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Biblical Accuracy and Human Error
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As Christians we believe that our most basic information about God and about ourselves comes to us in the Scriptures. Although men ought to recognize the existence of God by examining nature, many do not (Rom 1:18-32). Furthermore, the hopeless plight of man in his sinfulness and God's solution to this are known only through the Bible. It is therefore of utmost importance that Christians fully trust God's word so they may apply it to every aspect of their lives.

If you were to take your car to a mechanic who was reputed to be very competent, you would begin to have doubts about his ability if he kept calling a certain part the starter when you knew it was the generator. Now your doubts might be unfounded after all, but they would certainly be natural and reasonable. Yet there are some persons today who tell us that the Bible is right in religious matters (where we cannot test it) but wrong in scientific and historical matters (where we can test it).

With the rapid advance in scientific and historical knowledge since about 1700, a number of contradictions have been alleged between the Bible and findings in these areas. In dealing with such matters, Christians need to consider two important questions. First, to what extent does the scientific or historical data require the interpretation usually given by the academic community? Second, to what extent does the Biblical material require the interpretation traditionally given by the Christian community? Both of these interpretations involve human understanding, which may be in error, even though the data of God's world and the statements of God's word will not be in error.

Let us consider an example I have studied recently. In Job 37:18, the King James Version reads:

"Hast thou with him [God] spread out the sky, which is strong and as a molten looking glass?"

The Revised Standard Versions reads:

"Can you, like him, spread out the skies, hard as a molten mirror?"

Here we seem to have a real problem. Few people today would be willing to say the sky is actually solid, although this seems to be the clear teaching of this passage as translated about 1611 by consecrated Christians (with a limited knowledge of the universe) and about 1952 by men who should at least know Hebrew. Some conservatives have sought to avoid this problem by noting that it is Elihu, one of Job's friends, who is speaking. But God does not rebuke Elihu for speaking error as He does Job's other three friends.

I believe the solution can be found by looking carefully at the Hebrew of this passage and accepting what *it* says, rather than merely accepting one translation (interpretation) made by Christians before the age of science or another made by modern men who believe the Bible has errors.

The word rendered "sky, skies" here is the plural of *shahaq*, which is also translated "cloud(s), small dust, heaven" elsewhere in the King James Version. The lexicon (dictionary) of Brown, Driver and Briggs indicates the word is derived from the verb meaning "to pulverize," and the noun is listed with the meanings "dust, cloud." "Sky" is listed only as a usage under "cloud." Having examined all usages of this word in the Old Testament, I suggest that all can be rendered either "dust" or "cloud(s)." Elihu's previous use of the word in Job 36:28 demands the translation "clouds," and even the context of Job 37:18 concerns present-day weather conditions, not the activity of God at creation.

The translation of *re'iy* as "mirror" is even stranger, though almost universal among English versions of the Bible. But the lexicon cites no other occurrence of the word but here! The original Hebrew Old Testament was written without vowels (as most Hebrew is today); these were put in by Jewish scholars in the tenth century AD, so that the Jews, who no longer spoke Hebrew, might pronounce the words properly in the synagogue services. By changing one vowel to get *ro'iy*, we obtain a word meaning "looking, sight, appearance." This word occurs several times in Scripture, of which Job 33:21 (Elihu speaking) and Nahum 3:6 are noteworthy. This suggestion is not merely a modern attempt at harmonization is clear from the fact that the ancient Greek Septuagint translation uses *horasis* here, meaning "sight, appearance," not "mirror."

Hence we find that this verse can be translated:

"Can you , with him, spread out mighty clouds, with an appearance of being poured out?"

Thus two suggested changes in the traditional translation of this passage remove the apparent contradiction with modern science. Notice that each of these changes finds independent support in the context, elsewhere in the Bible, or in ancient translations.

The Bible *can* be trusted in scientific and historical areas. But we must examine our interpretations of the Bible, as well as those of science and history, if we are to avoid serious error.