

JERUSALEM: CENTRAL^{IN} *His* SIGHT



The
Berean
Call

JUNE 2006

COSMOS AND CREATOR

by DAVE HUNT

NEW! EXTRAORDINARY VIDEO DOCUMENTS EARTH'S REMARKABLE PLACE



THE PRIVILEGED PLANET: NEW! The Search for Purpose in the Universe

Illustra Media—There is an opinion, common among scientists and intellectuals, that our earthly existence is not only rather ordinary but, in fact, insignificant and purposeless. The late astronomer Carl Sagan typifies this view in his book, “Pale Blue Dot”:

“Because of the reflection of sunlight the Earth seems to be sitting in a beam of light, as if there were some special significance to this small world. But it’s just an accident of geometry and optics. Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we

have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.”

But perhaps this melancholy assumption, despite its heroic pretense, is mistaken. Perhaps the unprecedented scientific knowledge acquired in the last century, enabled by equally unprecedented technological achievements, should, when properly interpreted, contribute to a deeper appreciation of our place in the cosmos. This 60-minute documentary explores a striking feature of the natural world—a feature as widely grounded in the evidence of nature as it is wide-ranging in its implications: the conditions that allow for intelligent life on Earth also make it strangely well suited for viewing and analyzing the universe. The fact that our atmosphere is clear; that our moon is just the right size and distance from Earth, and that its gravity stabilizes the Earth’s rotation; that our position in our galaxy is just so; that our sun is its precise mass and composition: all of these factors (and many more) are not only necessary for Earth’s habitability; they also have been surprisingly crucial for scientists to measure and make discoveries about the universe. Mankind is unusually well positioned to decipher the cosmos. To put it more technically, “measurability” seems to correlate with habitability. But is this correlation between the existence of complex life and our ability to make scientific discoveries simply a coincidence or the result of blind chance? Or does it point to a deeper explanation?

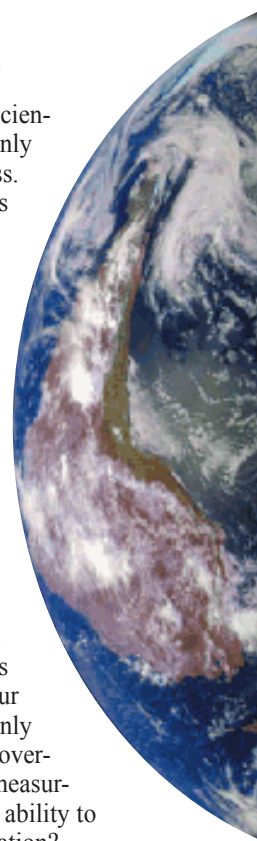
The Privileged Planet examines these questions in a remarkable search for evidence of design and purpose within the universe. Utilizing stunning computer animation and the visual archives of NASA, the Hubble Space Telescope Institute, the European Space Agency, and leading observatories throughout the world, the program will present a spectacular view of our planet, galaxy, and the entire cosmos. The result is an extraordinary documentary and a fascinating look at a timeless question: What is our significance within the grand scheme of the universe?

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"[The Bereans] . . . searched the scriptures daily, [to see] whether those things were so."—Acts 17:11

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Cosmos and Creator

Dave Hunt

President Bush has said, "We are proud of our space program....We have undertaken space travel because the desire to explore and understand is part of our character....Using the Crew Exploration Vehicle [CEV—not yet built], we will undertake extended human missions to the moon... living and working there for increasingly extended periods....[W]e will then be ready to take...human missions to Mars and to worlds beyond...we'll develop new power generation propulsion, life support, and other systems that can support more distant travels...human beings are headed into the cosmos!"

It was an inspiring speech cheered by NASA. But a little honest reflection reveals the simple truth: the vast distances in the cosmos present an impassable barrier to our grandest ambitions. The Voyager I "space probe" travels about 335 million miles per year. If it survived, it would take it about 162,000 years to reach Alpha Centauri, the nearest star system in our galaxy where there might be some planets. It would take our space craft about 1.3 billion years to reach the closest galaxy outside our Milky Way, the Sagittarius Dwarf Elliptical Galaxy, and more than three billion years to reach the next closest galaxy, the Large Magellanic Cloud Galaxy.

How could such distant dreams benefit anyone alive today? Shouldn't we admit the humbling fact that vehicular "space probes" are hopeless outside our Solar System? "Headed into the cosmos"? Bold words, but utterly ridiculous!

Well, we're sending radio messages into space, and they travel at the speed of light, 186,000 miles per second. That's fast, but not fast enough to "head into the cosmos." At that speed, it would take 100,000-150,000 years to cross our galaxy, the Milky Way, and thousands to billions of years to reach other galaxies, of which there may be a trillion. Why continue to delude ourselves?

Radio reaches Alpha Centauri in 4.3 years, so we could theoretically have a reply in less than 9 years. We've been listening for intelligent radio sounds since 1960, and nothing so far. There are only three other star systems with the possibility of a radio reply in less than 100 years, and then the distances mount rapidly: 130 years for Aldebaran

(brightest star in Taurus), 150 for Regulus (brightest star in Leo), over 500 years for Spica (brightest star in Virgo), nearly 800 years for the Pleiades, 3,000 for Orion, 12,000 for the Crab Nebula, etc. Most of the stars in the Milky Way are many thousands of years away by radio contact. In 1974, a radio message was aimed at a huge cluster of stars known as M13, but it will take 25,000 years for the message to get there and another 25,000 to receive a reply.

