DINOSAURS AND THE BIBLE

by

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INTRODUCTION

Dinosaurs! *Iguanodon, Struthiomimus, Podokesaurus, Triceratops, Styracosaurus, Stegosaurus, Trachodon, Psitticosaurus, Brontosaurus, Tyrannosaurus*. Who were these strange creatures with poly-syllabic names? Whence did they come? Where did they go? Or did they ever even really exist—these magnificent creatures of the past, some of which stood over 3½ stories tall, and weighed over 90 tons? The answers to these, and many other related questions, form an interesting part of the creation/evolution controversy. Such questions frequently are “bothersome” to sincere seekers of truth concerning the question of origins. And so it is to the dinosaurs, and what the Bible and science have to say about them, that we now turn our attention.

**DID THE DINOSAURS REALLY EXIST?**

Did the dinosaurs really exist? There is no doubt about it. Dinosaurs really did exist. The first discovery of the dinosaurs as far as “recent” times is concerned came in the spring of 1822. Gideon Mantell, a country doctor in England with a life-long passion for collecting fossils, set off via horse and buggy to visit a patient. His wife Mary Ann went along for the ride. While Dr. Mantell attended to the patient, Mrs. Mantell took a stroll and came across a pile of stones that had been placed alongside the road to be used for filling ruts caused by the spring rains. In those stones, she glimpsed some very large fossil teeth. She showed them to her husband who was amazed, never having seen such huge teeth before. He went to the quarry from which the stones had been cut and found more teeth similar to those found by his wife. Though he showed the teeth to several scientists, none agreed with him that they were from some kind of heretofore-unknown creature. He, however, was stubbornly sure that they were. In 1825, he finally named the long-dead owner of the teeth an *Iguanodon* (“iguana-tooth”) since the teeth were like those of an iguana but much larger. Several years later more teeth like these were discovered in a different quarry. Now no one doubted that *Iguanodon* lived. Meanwhile, huge bones of a *Megalosaurus* had been dug up
farther away in Oxfordshire. By 1842, enough of these fossils had been discovered to convince the leading British anatomist, Richard Owen, that a whole tribe of huge, lizard-like reptiles had lived in the distant past. Based on his studies, he named them “dinosaurs” (from the Greek words deinos and sauros, translated by him as “fearfully great lizards”)—today known to us as “terribly great lizards.”

Soon American fossil hunters joined the search. The climax came in March 1877 when two schoolmasters, Arthur Lakes and O.W. Lucas, separately stumbled onto colossal fossil bones projecting from the rocks in different parts of Colorado. Lakes revealed his find to the well-known paleontologist, Othniel Marsh. Meanwhile, Lucas showed his finds to Marsh’s bitter rival, Edward Cope. Marsh and Cope became the most famous “dinosaur hunters.” All told, Cope named nine new genera of dinosaurs, compared to Marsh’s total of nineteen. Now no one who bothered to keep up with the times doubted the existence of the dinosaurs. The question no longer was, “Did the dinosaurs exist?” The question was, and still is, “When did the dinosaurs exist?” And therein lies the controversy, even today.

WHEN DID THE DINOSAURS EXIST?

The Bible Says...

Knowledgeable, conservative Bible students are fully aware of the plain and simple teachings of the Bible on creation of all life forms—including the dinosaurs. Exodus 20:11 (cf. Exodus 31:17) simply could not be any clearer than it is: “For in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day...” (emp. added). If in the six days of creation God made the heavens, the Earth, the seas, and all that in them is, what does that leave out? The answer, of course, is absolutely nothing.

If God created everything in six days, then everything created was created in those six days. It would be difficult to imagine anything clearer or plainer than what God said He did. [We are aware, of course, of the attempts of some to avoid the implications of this teaching, via the Day-Age Theory and/or the Gap Theory. A refutation of these false concepts is provided in Thompson, 1995.]

