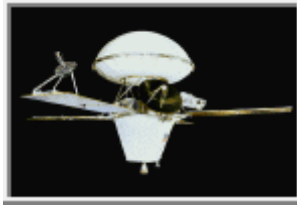


Could There Be Life on Other Planets? Theological Questions Posed By a Modern Issue



Viking 1 – 1975-76

About two years after I became a Christian, I was in my office working in the aerospace industry for Teledyne Brown Engineering, when my boss walked in to talk to me. The date was July 20, 1976. The occasion was the landing on Mars of NASA's Viking 1 Lander, which was soon to scoop up some Martian dirt to analyze it. I have never forgotten the question my boss asked me that day. He knew I was a Christian and attended church. His query for me was this: "If they find life on Mars, will your church issue a statement?"

Now what in the world does such a question imply? From the point of view of my boss, it was impossible to reconcile the biblical view of the universe with the discovery of any microbes of life on Mars. If there are microbes of life in the Martian dirt, as the reasoning goes, there must be more advanced forms of "intelligent" life out there somewhere. If that were the case, the uniqueness of the earth and mankind as portrayed in the Bible supposedly can not be maintained. While intelligent life elsewhere in the universe might be harmonized with more liberal versions of Christianity, it certainly could not be squared with any literalist understanding of Genesis. The average Christian is probably unaware of how deeply rooted this thinking is within much of the scientific and engineering community. In some respects, "first contact" is considered the last nail in the coffin of a dying conservative Christian faith.

Many scientists were no doubt extremely disappointed when the Viking Landers turned up absolutely no evidence of even microbes of life on the surface of Mars. A NASA statement summarizes:

The three biology experiments discovered unexpected and enigmatic chemical activity in the Martian soil, but provided no clear evidence for the presence of living microorganisms in soil near the landing sites. According to mission biologists, Mars is self-sterilizing. They believe the combination of solar ultraviolet radiation that saturates the surface, the extreme dryness of the soil and the oxidizing nature of the soil chemistry prevent the formation of living organisms in the Martian soil. The question of life on Mars at some time in the distant past remains open.¹

¹ "Project Viking Fact Sheet," Courtesy of NASA, available from <http://www.solarviews.com/eng/vikingfs.htm>; Internet; accessed 16 September 2004.

Humorously, we could say that they should have known they would not find bacteria in Martian soil. After all, in the 1953 film *War of the Worlds* the Martian invasion is staved off in the end by bacteria (put on earth by God) which the green creatures could not handle!

Nonetheless, vast numbers of educators, scientists, and citizens, even apart from those enmeshed in chasing the UFO phenomena, believe beyond doubt that intelligent life exists on other planets outside our solar system and galaxy. Many do so without having seen life from other planets or without believing in the modern UFO craze. Perhaps Bible-believing Christians should be forgiven for being skeptical after being accused of strange faith in a God that they cannot see with their eyes and inexplicable belief in a Man that they have never met.

The Search for ExtraTerrestrial Intelligence

A common joke is that we can be sure there is no intelligent life in outer space because none has been found on earth! However, the amount of effort and volume of money spent on the search for life in outer space is no laughing matter. The search for extraterrestrial intelligence or SETI continues to be a serious and scholarly undertaking by many in the scientific community. The acronym SETI is used for the general project of searching for life in outer space regardless of the organization making the effort as well as the specialized project started by NASA in 1992. The work of Giuseppe Cocconi, Philip Morrison, and Frank Drake in the late 1950s and early 1960s is considered the fountain of the modern era of radio searches for intelligent messages from outer space.² Drake's equation for estimating the number of extraterrestrial civilizations is still touted, even by NASA.³

NASA's involvement began in the late 1960s during the height of the Apollo Space Program to reach the moon as it offered expertise and help in the area. However, there was no formal government program until the aforementioned one in 1992. This project was short-lived. Stephen Garber, a NASA historian laments the circumstances:

On Columbus Day, 1992, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) formally initiated a radio astronomy program called SETI ... Less than a year later, Congress abruptly canceled the program. Why? While there was and still is a debate over the likelihood of finding intelligent extraterrestrial life, virtually all informed parties agreed that the SETI program constituted worthwhile, valid science. Yet, fervor over the federal budget deficit, lack of support from other scientists and aerospace contractors and a significant history of unfounded associations with nonscientific elements combined with bad timing in fall 1993 to make the program an easy target to eliminate. Thus SETI was a

² Thomas R. McDonough, *The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence: Listening for Life in the Cosmos* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1987), 111. See also Stephen J. Garber, "Searching for Good Science: The Cancellation of NASA's SETI Program," *Journal of the British Interplanetary Society* 52 (1999): 3-4 and Frank Drake, "The Foundations of the Voyager Record" in *Murmurs of Earth: The Voyager Interstellar Record* edited by Carl Sagan (New York: Random House, 1978), 46-47.