Do such projects represent time, effort, and money well spent? Refusing to acknowledge the Creator, who offers instantaneous access to Him, science persists in attempting to explore the impossibly vast universe it won't admit He made. Our strongest telescopes can't even show us the universe as it is today but as it was long ago when the reflected light we see began its journey toward us. What blind pride drives this madness?!

Some astrophysicists argue that gravity seems to act instantaneously throughout the universe; and therefore, if we could achieve gravitational propulsion systems, we could travel almost anywhere in the universe in a moment of time. But most space scientists (and NASA) agree that the speed of light, which has proved to be the maximum for particles in accelerators, cannot be exceeded by physical objects.

Much science fiction (even by professed Christians such as C.S. Lewis) has popularized the idea that intelligent beings similar to man populate other planets in the universe. Billy Graham, who accepts evolution as one way God may have created man, has said: "I believe there is life on other planets....I can't imagine that we're the only one [planet] that has life. That would be an...egotistic thing for us to say." As for preaching the gospel on other planets, Billy said, "I'd love to, but nobody's invited me...I don't think I could speak their language...." What *gospel* would that be?

Billions of dollars are being expended to contact intelligent life "out there" in the hope that "we are not alone." The Voyager spacecraft carried this message from President Carter, dated June 16, 1977: "Of the 200 billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy, some...may have inhabited planets and space faring civilizations. If one such civilization intercepts Voyager...here is our message: We...hope some day...to join a community of Galactic Civilizations. This [is] our determination...in a vast and awesome universe."

That is absurd according to the Bible, yet the scientific and academic community—and many Christians—take it very seriously.

Carter claims to be a Christian. Yet the hope he holds out for earthlings is to "join a community of Galactic Civilizations"? That's hardly what Jesus meant by His Father's house of "many mansions" (Jn 14:2,3)! Carter's "hope [and] determination" caused me to title a book, *Whatever Happened To Heaven?*

Evolutionists reason that if life could happen by chance on earth, it could have happened on millions and perhaps billions of other planets—and the challenge is to find it. But life could never happen by chance. This fact is backed by overwhelming scientific proof, although most scientists ignore it in their desire to escape accountability to the Creator.

This scientific evidence demands an inescapable conclusion: the earth is uniquely fitted for life, and the universe is designed to sustain it. During the first-ever manned orbiting of the moon, William Anders announced, "For all the people on Earth the crew of Apollo 8 has a message we would like to send you... 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth....'" Anders, followed by Jim Lovell and Frank Borman, broadcast back to earth the first ten verses of Genesis (though Anders inadvertently skipped verse 3).

After their return to earth, a reporter asked Borman whether he had seen God out there. He replied, "No...but I saw His evidence." Wernher von Braun, German World War II rocket scientist, who became the father of America's space program and first director of NASA, put it like this: "One cannot be exposed to the law and order of the universe without concluding that there must be design and purpose behind it all." In a letter to the California State Board of Education (9/14/72), von Braun wrote:

My experiences with science led me to God....Prove the existence of God...? Must we really light a candle to see the sun...? The better we understand the intricacies of the universe...the more [we] marvel at the inherent design upon which it is based.

While the admission of a design...ultimately raises the question of a Designer (a subject outside of science), the scientific method does not allow us to exclude data which lead to the conclusion that the universe, life and man are based on design.

To be forced to believe only one conclusion—that everything in the universe

happened by chance—would violate the very objectivity of science itself.

It is in...scientific honesty that I endorse the presentation of alternative theories for the origin of the universe, life and man in the science classroom.

God created Adam and Eve to populate the earth (Gn 1:28). When they rebelled and had to be expelled from the Garden, God didn't moan, "They let me down. I'll try again on another planet." God knew that Adam and Eve would sin—and He knew how He would redeem mankind. Christ is called the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rv 13:8). As von Braun said, "God deliberately reduced Himself to the stature of humanity in order to visit earth in person, because the cumulative effect over the centuries of millions of individuals choosing to please themselves rather than God had infected the whole planet."

Any intelligent, morally responsible beings with the power of choice would inevitably sin. It would therefore make no sense for God to "start over" with other Adams and Eves on one or thousands of other planets. That would only fill the universe with more rebels. Because "God is love," He would be compelled to redeem sinners by paying the infinite penalty for sin in the place of finite creatures who would otherwise suffer His just judgment eternally. In order to pay for their sins in their place, the Creator would have to become one of them. Obviously that fact limits redemption (and thus creation) to one race of intelligent, morally accountable beings. There could only be salvation for man, so God would not create others.

Christ became a man to redeem mankind. He couldn't also have been born as other creatures on other planets to redeem them. God has only one Son to give, and He gave Him to this world (Jn 3:16). He promised to take those who believe on Him to His Father's house of many mansions (Jn 14:2,3), bringing "many sons unto glory" (Heb 2:10) "in his image" (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10). He can do this only for the human race, of which He eternally is a member.

