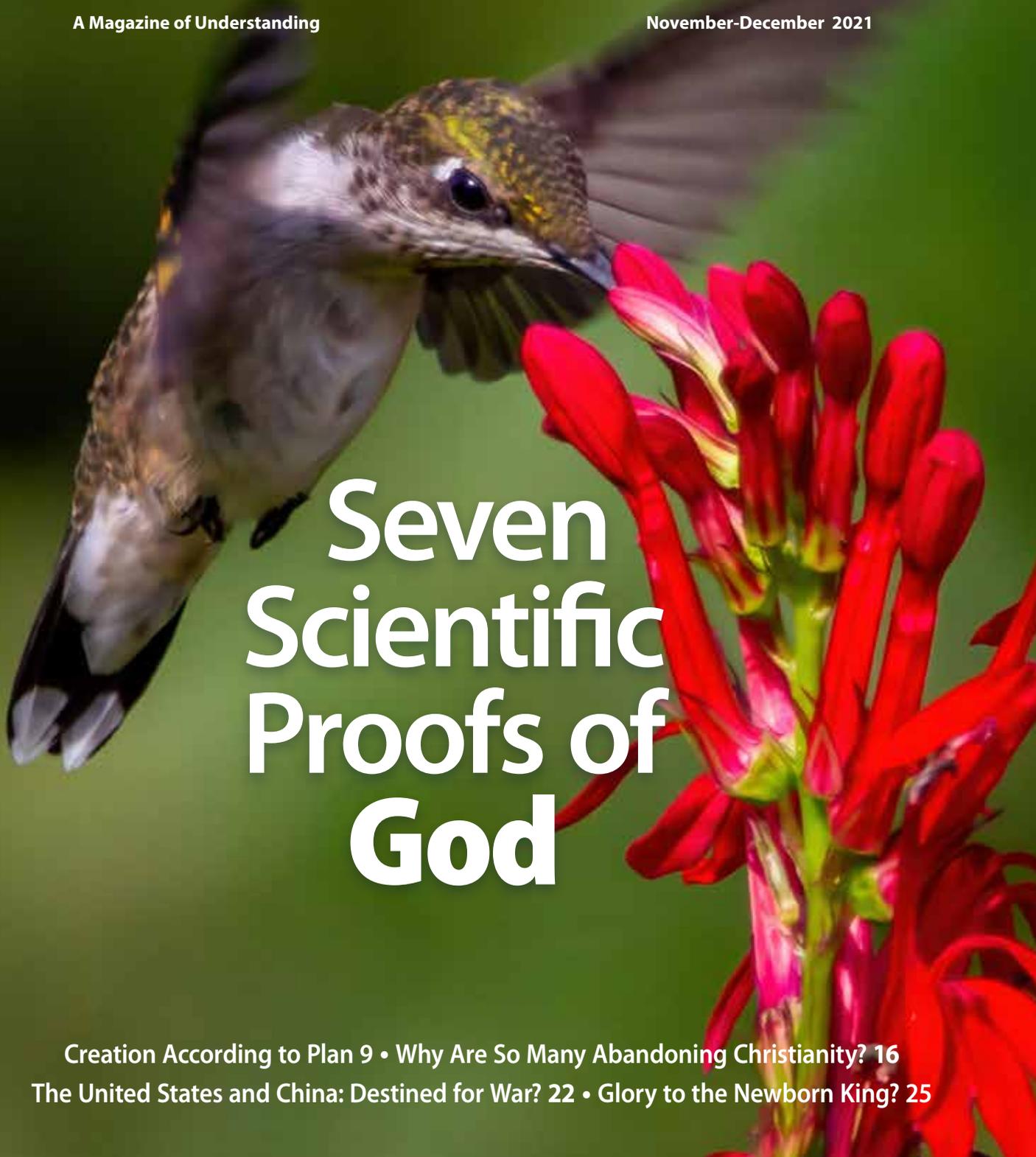


BEYOND TODAY

A Magazine of Understanding

November-December 2021

A close-up photograph of a hummingbird in flight, hovering near a vibrant red flower. The bird's wings are blurred, suggesting rapid movement. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

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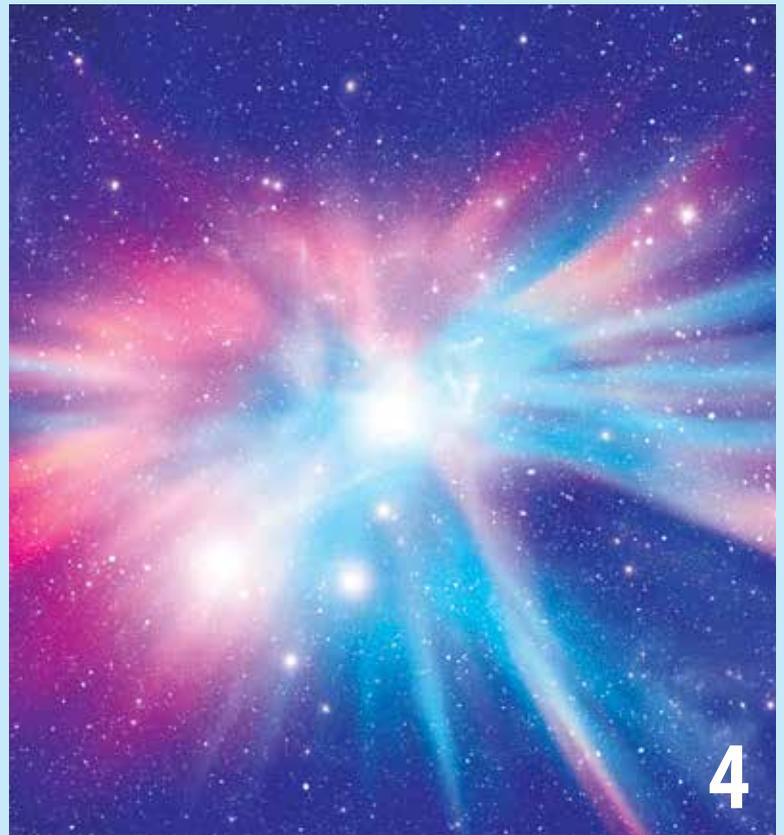
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Scott Ashley
Managing editor

Contemplating Hummingbirds

Living in Colorado, I'm blessed to share space with a great variety of bird species. Over the time I've lived here, bald eagles have nested and reared eaglets at a large lake near my home. I often hear owls on my evening walks. Seeing hawks is a near-daily occurrence. And there are a lot of songbirds that vary with the season.

But of all these, my favorites are the tiny, thumb-sized hummingbirds. One nature photographer dubbed them "flying jewels," and that's what they look like with their iridescent feathers that sparkle and change colors depending on the angle of the light. I've placed hummingbird feeders around my house, so I get to see them often and up close.

Another good description of these tiny birds would be "flying miracles," because that's exactly what they are.

Consider first their astounding flight capabilities. While most birds flap their wings up and down, hummingbirds' wings move in a figure-eight motion that enables them to hover in one place, fly backwards or rocket off in any direction in a split second. Their wings beat 50 to 80 times per second, but can reach an astounding 200 in short bursts.

They can fly at 30 to 35 miles per hour, and one species has been measured diving at *90 feet per second*. Relative to size, hummingbirds can fly faster than modern fighter jets, withstanding g-forces that would cause human beings to black out!

These amazing speeds require an equally amazing metabolism. A hummingbird's active heart rate is an astonishing *1,200 beats per minute*. To support this metabolism, hummingbirds must feed almost constantly. For a human being to function at this energy level would require eating well over 1,000 hamburgers a day. But no person could do this, because the heart beating this fast would heat the body to 725° F (385° C), causing it to literally burst into flames!

Hummingbirds commonly feed on nectar, *drinking more than their body weight daily*. Their long, needlelike beaks contain a much longer tongue that extends and retracts *15 to 20 times per second* when lapping up nectar.

And then there are some species' incredible migrations. One common North American species migrates *4,000 miles* from Mexico to Alaska each spring, then reverses

the journey in the autumn. Another common North American species migrates *over the Gulf of Mexico—a 500-mile, 18- to 22-hour nonstop trip!* More remarkable still, they migrate *alone*—even young hummingbirds that have never made the journey before!

How could such amazing creatures have somehow evolved? Evolutionists assure us they did. But how many hundreds or thousands of generations of hummingbirds would have perished trying to fly nonstop over the Gulf of Mexico (in both directions), with a few figuring it out by chance and somehow imprinting that on their young so they could make the same identical journey without ever having done so before?

And how could the hummingbird's beak have evolved to be ideally suited for drinking nectar from trumpet-shaped flowers? How would any hummingbirds have lived long enough to survive and evolve if trumpet-shaped, nectar-bearing flowers weren't around

and their beaks weren't suitable for getting any other kind of food? And how could trumpet-shaped flowers have evolved and thrived before hummingbirds evolved and were able to pollinate such flowers, enabling them to reproduce?

How could the hummingbird's astonishing flight capabilities have evolved, enabling them to hover in front of a flower and drink from the thousands of flowers they need to drink from daily to sustain their incredible metabolism? The same goes for their unique wing structure and shoulder joints unlike anything seen in other bird species.

As the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1:20 of people everywhere, "Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse" (New Living Translation).

As shown in the articles in this issue, God's eternal power and divine nature are clearly seen from what He has made. New scientific discoveries constantly confirm this.

Meanwhile, as I enjoy watching the hummingbirds perform their aerial acrobatics around my backyard, I contemplate them and the opening words of Psalms 14 and 53—"The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." **BT**



Scott Ashley



Seven Scientific Proofs of God

Is it possible to know whether God is real? Can we know for sure? Yes we can!
We only need to examine the evidence and accept what it clearly reveals.

by Mario Seiglie

In an increasingly secular society, many people today, especially those in public school or higher education, face intense pressure to reject belief in God. In most colleges and universities, especially in the Western world, a great many young men and women who start out believing in God will eventually end up denying His existence. They are not prepared for the barrage of arguments from textbooks and classes taught by atheist and agnostic teachers.

What can be done to avoid such tragic results? One key element is to *educate and equip* yourself and young people with arguments and answers to counter the

attacks against belief in God they will encounter.

What does the evidence show?

Ironically, as scientific discovery has progressed, the evidence for God's existence has actually *grown stronger* rather than weaker, although most of the media and educational institutions will not readily admit it. One exception was a recent article in *The New York Times'* opinion page, where Ross Douthat made the case that there are "important ways in which the progress of science and the experience of modernity have *strengthened the reasons to entertain the idea of God*" ("A Guide to Finding Faith,"

Aug. 14, 2021, emphasis added throughout).

He explains: “The great project of modern physics, for instance, has led to speculation about a multiverse in part because it has *repeatedly confirmed the strange fittedness* of our universe to human life. If science has discredited certain specific ideas about how God structured the natural world, it has also made the *mathematical beauty* of physical laws, as well as

complexity of even the simplest life could possibly have arisen.

“Each year brings new scientific evidence of wonder, facts for which there are essentially *no explanations without God*, no believable way around the wonder. Contrary to what you may have read, and contrary to what you may believe, science and religion are converging on wonder. The universe is a marvel to behold, and both scientists and religious

like that outcome and so added a constant to his equation that nullified the expansion. Later, he admitted it had been the biggest mathematical blunder in his life.

Then in 1929 astronomer Edwin Hubble affirmed he saw galaxies expanding outward, which meant they had been much closer together in the past. Einstein, intrigued, wanted to see the evidence for himself and in 1931 he visited the

Mt. Wilson Observatory in Los Angeles, Calif. Einstein peered through the telescope, examined the evidence and then concluded, “I

now see *the necessity* of a beginning.” This started a change in the scientific attitude toward the cosmos.

Decades after, in 1965, two U.S. scientists detected the remnants of the initial burst of energy of the creation event typically called the “Big Bang.” They both won a Nobel Prize in physics. One of them, Arno Penzias, later declared, “The best data we have [about the Big Bang] are exactly what I would have predicted had I nothing to go on but the first five books of Moses, the Psalms and the Bible as a whole” (“Clues to Universe Origin Expected,” *The New York Times*, March 12, 1978, p. 1).

With the evidence at hand, what was written in Genesis 1:1 truly shocked many scientists by its accuracy: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Here it says the universe of matter and energy *appeared at a certain point in time* and was all created by a Supreme Creator who existed before all of this happened. It was a huge proof of God’s existence, with no real alternative explanations for a universe that, according to modern physics, *appeared out of nothing*.

2. Science has found the universe to be fine-tuned for life.

Almost 50 years ago, in 1973, cosmologist Brandon Carter found that

“Each year brings new scientific evidence of wonder, facts for which there are essentially no explanations without God, no believable way around the wonder.”

their *seeming calibration* for the emergence of life, *much clearer* to us than they were to people 500 years ago.”

Intelligent Design pioneer Dr. Stephen Meyer, discussed elsewhere in this issue, adds: “The major developments in science in the past five decades have been running in a *strongly theistic direction*. Science, done right, *points toward God*” (quoted by Lee Strobel, *The Case for a Creator*, 2004, p. 77).

It’s vital to have faith in God’s existence (Hebrews 11:6). Yet this is not a blind faith, but one that’s based on clear evidence in creation all around us (Romans 1:20).

Scientists might be reluctant to admit it, but they are finding it harder to deny the overall picture of a carefully designed and purposeful universe.

