

"Great are the works of the Lord; They are studied by all who delight in them."
—Psalm 111:2

Reasons To Believe Rochester, N.Y. Network



Ithaca Falls, Ithaca, Tompkins County, N.Y.

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REASONS TO BELIEVE

The mission of Reasons To Believe is to show that science and faith are, and always will be, allies, not enemies. Our goal is to bring that life-changing truth to everybody who needs to know, both believers and nonbelievers.

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Reflections on the Universe

by John Piper

The really wonderful moments of joy in this world are not the moments of self-satisfaction, but self-forgetfulness. Standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon and contemplating your own greatness is pathological. At such moments we are made for a magnificent joy that comes from outside ourselves. And each of these rare and precious moments in life--beside the Canyon, before the Alps, under the stars--is an echo of a far greater excellence, namely, the glory of God. That is why the Bible says "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1).

Sometimes people say that they cannot believe that, if there is a God, he would take interest in such a tiny speck of reality called humanity on Planet Earth. The universe, they say, is so vast, it makes man utterly insignificant. Why would God have bothered to create such a microscopic speck called the earth and humanity and then get involved with us?

Beneath this question is a fundamental failure to see what the universe is about. It is about the greatness of God, not the significance of man. God made man small and the universe big to say something about himself. And he says it for us to learn and enjoy--namely, that he is infinitely great and powerful and wise and beautiful. The more the Hubble Telescope sends back to us about the unfathomable depths of space, the more we should stand in awe of God. The disproportion between us and the universe is a parable about the disproportion between us and God. And it is an understatement. But the point is not to nullify us but to glorify him.

--from *Don't Waste Your Life*, Crossway Books, 2007, pp. 33-34.

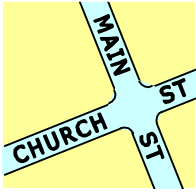
John Piper is pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minn. His books, writings, and sermons may be found online at <www.desiringgod.org>.



Does the Bible Contradict Itself?

by David Peterson

INTERSECTIONS My last two articles looked at cases where the Bible appears to disagree with evidence of history and of science. We saw a number of principles for dealing with such apparent discrepancies: recognize that the data is always incomplete, allow for alternative interpretations of both scriptural and external data, and don't let assumptions or biases determine your interpretation.



In particular, we saw that “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence”: Belshazzar could exist though no records say so. Also, we must not jump to conclusions: Darius the Mede was not the ruler of Persia. Further, we may be making unnoticed assumptions even as we read a passage in what seems to be the only reasonable way: the Bible does not teach that the earth is at the center of the universe. Finally, we must not read Biblical language as if it were the language of modern science or history; it uses ordinary language, in which the sun “moves through the sky”, regardless of whether it is actually moving!

The same sorts of things can happen when the apparent contradiction is not between the Bible and some other source, but between one scripture and another. Such internal contradictions are often cited as reasons not to believe the Bible. In many cases, however, they turn out to be powerful evidence that the Bible is just what it claims to be!

Let's imagine a courtroom scene where a young man is on trial for robbery. He testifies about what he was doing at the time of the crime. His lawyer brings in several witnesses who agree that he was not there;

but there are little differences in their testimony, and it is not obvious that they fit together. We might think that the defense is lying, because their witnesses disagree. But consider the alternative. If the witnesses came in telling exactly the same story, we would wonder if they had all been told what to say, and were in fact all just repeating what they had been told by the lawyer! Genuine witnesses will tell the story from different perspectives. They will not all have seen everything, nor will they think the same things are important. They will not use the same words even when they describe the same event. But these variations are the mark of genuine witnesses. Our job as judge or jury is to put the stories together into a more complete picture.

We have four “witnesses” to the life of Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Sometimes they just report different stories; often they tell the same story and agree on all the main facts (even using the same words at times, probably because they used the same sources in their research). But sometimes they give details that do not appear to fit together at all. The differences, as in our examples from history and science, do not generally concern the main teaching of a passage, which will be clear from every report, but the incidental facts: who did what, and in what order? Yet they can make readers wonder if the Bible can be trusted.

