

Has Science Solved the Ancient Mysteries of the Bible?

Popular Mechanics made a huge mistake

Don Ruhl • Savage Street, Grants Pass, Oregon • February 5, In the year of our Lord, 2017

Scripture Reader and Reading: Carl Peugh – Genesis 6.13–16

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Phil Joseph – No suggestions

Prelude:

I. *Popular Mechanics Magazine* is an exciting and useful publication.

A. I loved reading my grandpa's copies of it, and of *Popular Science*.

1. They told of useful things for now and
2. of exciting things coming in the future.

B. However, in December 1996, *Popular Mechanics* took a swipe at the Bible.

1. The cover story was, "Science Solves the Ancient Mysteries of the Bible,"
2. not attempts, but solves,
3. not gives its opinion, but explains.

II. Many people believe that past centuries were ignorant and superstitious, and

A. that today we are intelligent, because

B. we only deal in facts,

1. since we have modern technology and science.
2. People believe that science can solve every mystery.

C. The abstract or subtitle is this,

"Technology and a better understanding of natural processes may explain how these seemingly impossible events occurred."

1. The article argues that modern technology and modern knowledge
 - a) supersede whatever the Bible writers had at their disposal,
 - b) which sometimes was the very incident itself.

2. Some scientists believe that we can know more than biblical witnesses!

D. Has our technology and knowledge of nature benefitted us?

1. Who would dare argue against such?
2. However, some scientists believe that biblical writers were superstitious,
 - a) trying to explain unusual phenomena in supernatural ways.
 - b) The editor-in-chief, Joe Oldham, defended Mike Fillon, the author of the article I will review,

“The naturally skeptical members of the scientific community have long had an interest in stories found in the Bible, not so much to say the incidents never happened but rather to offer what may be logical, nay scientific, explanations of some of these incidents. After all, not everyone possesses the blind faith needed to accept occurrences that defy logical reality. Some need more, an explanation that takes into account modern investigative technology, forensic science and perspective of thousands of years” (p. 4).

- (1) They will offer logic and science rather than blind faith.
- (2) The Bible records, “occurrences that defy logical reality.”
 - (a) *Popular Mechanics* dismisses the possibility of miracles.
 - (b) Interestingly, Joe Oldham quotes Mike Fillon,

“God gave us the ability to make scientific inquiries...” (. 4).

- i) Mr. Fillon is vice president of St. James Lutheran Church in Norcross, Georgia, yet,
- ii) cannot accept a God who works miracles.

III. In the opening paragraph of the article Mike Fillon, the author, says,

“For centuries, theologians have looked beyond the stories’ implausible aspects, focusing instead on their moral messages of divine punishment for the wicked and reward for the good.”

- A. We do consider the miraculous elements of the Scriptures and
1. realize that they cannot be explained naturally or scientifically, but only
 2. supernaturally, that miracles are the temporary suspension of natural laws.

IV. If we can explain miracles, then they are not miracles.

A. Mike Fillon also said,

“Now—with the help of high-tech methods including radar imaging, computer simulation and chemical analysis—scientists are becoming convinced that there may be another dimension to these miraculous tales.”

B. These scientists attempt to understand, test, and decipher a piece of *literature*.

1. How can they test whether Moses saw a bush on fire without burning up?
2. How can they test whether Lot mistook his wife for a pillar of salt?

V. Mike Fillon discredits the biblical writers,

“What the Bible’s authors interpreted as miracles may have been phenomena of nature.”

A. Mr. Fillon quotes Steve Prothero, an assistant professor of American Religious History at Boston University,

“Prior to that, what people were really working with were texts.”

1. As though a historical document is not as reliable as archaeology!
2. As though eyewitnesses are not as accurate as modern researchers!

Persuasion:

I. Noah and the Ark

A. Mr. Fillon refers to the ark as a ship-like structure and

1. shows a photograph of a formation that looks like a ship on Mt. Ararat.
2. However, Genesis 6 records what God said to Noah,

14 “Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch” (Gen 6.14).

B. He quotes an American shipwreck specialist, saying,

“[The Flood could have been] an astronomical event causing a tectonic upheaval or a tidal bore causing gravitational pull in the ocean waters that forced the boat into the mountains” (p. 40).

1. He relegates it to a local flood.
2. However, the Lord promised never to flood the Earth again as He had,

21 The LORD said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.

**22 While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Winter and summer,
And day and night
Shall not cease.”
(Gen 8.21–22).**

- a) Yet, we have local or even regional floods all the time.
3. Moses also stated explicitly the extent of the flood,

19 And the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered (Gen 7.19).

4. These people never deny that there was a massive flood. Why?
 - a) Because evidence of huge floods are over all the Earth.
 - b) That indicates global, but they just affirm many local floods.

II. Lot’s Wife

- A. Genesis 19 shows how the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah,

24 “Then the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens” (Gen 19.24).

1. Mr. Fillon argues that an earthquake liquefied the rocks and soil underneath the cities.

2. Also, the asphalt close by ignited, giving the appearance of what Abraham saw in Genesis 19.

a) Mr. Fillon argues it has happened to other cities or places.

b) That does not establish the case for Sodom and Gomorrah.

3. We have to examine the Genesis record for accuracy.

B. Genesis 19 shows what happened to Lot's wife,

26 "But his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt" (Gen 19.26).

1. *Popular Mechanics* asserts

a) that the earthquake caused a tidal wave on the Dead Sea and

b) the tidal wave drowned Lot's wife,

"...what Lot saw when he looked back from the safety of the mountain was not his wife transformed into a pillar of salt, but a woman-sized block of salt on the newly formed beach" (p. 41).

