

Life on Other Planets and Our Future Place in the Universe –A Christian Perspective

Derek Rabbers

Star Trek

As a young boy, one of my favorite television shows was *Star Trek*. I wasted away many hours in front of the television wondering in amazement at what the future could be like. One of the cornerstones of the stories of that science fiction series was the presence of alien species working together for the good of all under the banner of the United Federation of Planets. Through the grand technology of that time and the sharing of knowledge between alien cultures, humanity had almost eliminated violence, war, sickness, and even greed. However, as I grew older I started to realize *that there was an irreconcilable difference between the philosophy of Star Trek and the reality that is laid out for us in God's Word in terms of an evolving humanity and in the chances of finding life elsewhere in the universe.*

Star Trek is based on the idea that humans are continuing to evolve, not just biologically but morally and ethically as well. In several scenes from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* the main character, Captain Picard, claims that the human race has evolved beyond our more violent tendencies and beyond the need to acquire wealth. In other episodes, we see alien species who have evolved rapidly, developing fantastic powers or even evolving beyond the point of needing a body. One recurring character, an omnipotent entity known as Q, says that he has seen how far humanity will develop in the future and that humanity will even surpass the power of Q.¹

¹ “*The Next Generation Transcripts - Hide and Q.*” Chakoteya.net. <http://www.chakoteya.net/NextGen/111.htm> (accessed Aug 28, 2017)

The Truth About Humanity

The Bible paints a very different picture of humanity. One instance from Matthew gives us an idea of how humanity will get worse, not better, as we approach judgment day. God reveals in Scripture,

You are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, because these things must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these events are the beginning of birth pains. (Matthew 24:6-8)

Sin is a constant in the universe. With sin there is no hope for any type of earthly utopia in the future. No matter how technologically advanced we become, sin will always be there to stain our accomplishments.

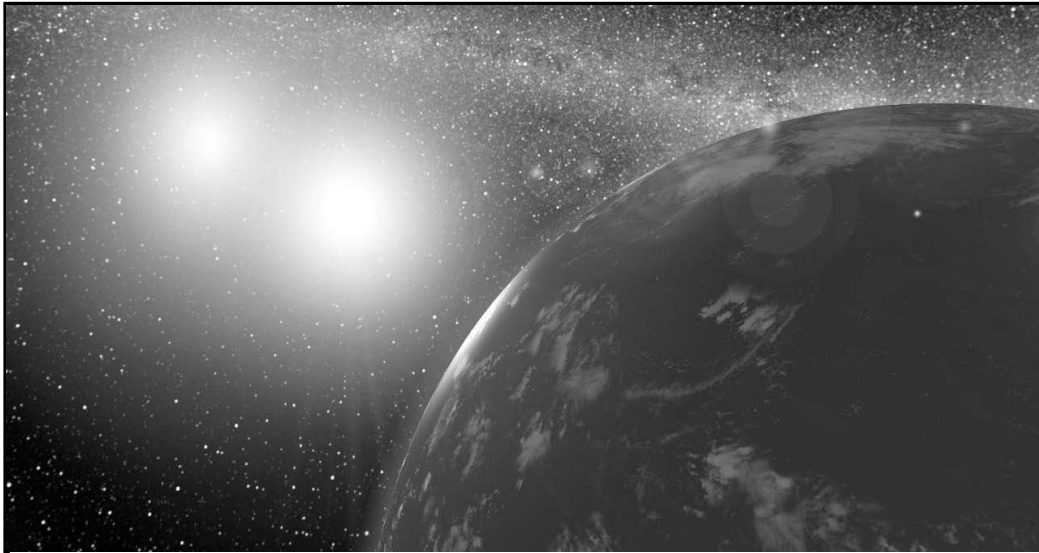
Today we focus on the question:

“Is there life on worlds other than Earth?”

Genesis chapter one clearly states that God created Earth in six days along with all the living things that reside here. We also know that God created the rest of the universe – a universe that appears to be immense. Astrophysicists estimate the size of the universe to be 92 billion light years in diameter². Inside our galaxy, astronomers, using telescopes and specialized techniques, have been able to find thousands of planets.³

² This estimate is based on the assumption that evolution is true. Based on indirect measurements and assumptions, astronomers estimate that the farthest stars we observe are 13.8 billion light years from the earth. That estimate may indeed be correct and is not contrary to Biblical creation and a young universe. What is against Scripture is that they assume it took 13.8 billion years for this light to travel from the star to the earth. It is further assumed that the stars have moved farther away from earth during that time, resulting in an observable universe 92 billion light years in diameter. Some scientists think the universe is infinite in size. Nola Taylor Redd, *How Big is the Universe?*, SPACE.com, <http://www.space.com/24073-how-big-is-the-universe.html> (accessed Aug 28, 2017)

³ “NASA Exoplanet Archive.” <http://exoplanetarchive.ipac.caltech.edu/> (accessed Aug 28, 2017)



NASA Imagines a Habitable Planet Orbiting Kepler-35A, B

[credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech]

NASA writes (April 12, 2017),

This artist's concept shows a hypothetical planet covered in water around the binary star system of Kepler-35A and B.