What, then, does this mean? Simply put, it means that dinosaurs and men lived as contemporaries on the Earth. There is no other conclusion that can be drawn, respecting the verbally inspired Word of
God. For some, of course, this conclusion simply is not acceptable, and they therefore have gone to great lengths to try to avoid the implications of the Bible’s instruction on this subject. Consider, for example, these quotations from John N. Clayton:

1. “If dinosaurs existed 200 million years before Adam and Eve it does not present any problem to a literal understanding of the Genesis record” (n.d.[b], p. 16).
2. “I have no way of telling where man’s beginning should be on the chart (of geological time—BT). Clearly man has become the dominant form of life on the Earth only in modern times, but where Adam and Eve fitted into this picture is unclear” (n.d.[b], p. 35, emp. added).
3. “Birds, mammals and man are mentioned; and all of these are recent additions to the earth geologically” (1977, p. 151).
4. Man “is a very recent newcomer to this planet” (n.d.[a], p. 8).
5. “Genesis 1:1 simply says, ‘In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth.’ The verse is undated, untimed, and without details as to how this was done. Tradition has said that the first verse is an instantaneous event and that verses 2-31 detail how it was done. It does not seem consistent to this writer with the flow of the language and the message. ... Could not dinosaurs and many other forms have been involved in the production of an Earth ready for man? ... I further submit for your consideration that some time may be involved in this verse and that natural processes may have been used as well as miraculous ones to prepare the Earth for man” (1982, pp. 5-6, emp. added).

Compare such statements as “man is a very recent newcomer to this planet” with statements from Jesus Christ: “But from the beginning of the creation, male and female made he them” (Mark 10:6; cf. Matthew 19:4). Or compare such statements as “all of these are recent additions to the earth geologically” to statements of the inspired apostle Paul: “For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse” (Romans 1:20). The term “perceived” is from the Greek noeo, a word used for rational, human intelligence. Paul’s implication is that someone human was “perceiving.” Perceiving what? The things that were made. And how long had this been occurring? Since the creation of the world. Who had “perceived” these things? Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45; Romans 5:14) and Eve (1 Timothy 2:13) were their names, and they were present “since the creation of the world.”

One might wonder, if dinosaurs were created during the creation week of Genesis 1-2, why are they not mentioned in the Bible? A similar question may illustrate the folly of this type of thinking: “If God created cats and kangaroos, why are they not mentioned in the Bible?” The Bible is not a zoology text; its purpose is no more to catalog every species of animal than it is to list every human who has lived or ever
will live. When we read that “all things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3), we are told by implication that the creation week included cats, kangaroos—and dinosaurs!

Does the Bible mention specifically the creatures that we classify as “dinosaurs”? To answer this question, we need to study three Hebrew words: behemoth, tannim, and leviathan. These terms often are used to describe unusual creatures in the Bible. There can be only three possible explanations for the identity of these creatures: (1) they were mythological creatures that had no true existence in reality; (2) they were non-dinosaurian creatures (living or extinct) that can be identified in the ecosystem of the ancient world; or (3) they were now-extinct creatures that are classified as dinosaurs (and dinosaur-like creatures). The first option fails to satisfy the conservative student who accepts the Bible as the inspired Word of God. To such a person, the Bible does not contain the fabrications of heathen imagination. The second option is acceptable when one finds such creatures that fit the biblical description. The third option, although often unpopular, fits the data best in certain passages, as this study will show. In order to arrive at this conclusion, these three words must be considered in their appropriate contexts.

First, the word behemoth occurs with certainty one time in the Hebrew text (Harris, et.al., 1980, p. 93). In form, behemoth is the same as the plural of behema—the Hebrew word for “beast.” However, behemoth is used as a singular word in Job 40:15, indicating that a specific animal is being described. Some writers suggest that the word appears in two other passages (Brown, et. al., 1979, p. 97). In Psalm 73:22 the psalmist called himself foolish, ignorant, and “as a beast [behemoth] before Jehovah.” Isaiah 30:6 speaks of “the burden of the beasts [behemoth] of the south.” If these verses indeed refer to behemoth, neither is specific enough to reveal the nature of the animal mentioned.

