

Science and Scripture

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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INTRODUCTION

The famous evolutionist Julian Huxley once said, "Any view of God as a personal being is becoming frankly untenable. The difficulty of understanding the functions of a personal ruler in a universe which the march of knowledge is showing us ever more clearly as self-ordered and self-ordering in every minutest detail is becoming more and more apparent" (Essays of a Biologist [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923], p. 217). His sentiments were echoed by the British philosopher Bertrand Russell: "That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins--all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand" ("A Free Man's Worship" in Selected Papers of Bertrand Russell [New York: The Modern Library, 1927], p. 3). Others have said that as science finds explanations of natural phenomena, God becomes smaller and smaller. Once God was the Almighty; now science is the almighty.

Our Christian faith is under constant attack. Many in our day would tell us that there is a conflict between science and Scripture, that the Bible reflects a pre-scientific world view and is scientifically inaccurate. We are told we are faced with a choice between the facts of science and the fantasy of Scripture. The conflict stems from the fact that, all too often, science has overstepped its bounds. Instead of being a method of discovering knowledge, it has become an all-encompassing world view. No one has stated that more clearly than the British mathematician Karl Pearson: "The goal of science is clear--it is nothing short of the complete interpretation of the universe" (cited by Gordon H. Clark, A Christian View of Men and Things [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952], p. 201).

A. The Presuppositions of Science

One presupposition held by many scientists is that "the scientific method is the sole gateway to the whole region of knowledge" (Pearson, cited by Clark, p. 201). In other words, science allegedly has absolute authority. Science says that truth is discovered empirically, while the Bible says that man can't find ultimate truth on his own (1 Cor. 2:9-11; Rom. 11:33). It is here that one of the fundamental conflicts between science and Scripture is found. Science holds that only that which is observable and testable is true. Christianity holds that ultimate truth is found only in God's revelation.

B. The Peril of Scientism

As Christians we accept the facts of science. What we do not accept are the interpretations of those facts offered by some scientists. There is no conflict between the established facts of science and the Bible, though scientists often make unproved assumptions (such as the theory of evolution) that do conflict with Scripture. Although the Bible is written in everyday language and doesn't use modern scientific terminology, that does not mean it is scientifically inaccurate. Indeed, many of the world's greatest scientists have accepted the authority of the Bible, such as Newton, Faraday, Maxwell, Lister, Pasteur, Kelvin, and others.

The conflict between science and Scripture comes when science steps outside the realm of that which is observable and reproducible and speculates on origins, values, and destinies. At that point science has ceased to be science and instead become a religious viewpoint, since those things are not subject to observation and experimentation.

Does the Bible Contain Scientific Errors?

Many Christians assume the Bible contains scientific errors, and that it is authoritative only when it speaks on spiritual matters. But that is saying in effect that the God who wrote the Bible knew a lot about spiritual things, but not too much about science. To say that parts of the Bible are accurate, but others are not is to deny the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. Since God knows all things, and what He speaks is true (cf., Titus 1:2), all that the Bible teaches is accurate, not just its spiritual truths.

The issue is not between science and Scripture; the issue is whether man will submit to the Word of God. Romans 1:28 describes people who refuse to submit as those who "did not like to retain God in their knowledge." Because they rejected God's revelation of Himself as Creator, men came up with the only alternative: that the universe and everything in it just happened.

LESSON

I. THERMODYNAMICS

There are three principles basic to science: matter, energy, and the space-time continuum. Science tells us that none of the three can exist without the other two; therefore all three must have existed from the beginning of the universe. Note that Genesis 1:1 mentions all three: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

A. The First Law of Thermodynamics

The Bible says in Genesis 2:2 that "God ended His work which He had made." The matter and energy that was part of the original creation is all there will ever be; no new matter or energy is being created. The complete cessation of creative activity has been recognized by modern science as the first law of thermodynamics, or the law of the conservation of mass and energy. According to this

law, which is one of the most universal and certain of all scientific principles, nothing is now being created or destroyed. That principle is illustrated in the following verses:

1. Isaiah 40:26--"Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, who bringeth out their host by number; he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might; for he is strong in power. Not one faileth."
2. Nehemiah 9:6--"Thou, even thou art Lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are in it, the seas, and all that is in them, and thou preservest them all."
3. Ecclesiastes 3:14-15--"I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever; nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it That which hath been is now, and that which is to be hath already been."

