

Why should a creationist study the historical sciences?

SOPHIE SOUTHERDEN

ABSTRACT

Young creationist students often shy away from studying the historical sciences because of the opposition they will inevitably encounter in the secular education system. However, there are several biblical and practical reasons why creationist students should confidently step into the challenges and opportunities that await them in this area of scientific endeavour.

INTRODUCTION

Naturalism and evolution are the starting point for conventional science today. This poses many difficulties for Christian students who hold to a biblical view of creation and want to study a scientific subject at university. This secular worldview mostly affects students who want to study a scientific subject that is concerned with origins and design (the historical sciences), such as geology, pal-

aeontology, genetics or cosmology. The aim of this article is to persuade young prospective students

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to pursue further education in these areas of study, even though they are currently taught from a naturalistic and evolutionary worldview in most universities. There are a number of good reasons to consider:

1. Participating in science is acting according to our *design*.
2. God created us to *delight* in learning about his acts through studying his creation.
3. There is a *demand* for creationists to continue to add to and advance research.
4. Christian scientists are at a natural *advantage* in their quest for understanding.
5. There are many exciting *opportunities* for creationist students in the historical sciences.

DESIGN

The first reason why Christian students should pursue a career in the historical sciences is a biblical one; when we endeavour to understand and care for Yahweh's creation through the study of the historical sciences we are acting in accordance with our design. Genesis 1:26–29 (known as the creation mandate) says that God made man to have dominion over all the Earth. This means that

God gave mankind the responsibility to steward Earth's resources and to care for all that had been entrusted to him. God also gave mankind an intellect that could reason and deduce meaning from the physical universe in a way that was superior to the rest of creation (Figure 1). These unique responsibilities and abilities are part of what distinguished mankind from the rest of creation and entail what it means to be made in the 'image of God' (Morris 1976, p.74).

In order to have dominion over the Earth mankind must first make an effort to understand it. Adam put this into practice by naming the animals according to their kinds (Genesis 2:19–20). Adam was worshipping his creator by using his intellect to categorise the creatures of the Earth, fulfilling his God-given purpose to have dominion over the animals.

Deducing meaning from the physical universe in order to understand and care for it is what science achieves at its most basic level. The belief in a rational and intelligent God who had created the universe gave early scientists confidence to investigate the universe through the means of science, and therefore one can argue the Christian faith was the driving force behind modern science (Brand 2006). Scientists of past generations sought to act according to their God-given design by taking dominion of the Earth through their scientific exploration. This included the study of the historical sciences.

Today, most Christians approach the historical sciences to better equip themselves to defend Scripture and refute evolution. As important as this type of equipping



Figure 1. God designed humans to be able to understand the world, including through the scientific method. Photograph by StFX / CCO 1.0.

is in today's naturalistic world, the study of the historical sciences is not primarily for the purpose of defending a theological belief. Primarily, these studies are to enrich our understanding of the universe, past and present, and to advance technology in order to better steward the creation's resources for the good of mankind and the glory of God. This has been achieved; the study of the historical sciences has propelled technological advancements throughout history. It has initiated and instructed the mining and utilization of natural resources, led to medical advancements and has contributed to hazard prevention and environmental conservation. In pursuing further education in these subjects, students are obeying the creation mandate by using their intellect to understand and care for the world. They are acting in accordance with their design.

DELIGHT

A welcome by-product of pursuing a career in the historical sciences is joy and satisfaction. As humans, we are programmed to find joy in God's creation. In doing so we are taking after our creator: God himself delighted in his creation as he created it. Five times Genesis 1 says 'and God saw that it was good' (verses 4, 12, 18, 21, 25). We are commanded to understand and steward our planet and, incidentally, it fills us with joy. Our inbuilt fas-



Figure 2. The author on her first trip to the Grand Canyon in Arizona with The Master's University. Photograph by Sophie Southerden.

ination with creation is why people flock to the Grand Canyon every year (Figure 2), David Attenborough is still making new documentaries which put the wonder of planet Earth on display, and explorers risk their lives to find beauty in the hardest-to-reach places on Earth and in space. For the non-believer, their fascination and delight in the natural world is an end in itself. They may turn to worship creation, and as a result subject themselves to it. However, as Christians our delight in creation is taken to greater heights and depths because it tells us about God, who created it for us. We are not subject to worshipping it; instead, we delight in the beauty and order that exists in the natural world because it is a wonderful demonstration of our loving Father's generosity and kindness to us.

But humans have a particular fascination, and receive a peculiar sense of satisfaction and joy, when reflecting upon the history of the universe. The writer of Psalm 104 exults in God as he reflects on the wonders that he has performed in creation, Psalm 139 marvels at God's creating work in the womb, and Psalm 8 is in awe of the almighty God who has made the heavenly bodies and put them in their place. Observing God's historical works in creation creates a sense of awe for who he is and what he has done. Reflection on natural history can also serve to strengthen our faith in God's Word and his attributes.

