

Q&A: What's your view on dinosaurs? Is there a biblical basis for them (i.e. the reference to 'behemoth' and 'leviathan' in Job)? How do they fit in the Christian world-view?

What's that Terry Pratchett quote about the obstinate "god" who put pre-fossilised bones in the ground just to confuse archeologists?

By dinosaur I'm assuming you mean the big extinct sort. After all, I was just in Cairns, and I bought a bag of crocodile jerky, and I felt real close to a "terrible lizard."

The Job quotes you refer to are from Job 40:15 and 41:1. The first refers to what is translated as "behemoth" with "a tail" that "sways like a cedar." From the description you can imagine one of those big four-legged dinosaurs – more so than an elephant which, last time I looked, did not have a "tail that sways like a cedar." But I don't know enough Hebrew to be able to analyse the original language – and the NIV footnotes point out that "behemoth" could be "elephant" and "tail" could be "trunk." So perhaps it's referring to an elephant – it would still fit the imagery and the point that is being made at that point in Job.

Similarly with 41:1 which refers to a "leviathan" – a water-based creature from the imagery. Again, imagination allows for a Loch-Ness-Monster type animal. But a crocodile also fits. I also like 41:3-5 which seems to be the inspiration for the

song "Never smile at a crocodile."

So basically, if you're looking for a biblical basis for dinosaurs: is the Bible aware of them? In particular, does it have an example of humans and dinosaurs co-existing? Then my answer is: you're asking a question that the Bible is not setting out to answer. The point of Job 40 and 41 is not to answer that question, it's to point out Job's inherent smallness and powerlessness by comparing him to this big animals.

The Bible also doesn't mention kangaroos, polar bears, or boa constrictors. Doesn't mean they didn't exist or didn't coexist with humans. But you can't invent an answer (one way or the other) where the information simply does not exist.

In that sense, a particular view on dinosaurs is not an inherent requirement for holding a Christian world-view. It's an "open hand" question – something on which variation in thought, speculation is allowed, necessary in fact.

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