

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### A.P. Summer Interns and Professional Staff

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Regular readers of *Reason & Revelation* are aware of the fact that, on occasion, we publish articles authored by young men who have served as interns at Apologetics Press during their summer break from school. In December 2000, we ran the first set of such articles by our two "veteran" interns—**Alden Bass** (now a sophomore zoology major at Yale University), and **Joe Deweese** (now a junior biochemistry major at Freed-Hardeman University). Since then, we have printed several other articles by both Joe and Alden—and always have received the highest compliments from our subscribers. In this issue, we are running articles by two additional young men who served as interns for the first time in the summer of 2002. **Branyon May** is a junior physics major at Angelo State University in San Angelo, Texas. **Zach Smith** is a sophomore Bible major at Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tennessee. I have been blessed with an incredibly talented staff. Kyle Butt, Eric Lyons, Brad Harrub, and Dave Miller are diligent, dedicated coworkers. Each one of these interns is, too. It is our hope that, upon completion of their graduate degrees, they will be able to join us in the work of Apologetics Press. That is our goal. We are working with them to make it theirs as well. I commend them to you.]

Evolutionists often use as a proof of their theory the intriguing case of fish that live in deep-water caves and that have lost their sight permanently, yet still function quite well. Are blind cave fish a good example of organic evolution in action?

Found in the subterranean caverns of the world are rare, unique, and sometimes exotic creatures. Numerous varieties of bats, spiders, insects, and other curious creatures populate these damp, cool environments. Hidden from the Sun, weather, and intrusion of man, these caverns represent a truly intriguing habitat. Another an-

imal also dwells in these cavernous environments—the cave fish. Restricted to the dark confines of the globe, cave fish possess unique qualities that differ from the surface varieties generally seen. The most remarkable distinction between cave fish and their surface counterparts is a loss of visionary processes. There are several other interesting differences, but this particular disparity is the most commonly referenced in support of evolutionary theory. How did this difference come into existence? And why has it continued? These are the underlying questions that need to be answered.

Lamarckianism (as it is known today) was the most prominent theory preceding Darwinian evolution. Jean-Baptiste Lamarck is remembered most notably for his theory of the "inheritance of acquired variations" (Ruse, 1979, p. 8). This theory holds that the acquired physiological traits of the parent are passed down to the offspring. This proposal, however, has been known to be false for more than a century. The classic evolutionary example of this theory is the giraffe. Supposedly, as the scarcity of food increased, the giraffe was forced to extend its neck higher and higher to reach diminishing food sources. Over the ensuing generations, the giraffe subsequently developed a longer neck, due to constant straining and stretching—a ridiculous idea, to be sure.

Yet some in the past attempted to apply this same type of "reasoning" to the cave fish situation in a Lamarckian scenario which suggested that through a natural event (such as a flood or terrain upheaval), a population of creatures, including fish, found itself geographically separated and isolated in a new environment—specifically, a cave. As they continued to live in this cave, the fish physically

lost the use of their eyes, perhaps through injury or muscle atrophy. When the fish eventually spawned, the young possessed the same physical defects that the parents had acquired. Although such an explanation made for a good "just-so" story, the Lamarckian theory eventually was rejected by the scientists after Darwin's day because it did not fit the available facts.

A convenient and rather enlightening illustration to better relate the absurdity (if it is not already apparent) of Lamarck's theory can be made by comparing your father, your siblings, and you. If, for some unfortunate reason, your father were to lose an appendage (a finger or an arm, for instance), this loss would not be passed along to either your siblings or to you. While the accident would affect your father's life significantly, it would not have any bearing on the physical appearance of his future offspring. But the question then springs to mind, "Exactly how do children obtain their appearances?"

Certainly, children do possess both maternal and paternal characteristics. Why is this the case? Through the study of DNA and its genetic coding, the process of inheritance and expression of traits can be described scientifically. The physical appearance of a child is ultimately the result of his or her genetic makeup, which itself is the product of the combined genes received from the parents. An old saying correctly expresses the matter: "It's in your genes." Technically, a gene is defined as a "self-replicating unit of heredity; a portion of DNA (i.e., a sequence of nucleotide units) that encodes a protein" (Schwartz, 1999, p. 406, parenthetical item in orig.). As the definition states, genes are portions of the DNA strand. Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) contains the genetic coding that forms a sort

