



# *The North Texas*

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## The New Old Testament

by John Blanton

Scientists have gone head-to-head with creationists on the matter of Genesis for two hundred years. For a long time it has been apparent the first story in the Bible just does not add up. Neither does the second biblical story, Exodus, according to James Cunliffe.

James Cunliffe has a Ph.D. in geology from Rutgers University, and he dabbles in archeology. He has previously lectured on the “rock wall” that gave Rockwall, Texas, its name. At the July NTS meeting he explained what has been talked around in archeological circles for years and is now popping up in the popular press. Not only is the story of the escape of the Jews from Egypt a myth, but there is no evidence there was ever such a large number (in the order of 600,000) of ancient Jews in the land of the Nile, much less as slaves building the pyramids.



James Cunliffe explains the biblical timeline

The traditional story of the Bible has the world being created about 6000 years ago and being destroyed by a world-wide flood a few hundred years later. Only eight people were saved from the flood, and they restarted the human race from the region of Mount Ararat in Turkey. A tribal leader named Abraham brought his people into what is now Israel and Palestine from Mesopotamia (land between the rivers), in what is modern Iraq. Thence there was a migration into Egypt where the ancient Hebrews worked as slaves for about 500 years before quitting and returning to Canaan (Israel/Palestine), where they had to conquer the Canaanites to get back in. Subsequently, the Hebrew tribes split into Israel in the north and the powerful

Daniel Lazare has recapitulated the current status of the story in the March issue of *Harpers*.<sup>1</sup> The gist of the July lecture was taken from that essay.

The traditional story of the Bible has the world being created about 6000 years ago and being destroyed by a world-wide flood a few hundred years later. Only eight people

## EVENTS CALENDAR

### NTS Monthly Meeting

**Saturday, August 10, 2002, at 2 p.m., 2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas**

#### “Photo Fakery”

Mike Selby will present a demonstration of faking photos with a computer. Think “the tourist guy” atop the doomed WTC tower was sensational? Mike shows how it’s done.

### NTS Social Dinner and Board Meeting.

**Saturday, August 24, 2002, at 7:30 p.m.**

**Village Grill**, Belt Line and Central Expressway in Richardson, (SW corner, in the shopping center)

Let us know if you are coming. We sometimes have 2 for 1 coupons for dinner that we can provide if you let us know in advance. Also we need to reserve a table, and sometimes these meetings get changed or cancelled.

Phone the NTS hotline at 214-335-9248 or send e-mail to: [skeptic@ntskeptics.org](mailto:skeptic@ntskeptics.org)

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kingdom of Judah to the south. Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BCE, and Judah was conquered by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. Only Judah survived after a period of enslavement, and modern Judaism derived from the history of those people.

*But it ain't necessarily so.* Here are a few of the points of contention raised by recent archeological studies:

**Use of camels.** Abraham sent out a servant with camels to find a wife for his son, Isaac. This was about 2100 to 1800 BCE. Actually, camels were not much used for transport in this area until after 1000 BCE.

**Isaac and Abimelech.** Abimelech was king of the Philistines, and Isaac sought help from him, which could not be much later than 1800 BCE. Problem is, there were no Philistines present until after 1200 BCE.

**Heshbon and Edom.** Hebrews fought King Sihon at Heshbon and also the king of Edom. But these two cities did not exist at the time of the supposed battles.

**Forty years in the Sinai.** Archeologists cannot find any trace of such a large number of people living in the Sinai during the time the Jews were supposed to be wandering or camped there.

**Invasion of Canaan.** There is no indication of an invasion. It appears "a distinctive Israelite culture arose locally around 1200 BCE as nomadic shepherds and goatherds ceased their wanderings and began settling down in the nearby uplands" according to Lazare.<sup>2</sup> The Israelites were there all along and were much like other cultures in the area at that time. They differentiated themselves from the others by abstaining from pork, as evidenced by a lack of pig bones in the archeological digs.

**Envy of the hillbillies.** Supposedly David and Solomon of Judah built a great civilization and lived lavishly during the time 1005 to 931 BCE and also ruled over the kingdom of Israel to their north. Archeological evidence does not indicate the southern mountain tribes were all that prosperous. Evidence does exist for a prosperous and worldly tribe of Israel, and there is no indication the two nations were ever joined.

In short, it would seem the dominance of Judah was built into the written history after the demise of Israel through the Assyrian conquest. As mentioned previously, Judah survived the Babylonian conquest and went on to write the history.