Let's look at one brief example that illustrates several useful points. Compare these three passages:

Matt 20:29-30 As Jesus and his disciples

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Bible *(Continued from page 3)*

were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”

Mark 10:46-47 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Luke 18:35-38 As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” He called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Where did this happen? Matthew and Mark agree he was *leaving* Jericho, but Luke says they were *approaching* the city.

How many blind men were there? Mark and Luke agree that there was *one*; but Matthew says there were *two*. Only Mark gives a *name*.

What did he or they say? Mark and Luke again agree on “*Jesus*”, but Matthew says “*Lord*”. In Matthew, since two men are speaking, they ask for mercy “on us”, not “on me”.

The variation in numbers is a problem only if we read the language as if it were technically precise: saying there was “a blind man” does not mean “*exactly one*”. Clearly Mark was focused on an individual; perhaps he knew him personally, or he was just the bolder of the two. We need to see clearly what the passage does *not* say, as well as what it does say.

The variation in quotations likewise is no problem if we have reasonable expectations. Quotations in ancient records were not intended to be word-for-word and complete, but were often summaries or paraphrases of longer speeches; here it would be easy for the blind men to have called Jesus by both terms as they cried out over and over.

As for the location, I have seen several possible explanations. Perhaps there were two separate events, one before Jericho, and one on the way out. (There was a plentiful supply of blind men to be healed!) Or perhaps Bartimaeus first called out to Jesus when He was approaching, but only got His attention as He came back out (by which time another blind man had joined him).

Or what about this: maybe there were two cities called Jericho, which we might call Old Jericho and New Jericho, close enough together that an event that happened as Jesus left Old Jericho would happen as He approached New Jericho. As contrived as that might sound, it has been found that this was true! We can't be sure this is the correct explanation, but we see that an answer is possible, even if it seems absurd at first glance.

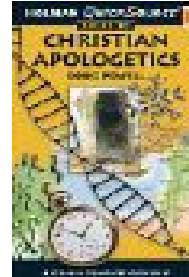
We don't need to have a complete answer. It is the nature of truth that we will never know *all* of it, but that if we knew all, stories that seemed irreconcilable would turn out to be perfectly consistent. The *clear* fact that the gospels are independent witnesses to the truth of Jesus' great power and love overshadows our lack of certainty about unimportant details.

Dave teaches math at Monroe Community College in Rochester and is an elder and teacher in his church. This article was originally written for the church newsletter.

Resource Spotlight: Two Guides

by Virginia Peterson

***Holman QuickSource Guide to Christian Apologetics*, by Doug Powell, Holman Reference, 2006.**



“The vast majority of Christian apologetics is done everyday though casual conversation, not in classrooms or debates that can seem to be detached from any personal relevance. It is here that we discuss and attempt to make sense of the issues of life. And it is for such spontaneous conversations that Christians need to be prepared.” (p. 20)

With this observation, the author shows us what is the greatest and most useful benefit of studying apologetics: to aid us in our ordinary encounters with people who have questions about our Christian faith. For most of us, those interactions won’t take place as part of a formal event or with a large audience, and may come at unexpected times, so we need to be prepared with the type of information presented in this book. Starting with the question “What is apologetics?” and proceeding to the last chapter on “Methodology”, the author follows a logical progression in laying out the case for Christianity.

To begin, the first question is: “Does God exist?” This has typically been answered with the cosmological, design, and moral arguments, of which there are several kinds of each. But if these arguments offer strong evidence that God exists, which view of God is the correct one? An examination of the various types of belief, such as pantheism, atheism, deism, and polytheism, leads to the conclusion that monotheism best fits the characteristics of God derived from the cosmological, design, and moral arguments.