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The interest in natural history is not unique to Christians. Humans were created with a natural curiosity about the Earth's historical events. People are enthralled, and occasionally obsessed, with what the world was like in the past, how it has changed and what was it was like before they got here. The academic study of the historical sciences serves the purpose of satisfying a philosophical curiosity about the origin and progression of space, time and matter.

As a Christian, studying the historical sciences will bring much satisfaction, joy and delight (I say this from experience). Human intrigue concerning Earth's natural history is nowhere better satisfied than in studying the historical sciences alongside the Scriptures. Active interaction between science and Scripture brings the past to life. A biblical perspective gives the creationist scientist a rare opportunity to see the evidence left by God's past acts of creation, provision and judgement as they study the natural world. Humans were created to marvel at God's past acts of creation and, apart from reading the Word of God by faith, studying the historical sciences is the best way to do this.

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Figure 3. Ebenezer the *Allosaurus*, on display in the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky. Photograph by Paul Garner.

DEMAND

We live at a time when creationist scientists are under pressure and their skills are in high demand to contribute to ongoing creationist research. The mainstream historical sciences are grounded in naturalism and teach evolution as fact. Pursuing an education or career in the historical sciences, therefore, is not a straightforward decision for a Christian with biblical convictions. Many young students are hesitant to pursue further study in these areas because they are unsure if they will be able to make it through the three years of university with their faith still intact. Some prospective students may worry that they are wasting their education by learning a worldview that undermines the truth of the Bible. There is also the overwhelming thought of trying to defend a biblical worldview from a scientific standpoint to accomplished (and occasionally hostile) professors who maintain a different worldview. Today, the realm of historical science is an intimidating environment for even the most secure and established creationist scientist.

This is a situation that I have been in and can relate to. I arrived at the University of Sussex to study BSc Geography in 2011 with the hopes of becoming some kind of explorer/researcher. I became a Christian in my first year and in the Lord's sovereignty I started an in-depth Bible study on the book of Genesis from a creationist worldview. After some time, I felt discontent with how there was no room for a creationist worldview in the university environment. I decided it was not an appropriate environment for me and I left the university. I doubted if studying geography in a secular environment was an edifying life choice and whether it really would make a

difference in the grand scheme of eternity. In hindsight I can see that my decisions were guided by doubt and fear.

I can see why many Christians are considering medicine or engineering as a profession over the historical sciences: they benefit society, they seem to be serving a purpose that the Bible would consider worthwhile, and they also have the extra advantage of avoiding the need to learn about topics that contradict the Bible. Young Christians are drawn to these areas of study as they are able to satisfy their academic talents without needing to fully confront the prevailing naturalistic worldview head-on, and there is a high demand for students trained in them. However, there are also plenty of worthwhile reasons for Christian students to pursue further education in the historical sciences, especially those that have a heavy emphasis on questions of origins, and there is definitely a high demand for their talents to be used in this field of study.

A trip to the Creation Museum in Kentucky¹ (Figure 3) made me realise that studying geology could be extremely edifying. It was a freeing moment where my passion for God's Word and my passion for rocks collided! My eyes were opened to 'Flood geology' and things started to click into place for me. I finally realised that my two competing loves were complementary and could actually bolster each other. As a young Christian student, there is plenty of freedom, resources and opportunities to pursue a career in the historical sciences.

Furthermore, I recognised that there was a demand for more well-trained Christian, Bible-believing geologists to contribute to the ongoing young-earth creationist research. There is an exciting opportunity to be a pioneer

in this field. The young-earth creationist movement in the historical sciences is fairly small and underfunded compared to the secular field, but nonetheless, they are producing some exciting new models of Earth history that are able to better explain the data and challenge conventional models (see Baumgardner 2003; Snelling 2007; Snelling 2010) as well as conducting research that gives insight into biblical events (see Wise 2003; Faulkner 2013; Coulson 2020). The smallness of this group of scientists actually works to the student's advantage. I have found it very easy to get connected with creationists who are at the top of their field who have been more than willing to help me along my way.

ADVANTAGE

Another reason why creationists should pursue further education in the historical sciences is because a biblical perspective naturally puts the student at an advantage when it comes to interpreting scientific data. Science is not a linear progression of knowledge. Looking back in time you can see that science has traversed a series of paradigms (Kuhn 1970, p.92). The rapidly shifting nature of scientific theories upon the discovery of new data makes it a shaky foundation for truth. In the world of science, what is thought to be true today could be found to be false tomorrow.

As creationists, we are at a natural advantage when it comes to engaging in science because the foundation of truth on which we base our trust is the rock-solid bed of Scripture, rather than a scientific paradigm. This is not to say that all scientific models that fit with the scriptural narrative are true, but we have a better chance at proposing an accurate model for reality as we can be certain about the historical accuracy of Scripture. Of all people, Bible-believing Christians should be the most confident in heading out into the study of the historical sciences; for we have a book written by the creator of the universe that, to put it plainly, gives us massive clues! Of course,

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in an anti-God world this will attract opposition, but in the end we are the ones with nothing to lose and so

much to gain. Scripture is the only true and complete account of history written by someone who was there to witness it all, and therefore we can confidently conduct science based upon its claims. By taking this approach, creationist science becomes an exciting frontier of discovery that not only refutes the foolish wisdom of the world, but also offers credible alternative explanations for what we see in the natural world.

