



Dinosaurs in the Bible?

by Warren Krug (March-August, 2000)

Dinosaurs are still in the news. From time to time the media tells us of fossils of previously unknown dinosaurs still being discovered. Dinosaurs still are popular toys for children and the *Jurassic Park* movies indicate dinosaurs can still attract a crowd. Much debate is going on within the scientific establishment over these creatures, such as whether they were cold-blooded reptiles or warm-blooded creatures related to birds.

What are Bible-believing Christians to think of dinosaurs? Over the years not all Christians have accepted their existence. Even today we hear a voice or two claiming that the dinosaur fossils are fossils directly created by God and placed in the ground merely to test our faith. However, the discovery of vast numbers of bones, tracks, and other fossils of creatures not known to exist today are not so easy to dismiss, nor is it at all necessary to do so. Not only is there nothing we really know about dinosaurs that conflicts in any way with the Bible and a traditional, Biblical understanding of the history of the world, but the Bible may actually contain direct support for a belief in the existence of dinosaurs.



Dinosaurs have been used by evolutionists to advance their ideas, but the first dinosaur fossil was discovered well before the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. In 1822 a large tooth was uncovered in England by the wife of a physician and amateur paleontologist, Dr. Gideon Mantell. The tooth along with more teeth and some bones discovered later were sent to the famous French scientist, Baron Cuvier, for identification. Not having seen anything like them before, Cuvier misidentified them as the teeth of an ancient rhinoceros and the bones of an extinct hippopotamus.

Sometime later, a friend of Mantell said the teeth were similar to but much larger than those of an iguana. Mantell decided he had found the remains of a new kind of creature. In time other fossilized bones and teeth of lizard-like animals were discovered. It was the great British anatomist and paleontologist, Sir Richard Owen, who gave the animals from which these fossils came the name Dinosaur, which means "monstrous lizard" in Greek. **1**

Evolutionists claim that dinosaurs lived and became extinct millions of years before mankind set foot on the planet. This, of course, cannot be. According to Genesis, all land-dwelling animals were created on the same day as Adam. This means, less than 24 hours separated the creation of the land-dwelling dinosaurs and the creation of Adam. Any extinct water-dwelling creature may have been created on the 5th day, or less than 48 hours before Adam's arrival. Thus, Adam and Eve lived at the same time as the dinosaurs, and there is no reason to doubt that at least their direct descendants also lived among these creatures.

There is some possible extra-biblical evidence that dinosaurs and humankind were alive at the same time, extending well into historical times. For instance, there are an ancient Roman mosaic and old Indian carvings which contain dinosaur-like images and also numerous legends of dinosaur-like animals called dragons. **2**

If the dinosaurs were contemporaneous with early man, it would not at all be surprising to find mention of them in the Bible even though early man would likely have kept his distance from the larger beasts.

The Behemoth

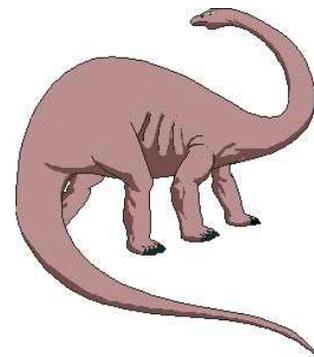
With this in mind, a Biblical reference to an imposing creature called the Behemoth deserves some scrutiny.

In His discourse with Job, God says, *“Look at the behemoth, which I made along with you and which feeds on grass like an ox. What strength he has in his loins, what power in the muscles of his belly! His tail sways like a cedar; the sinews of his thighs are close-knit. His bones are tubes of bronze, his limbs like rods of iron. He ranks first among the works of God, yet his Maker can approach him with his sword.*

The hills bring them their produce and all the wild animals play nearby. Under the lotus plants he lies, hidden among the reeds in the marsh. The lotuses conceal him in their shadow; the poplars by the stream surround him. When the river rages, he is not alarmed; he is secure, though the Jordan should surge against his mouth. Can anyone capture him by the eyes, or trap him and pierce his nose?” (Job 40:15-24 NIV)

This description of the behemoth includes the following:

- the behemoth ate plants.
- it must have been gentle; other animal appeared not to fear it.
- it was strong, especially its back legs, belly, and bones.
- it enjoyed resting in the water and was not afraid of flooding.
- it was too big and powerful to be trapped by humans
- its tail could sway like a cedar branch.
- it ranked first among all of God’s creatures. **3**



Down through the years commentators have tried to identify the behemoth as an animal currently alive today. James Boyd says flatly it was a hippopotamus.⁴ Matthew Henry says it may have been a bull, a hippo, or an elephant (his preference).⁵ The New International Version in a footnote says, “possibly the hippopotamus or the elephant.”⁶

