

A sugar-coated attack on Judeo-Christianity

The Serpent's Promise: The Bible Retold as Science

Steve Jones

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Author Steve Jones was the former head of the Department of Genetics at University College, London. He also was involved in universities in Africa, the United States, and Australia. He has also been distinguished and honoured for his role in promoting the public understanding of evolution.

The title of this book is straightforward. It refers to Satan's promise, to Adam, that he would become wise if he partook of the forbidden fruit.

This book promises much more than it delivers. Jones claims to "stand back and take a fresh look at the sacred writings" (p. 5). He does not. In fact, he admits that his own reconsideration of the Bible "is quite free of any taint of originality" (p. 14). That is quite an understatement! What he says turns out to be the same old, same old infidel drivel.

In addition, the reader will quickly find out that the book is quite unfocused. In fact, his book is a hodge-podge of numerous, unrelated topics thrown together.

Religion and science—not separate magisteria

Nowadays, at least in the USA, the conflict between the Bible and evolution is usually resolved (actually, circumvented) by the contention that science and religion

are non-overlapping magisteria. This serves as a sop to compromise-minded believers and a stick against those who recognize biblical truth. For example, in court decisions against creationists, judges have commonly talked down to creationists for "showing a misunderstanding of both science and religion", as if judges are experts on either.

In other words, science and religion are supposed to have completely different purposes, and to function in separate, watertight compartments. Jones will have none of it. He writes:

"In a covert attempt to accept that failing, some try to have a foot in both camps. They suggest that objective analysis can only go so far and that there must be another truth beyond. ... The notion that science and doctrine occupy separate, or even complementary, universes and that each provides an equally valid insight into the world seems to me unconvincing and is pursued no further here" (p. 5).

Does the miraculous equal superstition?

To the author, it does. Jones' concept of the nature of belief in miraculous events is totally defective. He appears to hold to radical empiricism: If something cannot be demonstrated by observation and experimentation, it therefore does not exist. However, no observation or attempt can demonstrate radical empiricism, so this is self-refuting.

Jones naively dismisses the miraculous as based on superstition, dogmatic authoritarianism, and the wish for something to be true. Moreover, according to Jones, "it's all the same" when it comes to miraculous claims, no matter who makes them. This reminds me of the silly argument of prominent British philosopher and atheist Bertrand Russell, who once said that there was just as much evidence for the miracles of the Homeric gods as there is for the Christian God.

Actually, miraculous events, no less than 'normal' events, can be tested—not through the scientific method (using observation and experimentation), but as historical events. On this basis, the miracles in the Old and New Testaments have much greater credibility than the miracles of other religions, and certainly have much greater credibility than the miracles in folklore. On this basis, belief in the miracles of the Bible is not based on wishful thinking or superstition. It is rational.

It is, of course, true that religion includes the belief in events that cannot be empirically tested but, as elaborated in the next paragraph, the same can be said about many beliefs in 'science', especially evolutionary theory. In addition, religion (notably the Christian religion) is much more than dogma. There is much room for independent thinking within Christianity, which is why there have been many theological disputes about

issues. It is also precisely the reason that modern science originated and developed in a Christian cultural matrix.¹

Who is it that engages in credulous faith? Jones completely ignores the vast amount of faith-based belief that characterize evolutionists. For instance, evolutionists are unwavering in their belief that life came about from non-intelligent interactions of lifeless chemicals, even though there is not a shred of evidence to support it. In fact, it has sagely been said that it takes more faith to believe that life arose spontaneously from nonliving chemicals than it takes to believe that life arose from the deeds of an Intelligent Designer.

Consistent hostility to religion

Jones claims that his book is neither a defence of, nor attack on, religion (p. 5). His posturing is laughable. Throughout this volume, Jones repeatedly displays an unmistakable antagonism towards religion, some of which has already been discussed. He unquestioningly accepts the JEPD hypothesis for the authorship of the Pentateuch (p. 245) and uses the BCE/CE system in place of BC/AD (p. 31). (The BCE/CE system, originally employed by non-Christian Jews, and some others, was first used on a large scale under Communism. It is nowadays widely used by non-Christians and especially by academics, who thereby try to delegitimize Christianity's role in Western thought and history.)

The author repeats standard jibes against religion, such as the "empty logic" of considering the heavens as declaring the handiwork of the Lord (p. 3), of the Old Testament God being an "implacable god" (p. 7), of the church's (alleged) proneness to use the stake to burn religious dissenters (p. 105), of the face of Jesus Christ seen by some of the

devout in tomatoes (p. 16), and other inanities. To crown the insults, he calls American fundamentalist preachers embezzlers (p. 405). He imagines that demonic possession is merely insanity (p. 360), and repeats the old saw that Saul's conversion experience to Paul was an epileptic fit (p. 361). He dismisses believers in religious visions as engaging in "the sleep of reason" (p. 347).