The vastness of this universe and the mind-boggling numbers of galaxies and stars make it all the more astonishing that one tiny planet is the focus of God's attention. And the more we learn of the universe, the clearer the amazing fact becomes that God created it all for earth and its inhabitants! (See *The Privileged Planet* in offering list.)

Most staggering of all, the Creator himself became a man on this earth through a virgin birth in order to reveal Himself to mankind, *knowing full well that they would reject, mock, and crucify Him*. Von Braun said: "When God became a man...the stage was set for a situation without parallel in

the history of the earth. God would visit creatures and they would nail Him to the Cross!" Yet, in loving response to man's heartless rejection and hatred, Christ asked the Father to "forgive them," and He gave His life to personally pay the penalty even for the sins of those who crucified Him! What love! What mercy! What grace!

Death ends physical life, but not our existence. If it did, we wouldn't need a Savior and should rather follow the philosophy, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." But the Bible says that after death comes judgment (Heb 9:27). That's why we need salvation—to rescue us from eternal punishment for our sins. As von Braun said, "Everything science has taught me...strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death...."

The Bible repeatedly declares that the universe gives proof of an infinite Creator to every thinking person, and that everyone's conscience knows God's laws and that we all have broken them repeatedly (Rom 1,2). Common sense also tells us that the penalty for breaking the law even once cannot be paid by keeping it perfectly in the future or by any number of good deeds. Defying this obvious fact, religions offer various schemes (really scams) for appeasing God through ritual or good deeds. Those who persist in such religious dishonesty violate their own consciences and reject the forgiveness they inherently know they cannot merit but that only God could provide. Therefore, they cannot be excused because they never heard that Christ paid the full penalty for their sins when He died. They have rejected what the universe and conscience plainly tell them.

The Bible provides hundreds of prophecies (which we have given in detail in the past) concerning the coming Messiah/Savior: His ancestry is foretold; the place of His birth; the very day He would ride into Jerusalem and the beast upon which He would ride; His rejection by the Jews, and by the world; His crucifixion; His resurrection and ascension to heaven; the resurrection and Rapture of the redeemed to heaven; His return to earth to reign, etc. These prophecies identified without question Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. Those who knowingly deny these facts and reject Him are doubly condemned.

It was on Planet Earth that Christ was born as a man, lived, died, and it is to the earth that He will return. According to the Bible, this earth is the center of the universe. All of God's future plans involve mankind. Man was made in the image of God (Gn 1:26,27). Redemption is all for him. Scripture declares, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus..." (1 Tm 2:5).

Christ offered "one sacrifice for sins for ever" (Heb 10:12)—His work of redemption was forever completed. That cosmic event, which defines all of history, happened on earth to redeem mankind. It is through Christ's death on this planet and through "the blood of his cross" that peace was made, enabling God to "reconcile all things unto himself...in earth [and] in heaven" (Col 1:20). It is in Christ (by virtue of His death and resurrection) that God will "gather together in one all things...which are in heaven, and which are on earth" (Eph 1:10). It is through Christ's death on the Cross that Satan has been defeated, that heaven itself has been cleansed, and that a new universe will be created without sin—and there God will dwell with man, on earth, forever.

To earth Satan came to destroy God's creation, and to earth the "great dragon...that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan" (Rv 12:7-10) will be cast down from heaven. The final battle between God and Satan will be fought for earth's destiny, and the enemy of God and man will be confined to "the lake of fire...and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" along with his followers (Rv 20:10-15).

Most astonishing of all is the fact that on this minuscule planet is a tiny city that is very precious to the Creator of this vast universe. That city is Jerusalem, mentioned 811 times in the Bible and *not once* in the Qur'an—a fact that exposes Muslims' claim to Jerusalem as a brazen lie. In this "holy city" (Neh 11:1; Is 48:2; 52:1; Mt 4:5, etc.), Christ was welcomed as the Messiah by hundreds, and perhaps thousands, lining the road from the Mount of Olives as He made His triumphal entry through the Eastern gate—an event celebrated ever since as Palm Sunday. Four days later, the same mob cried "Away with him, crucify him, we will not have this man to reign over us"—and He was nailed to the Cross on Jerusalem's outskirts.

This is the city God loves and wants to bless, but which has rebelled against Him repeatedly. This is the "city of God" (Ps 46:4; 87:3), the city to which God sent prophets day after day, week after week, year after year, pleading for repentance. This is Zion, "the city of David" (2 Sm 5:7; Neh 12:37; Is 22:9, etc.) over which Christ wept, and which God finally destroyed because of its wickedness, but has promised to fully restore.

God still watches over Jerusalem. For denying its place in His plan for the universe, He will punish all nations. This is the city that, in fulfillment of prophecies uttered thousands of years ago, has become a burden to the entire world. It is to Jerusalem that (God willing) we will turn our focus more fully in July's article.

—TBC

Quotable

How does the branch bear fruit? Not by incessant effort for sunshine and air; not by vain struggles for those vivifying influences which give beauty to the blossom, and verdure to the leaf: it simply abides in the vine, in silent and undisturbed union, and blossoms and fruit appear as of spontaneous growth.

How, then, shall a Christian bear fruit? By efforts and struggles to obtain that which is freely given; by meditations on watchfulness, on prayer, on action, on temptation, and on dangers? No. There must be a full concentration of the thoughts and affections on Christ; a complete surrender of the whole being to Him; a constant looking to Him for grace.

