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DID ANCIENT EXTRATERRESTRIALS VISIT EARTH?

by Robert Velarde

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In the beginning, ancient aliens visited planet Earth, significantly influenced human history, and possibly even engineered human life to evolve. Furthermore, as a result of ancient alien visitations, history is replete with clues regarding these alien astronauts.

Flying saucers and little green men may seem the stuff of 1950s B-movies, yet ideas like the ones just described are gaining momentum not only in popular culture but also in some scientific circles. In the 2012 motion picture *Prometheus*, director Ridley Scott touted the concept that aliens visited Earth and seeded human life on it.¹ The more lighthearted adventure, *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008), also gave direct nods to alien involvement on Earth, while the older film, *Stargate* (1994), made a direct connection between Egypt and ancient aliens, and the seminal film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) involved aliens in the development of human intelligence.

Besides film, the 2011 book *The Ancient Alien Question* by Philip Coppens added further speculations about ancient aliens. Such ideas have also made their way into millions of homes via the History Channel television program *Ancient Aliens*, currently in its seventh season.

Moving beyond pop culture, codiscoverer of DNA Francis Crick held to the possibility of directed panspermia—the belief that life on Earth did not come about on its own, as naturalism holds, but was instead seeded extraterrestrially. Atheist Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*, also lends credence to this perspective.² But aren't ideas about ancient extraterrestrials nothing more than supermarket tabloid fodder? Isn't it just harmless fun? This article will offer a brief look at the historical roots of the alien astronauts fascination, explore some of the purported evidence, evaluate claims that the Bible supports UFOs, and review some implications for theology.

CHARIOTS IN SPACE

The rise of modern interest in ancient astronauts rests strongly on the 1968 book *Chariots of the Gods? Unsolved Mysteries of the Past*, first published in German and penned by Swiss author Erich von Däniken one year before NASA's Apollo 11 mission landed men on the moon. Von Däniken's book became a bestseller and, in 1970, a popular

documentary film. Von Däniken followed his success with a variety of sequels including *Return to the Stars* (1970), *The Gold of the Gods* (1973), *Miracles of the Gods* (1975), *In Search of Ancient Gods* (1976), and more.

Von Däniken's basic premise is that evidence strongly points to the reality of ancient alien involvement in human history. This is found, he argues, in evidence provided by ancient artifacts and, in his view, technological achievements that would not have been possible without the assistance of far more advanced technological beings (i.e., aliens). As such, von Däniken concludes that the pyramids of Egypt and Stonehenge, for example, offer evidence of alien construction. Von Däniken also seeks to bolster his claims by pointing to artwork allegedly depicting aliens, and biblical examples.

Despite critics of von Däniken, who claimed his convoluted arguments represented faulty pseudoscience, the ideas found in *Chariots of the Gods?* its various sequels, and in the 1970 documentary, captured the imagination of people the world over. The Unidentified Flying Object craze that continued throughout the 1970s and beyond, fueled at least in part by von Däniken's influence, ultimately resulted in numerous motion pictures portraying the reality of intelligent alien life, such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), popular television programs, including *The X-Files* (1993–2002), and more recent television ventures such as the previously mentioned program *Ancient Aliens*.

THE CASE FOR ANCIENT ALIENS

The popular evidence for ancient aliens is often presented as compelling and insurmountable. Supporters point to religious writings, artifacts, artwork, and other sources, but each of their interpretations is diametrically opposed to common sense and a large body of consensus that in no way ties the evidence to aliens.

The first episode of *Ancient Aliens* is called "The Evidence," but what it offers is sheer speculation.³ One would think it would marshal its best arguments, but instead viewers are treated to the likes of an Egyptian model of a bird that is supposedly a model of a real aircraft, a gold Columbian figurine (also said to be a model of an aircraft), and Sanskrit texts that speak of Vimana (again said to be aircraft or alien spaceships). Following a truly circuitous path of reasoning, it is then argued that ancient civilizations were probably all connected via air travel, including many runways the world over.

Additional supposed scientific evidence fares no better. Directed panspermia, for example, is a completely ad hoc theory. It has no basis in empirical evidence—what modern science is supposed to value. Instead, since biology has no viable explanation for the origins of life, some suppose that aliens must somehow have seeded life on earth or otherwise jumpstarted human evolution.

Several applicable general observations arise regarding problems with evidence for ancient aliens. First, there is the error of reading into the evidence rather than drawing out from it what is actually present. Just as in biblical hermeneutics, we want to practice drawing out from the text what the author truly intended rather than

reading into it what is really not there. Instead of looking to support presuppositions, we should strive as much as possible to evaluate any evidence we encounter objectively.

Second, as Ockham's razor informs us, we shouldn't seek to multiply or expand explanations beyond what is necessary. In other words, simpler explanations are typically preferred. Consequently, when encountering evidence such as artifacts, artwork, legends, or other material, what explanation makes the best and simplest sense? Is it that ancient aliens visited our planet and helped build artifacts such as pyramids or is it that such things can be explained simply by appealing to human ingenuity alone? The simplest explanations of the evidence point to human beings, not outer space.