# CONTENTS

## ARTICLES

### *Questions and Answers*

A.P. Summer Interns  
and Professional Staff . . . . . 89

## DEPARTMENTS

Speaking Schedules . . . . . 93

### Note from the Editor

*Announcing: Reason & Revelation/  
Discovery 2002 Bound Volumes*  
Bert Thompson . . . . . 96

## RESOURCES

*"Quick, Let's Discriminate  
Against the Creationists!"* . . . . . 45-R

*"James, Son of Joseph,  
Brother of Jesus"* . . . . . 48-R

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of "blueprint" for the design of the organism. On a single strand of DNA, there can be numerous portions (known as genes), each of which assists in the design of the body plan. Gene expression is responsible for the visible attributes of an organism (known as the phenotype), which is the end result of the expression of one's DNA. Likewise, in cave fish, the resulting blindness among the populations is an effect of genetic mutations, and not a simple transference of an injury or organ loss.

The importance of understanding the role of genetics in this situation is obvious. First, we need to be accurate scientifically. Second, such accuracy lays the groundwork for understanding the true progression that is taking place in this example of cave fish. Any genetic mutation can be classified into one of three groups: good, bad, and neutral. Bad mutations, as the name plainly implies, are detrimental to the affected organism. As long ago as 1950, Hermann J. Muller, Nobel laureate in genetics, observed: "The great majority of mutations, certainly well over 99%, are harmful in some way" (1950, 38:35). Fifty years later, nothing much had changed. The renowned geneticist of Stanford University, Luigi Cavalli-Sforza, who is head of the International Human Genome Diversity Project, wrote: "Genetic mutations are spontaneous, chance changes, which are rarely beneficial, and **more often have no effect, or a deleterious one**" (2000, p. 176, emp. added).

Such harmful mutations affect their host, leading almost exclusively to its demise. For an epigeal (surface-dwelling) organism, the loss of sight would be considered a bad mutation. But for a hypogean (underground) organism, this does not present the same problematic scenario. In complete darkness, eyesight is basically a moot point, and at worst would be considered simply a neutral mutation. Neutral mutations, however, are of no use to the evolutionist since they (to use Dr. Cavalli-Sforza's words) "have no effect." Occasionally, mutations do occur that are beneficial to survival. But those are rare indeed. Almost thirty-five years ago, Theodosius Dobzhansky, the famous evolutionary geneticist of the Rockefeller University, admitted that favorable mutations amount to less than 1% of all mutations that occur (as quoted in Davidheiser, 1969, p. 209). Once again, not much has changed. The man who is arguably the world's most eminent evolutionary taxonomist, Ernst Mayr (professor emeritus at Harvard), discussed this very point in his 2001 book, *What Evolution Is*, when he wrote (with a bit of understatement): "...[T]he occurrence of beneficial mutations is rather rare" (p. 98). Rare indeed!

Furthermore, the point must be stressed that although these mutations may be beneficial to the survival of the organism, they are still defects in the genetic code—a corruption that represents **loss of information**. Evolution does not require "just" mutations; it requires mutations that produce **new information**. As Dr. Cavalli-Sforza remarked: "Evolution also results from the accumulation of new information. In the case of a biological mutation, **new information is provided by an error of genetic transmission** (i.e., a change in the DNA during its transmission from parent to child)" [p. 176, emp. added, parenthetical comment in orig.]. **In theory**, beneficial mutations add "new information." But **in practice** that is not the case. As Jonathan Sarfati noted: "If evolution from goo to you were true, we should expect to find **countless** information-adding mutations. But we have not even found one" (2002, emp. in orig.).

To further establish the genetic mechanism by which cave fish lose their eyesight, it is interesting to point out that a similar result can be obtained experimentally. Through the manipulation of a group of genes known as the homeobox or Hox cluster, scientists can induce the mutation of ectopic (abnormally positioned) eyes. The eye structures have been found to grow in antenna, leg, and wing tissues. These eyes, like the eye structures of the cave fish, are non-functioning entities. These laboratory-induced structures are practically complete, and are "morphologically normal with normal photoreceptors, lens, cone and pigment cells," according to Walter Gehring, an evolutionary expert in Hox gene mutations (see Gould, 2002, pp. 1124-1125). Although the physical structures are constructed successfully, the eye fails to possess the necessary neural "wiring" to function properly (Gould, p. 1125). Yet, the mutational precedence for such an occurrence is well documented.

