

# How do Christians Explain the Existence of Dinosaurs?

## Christianity and Science

### Job 40:15-41:11 and Psalm 24

#### Introduction

Today we're going to answer one of the questions which was submitted to be answered in January. This question is, "How do Christians Explain the Existence of Dinosaurs?" In one sense, this is a really easy question to answer, dinosaurs existed and Christians simply look at the bones like everyone else. However, I think what the question is wanting to know more about is why there are no references to dinosaurs in the Bible, particularly when we have the description of God creating the world?

This question also touches on the relationship between science and Christianity and so I'm going to consider that issue as well. This message will be different to my usual messages in that I'm not going to go through a section of the Bible in detail but I will point to some parts of the Bible. This talk is also just an overview. If you'd like to know more about this topic I can point you to some great books and websites, etc.

#### Are There Dinosaurs in The Bible?

So then, are there dinosaurs in the Bible? We've had read to us a section from Job, one of the oldest books in the Bible, which describes Behemoth and Leviathan. These two creatures have been regarded as various animals but there are no animals we currently have which fit all the descriptions.

Because there is no exact match for these creatures with current animals some have taken these references to be dinosaurs. Some people see Behemoth as a large herbivore and Leviathan as a massive sea dinosaur. However, dinosaurs are not the only explanation as some see the descriptions here as more metaphorical to describe supernatural suffering and evil, similarly to how there is a reference to a great dragon in the book of Revelation (which nobody thinks is a dinosaur that's going to come back because of *Jurassic Park* type experiments). However, one thing to keep in mind

is, if Behemoth and Leviathan (along with the Dragon in Revelation) are used in a metaphorical way, then it could be because of latent memories which humans have of huge creatures which our ancestors engaged with in the past. In other words, humans have some sort of memory of fearsome great creatures and so are able to use such imagery to describe things even if they don't exist before our eyes today. Personally I think that humans are creative enough to come up with *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* but I guess the hypothesis can be considered.

To summarise then, there are no explicit, undeniable descriptions of dinosaurs in the Bible but there are a couple of possible descriptions or connections. The absence of explicit references to dinosaurs in the Bible should not be a concern to us when we reflect on the purpose of the Bible and the relationship between science and Christianity. It is to that topic that we now turn.

## Christianity and Science

In considering the relationship between science and Christianity I want to say again that this is really just a very brief survey. I am only going to highlight three possible positions for the interaction between science and Christianity. I will give you the title and the distinguishing features of the position as well as a few of the strengths and weaknesses of each position.

I also want to say that while it will be clear what my position is, I will try not to be disparaging of other opinions. However, if you think that I have only given a caricature of your position then feel free to speak with me after the service or at another time or send me a message. Let's be polite and respectful in our conversations and seek to express Christian love even if we disagree.

## Six Day Creation and Young Earth

The first position which some people take in regards to the interaction between science and Christianity is that which is held by people who hold to God creating the

world in six days and this happening approximately six thousand years ago (i.e. the earth is young). This view could be summarised as holding the view that **the Bible is a science book**. Depictions of creation and natural features in the Bible are intended to be read as scientific fact. Where the Bible and scientific understanding disagree then science is wrong or has been mis-interpreted.

The major apparent strengths of this position can include: First, it takes most seriously what is written in the Bible; Second, it presents the view which Christians have held the longest; Third, it does give voice to scientists who genuinely differ from the evolutionary theory which some regard as the only acceptable theory to be taught.

A number of the proponents of the young earth six day creation position will say that Genesis 1 and 2 were always interpreted literally until the rise of modern science and Christians have compromised on this area to make it more acceptable today.

If I told you that a person “believed that the creation was an instantaneous event rather than being spread out over six literal days, and that the six days of Genesis 1 were a literary structure rather than a statement of the order or timing of events.”<sup>1</sup> Would you say that this is an example of the kind of modern compromised understanding that six day creationist warn us against? The problem with that view is that this was the understanding of Genesis of Augustine of Hippo, the great Christian writer from the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, hundreds of years before the development of modern scientific theory. To add extra irony here, Augustine titled his treatment, “The Literal Meaning of Genesis.” However, ‘literal’ originally meant how something is to be read in its literary context, not ‘literalisticly’ as the word normally means today. This now brings us to the weaknesses of the young earth six day creation position.

The major weaknesses of this position can include: First, it doesn’t take seriously the way the Bible is written. None of the Bible is written to address modern scientific questions, and not only that, the vast majority of Christian scholars recognise that Genesis 1-11 are best described as pre-history, often using an ‘elevated prose’ to present images and broad descriptions of events; Second,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://geochristian.com/2009/03/17/augustine-the-literal-meaning-of-genesis/> (accessed 10/01/2020)

proponents of this position have perhaps been most guilty of selectively choosing what information (scientific or Christian history) they wish to interact with; Third, while not indicative of all who hold to this position, it is this position which is most commonly associated with a faith vs. science approach, placing science and Christianity at odds with each other; Fourth and finally, while this position presents itself as defending God's honour, it actually risks making God into a great deceiver. As one example, God places stars millions of light years away and yet bringing their light closer to us. It is not that such concerns can't be answered but it shouldn't be held that this is the only position that really honours God and his Word.

## Intelligent Design

The second position regarding creation is that of Intelligent Design. Intelligent Design is much larger than Christianity, encompassing other religious beliefs as well as belief in aliens. For us today, this interaction between science and Christianity can be summarised as **God fills in the holes of science**.

The strengths of this position include: First, it points out the staggering improbability that human life on planet earth originated here by chance; Second, it seeks to highlight holes in scientific understanding; Third, because it does not force a single view of how creation came to pass, it has been a unifying position for a number of positions who oppose a purely atheistic chance-driven opinion as to how the universe came to be.