Third, ad hoc theories that are presented with the sole intention of supporting ancient aliens offer little in the way of evidence. Simply because proponents of biological evolution have encountered difficulties explaining the origin of life does not mean that the ad hoc theory of directed panspermia is the solution. In reality, even if accepted, this theory simply pushes the problem of the origins of life back farther into the past. After all, if alien intelligence seeded or influenced life on Earth in some way, then who or what seeded or influenced the alien life? In short, directed panspermia may explain the origins of life on Earth, albeit via unsupported speculation, but it does nothing to explain the origins of life as a whole.

Fourth, arguments that require us to admit, "Everything we know is wrong," are highly unlikely to be true. If a theory requires that we jettison all that we know about human history, including validations of architectural achievements, we shouldn't readily acquiesce to far-fetched ideas. This does not mean that we are closed-minded, but it does mean that we carefully evaluate all evidence, especially in cases where accepting an alternative theory will cause us to toss out everything we believed was true.

UFOS AND THE BIBLE

Supporters of ancient alien visitations and origins of human life sometimes also point to the Bible to add credence to their conclusions. Not only is Moses supposed to have seen UFOs on Mount Sinai but Ezekiel, we are told, undoubtedly described UFOs in Ezekiel 1. Some even argue that Jesus must have been a space alien who, ultimately, was taken up to space.⁴

Far from credible, these claims fall squarely within the bounds of what James Sire calls *worldview confusion* in reference to biblical interpretation: "*Worldview confusion occurs whenever a reader of Scripture fails to interpret the Bible within the intellectual and broadly cultural framework of the Bible itself and uses instead a foreign frame of reference*" (emphasis in original).⁵ In the case of passages such as Ezekiel 1, Sire adds, "Speculation is piled on speculation, but the evidence for it is exceptionally thin. Each passage of Scripture has to be made to mean something either *other* than it says or *more* than it says."⁶ One biblical scholar adds, "I do not believe for a minute that UFOs are in the Bible. In every case mentioned previously [including Ezekiel 1], UFOlogists are reading

their own meanings *into* the biblical text (eisegesis) rather than drawing their meanings *from* the biblical text (exegesis)...Ezekiel did not encounter a UFO but rather experienced a vision of the glory of God."⁷

As far as claims that Jesus is or was an alien are concerned, they, too, are based on wild speculation, worldview confusion, poor interpretation, and a complete disregard of the cultural context of the New Testament. The biblical evidence is clear: Jesus' origins are indeed not of this earth, but neither is He from another planet: He is the Lord from heaven, but He was in fact born as a human being, in the flesh (incarnated), in a specific location (Bethlehem). Nothing that He said or did, taken at face value within its context, is remotely related to aliens.

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND EVALUATION

If we were to play alien's advocate for a moment, granting validity to the existence of alien life, what theological implications would result? In reference to Christianity, what if intelligent alien life exists? We might wonder, for instance, whether or not we are the only fallen and depraved life in the universe and, if not, how or if the message of Christ applies beyond humanity. C. S. Lewis pondered these sorts of questions: "The eternal Son may, for all we know, have been incarnate in other worlds than earth and so saved other races than ours."⁸ This, however, seems a less than satisfying conclusion, as it appears to require God to sacrifice His Son multiple times—an event that appears singularly and definitively complete in the sacrificial atonement of Christ.

There are other options, of course. Perhaps human beings are the only sentient life in the universe; perhaps other intelligent races did not fall as the human race did. The key word here, though, is "perhaps." We simply do not have enough biblical data to address such hypotheticals. What we do know is, given God's loving and just nature, He would certainly do what is right.

Furthermore, the discovery of intelligent alien life wouldn't change the overwhelming evidence for the existence of God, the resurrection of Christ, the reliability of the Bible, or the depravity of human nature and our overarching need of radical redemption.

SPACE INVADERS: GAME OVER

One early response to von Däniken, published in 1972, is amusingly titled *Crash Go the Chariots*. The author, Dr. Clifford Wilson, interviewed a physics professor about von Däniken's ideas. The professor's comments remain astute and relevant: "[Von Däniken] takes conjectures, accepts them as fact, builds on to them way-out theories, and presents his 'many small coincidences' according to his own preconceived notions. He deliberately chooses the unconnected, weaves a semblance of connection around it, and puts his theories out as foregone conclusions...it may make exciting reading, but one dare not accept it as substantially credible."⁹ These remarks remain quite applicable to similar sorts of arguments and reasoning presented by contemporary proponents of ancient aliens. In sum, the opposing evidence results in "game over" for these modern space invaders, offering no compelling reasons to abandon existing viewpoints.

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NOTES

- 1 For an assessment of Prometheus, see Robert Velarde, "Prometheus: Finding God in Outer Space," *Christian Research Journal* 35, 6 (2012).
- 2 See, e.g., Dawkins's segment in the Intelligent Design film *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, directed by Nathan Frankowski (2008; Premise Media Corporation and Rampant Films).
- 3 *Ancient Aliens*, Season 1, Episode 1, "The Evidence," April 20, 2010.
- 4 The Aetherius Society, for example, considers Jesus to be an alien.
- 5 James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 26.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 84.
- 7 Ron Rhodes, *Alien Obsession* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998), 79–81.
- 8 C. S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), 86.
- 9 Clifford Wilson, *Crash Go the Chariots: An Alternative to Chariots of the Gods?* (New York: Lancer Books, 1972), 122.