The Word of God accurately states the first law of thermodynamics.

B. The Second Law of Thermodynamics

This law, also known as the law of entropy, tells us that though energy cannot be destroyed, its ability to do useful work decreases. Systems tend to degenerate from a state of order to a state of chaos. Science tells us that eventually this process will lead to the death of the universe.

The Bible teaches that the second law of thermodynamics is a result of the Fall. Romans 8:20-22 says, "The creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. Because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." Although that passage pictures the entire creation as progressively breaking down, it also gives us hope for the future. When God creates the new heaven and the new earth, the second law of thermodynamics will not operate. In that new creation there will be no more curse, death, decay, or sin.

II. HYDROLOGY

A. Defined

Hydrology is the branch of science that studies the waters of the earth. In the hydrologic cycle, water evaporates into the atmosphere and is redeposited onto the earth in the form of rain or snow. That precipitation feeds rivers, which flow into the ocean. Evaporation from the ocean forms clouds, from which precipitation falls on the land, and the cycle repeats itself.

B. Described

The science of hydrology was founded in the seventeenth century by Mariotte, Perrault, and Halley, but the hydrologic cycle is clearly described in Scripture:

1. Isaiah 55:10-11--"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it" (NASB).

2. Ecclesiastes 1:7--"All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full." That's because of the hydrologic cycle.

3. Job 36:27-28--"He [God] draws up the drops of water, they distill rain from the mist, which the clouds pour down, they drip upon man abundantly" (NASB).

4. Psalm 135:7--"He causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain." This verse speaks of evaporation and precipitation.

5. Job 26:8--"He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not torn under them." This verse speaks of the formation of clouds by condensation.

6. Job 28:10--"He cutteth out rivers among the rocks." This verse describes run-off.

7. Job 38:22--"Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? Or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail?" This speaks of the clouds.

III. ASTRONOMY

A. The Size of the Universe

1. Job 22:12--"Is not God in the height of heaven? And behold the height of the stars, how high they are!" Although the height of the stars was unknown until the nineteenth century (Jean Sloat Morton, Ph.D., Science in the Bible [Chicago: Moody, 1978], p. 15), the book of Job recognized they were very distant from the earth.

2. Jeremiah 31:37--"Thus saith the Lord, if heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord." This verse mentions the immense size of the universe. It also tells us that God will not permanently set aside Israel.

B. The Variety of Stars

1. Jeremiah 33:22--"As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured, so will I multiply the seed of David, my servant." The invention of the telescope in the seventeenth century made men aware of the vast number of stars. Beforehand scientists had said the total number was only in the hundreds or thousands. Only about four thousand can be counted with the unaided eye. Today no one knows how many stars there are, but "with the giant telescopes now available ..., astronomers have statistically estimated that there are about 1025 stars (that is, 10

million billion billion) in the known universe. One can also calculate that this is about the number of grains of sand in the world" (Henry M. Morris, *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], p. 156; *The Genesis Record* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976], p. 384). The Bible is accurate when it states the impossibility of numbering the stars.

2. 1 Corinthians 15:41--"There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory." With the development of modern astronomy has come the realization that there is great variety of sizes and degrees of brightness among stars. If the Bible had stated that all stars were the same, it would have been in error. However, it doesn't say that because God knows as much about stars as He does about salvation!

C. The Order of the Solar System

1. Jeremiah 31:35-36--"Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day, and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night...'If this fixed order departs from before Me,' declares the Lord, 'then the offspring of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me forever'" (NASB). When I was a kid I remember thinking it was amazing how the planets all stayed in their orbits. The orbits of the moon and planets are so constant that eclipses can be predicted with great accuracy.

2. Psalm 19:6--Referring to the sun the psalmist says, "His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hidden from the heat thereof." This verse took on new meaning when it was discovered that the sun, along with the other stars in our galaxy, revolve around the center of the galaxy. Astronomy books currently teach that the sun completes one such circuit every 250 million years (e.g., Robert Jastrow and Malcom H. Thompson, *Astronomy: Fundamentals and Frontiers* [New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1977], p. 6)

IV. GEOLOGY

A. Isostasy

Isostasy is a field of study within geology that deals with the balance maintained within the earth's crust. The differing weights of the various types of rock maintain a delicate balance; otherwise the earth would wobble in its rotation like a lopsided basketball. Isaiah 40:12 says, "[God] hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and measured out heaven with the span, and measured the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance." Psalm 104:5, 8 tells us that God "established the earth upon its foundations, so that it will not totter The mountains rose; the valleys sank down to the place which [He] didst establish for them" (NASB). The Bible teaches that the earth is balanced.