However, Job 40:15-24 is very explicit in its description of behemoth. A particular animal obviously is in focus. The creature thus described was herbivorous, massive in size (with extremely strong muscles and bones), had a noteworthy tail, dwelt near water, and was fearless. Note the description:

Behold now, behemoth, which I made as well as thee; he eateth grass as an ox. Lo now, his strength is in his loins, and his force is in the muscles of his belly. He moveth his tail like a cedar: the sinews of his thighs are knit together. His bones are as tubes of brass; his limbs are like bars of iron. He is the chief of
the ways of God: He only that made him giveth him his sword. Surely the mountains bring him forth food, where all the beasts of the field do play. He lieth under the lotus trees, in the covert of the reed, and the fen. The lotus trees cover him with their shade; the willows of the brook compass him about. Behold, if a river overflow, he trembleth not; he is confident, though a Jordan swell even to his mouth. Shall any take him when he is on the watch, or pierce through his nose with a snare (Job 40:15-24).

What is this behemoth? Some have argued that it is an elephant or hippopotamus. While the habitat may be fitting, there are some difficulties with this view. First, and perhaps most obvious, neither of these creatures possesses a noteworthy tail. Second, the behemoth is said to be “chief of the ways of God.” If this phrase is taken to indicate size (which is reasonable), it would rule out the hippo since at his full size he is but seven feet high. Although an elephant may be twice as tall as a hippo, he still is dwarfed by the dinosaurs (some of which reached heights of up to 3 stories and weights of over 90 tons). While it is inappropriate to be dogmatic, it does seem that a dinosaur (such as Brachiosaurus or Apatosaurus) could be under consideration in Job 40.

The second word that sheds light upon this topic is tannin (and its plural form tannim), which has been translated in various ways in English versions. Of the sixteen times that the word occurs in the Hebrew scriptures, the King James Version (KJV) renders tannin as “whale(s)” three times, “dragon(s)” nine times, “serpent(s)” three times, and “sea monsters” one time. The American Standard Version (ASV) employs the terms “serpent(s)” five times, “sea-monster(s)” six times, “monster” three times, and “jackals” two times in its translations of tannin. This seems to indicate that either the word is of a generic character so as to include these variations of meaning, or else the word is too obscure to confidently assign it a consistent definition.

Of these two, the first option is to be preferred when one considers the contexts that surround the word. Representative of these is Genesis 1:21: “And God created the great sea-monsters [tannim], and every living creature that moveth, wherewith the waters swarmed, after their kind” (ASV). This verse clearly is a listing of the broad categories of sea life that were created on day five, rather than a listing of particular sea creatures. This fact alone shows the KJV rendering of “whales” in this verse to be inappropriate. Similarly, other passages use tannin in a general sense to refer to a sea creature of perhaps enormous and frightful dimensions (Job 7:12; Psalm 74:13; 148:7; et al.).
Specific creatures of somewhat smaller dimensions apparently are indicated in other passages. For example, the parallelism in Psalm 91:13 shows that *tannin* could be used to refer to some sort of serpent: “Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the serpent [*tannin*] shalt thou trample under foot.” In other passages *tannin* is used representatively of great powers over which Jehovah has mastery (cf. Isaiah 27:1; 51:9; et al.). In a familiar passage, Aaron’s rod was cast to the floor in Pharaoh’s court and was transformed into a *tannin*. The English versions call it a serpent, which likely is correct.

Interestingly, Henry Morris has suggested: “If one will simply translate *tannim* by ‘dinosaurs,’ every one of the...uses of the word becomes perfectly clear and appropriate” (1984, p. 352). While this view likely goes too far, there may be some validity to it. It seems more probable that tannin refers to a general category of reptiles of various sizes, some of which may have been dinosaurs and/or dinosaur-like creatures. [NOTE: The plural form of “jackal” apparently was confused with *tannim* about twelve times in the KJV. Hence, the translators used the word “dragons” when they should have used the word “jackals.”]