Two scientists, Yoshiyuki Yamamoto and William Jeffery, have been involved in specialized research on the eye formation of the cave fish specimen, *Astyanax mexicanus*. This particular species of teleost (bony fish) possesses both epigeal and hypogean forms that enabled the team to perform experiments on the blind cave fish, using the surface form as the control specimen. Yamamoto and Jeffery have begun to establish some of the steps in the formation of the fish's eye, from the embryonic stage to the adult stage. "Although adult cave fish lack functional eyes, eye formation is initiated during embryogenesis. The lens vesicle is formed but later degenerates, and the cornea, iris, and other optic tissues are absent or rudimentary" (2000, 289:

631). The apoptosis (programmed death) of the lens cells occurs prior to the degeneration of any other tissue. Yamamoto and Jeffery observed:

The optic cup and neural retina are formed in cave fish, but the retinal layers are disorganized, growth is retarded, and photoreceptor cells do not differentiate. The degenerate eye sinks into the orbit and is covered by a flap of skin (289:631).

As a result of their research, these two scientists have concluded that the lens plays a dominant role in the subsequent development of the eye's entire structure. To prove their hypothesis, a lens from the "eyed" variety was transplanted into the eye of the blind variety. After 8 days "a larger eye was detected on the transplant side," and after 2 months "a large eye (restored eye) with a distinct pupil was present.... Sections of the restored eye showed an anterior chamber, cornea, iris, and lens" (289:631, parenthetical item in orig.). In the final analysis, Yamamoto and Jeffery concluded: "[T]he results show that the cave fish lens has lost the ability to promote eye development" (289:632). In other words, the data show that the blindness found in cave fish is a product of a genetic mutation affecting the fish's lens. Peter Mathers, a developmental biologist, summed up the results well when he said: "It's possible you are looking at a **single gene defect** that has caused a drastic developmental change" (as quoted in Penisi, 2000, 289:523, emp. added).

But that has not kept some evolutionists from claiming that the concept of blind cave fish supports their theory. As one news report stated: "**Millions of years ago it had eyes**; but now, soon after it starts growing in the egg, the eyes start to degenerate and the fish are born blind" (see "Blind Fish...," 2000, emp. added). However, nowhere in the scientific experiments is there evidence that lends itself to an ancient timeline of descent. The small genetic changes (microevolution) that **can** be observed are wrongly assumed to be the foundation from which macroevolution emanates.

First, notice that no new speciation has occurred due to this mutation: the species *Astyanax mexicanus* can be either the "eyed" form or the "eyeless" form. It is refreshing to note that even biological taxonomy plainly supports the fact that the fish with which we began is still a fish. Neither the genus nor the species has changed between the epigeal and hypogean forms. Second, there is the principle of **progression** versus **regression**. Here, information is the key. Evolution demands **progression**, and with it there must accompany an increase of **new** information. **Regression** can be described by the loss or corruption

of genetic information. Harvard's Ernst Mayr defined macroevolution as the "evolution above the species level; the evolution of higher taxa and the production of evolutionary novelties, such as new structures" (2001, p. 287). He included in his definition the requirement for the "production of evolutionary novelties, such as new structures." The question then becomes, "What new structures has the cave fish evolved?" Here is where progression comes to a screeching halt. The cave fish actually falls into the category known as "devolution," which is a category of regression on a downhill slope, where information is being lost—not gained (Wieland, 2001, p. 47). Organic evolution cannot be sustained using examples of "downhill" change. The basic tenets needed by evolutionists are not met, and thus cave fish cannot be touted as an example of evolutionary hypotheses.

Organisms are affected greatly by the habitats in which they live. Within their specific environments, they perform all the functions of life—feeding, procreating, etc. Thus, environmental changes and fluctuations have the potential to affect every aspect of their lives. Above ground, the sense of sight is a



Blind cave fish (compliments of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

widely used, extremely beneficial trait. Underground, however, sight takes on a completely different role. Whereas **above** ground the loss of sight very likely would spell doom for most creatures, **beneath** the earth it is far less detrimental. When viewing the hypogean populations, mutated eyes characterize the vast majority. How can the mutation spread (and spread quickly) if it is completely neutral? In this setting and environment, the loss of sight for the cave fish could be beneficial, presenting itself as a good mutation.

