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MINISTRIES

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Is the Bible Anti-Science?

Religion, or belief in God, is frequently said to be in conflict with science. In 1873, scientist and author John William Draper wrote:

The history of Science...is a narrative of the conflict of two contending powers, the expansive force of the human intellect on one side, and the compression arising from traditionary faith and human interests on the other.

- John William Draper, Preface to History of The Conflict Between Religion and Science
(www.gutenberg.org)

Since the Bible is a collection of religious texts, it too has been characterized as being opposed to science. In 2013, physicist and outspoken atheist Victor Stenger wrote an article talking about this supposed conflict between science and the Bible. He said:

Evangelicals and fundamentalists see evolution as a threat to their belief in the inerrancy of scripture, which indeed it is. No compromise is possible here.

- Victor Stenger, “The Rising Antiscience” 9-27-2013 (<https://www.huffpost.com/>)

The idea that science and the Bible disagree is not just an atheist argument. Many Christians hold the same view. For example, Roger Patterson of Answers in Genesis wrote:

Science and the Bible each represent two different religions in a manner of speaking. The Bible offers us an authoritative source of truth from which to begin our study of the universe. It is the only rational faith that can even explain the existence of scientific thought in the first place.

- Roger Patterson, “Science and the Bible: Should There Be a Conflict?”, November 23, 2019
(<https://answersingenesis.org/creation-vs-evolution/battle-between-science-and-the-bible/>)

So, then, are science and the Bible really opposed to each other? Does the Bible teach things that are anti-scientific? If the Bible is true, and science is true, then how is that possible?

To address this issue, we need to be clear about what we are really asking. What do we mean by “science”? “Science” is a term that is used to mean many different things. Sometimes people use “science” to refer to the scientific method, the process of using observation and experimentation to discover truths about the natural world. Sometimes people use “science” to mean the data that is collected by this process. Sometimes people use the term to mean extrapolations or predictions based on that scientifically derived data. Sometimes people use “science” to mean opinions that are popular among scientists, or theories that are accepted by scientific institutions. And sometimes people use “science” to mean all the world’s recorded information.

Obviously, these are all very different things, and it is important to distinguish between these things if we are going to honestly answer the question of whether “science” agrees with the Bible. For example, if we define “science” as being the opinions of scientists, then we have to conclude that science and the Bible disagree. Victor Stenger, whom we quoted earlier, was a scientist who said that there was no god. The Bible says that there is a God. So, under that definition, the case is closed; science disagrees with the Bible, and there’s nothing more to talk about.

But if we were to define “science” like this, then there would be no reason to ask whether it disagrees with the Bible. The Bible disagrees with all kinds of opinions, from the opinions of politicians, to religious leaders, to philosophers, to artists, to experts of all kinds, so why would it not disagree with the opinions of scientists? When we ask whether science and the Bible disagree, what we are really asking is whether there are Biblical claims that can be refuted by the scientific method. In other words, can we use observation and experiment to demonstrate that claims from the Bible are false? That’s what we really want to know.

Even though the spirit of the question is whether experiments and observations contradict the Bible, people frequently confuse the issue by using unreasonably broad definitions of science. For example, Victor Stenger also wrote this:

The whole point of Darwin's theory of evolution is that it works with random variation. There's no God in Darwinian evolution.

- Victor Stenger, “The Rising Antiscience” 9-27-2013 (<https://www.huffpost.com/>)

Here, Stenger mixes an element of science with an unrelated opinion. Let’s ignore for a moment whether Darwin’s theory is scientifically sound, and focus on the statement that “there is no God in Darwinian evolution.” In other words, if evolution is true, then God is false. Is that really the case? Does Darwin’s theory state that there is no God? In fact, it does not. Evolution is based on the hypothesis that a species can change over time. This hypothesis does *not* state that God does not exist. And that’s a point in the theory’s favor, because if it did state that, then it wouldn’t be science at all. Why is that? Because science relies on the scientific method—on observations and experiments—and we can only observe or experiment on things that are part of the natural world. God is supernatural, beyond the natural world, so his existence cannot be tested in a laboratory.

So, when Stenger says, “there is no God in Darwinian evolution,” he is combining Darwin’s hypothesis about the “origin of species” with an unrelated opinion about God’s existence. By considering both of those things “science,” he can then pit “science” against the God of the Bible. But this is a false dichotomy based on a bad definition. Evolution has nothing to say about God’s existence, but Stenger would have us believe that the theology of evolutionists is somehow part of the theory. Notice how this creates a problem before we have even evaluated whether evolution is solid science. We have entered the situation already assuming that the existence of God is tied to this theory. Evolution could very well be bad science, but God’s existence is not dependent on whether it is true or false. This is why it’s important to be specific about what we mean by “science.”

While it’s good to use a narrow and precise definition of "science," we also need to correctly interpret the Bible. There are many times that people bring up a supposed contradiction between science and the Bible, without stopping to consider what the Bible is actually saying. A great example of this was the so-called “Galileo affair.” Galileo was the inventor of the telescope, and using his invention, he found moons orbiting the planet Jupiter. When he published these findings, the Catholic church objected to them, and eventually arrested Galileo for propagating them. Why did the church do this? Well, the church had been teaching the theories of Aristotle for some time, and Aristotle said that everything in the sky revolved around the earth. If there were objects orbiting another planet, then Aristotle, and by extension, the church, was wrong. This was at a time when the church was trying to reclaim its credibility and influence after the Protestant reformation. The church really didn’t want information to be spread around that made them look bad. Also, Galileo did not present his findings to the church in the most humble or respectful way (For more on the church’s opposition to Galileo, see <https://www.catholic.com/tract/the-galileo-controversy>).