Christians in whom these dispositions are once firmly fixed go on calmly as the infant borne in the arms of its mother....In spiritual as in temporal matters they take no thought for the morrow; for they know that Christ will be as accessible tomorrow as today....Their hope and trust rest solely on what He is willing and able to do for them; on nothing that they suppose themselves able and willing to do for Him....

Such is the "exchanged life," the abiding, fruitful life, the life that is Christ, which should be the possession of every believer. Galatians 2:20 should be, and can be, a glorious reality.

—Harriet Beecher Stowe, in the booklet, *How to Live on Christ*, a copy of which Hudson Taylor sent to every member of the China Inland Mission

Q&A

QUESTION: What does the Bible mean when it says the disciples "forsook all and followed him"? Is everyone called to full-time ministry? Does God allow us to have any possessions at all? How can a person support and raise a family while at the same time "forsaking all"? With all my heart I want to follow the Lord wherever He leads me, and I don't want to shrink from whatever the cost, but I'm getting confused about what that means.

ANSWER: We commend you for a sincere concern that most Christians don't want to face. We must not blunt the sharpness of the Sword of the Spirit; but neither do we want to misapply God's Word. Bill MacDonald quotes George Verwer: "Either the Bible means what it says or we should throw it away." But what does the Bible mean by what it says? That remains a sincere question not only on this but on other scriptures.

To "forsake" is obviously not the same as to "abandon" or to "give away." If it were, then we would abandon all clothes and walk

around naked; abandon all food and have nothing to eat; give away all furniture and have no bed, chairs, or tables; give away all money and have to depend upon the gifts of others who hadn't "forsaken all," etc. Well, that would be ridiculous extremism, most would say. But how is "extremism" defined? The Bible means what it says—but what does it mean?

"*Forsake all!*" can be a condemning challenge when coupled with the phrase, "All means *all!*" But the person saying this probably has *something* that hasn't been given away or abandoned: perhaps a car, the pallet he sleeps on, at least some clothing, etc. Must a carpenter give away all of his tools, a painter all of his brushes, a farmer his plow—and have no means of income? If not, how can they say that they have forsaken *all* to follow Christ? If one gives away beds and bedding and uses only a sleeping bag on the floor, one still has not abandoned *all*. Common sense is required to understand the Bible.

Bill MacDonald writes, "The command to forsake all has tremendous shock value. It awakens us from the lukewarm, cream puff, cotton-candy, Christianity 'lite' we have today. [But] forsaking all is not the same for a couple with a large family as it is for a single person. It is not the same for the owner of a company that requires assets as for the employee. Single person or married couple should get down on their knees and ask, 'Lord, what is this going to mean in my (our) life?' Then as the Lord begins to finger material possessions, they should be willing to forsake them and put the proceeds to work for the Lord and for the blessing of never-dying souls."

Comparing scripture with scripture and taking all of the Bible in context, one can see that we are to hold nothing as our own, but all belongs to the Lord to be used as He leads—and not misused or abused: "use this world, as not abusing it" (1 Cor 7:31). It isn't the possession of things, or the quantity or quality of them, but the heart attitude. However, Bill MacDonald reminds us, "The heart attitude is important, but...it has to be translated into action." As Paul said, "I know both how...to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil 4:12).

Jesus and James both cursed the rich. But what does "rich" mean? "Poor" in the West would be "rich" in many places. Yes, James cursed the rich, but not for the amount of their money or possessions. It was rather for living for self and pleasure and holding back wages by fraud (Jas 5:1-6). Jesus says, "Woe unto you that are rich...(Lk 6:24); and He declares, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mk

10:25). We are still left with the question, "How much money or possessions makes one rich? How good a house or car is too good?" Jesus gave no such measurements but condemned "them that trust in riches" (v. 24). Not money, but "the love of money," is "the root of all evil" (1 Tm 6:10). Caution here: we must ask God to search our hearts.

Joseph of Arimathaea is mentioned favorably in every gospel. He is called a "disciple" (Mt 27:57), an "honourable counsellor" (Mk 15:43), a "good man, and a just" (Lk 23:50,51), and again, "a disciple [secretly, until he claimed the body of Jesus]" (Jn 19:38-42). Yet he was a "rich man" (Mt 27:57) and is not criticized for being rich. Had he not been rich, he wouldn't have had an extra empty tomb to give to Christ, nor would the prophecy have been fulfilled that Christ would be "with the rich in his death" (Is 53:9).

We are commanded to work (2 Thes 3:11-14), and that implies income. We are supposed to give to the poor, which would be impossible if we had nothing to give. A man who provides not for his own family "hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tm 5:8). Paul spoke of the "collection for the saints," which was to be taken on the first day of each week (1 Cor 16:1,2); and he never suggests that they retain nothing for themselves, but praises them for their "liberality" (v. 3).

Yes, but didn't the early church "sell their possessions and goods...as many as were possessors of lands and houses, sold them, and...laid [the proceeds] at the apostles' feet" (Acts 2:45; 4:34,35)? It cannot mean that they sold their dwellings and lived in the street; or sold their farms and had no means of income. They must have sold extra lands and houses they didn't need. A prayer meeting for Peter's release from prison was held in "the house of Mary the mother of John," and it was large enough to accommodate "many" (Acts 12:12). Paul as a prisoner in Rome lived "two whole years in his own hired house" (Acts 28:30). John writes as though each Christian family lives in its own house (2 Jn 10). The fact that Christians live in their own houses (not necessarily rentals), and that the church often met in the homes of Christians is mentioned many times: Acts 2:46; 5:42; 8:3; 10:6,17,32; 20:20; 21:8; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 1:11, etc.

