

Unicorns – Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

Skeptics mock the 1611 King James Bible’s mention of unicorns (found in 9 verses) accusing it of being unscientific. However, such is readily refuted for it relies upon flawed reasoning:¹

Assumption A: If the Bible is true and credible, it would not report unicorns as real animals.

Assumption B: The Bible reports unicorns as real animals.

Conclusion: Therefore, the Bible can’t be perfectly true and credible.

This syllogism implies that the English word unicorn is the core of the controversy – rather than seeking to determine what the Hebrew noun *re’ēm* actually means.

Assumption A contains the uniformitarian fallacy. It assumes the Hebrew word *re’ēm* must match some animal alive today – such ignores *extinction* scenarios.

Assumption B assumes the Bible’s *re’ēm* must match the imaginary unicorns of fairy tales and cartoons. The scoffer’s narrow caricature of biblical unicorns misses the point, which is that relevant Bible passages *never* portrays *re’ēm* as a spiral single-horned horse.

Modern versions insist that it be a “wild ox” or a “bull.” But how can the biblical unicorn be a wild ox or bull when we consider Job 39:9: “Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib?” Wild oxen can be and are tamed to serve, as are bulls – but not the unicorn, which is also very powerful (Numbers 23:22).

According to Psalm 92:10 the unicorn has one horn: “But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn.” Now the Hebrew for ox is שׁוֹר (= *showr*: pronounced “shore”) whereas the Hebrew for unicorn is רֶאֵם (= *re’ēm*: pronounced reh-āim). Obviously, they are nothing alike!

As the historic interpretation of *re’ēm* has always been rendered “unicorn” and since Scripture defines the creature as being un-domesticatable and having but one horn – taken with the fact that the Hebrew in no way resembles the word for an ox or bull – it should be seen that to not translate the word as unicorn is not a valid alternative. The modern versions have completely missed it (yet unicorn is in the 1539 Great Bible, the 1560 Geneva & the 1568 Bishops).

Moreover, we find unicorns mentioned together with bullocks and bulls in Isaiah 34:7 (in the OT Hebrew also), thus ruling out the possibility that a *re’ēm* was a bull or bullock!

But is the unicorn actually mythical? Sightings of animals that fit the broad-spectrum depiction of unicorns date as recently as the 18th century. These descriptions do not readily fit that of any animal alive today, especially given that the horn is reported as two to three feet long.²

Of course the biblical unicorn could be (or similar to) the wild looking scaly, single horned creature with powerful talons for back feet that is often displayed on the renowned Ishtar Gate of Babylon. Although many say it represents Bel-Marduk (or Marduk) the chief god of the Babylonian pantheon, the suggestion should not be taken as mere fanciful assumption, because the other images on the gate are those of animals living today (bulls and male lions). Such infers the creature below lived and is now extinct – was it the unicorn? Perhaps, but who knows.



The skeptic’s attempt to equate the English term unicorn to a spiral-horned horse is totally without justification, and Christians should not be intimidated by such unworthy so-called scholarship. There is thus no reason to doubt the reading in the KJB, especially given that the unicorn will return to earth when Christ comes from heaven (Isa. 34:1-8). The implication is that they are extinct on earth at the time.

¹ James J. S. Johnson, J.D., Th.D., ‘Skeptics’ Pointless Ridicule of the Bible’s ‘Unicorns’, *Acts & Facts*, (Feb. 2018.) 47 (2).

² Recorded unicorn sightings come from India, Ethiopia, Abyssinia, Mecca, China, Persia, & Canada. Gerardus Bouw, Ph.D. Astronomy, *The Book of Bible Problems*, (Cleveland, OH: Assoc. for Biblical Astronomy, 1997) p. 238. Moreover, some take Psa. 22:21 “thou hast heard me from the horns of unicorns” to mean they have two horns, thus contradicting Psa. 92:10. This is of no force as both ‘horns’ & ‘unicorns’ are plural and ‘unicorns’ have *many* horns. Indeed, the Talmud, Aristotle, and Pliny describe a one-horned antelope, an oryx, in their day – the unicorn? (Keil, *OT Commentary*, Psa. 92:10; Job 39:9-12).