The third word to consider is *leviathan*. Of its six occurrences in the Hebrew text, the KJV transliterates the word five times as “leviathan” (Job 41:1; Psalm 74:14; 104:26; Isaiah 27:1), and renders it “mourning” one time (Job 3:8). The ASV uses the transliteration every time. In Job 3:8, the patriarch decries the day of his birth and says: “Let them curse it that curse the day, who are ready to rouse up leviathan” (Job 3:8). Job’s meaning is unclear. It may be that he (speaking in hyperbole) was suggesting that if aroused, *leviathan* may have blackened the day of his birth—thereby eliminating its occurrence. Regardless, this passage tells little of *leviathan’s* nature.

In Psalm 74:13-15 the writer describes the majestic strength of Jehovah by ascribing these accomplishments to Him:

-Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: Thou brakest the heads of the sea-monsters [*tannin*] in the waters. Thou brakest the heads of *leviathan* in pieces; Thou gavest him to be food to the people inhabiting the wilderness. Thou didst cleave fountain and flood: Thou driedst up the mighty rivers.

In this context, *leviathan* is considered as a creature on the same fearful scale as the ocean and sea-monsters; in fact, it probably is an inhabitant of the seas. Psalm 104:26 confirms this habitat and portrays *leviathan* on a scale with ships. Added to these sparse facts is the very descriptive text of *leviathan* in Job
41. Many scholars have supposed that the leviathan of Job 41 was a crocodile; even the chapter title in the ASV is “God’s power in the crocodile depicted.” There are some possible similarities between the leviathan and the crocodile, but the differences are so numerous and significant that they cannot be ignored. Consider these dissimilarities:

1. “His [the leviathan’s] sneezings flash forth light...out of his mouth go burning torches, and sparks of fire leap forth out of his nostrils a smoke goeth...his breath kindleth coals, and a flame goeth forth from his mouth” (verses 18-21).

Crocodiles do not have capacity to breathe fire. If one suggests that this is highly figurative, then to what do the words fire, smoke, and flame refer as concerns the crocodile?

2. “When he raiseth himself up, the mighty are afraid: by reason of consternation they are beside themselves…. He beholdeth everything that is high: he is king over all the sons of pride” (verses 25,34).

The crocodile is not much more frightening when he stands than when he sits, since his legs are so short. How could it be said of the crocodile “he beholdeth every thing that is high”?

3. “If one lay at him with the sword, it cannot avail; nor the spear, the dart, nor the pointed shaft.... Clubs are counted as stubble: he laugheth at the rushing of the javelin. His underparts are like sharp potsherds” (verses 26,29-30).

Although the hide that covers the crocodile’s back is extremely thick and difficult to penetrate, this is not true of his belly. The crocodile is most vulnerable to spears and javelins on his underside; hence, it could not be said of him that, “his underparts are like sharp potsherds.”

4. “He maketh the deep to boil like a pot.... He maketh a path to shine after him; one would think the deep to be hoary” (verses 31-32).

The leviathan causes such commotion in the water that he leaves behind a churning wake; contrastingly, the crocodile is a stealthy swimmer.

These are just a few incongruities that remove the crocodile as a possible candidate for the leviathan. Regardless of the similarities that one might find (and they are indeed difficult to discover), these dissimilarities are incontrovertible. Although it may not be possible to single out the one creature that alone could be called leviathan, the possibility that it was a dinosaur-like, sea-dwelling reptile cannot be dismissed.

So, while the Bible does speak indirectly (Exodus 20:11) of dinosaurs, it also is possible that direct references are made to these creatures (e.g., Job 40-41). Regardless, Bible teaching is plain. Men and di-
nosaurs lived upon the Earth at the same time. No other view acknowledges the verbal, plenary inspiration of God’s Word.

Science Says...

But what about the evolutionists’ claims that dinosaurs lived from 200 million to 65 million years ago, becoming extinct long before man ever came on the scene? How do we correlate the Bible’s teachings with these claims?

First, let us state emphatically that there is no way to “square” the Bible’s teaching of a six-day creation of all forms of life with evolutionary theories. It simply cannot be done, while at the same time leaving both the Bible and evolutionary theory intact.