³ *Ibid.*, 112-17. See also

relative anomaly in terms of a small, scientifically valid program that was canceled for political expediency.⁴

In spite of this setback, other organizations like the SETI Institute and SETI League have picked up some of the work.⁵ NASA continues to contribute indirectly in a couple of ways. It has moved its interest in life on other planets to its Origins program. It also keeps the issue in mind within the context of its exploration programs which have other agendas. For example, the recent landings in January of this year of the Mars Exploration Rovers named Opportunity and Spirit are a case in point. While confirming the almost thirty-year old verdict from Viking of the absence of organic material, the new rovers explore for many reasons, one being great curiosity, but nonetheless with an eye for anything that might show signs of past life or the origins of the universe. Any information along those lines could bolster the overall call for SETI. The controversy a few years ago about the Martian rock allegedly found in Antarctica and allegedly containing signs of life shows how important this issue has become.

However, there is no unanimity even among scientists on this issue especially since ET has not checked in yet. But speculation continues to wax eloquent as seen by the following list produced by John Ball of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics which yields ten possibilities for SETI:

1. There are no other civilizations.
2. There are other civilizations, but they are primitive. They don't know about us, but might like to.
3. There are other civilizations, but they are at roughly our level. They suspect we may exist, and would probably like to talk with us.
4. They exist, they know we're here, and would like to talk, but haven't managed to attract our attention yet.
5. They don't care about us. We pose no threat and don't have anything they want.
6. They're somewhat interested in us, and a few of their scientists are quietly studying us now.
7. They're very interested in us, and they are studying us extensively but secretly.
8. They are dabbling in our affairs right now.
9. We are an experiment in their laboratory.
10. God exists. (This is not necessarily inconsistent with any of the other options.)⁶

Only an actual and incontrovertible event of first contact would change the contents of such a list.

⁴ Garber, "Searching for Good Science," 3.

⁵ Steve Garber, "SETI: The Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence," NASA History Office, available from <http://history.nasa.gov/seti.html>; Internet; accessed 16 September 2004.

⁶ Cited in McDonough, "The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence," 202-03.

Does the Issue Matter for Biblical Christians?

Many Christians I have talked to yawn at this issue and its debates. If there is life on other planets, who cares? ⁷ The Bible does not talk about it, so it can go either way. Let's move on to something else. While life on other planets is not in my top ten list of theological issues, let me suggest a couple of reasons why the Christian should not duck this question. First, we must confront the apologetic situation of our own day. My boss's question that opened this paper shows that there is a popular perception that the probability of life on other planets shows a universe quite different from the archaic portrait of the world found in the Bible. The issue of intelligent life out there is usually expressed as part of the larger evolutionary worldview that has become one of the greatest enemies of the Christian faith. Christians should not give the impression that we have no intellectual and serious responses to this question.

Second, the controversy over intelligent life in outer space and even the possibility of first contact does raise some serious issues the Church would have to confront. On that score alone, church leaders need to do some hard thinking. Even if the biblical conclusion is that there is no life on other planets, wrestling with the theological issues surrounding the question will strengthen one's understanding of his own Christian grid for thinking.

One of the few places to go for Christian thinking in this area is the Space Trilogy of C. S. Lewis.⁸ In these three works of fiction, Lewis investigates the depravity of man, how his depravity would affect life on other planets, and the connection between angels and celestial stars, a frequent coupling made in Scripture (e.g., Rev. 12:4, Job 38:7). Because his writing was before its time, so to speak, it is hard reading for those of us used to the slick presentations of *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*. However, we will explore some of the issues he raises (not necessarily his conclusions) because they go to the heart of the question of how life on other planets can or cannot fit into a Christian view of the universe.