Douglas Ell, an MIT graduate in math and physics who also holds a law degree, was previously a longtime skeptic about God. Yet no longer. He explains in his 2014 book *Counting to God: A Personal Journey Through Science to Belief* why he now accepts the existence of God: “Modern science has revealed a universe of absolute wonder. Wonder in the sense of awe, astonishment, surprise, and admiration. Wonder in what caused our universe to come into being; wonder in why our universe is designed just right for life, wonder in how the incredible

believers are in awe of its magnificent design” (pp. 13-14).

Ell published a newer book in 2020 titled *Proofs of God: A Conversation Between Reason and Doubt*. Though written for teens and young adults, its clear and compelling case for a Creator is highly recommended to all.

The evidence for intelligent creation continues to mount. Here we’ll look at seven scientific findings that prove the existence of God.

1. Science has discovered ample evidence that the universe had a beginning.



The scientific consensus 100 years ago was that the universe was eternal. This idea began to unravel with the implications of Albert Einstein’s Theory of Relativity back in 1916, where his equations pointed to an expanding universe. Yet he didn’t

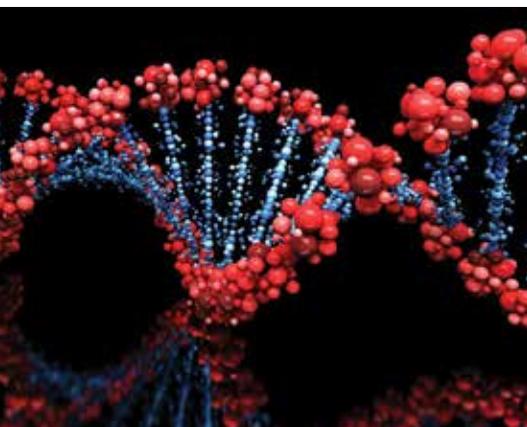


the independent constants or laws in physics have one highly unusual characteristic in common—they are precisely the values needed to establish and sustain a universe capable of producing life. This is another enormous and virtually uncontested proof for a universe that has been carefully designed.

Scientists have found some 30 constants or laws of physics that govern the universe. All are unrelated to each other and yet are finely tuned to incredible proportions to make life possible. The evidence points to “Someone” spending a lot of time tuning all of these laws so they would work in unison.

Remarkably, the Bible revealed this truth long before any scientist discovered these facts. As Jeremiah 33:25 states, “But I, the LORD, have a covenant with day and night, and I have made the laws that control earth and sky” (Good News Translation).

3. Scientists can’t explain the origin of life and its genetic code apart from an Originator.



Contrary to what many have been led to believe, scientists have no realistic explanation for how life arose.

Even the famous atheist and evolutionist Richard Dawkins admitted regarding the appearance of life, “Nobody knows how it happened” (*Climbing Mount Improbable*, 1996, p. 282). Furthermore, one of the discoverers of the DNA code, the atheist Francis Crick, concluded, “An honest man, armed with all the knowledge available to us now, could only state that in some sense, *the origin of life* appears at the moment to be almost a miracle, so many are the conditions which would have had to have been satisfied to get it going” (*Life Itself: Its Origin and Nature*, 1981, p. 88).

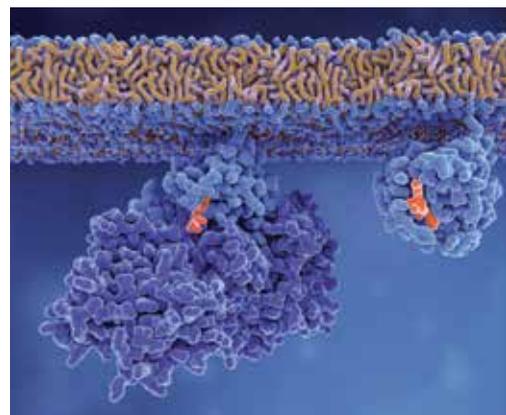
In the last 60 years, biologists have found that life began with an enormous amount of precise information

From the most primitive cells to human beings, all have the same basic operating system of mind-boggling complexity.

already embedded in the cell. The human genome alone is a molecule with approximately 3 billion genetic letters, all precisely ordered to give instructions to the cell. Moreover, scientists have never found inorganic matter to create a coded system of information and the machinery to interpret it. From the most primitive cells to human beings, all have the same basic operating system of mind-boggling complexity, with codes, transmitters and receivers all working together.

In addition, the origin of life puzzle has a “chicken-and-egg question”—which came first, the chicken or the egg? In this case, to get life to occur, you need *both* the complete genetic code and the proteins—the machine parts—that read the code and build new proteins. Without the code, you can’t build proteins. And without proteins, you can’t process the code. So how could both have arisen at the same time?

4. Science has proven that biological life runs by millions of exquisitely programmed “robotic machines.”



To understand what is happening inside a cell, a good illustration is picturing a large city teeming with life and movement.

Biochemist Michael Denton describes the cell this way: “To grasp the reality of life as it has been revealed by molecular biology, we must magnify a cell a billion times until it is twenty kilometers in diameter and resembles a giant airship large enough to cover a great city like London or New York. What we would then see would be an object of unparalleled complexity and adaptive design . . .

“We would see around us, in every direction we looked, all sorts of robot-like machines. We would notice that the simplest of the functional components of the cell, the protein molecules, were astonishingly complex pieces of molecular machinery, each one consisting of about three thousand atoms arranged in highly organized 3-D spatial conformation.

“We would wonder even more as we watched the strangely purposeful activities of these weird molecular machines, particularly when we realized that, despite all our accumulated

knowledge of physics and chemistry, the task of designing one such molecular machine—that is one single functional protein molecule—would be completely beyond our capacity at present” (*Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, 1986, p. 329).

This is why biochemists have a hard time believing and explaining that blind evolution can construct such machinery—and get all the parts to function together from the start. Additionally, to keep the human body functioning, biologists calculate that “about 330 billion cells are replaced *daily*, equivalent to about 1 percent of all our cells” (Mark Fischetti, “Our Bodies Replace Billions of Cells Every Day,” *Scientific American*, April 1, 2021).

“We take life for granted,” adds Douglas Ell, “because it is everywhere. Our planet is overrun by *biological machines*. There are at least 10 million different types (species) of machines; some estimate that tens of millions of other types (species) have not yet been discovered . . .

“Coordinated systems allow blue whales to dive thousands of feet below sea level without being crushed and sing complex songs that travel across oceans. Other systems allow bees to do a dance that tells other bees where to find the best sources of pollen. There are systems for hiding, systems for fighting, systems for reproducing, systems for getting food, systems for communicating, and so on” (*Counting to God*, p. 110).

Such discoveries show that everything about life is programmed to the last detail and that virtually nothing has been left to chance. Does this exquisite design point to evolution or to God? The answer is obvious.

5. Science has found the earliest evidence of life to be of great variety, fully formed and without transitions.

Though Darwin titled his book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, he was never



able to substantiate that assumption. Many people assume that the theory of evolution, with its countless mutations and natural selection as the means of change, can account for the origin and development of all the living things on this planet.

Yet this is sleight of hand, since evolution can account for *microevolution*, or changes *within* a species (such as dogs of varying sizes, shapes and colors), but not *macroevolution*, or changes from one kind of creature to another. Natural selection can tell you something about the *survival* of the species, but nothing about the *arrival* of the species. It certainly cannot trace the origin of the approximately 10 million species on earth. These are classified into some 33 main body types or phyla, such as sponges, worms, insects and mammals.

Darwin predicted that as more of the fossil record was uncovered, it would show types of species gradually appearing, beginning with one or a few, and then multiplying from simple to more complex life forms. He wrote, “If numerous species . . . have really *started into life at once*, the fact would be *fatal* to the theory of evolution through natural selection” (*Origin of Species*, 1859, p. 305). Yet that is precisely what has been found—major body types appearing at what’s considered the *beginning* of the fossil record rather than in deposits laid down later.

Scientists call this “the Cambrian Explosion,” referring to major types of plants and animals suddenly appearing

fully formed in that fossil layer. This is the *opposite* of what Darwin and evolutionists had claimed would be found—and they have no real explanation or answers. Of the 33 main body types, 23 of them (or 70%) appear at the recognized *beginning* stage of the fossil record.

What we are talking about here, by analogy,

would be like finding together such different inventions as a washing machine, a refrigerator, a bicycle, a car and an airplane. Although they do have some features in common, they have very distinct functions and purposes. Similarly, the major types of creatures found in the Cambrian layer, such as sponges, worms, trilobites and jawless fish, are quite diverse, complex and appear suddenly, with no evidence of these main body types evolving from other creatures.

As paleontologist Niles Eldredge admitted: “If life had evolved into the wondrous profusion of creatures little by little, then there should be some fossiliferous record of those changes . . . But no one has found any evidence of such in-between creatures . . . All of the fossil evidence to date has failed to turn up any such missing links” (George Alexander, “Alternate Theory of Evolution Considered,” *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 19, 1978).

Yes, Darwin has been let down by the fossil record!

6. Science has shown the earth to be a unique planet with so many “just right” conditions to sustain life.

In 1966, Carl Sagan hosted the famous TV documentary series *Cosmos*. He thought in order to have life you just needed two conditions—a right kind of star and a planet at the right distance. This conclusion proved to be totally off base.

Now, more than half a century later, scientists have come to the real-



ization that *more than 200 conditions* have to be “just right” for life to exist and thrive. As author Eric Metaxas explains: “Today there are more than 200 known parameters necessary for a planet to support life—*every single one of which must be perfectly met, or the whole thing falls apart.* Without a massive planet like Jupiter nearby, whose gravity will draw away asteroids, a thousand times as many would hit Earth’s surface. The odds against life in the universe are simply astonishing” (“Science Increasingly Makes the Case for God,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 25, 2014).

The Bible tells us: “The LORD is God. He made the skies and the earth. He put the earth in its place. He did not want the earth to be empty when he made it. He created it *to be lived on.* I am the LORD. There is no other God” (Isaiah 45:18, Easy-to-Read Version).

7. Science reveals the universe is precisely mathematically designed while allowing for free will.

Incredibly, the universe has been found to be mathematically designed. It follows orderly laws that can be described in mathematical terms. Sir James Jeans, one of the great astronomers of the 20th century, remarked: “From the intrinsic evidence of his creation, the Great Architect of the Universe *now begins to appear as a pure mathematician . . .* The universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine” (*The Mysterious Universe*, 1930, pp. 134, 137).

A big problem for evolutionists and atheists is this: *Evolution can’t do math*, since it is based on random variations and mutations, and math requires an intelligent agent who can first prepare a mathematical blueprint of laws before creating things so they will be orderly. This is why the present cosmos can be traced back to mathematical rules.

As Einstein noted, “The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible.” He meant that it could be understood in *mathematical* terms but that an explanation for that was beyond math.

As far back as the early 1900s, scientists were discovering the laws that govern the subatomic realm, the tiny microcosm described by quantum mechanics. It has very different rules than our macro world and appears

between life and death, success and disaster. I command you today to love the LORD your God. I command you to follow him and to obey his commands, laws, and rules. Then you will live . . .” (Deuteronomy 30:15-16, ERV).

What do we learn from this?

Science offers many proofs from our physical universe that point to the existence of God. We’ve looked here at seven. And cutting-edge science is constantly revealing more complexity and deeper design, not only in the cosmos, but also in all living things.

The biblical patriarch Job once challenged skeptics to look at the design of the creatures around them and notice they witness to a Supreme Designer and Creator. He stated: “Even birds and animals have much they could

Our Creator has an exciting purpose for all of us. The lives of all people and every preborn child are supremely and infinitely precious!

to make room for such things as free will to arise.

Many scientists came to realize that *not all is determined by matter and energy.* Experiments show that an observer can alter a particle through means of observing it. The implications are that we can determine the outcome of our lives by the choices we make.

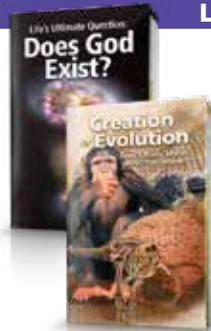
It brings to mind what God said: “Today I have given you a choice

teach you; ask the creatures of earth and sea for their wisdom. All of them know that *the LORD’s hand made them*” (Job 12:7-9, GNT).