Lazare is of the opinion the priests of Judah promulgated monotheism as a counter example to the polytheistic Israelites. If you don't want to go the way of the Israelites, you had better toe the party line and stick to the one true god. Yaweh (Jehovah) was the god of one of Solomon's wives, and Solomon made Yaweh the chosen deity and built the now famous temple. A lot of the accepted history seems to have been written to accommodate this result.

Religious adherents, both Jewish and Christian, are not comfortable with these findings. Forget about Genesis. The holy day of Passover is inextricably linked to flight of the Jews from Egypt, and the persecution and execution of Jesus are tied to the Passover celebration. Furthermore, the indication that monotheism appears to be an afterthought to the Jews will be discomfiting to some. If Jehovah was just a god picked from a lineup, then who created the world and all the people and the animals?

And who was the father of Jesus? God number three from the right?

The historical crises of the Old Testament is not being ignored by the mainstream religions. Many doing this research or otherwise taking it seriously are the pillars of the main faiths affected. In March of this year Rabbi David Wolpe told 2000 worshipers at the Conservative Sinai Temple in Los Angeles that “the way the Bible describes the Exodus is not the way it happened, if it happened at all.”<sup>3</sup> His remarks made the front page of *The Los Angeles Times*. Most naturally, this does not go down well with some other people of faith. Rabbi Ken Spiro and others have responded to this unorthodoxy. According to Spiro:

As a science, we must understand what archaeology is and what it isn't.

Archaeology consists of two components: the excavation of ancient artifacts, and the interpretation of those artifacts. While the excavation component is more of a mechanical skill, the interpretive component is very subjective. Presented with the same artifact, two world-class archaeologists will often come to different conclusions — particularly when ego, politics and religious beliefs enter the equation.

In the subjective field of Biblical Archaeology, anyone making a definitive statement like “archaeology has proven...” has probably chosen to take sides and is not presenting the whole picture. When *Los Angeles Times* reporter Teresa Watanabe writes that “the rabbi was merely telling his flock what scholars have known for more than a decade” (emphasis added), she is revealing her anti-Biblical bias.<sup>4</sup>

Spiro points out, as others have, that losers don't like to record their disgrace. One argument is that the Egyptians would have been so embarrassed at allowing the Jews to slip out in the middle of the night they would have erased all records of their presence. As Spiro tells it:

The British Museum in London displays inscriptions from the walls of the palace of the Assyrian Emperor, Sancheriv. These show scenes from Sancheriv's military campaigns from the 8th century BCE, including graphic depictions of destroyed enemies (decapitations, impalings, etc.). Sancheriv himself is depicted as larger than life.

But one element is missing from these inscriptions: There are no dead Assyrians! That is consistent with the ancient “historical” style — negative events, failures and flaws are not depicted at all. When a nation suffers an embarrassing defeat, they usually whitewash the mistakes and destroy the evidence.

This idea has significant ramifications for archeology and the Exodus. The last thing the ancient Egyptians

wanted to record is the embarrassment of being completely destroyed by the God of a puny slave nation. Would the Egyptians ever want to preserve details of the destruction of fields, flocks, and first borns—plus the death of Pharaoh and the entire Egyptian army at the Red Sea?

In other words, we wouldn't expect to find prominent attention to Moses' humiliation of Pharaoh—even if it occurred.<sup>5</sup>

According to Spiro, we would expect to see the same archeological record whether the Jews were ever in Egypt or not. Makes us wonder how the archeologists ever get anything accomplished. One thing we do know for sure. Historical revisionism was as alive over 2000 years ago as it is today.

Coming back to the 21st Century, James Cunliffe has provided a bibliography for those who want to follow up:

Albritton, Claude, 1986, *The Abyss of Time*; Freeman, Cooper, and Company, 251 p.

Armstrong, Karen, 1993, *A History of God*; Ballantine Books; pp. 1-78.

Ballard, Robert, 2001, *Deep Black Sea*; National Geographic, May, pp. 53-69.

Cohn, Norman, 1996, *Noah's Flood, the Genesis Story in Western Thought*; Yale University Press, 154 p.

Diamond, Jerod, 1999, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, Chapter 14: From Egalitarianism to Kleptocracy; pp. 265-292, W.W. Norton & Company.

Finkelstein, Israel, and N. A. Silberman, 2001, *The Bible Unearthed*; The Free Press, 385 p.

Gore, Rick, 2001, *Ashkelon, Ancient City of the Sea*; National Geographic, January 2002, pp. 66-90.

Lazare, D., 2002, “False Testament;” *Harper's*, March, pp.39-47.

