

Bill Cooke - "Does humanism have to be optimistic?" (via Zoom)

Dr Bill Cooke teaches philosophy and religious studies at **Priestley College** in Warrington, United Kingdom. Until 2008, he was Senior Lecturer at the **School of Visual Arts, University of Auckland** at Manukau, in New Zealand.



Bill Cooke

Dr. Cooke has also served as the International Director of the **Center for Inquiry** in Amherst, New York, and currently he is a Senior Editor of *Free Inquiry*, the Center for Inquiry's magazine and of *The Open Society*, the journal of the **New Zealand Association of Rationalists & Human-**

ists. He is author of seven books, around sixty encyclopaedia entries and over 300 articles in journals around the world and is currently writing a reassessment of the place of **H G Wells** in contemporary thought.

Humanism has long been thought of—and has thought of itself—as an optimistic outlook on life. But has that ever been wholly true and is it still valid in the twenty-first century? In an age of climate change, growing social tensions and culture wars, where democracy is under threat around the world, it is well past time for this aspect of humanism to be re-examined.

In this Zoom meeting on Sunday, March 14 at 1:00 pm EST, Dr. Cooke will look at what pessimism implies and what it can give to a humanist outlook fit for the twenty-first century. Please click on the link below to participate in the meeting. Socializing starts at 12:30 pm.

AFS March Meeting

March 14, 2021 1:00-2:30 PM (EST)

To join Zoom meeting go to this link:
us02web.zoom.us/j/89006560911

FOUR GREAT RELIGIOUS TRUTHS



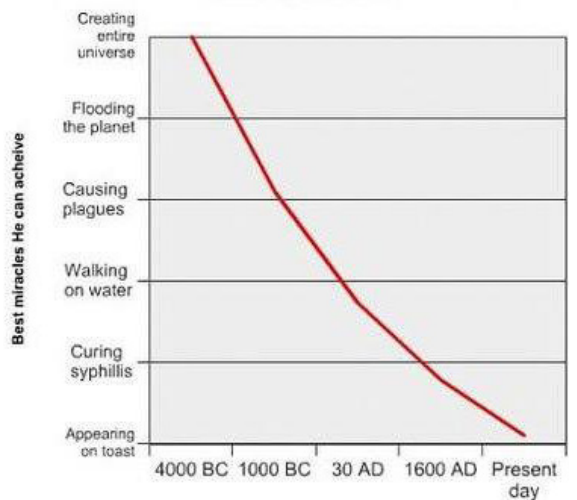
1. Muslims don't recognize Jews as God's chosen people
2. Jews don't recognize Jesus as the Messiah
3. Protestants don't recognize the Pope as the leader of the Christian world
4. Baptists don't recognize each other at Hooters

Calendar

Mar 14	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Apr 11	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
May 9	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm

All events are via Zoom unless noted and are subject to change.

God's power



For the latest in upcoming AFS events, join our Meetup group!
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Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Atlanta, GA, 30339 unless presented online due to global pandemic (see link on page 1). Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:30 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.



The views and opinions expressed by speakers at AFS do not necessarily reflect those of AFS members or its policy.

April 11: Paul Armstrong

May 9: Jim Underdown

June 13: Kathleen Johnson

July 11: TBD

August 8: Kenneth Copp

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We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

We define freethought as “the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.”

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other’s company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences. Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

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Noah's Ark #1: Ship Shape By Freya Harris

In this month's Atlanta Freethought News, we are featuring an article written by our longtime member and local activist (and former Board Member) **Freya Harris**, who very graciously agreed to send us this piece about why Noah's Ark is, in her words, "Baloney." She hopes to have a book about this published soon—a fascinating subject. Good luck to her!!