Consequently, by examining all the evidence and realizing where it leads, we hope you will believe in God, will *keep* believing, and will earnestly seek His will for your life! BT



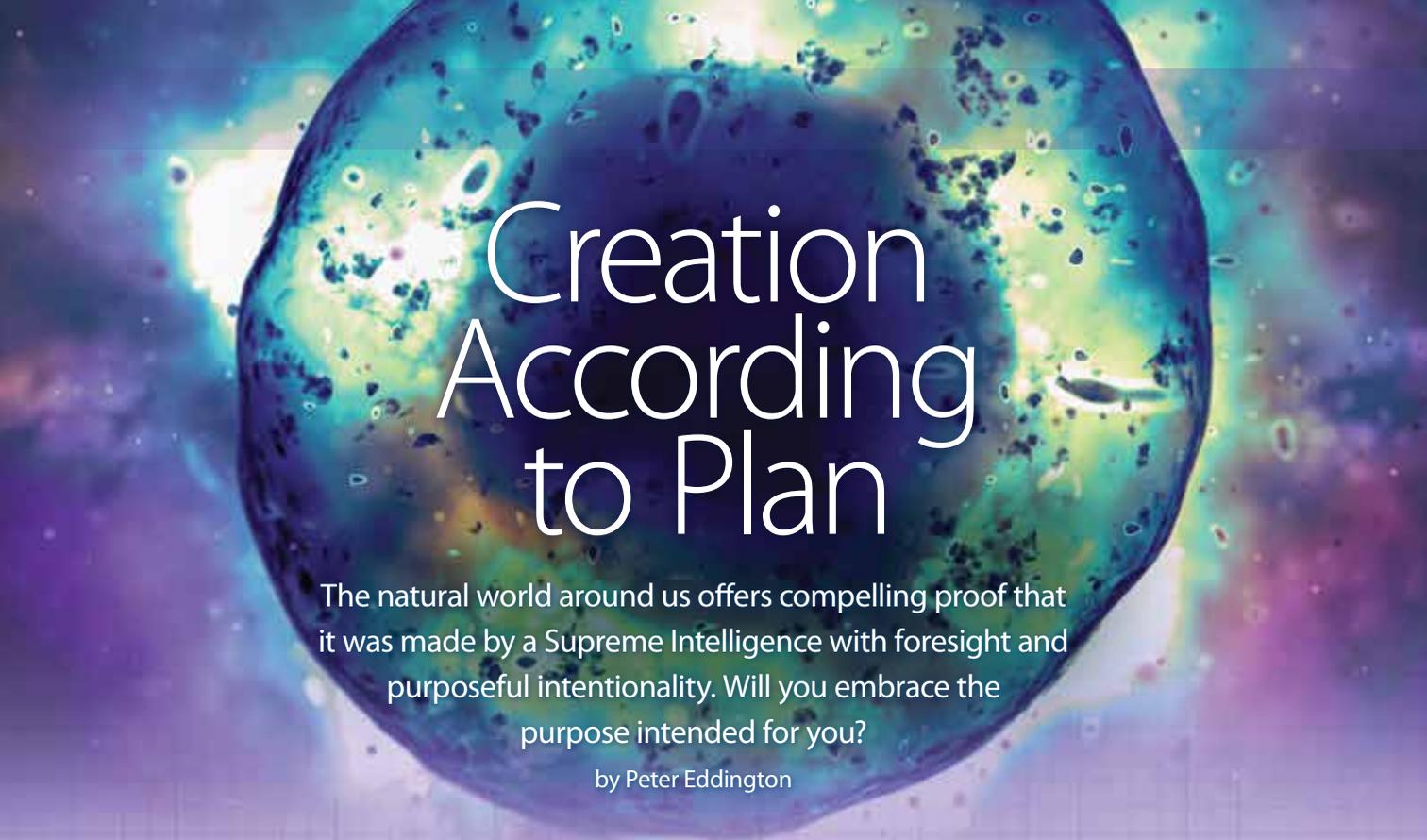
LEARN MORE



Have you really explored the evidence as to whether God exists? Or whether Darwinian evolution is likely or even possible? To learn more, you should read our eye-opening

study guides *Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?*

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Creation According to Plan

The natural world around us offers compelling proof that it was made by a Supreme Intelligence with foresight and purposeful intentionality. Will you embrace the purpose intended for you?

by Peter Eddington

Many of us are facing serious struggles. We are looking for solutions, for healing, for help. We try to make sense of our world and want to believe there is a Creator behind what exists—a great God who cares about us. But in our troubled world we can so easily lose focus, especially with so many respected academics urging us to reject this view as primitive superstition and false hope.

Those who believe in God need at times to look deeper to reaffirm our faith. And those who've been convinced *out of faith* need to see that there are valid reasons to believe—not blindly but based on evidence and sound logic.

And the evidence is everywhere. As the Bible tells us, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse” (Romans 1:20, New International Version).

How much more is that true now? More is coming forward every day to show that our universe is not random but was *purposefully designed*—the product of a Creator who planned ahead before implementing His plan. And His plan *includes you*.

Darwinism collapses as creation evidence builds

Probably the most destructive deception of modern times—which our youth in primary schools and up through prestigious universities have been brainwashed into accepting—is that of Darwinian evolution, a theory that’s become a curse on our educational systems and society. But its grip is weakening as its falsehoods are exposed.

We can see a figurative picture of the shift that’s occurring in a recent news story about a famous rock formation in the Galapagos Islands, where Charles Darwin voyaged and conducted studies of nature prior to developing His evolutionary theory. Discovery Institute reported:

“For generations, ‘Darwin’s Arch’ in the Galapagos Islands stood as an unmovable monument to the life and work of Charles Darwin. A few weeks ago, on May 17, the arch collapsed. While the loss of this landmark is sad, it’s also fitting—for Darwinism as a scientific and social theory is collapsing as well. Just look around:

“In March, Nobel Prize-winning physicist Brian Josephson declared that ‘intelligent design is valid science.’ In April, researchers writing in the journal *Current Biology* asked whether Darwin’s ‘tree of life’ [showing supposed evolutionary links] should ‘be abandoned.’

“In May, it was reported that Sheffield University has stopped hiding Darwin’s deadly social views from students. A university handbook now accurately notes that Darwin ‘believed . . . his theory of natural selection justified the view that the white race was superior to others, and used his theory of sexual selection to justify why women were clearly inferior to men’” (June 15, 2021).

As Darwinian theory faces decline, the title of a pivotal new book announces, *Return of the God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries That Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe*. In it, bestselling author Stephen C. Meyer, who holds a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in the history and philosophy of science, lays out powerful scientific evidence for the Creator of the universe and of life. No other theory or hypothesis—even belief in other gods or in religions other than what we find in Scripture—offers

a better explanation as to why we are here. (Be sure to read more about this significant work on pages 14-15 of this issue.)

The personal God of Scripture declares that He made the universe we inhabit (Genesis 1:1). The cosmos reveals His glory and handiwork (Psalm 19:1). And as we gaze out into the depths and interrelations of it all, we find a clear requirement for the existence of an all-wise and all-powerful God in the design, fine tuning and sustainability of the universe. It could not exist through blind random processes. Nor could life have developed through Darwinian evolution—not even the tiniest microbes, which are immensely complex.

Rather, it must have taken incredible planning.

The universe and life required foresight

So much of the world around us displays not only awesome ingenuity but also detailed foresight of interrelationships between various systems and the need to resolve problems that would arise. Foresight in this context is the ability to see or plan for what will happen in the future.

We see such foresight at work in human daily life today. For example, having builders install a gas range in a new home. Or saving money in an emergency fund in case you lose your job. Also, staying home or having a warm winter coat on hand when a winter cold front moves through. In human interaction, planning and foresight can eliminate the last-minute crisis of an unfinished project or an unhappy client.

God clearly built His creation with great foresight. When a builder builds a home, he thinks—*ahead of time*—of all that will be needed to make the home function and keep it functioning.

Marcos Eberlin, a member of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences, is a chemist and former professor at the Institute of Chemistry of the University of Campinas. One of his most recent books is titled *Foresight: How the Chemistry of Life Reveals Planning and Purpose* (2019). We've relayed some of its examples before (see "Foresight or Blind Evolution?" in our November-December 2019 issue).

In a Discovery Institute video interview about his book available on YouTube, titled "How the Chemistry of Life Reveals Planning and Purpose," Dr. Eberlin explains why the idea of foresight is so important in origins of life research. Quoting from the video:

"In studying life in the universe, we see solutions that solve really big problems. When we see those solutions, we wonder: Could evolution have provided those solutions?"

"As you look at the solutions and look for mechanisms that could provide those solutions, we see that foresight is so important. When we study those solutions at the molecular level, we see those solutions have to be there



The natural rock formation named "Darwin's Arch" in the Galapagos Islands, before and after its collapse in 2021.

Darwin believed that natural selection justified his view that the white race was superior to others and that sexual selection made women inferior to men.

from the very beginning" (Oct. 21, 2019, emphasis added throughout).

Yes, it's impossible that our universe could have waited for millions or billions of years for those solutions to appear. The problems demand that the solutions be there right away. The survival of life cannot wait for those solutions to gradually evolve—for gradual steps to start solving the problems.

For example, each animal cell can be thought of as a large factory with many departments such as manufacturing, packaging, shipping and accounting—each of which must be there from the beginning to support each other in order for the cell to survive.

Before the first cell existed, someone had to consider the future circumstances of the cell and anticipate that it would face some big problems demanding immediate solutions. Design foresight is critical. Only a *mind* with *rational intelligence* is able to predict the various problems and provide the means to solve them from the very first moment of life!

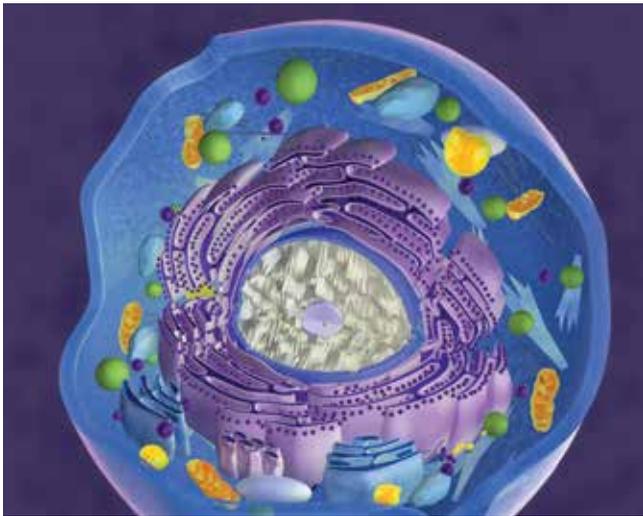
Cell membrane challenges worked out in advance

Think about what human designers and engineers do today. They put brakes on our cars, figuring that we will have to stop at some point. This is foresight. Seatbelts, in case we have an accident so we don't go flying through the windshield. This is foresight. We look ahead to the

winter months, knowing we have to have heat in our homes and do what's necessary to ensure that. Random chance—evolution—would not have foreseen the first cold winter. And so early life would have died at the first freeze without fur or a layer of blubber.

Once problems appear there is no way for a gradual evolution of solutions to solve them—and you couldn't roll back the evolutionary process to start over. Instead, a creative mind is essential for life and the universe as a whole to function. Quoting Dr. Eberlin again from the earlier-mentioned video interview:

“For example, at the simplest level of biology, we have the *membrane that encloses the cell*. Obviously, cells can't exist without membranes to enclose them. When we look at the membranes, when we start to study the way they function, we discover those simple membranes are not so simple after all . . . The molecules that make up those membranes make a barrier to the outside world. That barrier must prevent some types of molecules from



entering, but also . . . let other molecules escape . . .

“So, to let some molecules in and out, you need gates right from the very beginning of the cell membrane being formed. The cell needs gates, doors, to open and close. This is the most crucial problem for cell membranes—what is called the permeation problem—which *needs foresight to solve* before the first cell is formed!

“The membranes that evolutionists have proposed are not able to provide for those gates instantly . . . No, first, an intelligent being must look at those membranes and see the explicit need for permeation—see the need for gates—and also see the need for mechanical resistance for those gates to open and close. And all at the same time, *everything must be there from the very first time the cell membrane starts to work as a cell membrane.*”

Eberlin then goes on to explain further why a mind is required to design the cell and its isolating membrane. Foresight is needed from the very beginning. The task of

building those membranes is extraordinary. It takes a lot of mechanical engineering and complex chemistry. The right molecules have to be selected, not just randomly chosen.

Repair system in place from the beginning

And here's another piece of foresight in the design of cell membranes. Cell membranes easily tear and must have repair mechanisms built into their design *ahead of time!*

An article at Discovery Institute's EvolutionNews.org relates: “Membrane repair would have been necessary with the first cell. If by a most fantastic miracle scenario—against all probability—a protocell emerged from the primordial soup [in which life supposedly originated], it would be all over quickly *if the membrane sprang a leak . . .*

“Membranes need channels for active transport to control what goes in and out. They also need repair mechanisms if they break . . . Along with code, machinery must be present to translate the code into other machines that know what to do when a membrane breaks. Unwatched membranes are vulnerable to leaks, and they don't care.

“Without foresight and oversight, protocells would be like bubbles that pop in due time. Too bad for those hard-won living ingredients inside . . .” (“Zip It: How Cells Repair Leaking Membranes,” May 27, 2021). Again, without foresight in creation, no life would have survived!

We now see the need for foresight in the design and preservation of a *single-cell membrane*. But our bodies are made up of *30 trillion cells!* Just imagine how all these have to work together and how much planning would be needed ahead of time for all their differing functions!

Again, only a supremely intelligent mind could plan everything in advance, to have the foresight, to consider future needs to provide for facilitating interaction and solving problems.

The psalmist wisely penned about our amazing human bodies: “For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and *that my soul knows very well*” (Psalm 139:13-14). May we know it well too!

As Eberlin concludes in his interview: “When we consider foresight we see it is by far the best explanation for many solutions in life in the universe. Scientists should follow the evidence wherever it leads, and when they do, foresight is clear and is evident. We are forced to accept it as the best evidence for design in the universe.”

Evidence of intentionality in design demolishes materialism

From foresight and complex operations of living systems we can infer another clear aspect of mind—*intentionality*.

Intentionality is a philosophical term for purposeful

Salvation in Christ, Not in Science

Alongside a freeway not far from our *Beyond Today* magazine home office, a billboard declares in bright red letters, “In Science Lives Hope.” It’s a billboard for UC Health, the University of Cincinnati Medical Center.