Ryan, William, and Walter Pitman, 1998, *Noah's Flood*; Simon and Schuster, 317 p.

Sanders, N.K., 1960, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*; Penguin Books, 125 p. □

#### References:

1 Daniel Lazare, “False Testament.” *Harper's Magazine*, March 2002. pp. 39-47.

2 Ibid.

3 Ken Spiro, “Archeology and the Exodus” at [http://www.aish.com/societyWork/sciencenature/Archeology\\_and\\_the\\_Exodus.asp](http://www.aish.com/societyWork/sciencenature/Archeology_and_the_Exodus.asp)

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

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## Oh, Say, Can You Chi?

### A Quick Look at the “Chi Machine”

By Daniel R. Barnett

Sometimes, it's my turn to be surprised. During my presentation on medical quackery at the NTS meeting in June, I showed off an old Master Violet Ray wand and my own collection of antique quack medicine bottles. Near the end of the meeting, however, Mr. and Mrs. Fritz (I'm sorry I forgot your first names) informed me that they had a “Chi Machine” in their car that belonged to one of their relatives, and were happy to show us the device.

Designed by Dr. Shizuo Inoue, the Chi Machine is a small unit with an electric motor and a contoured cradle designed to hold a person's ankles and gently rock her legs while she lies on her back. What



The chi machine

are the benefits, though? The Fritzes informed me that they've seen promotional literature claiming that the Chi Machine could cure dyslexia. I haven't seen that particular claim myself, but I received an MLM solicitation for Chi

Machines back in October of 1999. While deleting a horde of e-mails advertising porno sites, low mortgage rates, and herbal

alternatives to Viagra and marijuana, I came across this one lengthy e-mail extolling the virtues of the Chi Machine. Here's some excerpts from the sales pitch:

We have had men with prostate problems urinating 15 times in a night who have cleared up the problem with the help of the Chi Machine.

We have those who have been using the machine say they have had better elimination...



Danny Barnett gets the chi. Or is he napping?

Everything opens up and the body makes connection with energy in the body in the figure eight and actually gets the right brain / left brain functioning together. For this reason we have a great deal of success with ADD and learning disabilities. It's putting meditation and exercise together. Plus, it increases the oxygen and energy, takes away 30 percent of the stress, allows the body to realign itself, burns calories, tightens and tones the muscles and helps with weight loss...

It also oxygenates the cells in your body. It is well documented that cancer cannot grow in a well-oxygenated environment. My immediate sponsors who sold me the Chi Machine know a lady whose mother was about to have her toes amputated because of the lack of oxygen being circulated to them due to her diabetes. She had a Chi machine and told her mother to at least try using it before she had the surgery. Within a week her toes looked normal and the surgery was cancelled.

The e-mail informed me that I could call the distributor's voice-mail line for a free video, but if I purchased the "distributor sales kit" for \$18, I could purchase a Chi Machine for myself at the wholesale price of only \$460. As you can probably imagine, I declined.

Back to the meeting in June. I volunteered to give the Chi Machine a try, so the Fritzes kindly set up the machine for a test drive. When I inserted my feet and switched on the Chi Machine, the device gently rotated and rocked my ankles in a figure-eight pattern (or, if you prefer, the infinity symbol), producing a sensation not too unlike standing on a pontoon bridge. It *was* pretty relaxing, in a weird sort of way. I can't say that I felt more oxygenated or aligned after using the Chi Machine, though.

All in all, the Chi Machine is an interesting little device, and you can probably get some relaxation out of using it, but that's as far as I'll go. Many thanks to the Fritzes for sharing their Chi Machine with us at the June meeting! □

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## Beam me up

by John Blanton

**T**he words still echo.

Mr. Speaker, a new report says only 7 percent of scientists believe in God. That is right. And the reason they gave was that the scientists are "super smart." Unbelievable. Most of these absent-minded professors cannot find the toilet.

Mr. Speaker, I have one question for these wise guys to constipate over: How can some thing (sic) come from no thing (sic)?

And while they digest that, Mr. Speaker, let me tell it like it is. Put these super-cerebral master debaters in some foxholes with bombs bursting all around them, and I guarantee they will not be praying to Frankenstein. Beam me up here. My colleagues, all the education in the world is worthless without God and a little bit of common sense. And I yield back whatever we have left.<sup>1</sup>

Bible-thumping, evolution-bashing James Traficant (D. Ohio) has been ousted from his seat in Congress. He was convicted of a number of offenses involving misuse of his office for personal gain. His sentence includes up to eight years in prison.