B. Geodesy

This branch of geology studies the size and shape of the earth.

1. The ancient views

a) The flat-earth theory

People in ancient times thought of the earth as being a flat disk, like a record, surrounded by a river called Oceanus. It was believed that anyone foolish enough to sail through the Pillars of Hercules (the Strait of Gibraltar) would fall off the earth into nothingness.

b) The Ptolemaic theory

Ptolemy, in the second century after Christ, proposed a spherical earth as the stationary center of the universe, with the sun and the other heavenly bodies revolving around it. Not until the sixteenth century with the discoveries of

Copernicus was this theory abandoned.

2. The biblical view

In contrast to the widely held ancient belief that the earth was flat, the Bible clearly teaches that it is round. Isaiah 40:22 says, "It is He who sitteth upon the circle of the earth." Job 38:14 says, "It [the earth] is turned like clay to the seal." That is a reference to the small cylinders used in ancient times to put one's seal on a clay document. Those cylinders had sticks through the center, like a rolling pin, and while the clay was still soft, they would be rolled across it, leaving the impression of the seal. The Bible tells us the earth rotates on its axis like a cylinder making a seal.

V. METEOROLOGY

A. Wind Circulation

In the seventeenth century George Hadley discovered that the winds circulate around the earth. Thousands of years earlier the book of Ecclesiastes referred to this phenomenon: "The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to its circuits."

B. Air Pressure

Before the time of Galileo, it was not known that the air had weight. Evangelista Torricelli, a student of Galileo, invented the first barometer, proving the air has pressure. However, Scripture implied that thousands of years before. Job 28:25 says, "He imparted weight to the wind" (NASB).

VI. PHYSIOLOGY

A. The Circulatory System

In the seventeenth century William Harvey discovered the circulatory system, demonstrating that the blood sustains life. In ancient and medieval times it was common practice to bleed sick people. Now that we understand the importance of blood in sustaining life, doctors sometimes give blood transfusions to sick persons. The importance of the blood in sustaining life is recognized in the statement of Leviticus 17:11 that "the life of the flesh is in the blood."

B. Psychosomatic Illness

In 1953 a medical book was published entitled *Personality Manifestations in Psychosomatic Illness* by psychiatrist Oliver Spurgeon English (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders?). It discussed how emotions can cause debilitating and even fatal illnesses. The book diagrammed the emotional center of the brain from which nerve fibers descend to every area of the body. Because of these intricate connections, emotional stress can cause anything from headaches to foot itch, as well as serious illness. The book said the emotional center produces illness in three ways:

1. By affecting the flow of blood--Emotional stress can increase or decrease the amount of blood in certain areas of the body. For example, anger often makes a person red in the face.
2. By affecting the secretions of certain glands--Have you ever gotten nervous and had your mouth dry up before you gave a speech? Your brain sent certain impulses through your nervous system that dried up the glands that provide the fluid in your mouth. Excessive emotional stress can produce excess thyroxine, which is then poured into the blood stream. That can cause illnesses such as a goiter or even serious heart disease.
3. By affecting the muscles--Emotion can change a person's physical health by creating muscle tension. The nerves affect the muscles by causing them to tighten up and become tense.

God knows that our emotions are very important to good health. Proverbs 16:24 says, "Pleasant words are like an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones." Emotional stress caused by criticism and angry words can adversely affect our health. Proverbs 17:22 says, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones." A happy person tends to be healthy; an unhappy person tends to be unhealthy.

C. Leprosy

In his book *None of These Diseases* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1984), Dr. S.I. McMillen cited this example of important medical principles found in the Bible:

"For many hundreds of years the dreaded disease leprosy had killed and maimed countless millions of people in Europe. The extent of the horrible malady among Europeans is described by Dr. George Rosen, Columbia University emeritus professor of public health: 'Leprosy cast the greatest blight that threw its shadow over the daily life of medieval humanity. Fear of all other diseases taken together can hardly be compared to the terror spread by leprosy. Not even the Black Death in the fourteenth century or the appearance of syphilis toward the end of the fifteenth century produced a similar state of fright.... Early in the Middle Ages, during the sixth and seventh centuries, it began to spread more widely in Europe and became a serious social and health problem. It was endemic particularly among the poor and reached a terrifying peak in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.'