In 2016 the Creationist theme park **Ark Encounter** opened in Grant County, Kentucky. Its purpose is to promote the idea that Noah's Ark was real, even in the face of reason and modern science. **Ken Ham's** playground of ignorance and sophistry prompted me to write an essay on all the reasons that the ark could never be anything other than a legend. As I researched books and websites, though, I soon realized that there was far more material than could fit in one article. Currently I am polishing a book that I hope I can publish; meanwhile, I can present several arguments against the ark, each in its own piece.

How could eight people with no knowledge of advanced shipbuilding, or the mechanics and physics of materials, possibly assemble such an enormous vessel? Where did they obtain sufficient wood to build the ark, as well as the cages and pens for the animals it would hold? How could a wooden ship so large hold together in what would have been the most devastating storm this planet has ever seen?

During the age of sail, an average ship required four to five years of construction by a large team of skilled artisans. Not only did those craftsmen have proper tools and workshops for creating all the parts and pieces that went into assembling a sailing ship, they also apprenticed for years beforehand to gain the experience and knowledge necessary for such a task. Noah and his family would have had to know not just how to build a large wooden vessel, but also how to select the right trees to fell. Not all of the wood they collected would have been immediately useful, as the largest beams would have to dry and cure for months.

Before even starting the construction of their ark, the Noah family would have had to build workshops and make tools in order to shape all the wood into planks, decking, bars and slats. Creationist websites give a range of between 55 and 120 years for the project. If Noah and company had taken that much time, they would have had to worry about wood rotting away or splitting as it dried. Shipbuilding projects that lasted no more than five years faced the problem of decaying lumber.

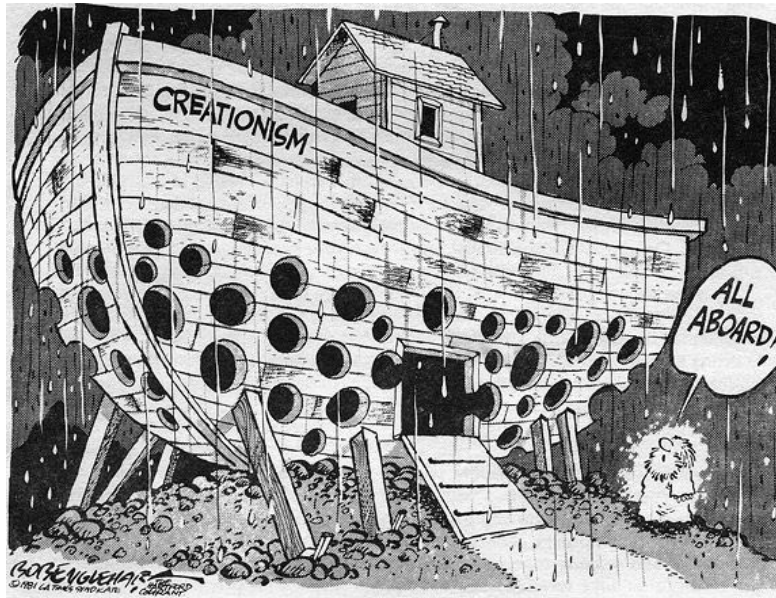
Wood is a bad material for shipbuilding because it is not strong enough to prevent separation at the joints. Wooden vessels have a tendency to flex in heavy seas, causing the planks to twist and buckle, resulting in numerous leaks so they must be continuously bailed or pumped. Long ships tend to "hog," or arch up in the middle, and sag, putting added stress on the hull and

keel. They also "snake," or bend from side to side, adding even more stress and strain. Moisture and poor ventilation contribute to wood rot, so Noah and his gang would have had to perform constant maintenance on their craft.

The longest wooden ship on record was the **Wyoming**, a six-mast schooner that measured 140 meters (450 feet) from jib boom to spanker boom and had a crew of fourteen. Even with early 20th Century pumping equipment, the fourteen crewmen were unable to keep the ship entirely free of water. In 1924 the **Wyoming** sank with the loss of all hands. If a ship that long, and built by experts, was good for sailing only close to shore in good weather, how could a considerably longer vessel possibly survive the incredibly violent seas that would have formed during the massive Deluge? If fourteen people aboard the **Wyoming** could not keep up with all the leaks on that ship, how could eight people keep an even larger bark dry - and care for thousands of animals? Ships smaller than the ark can take on 30 cm or more of water per hour, so unless Noah installed enough pumping equipment, and had a way to run it 24/7, the ark would have foundered and sunk long before its voyage was over.