In his recent commentary on Job, Rudolph Honsey lists four possibilities for the nature of the behemoth (along with another creature, the leviathan): a mythological monster, a wild animal in general, an animal still in existence, or an extinct animal such as the dinosaur. Honsey appears to favor the latter. But he wisely urges caution about making dogmatic statements and to leave this question open. **7**

For those who favor the dinosaur explanation, the strongest arguments may be the references to the behemoth being too powerful to be trapped by man and to its ranking first among God’s creatures. Because it wasn’t the first creature made by God nor was it God’s most important creation (humans are), the “ranks first” description undoubtedly referred to the behemoth’s size, and no other land creature has ever matched the dinosaur in bulk.

If the behemoth was a dinosaur, what kind might it have been? At least one author, Paul Taylor, thinks it may have been a *Diplodocus* or an *Apatosaurus*, which were gigantic plant-eating dinosaurs. **8**

The Leviathan

Having discussed one strange creature, the behemoth, with Job, God continues with a description of another mysterious animal—the leviathan.

“Can you pull in the leviathan with a fishhook or tie down his tongue with a rope? Can you put a cord through his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook?...Can you make a pet of him like a bird or put him on a leash for your girls?...”

“Can you fill his hide with harpoons or his head with fishing spears? If you lay a hand on him you will remember the struggle and never do it again! Any hope of subduing him is false; the mere sight of him is overpowering...

“I will not fail to speak of his limbs, his strength and his graceful form. Who can strip off his outer coat? Who would approach him with a bridle? Who dares open the doors of his mouth, ringed about with his fearsome teeth?

“His back has rows of shields tightly sealed together; each is so close to the next that no air can pass between. They are joined fast to one another; they cling together and cannot be parted.

“His snorting throws out flashes of light; his eyes are like the rays of dawn. Firebrands stream from his mouth; sparks of fire shoot out. Smoke pours from his nostrils as from a boiling pot over a fire of reeds. His breath sets coals ablaze, and flames dart from his mouth.

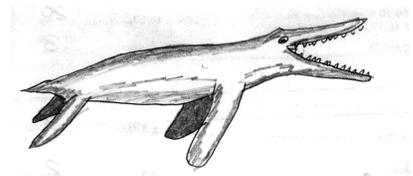
“Strength resides in his neck; dismay goes before him. The folds of his flesh are tightly joined; they are firm and immovable. His chest is hard as rock, hard as a lower millstone. When he rises up, the mighty are terrified; they retreat before his thrashing. The sword that reaches him has no effect, nor does the spear or the dart or the javelin...

“His undersides are jagged potsherds, leaving a trail in the mud like a threshing sledge. He makes the depths churn like a boiling caldron and stirs up the sea like a pot of ointment. Behind him he leaves a glistening wake; one would think the deep had white hair. Nothing on earth is his equal—a creature without fear.” Job 41 (NIV)

“In that day, the Lord will punish with his sword, his fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent; he will slay the monster of the sea.” Isaiah 27:1 (NIV)

This description of a leviathan suggests the following features:

- it was amphibious, spending much of its time in water but capable of coming up onto the land.
- like the behemoth, it was too big and strong to be captured.
- it had a tough scaly hide.
- it had large, sharp, dangerous teeth set in strong jaws.
- it had a strong neck.
- it swam or walked with a coiling motion (like a snake?).
- it breathed smoke and fire and had eyes that glowed.
- it must have had short legs or flippers for its belly dragged on the ground.
- in terms of fearlessness, nothing on earth was equal to it.



Kronosaurus

Until recently, as was the case with the behemoth, Bible commentators have tried to link the leviathan with an animal still in existence. Boyd says it was probably a crocodile.⁹ Matthew Henry admits to be puzzled but quotes others who think it was a crocodile or a whale.¹⁰ The NIV says “possibly the crocodile.”¹¹ Honsey notes that the leviathan spent time in the sea, unlike the crocodile.¹² And remember the leviathan was too strong and ferocious to be captured while a crocodile can surely be subdued, though with a bit of difficulty.

The references to breathing out smoke and fire and eyes that glow pose a problem in interpretation. Some commentators think we are dealing here with figurative language, since there is no creature alive today known to emit actual smoke or fire from its mouth or nostrils.