Most offensive of all is Jones' characterization of the evolution of sex as a means of "rejuvenating" the expression of the DNA molecule. He vulgarizes this as a type of born-again process, comparable to the biblical born-again process of people experiencing salvation, and cleansing, through Jesus Christ (pp. 163–164).

Are secular nations 'superior'?

Jones makes a variety of unsupported assertions on the sociological aspects of religion. He claims that religious nations have more crime, more mental illness, and less social mobility than more secular ones (p. 403). As anyone with a modicum of common sense knows, there are many factors that influence the major trends in modern societies.

Perhaps less stable and less prosperous nations *are* generally more religious than more stable and more prosperous nations. The actual explanation is prosaic. Since humans are naturally sinful, and sin is so insidious, it is easier to deny sin and be comfortable with one's sinfulness in an environment that facilitates complacency, self-sufficiency, and a perceived lack of need for God, at least for material things.

Jones brings up Sweden and Finland as models of nations that are very secular, yet superior to devout nations in dealing with crime, illness, etc. (pp. 417–418). His comment is beyond ridiculous. Finland and Sweden are small nations that are

very ethnically homogenous. Why, then, should the low crime rate be a surprise? As for the social services of these nations, the efficacy of the economies of these nations is a debatable matter.

The author summarizes what he thinks is the modern irrelevance of religion. He makes the following patronizing remarks:

“Whether religion was invented as a means of social control or as an attempt to increase stability now means little, for in the West at least God’s work has been replaced by that of Man. The decline of faith shows how peace, contentment and prosperity have come to depend more on human actions than on those of some imagined deity” (p. 418).

The Bible warns us time and time again that riches do not last. Considering all the prosperous and powerful nations of the past that have fallen, and the great evils that humans have shown themselves capable of, Jones’ flippant remarks seem to partake of the height of hubris. He also wilfully forgets about the megademocides (millions of people murdered by their government) of the aggressively secular communist nations last century.

The big bang—a lesson for Hugh Ross

Christian astrophysicist and well-known speaker Hugh Ross goes around attacking biblical (‘young earth’) creationists, proclaiming the big bang as a reconciliation of God and

evolution, and something that makes God respectable in the eyes of most scientists. In a stinging implicit rebuke to Ross, Steve Jones makes it obvious that dragging God into the big bang does not impress atheists in the least.

More fundamentally, Jones makes it clear that most scientists find no more value in a God-involved big bang than they would in a recent, six-day divine fiat creation. He comments:

“What sparked off the Bang is a mystery. For believers, God did it; but to most scientists that statement is not an answer but an excuse. As those who study the skies struggle to fit mathematics to reality, some of their suggestions are almost beyond comprehension” (pp. 64–65).

In other words, any idea—no matter how woolly—will be entertained, except, of course, God.

A healthy dose of evolutionary storytelling

There is nothing unusual about evolutionists confusing their storytelling, about inferred evolutionary events, with science. However, author Steve Jones takes this storytelling to new levels. Perhaps this is not surprising, as he is hailed by *The Independent*, a leading UK paper, as a “master storyteller”. As an example, Jones conceptualizes the role of continental drift on the imagined origin of life. He comments:

“Life itself was born in the ruins of such a slow geological car-crash. The uneasy movements of the newborn planet provided many of its ingredients for as the ground churned it dug up minerals from the depths. They were washed away by the rain to make a fecund chemical broth, the fare of the first organisms” (p. 69).

And everyone lived happily ever after.