A vessel the size of Noah's Ark would have required a lot of wood. A LOT. Where did they find it in a region as arid as the Middle East? How many forests do you see in the middle of a desert? Also, what, exactly, is gopher wood? Did the writers of Genesis mean cedar? Or was it wood that had been prepared in a certain way? The Bible is never clear on this matter.

The aforementioned **Wyoming** called for 3100 tons of wood for its construction, as well as 300 tons of metal. **The Great Michael**, a ship assembled in 1511 that was considerably smaller, was said to have needed all of the wood in Fife, a Scottish district noted for shipbuilding, as well as



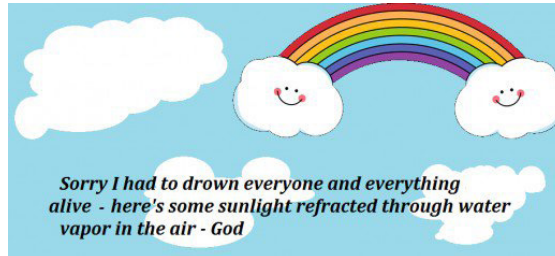
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Ship Shape continued from page 3

wood imported from France and the Baltic and pieces salvaged from disassembled cargo ships. The Ark Encounter itself required 3.3 million board feet of timber. Constructing Noah's Ark would have entailed chopping down tens of thousands of trees. Not just any trees would do, either - Noah and his gang would have to know how to tell which ones would provide the high-quality timber necessary for this mega-project. Even if they knew how to select which trees would yield wood of the quality they needed, they would have had to travel far afield to find them.

The triremes (a type of boat) of the ancient Greeks had powerful cables called *hypozomata* ("undergirds") that ran along the interior of the hull from bow to stern, and were twisted until they reached the appropriate tension. The Greeks had regulations that specified the minimum number of men on a team to twist these cables properly. No mention is made in Genesis about cables or metal strapping to reinforce the ark's hull.

Just because experts design and assemble a ship does not mean that it will be seaworthy. The *Vasa*, which was supposed to have been the pride of the Swedish Navy in the early 17th century, was designed by a man who had been working for the Swedish Crown for over 25 years, so he should have known his craft. However, the *Vasa* had problems from the start. Faulty design put too much weight high on the hull. Workers putting the vessel together used two different systems of measurement: some used Swedish feet, which were twelve inches, while others used Amsterdam feet, which were eleven inches, causing the ship to be asymmetrical. When you consider that there is no agreement on how long a cubit is, imagine workers with primitive tools and yardsticks (cubitsticks?) trying to build Noah's massive ark.



The logistics of constructing not just the hull of the ark but also the pens and cages to hold Noah's menagerie would have overwhelmed even the most skilled and experienced shipbuilders from the age of sail. This massive project would have required dozens of accomplished shipwrights years of toil, as well as a thorough knowledge of not just shipbuilding but also calculus, which was entirely unknown in Noah's time.

Eight amateurs could never have assembled such an enormous vessel; even if they somehow managed, they would have had to gather thousands of tons of wood, deal with rotting and splitting, and devise mechanisms for automatic feeding, watering and waste removal, to say nothing of bailing the water that would seep in. And that is all without collecting the provisions they would require to feed their charges.

Some Bible literalists claim that Noah was rich and able to hire laborers to assist him and his family. Why does Genesis not mention this? If he was just a farmer, where did he get the money to pay help? Or did he pay them with grain? Besides, even if he could hire people to work on this project, eventually they would have figured out what was going on. Of course, they could have

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dismissed it as “Noah’s Folly” and be happy with any grain or coin of the realm that they got for their efforts.