According to Yamamoto and Jeffery, *Astyanax* has undergone certain changes, "including enhanced lateral line [sense of touch—BM/BT] and gustatory systems [sense of taste—BM/BT]" (289:631). These enhancements are part of a well-documented occurrence known as plasticity. Plasticity refers to the brain's ability to change. For instance, take the example of the father who lost his limb. Emotionally, this would be an extremely tragic situation that would require some mental adjustment to overcome. Neurologically, there

also would be some adjustments that would have to take place. To use a somewhat simplified explanation, the human brain contains "maps" of the body. When something is lost, like a limb or even a digit on the hand, the brain adjusts the neural network and the mental "map" accordingly. For the hand, the adjacent digits' representative image will expand to include the missing finger. This process works on varying timescales, but nowhere near an evolutionary timescale. According to the textbook, *Neurobiology*, "these changes take place over varying time scales; in some cases the shifts in representations are slow, developing over **weeks**, but in other cases they may be surprisingly rapid, beginning within a **day** or so, or even a **few hours**" (Shepherd, 1983, p. 290, emp. added). For amputee patients, this is an established fact, and provides an extraordinary example of the amazing adaptive nature (and incredible design!) of the human brain.

This neurological process applies to the cave fish, as evinced by Yamamoto and Jeffery's aforementioned conclusion regarding enhanced touch and taste. For a fish in complete darkness, the lateral line (which is the sensory network for touch) would be essential, since it would guide the fish through the cavern. The gustatory system (which is primarily responsible for taste) would aid in the location of food. As scientific studies have documented, there are "compensatory improvements of the sense of taste in the blind, cave-dwelling fish" (Boudriot and Reutter, 2001, p. 428). These enhancements, due to a mutation, would confer an advantage for the blind cave fish over the non-mutated variety. However, notice that this is an advantage only to this highly specific environment, and would become of ill effect outside of these parameters.

In conclusion, blind cave fish are just that—**blind** (by mutation) and isolated to a **cave** environment. As they have been from the beginning, they are still **just fish**. Genetic mutations and variations are found throughout nature, occurring in all populations. In many cases, they represent a defect—i.e., the corruption or loss of valuable genetic information that results in a "downhill" change or devolution, which is in direct opposition to the required demands of macroevolution. The incredible design and complexity of life is seen by its ability to survive. Whether changing behavior due to environmental strain, or re-networking a neural interface, life is dynamic, and is filled with remarkable intricacies. One cannot help but wonder: whence came such design?—**Branyon May and Bert Thompson, Ph.D.**

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**Q** I have heard it stated that in the New Testament book of James, the writer referred to a quotation from the Old Testament that actually does not exist. Is there a "missing quote" from the O.T. to which James was referring?

**A** In addressing the passage found in James 4:5 (to which this particular question refers), Albert Barnes wrote in his commentary: "Few passages of the New Testament have given expositors more perplexity than this" (1972, p. 70). Those hostile to Christianity often try to find anything they can to discredit the Bible. The slightest "discrepancy" or "contradiction" is considered as solid proof that the Bible is inaccurate and therefore unreliable. The passage in James 4:5 is one such instance where skeptics and infidels have taken a verse and tried to use it to discredit the Scriptures. In context, the passage reads as follows (the highlighted section is the particular portion in question):

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. **Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?** But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4: 4-7, KJV).

Unfaithful creatures! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. **Or do you suppose it is in vain that the scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit which he has made to dwell in us"?** But he gives more grace; therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you (James 4:4-7, RSV).

The KJV and RSV separate verse five into two sections. The first introduces a supposed quote with the phrase "the scripture says," and draws attention to the second section, which seems to highlight the quotation either via quotation marks (as in the RSV) or by capitalizing the first word of the quote (as in the KJV). According to those attempting to discredit the Bible, this verse "proves" that the Bible is false since the supposed quotation is found nowhere in Scripture. If it were true that there is a missing quote in the Bible, then some would perceive it as bringing into doubt the validity of the book of James. If the Bible is legitimately called into question, then Christianity's foundation crumbles. Thus, there is a need to answer such charges brought against the Word of God.

With some careful study, one finds that the controversy can be explained fairly simply. When James' comment is considered in its context, and is translated correctly, it becomes apparent that he did not intend for the second half of the verse to be taken as a **direct quotation** from the Old Testament. The translations provided by the King James Version, Revised Standard Version, and others that render the verse as a quotation, are incorrect. [It is important to realize that the manuscripts with which translators work contain little or no punctuation. Thus, the translators must exercise some discretion when implementing punctuation marks in the text.]

Such a suggestion raises the question as to what the correct translation is for the passage. Several solutions have been presented, the most likely of which being that James did not intend to quote a **specific verse**, but instead was referring to **ideas and concepts**

found throughout the whole of the Old Testament. In his commentary on the books of Hebrews and James, R.C.H. Lenski wrote:

Many pages have been written regarding the different interpretations of v. 5 and the discussions of these interpretations. We confine ourselves to two points. We are not convinced that the question is a formula of quotation. Such a formula has never been used: "Do you think that the Scripture speaks in an empty way?" If a quotation **were** to follow, we should certainly expect the addition "saying that."