But the church did not say that they opposed Galileo because they found him obnoxious; instead, they claimed that Galileo’s findings contradicted the Bible. And this is how the story is usually framed, as Galileo’s “science” versus the church’s “Biblical religion.” But if you know the Bible, then you know that this framing makes no sense because the Bible doesn't say anything about Jupiter or its moons. So, then, how could it possibly contradict Galileo's observations? How could the Bible contradict the idea that Jupiter has moons if it never mentions either of those things? The supposed contradiction completely disappears when we stop to consider what the Bible actually says. One lesson we can take away from this piece of history is that we have to accurately interpret the Bible before we assert that science contradicts the Bible. We shouldn’t characterize the Bible in a way that is inaccurate or dishonest, and that brings us to our main point:

The Bible doesn't say anything about the scientific method, or about scientific data.

The Bible is not a scientific thesis; its purpose is not to explain features of the natural world. The books of the Bible have a moral message; their purpose is to point us toward God, and to tell us how we should live. Sometimes the Bible does describe the natural world in pursuit of its moral goal, but those descriptions are frequently poetic, that is to say, they are not meant to be taken as scientific descriptions of the natural world. For example, Psalm 19:4-6 mentions the sun. It says:

Psalm 19:4-6

...In them [the heavens] he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

Now, scientific observation indicates that the sun is, in fact, not contained in a tent, and furthermore, it does not have legs, so it cannot run. But, obviously, that doesn't mean that this part of the Bible is contradicting science. It would be silly to say that Psalm 19 is a scientific description of the sun. It is clearly a poetic description. The purpose of this passage is to glorify God because of the wonders of his creation (Psalm 19:1), not to document the sun's features so that they can be scientifically analyzed. As another example, consider this verse:

Proverbs 3:7-8

[Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD \[YHWH\], and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.](#)

So, turning away from evil will bring “healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.” Is the Bible giving scientific medical advice here? Is it saying that a person who breaks his leg can make it heal properly if he stops lusting or coveting? No. This verse is giving moral advice, and it is doing so in a poetic way. Proverbs 3:6 says that God will make your paths straight, and Proverbs 3:10 says that your vats will “burst” with wine. Neither verse 6 nor verse 10 is meant to be taken in a literal or scientific sense, and verse 8 is not meant to be taken that way either.

Unfortunately, applying a "scientific" purpose to parts of the Bible where it does not belong is a mistake that is made far too often. Doing this is a great disservice to the Scriptures, because it is missing the point of their existence—that point being, to teach us how to live. As Paul said:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

[All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.](#)

The Bible teaches us about morality—a subject that science cannot give us any insight into. Moral teaching cannot be measured or tested in a lab to see if it is right or wrong. Science cannot tell us what is moral or immoral. As the philosopher David Hume famously said, we cannot derive an ought from an is (David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Book 3, Part 1, Section 1). That is to say, no matter how thoroughly we study the natural world, no matter how well we understand the way that something is, we cannot use that knowledge to figure out how something ought to be, or what we ought to do with it. Moral rules and principles, like the ones contained in the Bible, are what give us knowledge about what we should or should not do. Science can't tell us anything about what we should or should not do. So it makes no sense to say that science and the Bible are in disagreement. They exist for different reasons, and their fields of inquiry rarely overlap with each other.

To round out this topic, there are two more matters to address. First, we should make a clear distinction between science and history. History is the study of the events of the past, and while the Bible does not make scientific claims, it does often make historical claims. So the question of whether the Bible is historically accurate is a completely different question from whether it is scientifically accurate. Second, there are believers who think that the Bible *does* make scientific claims. Such people sometimes use "science"—quantum mechanics, cosmology, chemistry, biology—to assert that the Bible's claims are true. That is to say, they interpret a statement from the Bible to be a scientific claim, and then they show how that claim agrees with a quote from a scientist, or a finding from a scientific study. Then they argue that, since this part of the Bible agrees with science, therefore the Bible is a reliable scientific source.

The enthusiasm behind this practice is understandable; when someone is interested in both the Scriptures and in science, it is tempting to combine the two. But basing the Bible's reliability on whether it agrees with science is foolish. The history of science demonstrates that science constantly changes. As new methods, new equipment, new studies, and new cultural standards arise, "science" changes to fit these new revelations. Consequently, yesterday's "science" is frequently today's laughingstock. The scientists of the past believed that atoms were indivisible, that outer space was full of a liquid called ether, that a lobotomy was an effective treatment for a person with behavioral problems, and many other things that we now consider ridiculous. Modern science rejects those ideas; in fact, it rejects most of the "science" of the past. In the same way, tomorrow's science is going to reject many of the ideas we call "science" today. We should not base the Bible's truth or reliability on a field of study that is constantly changing. And we don't have to, because the Bible isn't there to teach us about nature—it is not there to add information to an evolving field of human understanding. The Bible is there to teach us about God, who is eternal and unchanging. That has always been the Bible's purpose, and that will always be its purpose, no matter what the "science" of the present day may tell us. In 500 years, scientists will have completely different ideas about how the natural world works. But God will still be the same. Human nature will still be the same. Good and evil, right and wrong, sin and repentance, forgiveness and redemption will all be the same. And the Bible's descriptions of all of these things will still be true. As it's written:

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua] is the same yesterday and today and forever.

So, does science disagree with the Bible? If we limit the term "science" to mean the scientific method, and we interpret the Bible correctly, then no, it doesn't. Most of the supposed conflicts between the Bible and science are based on either misinterpretations of the Bible, or extremely liberal definitions of science. However, the idea that the Bible *agrees* with science is also incorrect; our understanding of the natural world is constantly changing, but the Bible does not constantly change. Ultimately, science is a method that we can use to learn about the natural world, but the Bible is a collection of books that teach us about God and his ways. We should not confuse one for the other.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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