But what if somebody started to realize there was method to the madness? How difficult would it have been to sneak aboard the ark with all the animals marching two by two - or to hide somewhere on the ark the night before? Or to take one of the wives hostage? “Let me and my family on, or Mrs. Ham gets it!” Since Noah grew grapes and made wine after the Deluge, maybe he paid off his laborers with some extra-potent Cabernet Sauvignon the night before the Genesis Flood began so they’d be too stewed to cause any trouble.

The Ark Encounter was built with 21st century tools and materials. How much more impressive it would have been if Ken Ham’s company had instead used Bronze Age technology and tools to shape the components and put them together! But they opted for modern power tools and Tyvek®. Also, his ark has a bulbous bow, which was not a feature on ships till the 19th century. Old pictures of Noah’s ark don’t show this.

Genesis states that the ark was to be sealed inside and out with pitch, in line with common practice back in the days when the Old Testament was first written. However, where did Noah find enough pitch to coat the entire ark? Pitch, or bitumen, comes from ancient life. Creating bitumen requires millions of years, as well as the right conditions of temperature and pressure. Thus, a young Earth would not have had any bitumen deposits.

The ark would need to be well-ventilated to disperse the heat, humidity and waste products from the many thousands of animals that were crowded aboard. One window 45-50 cm on each side could not have provided sufficient ventilation, or lighting. One creationist interpretation of Genesis 6:16 is that there was a cubit-wide opening all around the top; the claim is this opening, with slight breezes, would have been enough to provide adequate ventilation. Tables and equations for calculating ventilation in barns show that,

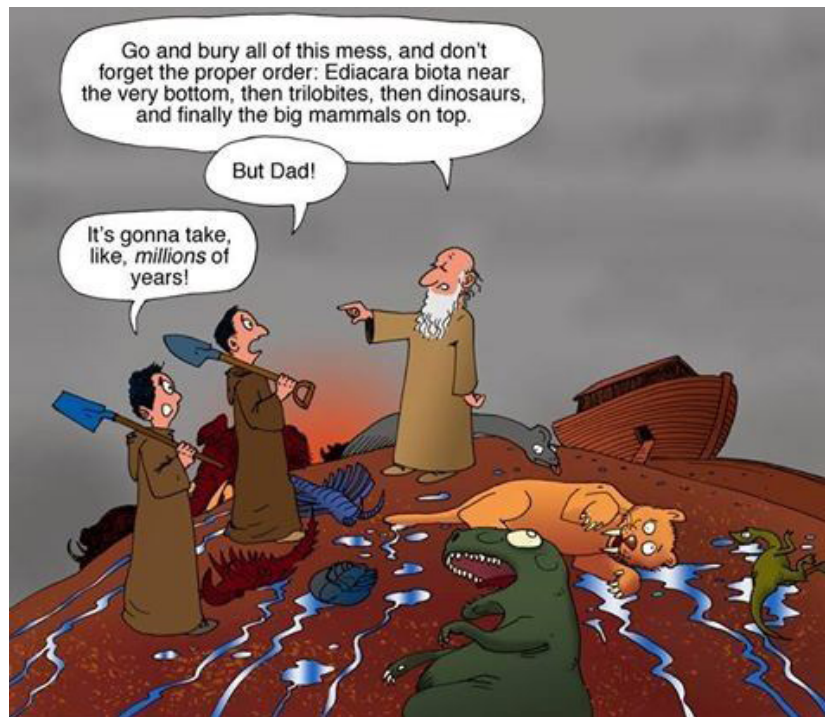
if the openings are near the top, air circulation will be poor. Since the ark was divided into separate decks, how was fresh air circulated throughout the structure? The top deck might have received sufficient fresh air, as well as light during daytime - but what about the two lower decks? Ark apologists claim there was a “wind-deflecting system” that would funnel fresh air to the lower decks, but even if Noah was clever enough to design and construct such a system, this would not have addressed the problem of providing light throughout the ark.

