

Clarifications Regarding the *TJ* Book Review of *Biblical Classification of Life*

By Chard Berndt

(Response to “A rose by any other name,” Don Batten book review,
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To begin, I must say that I am pleased that Answers in Genesis’ *TJ* regarded my book *Biblical Classification of Life* as worthy of a review. As a high school science teacher just now underway on my masters work, I realize that I have not entered into the creation science dialogue packing any weighty credential. As it is, Dr. Batten graciously regarded the book as “one incredible, very original book,” “thoroughly creationist in its perspective, and well-written.” I put a lot of hard work into this, and as I’ve told some, I believe that God “lit a fire under me” to write it during a busy season of family and professional responsibilities. I am compelled, however, to write this response to several aspects of Dr. Batten’s review that I would like to clarify. Keep in mind that in writing a response that is almost as long as the review itself, I do not mean to express dissent; I have much respect for the *AiG* ministry, its publications, and scientists, and simply want to make sure that I am understood.

Dr. Batten expresses that I have classified insects as “birds.” This is not accurate. Rather, I have regarded the biblical term *owph* (translated as “fowl” in the KJV and as “birds” in most translations—perhaps contributing to the misunderstanding) to mean “flying creatures,” inclusive of both birds and true insects. (Regarding the misunderstanding, I should also mention that I have recently come to realize that the label “avian creatures,” which I have used interchangeably with “flying creatures,” is a poor choice.) I have stated that birds are distinct from insects, as birds are specifically named *tsippowr* in Scripture (a subset of *owph*), and insects as *owph* that creep (*sherets*) in Leviticus 11. Thus, insects are not birds, but are created alongside birds, unified in purpose as Day 5 flying creatures. (See “The Unified Owph” at <www.creationbydesign.com/articles> for a full explanation). The implications of this word study are simply this: the characteristic of powered flight is the biblical criterion for grouping “creatures of the sky”—a biblical “phylum” if you will. Modern classification, by widely separating insects (arthropods) and birds (chordates), places a greater value on body structure than on flight itself. Dr. Batten considers this a “functional, rather than ‘natural’” classification, but what makes the function of flight any less “natural” than other aspects of an organism’s anatomy? Indeed, an endoskeleton, warm-bloodedness, and capacity for powered flight are all natural. Yet the capacity for flight is the biblical priority—God spoke out the creative “movement” on Day 5 according to this criterion.

Dr. Batten wonders “would a flying fish be a sea creature or a ‘bird’?”, adding that it is designed to do both. Certainly, an organism that shares attributes of both major groups of Day 5 creatures (water and sky) may be an enigma. But the point of the BCL is that it must be, in essence and in its original placement on the planet, either one or the other. The flying fish doesn’t exhibit powered flight, and it possesses both fins and scales (as specified in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14), so it would be clearly defined as an aquatic creature. Likewise, Dr. Batten did not distinguish gliding and powered flight in mammals or reptiles (I do not regard all of these as “birds”), or mention that I include the bat among birds in the BCL primarily because it is stated as such in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

Dr. Batten disagrees with my basic assumption “that modern classification is basically evolutionary and that it is therefore incompatible with biblical Creation.” I think he made some excellent comments about the non-evolutionary potential of classifying according to biological similarities (as per Linnaeus’ intentions). Yet I still contend that the modern approach to biosystematics (even in the more objective cladistics manner) plays into the hand of evolutionary ideas, and that a scheme based on the original Creation is a higher ontological pursuit. Just because sound cladistics may contradict some evolutionary phylogenies doesn’t mean that this will bring us closer to the biblical truth. For example, it may distance humans farther from primates, but will still regard us as animals. Dr. Batten considers the BCL “of interest for biblical study, but not much use for developing a creationist taxonomy.” Should not a creationist approach be, first of all, biblical?

While it is true that I have delved into some areas that could be contentious (creatures and the afterlife, and angels), and made some assumptions about eschatology (millennial kingdom), my comments about soul- and spirit-life in creatures are well-studied and supported biblically. I do not attribute spirit-life to creatures based only on their description as living souls (*chayyah nephesh*), as Dr. Batten suggested toward the end of the review. Rather, I have indicated that spirit, or breath life (*ruwach*) is a subset of soul life (*nephesh*). That is, all creatures have *nephesh* life (distinguishing them from vegetation), but not all have *ruwach* life in addition.

Finally, I wish to speak to the statement that “the book is based on a confusion of categories.” I agree that classification schemes can vary in accordance with their purposes, and that trees or fruits (as exemplified in Dr. Batten’s review) can indeed be categorized logically, consistently, and practically in many valid ways. Yet just as one who classifies fruits according to climate (tropical, sub-tropical, temperate) has not confused the matter of their biological formation (simple-dry, simple-fleshy, aggregate, multiple), I, by classifying according to biblical Creation criteria have not confused other criteria. Like anyone with a classification purpose, I have chosen my criteria and made categorical decisions based on upon them. I have not made exceptions, or

mixed my criteria. My contention is that when a biblical creationist applies criteria that generate non-biblical groupings, *that* constitutes a confusion of categories.

My thanks go to Dr. Batten for taking the time to review my work, for pointing out an error (my use of “polyploidy”), and for *not* pointing out a number of other genuine errors that might have sidetracked the review. I am aware that revisions and improvements must eventually come. I do hope, however, that rather than to be skeptical of a biblical classification scheme’s usefulness to biology, Dr. Batten and others will remain open to the possibility that this is a logical extension of baraminology, providing a framework for an origins-based sorting of the Kinds. If Kinds, or holobaramin, are indeed discontinuous biological units of Creation (not ancestrally related to each other), then we should reconsider our practice of grouping these discontinuous units according to anatomical continuities, rather than according to the discrete groupings laid out in Scripture. My exhortation in this area was echoed by Richard Sternberg at the Discontinuity Conference, which I attended (see “The future looks bright,” Todd Charles Wood, *TJ* Volume 15(3), 2001, 75). He challenged creationists to avoid evolutionary terms, and advocated the development of an alternate vocabulary.