

ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN AWAY MIRACLES THAT THE BIBLE REPORTS

We should be able to expect that theological scholars and clergy would be among the first to assert the full reliability of God's Word. However, it is disappointing when that does not happen. Sometimes hard-headed sceptics see the alternatives more clearly, and see theologians' attempts to bring God's Word more into line with what they perceive modern scientific people might find acceptable as the folly that it is.

One relates to is the feeding of the Israelites with manna. One theologian suggested that the numbers of the Israelites who left Egypt were "beefed up" in the Bible. Other have explained that the manna that fed the Israelites in the wilderness was some naturally occurring substance on shrubs in the desert of Sinai or Midian. For example, the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* says: "The most widely held theory identifies the manna with a secretion from the tamarisk tree. Certain types of insects puncture the bark and small, sticky, light-coloured drops of sap crystallize on the twigs or drop to the ground. In the cool of the morning, before the hot sun melts them, these sweet particles can be gathered and eaten. There are obvious resemblances between this natural phenomenon and the biblical manna: both appear in the morning 'with the dew' (Num 11:9); the material looks like small white globules or flakes (Ex 16:14, 31; Num 11:7; the description 'appearance of bdellium' was interpreted by the rabbis as 'like pearls' ... the taste is sweet, 'like wafers made with honey and oil' (Ex 16:31; Num 11:8); and both substances melt in the sun (Ex 16:21)."

Wait a minute! What kind of quantities are we talking about? The number of Israelites who left Egypt was "about six hundred thousand strong men on foot, besides the women and children" (Ex 12:37). So with women and children the amount of food needed had to be enough for about two million people. What kind of forest of tamarisks would be needed for that at the different staging points in the desert? Remember, too, that they stayed at some places for a considerable time. What distances from the camp would they have had to walk to find enough? Certainly, the amount of food required could not be supplied from such a source.

Besides, there were differences between such a substance and manna. The manna could be ground, milled, baked, or boiled (Ex 16:23; Num 11:8). The secretion tamarisks cannot be processed in those ways.

The strongest objection to this suggestion is the fact that it was there six days out of seven. No naturally occurring substance would come and then fail to come in such a way. The manna could not be kept for more than a day without becoming wormy. However, it could be kept overnight on the Sabbath. The tamarisk secretion occurs for only a few weeks in the summer, while manna was a daily provision for forty years the wilderness, and suddenly ceased when the Israelites entered Canaan. The attempts to explain away the miracle are less credible than faith that God truly supplied this food miraculously in His own way, precisely as the Scriptures consistently report it.

Failure to take God's Word at face value is a form of unbelief and disobedience, by which the Israelites themselves often provoked the Lord to anger.

One person suggested that a subsidence of ground at Sodom and Gomorrah caused reserves of underground oil to spray into the air, which, when ignited, burnt the cities. Another suggested that the ten plagues of Egypt were caused by the coming of the tail of a comet close to the earth. Death of livestock, darkness, and hail? Perhaps. But why none in Goshen? What about blood in the Nile, frogs, gnats, flies, boils, locusts, and the selective killing only of firstborn? What kind of stretching of credence is that? Some have suggested that, when Elijah and Elisha stretched out their bodies on the dead boys at Zarephath and at Shunem, they were really engaging in some early form of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Another suggested that the boy with the five loaves and two fish made his lunch available to others, and that his generosity then prompted the five thousand men to bring their lunches out also, and, presto, there was enough for all to be fed. The "miracle" then becomes an example of how one person's generosity can influence others in a remarkable way. Convincing?

What about the walls of Jericho? Some have tried to explain the miracle by saying that, when a company of soldiers marches across a wooden bridge, the company is given the order not to keep step. The tramping of many feet in time could cause a bridge to bounce and even collapse. It has been suggested that the trampling of the feet of the Israelites around Jericho once each day, and then seven times with the noise from trumpet blasts on the final day triggered off a weakness in the walls, so that they suddenly collapsed. Such a softheaded suggestion requires more faith than acceptance of God's direct and miraculous intervention. Why should the walls have fallen outwards in such a way that the Israelites could go directly from where they were into the city, and in such a way that only the house of Rahab's family should have been spared? Certainly God could and did employ natural means to bring about some of His miracles. However, there are many that defy naturalistic explanations. Jesus' turning water into wine and His raisings from the dead, for example. These miracles cut right across laws of nature. The alternatives are that either they happened as the Scriptures report them or that they are untrue.

Robert Doolan wrote an article, "Sceptic Sees Flaw in Watering Down Genesis" (*Christian News* 17 June 2002, p. 20). "I recently found an evolutionist discussion group on the web that had an excellent comment from a sceptic about why Christians should accept only the view that Genesis is literal, historical truth.

"The sceptic had all the arguments that creationologists use. In fact, he expresses the arguments better than many Christians do (remember, this sceptic doesn't believe Genesis at all). He has shown this in other comments:

"I don't see how you can reconcile the facts of evolution and an old earth with Genesis... I mean really, Adam and Eve, though fictional, are described as real people in Bible genealogies, as is Noah. There's nothing in the creation and flood stories which indicates it's to be treated differently from stories of identical context like David and Goliath, Elijah

going into heaven, and so on.

“Some say the creation story happened over millions of years. But it says “There was evening and there was morning, the ___th (whatever) day.” Seems to mean a real day. Also the order of creation is way out of line: sun and stars after the earth and vegetation; flying creatures before land ones; domestic animals (cattle) created before humans, just to name some. And how do you reconcile billions of years of death and suffering of animals with a perfect, death-free creation?”

Robert Doolan commented: “Christians who say they believe the Bible but then try to water it down by saying they also believe evolution and an old earth are doing great damage to Christianity. That kind of Christian will never influence sceptics who can see through their contradictory arguments.

“The sceptic also had a powerful comment on Noah’s Flood...: ““The flood seems ridiculous too if interpreted as local. The point wasn’t “to destroy all flesh outside the ark” and presumably there were “corrupt and sinful” people all over the world, not just in Noah’s specific location. Also why did he not just run away to some place else instead of building such a huge ark (if the flood was not worldwide)?”

Doolan then comments: “Whether this sceptic came to his conclusion himself or heard the arguments from creationists is not important. What is important is that he can see the inconsistency in Christians who say they believe the Bible but then try to explain Genesis as something other than a true, living historical account of the creation of the universe.”