Indeed, no mention is made in Genesis of how the interior of the ark was lit. Torches and oil lamps would have been a fire hazard, especially on a violently rolling and pitching vessel made entirely of wood, coated with flammable pitch, and filled with methane and other foul gases from all the manure that the animals would generate.

Ark apologists dodge the problem of watering and feeding Noah’s enormous menagerie, as well as removing waste, by claiming that they had automatic feeders and troughs. Even if the Noah clan could have created these in between wrestling massive planks in place to assemble the ark’s hull, how did they function? And even if they had installed working feeders and water dispensers, these would require frequent inspection to make sure

they were working and hadn’t jammed or broken. Considering how violent the seas would have been during the Deluge, and how the ark would have been hogging and sagging and snaking amidst the powerful waves, these devices could easily have become dislodged or clogged.

The sheer weight of the animals and needed supplies would have sunk the ark. Assuming that the ark had a displacement of 24,000 tons, this would have probably been enough to float with all the animals aboard. However, Noah had to bring on board enough food for his menagerie, to



say nothing of water since fresh water would not have been available - unless some fell after the main deluge, and the ark had some way to collect it. Water cisterns and their contents would have added even more weight. The big boat would not have calmly glided on the surface of the floodwaters as is often shown in art, but been deeply submerged.

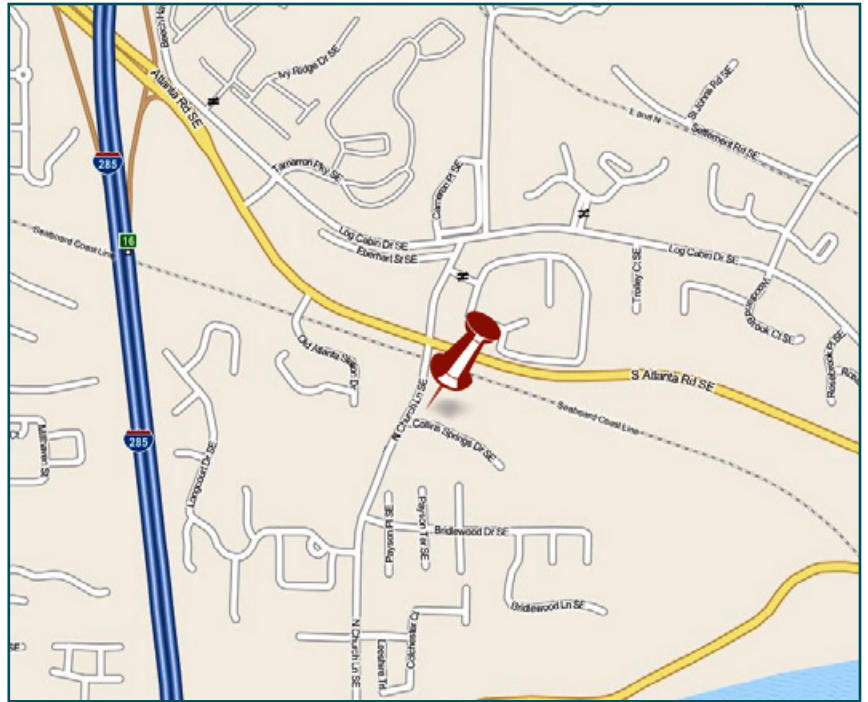
Even if a handful of people could have built a vessel the size of Noah’s ark with primitive tools and without considerable training and experience, making sure it was seaworthy would have been something entirely different. And that is to say nothing of caring for thousands of animals, many of which had special dietary needs, or cannot be kept cooped up in pens or cages for long. Also, how was the entire planet flooded, and where did the water come from, and where did it go? Future essays will deal with other reasons that the ark could never be anything other than a myth.

*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



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**Bill Cooke
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