Its website further states: “Because UC Health trains 1 out of every 3 doctors in the region, we are the teachers others look to. We are the authors of healthcare’s greatest breakthroughs. And we are always showing the world how science can win. UC Health, *In Science Lives Hope.*”

Science: good and bad

Since our world is in the middle of a pandemic that more and more are asserting was created in a science lab, such appeal to science doesn’t necessarily raise confidence. Yes, science has brought wonderful things—like air travel, cars, refrigeration and safe drinking water. But science has also become like a god to many people.

Think of some of what “science” is responsible for—nuclear bombs that could exterminate all human life, the World War II scientists who performed gruesome experiments on children to advance scientific understanding.

Then there are the scientists who want to protect us from global warming. More than one of the so-called experts would like to change the orbit of the earth to move us farther from the sun. Yeah, let’s try that!

Words without wisdom

When Job questioned the wisdom of God he was called to answer for his arrogance. The same response God gave Job could be given to many evolutionists and scientists today.

“Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: ‘Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements?

Is there hope for our future? Yes, but it’s not in science. Our hope is in God through Jesus Christ.

Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth and issued from the womb; when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band; when I fixed My limit for it, and set bars and doors; when I said, “This far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop!”” (Job 38:1-11).

I guess we could add some new thoughts today: “Where were you when I designed the cell membrane with the ability to let nutrients in and waste out and to repair itself when torn?” God is telling Job about very intentional things!

Is there hope for our future? Yes, but it’s not in science. Our hope is in God through Jesus Christ.

A better billboard

Science cannot change the heart of a person. Science has never saved a marriage. Science has never caused a criminal to repent. But God has done these things many times over.

And, most importantly: Science has never

forgiven a man of sin. The freeway billboard should rather read, and our personal slogan should be: “*In Jesus Christ Lives Hope.*”

We must never forget that God the Father “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16), and

that Jesus “Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree [in crucifixion], that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24).

In Christ is our salvation

Isaiah 40 declares: “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary . . . Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (verses 28, 31).

Maybe you are weary and faint. At times we all need to be lifted up *with wings like eagles*. And we ultimately need deep and abiding faith in our Creator to help us rise anew and press on.

We must never lose sight of our destiny as children in God’s family. We must understand just how awesome our God is—believing in what He has promised us with foresight and intentionality toward us—to always keep the larger goal of our eternal life in perspective.

By our Father in heaven and Jesus Christ have truly come all things, including our life and our salvation!

directedness of thought toward an intended object, whether other people, things, places or circumstances. It’s grounded in our mind, in our consciousness, and not in physical matter. Intentionality cannot exist in material objects.

Michael Egnor, a pediatric neurosurgeon and professor in the Department of Neurological Surgery at Stony Brook University, is an intelligent design advocate and blogger at Discovery Institute. In another Discovery video available on YouTube, this one titled “The Evidence Against Materialism,” Dr. Egnor explains several ways in which materialism—the denial of any existence beyond material reality—is not a viable theory of the origin of

life. His final point is about intentionality.

Remember that for materialists there is only the physical realm. They see even our thoughts as merely a confluence of atoms. Here are some excerpts from Dr. Egnor’s video:

“Intentionality . . . is the ability for something to be *about* something else. For example, if I’m thinking now about Washington, D.C., my thought is intentional in a sense that I am thinking about something that’s not me. I’m thinking about a city, or I’m thinking about a doorway, or thinking about my wife. So the ability for a thought to be *about* something is unique to the mind, because no physical object is *about* anything—in the *absence* of a mind. A rock sitting on a beach isn’t *about*

anything. A tree isn't *about* anything. Only a *thought* can be *about* something" (June 10, 2019).

He further points out: "You can't explain intentionality using materialistic precepts . . . You can't explain a living thing without explaining what the purpose of the parts of that living thing are. You can't explain the *heart* unless you explain that the purpose is to pump blood. You can't explain the *eye* unless you understand the purpose is to see. Where do those purposes come from? Well, those purposes are kind of like intentionality, they're kind of like a mind. And the implication is that behind the universe there's a mind, a *grand* mind, a mind that is reflected in the way the universe works."

It's like your coffee mug or tea cup. The form shows intentionality, the purpose being to hold a hot drink. Likewise, we see that the entire creation shows purpose, a goal, intentionality. What we see all around us is a reflection of a much higher mind. It's a reflection of God.

Egnor goes on to say: "Materialism in my viewpoint is not even really a philosophical perspective; it's just a mistake . . . It's like claiming that $2 + 2$ is 5 is mathematics. It's not really mathematics; it's just an error. And materialism isn't even sufficiently coherent in my view to qualify as a philosophical perspective . . .

"In biology, we need to focus on the purposes of biological structures, not just on the details of the structure itself. We need to know *why* they're doing what they're doing. And once you start looking for purposes you start looking at immaterial aspects of nature, at form. And that leads you out of materialism."

God's plans for you

Don't fall for the lies of materialist pseudoscience anymore. Embrace the evidence of a divine Creator and His testimony in Scripture. Leave your old ways and confusion behind through the mercy and help of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. (See "Salvation in Christ, Not in Science" on page 12.)

Yes, there is an infinite Mind behind the creation of the universe—a Master Designer exhibiting in His amazing handiwork intentionality, purpose and planning. *You* are part of God's incredible purpose. He has a plan for your life—and is planning still for your ultimate future with Him if you will accept it.

As God told His people long ago, so He declares to you today: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' says the Lord, 'plans for well-being and not for trouble, to give you a future and a hope'" (Jeremiah 29:11, New Life Version).

That hope is in a future beyond imagining. God's ultimate purpose, as explained in our free study guide *Why Were You Born?*, is for all of us to become His divine sons and daughters, raised from this earthly existence into His eternal glory as His divine family to share dominion with Him over all creation! BT

Who's Behind Beyond Today?



Who's behind the *Beyond Today* magazine and television program? Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide *Beyond Today* free to all who request it. Simply put, *Beyond Today* is provided by people—people from all



walks of life, from all over the world, as enabled by God.

These people have a common goal—to proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).



We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought—the wonderful good news of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all the problems

that have long plagued humankind.

Through the pages of this magazine, on the airwaves of our TV show, and in dozens of helpful study guides (also free), we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten our very survival.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of God's purpose as taught by Jesus Christ and His apostles.

The United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship. For locations and times of services in your area, contact us at the appropriate address on page 31. Visitors are always welcome.

For additional information, visit our website:

ucg.org/learnmore

THE RETURN OF the GOD Hypothesis

Three Scientific Discoveries That Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe

by Peter Eddington



The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Psalm 19:1, New International Version). Indeed, God created all things, and by His will they exist (Revelation 4:11).

Stephen Meyer, author of the best-seller *Darwin’s Doubt*, just released his latest book *Return of the God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries That Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe*.

A portion of the dustcover explains the book’s direction:

“Beginning in the late nineteenth century, many intellectuals began to insist that scientific knowledge conflicts with traditional theistic belief—that science and belief in God are ‘at war.’ Philosopher of science and director of the Center for Science and Culture at Discovery Institute Stephen C. Myers challenges this view by examining three scientific discoveries with decidedly theistic implications . . . Meyer demonstrates how discoveries in cosmology and physics coupled with those in biology help to establish the identity of the designing intelligence behind life and the universe.

“Meyer argues that theism—with its affirmation of a transcendent, intelligent, and active creator—best explains the evidence we have concerning biological and cosmological origins. Previously Meyer

refrained from attempting to answer questions about ‘who’ might have designed life. Now he provides an evidence-based answer revealing a stunning conclusion: the data support not just the existence of an intelligent designer of some kind—but the existence of a personal God.”

In his prologue, Meyer mentions his wrap-up in a 2016 debate that led him to write this book:

“I found myself briefly describing three key scientific discoveries that I thought jointly supported theistic belief—what I call ‘the return of the God hypothesis’: (1) evidence from cosmology suggesting that the material universe had a beginning; (2) evidence from physics showing that *from the beginning* the universe has been ‘finely tuned’ to allow for the possibility of life; and (3) evidence from biology establishing that *since the beginning* large amounts of new functional genetic information have arisen in our biosphere to make new forms of life possible . . .

“The three scientific discoveries . . . together point not just to a designer, but to an intelligence that religious theists have long ascribed to God . . . Perhaps, I thought, it was time to develop this case.”

Theistic belief and science have fit together well

It took several weeks to complete my reading of this major work with its compelling scientific and mathematical arguments for the existence of a personal God,

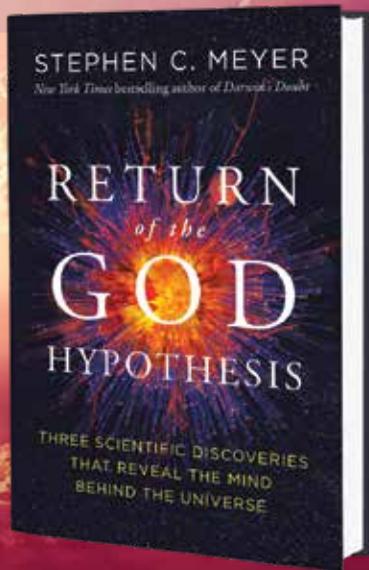
but it was time well spent.

The book is laid out in five parts.

In Part I, Meyer examines the rise and fall of theistic science, showing that at one time in our not-too-distant past, religion and science were very compatible. It wasn’t until the rise of materialism and naturalism, spurred on by Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, that science and religion were seen to be at odds. In fact, the earliest scientists were of Jewish and Christian faith and viewed the Bible and science as supporting each other. They saw the Bible encouraging scientific discovery, whereas materialism does not.

In Part II, Meyer delves further into the three discoveries mentioned above that support the God hypothesis as to why the universe exists. He points out how the light from distant galaxies and the discovery that our universe had a beginning, often explained as the Big Bang theory, point to a *cause* for this beginning—as does the curvature of space.

In addition, the fine tuning of the



fundamental constants of our universe could not be by blind chance. They require an intelligent designer.

Cosmic fine tuning merely “exquisite”?

Continuing in Part II, Meyer writes: “Physicists have determined that if the matter at the beginning of the universe had been configured even slightly differently, there would be either an extreme clumping of matter resulting in a universe in which only black holes would exist or, alternately, a highly diffuse arrangement of matter without any large-scale structures at all” (p. 147).

He goes on to discuss Oxford physicist Sir Roger Penrose mathematically determining “that getting a universe such as ours with highly ordered configurations of matter required *an exquisite degree of fine tuning*—an incredibly improbable low-entropy [i.e., low movement to disorder] set of initial conditions” (p. 149).

“The number that Penrose calculated —1 in $10^{10^{123}}$ —provides a quantitative measure of the unimaginably precise fine tuning of the initial conditions of the universe. In other words, his calculated entropy [or disordering tendency] implied that of the many possible ways the available mass and energy of the universe could have been configured at the beginning,

only a few configurations would result in a universe like ours” (p. 150).

Physicists have estimated that the whole universe contains “only” 10^{80} elementary particles (a huge number —1 followed by 80 zeroes). This is nothing next to Penrose’s number of possibilities out of which only one might yield our working universe.

As Meyers writes: “In fact, if we tried to write out this number [$10^{10^{123}}$, or 10 to the power of 10 to the 123rd] with a 1 followed by all the zeros that would be needed to represent it accurately without the use of exponents, there would be more zeros in the resulting number than there are elementary particles in the entire universe. Penrose’s calculation thus suggests an incredibly improbable arrangement of mass-energy—a degree of initial fine tuning that really is not adequately reflected by the word ‘exquisite.’ I’m not aware of a word in English that does justice to the kind of precision we are discussing” (p. 151).

Besides such powerful findings, Meyer also discusses the origin of life and the enigma of DNA and RNA—more discoveries that show the need for a designer. We can see in all this the absolute mathematical impossibility for life to have emerged through random chance. Along with that is the immense amount of immaterial *information* contained within life—distinct from the physical elements in which the information is encoded.

“Inference to the best metaphysical explanation”

Meyer then moves into Part III of his book, titled: “Inference to the Best Metaphysical Explanation.” He shows how to mathematically and scientifically assess a hypothesis—whether it be the theory of evolution or something else. He shows how scientists can rationally evaluate different worldviews as competing metaphysical hypotheses and determine which

is most likely to be true. (Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy concerned with existence, object properties, causes and possible effects.)

As you may have guessed, by the end of Part III the God hypothesis—of an active and intentional Designer and Creator—is shown through math and reason to be a more probable explanation for the origin of the universe and life than *any other competing hypothesis*. The real answer is clearly inferred from the facts.

In Part IV, Meyers addresses other attempts to explain the evidence before then affirming His conclusion in Part V.

This is a very technical book. I had to read many paragraphs two or three times to fully inculcate what Meyer is explaining. Just the bibliography and notes at the end of the book cover 115 more pages! Every claim, every formula, every scientist quoted, every chart, every graph, every diagram is carefully documented.

And it all points to the best metaphysical explanation for why we are here—the reality of a personal God, as revealed in creation. And that God is further revealed in His Word, the Bible. No other theory or hypothesis—even belief in other gods or in religions other than what we find in Scripture—is a more reasonable inference as to why we are here.

I would encourage you—if you are up for a fascinating read about the need of a personal Creator to make sense of the universe, the same God revealed in the Bible—to find a copy of Meyer’s book.