However, there are three monotheistic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, that make claims about Jesus. How do we know which one portrays him correctly? Delving into the history and sources of the Old and New Testaments reveals their trustworthiness and accuracy, and the conclusion that Christianity is correct. But there are many miracles mentioned, and much prophecy -- how do we deal with the truthfulness of these in accepting the Bible? One way to look at prophecy is that it is miraculous communication that can be tested, and which finds its culmination in Jesus Christ himself. He also did miracles and claimed authority – what validates these? The Resurrection.

Even if one accepts the Resurrection as authenticating Jesus’ words and teaching, he may not be viewed by everyone as God or as the only way to God. These claims are examined next, with the conclusion that he did claim to be God and the exclusive way to God. Even so, some still protest based on the existence of evil, but then the presence of evil forces us back to reconsider the existence and nature of God.

The final chapter explains the various methodologies that have been used in defending the

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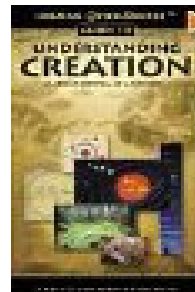
Christian faith, which are distinguished mostly by what kinds of arguments are emphasized. Classical apologetics, evidentialism, presuppositionalism, and fideism all have their proponents, but most apologists have usually drawn ideas from all viewpoints. An integrative approach is like that expressed by Francis Schaeffer: “I do not believe that there is any one system of apologetics that meets the need of all the people, any more than I think there is any one form of evangelism that meets the need of all the people. It is to be shaped on the basis of love for the person as a person.” (Appendix A, *The God Who is There*)

This book will help you gain the necessary knowledge to explain your faith under many kinds of challenges and circumstances, remembering that we never know when the opportunity will arise.

For more detailed information on the topic of creation apologetics, see the next book.

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***Holman QuickSource Guide to Understanding Creation, A Biblical and Scientific Overview*, by Mark Whorton and Hill Roberts, Holman Reference, 2008.**



Written by two RTB apologists, this book covers the spectrum of information on the subject of creation. With an attractive layout containing many pictures, tables and diagrams, it draws the reader into the book while presenting the necessary detail to understand the many facets of the subject. While the authors' personal views are discernible, they offer fair critiques of all positions.

A look at the table of contents will illustrate the book's offerings:

**Part 1: Ancient Stories about Creation and the Creator**

Creation myths of different cultures compared with the Bible's creation accounts

**Part 2: Revelation in Scripture and Creation**

Models for relating science and the Bible, and the three major views: scientific creationism, progressive creationism, and evolutionary creationism

**Part 3: The Creator's Week of Creation**

An examination of the creation commands in Genesis, commentary on each, and what the record of nature says

**Part 4: Eden, Fall and Flood**

An examination of Genesis chapters 2 and 3 and the Flood story

**Part 5: Genesis and the Age of the Earth**

The five major views and how they critique each other, with worldview implications:

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recent creation view, day-age view, analogical days view, fiat days view, and the framework view.

### **Part 6: Science and the Age of the Earth**

Evidence pro and con for a young or old earth, an examination of geology and the Flood, and a review of radiometric dating.

### **Part 7: Six Impossible Things: Nature's Story of Creation**

An examination of Darwinism and Intelligent Design, followed by the "six impossible things": highly specific design evidences in philosophy, physics, astronomy, chemistry, biochemistry, and anthropology.

### **Part 8: Apes, Bones and Human Ancestry**

Hominids, "cavemen", and the nature of the fossil record.

### **Part 9: Concluding Thoughts**

Includes suggested reading.

