

## Dragons, Dinosaurs, and “Fiery Serpents”

Bert Thompson, Ph.D. and Brad Harrub, Ph.D.

“Smoke pours out of his nose and sparks of fire leap out of his mouth. He is covered in hard scales, and his underbelly is hard, like sharp pieces of pottery. He makes the deep waters boil, and is not afraid of an arrow or slingstones. And when he raises himself up, the mighty are afraid.”

Quote this description to any 10-year-old child, and he or she very likely will be able to provide the generic name of the creature under consideration—“dragon.” Yet these are the very words God used during His conversation with Job (see Job 41) to describe “leviathan.” What was leviathan? Was it a dragon? If so, did it really exist? Numerous cultures possess accounts of creatures referred to as dragons. Stories from China to England recount tales about such creatures. Even Indians of North and South America had legends about them.

Atheistic astronomer Carl Sagan once remarked: “The pervasiveness of dragon myths in the folk legends of many cultures is probably no accident” (1977, p. 140). But rather than accept the possibility that such creatures actually existed, Sagan felt obliged to “explain them away.” How did he attempt such a feat? Peter Dickinson noted: “Carl Sagan tried to account for the spread and consistency of dragon legends by saying that they are fossil memories of the time of the dinosaurs, come down to us through a general mammalian memory inherited from the early mammals, our ancestors, who had to compete with the great predatory lizards” (1979, p. 127). Thus, according to Sagan, we evolved not merely our physical bodies, but also memories “uploaded” from our mammalian ancestors.

From countries all around the world, we hear stories of dragons. We learn about those that lived in murky swamps, some that terrorized entire regions, and still others (referred to as “fiery serpents”) that were vicious flying reptiles. As late as the early twentieth century, elderly people at Penllin in Wales told of having seen winged serpents. Marie Trevelyan said:

The...winged serpents...were the terror of young and old alike.... They were coiled when in repose, and looked as if they were covered with jewels of all sorts. Some of them had crests sparkling with all the colours of the rainbow. When disturbed, they glided swiftly, sparkling all over, to their hiding places. When angry, they flew over people's heads, with outspread wings... (as quoted in Simpson, 1980).

Other accounts from the British Isles of dragons and/or flying reptiles have survived to the present day (see Cooper, 1995, pp. 130-161). One true account, recorded in a chronicle from 1405, told of a giant reptile at Bures in Suffolk:

Close to the town of Bures, near Sudbury, there has lately appeared, to the great hurt of the countryside, a dragon, vast in body, with a crested head, teeth like a saw, and a tail extending to an enormous length. Having slaughtered the shepherd of a flock, it devoured many sheep.... In order to destroy him, all the country people around were summoned. But when the dragon saw that he was again to be assailed with arrows, he flew into a marsh or mere and there hid himself among the long reeds, and was no more seen (see Simpson, p. 60).

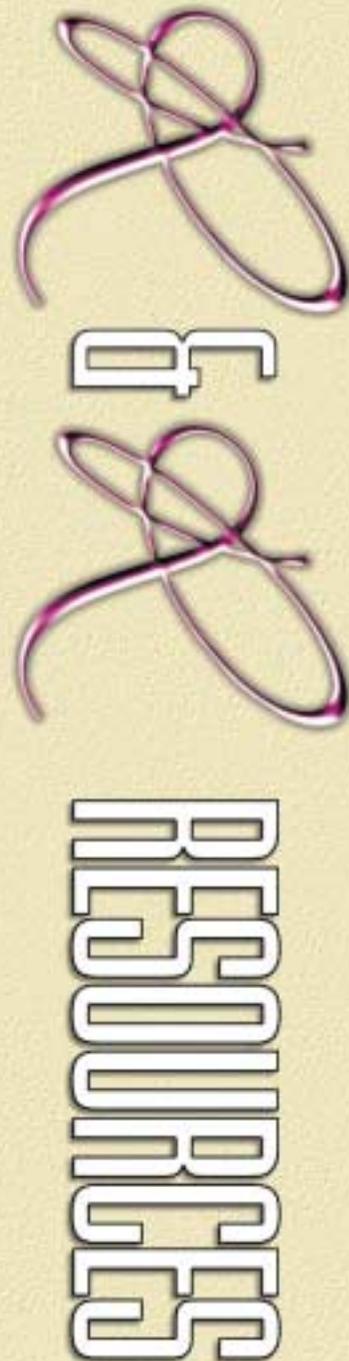
One of the most famous dragon stories from England tells about a time when, around A.D. 300, not far from the town of Silene, there lived a dragon that terrorized the townspeople. Every day they would feed the beast two sheep. When the supply of sheep was depleted, they began to feed their children to the dragon. It came time for the king to offer his own daughter. Just as she was about to be eaten, the brave St. George rescued her and killed the beast. This account likely contains a great deal of truth. St. George was a real historical figure whose martyrdom occurred on April 23, 303.

The epic poem *Beowulf* describes a battle in Denmark between Beowulf and a terrible monster called Grendel. Beowulf, like St. George, was a real person (he lived from A.D. 495 to 583, and was king of a tribe known as the Geatins). Grendel was bipedal, possessed powerful jaws, and had small, weak forearms (Beowulf slew him, you may recall, by tearing off one of those arms). As Bill Cooper inquired: “Is there a predatory animal from the fossil record known to us, who had two massive hindlegs and two comparatively puny forelimbs? There is indeed.... I doubt that the reader needs to be guided by me as to which particular species of predatory dinosaur the details of his physical description fit best” (1995, pp. 159,160). Could it be—*Tyrannosaurus rex*!?