An Analogy from the Early Church

Before examining some hotspots in theology concerning the question of life on other planets, a question that often has us looking forward, it is worthwhile to take a backward look to an analogous question provided to us courtesy of the Greek philosophers and the Church Fathers. It is common knowledge that the Greeks in pre-Socratic times had begun to view the earth as more than a flat plane. Of course, those of us who take a literal approach to the Bible have our passages to show that the biblical

⁷ I am assuming throughout this paper that the debate is about non-angelic life on other planets or in interstellar space. Christians might affirm angelic life out there while denying intelligent, humanoid life. Lack of space prevents me from discussing the various levels of life and debating what words like "sentient" might mean.

⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (London: John Lane, 1938); *Perelandra* (London: John Lane, 1943); *That Hideous Strength* (London: John Lane, 1945).

conception of the earth is consistent with a sphere in space.⁹ This would pre-date the height of the classical Greek period as well. Anaximander of Miletus (6th century B.C.) suggested that the earth was a curved cylinder. Later in the post-Socratic period Eratosthenes of Cyrene (276-196 B. C.) calculated with great accuracy the circumference and diameter of a spherical earth.¹⁰

The possibility of a spherical earth and the theological implications associated with it was not lost on the early Church Fathers. The primary theological issue arose through the consideration of the possibility of antipodes. The term *antipodes* etymologically means “against the feet” and refers to the people who might be on the other side of the globe with their feet against ours, i.e., turned toward our feet. Most of the Church Fathers apparently were at least open to the idea of a spherical earth, sometimes reluctantly, but struggled mightily with the concept of actual people living on the other side of the globe. Augustine wrote

As to the fable that there are Antipodes, that is to say, men on the opposite side of the earth, where the sun rises when it sets on us, men who walk with their feet opposite ours, there is no reason for believing it. Those who affirm it do not claim to possess any actual information; they merely conjecture that, since the earth is suspended within the concavity of the heavens, and there is as much room on the one side of it as on the other, therefore, the part which is beneath cannot be void of human inhabitants. They fail to notice that, even should it be believed or demonstrated that the world is round or spherical in form, it does not follow that the part of the earth opposite to us is not completely covered with water, or than any conjectured dry land there should be inhabited by men. For Scripture, which confirms the truth of its historical statements by the accomplishment of its prophecies, teaches not falsehood; and it is too absurd to say that some men might have set sail from this side and, traversing the immense expanse of ocean, have propagated there a race of human beings descended from that one first man.¹¹

Augustine is fairly representative of the Church Fathers in allowing for a spherical earth. However, the real concern was how men who were descended from Adam could end up on the other side of the world. Furthermore, if non-Adamic beings lived on the other side of the earth, that would constitute in Augustine’s mind that the Bible was wrong when it said that all men descended from Adam (Acts 17:26).

Why was it hard for Augustine to believe that any antipodeans could be descended from Adam? The reason was found in the natural philosophy of that day which taught that there could be no connection between intelligent life on the other side of the globe and the known world of that time “because the sea was too wide to sail across or because the equatorial zones were too hot to sail through.”¹² In addition, there

⁹ E.g., Isaiah 40:22; Job 26:7.

¹⁰ Isaac Asimov, *The Universe: From Flat Earth to Quasar* (New York: Walker and Company, 1966), 1-9.

¹¹ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, xvi, 9.

was the supposed theological problem of how such people could see Jesus at the Second Coming. To that could be added the argument that the apostles had been told to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth and they had not gone to any so-called antipodes. In the end, the Bible was silent about them and thus they probably did not exist. If antipodes did exist, the missiological questions needed to be asked: “if they are not descended from Adam, do they have souls and do they need to be saved and if they do need to be saved, on what basis are they ‘lost’?”

Many of the Church Fathers took up the discussion. Unfortunately, the discourse unfortunately turned toward the dogmatic adoption of a flat earth, which dominated much thinking during the Dark Ages. But when Columbus discovered America, to its credit, the Western world considered the antipodes part of Adam’s family and sent evangelists so God would save their souls.

There are both similarities and dissimilarities between this earlier question of life on the other side of the globe and life on other planets. The question of the connection of extraterrestrial intelligent life to Adam enormously complicates the discussion of the relationship between such life and the concepts of sin and redemption. It is also much harder to demonstrate any genetic tie between Adam’s race and the Klingons, although some scientists and many UFO watchers have tried to argue that the earth has been seeded by aliens.¹³

On the other hand, it would be appropriate to know whether such intelligent life in outer space, if it existed, was “soulish” life for which a Gospel message was needed. It would be appropriate for the Church to respond to “first contact” with serious thought. Perhaps a missionary enterprise would be needed and the cost for deputation would quite literally sky-rocket (pun intended). It is these kinds of issues which the debate over antipodes among the Church Fathers forms a kind of backdrop. The Church has been to this doorstep before although the step here would be much longer. As a result of this and like questions, one should take the question of life on other planets as a serious one with theological implications.