What follows has never been verified as being a quotation; nothing like it has been found in any writing as all admit. The fact that the Scripture does not speak in an empty way refers to v. 4 which presents as a teaching of Scripture the truth that friendship of the world is enmity against God, etc. The idea is not that this is a quotation, but that it is a teaching of Scripture and by no means empty (1966, p. 631, emp. in orig.).

The late Bible scholar, Guy N. Woods, supported the idea of James' reference being, not to a specific quote, but rather to a general concept within the Old Testament writings. He cited Genesis 6:3-7, Exodus 29:5, Deuteronomy 32:1-21, Job 5:12, Ecclesiastes 4:4, and Proverbs 27:4 as verses where the thought behind James 4:5 is conveyed (1972, p. 214). Several commentators believe that James' statement represents a "condensation" of the Old Testament rather than an exact quotation—a position that fits the context of the verse, and solves the problem of the "missing quote."

James Coffman offered another possibility along the same line. He suggested that the verse is referring to the **New Testament** writings, particularly those of Paul, instead of those from the Old Testament (1984, p. 87). However, it appears highly unlikely that, as Coffman maintains, James' comment refers to the Pauline epistles, since New Testament Scripture is referenced only twice in the New Testament—once where Paul (in 1 Timothy 5: 18) quotes the words of Christ as written by Luke in Luke 10:7, and once where Peter (in 2 Peter 3:15-16) mentions as a whole the writings of Paul. The remainder of the citations in the New Testament come from the Old Testament, except for a quote from an Athenian poet in Acts 17:28, from Epimenides in Titus 1:12, and possibly from a now-lost hymn or poem in Ephesians 5:14.

Whether it is a reference to Old or New Testament concepts, the KJV and RSV both have done an inadequate job of translating the verse. The late, respected Greek scholar J.W. Roberts was correct in saying that the 1901 American Standard Version provides the closest match to the true meaning (1977, p. 129).

Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God. **Or think ye that the scripture speaketh in vain? Doth the spirit which he made to dwell in us long unto envying?** But he giveth more grace. Wherefore the scripture saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Be subject therefore unto God; but resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:4-7, ASV, emp. added).

Hugo McCord, in his independent translation of the New Testament, rendered James 4:5 very much like the American Standard Version, with a slight updating of language. His translation reads: "Do you think that the scripture speaks emptily? Does the Spirit living in us lust to envy?" (1988, p. 442).

Regardless of which version is used, it appears that James did not intend this verse to be taken as a quotation. The most likely answer is that James did indeed refer to ideas and thoughts expressed throughout the entire Old Testament, rather than quoting a specific verse. — **Zach Smith and Eric Lyons, M.Min.**

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**Q** In Acts 7, Stephen had been accused of advocating the overthrow of the Law of Moses and speaking out publicly against the Temple. The Sanhedrin convened to discuss his fate, and to hear his defense. During his discourse, Stephen made the following assertion: "And Jacob went down into Egypt; and he died, himself and our fathers; and they were carried over unto Shechem, and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a price in silver of the sons of Hamor in Shechem" (7:15-16). Various critics of the Bible have accused Stephen of having made two blatant errors. First, he apparently stated that Jacob had been buried in **Shechem**, whereas Genesis 49:29-30 states that Jacob was buried at **Machpelah** in Hebron, fifty miles away. Second, Stephen suggested that **Abraham** bought the tomb in Shechem, while the Old Testament notes that it was **Jacob** who did the buying (Genesis 23:16-18; 33:18-19; 50:13; Joshua 24:32). Who is right—Stephen or Moses?

**A** In order to understand the situation that arose in Acts 7, some background information is necessary. The church in the city of Jerusalem was growing by leaps and bounds—as is evident from the fact that "the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (vs. 7). Stephen, as a dedicated worker in the Jerusalem congregation, was providing a great service for the church. But as a preacher, he also was having a powerful influence on non-Christians. The account recorded in Acts 7 indicates that he "wrought great wonders and signs among the people" (vs. 8), and must have been both logical and eloquent in his oral presentations, since the people "were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake" (vs. 10).