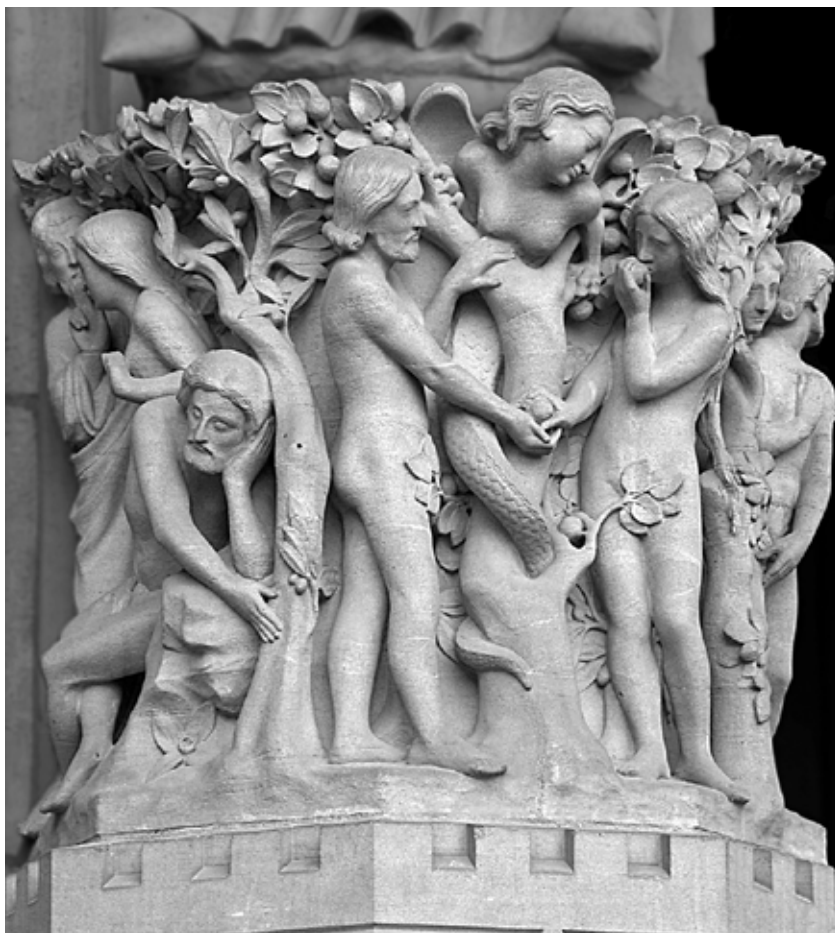


Figure 1. The serpent promised wisdom when he tempted Eve. The author appropriates this by changing it to a different kind of wisdom.



Figure 2. The appearance of the Holy Spirit before Teresa of Avila. Not surprisingly, author Steve Jones is dismissive towards such mystical experiences.

Scientism and evolutionistic triumphalism, not science

The author has a pronounced ‘science has facts and religion has faith’ mentality. Jones has a burlesqued view of religion. To him, it is a set of unquestioned, non-factual, superstitious beliefs. Science, in contrast, is based on evidence, and even the reluctant scientist may have to admit that his theory was wrong (p. 15).

In common with many evolutionists, Jones speaks out of both corners of his mouth. On one hand, he exults science, unlike religion, as non-dogmatic. On the other hand, he engages in heavy-duty dogmatism (not to mention intellectual arrogance) as he summarily despises those who “deny the truth of evolution” and those who “reject the notion of man-made climate change because they do not like the idea. I find such ideas impossible to understand” (p. 17). It certainly looks as though Jones cannot grasp the fact that intelligent people, including scientists, can legitimately disagree with him.

Ironically, the foregoing creates a conflict for the author. Jones does not know how to deal with prominent Australian atheist Ian Plimer. On one hand, Jones praises Plimer for attacking the account of Noah’s Ark but then expresses disdain for Plimer questioning man-made global warming! (p. 230).

Dubious to tenuous analogies with Scripture

As part of his fast-and-loose storytelling, Jones cites the Bible when it serves his purposes. He finds a parallel between conventional evolutionary and biblical themes, no matter how far-fetched. He ‘steals’ events in the Bible and refashions them according to his ideas.

Thus, to Jones, the drifting continents are “arks” that parallel Noah’s Ark (p. 68). The founder effect, in evolutionary theory, is supposed to be comparable to the founders in the Bible (e.g. Noah’s family) (p. 255). The debate, between Calvinists and non-Calvinists, on free will versus

predestination, is supposed to be comparable to the modern debate about free will and determinism in human behaviour (p. 104).

Much about little

Whether or not he refers to the Bible, author Steve Jones meanders from topic to topic. He jumps around to matters as diverse as ancestry and kinship, ancient Judaism, human life expectancy, sensory and hallucinatory experiences, chimpanzees, climatic change, the DNA molecule, food and diet allergies, health and disease, mystical experiences, human population trends, the biology of sex, and human starvation (of course, the worst example was the genocidal *Holodomór*, ‘extermination by starvation’, where millions of Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians, including Poles, were starved to death under his fellow atheist, Stalin). All of these, and more, he covers in a centimetre-deep, kilometre-wide manner.

Conclusions

This book is a disappointment for several reasons. Its content is quite disjointed, and it is unlikely to hold the interest of the reader. It presents all the evolutionary dogmas as fact while, ironically, excoriating religion for being dogmatic.

The author offers nothing new. When not finding imaginary parallels between Scripture and modern thinking, Jones simply repeats many of the time-worn attacks on religion, especially Christianity.

References

1. Stark, R., *How the West was won*, ISI Books, Wilmington, DE, 2014.