¹² Jeffrey B. Russell, *Inventing the Flat Earth: Columbus and Modern Historians* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 20. For an Internet article making use of Russell’s statements, see Rob Bradshaw, “Lactantius,” available from <http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/lactantius.html>; Internet; accessed 16 September 2004. Lactantius was a syncretistic rhetorician during the time of Diocletian about one century before Augustine. In general, Lactantius had a public reputation for being extremely adept at criticizing the opponents of the Christian faith but a poor theologian when attempting to make a positive case for Christianity. Specifically with respect to the antipode question, he commented “Is there any one so senseless as to believe that there are men whose footsteps are higher than their heads?...that the crops and trees grow downward?...that the rains and snow and hail fall upward toward the earth?...I am at a loss what to say of those who, when they have once erred, steadily persevere in their folly and defend one vain thing by another” (cited in Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*; available from <http://abob.lib.uga.edu/bobk/whiteb03.html>; Internet; accessed 16 September 2004). In hindsight, of course, these words are quite foolish.

¹³ The idea that aliens seeded the earth and that humans are the offspring of an original extraterrestrial race is clearly a minority view within the scientific community. The generally understood evolutionary schema is that conditions for the development of life on the earth came about (some would say randomly) beginning with the primordial ooze in prehistoric times. For a sketch of traditional evolutionary thinking see A. I. Oparin, “The Appearance of Life in the Universe” in *Exo-Biology*, Vol. 23 *Frontiers of Biology* edited by Cyril Ponnamperna (London: North-Holland, 1972), 1-15.

The Theological Issues

In the final analysis, the issue comes down to what the Bible either teaches or allows. It is similar to the debate over the Trinity. Does the Old Testament explicitly teach the Trinity? No. Does it allow for the doctrine of the Trinity? The theologian answers “yes” with good reasons. Concerning the issue of intelligent life on other planets, the Bible must either explicitly teach that it exists or its teaching must allow for it to exist. In the latter case, the Bible’s teaching would be congruous with and certainly not contradictory to the presence of intelligent life on other planets.

In my judgment, an examination of the teaching of the Bible leads one in the direction away from the conclusion that there is intelligent life on other planets. Quite frankly, part of my thinking comes from a distrust of the evolutionary framework from which the modern notions of life on other planets have emerged. However, many other biblical and theological reasons exist to persuade that the notion does not fit well the biblical view of the universe.

The Uniqueness of Man

The Bible clearly teaches the uniqueness of man in the created order. God has made several things. He created the Sun, Moon, and stars. He made the animals and plants on the earth, in the sea, and in the air. He made the angels as living creatures. Out of all of those created things, living and nonliving, the Bible teaches that man *alone* is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28). He is pictured as distinct from the animals as he carries out dominion over them in general, names them (Gen. 2), and takes care of them during the flood (Gen. 6-8).

Now one might say that man is only unique in the context of planet earth. There could be intelligent life out there, which would be in the image of God for that particular planet. But to make that assertion ignores the larger context. The claim that man is made in the image of God is given in the context of the creation of the entire universe, not just planet earth. The Genesis account mentions the Sun, Moon, and stars. Taken in a straightforward way, this description covers the entire gamut of the universe. Similar passages mentioning God’s special treatment of man in the context of all creatures made by God (such as Romans 8:38) reinforce this picture. It is hard to imagine intelligent life on other planets on the same plane with mankind in light of such biblical teaching.

The uniqueness of man in the entire universe is also highlighted by the angelic attention given to man. This can be seen in two ways. First, when Satan fell with one-third of the angels going with him, he fell to planet earth. Why? Were we just the lucky ones? Is there a Satan for other planets and other life on those planets? The biblical portrait of the universe does not seem to allow for that. Satan led one-third of *all* of the angels that had been created. They *all* fell to earth according to Revelation 12:4. There is an earth-centeredness to the focus of Satan and *all* fallen angels. In light of man’s divinely intended role of dominion on earth, the uniqueness of man may be highlighted especially since Satan has usurped man’s role and made himself the prince and power of the air or the ruler of the world. That is why both Jewish and Christian traditions have suggested the possibility that Satan out of jealousy rebelled because of the creation of man in the image of God.