The word “dinosaur” was not even coined until the 1840s. What might these creatures have been called prior to that time? **Dragons!** Many creatures from ancient stories closely resemble what we today call dinosaurs. But ask yourself: How could **so many different cultures** from all over the world independently fabricate accounts about dragons—if dragons never existed in the first place?

### REFERENCES

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 Dickinson, Peter (1979), *The Flight of Dragons* (New York: Harper and Row).  
 Sagan, Carl (1977), *The Dragons of Eden* (New York: Random House).  
 Simpson, J. (1980), *British Dragons* (London: B.T. Batsford, Ltd.).



**Q** Was the “behemoth” of Job 40 a hippopotamus?

**A** When commenting on the behemoth of Job 40:15ff., modern scholars often make a general statement that goes something like this: “Most identify this beast as the hippopotamus.” While it is true that a few similarities do exist between the behemoth and the hippo, some of the descriptive details simply do not fit. For example, God described the behemoth as a creature that “moves his tail like a cedar” (40:17). The hippopotamus, however, hardly could be described—with its little 6-8 inch stubby appendage—as having a stiff or large tail. The tail of the hippo is short and small like that of a pig, and is a mere twig in comparison with a cedar tree. But that fact has not prevented commentators from attempting to avoid the obvious. Some believe that God was comparing the hippo’s tail to a cedar branch, not a cedar tree. Others, like John Hartley, have advocated the view that the tail is being compared to a cedar tree, rather than to a branch, but that God really was referring to the genitals of the hippopotamus (1988, p. 525). However, there is no credible evidence that suggests the Hebrew word for tail (*zanab*) ever was used euphemistically in He-

brew (e.g., as in regard to reproductive organs). It appears that Hartley and others have rejected the logical rendering of the passage in order to force a comparison between the behemoth and the hippopotamus.

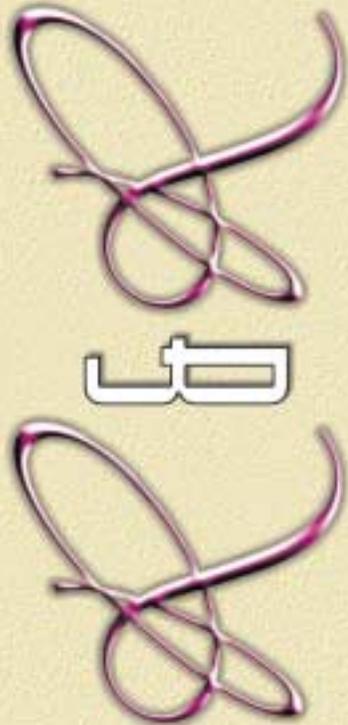
The text also indicates that no man could approach the behemoth with a sword (40:19; cf. 41:10). Yet the hippopotamus was hunted frequently and captured successfully by the Egyptians. Hartley admitted: “Egyptian pharaohs took pride in slaying a hippopotamus. There are numerous pictures in which the pharaoh, hunting a hippopotamus from a papyrus boat, is poised to hurl his harpoon into the animal’s opened mouth, thereby inflicting a fatal blow” (1988, p. 524). Egyptians even celebrated festivals known as “Harpooning the Hippopotamus.” One wonders how anyone could accurately compare the mighty, unseizable behemoth with a hippopotamus? God’s description of the behemoth actually is compatible in every way with the descriptions we have of some of the dinosaurs that roamed the Earth a few thousand years ago.

REFERENCES

Hartley, John E (1988), *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).

**Eric Lyons**

RESOURCES



IN THE NEWS

AN IMPORTANT NOTE TO OUR READERS

The February 19, 2001 issue of *Time* magazine screamed on its front cover in big, bold letters, “Human Cloning is Closer than You Think!” On Friday, December 27, 2002, Dr. Brigitte Boisselier, the chief executive officer of a Bahamas-based company known as Clonaid, held a news conference to announce that scientists working for her had succeeded in producing the world’s first cloned human baby (a little girl nicknamed “Eve”). Needless to say, everyone—scientist and non-scientist alike—was stunned by this incredible news.

Previously, various individuals or groups had claimed that they had impregnated surrogate mothers with cloned fetuses, but up until the December 27 announcement, no one had yet announced an actual **birth**. If Clonaid’s claims are true, *Time*’s statement is suddenly irrelevant and erroneous, because cloning is here—**now**.

The key phrase here is, “**if Clonaid’s claims are true.**” Admittedly, as things now stand, that is a very big “if.” On the very day that Clonaid held its news conference, Dr. Brad Harrub and I began working on an article for *Reason & Revelation* as our response to the purported cloning of a human being. We under-

stand that our readers expect, and deserve, an in-depth, well-researched response. You look to us for the most up-to-date information on, and an assessment of, matters such as these. And rightly so. That is an important part of our job, and we take it very seriously.

However, long-time readers of *R&R* are well aware of the fact that we **never** rush into print on **any** issue. It is not our policy to offer a “knee-jerk” reaction to media pronouncements, regardless of the sensational nature of their claims, or the subject matter involved (whether it concerns the latest alleged human fossil find, or current progress in human genetic engineering). Rather, we move slowly, research thoroughly, and write carefully. Then, when all the relevant facts are in, we publish.

As this issue of *Reason & Revelation* goes to press, no verifiable, scientific proof of any kind has been forthcoming to confirm Clonaid’s claim of having produced a human baby via cloning. We are, of course, watching this case very closely (on a daily basis, in fact). As soon as we can verify—one way or another—the veracity of the claim, we will respond accordingly. But not a moment before! Please be patient—and know we are “on the case.”

**Bert Thompson**