Above all, of course, make sure to turn to the ultimate source of truth—the Bible itself. Long before modern science, it announced that God made the universe, including us (Genesis 1:1, 26-27). How plain! What could be more obvious? This is the majesty we see in the heavens and in our own makeup—the handiwork of God. This is what Stephen Meyer points to as the best metaphysical explanation for why we are here! BT



Why Are So Many Abandoning Christianity?

Organized Christianity is in significant decline. Church attendance is plummeting, and many people are shedding religion altogether. Why is this happening? The underlying cause principally involves vital biblical values that have been rejected by both individuals and traditional Christianity itself.

by John LaBissoniere

Many today are forsaking traditional Christianity, continuing a trend that's been accelerating for decades in the Western world. Statistics show that each succeeding generation is becoming less religious than the previous one. As society is increasingly secularized, traditional Christianity has a significantly smaller cultural impact, and religious organizations are quickly losing social authority.

This cultural transformation and abandonment of religion is reflected in what's happening to places of worship. As *The Wall Street Journal* reported several years back, "churches are being closed by the hundreds, deconsecrated and rehabilitated as housing, offices, restaurants and the like, or just abandoned" (Daniel Dennett, "Why the Future of Religion Is Bleak," April 26, 2015).

Considering the large numbers of people who have no religious preference and those who identify as Christians but do not attend church, what consequences does this have for society? And what is the pathway to leading people out of darkness and confusion and into the light of truth and righteousness?

"Nones" becoming the new normal

According to a 2018 Pew Research Center survey of 15 Western European countries, most people identify as Christian yet few go to church. For example, out of those who say they are Christian in the United Kingdom, only 18 percent attend church on a regular basis. In Canada it's merely 13 percent. In Australia the figure stands at 17 percent, and in New Zealand just 15 percent go to church services consistently.

The least religious nations in Western Europe are the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, followed by Germany, Switzerland, Spain and Austria. In France, half

of the population is non-religious or atheist. And looking over to the Jewish state of Israel in the Middle East, it may be surprising to learn that 65 percent of its citizens consider themselves non-religious or atheist.

The number of people who claim no religious association—called "nones" in reference to selecting "none" when answering survey questions about their religious affiliation—is increasing in many countries. For example, according to Australia's ABC News, "All states and territories are at or above the 30% 'none' national figure, led by South Australia at 40% and Tasmania at 38.3%" (Gary Bouma, "Religion in Australia: What are the Implications of 'None' Being the New Normal?" June 28, 2018).

In the United Kingdom, "The avowedly non-religious now make up 48.6% of the British population" (Harriet Sherwood, "Nearly 50% Are of No Religion—but Has UK Hit 'Peak Secular'?" *The Guardian*, May 19, 2017).

While many Americans say they believe in God, increasing numbers have lost all interest in organized religion. A 2021 Gallup poll found that membership in religious organizations in the United States had further tumbled to just 47 percent (down from 50% in 2018 and 70% in 1999). This was the lowest percentage the organization reported since first asking the question more than 80 years ago.

The drop in church membership corresponds with the upsurge in "nones." Research shows that these religiously unaffiliated people make up 20 to 25 percent of U.S. adults, although some of them believe in a "higher power" or seek "spirituality," besides those who are simply agnostic or atheist.

In a 2018 Pew Research Center study, a sample of 1,300 such people gave the following responses when asked why they chose not to identify with a religion: 60 percent questioned religious teachings; 49 percent opposed positions

taken by churches on social and political issues; 41 percent disliked religious organizations; 37 percent didn't believe in God; 36 percent considered religion irrelevant; and 34 percent disliked religious leaders.

An earlier Pew study found that many religiously unaffiliated people had been raised in a religious faith before abandoning it later in adulthood. "About half of current religious 'nones' who were raised in a religion (49%) indicate that a lack of belief led them to move away from religion. This includes many respondents who mention 'science' as the reason they do not believe in religious teachings. Others reference 'common sense,' 'logic' or a 'lack of evidence' or simply say they do not believe in God" (Michael Lipka, "Why America's 'Nones' Left Religion Behind," Pew Research Center, Aug. 24, 2016).

Subjugating the Bible to scientism and personal morality

It's obvious from these facts that people increasingly reject the authority of the Bible. Many feel this is justified on the basis of science. But real science, an investigative method to arrive at truth, has been confused with scientism, which amounts to faith in the academic scientific community and its unproven ideas.

A Pew survey found: "The view that science and religion are often in conflict is particularly common among Americans who are, themselves, not very religiously observant. Some 73% of adults who seldom or never attend religious services say science and religion are often in conflict" ("Perception of Conflict Between Science and Religion," Oct. 22, 2015).

The Barna Group, a U.S.-based faith and culture research organization, conducted a study to learn why nearly 60 percent of young Christians had disconnected from church after age 15. Many responses were related to science: "Churches are out of step with the scientific world we live in' (29%) . . . [and] 'Christianity is anti-science' (25%)" ("Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church," BioLogos, June 5, 2017).

Despite the many claims that science and the Bible are at odds, this is categorically false. The genuine findings of science in recent decades have been *highly supportive* of Scripture rather than antagonistic toward it. Be sure to read the articles in this issue of *Beyond Today* magazine that highlight this critical point.

Appallingly, organized Christianity *itself* is culpable in its *own* demise, increasingly accepting evolutionary concepts and not taking the Bible for what it says—watering down or forsaking eternal truths and key moral values to fit in with society.

Many churches have long disregarded the authority of Scripture. They avoid uncomfortable talk about repenting of sin, stressing tolerance and acceptance. By not standing up against moral laxity such as abortion, extramarital sex and gay marriage, churches have become a reflection

of worldly values, losing any principled influence.

As church members realized that *less* was required of them, many decided they no longer needed the church to guide them—so they left. Such churches have proved by their works to be false, fruitless and faithless (2 Timothy 4:4). While the Church of God continues in its mission, standing firm on biblical truth and teaching it faithfully (1 Timothy 3:15; compare 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 4:2), society at large continues its push away from God.

A May 2021 study by Arizona Christian University found that a stunning 43 percent of Americans ages 18 to 36 are either atheists or apathetic towards the existence of God. In practical terms, they have taken it upon themselves to determine right and wrong. A July 2019 Pew study found that 67 percent of Canadians said it was unnecessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values.

However, the Bible informs us otherwise. As it reveals, our Creator *has already decided* what is good and evil and documented it in His commandments and other scriptural teachings. When people attempt to decide for themselves what is right and wrong, they usurp God's role.

The apostle Paul wrote of his countrymen, "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and *seeking to establish their own righteousness*, have not submitted to the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:3, emphasis added throughout). And these were people who actually believed in God. In addition, Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and *lean not on your own understanding*; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

Family: the chain for passing on morality broken

Also devastating to generational instruction in Christian faith is the disintegration of the family in the West. A 2019 survey by the American Enterprise Institute found that children raised by divorced or separated parents received less robust religious experiences during their childhood. And only 28 percent of Americans brought up in households with divorced or separated parents attended religious services.

The example of a loving, committed marriage—with God at its center and where the Sabbath and all of God's other laws are faithfully observed—is invaluable to children's spiritual development. As Malachi 2:15 states: "Didn't the LORD make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth" (New Living Translation).

The Bible gives the following crucial instruction to parents: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down,



and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

This is a duty for *both* parents. But sadly it often falls to the mother alone in broken homes with absent fathers!

A 1994 Swiss survey discovered that a father’s religious conviction was the primary factor in determining if parents’ religion will be carried on by their children. If the father is non-practicing and the mother is a steady church attendee, only 2 percent of their children will become regular worshippers and 37 percent will attend sporadically. Plus, when the children become adults, more than

By not standing up against moral laxity and sin, churches have become a reflection of worldly values, losing any principled influence.

60 percent of them will stop church attendance entirely.

It’s vital that a father fulfill his responsibility to set an example of spiritual faithfulness that his children will want to emulate. Showing and teaching them that their Creator and His way of life are extremely important must be one of his principal duties. Ephesians 6:4 encourages fathers to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”

Tragically, both fathers and mothers are neglecting or outright rejecting their duty of teaching God’s ways. Should it surprise us that young people who grow up with no biblical moorings end up looking to themselves for direction?

Self-seeking and confusion

In the largest study ever conducted about Americans’ religious involvement, researchers at San Diego State University found that millennials (born from 1981–1997, ages 24-40 in 2021) are the least religious generation of the last six decades and possibly in the nation’s history.

The study’s author explained that one of the reasons is “rising individualism in U.S. culture,” pointing out that “individualism puts the self first, which doesn’t always fit well with the commitment to the institution and other people that religion often requires” (“Millennials: The Least Religious Generation,” ScienceDaily.com, May 27, 2015).

Of course we must define individualism. If it means not going along with the crowd when the crowd is wrong, that’s good. But if it means being self-centered, that is contrary to God. As the Bible instructs: “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).

Sadly, it’s very easy for people to decide morality for themselves when so many influences and resources are only a mouse click or screen press away. A study published in *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* found that the more time people spend on the Internet, the less likely they will affiliate with a religious tradition or believe that

one religion is more acceptable than another.

While the Internet has value, God’s Word, the Bible, is priceless. Yet according to a 2020 study by the Barna Group and the American Bible Society, only 9 percent of U.S. adults read the Bible daily. Rather than spending time searching the Internet to explore religious ideas, people would benefit much more by reading and studying the actual Word of God.

There are so many wayward influencers around seeking to lead people astray. Even some who promote and use the

Bible can be part of this confusing mix. We need to know what the Bible actually says.

Also vying for our loyalties are political ideologies and systems.

Again, we must look first to God

and His Word, which tells us that the whole world has been deceived by Satan the devil (Revelation 12:9).

God’s truth is marching on

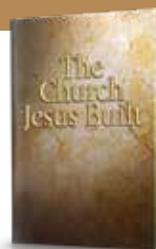
As people seek to determine for themselves what is right and try to construct an ideal humanly designed society, they are oblivious to the fact that God long ago set in motion a blueprint to establish His government on earth. Today, in a society filled with countless forms of counterfeit Christianity and quasi-religions, God’s Church faithfully proclaims the incredible message of His soon-coming Kingdom (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

God is calling people to *come out* of the evils of human society and its corrupting influence (2 Corinthians 6:17; James 4:4). They are to prepare to “reign on the earth” with Jesus Christ in His future government, when “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Revelation 5:10; 11:15, English Standard Version). At that time, a wonderful, peaceful society, devoid of religious confusion and corrupt influences, will be available for all people.

And although many people are forsaking any form of Christianity today, it’s important to understand that Jesus Christ said He would build His Church and it would prevail (Matthew 16:18).

Traditional Christianity has failed in remaining faithful to the Word of God. We hope you are coming to recognize that the United Church of God, the publisher of *Beyond Today* magazine, does preach truth grounded in the Bible! **BT**

LEARN MORE



A close look at the Bible shows that today’s forms of Christianity are very different from that of the early Church of the apostles taught by Jesus Christ. What did they believe and practice? Download or request your free copy of *The Church Jesus Built* to learn more!

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Afghanistan: Milestone on a Road to Decline

America's retreat from Afghanistan is another milestone on the long road of decline for a great power. Here is what you need to understand about why it happened.

by Darris McNeely

I remember seeing the footage of the helicopters lifting off the roof of the American embassy in Saigon in April 1975. America was leaving Vietnam after years of war, more than 50,000 dead American soldiers and a bitterly divided and demoralized America. It was a humiliating defeat that left deep scars from which the nation has not fully recovered.

Then, this August, 46 years later, came more images of American retreat. After 20 years of war in Afghanistan, America was pulling out in defeat. The scenes of Afghans hanging from an Air Force jet taking off from the Kabul airport were tragic. America left thousands of those who had helped U.S. military efforts to become sacrificial lambs at the hands of the conquering Taliban. To see two such scenes in my life is astonishing.

The scale of defeat is epochal. Bagram airbase, a multibillion-dollar, state-of-the-art military facility, was abandoned in the dark of night—along with billions of dollars' worth of sophisticated aircraft, weapons and artillery. Instantly the Taliban, the enemy of Western democracy, possessed more weaponry than most modern nations. Such a turnover of advanced weaponry to an enemy is unprecedented in military history.

It's important for readers of *Beyond Today* to understand this event in the context of a biblical worldview. America is a world empire of staggering proportions. Its being routed from Afghanistan by a medieval-minded terror group is a sign of internal spiritual sickness that, if not reversed, will

lead to America's collapse.

We do not say that collapse is imminent. But we do say we should look at what Scripture says about a nation as blessed as America has been, and there find the understanding to discern what God says about such an event. The debacle in Afghanistan is not inconsequential to America's future. We are watching history break into our timeline. It is a hugely important moment.

What happened in Afghanistan?

America entered Afghanistan in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, in which nearly 3,000 people were murdered by members of the terror group al-Qaeda operating under its leader Osama bin Laden. The goal was to force the Islamist Taliban regime there, where Bin Laden was based, to hand him over. Within months al-Qaeda was routed and the Taliban regime was broken. Yet Bin Laden escaped—to Pakistan, it was later learned, where he was eventually killed by American special forces.

In early 2002, during his State of the Union address, President George W. Bush declared military victory in Afghanistan. "In four short months, our nation has comforted the victims, begun to rebuild New York and the Pentagon, rallied a great coalition, captured, arrested, and rid the world of thousands of terrorists, destroyed Afghanistan's terrorist training camps, saved a people from starvation, and freed a country from brutal oppression," he said.