"What did the physicians offer to stop the ever-increasing ravages of leprosy? Some taught that it was brought on by eating spiced food, spoiled fish, or diseased pork. Other physicians said it was caused by 'malign conjunction of the planets.' Naturally, their suggestions for prevention were utterly worthless.

"What brought the leprosy epidemic of the Dark Ages under control? George Rosen gives us the

answer: 'Leadership was taken by the church, as the physicians had nothing to offer. The church took as its guiding principle the concept of contagion as embodied in the Old Testament.... This idea and its practical consequences are defined with great clarity in the book of Leviticus.... Once the condition of leprosy had been established, the patient was to be segregated and excluded from the community. Following the precepts laid down in Leviticus the church undertook the task of combatting leprosy ... it accomplished the first great feat ... in methodical eradication of disease.

"The procedures came from Leviticus 13:46: 'As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp' (NIV). Although the 'leprosy' of the Bible was much more ravaging than the modern disease we call 'leprosy' and although it may actually have been a completely different disease, the biblical method for control of infectious skin diseases is unequalled in the history of ancient man.

"Other historians credit the Bible for the dawning of a new era in the effective control of disease: 'The laws against leprosy in Leviticus 13 may be regarded as the first model of a sanitary legislation'" (pp. 21-22).

CONCLUSION

We could consider evidence from other branches of science, such as biology and anthropology, and still find the Bible accurate when it touches on those and any other fields. That's because the God who inspired it is the Creator of the world. Far from refuting Scripture, science helps confirm it. In the final analysis, all truth--scientific and spiritual--is one. Jesus said, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). The Bible speaks accurately on any subject it touches on because God inspired its writing.

Focusing on the Facts

1. How has science usurped the place of God?
2. What is the underlying cause of the conflict between science and the Bible?
3. What is one presupposition of science that brings it into conflict with Scripture?
4. Contrast what science teaches about discovering truth with what the Bible teaches.
5. True or False: As Christians we accept the facts of science.
6. Describe the difference between science and scientism.
7. In your own words explain the problem with assuming the Bible contains scientific errors.

8. What is the basic reason men come up with explanations of the universe that leave out God?
9. What are three basic principles of science?
10. True or False: According to the first law of thermodynamics, matter and energy are constantly being created.
11. According to the second law of thermodynamics, systems tend to go from _____ to _____.
12. Explain the origin of the second law of thermodynamics from a biblical perspective.
13. True or False: The Bible agrees with the ancient view that the earth is flat.
14. Describe how emotions can affect our health.

Pondering the Principles

1. The biblical doctrine of creation is being strongly opposed these days, not only from enemies of the Bible, but also from those claiming to be its defenders. The forsaking of the clear biblical teaching that God created the heaven and the earth in six twenty-four hour days, and that Noah's Flood was worldwide in extent has led to the rise of such compromise positions as theistic evolution, progressive creationism, the day-age theory, the gap theory, and the local flood theory. In light of the abundant scientific evidence against the theory of evolution, such compromises are unnecessary. If you are not certain what to believe about creation and evolution, why not study the issue for yourself? The following books are a good place to start: Henry M. Morris, ed., *Scientific Creationism* (El Cajon, Calif.: Master Books), Henry M. Morris and Gary E. Parker, *What Is Creation Science?* (El Cajon, Calif.: Master Books), R. L. Wysong, *The Creation-Evolution Controversy*, (E. Lansing, Mich.: Inquiry), Duane T. Gish, *Evolution: The Challenge of the Fossil Record* (El Cajon, Calif.: Master Books), and Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Bethesda, Md.: Adler & Adler).

2. As the quote from Bertrand Russell on p.XX indicates, those who reject God are faced with hopeless despair. They're forced to conclude that all man's efforts are ultimately meaningless since all men die, and eventually the universe itself will die. However, Christians have hope. In fact, we are to rejoice in hope (Rom. 5:2; 12:12). We can have hope when others have only despair because what we do for God in this life is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). Are you a hopeful person? Or is your life clouded with the same despair that plagues non-believers? If your hope is sagging, why not pump new life into it by taking your Bible and concordance and doing a Bible study on hope?

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