural means that science can explore; and by outright miracles, which science cannot. God works both ways. When we get to heaven he will answer all our questions in person. Until then, science in general, and biological evolution in particular, will continue to be the witness of God’s creation.

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

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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.

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"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.

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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.