With early success, instead of

learning from the examples of other powers that had occupied Afghanistan only to later leave in ignominy, America's political elite under President Bush decided to stay. America also invaded terror-supporting Iraq, overthrew Saddam Hussein and occupied a second Muslim nation. And soon after, America's mission in both Afghanistan and Iraq was proclaimed to be establishing Western-style democracy in the region.

And so began a vast effort to spread democratic seeds in areas incapable by virtue of religion and culture of providing a stable environment for freedom to flourish. Two decades later, trillions of dollars spent and a generation of wounded and dead warriors, it has all proven to have been a fool's errand. Democracy did not take root, much less flourish.

America's ruling elite clearly did not understand Afghanistan nor its long history as "the graveyard of empires." No other world power—not the Soviet Union, Great Britain or the forces of Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C.—succeeded in changing the tribal clans of this isolated mountainous world. The error of America's ruling class was trying to transform another nation when its own spiritual state is bankrupt and in need of complete overhaul.

The case can be made that America's elite have lost confidence in their own nation's story and its reason to exist. Why is this?

Spiritual decay rapidly spreading

In past articles we have quoted



the scathing denunciations of the prophet Isaiah. Speaking to a nation that's lost its way, having forgotten its reason for existence, he said:

“Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged. Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds . . .” (Isaiah 1:4-6, English Standard Version).

This describes the moral and spiritual state of America. Like ancient Israel, America has received its portion of the wealth and material prosperity given to nations arising from promises made to the biblical patriarch Abraham (to learn more about this remarkable story, be sure to read our eye-opening study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*). And like Israel, America is shedding its core principles derived from the Bible. God, the Bible and what's been called the Judeo-Christian ethic are dwindling throughout the nation.

The cultural upheaval of recent years has exposed the fruits of decades of rejection of God. Truth based on the Bible has been exchanged for lies rooted in material creation, resulting in debased minds incapable of discerning the truth of God (Romans 1:25-28). Biblical perspective has disappeared from a generation of those who shape today's culture.

So many among the leadership class of the past several decades are alienated from the principles that formed America. They no longer understand the nature of their own country. America has been defeated by rough Pashtun tribesmen because of a pride that has blinded its leaders from understanding their own hollow character.

America lost in Afghanistan because it is morally lost as a nation.

This defeat is a symptom of deep spiritual decay. America still stands with vast physical strength but on a hollow spiritual foundation that could quickly crumble.

The Taliban know who they are as a people. They know why they fight for their homeland. They take their religion seriously, and it defines them to their core. We may ridicule them as anti-Western, anti-democratic and alien to nearly every Western value. But they look down on *us*. They do not want American culture because they see it as inferior and decadent. We fail to grasp this to our peril.

The Taliban have just done what nomadic peoples have done throughout history. They have successfully defeated more advanced cultures who have grown soft, indifferent and disdainful of their past and what built their success.

What the Germanic tribes did to Rome and the Asian hordes did to Damascus in 1400, the Taliban did to America in Afghanistan. History turns and accelerates when those who are driven by a purpose overturn those who have grown indolent through luxury and corruption.

What's behind America's decline?

American decline is much debated. Among analysts you will find mixed messaging. Some regularly discuss the country's downfall as if it has already occurred. Others see a temporary slump right now and predict the 21st century will be another “American Century”—this despite troubling cultural, economic and political trends that jeopardize America's current standing as the world's sole superpower.

Readers of *Beyond Today* know we regularly point to the Bible to understand world affairs, viewing what's happening in light of Bible



U.S. Army troops board a Chinook helicopter in the rugged mountains of Zabul province, Afghanistan, in the early years of the war.

prophecy and God's purpose for the nations. We understand that America and the English-speaking peoples currently have their “day in the sun,” but prophecy reveals a period soon ahead when a different power, called “Babylon” and “the beast,” will dominate the world (Revelation 13, 17-18). God, who determines the preappointed times and boundaries of nations (Acts 17:26), controls history.

America has been in decline in different ways for several decades. I mentioned earlier the fall of Saigon at the end of the war in Vietnam. That conflict began the killing of the soul of a generation. Not just a military defeat, it was also a moral defeat.

It occurred in the midst of the social revolution of the 1960, the effects of which are still with us. The seeds of rebellion and sexual immorality, along with cultural and societal upheaval, spawned the LGBTQ, BLM and other “woke” elements that have seized our time. Despite this moral and spiritual quagmire, America still leads the free world. Migrants crash America's borders seeking a better life. No one is migrating to Afghanistan, Iraq or Cuba.

The elite of America have been making themselves rich and richer at the expense of the middle and lower class for several decades. The entry of China into the World Trade Organization began the growth of China in the global markets, with manufacturing of basic commodities transferred there where cheap labor could produce everything from technology to goods and services to drugs. The



American military personnel carry the remains of a service member killed in a suicide bombing at the Kabul airport in the closing days of the Afghanistan War.

heartland of American manufacturing was gutted as jobs went to China—and vital supply chains for American goods became reliant on China.

Meanwhile, the political, military, business and media elite have become engorged by lucrative arrangements with China. While all this is known, few dare call it what it really is—*treason*.

Yet America has remained the world's safest economy because of the rule of law creating safe havens for wealth. No, the United States has not declined to the point of second-rate power—*not yet*. The Afghanistan debacle has dealt a blow to America's prestige that can trigger a loss of trust among the nations. It is safe to assume world capitals are figuring this calculus into their short-term geopolitical assessments. Yet the United States remains alone in its ability to patrol the sea lanes of the world to keep trade flowing. It can still project power through its naval capabilities. It is a wounded but still dangerous power should it have the will to *use* its power.

Message for today from an ancient prophet

The Afghanistan War was a folly involving four presidential administrations. It is a tragic sequel to Vietnam. The precipitous pullout damaged American prestige. While it has led to decline that will take time to measure, America is not yet at the point of collapse. It's part of a longer-term story for a great nation God has blessed with the heights of material prosperity according to the promises

made to Abraham.

Beyond Today always turns to what God said to the people who received the earlier portion of these blessings, the ancient nation of Israel, descended

from Abraham's grandson Jacob. The prophet Amos offers insight through the message he took to Israel in the middle of the eighth century B.C.

Israel was prospering among the nations. Trade with others was making the merchants and craftsmen wealthy. People could invest in luxury goods. The ivory beds on which they slept were symbols of extravagance. They were well fed and well entertained.

But there was a large gap in the cycle of wealth. It came at the expense of the middle class and the poor. The social inequity drew God's attention, and he directed Amos to point this out: "The people of Israel have sinned again and again, and I will not let them go unpunished! They sell honorable people for silver and poor people for a pair of sandals. They trample helpless people in the dust and shove the oppressed out of the way" (Amos 2:6-7, New Living Translation). Income inequity was a problem. The rich got richer and the poor got poorer. The elite did not seem to care.

The heart of the problem was corruption. As God said through the prophet: "For I know the vast number of your sins and the depth of your rebellions. You oppress good people by taking bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts" (Amos 5:12, NLT). Corruption among leaders at all levels robbed the poor, making them even more destitute. Amos was not inciting class warfare. He was pointing out reality. We see the same today. Bad policies. Disappearing opportunities. Inflationary spending.

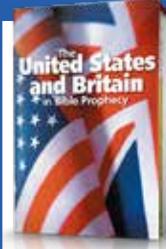
These rob people of wealth. Pushing social programs whose foundations are counter to the law of God is nothing short of sin.

Amos called this out in his years as a prophet in Israel. But things evidently went on as normal, and his pronouncements do not seem to have changed many minds. After speaking to false religion and other societal ills, he ends with a promise of a better time and a hope for a better future.

After suffering the devastating consequences of their actions, Israel would return to the land. They would make gardens and eat fruit from them. They would be planted in their land and no longer pulled up (Amos 9:14-15).

Amos seems to have done his job and then returned to his home as a breeder of sheep. Israel went on with business as usual. They soon forgot Amos and his message. It took many more years for the prophecies of calamity and ultimate decline to come on Israel. *But it did come*.

Our takeaway? *Now* is the time to listen. Now, while we still have security and prosperity, is a time for us to heed God's call to repentance. We are watching history break into our timeline. Events foretold in Bible prophecy are speeding up. Now is the time to awaken and understand the momentous times we're in. It is a time to grieve for the affliction of our people. Pray that God will grant you repentance leading to life. Heed the message of Amos and all the prophets. *It is time to awake.* BT



LEARN MORE

Centuries ago the biblical prophets foretold what would happen to the United States and major English-speaking nations. But you need to recognize their biblical identities to understand what will happen! To learn more, download or request your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

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The United States and China: Destined for War?



As the leaders of the two mightiest global economic and military powers warily eye and threaten each other, what are the prospects for deadly global conflict? Will that awaken Europe and Russia?

by Victor Kubik

Taiwan is under increasing pressure from communist China, especially in light of the United States' sudden and disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan—widely seen around the world as a shameful betrayal of longtime allies.

The small island nation could easily become a flashpoint leading to war. In recent weeks China has increasingly harrassed and threatened Taiwan, repeatedly flying dozens of bombers and fighter jets near and into Taiwan's airspace and practicing amphibious landing drills near the island.

On Oct. 9, 2021, Chinese President Xi Jinping clearly stated his intention to bring Taiwan under Beijing's control. "People should not underestimate the Chinese people's determination to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity. The task of complete reunification of China must be achieved, and it will definitely be achieved," he said.

He also issued a clear warning to any nations—especially the United States—that might help Taiwan fight off Chinese aggression. "The Taiwan issue is entirely China's internal affair, and no external interference can be condoned," he warned.

This echoed an earlier message from

the Beijing-based Chinese Communist Party mouthpiece *Global Times* shortly after America's Afghanistan debacle: "From what happened in Afghanistan, they [the Taiwanese] should perceive that once a war breaks out in the Straits [of Taiwan], the island's defense will collapse in hours and the US military won't come to help. As a result, the DPP [Taiwan's independence-minded Democratic Progressive Party] authorities will quickly surrender . . ."

How did we get to this point?

China expert Dr. Graham Allison sums up the situation in his 2017 book *Destined for War*: "The world has never seen anything like the rapid, tectonic shift in the global balance of power created by the rise of China" (p. xvi).

On July 1, 2021, some 1.4 billion Chinese commemorated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Against a political backdrop of intense international trade war, military standoffs and allegations of broader cyberattacks on the West, Xi Jinping, who is also head of the CCP, took the opportunity to warn Western powers. Speaking to some 70,000 dignitar-

ies, business leaders, party administrators and children assembled in Beijing's Tiananmen Square—the site of a 1989 bloody massacre of students demanding democratic reform—Xi thundered that any nation that tries to "bully, oppress, or enslave us . . . shall be battered and bloodied from colliding with a great wall of steel forged by more than 1.4 billion Chinese people using flesh and blood."

No one doubted that these words were firmly directed at the White House. But what does this mean?

In barely a decade, the standard of living in China has vastly improved. China today is home to the world's largest army (2.8 million soldiers), directly reporting to President Xi. Once a backwater military, China has leaped forward to become the leader in deadly defense-evading hypersonic missiles, advanced over-the-horizon radar and other high-tech innovations.

As increasing clashes over trade, influence and territory escalate between the United States and China, so does the prospect for war.

China has made its intentions clear in how it has dealt with Hong Kong. Once part of the British Empire, Hong Kong today is Asia's leading financial center, long the bridge for interna-

tional capital entering the Chinese mainland. But in recent months it has been increasingly absorbed by mainland China and forced to surrender its citizens' freedoms and autonomy.

As noted earlier, China also has made increasingly threatening moves toward Taiwan, an island nation that the communist Chinese have long asserted is an integral part of China.

Among other strategic assets, in southern Taiwan stands a facility around which the entire world turns—the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company. Accounting for more than half of the world's semiconductor market revenue, it presents a highly tempting target for communist China. And Taiwan as a whole accounts for 60 percent of global semiconductor revenue. Whoever controls Taiwan controls the world semiconductor market, vitally important to the world's increasingly high-tech economy.

Is such a war likely? Note these sobering comments from Dr. Allison, who is also a leading analyst of U.S. national security and defense policy, with a special focus on nuclear weap-

ons and terrorism: "On the current trajectory, war between the US and China in the decades ahead is not just possible, *but much more likely than currently recognized*" (p. xvii, emphasis in original). He wrote these words long before the American debacle in Afghanistan emboldened America's enemies around the world.

Strategy leading to U.S. defeat?

What might this possible war look like? If war broke out today, the results would likely not be good for the United States, according to Christian Brose, a recognized military analyst and author of the *Wall Street Journal*-acclaimed 2020 book *The Kill Chain: Defending America in the Future of High-Tech Warfare*.

In the recent past, America has fought logistics-heavy wars, where ships, troops and equipment take multiple weeks to build up before the real conflict starts. Brose points out that Chinese military strategy and technological assets currently focus on preventing that from happening.

If war broke out, Chinese strikes

would try to neutralize American conventional forces before they could get into position. Chinese hypersonic missiles that travel 4,000 miles per hour—more than five times the speed of sound—would swarm American carriers and land-based operations in the first hours of a war.