Second, let us point out that the evolutionary claims of dinosaurs living and becoming extinct long before man ever arrived are at odds with what the real scientific facts have to say. Science bears out that the Bible is correct: man and the dinosaurs lived at the same time. Consider the following:

(A) In the early 1900s, Dr. Samuel Hubbard, Honorary Curator of Archaeology at the Oakland, California Museum of Natural History, was excavating old Indian dwellings in the Hava Supai Canyon in Arizona. High on the walls of the canyon in which the Indians’ ancestors lived long ago, Dr. Hubbard found elegant drawings of an elephant, an ibex, a dinosaur, and other “beasts.” He stated concerning the dinosaur drawing: “Taken all in all, the proportions are good.” He further suggested that the huge reptile is “depicted in the attitude in which man would be most likely to see it—reared on its hind legs, balancing with the long tail, either feeding or in fighting position, possibly defending itself against a party of men” (as quoted in Verrill, 1954, pp. 155ff.). Nearby were dinosaur tracks preserved in the stratum identified as Triassic—alleged to be more than 165 million years old. How did the Indians know how to draw such perfect pictures of an animal (the dinosaur) that they never had seen?

(B) According to the evolutionary timetable, the Carboniferous Period of the Paleozoic Era commenced more than 280 million years ago. Man allegedly didn’t “evolve” until one to two million years ago. Be that as it may, human footprints have been found repeatedly in Carboniferous formations. “The tracks are in formations considered to be Upper Carboniferous (250 million years old) and show five toes
and an arch which is unquestionably human. The tracks are 9½ inches long and 4.1 inches broad at the
heel. The width at the forward end of the track, by the toes, was 6 inches. The being that left the tracks
was a biped that walked uprightly like a human” (Wilder-Smith, 1970, p. 300). Evolutionist Albert G.
Ingalls noted that such tracks were found in Virginia, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, and
even westward toward the Rocky Mountains. He was very impressed by the human-like appearance of the
footprints. Clearly seeing, however, the logical conclusion that would necessarily follow if they were ac-
cepted as human, he was led to state:

If man, or even his ape ancestor, or even the ape ancestor’s early mammal ancestor, existed as far back as
in the carboniferous period in any shape, then the whole science of geology is so completely wrong that
all geologists will resign their jobs and take up truck driving. Hence, for the present at least, science
rejects the attractive explanation that man made these mysterious prints in the mud of the carboniferous
period with his feet (Ingalls, 1940, p. 14, emp. added).

Evolutionists may make jokes regarding such finds, but the evidence against evolution and for man
living as a contemporary with supposed “ancient” creatures is mounting.

(C) The trilobite, a small marine arthropod with a hard exoskeleton, is considered so important as to be
classified as an “index fossil” for the earliest period of the Paleozoic Era, the Cambrian Period. These
creatures allegedly flourished a half-billion years before man arrived on the scene. In June of 1968, how-
ever, William J. Meister, an amateur fossilologist, was working near Antelope Springs, Utah and made a
discovery that was to destroy that evolutionary supposition. Working his way up the side of a mountain
over 2,000 feet to a ledge above, he broke open a slab of rock with his hammer. Imagine his astonishment
when he “saw on one side the footprint of a human with trilobites right in the footprint itself. The other
half of the rock slab showed an almost perfect mold of the footprint and fossils. Amazingly the human
was wearing a sandal” (as quoted in Lammerts, 1976, pp. 186-187). Numerous other human prints, both
adult and child, have since been found in the area. The contemporaneousness of man and the trilobite ef-
effectively collapses a half-billion years of the geologic column.

(D) According to the belief commonly held by evolutionists, no advanced mammals were present in
the “age of the reptiles.” The dinosaurs allegedly became extinct in the Cretaceous Period, and the only
mammals that had evolved at that point (even at the very end of the period) supposedly were “small,
mostly about mouse-sized, and rare” (Simpson, 1957, p. 797). It is unthinkable, in evolutionary terms, that dinosaurs and advanced mammals (e.g., elephants) could have lived at the same time. The evolutionary system simply does not allow for such. Again, however, Dr. Hubbard’s discoveries have shown differently.