Famous for his "one-minute speeches," he was the anti-intellectual poster child, attacking a broad slate of liberal causes and anything contrary to his apparently fundamentalist religious views.

Jim, we're going to miss you. But we know you will always be able to find the toilet. There will be one right next to your bunk. □

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### References

1 <http://www.atheists.org/flash.line/atheism2.htm>

## The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal

encourages the critical investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims from a responsible, scientific point of view and disseminates factual information about the results of such inquiries to the scientific community, the media, and the public. It also promotes science and scientific inquiry, critical thinking, science education, and the use of reason in examining important issues.

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## ***The Mothman Prophecies* — DVD Review**

By Greg Wroblewski

**T**he *Mothman Prophecies* is supposed to be based on a real-life incident. Do you know that campfire game where you whisper something in a circle to see how much it changes when it comes back to the originator? That's what happened with this story as it progressed from life to a book to a movie.

### **Here's what really happened:**

For more than a year in the late 60s, terror and uncertainty gripped the town of Point Pleasant, West Virginia, as witnesses reported seeing a "big bird" that stood taller than a man with huge gray wings and glowing red eyes. It was first seen by about ten people in the area of the McClintick Wildlife Station, which had been a bird sanctuary for many years. It was nicknamed the Mothman by the local press. Hundreds of people reported seeing the creature.

During this time, there were some other reports of strange lights in the skies and miscellaneous corollary events, like a missing dog ninety miles away that was felt to be related (a man reported hearing, then seeing, the Mothman just before his dog disappeared).

Dr. Robert L. Smith, associate professor of wildlife biology in West Virginia University's division of forestry, told the sheriff that the "thing" was a migratory bird called the greater sandhill crane. Dr. Smith said the bird can stand five feet tall with a wingspread of seven feet, has gray plumage, has an eerie cry that can be heard for miles, and can fly at great speeds. One feature of its appearance is a bright red flesh area around each eye. In car lights, the bare skin around its eyes reflect as bright red circles. Dr. Smith warned that the crane, if cornered, may become a formidable antagonist. Its dagger-like bill is a dangerous weapon which it does not hesitate to use when at bay and fighting for its life, and these birds have severely injured many a hunting dog.

"The cry of the sandhill crane is a veritable voice of nature, untamed and unterrified," says one book on birds. "Its uncanny quality is like that of the loon, but is more pronounced because of the much greater volume of the crane's voice. Its resonance is remarkable, and its carrying power is increased by a distinct tremolo effect. Often for several minutes after the birds have vanished, the unearthly sound drifts back to the listener, like a taunting trumpet from the underworld."

Nobody was ever injured by the Mothman in any way. In fact, nobody ever saw a dog attacked by the creature. The miss-

ing and wounded dogs were simply assumed to be related to Mothy.

More than a year after Mothman's first appearance, around 5:00 in the evening on December 15, 1967, the 700-foot bridge linking Point Pleasant to Ohio suddenly collapsed while filled with rush hour traffic. Dozens of vehicles plunged into the dark waters of the Ohio River, and 46 people were killed. Two of those were never found and the other 44 are buried together in the town cemetery of Gallipolis, Ohio. That same night, one family reported strange lights in the sky above their home. People began to speculate that the Mothman was somehow responsible for the bridge's collapse, but there was no reason to make such a connection. The Mothman disappeared about this time, and never returned. (The actual related archives of the local paper can be seen at <http://www.herald-dispatch.com/2002/January/13/LNspotb.htm>) There were no reports of prophecies, communications from the dead, or any other type of similar paranormal phenomena.

### **Here's what the book was about:**

About a month after the first sightings, John Keel got an assignment to go there. Keel was on a contract to write a book about UFOs. As he began to talk to people and gather information, the journalist found himself getting more deeply involved in the events, to the extent that "There were entities that communicated with John by phone," one reporter declared. As Keel analyzed the events, he found Point Pleasant to be "a vortex of phenomena."

Keel received constant predictions throughout the 13 months, presumably "channeled" by various contacts. Although these "prophecies" were precise, none of them ever came true, except in the sense that any general type of prophecy may come true if worded correctly and interpreted liberally. If you say "an important man will die in June," for example, sooner or later, a June will come along in which a prominent man will die. The voices predicted an assassination attempt on the pope, followed by "days of darkness." There were such assassination attempts many, many years later, long after locals had forgotten the Mothman. No darkness ensued, except for nighttime. They also predicted that "when President Johnson turned on the Christmas lights at the White House, the whole Northeast was going to go into a blackout." Well, something like that did happen, but in the past, not the future. There had been such a blackout about two years earlier, in November of 1965. The predicted Christmas tree blackout didn't happen, but that very night turned out to be the same night that the bridge collapsed between Point Pleasant and Ohio. Keel saw that as a fulfillment of the prophecy somehow, but I'll be darned if I can see why.