As the book concludes:

"So what is the best path to understanding creation in the twenty-first century? We believe it is by starting with the Bible, which supplies the vital starting points for world-view formation and saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. We also believe it is vitally important to take a proper accounting of God's other book of revelation: the natural world. In this way we allow the Bible and nature to come together and present a unified message on life's major questions.... As we have seen, there are many science/Bible issues that Christians struggle with. Our recommendation is that Christians should not focus on what divides us but on what unites us.... Greater faith and understanding are the rewards for those who are willing to face the tough questions, lay their presuppositions on the line, and let God's revelation and Spirit lead in our pursuit of the truth." (pp. 369-70)



## Podcasts of Note

### **Apologetic Model: RTB's Five Point Interpretive Approach**

<[podcasts.reasons.org/straightthinking/st-29.mp3](http://podcasts.reasons.org/straightthinking/st-29.mp3)>

This episode of *Straight Thinking* by Kenneth Samples gives a concise summary of RTB's apologetic philosophy.

### **Making Sense of Science and Scripture: Old Earth Creationism**

<[podcasting.jessup.edu/?p=294](http://podcasting.jessup.edu/?p=294)>

In this talk at William Jessup University, Dr. Fuz Rana lays out RTB's creation model.

### **Lectures on Faith and Science**

<[saddleback.com/mediacenter/services/currentseries.aspx?site=yDi0V4EwP58=&s=OsqcpA0SUK=>](http://saddleback.com/mediacenter/services/currentseries.aspx?site=yDi0V4EwP58=&s=OsqcpA0SUK=>)

Talks by several of today's leading Christian apologists at Saddleback Community Church..



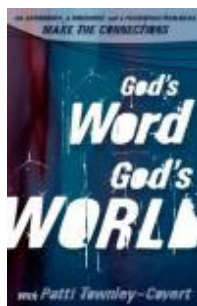
## RTB Resource News

### New!

#### God's Word, God's World

By Patti Townley-Covert, 2009.

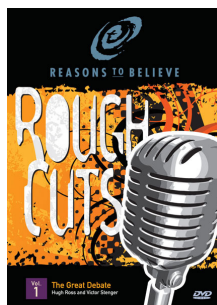
In this interview with Dr. Hugh Ross, Dr. Fazale Rana, and Kenneth Samples, an ordinary Christian explores how scientific discoveries connect with her faith. This booklet answers many compelling science-faith questions and points to resources that can help you and/or your friends dig deeper. Discover how science can impact your worship of the Creator and your enthusiasm for outreach.



### New!

#### Rough Cuts DVDs vol. 1-4

A brand new series of DVDs in which Reasons To Believe scholars participate in university forums and other speaking events across the U.S. Includes a debate between Dr. Ross and atheist Victor Stenger, a university Skeptics Forum, a "Beyond the Cosmos" talk by Dr. Ross, and "Religious Pluralism" by Kenneth Samples.

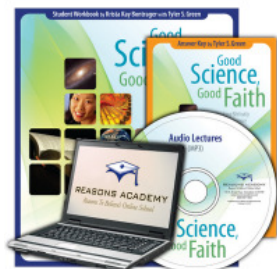


#### Good Science, Good Faith

by Krista Bontrager, 2009.

<[www.reasons.org/learning/reasons-academy](http://www.reasons.org/learning/reasons-academy)>

This online Reasons Academy course for high schoolers is now available in print form as curriculum. The year-long program is designed to prepare high school students to confront key questions related to the interface between science and Scripture that they will encounter in their university studies and beyond.

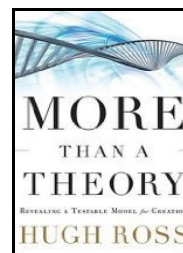


#### More than a Theory: Revealing a Testable Model for Creation

by Dr. Hugh Ross, Baker Books, 2009.

In this book, Dr. Ross offers a testable creation model, discusses what is good science, responds to the atheists' challenges, and offers Christians the knowledge they need to defend the God of the Bible as Creator. Predictions for the testing of creation/evolution models are revisited to assess their accuracy over the last several years. (The updated list of predictions is now available online:

<[www.reasons.org/resources/predictions](http://www.reasons.org/resources/predictions)> )



#### What Darwin Didn't Know

by Dr. Fazale Rana and Dr. Hugh Ross, 2009.