Some of the Greeks from the local synagogue—unable to refute his arguments defending Christianity—became jealous and bitter. Unable to disarm his magnificently stated case with reason, they decided instead to resort to false testimony and to violence. As a result, the text indicates that they

stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and seized him, and brought him into the council, and set up false witnesses, who said, "This man ceaseth not to speak words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us." And all that sat in the council, fastening their eyes on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel (Acts 6:12-15, KJV).

During his defense before the Sanhedrin, Stephen made the statements alluded to in the question above. Stephen knew his subject matter, and knew it well. His speech—which ultimately was intended to show the rebellious spirit that had been so prevalent during the Israelites' entire past history—was full of illustrations from the Old Testament that would have been dear to the heart of anyone professing Judaism. Consider, for example, his mentioning Jacob's death. Everyone present would have been intimately familiar with the story of Jacob's funeral, which was a remarkable event involving the two nations of Egypt and Israel (Genesis 50:1-13). It was then, and is now, an established fact that Jacob was buried at Machpelah in Hebron (Genesis 49:29-30).

What is the answer to the critics' suggestion that Stephen erred when he mentioned Shechem as Jacob's burial place, since it was common knowledge that Jacob had, in fact, been buried in Machpelah? And how do we respond when critics allege that Stephen com-



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mitted a second error because he suggested that Abraham purchased the tomb in which Jacob was buried?

First, the question needs to be raised about why no one in Stephen's audience pointed out his alleged "mistake." Remember that Stephen was speaking before an extremely hostile crowd that was filled with knowledgeable Jews who composed the Sanhedrin—men who would have been desirous of proving him wrong since he had impugned both their motives and their integrity. But they never got their chance, as is evident from the fact that they had to suborn perjury via false witnesses (vss. 11,13) and eventually take up stones to kill him. That, then, leaves only two options as to the nature of the alleged contradictions: (1) The things Stephen said really were true, but only **appear to us** to be mistakes; or (2) Stephen's statements were accurate, but subsequently were recorded or copied incorrectly.

On occasion, when the English text seems unclear or appears to contradict itself, it often is beneficial to be able to examine the original language in which the passage was written. This is one such instance. One of the leading biblical scholars (some have suggested he was **the** leading biblical scholar) of his day was J.W. McGarvey, whose knowledge of both the languages and the customs of the biblical lands was without peer. His 1881 volume, *Lands of the Bible*, was considered a classic, even in its day, and remains so today. In his commentary on the New Testament book of Acts, McGarvey provided an excursion into the Greek text that helps immensely in explaining the "contradiction" posed by Stephen's statement.

As the two clauses stand in our version, "he died, himself, and our fathers; and they were carried over into Shechem," there can be no doubt that "himself" and "fathers" are common subjects of one verb "died," and that the pronoun "they" before "were carried" refers to both alike. But it is not so in the original. The construction is different. The verb rendered died is in the singular number, *eteleutasen*, and it agrees only with *autos*, himself. The plural substantive "fathers" is not the subject of that verb, but of the plural *eteleutasan* understood. The construction having been changed with the introduction of the plural subject, it follows that the plural verb *metetethasan*, "were carried," belongs to fathers, and not to Jacob. The two clauses, properly punctuated, and with the ellipsis supplied, read thus: **"and he died; and our fathers died, and were carried over into Shechem."** With this rendering and punctuation, which are certainly admissible, the contradiction totally disappears; and if the passage had been thus rendered at first

into English, a contradiction would not have been thought of (1892, p. 121, emp. added, italics in orig.).

McGarvey's point was this. If Jacob was buried at Machpelah in Hebron (and of that there is no doubt, since Genesis 49:29-30 so states), then Stephen must have been saying that it was the **fathers alone** who were buried in Shechem, not Jacob. This is quite possible. We know that at least one of the fathers—Joseph—was buried in Shechem (Joshua 24:32). And while the Old Testament does not record the burial places for many of the other patriarchs, we can glean some information from secular history on the subject. In his discussion on Acts 7, the well-known commentator Albert Barnes mentioned that some Jewish historians (e.g., Kuinoel) held to the view that the fathers were buried at Shechem (1949, p. 124). In addition, Jerome, a fourth-century writer from Palestine, stated: "The twelve patriarchs were buried not in Arbes [Hebron—AB/KB], but in Shechem" (as quoted in Barnes, p. 124).