2. Some men do not pay very much attention to their wives, but

a) Lot was terrible!

b) He could not tell the difference between his wife and a block of salt!

3. Genesis does not say that Lot looked back to see his wife, for

a) if he had, he would have turned into salt also, because

b) the angels had told Lot and his family,

17 "...Do not look behind you..." (Gen 19.17).

III. Moses Parts the Red Sea

A. *Popular Mechanics* argues that the Red Sea is too deep to walk in it, but

1. that here is what happened,

"...a moderate wind blowing constantly for about 10 hours could have

caused the sea to recede about a mile and the water level to drop 10 ft., leaving dry land for a period of time before crashing back when the winds died down” (p. 42).

2. A moderate wind blew ten feet of water for one mile!

B. Upper Klamath Lake

1. has had moderate winds blow constantly for at least 10 hours

2. on about 10 foot-deep-Upper Klamath Lake.

a) To my knowledge a mile-wide path has never opened up.

b) Which is harder to believe?

(1) What the Bible says happened?

15 And the LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. 16 But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea” (Exo 14.15–16).

(2) Or this stronger than a hurricane–wind theory?

IV. Lazarus Rises

A. Mr. Fillon suggests that Lazarus was only in a coma or catatonic state (p. 42).

1. Catatonia is a schizophrenic syndrome in which a person can appear in a stupor or have muscular rigidity, thus appearing to be dead.

a) He says that since medicine was not nearly as advanced as it is today

b) the people in John 11 did not know that Lazarus was not dead.

2. A person in a catatonic state shows little breathing or heartbeat.

a) In a coma, hearing is apparently the last thing lost.

b) So Mr. Fillon quoted Gerald A. Larue, professor emeritus of biblical history and archaeology and president of the Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion, a secular humanist organization, as follows,

“Assuming Jesus had a loud voice, and he called out ‘Lazarus,’ the

man may have heard him and come out of the coma” (p. 42).

- (1) Would it not be nice to get others out of catatonic states by yelling!
- (2) Here is what John 11 says,

Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go” (John 11.43–44).

V. A Plague of Locusts

A. Mr. Fillon says that locusts often appear in Africa and Asia

1. after unseasonable rains, and
2. that this follows the order of the plagues,
 - a) there was the hail and then
 - b) the plague of locusts (Exo 9–10).

B. Yet, see Mr. Fillon’s perplexity,

“There remains, however, this mystery. Most of the plagues were produced at Moses’s command, in one case at a time set by the Pharaoh himself, and ceased at his prayer” (p. 42).

C. Consider these interesting facts:

1. Mr. Fillon refuses to acknowledge that God operated miraculously.
2. Mr. Fillon accepts
 - a) the biblical record of the meetings between Moses and Pharaoh, but
 - b) not the biblical record of the miracles.

VI. The Star of Bethlehem

A. Mr. Fillon says that in May of 7 BC

1. Jupiter and Saturn appeared close together, and

2. in September of 6 BC Mars, Jupiter and Saturn were closely aligned,
3. thus producing the star.

B. Matthew 2 shows that the star had to be more than the planets lining up.

1. The star had to be very low in the sky,
2. perhaps just a few stories up to accomplish a certain purpose,

9 “When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy” (Matt 2.9–10).

- a) The wise men saw the star first when they were in the East.
- b) Later in Jerusalem, they saw the star again and
 - (1) noticed that the star was moving,
 - (2) obviously distinct from the other stars of the night.
3. It even pinpoints the exact house where Jesus was.

VII. Shroud of Turin

A. This point is not a study of the biblical text.

1. Even the Catholic Church, which possesses the cloth,
2. has not come out and said that the cloth actually belonged to Jesus.

B. However, we can know that the cloth was not the burial cloth of Jesus Christ.

1. The Shroud of Turin is one piece
 - a) on which it appears that a man was laid upon and
 - b) the cloth was folded over the body from either the head or the feet.
2. Luke 23 shows what Joseph of Arimathea did with the body of Christ,

53 Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before (Luke 23.53).

3. Luke 24 shows Peter going to the tomb,

12 “But Peter arose and ran to the tomb; and stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying by themselves ...” (Luke 24.12).

4. John 19 shows even more,

40 “Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury” (John 19.40).

5. Now listen to John 20,

5 “And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, 7 and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself” (John 20.5–7).

VIII.The Burning Bush

- A. Mr. Fillon did not write much on this, but provided a picture and a caption.

1. The caption says,

“The biblical lands sit atop a sea of gas and oil. Some suspect that Moses saw a natural gas seep that was ignited by lightning” (p. 43).

2. I guess Moses just thought the bush was on fire.

- B. Was this man,

1. who had perfect eyesight (Deu 34.7),
2. who had been trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts 7.22),
3. who was mighty in words and deeds (also Acts 7.22),
4. who had skill and intelligence to write Genesis through Deuteronomy,
5. who could lead a few million people through a desert for 40 years,
 - a) not able to see that the fire was actually behind the bush?

C. Exodus 3 shows Moses investigating the bush,

2 And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, but the bush was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn." 4 So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am" (Exo 3.2–4).

Exhortation:

I. Mr. Fillon demonstrates what happens when a person rejects the miraculous.

- A. He becomes a judge of God's word.
- B. He accepts part of it, but denies the rest.

II. The skeptics come and go, but the word of God abides forever.

- A. Even as the anvil wears out the hammers,
- B. so the skeptics wear out their hammers on the anvil of the Bible.

III. Brethren, our faith does not rest upon misinterpretation of nature.

- A. There is a God in heaven.
- B. He has done marvelous wonders.
- C. His greatest work is that He would send Jesus Christ to die for our sins.