Jesus said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth" (Mt 6:19). But Paul said that parents ought to "lay up...for the children" (2 Cor 12:14). Does Paul contradict Jesus? No. Christ defines a "treasure" as something that one's heart is set upon (Mt 6:21). And Paul says, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col 3:2); so it is not the value or amount of possessions that is wrong but setting one's

affections upon them, unwilling to give them up. As MacDonald says, "Attitude has to be translated into action." And he adds, "People who forsake all should not be judgmental of others. Others who do not agree should not judge those who in their simple faith forsake all."

You ask whether all are called to "full-time ministry." Of course we all are, but not to the same ministry. Being a Christian is a full-time calling. We must represent Christ as His ambassadors everywhere, at every moment. That is, we must *live* for Him always. Christ lives in every Christian; He has become our life—and that cannot be true only part-time. Defining and living what that means is up to each individual as they study the Word and are led by the Lord, humbly and in full submission to His will.

Obviously, we are not all called to be preachers, writers, traveling evangelists, overseas missionaries, etc. Whatever job we have, we are to be His witnesses while giving our employer our best on the job, for which he is paying us. Paul used the analogy of a body. There are many members with different functions. He asks, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?" (1 Cor 12:29,30). The implied answer is clearly, "No." Failure to recognize this simple fact has been the cause of much error and abuse among Pentecostals and Charismatics.

We each have a ministry, but not the same. We are all witnesses for Christ and the gospel, to let Him live His life in and through us, and to testify to His grace and love and salvation with our lives and with our lips. This can be no less than a "full-time" ministry!

.....

QUESTION: How could God allow such cruelty to befall mankind, such as the ignorant millions in India suffering starvation, pain, disease, etc., brainwashed into a false religion?

ANSWER: I sense the pain of your heart. There are some key words in your important question; the first is, "allow." This is not the world as God wants it to be or made it to be; it is the world that man has made in his rebellion and that God has allowed.

Why would God "allow" sin, suffering, idolatry, etc., all of which will lead to eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire? The biblical answer is clear: He has given man the power of choice. Without free will, we could neither love one another, nor God, nor respond to His love for us. Love is the highest expression of God's character and image in the man whom He created. Obviously, love must come from the heart, or it is not

love. The ability to love would be meaningless without the ability not to love and even to hate: obedience is meaningless unless one has the option and ability to disobey.

Rejecting free will, the Calvinist says that this evil world is exactly as God predestined and brings to pass. But the very conscience God has given us will not allow such a wicked charge against God who "is love" (1 Jn 4:8,16), who is "good to all: and his tender mercies are over all His works" (Ps 145:9), and who desires "all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2:4). That many will suffer in the Lake of Fire for eternity is not what God desires for *anyone*!

Your next key word is "ignorant." On the contrary, God has given each person the witness of creation and conscience. No matter at what time in history or in what place and society anyone is raised (even in the pagan Far East, like India or China, where one-third of earth's population lives), the Bible says that "they are without excuse" (Rom 1:19,20). No one is totally "ignorant"—and to those who obey the light God has given them, more light and grace will be given. But those who reject the light of creation and conscience, which God has given to all, are given up by God to their own willful perversions.

Your third key word is "brainwashed." In fact, no one is a pawn of Satan without first having rejected the light God has given them in creation and conscience. Even then, Satan may need to do little, because "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (Jas 1:14).

The world in Noah's day was so far from what God desired it to be that "it repented the LORD that he had made man, and it grieved him at his heart" to such an extent that He said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth..." (Gn 6:6,7). Indeed, God destroyed everyone except one man and his family, Noah, who "found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (v 8).

Jesus said that in the last days just before His return, conditions on the earth would be as they were "in the days of Noe [and] in the days of Lot" (Mt 24:37-39; Lk 17:26-30). So we know that the world of sin and suffering you describe is not God's doing. Has He allowed it? Yes. But the only other alternative would have been to destroy mankind. We are glad that He did not, because many like Noah have found grace by accepting salvation in Christ Jesus—and there is a new universe coming, entirely without sin or suffering!

.....

QUESTION: I read a report that the SSA had been issuing benefit checks that include "666." If this is true, how important might this be to us?

ANSWER: It is of no importance. I do not know precisely what that number means or the role it will play, but it is "the number of the beast [antichrist]" (Rv 13:17), and he is not in power today—so this could hardly be his mark. He can only be "revealed in his time" (2 Thes 2:6-8) after the Rapture. Only "then shall that Wicked be revealed" (2 Thes 2:8). Obviously, the number 666 occurs once in every thousand checks issued and has no significance. Even if 666 is a group or batch number, it cannot be of any significance because Antichrist didn't impose it.