*On occasion, when the English text seems unclear or appears to contradict itself, it often is beneficial to be able to examine the original language in which the passage was written.*

[The idea that the patriarchs were buried in Shechem, however, was neither popular nor representative of the common Jewish thought of the day. In fact, Josephus and other Jewish historians suggested that the fathers were buried at Hebron. And there is a very good reason **why** they would say such a thing. The Samaritans—the Jews' bitterest rivals—had seized Shechem. The proud Jews, therefore, would have done anything—perhaps even going so far as to falsify history—to keep from having to admit that their ancestors were buried in their enemy's land. This actually lends credibility to Stephen's statement. Given the choice of two answers, one popular but untrue, the other true but unpopular, Stephen doubtlessly would have chosen the latter.]

But what may be said regarding the second mistake that Stephen is supposed to have made—that **Abraham** bought the tomb in

Shechem, whereas the Old Testament states that it was **Jacob** who did the buying? The possibility exists that this is a case which falls into the second category mentioned above—i.e., that Stephen's statements themselves were accurate, but subsequently were recorded or copied incorrectly. Various scholars (Adam Clarke, J.W. McGarvey, Albert Barnes, et al.) have presented a good case for the idea that the mistake should not be attributed to Stephen, but rather to a copyist's error.

However, there are other possibilities that are equally plausible. McGarvey correctly observed: "Two statements are contradictory not when they differ, but when they cannot both be true" (1886, 2:31). Here we have just such an instance. These two accounts do not conflict; rather, they only differ. Consider all the facts as we know them: (1) Abraham bought a field and a cave in Hebron (Genesis 23:17); (2) Abraham bought a sepulcher in Shechem (Acts 7:16); (3) Later, Jacob bought a parcel of ground or a field (Joshua 24:32) also in Shechem (Genesis 33:19). It could be that Jacob merely bought the land whereupon the sepulcher of his grandfather stood. This explanation certainly is feasible.

Yet there is still another prospect. We know that Abraham lived for a time in the land of Shechem, even building an altar there (Genesis 12:5-6). We also know that Jacob went to Shechem and set up his tent there about 185 years later (Genesis 33:18). Perhaps in the intervening time period, the native people had taken back the land, and, rather than fighting to reclaim what already was his, Jacob simply bought the land back peaceably. Thus, the land would have been purchased **twice**—first by Abraham, and then, almost two centuries later, by Jacob. This, too, appears to be a logical reconciliation of the facts.—**Alden Bass and Kyle Butt, M.A.**

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**Q** How did Judas actually kill himself? Did he perish from hanging, or from falling?

**A** In speaking of what can be called accurately the most dastardly betrayal of all time, Luke records in the book of Acts two prophecies from the psalms regarding Judas Iscariot: "Let his habitation be made desolate, and let no man dwell therein; and, his office let another take" (1:20). Judas was one of the main participants in the foulest plot in human history, but did not live long

enough to deal with the weight of the guilt resulting from his sin. From Matthew's account, we read where he committed suicide shortly after his betrayal of the Lord. Consider the following apparent contradiction:

And he cast down the pieces of silver into the sanctuary, and departed; and he went away and hanged himself (Matthew 27:5).

Now this man obtained a field with the reward of his iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out (Acts 1:18).

Some have used this difference in the accounts to suggest a contradiction exists. Matthew states clearly that Judas "went away and hanged himself" (27:5). On the other hand, Luke records in Acts 1:18 that "falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out." Matthew mentions only a hanging; Luke mentions Judas falling headlong (i.e., headfirst) and bursting open in the middle (i.e., at his midsection). Is there, then, a contradiction here?

First, as E.M. Zerr correctly pointed out, "they [the two passages in Matthew 27:5 and Acts 1:18—JD/BH] should not be taken as a contradiction if it is possible for both to be true" (1952, 5:272). Is this a possibility in the current case? Albert Barnes offered the following observation in regard to this alleged discrepancy: "Matthew records the **mode** in which Judas **attempted** his death by hanging. Peter speaks of **the result**" (1998, 9:300, emp. in orig.).

There are many types of bacteria that live inside the body. These bacteria are the first to begin the process of decomposition after an organism dies. Saprobic bacteria invade every inch of the dead body, and begin decomposing and digesting the organic tissue. (Saprobic bacteria are heterotrophs that live on decaying material, like a dead body.) As they decompose organic material to produce energy, these microorganisms help recycle nutrients such as nitrogen and carbon back into the environment. In accomplishing this, the bacteria produce significant quantities of gaseous by-products. If a body had been dead for several days, the gases present would begin to exert considerable pressure on the abdomen, causing the midsection to burst open easily upon hitting the hard ground. As Wayne Jackson observed:

The language necessitates no conflict. Either he hanged himself from a very high place—with perhaps the rope breaking; or else, no one removed his body for a while, it eventually fell under its own weight, and the decomposing corpse burst open (2000, p. 13).