"While these attacks were under way, America's forward bases in places like Japan and Guam would be inundated with waves of precise ballistic and cruise missiles . . . [that] would crater runways, blow up operations centers and fuel storage tanks, and render those US forward bases inoperable," writes Brose.

Again, with the present balance of forces, the outcome would likely not be good for America. Barring the deployment of nuclear weapons, America would potentially suffer significant defeat. Recent wargames show America losing the majority of the time.

How did we get to this situation?

China pivots and transforms

According to Brose, China's leaders watched intently as U.S. and allied

Taiwan: "The Most Dangerous Place in the World"

"Unifying Taiwan by force" has been a formal Chinese military policy for decades. Years ago, such a potential invasion of Taiwan by Chinese forces was widely derided as "the million-man swim," due to the inability of the People's Liberation Army and Navy to mount an invasion.

But no more. Host to the most vital and largest semiconductor fabrication plant in the world—the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC)—Taiwan holds enormous strategic and economic value. As evidenced in the Covid-19-era semiconductor shortage and its impact on the global auto and other industries, the world's economy literally depends on the availability of high-tech semiconductors. So much so that in early July 2021, Japanese Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso openly declared, "Japan and the U.S. must defend Taiwan together."

In concert with its treaty violations over the semi-independence of Hong Kong, China has escalated military intimidation, sending armed jets into Taiwanese airspace, parading destroyers and other ships in Taiwanese waters, and using cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns to undermine and weaken Taiwanese society. Its intentions seem deadly clear.

America has long been engaged in the promotion and protection of democracy in China. In 1945, following World War II, President Harry Truman sent then-popular five-star Gen. George Marshall to China to try to broker a peace between communists Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai and the

nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek. The decades-long Chinese civil war escalated, Gen. Marshall returned home, and Chiang ultimately retreated to Taiwan, then a strategic island newly recovered from Japanese rule. In June 1950, Truman sent the USS *Valley Forge*, flagship of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, and its battle group into the Taiwan Strait between the mainland and the island as an expression of Truman's new policy: America would defend Taiwan from attack.

Nearly 30 years later in January 1979, Taiwan was ousted from the United Nations and replaced by the People's Republic of China, which became a permanent member of the powerful U.N. Security Council.

What's on deck? In March 2021, U.S. Navy Adm. Philip Davidson told U.S. lawmakers he believes China will attempt a takeover of Taiwan by 2027, declaring, "This problem is much closer to us than most think." And the attempt may come much sooner, especially after the events in Afghanistan.

Proclaiming Taiwan as "The Most Dangerous Place on Earth" in its May 1, 2021 cover story, the British magazine *The Economist* noted that "the fall of Taiwan to China would be seen around Asia as the end of American predominance and even as 'America's Suez,' a reference to the humbling of Britain when it overreached during the Suez Crisis of 1956."

The danger if America stumbles in a Suez-like crisis? As a Hoover Institution podcast said, "There's not another United States waiting in the wings."

forces built up their forces before rolling over Saddam Hussein's state-of-the-art Cold War military forces in the first Gulf War. The Chinese observers decided they could not let this happen to them.

Between 2010 and 2020, Chinese military spending increased 900 percent. What they couldn't build, the Chinese bought, including high-tech, power-projecting aircraft carriers. How were they able to do this?

Following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States stood unrivaled as the world's sole superpower. China, its economy and influence on the world held down by more than a billion people eking out a sparse living below the poverty level, needed America and the West.

Then, during the rule of Deng Xiaoping, the prior nation-sapping Cultural Revolution—a 10-year reign of intellectual and societal devastation—was brought to an end. China opened itself to Western markets and the pragmatic inclusion of certain democratic economic principles. The Chinese economy—under the control of a renewed Communist Party—exploded with growth.

Soon the label "Made in China" adorned goods throughout the Western world. Cheap labor and subsidized costs made Chinese products ultra-competitive. Manufacturing of all shapes and sizes quickly made its way to the People's Republic of China, where electronics—like laptops, tablets, smartphones, battery chargers and more—could be manufactured at a fraction of the cost required in Western countries.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Communist Party built itself into a domineering powerhouse ruling all of China.

Capitalists and policy makers saw new opportunities for trade and profit, complaining only when Communist policy required that intellectual property—the real value of any company or product—had to be shared in joint venture agreements.

The formerly economically weak

China even became a regular customer for U.S. government bonds and related debt. Today China owns 15 percent—about \$1.1 trillion—of the \$7 trillion in U.S. Treasury bills, notes and bonds held by foreign countries.

A new global economic leader?

The result of all this astonishing economic growth? The United States, with its \$21 trillion Gross Domestic Product (GDP), still leads the world. But China has now taken second place, with a GDP level topping \$14 trillion. That's far above third-place Japan, at around \$5 trillion.

According to the World Bank, America's slice of the global economy is 24.4 percent. China carves out 16.3 percent, followed by Japan at 5.7 and Germany at 4.4 (2020 figures).

With a pre-Covid-19 economic growth rate of an incredible 6 percent (America's was then around 2 percent), China is expected to overtake America sometime this decade.

China has also dramatically extended its political and economic influence. In 2013, President Xi launched his foreign policy centerpiece—the globe-girdling Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

BRI invests and advances Chinese influence in some 70 countries. BRI's stated objective is "to construct a unified large market and make full use of both international and domestic markets, through cultural exchange and integration, to enhance mutual understanding and trust of member nations."

BRI has built billions of dollars of critical infrastructure in Asia and Africa, including power grids, roads, railways and education facilities. Using Chinese money as a primary currency, BRI openly seeks to reduce American influence and reliance on the U.S. dollar.

Such Chinese investment creates a "debt trap" that can bind and enslave third world countries and their assets, including rare metals needed to build and power computers and other critical modern technologies.

A catalyst for a more powerful European Union?

China's global outreach has captured the attention of leaders and policymakers, including those in the European Union. All of this economic and political instability and intrigue spawns a great deal of concern.

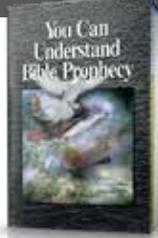
Added to this, the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union may encourage others to follow. And America's embarrassing abandonment of Afghanistan, leaving thousands of Westerners at the mercy of the Taliban, showed the world that America is an untrustworthy ally. How will the nations of the Continent react to these new realities?

Long-time readers of *Beyond Today* magazine and viewers of our sister TV/video program know that we have long drawn insight from critical biblical prophecies of the end time.

As the age of human self-rule under Satan's influence draws to a close, the Bible reveals the emergence of a European-centered consortium of 10 national powers from which will arise a new global superpower that will surpass what both China and Russia have thus far been able to achieve.

Will threats of war or fierce economic conflict between China and America or other countries prod a revamped European Union to set aside its many differences and become a true dominant global force?

In the days ahead, understanding the Bible can—and will—light the way for those who seek the truth. Keep reading *Beyond Today* for critical insight, be vigilant and watch! 



LEARN MORE

Global war is indeed on the horizon, but perhaps in ways few understand. To learn more, be sure to request or download our critically important Bible study guide *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.

BTmagazine.org/booklets

Christmas: Is It Really “Glory to the Newborn King”?

Most people assume Christmas originated as a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. But history shows that it’s far older, rooted in ancient idolatrous practices honoring other gods. So does it really honor Jesus and God the Father? How does God view observance of Christmas?

by Tom Robinson

As the year comes to an end and seasonal decorations appear on front lawns and in store windows, many choirs are already warming up to sing carols. “Hark! The herald angels sing,” they’ll declare, “glory to the newborn king.”

Truly the angels did give such honor at Jesus’ birth. But does Christmas do the same?

While a shopping frenzy ensues, from many a pulpit will come the cry to “put Christ back into Christmas,” as in earlier days. But was Jesus Christ ever really in Christmas? *U.S. News & World Report* explains that the historical record shows “the earliest Christians simply weren’t interested in celebrating the Nativity . . . They ‘viewed birthday celebrations as heathen.’ The third-century [Catholic] church father Origen had declared it a sin to even think of keeping Christ’s birthday ‘as though he were a king paraoh” (Dec. 23, 1996, p. 58).

In reality, Jesus Christ was not born

anywhere near December 25 (see our study guide offered at the end to learn more). The *U.S. News & World Report* article continues: “How the church [later] arrived at December 25 . . . is a matter of conjecture. *Most widely held is the view that the holiday was an intentional ‘Christianization’ of Saturnalia and other pagan festivals . . . in the third and fourth centuries . . . marking the winter solstice, when days began to lengthen . . . December 25—the solstice on the Julian calendar—[was the] natalis solis invicti* (‘birth of the invincible sun’), a festival honoring the sun god Mithras” (p. 59, emphasis added throughout).

Source after reputable source attests to the idolatrous origin of Christmas and its customs. For instance: “The Christmas tree is believed to have its origin in the ceremonial use of the palm tree in the worship of the Egyptian goddess Isis . . . at the winter solstice . . . In northern climates . . . the celebration of December 25

was modified by the substitution of a fir tree” (Clyde Parke, *The Lincoln Library of Essential Information*, 1959, p. 2070).

Most people aren’t too bothered by all this. But in light of the facts, we should at least ask, “How does Christmas bring *glory to the newborn King*?”

“Christmas” before Christ

Christmas today is often a joyous family occasion, but we must look at where it came from. In significant part it derived from the Roman Saturnalia, a hedonistic harvest festival dedicated to the god Saturn with exchanging gifts. Saturn was worshipped all around the Mediterranean under different names, and often with sexual immorality and horrible atrocities. The Phoenicians sacrificed their children to this god identified in the Bible as Molech and the sun god Baal, the birth of which was later declared to be Dec. 25.

While no one celebrates Christmas

in these ways today, they form the roots of the Christmas holiday. Tragically, even the ancient Israelites were swayed to adopt these heinous practices.

The winter solstice period was viewed as the birth of the sun god because it marked the time when the days began to lengthen. This was cause for great celebration, pointing toward the hope of returning life in the spring. Many degenerate idolatrous rites developed around these celebrations.

Evergreen trees, because they stayed green year-round, were often decorated and incorporated into these celebrations. The ancient Israelites adopted such practices in spite of God's stern warning against the gentile custom of cutting down trees to prop up and decorate (Jeremiah 10:2-4, King James Version). Some view this as describing carved wooden idols, but we should realize that decorated trees were also *themselves* idols, which God forbade at His altar (Deuteronomy 16:21).

Sadly, the Israelites fell into terrible idolatry, and it only got worse. Besides such decoration, the Israelites appallingly engaged in the sexually licentious rites attached to the Baal/Molech festivals, including sacrificing their children (Jeremiah 32:35).

These are the ancient origins of what would later come to be known as Christmas—depraved idolatry, decorated trees, exchanging gifts in honor of the birth of pagan gods, sexual licentiousness and even human sacrifice. No wonder God hated such practices!

And in the case of the Israelites, they actually thought they were honoring and pleasing God. Their worship was *syncretistic*—meaning they *claimed to worship God but blended pagan idolatrous practices with that worship*. Yet God is clear that *He absolutely forbids any practice originating in pagan worship* (see Deuteronomy 12:28-32; 28:9-14; 20:16-18).

If you can't beat 'em . . .

So what was the rationale for attach-

ing Christ's name to the supposed birthday of ancient gods and continuing in the same pagan customs as before?

A Reader's Digest Association publication tells us: "The early missionaries faced an uphill task. The pagans were reluctant to give up their false gods and ancient practices. So the missionaries, unable to convert them easily to an entirely new code of

Most people fail to understand what God plainly says. For many, it's about what *they* want rather than what God explicitly states.

worship, did the next best thing. *They took the pagan festivals as they were and gradually grafted the observances of the new faith onto these festivals and the rites and customs surrounding them*" (*Strange Stories, Amazing Facts*, 1976, p. 283).

Many today assume this was acceptable to God, believing that relabeling idolatrous practices to be about Christ is okay with Him. Some even argue that since God can convert a pagan *person* to Christianity, He can transform pagan *holidays* into Christian Holy Days. But that's faulty reasoning.

The fact is, the early Church of Jesus and the apostles *did not* observe Christmas. Instead, faithful Christians continued to celebrate the biblical festivals of God (listed in Leviticus 23) not only because God commanded them to do so, but also because they came to realize that they picture Jesus Christ's role in God's plan of salvation for mankind as King and Savior of all humanity (to learn more, be sure to download or request our free study guide *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*).

Christmas, in contrast, *obscures* this vision by constantly portraying Jesus as a helpless little infant "away in a manger," rather than the all-powerful, glorified divine Being He now is—blazing in infinite majesty at the right hand of the Father!

Can you imagine the early apostles attaching pagan religious customs to the worship they had learned from Jesus Christ Himself? Especially in light of what the apostle Paul told the Corinthians about not blending idolatrous gentile customs from demons with the true faith? (See 1 Corinthians 10:14-16, 19-22.)

Recall that Origen, the early Catholic church father, declared it a sin to

celebrate Christ's birthday. We find similar pronouncements from other Catholic church fathers. And even after Dec. 25 was declared Christ's birthday (in the fourth century!), "the use of evergreens was so closely associated with the garlands of pagan days that in many of the early [Catholic] church celebrations they were forbidden . . . It was therefore *not until the sixteenth century* that Christian houses were commonly decorated" (Alfred Hottes, *1001 Christmas Facts and Fancies*, 1944).