<https://photojournal.jpl.nasa.gov/catalog/PIA21470>

Astronomers claim that some of those planets may be able to support life based on size (mass, radius) and orbital characteristics (stellar flux). Even so, planets with size and stellar flux values similar to earth do not necessarily mean that they are habitable. Habitability depends upon other factors such as surface and atmospheric composition, which are unknowns.⁴ Early in 2016, it was discovered that there may be a planet in the habitable zone of Proxima Centauri, which lies just 4.24 light years away.⁵ One might think, with so many potentials, there must be life on at least a small percentage of them.

4 *The Habitable Exoplanets Catalog*, Planetary Habitability Laboratory @ UPR Arcibo. <http://phl.upr.edu/projects/habitable-exoplanets-catalog> (accessed Aug 28, 2017)

5 Nadia Drake, *New Planet Found Orbiting Proxima Centauri*. National Geographic, Aug 24, 2016. <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/08/earth-mass-planet-proxima-centauri-habitable-space-science/> (accessed Aug 28, 2017)

As Christians, we know that life can only arise from God himself. Those who reject God as the source of life propose abiogenesis - life spontaneously arising from non-living chemicals. Evolutionists have put vast efforts into showing how non-living chemicals might self-assemble into life, such as the 1953 Miller-Urey experiment and so many since then. While these experiments have been heralded as practically making life in a test tube, they have actually made almost no progress at all. So little progress has been made, that world renowned evolutionist Paul Davies⁶ recently wrote in *Scientific American*,⁷

We do not know the process that transformed a mishmash of chemicals into a living cell, with all its staggering complexity. ... We are almost as much in the dark today about the pathway from nonlife to life as Charles Darwin was when he wrote, “It is mere rubbish thinking at present of the origin of life; one might as well think of the origin of matter.”⁸

God made the heavenly bodies in the universe to display his wisdom and power⁹, to give light to the earth and to serve as a chronometer.¹⁰

6 Paul Davies, theoretical physicist, cosmologist, astrobiologist, best-selling author, and winner of many prestigious science awards. <http://cosmos.asu.edu/> (accessed Aug 28, 2017)

7 For a commentary on this quote see: Mark Bergemann, “We Do Not Know,” *LSI Journal* 31, no. 1 (2017): 23-24. www.LutheranScience.org/2017winter (accessed Aug 28, 2017)

8 Paul Davies, “Many Planets Not Much Life –We Still Have No Idea How Easy It Is for Life To Arise-and It May Be Incredibly Difficult,” in *Forum –Commentary on Science in the News From the Experts*, *Scientific American*, September 2016, 8.

9 Romans 1:20 “For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse.”

10 Genesis 1:14-18 “Then God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night. They will serve as signs for festivals and for days and years. They will be lights in the expanse of the sky to provide light on the earth.” And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to have dominion over the day and the lesser light to have dominion over the night—as well as the stars. God placed them in the expanse of the sky to provide light on the earth, to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light

Since only God can create life, and if there is life on other planets, we must assume that God was the one who put it there.

In the future, if spaceflight between planets becomes regular, we may see colonies forming on the Moon, Mars, and other planets and moons in the same way colonies formed in America in the 16th and 17th centuries. Finding water and simple life on these heavenly bodies would certainly help in any endeavor to live on those worlds. Since the Bible does not forbid travel to nor colonizing other planets, we certainly have the Christian freedom to explore his creation further and gain a better understanding of it. From this perspective, it might be understandable for God to have created life (such as algae or bacteria) on other worlds when he created the universe, although the Bible is silent on this matter.

I would have no trouble and no conflict of conscience if scientists discovered bacteria or small animals and plants on other planets someday. As was mentioned earlier, our universe is vast and the amount of complexity and beauty it contains is breathtaking. God has blessed us with minds that are able to not only appreciate this beauty but also explore and study it.

The struggle would be if we found intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. With such a discovery, a number of theological questions arise. Do they also have souls? Do they know about Jesus? We know that, as a result of humanity's fall into sin, all creation (the entire universe) has been affected.¹¹

We see in the account of the creation that God took special care to create Adam and Eve. They were special creations. He formed Adam from the dust of the earth and breathed life into him. God also took special care to create Eve from the rib of Adam to create the perfect partner for

from darkness. And God saw that it was good.”

11 Romans 8:19-22 “For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God’s sons to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to futility—not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it—in the hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of God’s children. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now.”

Adam.

God created humanity “in his image,” that is with “a special knowledge, knowing God to be the source of every blessing” (Colossians 3:10) as well as “an absence of sinfulness” (Ephesians 4:24).¹² He set man to be above all other animals and organisms on earth saying, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth” (Genesis 1:28). God blessed man with a level of intelligence and self-awareness that no other organism on earth possessed. Humans were created by God to be with him and worship him in a perfect world.

Conclusion

The question people sometimes ask is, “Are we alone?” With a question like this, my reason would like to say that if God had created other intelligent life elsewhere in the universe, he would have mentioned it in the Bible.

Nevertheless, by faith, I say with the writer to the Hebrews, “By faith we understand that the universe was created by God’s command, so that what is seen has been made from things that are not visible” (Hebrews 11:3). By faith, I am content with the fact that God is often silent about questions that my curiosity wants answered. And, by faith,

I am persuaded that not even death or life, angels or rulers, things present or things to come, hostile powers, height or depth, or any other created thing will have the power to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord! (Romans 8:38)

Derek Rabbers teaches grade 5 and also teaches science to grades 5-8 at St. John Lutheran School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He is a graduate of Martin Luther College with a bachelors of science in education with an emphasis on physical science.

¹² John C. Jeske, *The People’s Bible –Genesis*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), 24.