However, we can't be sure that the leviathan, as an extinct animal, wasn't actually able to do this. We do have animals that can create their own light, such as the firefly. And who has not seen the glowing eyes of a cat? Also, consider the electric eel which can produce its own electrical charge. Then there's a remarkable little bug called a bombardier beetle which can spray an enemy with a explosive mixture of gases heated to 212 degrees! **13**

Paul Taylor thinks the leviathan may have been an impressive reptile-like creature of the sea called a Kronosaurus or one of its close relatives. Although not a true dinosaur, the Kronosaurus was one of the most overwhelming animals ever to swim the seas. It was not a true dinosaur, but it had characteristics of a reptile including great, sharp teeth. Another possibility for the leviathan is a type of animal called a plesiosaur which had long flippers and webbed feet. **14**

Other references in the Bible to the leviathan include Psalms 74:14 and 104:26.

Dragons

Stories or legends of dragons have been with us since the beginning of recorded history. Dragon legends and pictures can be found in Africa, India, Europe, the Middle East, the Orient, and in other parts of the world. **15** The similarity of descriptions of dragons to those of dinosaurs has certainly been noticed. Ancient nations regarded dragons as real animals, frequently encountered by humans. They were described in highly regarded zoological works published during the Middle Ages. An article in the 1949 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* noted that dinosaurs were "astonishingly dragonlike" even though the author of the article assumed the ancients despite their dragon stories had no knowledge of dinosaurs. **16** Did people, maybe as late as the Middle Ages, actually see the larger dinosaurs and preserved their memories of these encounters in their dragon legends?

Dragons are also mentioned in the Bible. In his concordance, Alexander Cruden says about the dragon: *This word answers generally to the Hebrew, Thannim, or, Thannin, which signifies a large fish, or sea-dragon. By comparing the different passages where the word, tannin, or tannim, is to be met with, it signifies sometimes large river or sea fishes, and at other times venomous and land serpents, and more particularly the crocodile and whale.*

*As to the dragons which are talked of, and are often mentioned in books, they are for the most part only old serpents grown with age to a prodigious size. Some are described with wings, feet, claws, crests, and head of different figures...As serpents, dragons, and venomous beasts, hide themselves in uninhabited places, in the ruins of cities and in rubbish; for this reason, where there is mention of the ruin of a city, the ravaging of a province, or of a land reduced to a wilderness, it is said to be a dwelling for dragons, Isa. 13:22, 34:13, Jer. 9:11. **17***

Cruden was writing in 1953 and apparently did not consider the possibility of a connection between dinosaurs and dragons. We will consider a few of the references to dragons in the Bible where dragons could refer to large dinosaurlike creatures. Most of these references will be in the King James version because the NIV translators chose to replace the word dragon with other names.

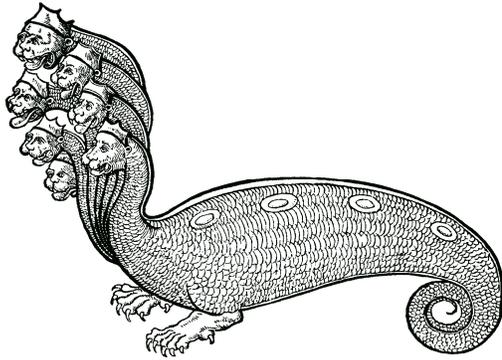
In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent, and he shall slay the dragon (monster, NIV) that is in the sea. Isaiah 27:1.

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon hath devoured me, he hath crushed me, he hath made me an empty vessel, he hath swallowed me up like a dragon (serpent, NIV), he hath filled his belly with my delicates, he hath cast me out. Jeremiah 51:34.

Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons (great sea creatures, NIV), and all deeps: Psalm 148:7.

And the wild asses did stand in the high places, they snuffed up the wind like dragons (jackals, NIV).
 Jeremiah 14:6.

In addition to these references to dragons, there are descriptions of Satan as a dragon in the Bible. Knowing the power of the devil, this would seem to indicate that dinosaurs were viewed by John in his Revelations as large, strong beings.



Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born... The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Revelation 12:3-4,9. NIV

Conclusions

The evidence from paleontology is overwhelming that there were once living on earth some large, now likely extinct, creatures which we call dinosaurs. Such an observation is not at all contrary to Scripture. According to Genesis, the dinosaurs would have been created either on the 5th day (in the case of the sea monsters) or 6th day of creation. They would have been contemporaries with at least early humans and undoubtedly have been seen by them.

The descriptions of a behemoth, a leviathan, and dragons in the Bible may well be descriptions of these beasts, but there is not enough reason for us to close the door to other possible interpretations.

While the belief or non-belief in the existence of dinosaurs is not necessary for salvation, what is absolutely necessary is to know and believe that God through Jesus has defeated our dragonlike enemy, the devil. LSI

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