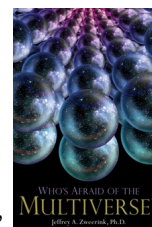
This booklet appears on the occasion of Darwin's 200th birthday and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *Origin of Species*. The focus is on the scientific discoveries since Darwin's time that throw doubt on his theory of evolution.



#### Who's Afraid of the Multiverse?

by Dr. Jeff Zweerink, 2008.

Do other worlds exist beyond the observable universe? If we do live in what scientists call a multiverse, doesn't this rule out the necessity of a Creator? In this booklet, astrophysicist Jeff Zweerink tackles these questions and many more as he explains this increasingly popular view of the universe. This booklet seeks to demystify the multiverse so that Christians can address skeptics' concerns with gentleness and respect, and without fear.



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**RTB** (Continued from page 8)

### **Why the Universe is the Way it is**

by Dr. Hugh Ross, Baker Books, 2008.

With the Bible in one hand and the latest scientific findings in the other, Dr. Ross tackles many of our most pressing cosmic "whys". Questions such as, If God made the universe, why:

- \* is it so vast?
- \* wait to bring humans onto the scene?
- \* allow decay and death to be part of it?
- \* let one man and one woman ruin it for every one?
- \* should I believe my life has any real meaning?
- \* should I get excited about anything beyond what I can see?

The same God who created the universe gave humans the intellect and curiosity to explore it. Dr. Ross leads the exploration by showing how cutting-edge research and key biblical principles agree. This book is not highly technical and is suitable for almost anyone.

### **Dual Revelation: God's Word, God's World**

<[www.dualrevelation.com](http://www.dualrevelation.com)>

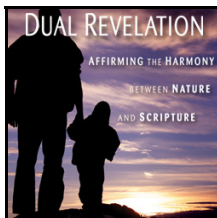
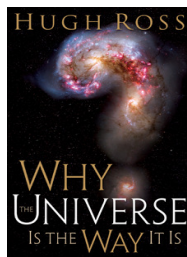
This 60 minute docudrama discusses the harmony between God's works in nature and His words in the Bible, using both provocative drama and input from knowledgeable scholars.

### **The Bigger Picture on Creation**

by Krista Bontrager, Reasons To Believe, 2008.

<[www.readthebiggerpicture.com](http://www.readthebiggerpicture.com)>

This is a seven lesson study guide on Genesis One for individuals or

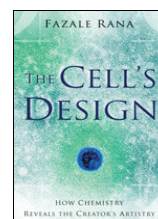


groups. Available for download are flyers, posters, notes for the DVD videos, and a pod-cast. The eight episodes of the podcast feature interviews with the person appearing on the DVD segment for each lesson, and deal with questions that are likely to come up during the study.

### **The Cell's Design: How Chemistry Reveals the Creator's Artistry**

by Dr. Fazale Rana, Baker Books, 2008.

<[www.cellsdesign.com](http://www.cellsdesign.com)>



Explore the magnificent design of the "lowly" cell, and the startling molecular features that argue for a supernatural agent responsible for life..

**All the above resources are available through the Reasons To Believe store at:**

<[www.reasons.org/store](http://www.reasons.org/store)>

### **Podcasts**

(also available on iTunes)

Listener contributions are invited for the question-and-answer podcast called "**I didn't know that!**". Questions may be submitted at the email address: <[ask@reasons.org](mailto:ask@reasons.org)>.



**Science News Flash** covers headline-making science news, as well as significant discoveries that didn't make the news.



Ken Samples' podcast is entitled **Straight Thinking**, dealing with philosophical and theological issues.



These podcasts, as well as those for the books mentioned above, are all available on a single page on the RTB website:

<[www.reasons.org/resources/radio-broadcasts-and-podcasts](http://www.reasons.org/resources/radio-broadcasts-and-podcasts)>



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