

USING THE POETRY AND SYMBOLIC RUSE TO GET AROUND BIBLE ERRORS

Russell Stannard is a retired high-energy particle physicist born in 1931. He has written books in defence of Christianity against claims that the faith is against science. His book *Science and Belief* is referred to for this article.

We will look at how he tries to explain away and bluff off texts in the Bible which contradict science. His approach is typical.

Stannard & Scripture Interpretation

Stannard wrote “Why do so many people today insist on adopting a literal approach to Genesis - one that inevitably puts them on a collision course with science?” Stannard, R. *Science & Belief, The Big Issues* (Lion, 2012), p. 19

This contains the hidden assumption that God, if he wrote the Bible, telling us something was the case is unscientific. Stannard is not much of a believer after all.

The Book of Genesis, chapter 1, speaks of six days of creation. God made all things in six steps. Chapter 2 says Adam was made from the dust of the ground and a rib was taken from him and built up into his wife Eve. How can these details be reconciled with modern science which says creation was a process that took billions of years and that the order given in the Bible is wrong? Stannard quotes the view that the fossil record contradicts the six day creation.

Stannard takes the view that the Genesis story is correct at its core and that it is poetry: “Take the core assertion that, somehow or other, God created the world, the events of the six-day narration being regarded as a form of poetry” Stannard R. *Science & Belief, The Big Issues* (Lion, 2012) p. 54.

Is the assertion that God made all things really the core statement in Genesis? Why not say that its core intent is to detail how God made all things? We might think the creation is the core statement but what matters is what the author of Genesis considered to be core.

The author of the creation story, lived in a time when the supernatural was thought be directly at work when lightning flashed or when anything even slightly strange happened. It is impossible to believe that he would have went to huge effort to write the story if it were not literal. It was not a very effective way to get a non-literal message across in a literal and simplistic age.

If we try to water down scripture for the sake of what we perceive to be scientific knowledge, then we are guilty of wresting the word of God. 2 Peter 3:16, He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. Do we really want to take sinful and often deceitful man as the authority of the truth and not God?

It is dishonest to reason that scripture is nonsense if you check it out against modern science and to postulate that it cannot be meant literally. That is reading today’s scientific claims back into the scriptures which were produced in a pre-scientific age. Liberal Christians seem to think that the early Bible readers were sophisticated theologians! Unlike people of today, they would have read the scriptures or heard them read and accepted them with faith instead of trying to formulate symbolic interpretations. The Bible always makes it obvious when it deploys symbolism. If people were able to see the Bible meaning so clearly without science then we should be able to see clearly with it.

It is possibly true that the story is poetic but it does not follow that it is necessarily non-literal. Mark’s Gospel for example mentions inexplicable darkness over the land during Jesus final hours on the cross Mark 15:33

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.. He wants to convey both Jesus’ utter sense of loss and does it by means of stating a historical fact. The entire gospel shows great restraint in what it tells us which proves that he was writing like a historian would.

Attempts to get around the literal meaning are attempts to make human opinion about the word of God into the word of God itself. That approach leads to people deliberately contradicting the Bible and claiming to believe that it is the word of God. If Genesis were being non-literal it would say so clearly. The Bible was meant to be understood by simple people and people of simple faith. How could it be if it used non-literal stories and wouldn’t say so?

An opinion is a view that does not really matter that much for its open to dispute and is only a little better than a guess. To turn faith into opinion is to make a shipwreck of the Christian faith and is a recipe for confusion and chaos.

Stannard rejects the notion that the six days in which God made all things are really days. Some who say they believe argue that: “the six ‘days’ of creation could hardly be solar days, since Genesis says that the sun was not made until the fourth day.” US Catechism. But this is saying there are contradictions in scripture. The dubious solution to the alleged contradiction is that the story is symbolic. Roman Catholic theologian Robert Sungenis states “the US Catechism is presuming that we can’t have a “day” without the sun. Says who?”

<http://www.catholicintl.com/index.php/catholic/scripture/786-the-us-catechism-more-problems-and-erroneous-concepts>. True - here is no reason why God can’t set up a 24 hour day without the sun being made.

Stannard argues on page 153 that the strangeness of Christian fundamentalists trying to force their view of scripture on biology but not on physics indicate that their behaviour is all about emotion and not belief. But Stannard forces his view of science on scripture and he forces his speculations on scripture. He's far more addicted to religious thrills than the most ardent fundamentalist Christian!

Stannard would probably agree that the scriptures were God communicating with people and with his own people in particular. Scripture helped them gradually move away from dangerous and blasphemous forms of religion. Another way to put this, is they were delivered from grave pre-scientific superstition. This might be a connection point between scripture and science but is it really?

All it leads to is us being confident that we know better and won't be like those barbarians. We are in many respects worse than them. There are mad scientific statements scattered all through the Bible. Its not errors decreasing more a new book is added in. Jesus would have died if he went up to Heaven the way Acts says on a cloud. Yet people pretend its a symbolic vision. Why not go the whole hog and say all the visions of Jesus were not of him but of symbols?