Another highly important feature of Dr. Hubbard’s report is the discovery of fossil footprints of both the three-toed carnivorous dinosaurs and the imperial elephants in the same locality. If, as it appears, both of these creatures left their footprints in the river’s sand or mud at approximately the same period, then we must assume that the dinosaurs continued to survive for millions of years later than some scientists would have us believe, or else that the imperial elephants appeared on earth millions of years before their supposed arrival. But it seems highly preposterous, and entirely contrary to all known laws of evolution, to assume that these highly developed pachyderms were inhabiting the earth long ages before more primitive types of mammals (Verrill, 1954, p. 162).

(E) If space permitted, much additional information on such “anomalies” could be presented to show that the geologic column is a figment of the evolutionists’ overactive imagination. Consider, if you will, this listing of such contradictions composed by Erich von Fange:

1. Fossil human footprints in South America, Indiana, Missouri Texas, New York, Nevada, Kentucky, and Nicaragua.
2. Fossil leather sole imprint, size 13 with a double line of sewed stitches, found in “Triassic” rock estimated to be 225 million years old.
3. Fossil sole imprint with visible sewed thread in coal estimated at 15 million years old.
4. Flint carvings on extinct saurian (reptilian) bones estimated to be 180 million years old.
5. Artifacts found down to 300 feet under the Earth.
6. Human skull at a depth of 130 feet under 5 separate layers of lava.
7. Paved tile in Colorado “Miocene” rock estimated to be 27 million years old (1974, 19ff.).

WHERE DID THE DINOSAURS GO?

Whatever became of the dinosaurs? Why did they seemingly become extinct? Many different theories have been suggested by evolutionists, but none seems to fit all the facts. Reginald Daly, in his classic work, *Earth’s Most Challenging Mysteries* (1972, pp. 29ff.), presented and discussed more than 20 proposed theories. Some years ago, scientists assembled at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science heard Walter Alvarez, son of Nobel laureate Luis Alvarez, make his presentation on how dinosaurs allegedly were killed off in three months (65 million years ago) by the effects of an asteroid collision with the Earth—which threw up such a dust storm that it blocked out the
Sun, which caused plants to die, which caused the plant-eating animals to die, which caused the carnivorous animals to die (Science Digest, 1982, pp. 58-63; Discover, 1984, pp. 21-32). One scientist at the AAAS convention offered what he called (tongue-in-cheek) his “zonk” theory. He suggested that dinosaurs were wiped out when they were “zonked” on the head by incoming meteorites!

Duane Gish, in his book, Dinosaurs: Those Terrible Lizards (1977, pp. 55-60), offered several suggestions, in light of Bible teaching related to the global flood of Genesis 6-8, concerning why the dinosaurs may have become extinct. As Dr. Gish pointed out, the idea most often suggested by scientists to explain the disappearance of the dinosaurs centers on a sudden climactic change over the entire Earth—a change so drastic that the dinosaurs no longer could survive in this “new” world. The change may have caused food-chain problems, affecting first the herbivorous (plant-eating) dinosaurs and then eventually the carnivorous (meat-eating) dinosaurs. Gish suggested that possibly the Noahic flood could have been responsible for such a drastic and sudden change in world conditions (and therefore possibly responsible for the extinction of the dinosaurs as well). This explanation is most attractive and is accepted by many creationists today. But, as Dr. Gish was quick to point out, we cannot speak with certainty because science cannot “prove” what caused the extinction of the dinosaurs and the Bible is silent on the matter. Consequently, we feel it is a safer course simply to say that we do not know specifically why (or when) the dinosaurs died out. It is best to leave the matter an “unknown” since certainty is impossible.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to some popular opinions or beliefs, dinosaurs do not present a “problem” to creationists. In fact, just the opposite is true. It is evolutionists who have a problem. With footprints of humans and dinosaurs in the same strata, with human footprints in coal veins, with trilobites in human sandal prints, with drawings of dinosaurs on canyon walls, etc., the data speak loudly against evolution and for creation. The evolutionist continues to maintain that “no man had ever existed in the age of the reptiles” (Bird, 1939, p. 257). In spite of such wishful thinking, however, the scientific and biblical evidence is to the contrary.

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