News Alert

Sunday Herald (Scotland) 7/17/05:

JESUS, MARRIED WITH CHILDREN, SAYS AUTHOR [Excerpts]—Author Dan Brown [defends] claims he makes in the book that Jesus Christ married and had a child. "I began as a sceptic," he says. "As I started researching *Da Vinci Code* I really thought I would disprove a lot of this theory about Mary Magdalene and holy blood and all of that. I became a believer."

Brown reaffirms his "belief" in the book's key theory—that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and their French-born child started a bloodline stretching to the present day. Critics have denounced the new claims as "bonkers".

The Da Vinci Code claims Leonardo Da Vinci's painting "The Last Supper" holds the key to the Holy Grail. According to the book, the Grail is not a chalice, as traditionally believed, but Mary Magdalene.

It alleges Jesus and Mary married and had a child and that their bloodline survives to this day—a secret kept by the Catholic Church.

Brown argues that efforts to describe Mary Magdalene as a prostitute were part of a smear campaign against the wife of Jesus.

Brown contends that Jesus must have wed because "in that time in history, for a young Jewish man to not be married... it was practically a sin." He insists that there are grounds for taking seriously his theories.

[Critics] tried to find the sources from which Brown said he gleaned the information to compile his theory. However, they noted that some of the claims were not supported by historians, theologians or in academic works. A spokesman for the Church of Scotland's panel on doctrine was also unmoved by Brown's comments.

[TBC: Perhaps Dan Brown should be a guest expert participating in the Jesus Seminar, a collection of pseudo-scholars that tell us about the historic Jesus through a process of best guesses, which are then put to a vote.]

Dave & T.A.'s Itinerary

Jun 16-18 (Dave)	Calvary Chapel Rome Rome Italy www.calvarychapelrome.org
Jul 1-8 (Dave)	Word of Life Schroon Lake NY (518) 494-6000 www.wol.org
Jul 10-13 (Dave/Staff)	Christian Booksellers Assoc. Conv. Denver CO
Aug 4-5 (Dave)	Hope for Today Conference Chino Hills CA (800) 752-4253 www.davidhocking.org
Aug 6 (Dave)	Calvary Chapel Golden Springs Diamond Bar CA (909) 396-1884
Sep 8-10 (Dave & TA)	Great Lakes Prophecy Conference Appleton WI (920) 735-1242 www.ccappleton.org
Oct 1-2 (TA)	Christliche Versammlung Thurstrasse Frauenfeld Switzerland 41 52 720 48 57
Oct 4-6 (Dave)	Winnipeg Prophecy Conference Winnipeg MB (204) 853-7786 www.wpgpc.org
Oct 7 (TA)	Centre Biblique Européen Lausanne Switzerland 41 21 887 75 63
Oct 18-22 (Dave)	Midnight Call Brazil 51 3241-5050 www.chamada.com.br
Nov 3-5 (Dave & TA)	TBC Conference Bend OR (800) 937-6638 www.thebereanall.org

Letters

Dear Mr. Hunt,

Great things come in small packages, and I must compliment you, for your newsletter is one of the most humbly packaged but best written and most sage Christian publications I have seen, and here in jail I have seen a lot of them! DW (prisoner, TX)

Dear Dave and Tom,

My wife and I have been reading *TBC* for many years, and I recently was convicted of the fact that I have never written to thank you....There are times when I worry that your criticism of other well-known evangelists crosses the line, but upon reflection, I generally agree with you because your criticisms are absolutely based on Scripture. ...[Y]our message is a welcome affirmation of our theological beliefs....I am not aware of ever having seen a single request for donations to your ministry in all the years we have been receiving your publication. JH (GA)

Dear Tom and Dave,

Your latest message was especially interesting for me. I am a nurse and have worked in an acute psychiatric and chemical dependency unit of a hospital for over 15 years....I want to tell you that your last message entitled "Christian? Psychology" was excellent. You are so very accurate in your exposé of the religion of psychology and how it has been accepted by so many Christians. I can speak from years of firsthand experience witnessing all the so-called best the world of psychiatry and psychology has to offer for both Christian and non-Christian patients....That includes chemically dependent people, with emphasis on the 12-step programs....Let me say this with the greatest emphasis: The religion of psychology, especially now that it's been "Christianized," is a tree with rotten roots. It can only bear rotten fruit. Never have I witnessed lasting, good fruit. And I emphasize never....Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the written Word is and forever will be the only answer to man's many woes. Let us all pray that many eyes will be opened and many Christians will turn away from these "doctrines of demons" and return to the profound simplicity of the gospel whereby death at the cross means life and redemption for our every need in life. BC (MT)

To Whom It May Concern,

I recently listened to your radio program "Hyping Narnia to Christians...." I agree with you concerning your analysis of the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, but I find it irresponsible for you to denounce *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* without having viewed the movie nor read the book....And since you apparently have forgotten, the Bible makes reference to Christ as the Lamb of God and as the Lion of Judah. The tribe of Judah (Yehuda) has traditionally used the lion as their symbol and it is used on the emblem of Jerusalem today....It is not incorrect for someone to use the lion or lamb to symbolize Christ. If it were, then God would not have had the writers of the Bible do so....Your theology is much too liberal in this area and I am concerned about your contempt toward God's creatures. For this reason, I ask that you remove me from your mailing list. I have had enough of this foolishness. SC (SC)

[TBC: Tom read the book and saw the movie.]