As an example of the staggering figures required for the establishment of life, here is what a friend of mine, a lecture in environmental science, has written,

Why do I find the Big Bang so faith inspiring? The so-called *anthropic principle* states that the laws of physics and the initial conditions at the Big Bang must be absolutely perfectly balanced and fine-tuned as to make our existence possible. This has been supported by considerable scientific analysis, observation and mathematical physics. The more scientists look, the more evidence they find of this incredible, super-duper fine tuning.

Initial conditions for the big bang had to be exact . . . really really really exact. If you are mixing weed spray, say 100 mls per however many litres of water, if you add in 101 ml – that is an extra 1 part in 100 – it's not going to make any difference at all. Well, for the big bang to work in a way that would kick start foundational

chemical elements, atmosphere, water, oxygen, evolving life, and humans capable of moral thought and scientific reasoning (so that we could understand Gods' creation and purpose) the initial conditions for the big bang had to be within 1 part in 10 to the power of 60 ( $1/10^{60}$ ). This precision equates to the accuracy required to aim a gun at a 5 cent piece 14 billion light years away, at the opposite end of the universe, and hit it! Truly faith inspiring.<sup>2</sup>

However, my friend doesn't hold to Intelligent Design per se, and to understand why he doesn't we need to understand some of the weaknesses of this position.

The biggest weakness of Intelligent Design for Christians is that the 'holes' in science which this position highlights are often not the best holes to focus on. Intelligent Design often emphasises gaps in our current scientific understanding and places god (or an intelligence) to fill those gaps. This is why this view can sometimes be nicknamed, "The god of the gaps." The problem with this is that as science advances and those gaps diminish, so does the god who filled those gaps.

A second weakness is that this position, while not antagonistic to science as such, simply doesn't take science seriously enough. Obviously this isn't true for all who hold to this position but there is a line of reasoning which says, "Why bother wrestling with complex scientific theory and practice if we can just say, "God's got it sorted"?"

### Bio-Logos / Theistic Evolution

The third position on creation and on the relationship between science and Christianity is what has been called Bio-Logos or Theistic Evolution. Because this position still sees an intelligent designer as being involved in creation this fits under the broadest category of Intelligent Design but it is unique and specific enough to be looked at independently. This position holds that the universe is billions of years old and that science reveals truth to us in our understanding of the universe and that science should never be held to be in competition with the Bible which also reveals truth. This position could be summarised as saying, **God designed and uses science.**

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<sup>2</sup> D. Brunckhorst, "Ancient of Days: Our Timeless God of the 'Big Bang'" 2017

The strengths of this position include: First, it focuses on the limitations of science rather than on the holes of science (science focuses on the how, when, where and what of the universe and the Bible / theology focuses on the why and who); Second, it emphasises the importance of science and, of all the positions, most strongly encourages Christians to engage with the sciences; Third and finally, it emphasises that the Christian understanding of God, and the way God creates, was fundamental to the development of the sciences.

The biggest weakness of this position is that it does raise questions as to how to understand certain Bible passages which talk about Adam. It is one thing to see the original creation account as metaphorically presented in Genesis 1 and 2 but what about God's creation of and interactions with humanity. This concern has been answered in a variety of ways (most commonly with God breathing of his Spirit into humanity to give us a soul at a particular point in evolution) but it certainly is an issue which Christians need to be aware of.

As an example of how Genesis 1 and 2 focus on the who and why of creation rather than the how, when, where and what, consider these observations which my scientist friend noted as to its purpose:

1. Directing us to Almighty God as Creator of a purposeful creation
2. To know and acknowledge that Creation is good, indeed very good! We should be in awe and wonder.
3. That we are special, made in his image (not physically!), we are complex moral beings knowing right and wrong; yet individual and unique, also interdependent yet independent in our use of free will to make choices, our morality and sin.
4. To know God desires a relationship with us. And we are meant to acknowledge and worship almighty God – the Ancient of Days.
5. To understand that humans have a special place in the creation, indeed with responsibilities to care for and nurture the creation while also having some power and capacity as co-creators of future conditions or states of the creation, at least on Earth.
6. To understand God's revelatory nature – God revealing himself to us.

God continues to reveal to us his creation and his creative power as we observe and slowly understand the "How". And as we do so we can only be awestruck and faith inspired.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

## Conclusion

In conclusion, while I'm not sure I showed you whether there's any dinosaurs in the Bible, I hope I have encouraged you to understand how Christians explain the existence of dinosaurs and that is through good and healthy engagement with the relevant scientific fields.

To close, I want to give you a quote from Augustine to help us consider why we have to rigorously use our brains as Christians and then we're going to have Psalm 24 read to us to remind us of Who is at the heart of creation.

Here is the reading from Augustine, writing in about 415 AD:

Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens, and the other elements of the world, about the motion and orbit of the stars and even their size and relative positions, about the predictable eclipses of the sun and moon, the cycles of the years and the seasons, about the kinds of animals, shrubs, stones, and so forth, and this knowledge he holds to as being certain from reason and experience. 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. The shame is not so much that an ignorant individual is derided, but that people outside the household of faith think our sacred writers held such opinions, and, to the great loss of those for whose salvation we toil, the writers of our Scripture are criticised and rejected as unlearned men. If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven, when they think their pages are full of falsehoods on facts which they themselves have learnt from experience and the light of reason?<sup>4</sup>

Now let us hear from Psalm 24 and commit ourselves to loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength and yes, our minds too.

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<sup>4</sup> quoted in M. Knoll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995) p. 202-203.