Later still, "England's Puritans inveighed against keeping the holiday *at all* and succeeded for a while in having it banned. The Puritans . . . 'were correct when they pointed out—and they pointed it out often—that *Christmas was nothing but a pagan festival covered with a Christian veneer*'" (*U.S. News & World Report*, p. 60).

Honoring God today?

Of course, some readers will be thinking at this point: "Okay, Christmas comes from paganism. So what? I'm not honoring some pagan god with any of these practices. I'm enjoying beautiful family time and honoring Jesus Christ." Let's analyze this attitude in light of some plain biblical statements and simple common sense.

Jesus Christ was the One the

Israelites knew as God in the Old Testament (compare Deuteronomy 32:4; 1 Corinthians 10:4; John 1:1-3, 14; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:1-2 and read our free study guide *Who Is God?*). He was *married* to ancient Israel by covenant (Jeremiah 3:14; 31:32). As we've seen, however, Israel was unfaithful to her Husband and "played the harlot" (see Ezekiel 23:16) by having countless "affairs" with other gods! And remember, the wayward Israelites even celebrated the winter solstice as the *birthday of the unconquered sun*—from which Christmas has arisen.

Some will claim that the command in Deuteronomy 12:28-32 to not worship Him with pagan customs was talking only about horrible practices like child sacrifice and not milder traditions such as decorations and pagan holidays. But that's just not true. For instance, not only did He tell His people not to raise up decorated trees, but He had earlier told them to get rid of *all* pagan worship sites, altars, sacred pillars, images, etc. (verses 2-3). "*You shall not worship the LORD your God with such things*" (verse 4).

Why didn't God want to be worshipped in this way? He *knows* what all the customs represent. He saw it *firsthand!* And He hates to be *reminded* of it, much less *associated* with it.

Let's look at this another way. Consider once again the Old Covenant marriage between Christ and Israel. He "put her away" or divorced her, and later died at His crucifixion. Now resurrected, Jesus is in the process of making a *New Covenant* with Israel (Jeremiah 31:31), of which the New Testament Church, the "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16), is the forerunner. This *spiritual* Israel is being cleansed of false religion and sin to once more marry Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 5:22-32; Revelation 19:6-9). Only this time, she will never again turn aside from her Husband!

With all this in mind, think what it would be like for God if His true

Church were to celebrate Christmas. Imagine that you are a kind, giving man married to a woman who's been having an on-again, off-again affair with an evil guy we'll call Nick. She has engaged in all kinds of perverted sexual experimentation with him in celebration of his birthday. After many failed attempts to change her conduct, you finally divorce her.

Years later, the wounds have begun to heal. Your wife returns and seems to be truly repentant. She begs your forgiveness and asks if the two of you can start all over. Your heart relents and you take her back. Yet no sooner have you done so than your wife says: "Honey, I know you haven't asked me to celebrate your birthday, but I'd really like to. And since I don't know when it is, I'll just pick the day myself. Ah, I know—I'll keep it on *Nick's* birthday! I'll go find all the decorations I used to put up for him. It'll be wonderful—just wait and see!"

Yes, it sounds ludicrous—it's supposed to. Yet isn't this *essentially how it is?* Of course, the woman *here* knew what the decorations and the birthdate represented in the past—just as did those religious leaders who intentionally "Christianized" the Saturnalia celebration. But today, many professing Christians *don't* know about the true origin of Christmas and its customs—at least not its more heinous aspects. This, however, cannot be used to support or excuse Christmas celebrations. For, as mentioned earlier, God *does* know where these practices came from. He remembers it all!

Elevating tradition over God's will

Yet most people fail to understand what God plainly says in His Word and assume that He gives His approval. For many, it's about what *they* want rather than what God explicitly states. And what they want is to continue with their *traditions*.

Jesus similarly described the religious leaders of His day: "And *in vain* they worship Me, teaching as doc-

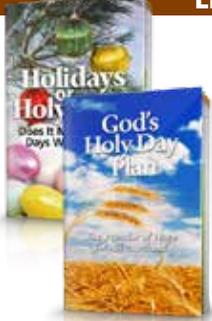
trines the commandments of men. *For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men*" (Mark 7:7-8). Most people today do not see the need to observe God's commanded festivals listed in the Bible and persist in traditions rooted in ancient idolatry. If you've been a part of this, it's not too late to change!

God *will* honor a humble and worshipful attitude—but it must be accompanied by a willingness to look into His Word and obey it (Isaiah 66:2).

Don't be misled any longer. Christ can't be "put back" into Christmas—*because He was never there to begin with!* This holiday does *not* bring glory to Jesus Christ. In fact, He abhors it because it is rooted in the repulsive worship of pagan gods. Will you ignore what you've just read from history and the Bible and insist on celebrating Dec. 25 as always?

Or will you instead humble yourself before your Creator and truly honor His wishes, cleansing yourself and your household of all traces of this pagan festival once and for all? Will you love Him and worship Him in the way He tells us to? He is waiting to see what you'll do and whether you'll follow His clear instructions on how to *truly* give glory to the King of kings! **BT**

LEARN MORE



Would you like to learn more about the origins of Christmas and other popular holidays? You'll likely be surprised at their origins as well as what the Bible says! Download or request your free copy of *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* And to learn about the Holy Days the Bible commands, be sure to read *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

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Meeting Others in Our Path

Be prepared for God to direct you on your path to encounters with others.

by Robin Webber

The best sermon is not what is preached or heard, but what is “lived out” in real time with real people before a very real God. Therein lies our most effective witness in heeding Jesus’ invitation of “Follow Me.”

Consider for a moment a miraculous event in the book of Acts when Peter and John approached the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 3:1-10). As they were about to enter, they came upon a lame man who daily sought alms from those crossing his path.

We may remember that this man was miraculously healed by the apostles, but what intrigues me is what immediately preceded that moment. Verse 4 reads, “And fixing his eyes on him with John, Peter said, ‘Look at us.’” This was in stark contrast to other people scurrying past this man as they hurried to fulfill their seemingly important religious obligations. It is Peter and John who locked eyes with this individual, offering him dignity and grabbing his attention.

From whom did Peter and John learn this method of dealing with those with whom they crossed personal paths of life? They learned from the One who offers us the same invitation of “Follow Me,” not merely by His spoken words but by practical examples of dealing with those in His path.

Practical spiritual realism

At times we can become spiritually stymied in allowing Christ’s light to shine through us in an increasingly darkened society. We might be asking, “Where do I start, and will it even make an impact?” What can we glean from the example of the One who declared, in the words of one translation, “I am the path, the truth, and the energy of life” (John 14:6, The Voice).

Let’s reflect on His invitation of “Follow Me” by considering four practical steps as to how He dealt with those crossing His path. We will discover that the choices made in those fleeting moments of encounter are what create the truly Christlike difference.

Step 1: Embrace your personal sphere of influence

Let’s be spiritually realistic as to what we are able to do. We can’t interact with the whole world at once, as much as we might desire to. Even Jesus, though He came to ultimately deliver all the people of the world through His sacrifice, didn’t meet them all at once during His fleshly existence. When traveling through the Galilean hill country, He was not overly anxious about what might be occurring over the next rise.

But He did take personal responsibility for those who were directly in His path and within His immediate reach—one person, one heart at a time, He never shied away in dealing with such people in an intimately focused manner, granting His undivided attention.

A careful study will show that most of Christ’s recorded encounters took place not in synagogues or the temple courtyard but in common venues such as village wells, weddings, dinners, meadows and on the road. But herein lies the difference between *His* example and where *we* might be: His heart and mind were always leaning forward in readiness as to who might come His way.

God has granted us a target-rich environment to give personal witness to the fact that Christ lives within us. And you don’t have to travel far. Think of it—your spouse, your children, extended family, coworkers, neighbors, classmates, fellow congregants and the unknown many who daily cross our path.

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One more note regarding spiritual realism and the challenge that lies before us: Jesus lived in a slower-paced society where humanity's speed was around three to four miles per hour. In general, walking was the way to get around and to interact with others. People didn't have smartphones to lure them into an insular existence. The pace of life and distractions were much different. But the greatest distraction of all existed then just as now—*self-absorbed and self-serving human nature*.

A vital key to remaining alert and ready is to learn to simply heed God when He says, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). It's the first and most important step in resisting self-centeredness. Strive with His guidance to spiritually pace yourself in serving Him as His witness on the ground. Ask God to develop in you a sense of anticipation that He will use you each day to make a difference in someone's life not by what you know or say, but by how your shared paths connect even for a moment. And in asking, knowingly prepare to meet your prayer request in real time with real people.

Step 2: Approach all people with a Christlike heart

Every human being is made in God's image and is His potential spiritual child. Lest we forget, what revelation we ourselves have from Him now has come only by His grace—yet there are so many who need to experience love, hope and peace of mind and heart. Matthew 9:35-38 describes what lay in Jesus' path. As He "went about all the cities and villages . . . [and] saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion [Greek *splanchnizomai*, 'to be moved as to one's inwards,' *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, "Compassion"] for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd." Does this sound like our world today?

What might we share on our pathway of life? Romans 5:5 speaks of "the love of God" which has been "poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit . . . given to us." This speaks of a love not rooted in human soil but that is the perfect outgoing affection of our Heavenly Father and Christ that is intentionally "poured out" and spread to all it touches. As developing disciples of Jesus, do we perceive ourselves as the human vessels that display, share and dispense to others this precious gift from above which was so freely given to us?

Step 3: Focus as Jesus did on those in your path

What follows next is a small yet key practical step that moves beyond our loudest arguments and can create a Christlike bond.

Scripture tells us that "God has given us the seeing eye and the hearing ear" (Proverbs 20:12). Such a blessing! But can we be honest? We don't use our eyes to full spiritual advantage due to the rush of life, our human nature and a lack of understanding that the eyes are "the lamp of

the body" (Matthew 6:22-24). They are truly the mirror of our souls and those who cross our path. They are a bridge by which relationships are forged and enhanced. And they need to be wide open to others!

Consider for a moment Jesus' interaction with Zacchaeus, the small man of Jericho who wanted to see Him arrive in town. Because the crowd blocked his way, he climbed into a tree for a clear view. Scripture tells us, "When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, make haste and come down'"—for, to paraphrase Jesus, *I'm coming over to your house tonight!*

Imagine the glistening smile in Jesus' eyes seeing this man in a tree straining to see Him, and imagine the smile of Zacchaeus over Jesus reaching out and locking eyes with him. I would suggest that, more than just eyes, they locked hearts. Is it any wonder that later Peter and John looked on the lame man lost in the crowd by the temple gate—and directed *him* to look at *them*?

Step 4: Whoever comes your way, give God the glory

This last step is perhaps the most important if we are going to truly heed Jesus' invitation of "Follow Me." What was incredible about Him was that He never took the glory for Himself but continually directed praise for His works toward God the Father. He set us an example in living by these words: "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner" (John 5:19).

Why is this so important? Because human nature left to itself wants our personalized autograph signature on all we do. "Look what I did today!" Here in stark contrast is perfect humility by One who was the Son of God yet encapsulated in human flesh. He exemplified the great understanding that praise should mainly be directed upward. His immediate response to those He actively connected with on the path of human experience echoed the words of David: "I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify your name forevermore" (Psalm 86:12).

It's time for me to stop writing and you to stop reading and for me to practice what I've written and for all of us to handle with Christlike care those we meet in our path today by God's will, giving Him all glory. **BT**



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In response to our September-October issue

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From the Internet

The Great Reset: Where Will It Lead?

Thank you for this article. It's an excellent picture of what is going on in our world behind the scenes. Those in our government see themselves as on board with a morally superior agenda and they really don't care how it will impact our nation and the people they are supposed to represent. They are already promoting all debt being forgiven—but what they don't say is that it also means all property will be held in common and dictated by those who lead this New World Order. Thankfully as you pointed out, Revelation shows it will not end there.

From the Internet

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From the Internet

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Thank you so much. I lost my fiancée and without your words, TV program and magazines, I don't know how I could've kept the strength to carry on. Thank you. God bless us all.

From the Internet

I understand the Covid issues and how they are hurting all of us. I lost

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BEYOND TODAY

November-December 2021

Volume 26, Number 6
Circulation: 327,000

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Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement Number 40026236.
Canada return address: *Beyond Today*, 2835 Kew Drive, Windsor, ON N8T 3B7.

Address changes: POSTMASTER—Send address changes to:
Beyond Today, Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027.



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What's the Real Truth About Christmas?

'Tis the season to be jolly—or is it? It may not be if you know the real truth about the holiday!

Millions of people continue the curious customs of Christmas, but few understand why they do so or what the customs and symbols are all about. After all, what does a jolly, plump man in a red suit (riding in a sleigh pulled by flying reindeer!) have to do with the birth of the Son of God?

How did Dec. 25 come to be chosen as the date of the birth of Jesus Christ when the Bible nowhere tells us the exact date—and in fact shows that He *wasn't* born in winter? Have you ever heard the real story?

And what about decorating with holly wreaths, kissing under mistletoe, burning Yule logs and setting up colorfully ornamented Christmas trees? What's the origin of these odd practices, and how did they come to be associated with the birth of the Savior of mankind? They're not found in the Bible, so who started them and why?

You need to discover the facts about this popular holiday. And most importantly, since most people celebrate it to honor God, you need to understand what *He* thinks about it!

Our eye-opening free study guide *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?* will give you the surprising (and sometimes shocking!) answers. For your free copy, visit our website or contact any of our offices listed on page 31.

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