Secondly, the Bible asserts that generally the good angels of the universe are ministering spirits sent for the benefit of man (Heb. 1:14). This is said in the context of teaching about the restoration of man's rule through the Davidic Messianic king. One thing that reinforces the uniqueness of man in this regard is where the good angels actually "live." They did not fall to the earth. The other choices appear to be heaven (the abode of God) or celestial space. It is possible to make an argument for the latter in light of the many associations given in the Bible between the angels and stars. Thus, the angels possibly abide in outer space and would be out there with intelligent life on other planets if it existed. The tenor of Scripture, whether speaking of the image of God in man or of man's relationship to the angelic realm, suggests strongly an earth-centered worldview that affirms the uniqueness of man, a concept that does not fit the Star Trek model.

A connection between one's view of God and the uniqueness of man is illustrated somewhat by the statements about religion made by scientists involved in SETI. Frank Drake, one of the fathers of the modern SETI movement, as he gave a testimony about his youth, asserted strongly

If religion was arbitrary, and I believed it was, then perhaps humanity, too, was arbitrary—was just one truth among many possible truths. I could see no reason to think that humankind was the only example of civilization, unique in all the universe. I imagined there could well be other forms of intelligent life elsewhere.¹⁴

Drake's attitude is joined by James Trefil who amazingly noted, "If I were a religious man, I would say that everything we have learned about life in the past twenty years shows that we are unique, and therefore special in God's sight. Instead I shall say that what we have learned shows that it matters a great deal what happens to us."¹⁵ It is safe to conclude that the search for intelligent life, with all of its own biases, is often grounded in the basic understanding that man is not unique in the universe.

Adam's Sin and the Entire Universe

Another problem area to resolve in this debate is the relationship of Adam's sin to any life on other planets. According to Genesis 3, God pronounced a curse on the earth because of Adam. Did the curse apply just to the earth or did it extend to all of the created order? Perhaps there was no curse on the Moon until Neil Armstrong set foot on it in 1969! The biblical message seems to be that the curse pronounced in Genesis 3 (which emphasized the earth) was actually applied to the entire universe as well:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own

¹⁴ Frank Drake and Dava Sobel, *Is Anyone Out There? The Scientific Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1992), 5.

¹⁵ Robert T. Rood and James S. Trefil, *Are We Alone? The Possibility of Extraterrestrial Civilizations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981), 252.

choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time (Rom. 8:18-22; NIV).

The language here appears to be larger than planet earth. It is hard to imagine Paul, who had earlier talked about the creation of the *cosmos* (Rom. 1:20), limiting his thinking to just the earth in Romans 8:18-22. This is especially true in light of the Jewish understanding of the created world as including all of what we would call the universe (see Psalm 19:1-6; Job 9:6-9; 38:31-33). Consequently, it is best to understand that Adam's sin brought a curse applied by God to more than planet earth. It extended throughout the entire universe.

This conclusion is in harmony with modern science's highly debated Second Law of Thermodynamics which suggests that everything in the universe on the whole is tending toward randomness or disorder.¹⁶ It will do no good to argue that the earth is an open system with extra energy coming in from the Sun to produce order. The Law applies everywhere in the universe. The result is that people die, plants die, animals die, cars die, houses left to themselves decay and die, and they even tell us that stars die. In the universe there is the sentence of death. The Bible tells us that it was Adam's fault.

Now what is the significance of this universal curse for the question of life on other planets? It means that a race not descended from Adam (unless one believes in uniform seeding theories for the whole universe) on another planet has been placed under the curse because of someone on our planet. Yet the Bible treats Adam's sin as having racial overtones. There is solidarity of the human race either federally as Adam represents all of us in the Garden or as seminally we participate with him in his sin (or both).

One can analyze sin as it relates to life on other planets by assuming it is there and asking how it would relate to civilizations not its own. In some circles there appears to be an assumption that first contact will be with an advanced civilization with loving purpose. But what if first contact is with the warrior-like Klingons and not the enlightened Vulcans?¹⁷ Perhaps here the science fiction writers have done us some good. They have helped us to visualize what inter-galactic sin would be like. If sin has won the day in the universe for the time being, there must be a way of dealing with it and eliminating it. But there is no way but Christ's work on the Cross near the city of Jerusalem on a planet called Earth.

Earth as the Teleological Center of the Universe

The Bible teaches that the earth is the teleological center of the universe. Of course, one must quickly point out that this does not require that the earth is the astro-

¹⁶ See William L. Masterton and Emil J. Slowinski, *Chemical Principles* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1969), 332 and Henry M. Morris, *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 185-215.