I need to stress here that not only were the prophecies all inaccurate, but these types of mysterious paranormal communications happened only to John Keel, not to any locals or others who could corroborate them. He wrote a profitable book based on these claims. The locals saw only the Mothman and some lights in the sky, and reported some lost and mutilated dogs, as noted in the newspaper stories cited above. I should probably also point out that, according to Keel, man has had a long history of interaction with supernatural beings. He asserts that the intervention of mysterious strangers in the lives of historic personages such as Thomas Jefferson and Malcolm X provides evidence of the continuing presence of the “gods of old.” The manifestation of these elder gods comes in the form of UFOs and aliens, monsters, demons, angels, ghosts, possibly even Christopher Walken and several members of the Harmonicats. (Just kidding about the last two.)

### Here’s how the movie altered the story further:

In the film’s version, the reporter is no longer a UFO investigator who believes in crackpot theories, but a distinguished investigative reporter for the *Washington Post* (Richard Gere). All of a sudden, there are “proofs” of paranormal occurrences. The reporter, for example, leaves D.C. for a location in Virginia at 1:00 a.m. One-and-a-half hours later, way off course, he knocks on a door in West Virginia. In 90 minutes, he has moved 400 miles away from his point of origin. Witnesses can pinpoint him in both places. When he knocks on that door, he does not know where he is. The people in that house claim that he was there at the exact same time the previous two nights.

Some of those details would be impressive if based on real events, wouldn’t they? But all of it is fictional. (Rod Serling narrates from the bushes next to the house. “Richard Gere – an aging leading man who made a livelihood in movies based entirely on his stunning looks – attempting to prolong his career. He will find that new career not on earth, but in...The Twilight Zone”. Cue theme music. Play opening sequence. Cut to commercial.)

In addition to the reporter, other people hear the strange voices and predictions. All fictional. The voices on the phone know Gere’s every thought and action. All fictional. He asks, “Where are my keys?” The voice says, “In your right shoe under the bed.” Gere grabs a book, asks, “What is the third line in page 51?” and the voice immediately recites it verbatim. “Why,” we think, “this is incredible evidence, and it’s all based on real incidents!”

In the movie, the predictions come true. In addition to some earlier predictions, the bridge collapse is predicted as a catastrophe on the “River Ohio.” All fictional. The real prediction is discussed above. Apparently the supernatural voices, as imagined in the film, can practically recite long passages verbatim

from the Chanson Roland in properly-inflected Old French, but cannot remember the correct order of the two words “Ohio” and “River.”

Gere gets some calls from his dead wife in her voice. Other people get calls from Gere that he did not actually make. Calls are recorded by tape recorders or answering machines and analyzed. A scientific expert would testify in court that the Gere call was made by Gere’s voice. All of this is fictional. Remember the real incidents happened in 1966-67, well before the era of the answering machine. In real life, there was not even any proof that the calls ever existed, only Keel’s claim to have received them. The Mothman looks exactly like some sketches that Gere’s dying wife had made two years earlier, providing a further inexplicable, pseudo-scientific link between the reporter and the Mothman. All fictional.

And thus is our film “based on real incidents”...if you consider the scientifically validated existence of corroborated paranormal phenomena to be based on a migratory bird sighting. Aside from that, how did you enjoy the play, Mrs. Lincoln?

Well, the movie is okay, although it has nothing to do with reality, and there is no reason to say it is based on real incidents — other than that many people reported seeing the Mothman in the month before the bridge collapsed and that one of the mysterious predictions said that something completely different would happen on the same night the bridge fell.

But if you ignore that and just watch the movie, it is a good extended “Twilight Zone” episode. The director does an excellent job at maintaining the creepy, spooky atmosphere and the sense of mystery, and it is comparable in the development stages to *The Others* or *The Sixth Sense*. On the other hand, if you need a big finish, unlike those other two films, *Mothman* doesn’t have one. There is no final surprise or last-minute payoff. When the bridge collapses, there is only the usual unrealistic movie rescue in which humans stay under water for weeks at a time without air, often performing heavy labor or writing complete symphonies. □

*Greg “Johnny Web” Wroblewski is a former actor and corporate executive who now writes some of the Internet’s most amusing and informative movie reviews for Uncle Scoopy’s Movie House (<http://www.scoopy.com>)*

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