Dear TBC,

Thank you for the April 2006 article on "Christian? Psychology." It is no different than normal psychology in pro-

moting—self-esteem! Dr. James Dobson is wrong for promoting it and encouraging Christians to pursue it. The worthy profession for a Christian man is to be a preacher! MC (TN)

TBC Notes

A Personal Thank You

Back in January, I mentioned that I always begin each year with a goal of reading through the Bible completely, and although my intentions were always earnest, somehow, as the days and months went by, I usually got sidetracked regarding my objective. What's my excuse? Here's a lame one: believe it or not, it's my daily TBC work in the Bible that has distracted me from my read-it-completely goal. Seriously. But that's history!

Thanks to dozens of TBC readers from around the world who have encouraged me, harangued me, chided me, impressed me, kept after me, and given me their strategies and counsel, I will have read the New Testament and the Old Testament by the time you read this. Too many years of blowing it prevents any prideful fist-pumping on my part. Besides, I'm more thrilled at what I got out of the task than the pride of the accomplishment.

I never realized the tremendous value of gaining an overview of the entire Bible in a relatively short amount of time. I was able to remember things and make connections that greatly increased my comprehension. For example, having just read the historical books (1 & 2 Samuel, Kings & Chronicles), I better understood what the books of the Prophets were referring to. Also, those O.T. types that pointed to Christ jumped off the pages, since I had just read their fulfillment in the N.T. These are just a small sampling of the benefits.

Hopefully, just as I have been encouraged after many failures, my success will encourage all of you. I'm going for two times through this year, starting July 1!

T.A. McMahon
Executive Director

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WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE? —T. A. MCMAHON

The subject matter has to do with Christianity and, more specifically, what took place in the life of Jesus Christ. Those contributing their ideas about the subject are professionals from Hollywood: an Academy-award winning director, a screenwriter, an art director, cinematographer, actors, etc. Although acclaimed in their field, they're not the most reliable group to turn to when seeking out facts contained in the Bible.

But hey, it's only a movie! Accuracy is irrelevant; entertainment is the main thing. Actually, accuracy is an impossibility in a theatrical film. A movie that attempts to recreate a historic event or time period is at best a creative reproduction that depends more upon the talents of the production team for credibility than concern for historic precision or truth. In other words, the *illusion* created by the medium of film is the critical thing, even if the elements that create that illusion are mostly *delusions*.

Most of us who aren't history buffs are rarely put off by inaccuracies in theatrical period pieces (e.g., *Gone With the Wind*, *Gladiator*, *Cleopatra*, *Pride and Prejudice*) because it's the drama that usually captures our emotions. That's what successful movies do. They manipulate our emotions with a story, images, acting, music, sound effects, special effects, and so forth. It's a purely sensual trip: we cry, we laugh, we sit on the edge of our seats, we scream, we fall in love (or lust), or we exit the theater prematurely because our moral senses were offended. Historical accuracy takes a back seat to all the above.

What about those of us who are biblical buffs, i.e., biblical Christians? What do we think when delusions begin pouring forth in a highly promoted motion picture that implies accuracy yet corrupts the content of historic Christianity? Sadly, many, if not most, Christians buy into the same delusions regarding biblical accuracy that their non-Christian friends and neighbors accept when it comes to historical accuracy. "Not true!" someone cries out in protest. They quickly point out that a large number of leading Christian authors, apologetic ministries, and evangelical leaders have written dozens of books, resource materials, and sermon helps to shed light on the lies presented in *The Da Vinci Code*. Moreover, I'm told that multitudes of evangelical pastors prepared sermons to beat back the delusion *The Da Vinci Code* author Dan Brown developed in his 40-million-plus copies bestseller, which was further promoted in the Ron Howard-directed, Tom Hanks-starred movie.

Okay. Except, I wasn't addressing *The Da Vinci Code*.

What I had in mind was a "biblical" movie that became a huge success, thanks especially to the support of evangelical Christians—a movie that had so many obvious distortions of the Scriptures in its first fifteen minutes that one would be hard-pressed to explain why any thoughtful believer would see it through to the end. I am, of course, talking about Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. This very Roman Catholic movie, wrongly considered to be the ultimate Christian classic in terms of "historic accuracy and fidelity to the Scriptures," is now used enthusiastically

in evangelical churches as a visual resource for various agendas, from Sunday schools to small groups to outreach programs. Many churches taking issue with *The Da Vinci Code* showed *The Passion* during Easter Week.

The point of this article is to underscore the irony in a host of leading evangelicals and ministries missing how the Bible was critically distorted in *The Passion of the Christ*, including an erroneous gospel and another Christ (see *Showtime for the Sheep?* for documentation), while crying foul regarding *The Da Vinci Code*. For example, *Christianity Today* called *The Passion* one of "our" movies, in comparison with Ron Howard's motion picture. Evangelical leaders seemingly felt a great need to rally pulpits and stuff Christian bookstore shelves with volumes that point out that Jesus did not in fact marry Mary Magdalene. Other than the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints, which holds such a belief as doctrine (they claim that He also married Lazarus' sisters, Martha and Mary), what professing Christian could not easily refute that bit of nonsense? Obviously, a biblically illiterate one.