¹⁷ Isaac Asimov discusses the possibility that first contact might not be a pleasant experience in *Extraterrestrial Civilizations* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1979), 255.

spatial center of the universe as the ancients appeared to believe. But we must be careful not to be too hasty in dismissing the old cosmology *in its entirety*. I am not here regressing into pre-Copernican ways. It is true that the earth is not at the center of our solar system. The earth goes around the Sun, not the other way around. It is probably also true that our solar system is not at the center of our galaxy. However, the centrality of our galaxy relative to the entire universe is an open question.

It is interesting that if one holds to the Big Bang cosmogony (which I do not) there are some issues to wrestle with based upon certain observations in the present. The universe seems to be proportionally expanding in all directions from our vantage point.¹⁸ While such observations are interpreted to support the Big Bang theory, they also tend to place the earth and its galaxy at the center of the Big Bang. If one were located on a planet in a star system on the fringes of the expanding universe, one would not necessarily see the universe proportionally expanding in all directions from that vantage point. Thus, while the earth is not at the center of our solar system, do not extrapolate that to mean that the earth is some remote outpost near the Neutral Zone.

However, the student of the Bible can categorically affirm that the earth is the teleological center of the universe. By *teleological* we mean *purposeful* center of the universe. It is at the heart of God's design and purpose for the universe. We had already seen that the activities of both good and bad angels were earth-centered, which is strange seeing that those creatures have had or currently have a cosmic domain. We will also see earth-centeredness in the next section when we discuss God's eschatological plan. However, here I want to emphasize a crucial statement in the Genesis account of creation:

And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day (Gen. 1:14-19).

Notice that even the stars have an earth-centered purpose in God's account of His own creation. It is this significant and consistent presentation in Scripture of earth-centeredness that does not seem to harmonize well with the notion of intelligent life on other planets. It is hard to imagine how a Vulcan could easily accept the Genesis account which says that the purpose of the stars in his planetary system were designed for the earth. While it is possible to argue theoretically that God has multiple purposes for the celestial heavens, the sheer weight of the biblical data pointing toward earth as the teleological center of the universe becomes quite compelling. The simpler solution then is to accept the fact from a biblical point of view that there is no life on other planets.

¹⁸ Asimov, *The Universe*, 185-96.

The Eschatological Problem

One of the greatest hopes of the Christian believer is the promise of no more tears in a new heaven and new earth that God is going to give at the end of the millennial phase of His kingdom (Rev. 21:1-4).¹⁹ Christians often fail to reflect on the details of this hope. There is a new holy city, the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven (v. 2). This is followed by the announcement that God is now going to dwell with men (v. 3). However, Jesus (who is God) had dwelt on earth during the millennium with men. Why is He now announcing His presence in this way? There is a difference. In the millennium Jesus was on the throne in Jerusalem while the Father was still in heaven. In the New Jerusalem the fullness of the triune God is coming to dwell with men on earth. It is both an earthly and a heavenly scene. Heaven is the abode of God. He is moving His home to earth permanently in a wonderful marriage of heaven and earth.

What does this mean for our question of life on other planets? It shows that God's ultimate eschatological plan is earth-centered. In the end, God, the Lord of the Universe lives on earth. Does this mean that intelligent races on other planets will come up to planet earth to worship God just as the Gentiles come up to Jerusalem to worship Israel's God? Again, the simpler solution is to reject the notion that there is life on other planets. It could be that the entire universe in the days of God's coming forever kingdom will be simply the playground of His earthly servants.

Does It Matter for the Work of the Church?

Intelligent life does not exist on other planets. The uniqueness of man, the fact that Adam's sin cursed the entire universe, the fact that the earth is the teleological center of the universe, and God's choice of earth as His final home provide compelling biblical and theological evidence that the world of Star Trek will remain a fantasy. Some might protest that the argumentation allows too much reasoning from silence. However, one must be careful here because we are not dealing with singular data items but holistic worldviews. If we believe in the sufficiency of Scripture, we can be assured that the portrait God Himself has painted of His universe corresponds to reality. The temptation of the Church in modern times is to let current trends of alleged scientific thought bend its thinking too far. The challenge to the Church is for it to maintain its commitment to the sacred book in spite of what Mr. Spock says.



¹⁹ See Paul M. Steidl, *The Earth, the Stars, and the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 230-32.