J.W. Haley wrote in a similar fashion:

Neither of these statements excludes the other. Matthew does not deny that Judas, after hanging himself, fell and burst asunder; Luke does not assert that Judas did not hang himself prior to his fall (1974, p. 349).

Haley continued by offering a possible scenario:

Probably the circumstances are much as follows: Judas suspended himself from a tree on the brink of the precipice overhanging the valley of Hinnom, and the limb or the rope gave way; and he fell and was mangled as described in Acts (p. 349).

Therefore, the verses actually supplement, rather than contradict, each other. Matthew gives the mode, while Luke gives the result.

Of course, when dealing with this same topic, skeptics likely will bring up the argument that Judas could not have "obtained" a field as Luke recorded that he did (Acts 1:18). J.W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton presented and refuted three "contradictions" in the account of Judas and the field:

His [Luke's—JD/BH] account of Judas' death varies in three points from that given by Matthew, but the variations are easily harmonized. 1. Evidently Judas hung until his abdomen was partially decomposed; then his neck giving way, the rope breaking, or something happening which caused his body to fall, it burst open when it struck the ground. 2. Judas is spoken of as purchasing the field, and so he did, for the priests bought it with his money, so that legally it was his purchase. 3. The field was called "The field of blood" for two reasons, and each evangelist gives one of them (n.d., p. 722).

Once again, God's Word can be seen to be internally consistent. Additionally, the explanations offered above form a pattern that can be used in answering such charges—i.e., whenever two seemingly contradictory accounts are under consideration, they could actually be complementary to one another. —**Joe Deweese and Brad Harrub, Ph.D.**

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## 2002 Index

### Subject

- Adam and Eve, how long in garden?, 22:43-45  
 Cave fish, blind, 22:89-92  
 Creation/evolution controversy, 22:65-71  
 Christ  
     Physical death, medical evidence for, 22:1-7  
     Resurrection of, evidence for, 22:9-15  
 Grand Canyon, shrinking age of the, 22:47  
 Humans, fossil record and, 22:33-39  
 "Image and likeness of God," 22:17-23,25-31  
 James' "missing quote," 22:92-93  
 Judas, manner of death of, 22:94-95  
 Judges, length of the period of the, 22:41-43  
 Language, origin of, 22:57-63  
 Life, value of human, 22:49-55  
 Seventh day of creation continuing?, 22: 45-47  
 Sex and gender, origin of, 22:73-79,81-87  
 Stephen's "contradiction" in Acts 7, 22:93-94

### Author/Title

- Bass, Alden and Kyle Butt  
     Questions and Answers, 22:93-94  
 Bass, Alden, Kyle Butt, Bert Thompson  
     Questions and Answers, 22:41-43  
 Butt, Kyle  
     Jesus Christ—Dead or Alive, 22:9-15  
 Deweese, Joe and Brad Harrub  
     How Did Judas Die?, 22:94-95  
 Harrub, Brad  
     The Inherent Value of Human Life, 22:49-55  
     Questions and Answers, 22:47  
 Harrub, Brad and Bert Thompson  
     An Examination of the Medical Evidence for the Physical Death of Christ, 22:1-7  
     Creationists Fight Back!, 22:65-71  
 Harrub, Brad, Bert Thompson, Eric Lyons  
     Human Evolution and the "Record of the Rocks," 22:33-39  
 Lyons, Eric and Bert Thompson  
     In the "Image and Likeness of God" [Parts I & II], 22:17-23,25-31  
 May, Branyon and Bert Thompson  
     Questions and Answers 22:89-92  
 Miller, Dave, Brad Harrub, Bert Thompson  
     The Origin of Language and Communication, 22:57-63  
 Smith, Zach and Eric Lyons  
     Questions and Answers, 22:92-93  
 Thompson Bert  
     Questions and Answers, 22:43-47  
 Thompson, Bert and Brad Harrub  
     The Origin of Gender and Sexual Reproduction [Parts I & II], 22:73-79,81-87

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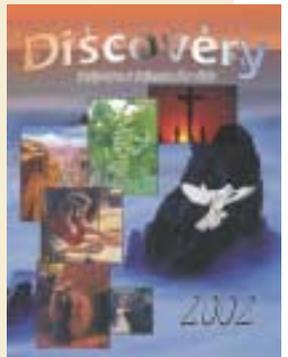
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