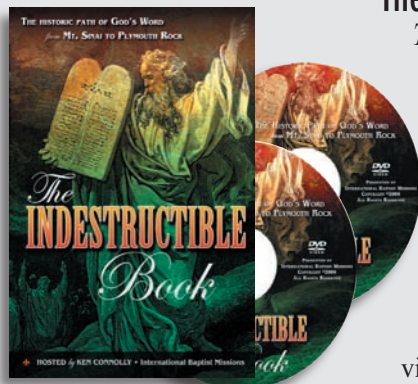
Hank Hanegraaf, head of the apologetics ministry Christian Research Institute (which highly endorsed *The Passion of the Christ*, calling its Roman Catholic influence "negligible to the point of irrelevance"), co-authored one of the dozens of books addressing *The Da Vinci Code*. In an article promoting his book he wrote, "a young woman pulled me aside and, fighting tears, asked me to reassure her that the Christian faith was valid. She, along with a group of her friends, had read *The Da Vinci Code* and was seriously shaken by its assertions."

What does that tell us about today's Christians, whose faith is gravely threatened by pulp fiction? The woman and her friends could have read the four Gospels three times over in the amount of time it took them to go through Dan Brown's religious conspiracy babble. That certainly would have set them straight about "the Christian faith." But why go to all that trouble when the "Bible Answer Man" can "reassure" her? Or, instead of actually reading the Bible, they could have taken up the latest evangelical trend for this "visual generation," which promotes watching a DVD such as *The Jesus Film Project*, *The Gospel of John*, or *The Gospel According to Matthew*. Who cares if it's an actor playing Jesus, God incarnate, or that it's the film's crewmembers who are interpreting the Scriptures?

I fear that the church is mustering its troops to battle lines against phantom enemies while the Adversary is softening her up from within. Succumbing to Satan's age-old strategy, Christians are using the ways and means of the world rather than adhering to God's Word. Marketing and entertainment have risen to the top of evangelicals' list of "How to Make Christianity Convenient and Popular." However, in attempting to appeal to the culture, the thinking of the culture has so permeated evangelicals that for many it has severely diminished their ability to discern the difference between man's way and God's way.

POINTING TO GOD'S WORD—APOLOGETICS RESOURCES FOR SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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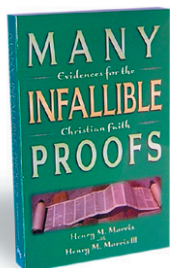
Connolly—From ancient deserts of Israel to the shores of the New World, *The Indestructible Book* documents an incredible story of faith and sacrifice. The Scriptures were banned, burned, and ridiculed by rulers of every age, from Roman emperors to English monarchs. Many who dared to read and share the Word met horrible deaths. Yet God's truth could not be crushed. The greatest worldly powers were no match for the mission of the Apostles, crusaders, translators, reformers, preachers, and printers dedicated to spreading the Gospel of *The Indestructible Book*. Filmed on location in Israel, Europe, Britain, and the U.S., *The Indestructible Book* captures the spectacular sweep of history with visual images as rich and varied as the story it unfolds. Four hours viewing time, in a 2-disc DVD package or 4-tape VHS boxed set.

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VT060

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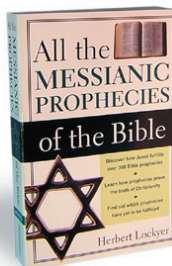
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Morris—This resource examines the internal and external evidences for the divine nature of Scripture. Christians will be strengthened with these topics: problems in verbal inspiration, fulfillment

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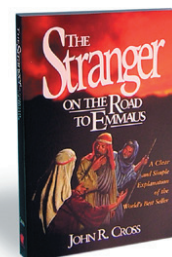
All the Messianic Prophecies of the Bible

Lockyer—A compendium of all the prophecies in Scripture concerning the promised Messiah. If you have been considering undertaking a study on this subject, this book is a tremendous tool. Prophecies are divided into two sections: Specific Messianic Prophecies and Symbolic Messianic Prophecies. 524 pp.

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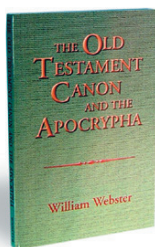
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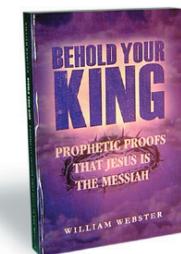


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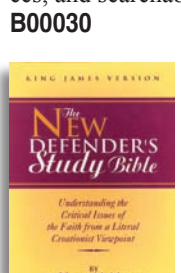
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Webster—A thorough look at the biblical and ancient rabbinic texts shows that the key messianic prophecies of the Old Testament have been interpreted by Christians and ancient Jews in like manner. The fulfillment of these prophecies in Jesus Christ proves He is the long-awaited Messiah. Extensive indexing, seven appendices, and searchable CD. 419 pp.

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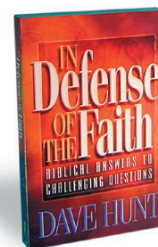
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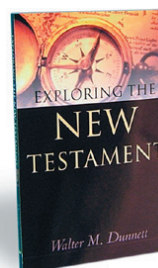
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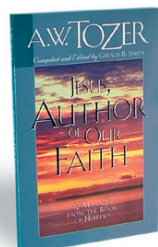
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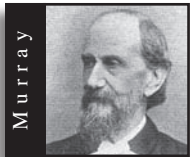
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