OPPORTUNITIES

Five years after dropping out of university in England I found myself on a plane to California to study geoscience at The Master's University – one of the only universities that continues to teach the historical sciences from a young-earth creationist perspective. At The Master's University, Scripture is the foundation to all subjects, including the historical sciences. The historical science programmes are not designed primarily to equip students to find fallacies in the evolutionary worldview; rather the primary focus is to equip students to gain a scientific understanding of the natural world through the lens of Scripture.

The Master's University is not the only option for creationists who desire to further their education in the historical sciences. Although there are many fundamental differences in worldview, you can get a good, honest education in a secular university. There are many scientific topics where issues of origin and age do not alter the method of interpretation; scientists can agree that gravity exists, even if they disagree about the age of the Earth. God has created all people, Christian or not, with the ability to reason. The large majority of secular scientists are honest and very intelligent – their work is worthy of our respect and appreciation, even if we do not subscribe to their worldview. There is no need to chuck out every bit of science that is not done by a Bible-believing Christian; we have much to learn from scientists in the secular world who have dedicated their lives' work to understanding creation.

However, a Christian scientist needs discernment and wise counsel in a secular learning environment. It can be a lonely place to be, and they will need to be guided by the truth of the Scriptures and have the accountability of other Christians to stay on track. The good news is that there are plenty of people and organisations who are ready and waiting to support Christians taking this path, and especially those studying at a secular university. Organisations such as Biblical Creation Trust and the makers of the documentary film *Is Genesis History?*²² have provided personal support and encouragement to me and have directed me to online resources that can be watched, listened to and read to inform my studies (Figure 4). Venturing into the historical sciences in a secular world will not be easy, but you will not be alone.

CONCLUSION

Bible-believing Christians are shying away from studying the historical sciences because of the pressure of the dominating evolutionary worldview that is imposed upon students at most universities. Although

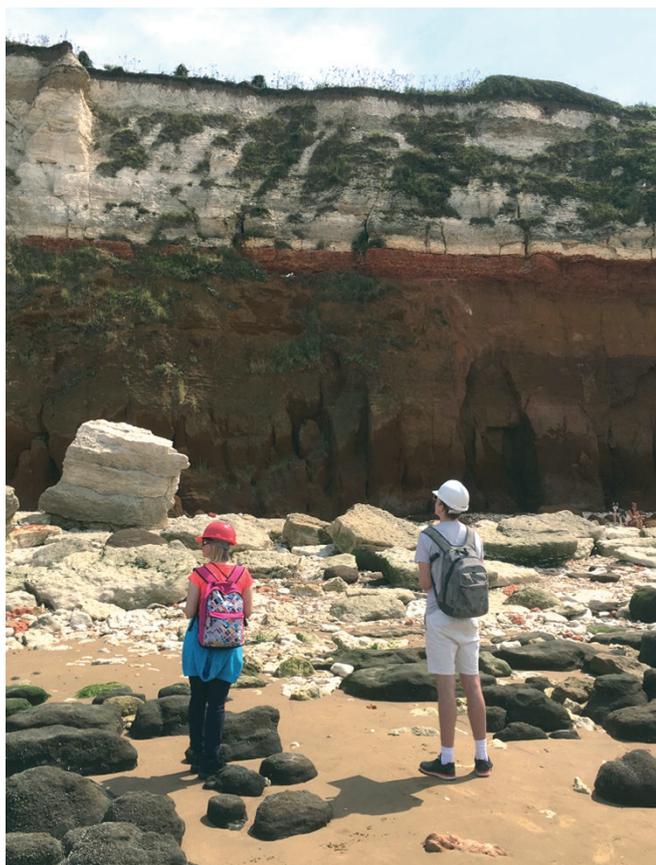


Figure 4. Organisations such as Biblical Creation Trust can provide invaluable support and mentoring for creationist students. Photograph by Paul Garner.

they may encounter hardships along the way, there are nevertheless good reasons for students to pursue further education in these disciplines. Studying God’s creation via the historical sciences is an integral part of our design. Acting in accordance with our design by furthering our knowledge of creation, past and present, will bring much delight. There is a demand for young Christians to further their learning in these topics in order to advance research contributing to the young-earth creationist model. Studying the historical sciences from a biblical perspective naturally puts the student at an advantage when it comes to interpreting scientific data. For these reasons, young Christian scientists with a passion for God’s Word should be excited about the opportunities that await them in pursuing a career in the historical sciences.

ENDNOTES

1. The Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, is a ministry of Answers in Genesis. Visit the website at: <https://creationmuseum.org/>.
2. There is a website accompanying the film (<https://isgenesishistory.com/>) and an associated blog (<https://newcreation.blog/>).

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Sophie Southerden was born and raised in Oxford, England. She is currently a geoscience undergraduate student at The Master’s University in Santa Clarita, California. She is particularly interested in studying the philosophy of science, origins and mountain formation (orogeny). She runs competitively for the university cross country and track team and also enjoys expeditions and climbing in the mountains.

