

The Inhabited Universe

by Ken McFarland and Daniel Knauft

With the recent discoveries by astronomers that neighboring suns do have orbiting planets, comes the obvious question: Could they be inhabited? Is there intelligent life out there - in a neighboring solar system, in our own Milky Way galaxy or elsewhere in the universe?

If so, what are they like? Can we communicate with them? And are they likely to know about planet Earth? Would they get in touch with us either by verbal transmissions or even direct encounter?

Such questions are being raised by the world's best space scientists. A whole new field of scientific inquiry called exobiology (the study of extraterrestrial life) has arisen in recent years, dedicated to the pursuit of solutions to these riddles of the cosmos. Biologist George Wald of Harvard University shared this sentiment of a growing number of space professionals: "I think there is no question but that we live in an inhabited universe that has life all over it."

Perhaps you, too, have stood gazing into the night sky on a clear and moonless evening, and wondered. Given the sheer quantity of those pinpoints of light scattered across the black dome of night, is it possible - and perhaps even likely - that at least some of them mark the locations of other civilizations?

1. Space: A Shoreless Sea

The sizes and distances of space are staggering. "Galaxies are like blades of grass in a meadow," says Kenneth F. Weaver, science editor of National Geographic Magazine. Current estimates indicate there are at least 100 billion galaxies in the known universe. Even at the farthest distances our telescopes allow us to see, there is no sign of their thinning out. Is all this cosmic real estate uninhabited?

When confronted with this incredible maze of suns and worlds, the conviction deepens that surely, we here on earth are not alone. Noted Harvard Observatory astronomer, Harlow Shapley, said: "As far as we can tell the same physical laws prevail everywhere . . . In view of a common cosmic physics and chemistry, should we not also expect to find

animals and plants everywhere? It seems completely reasonable; and soon we shall say that it seems inevitable."

Even our own galaxy, composed of more than 120 billion solar systems, may be teeming with intelligent societies. Stephen H. Dole of the Rand Corporation calculates that there may be as many as 640 million other earth-like planets in our galaxy alone. If only .0001 (one-hundredth of one per cent) of this number were inhabited, there would be 64,000 inhabited worlds revolving around sister suns.

2. Make - believe Worlds

The age of space beginning with the Russian Sputnik satellite (1959) has awakened the general public to the question of life in space. A steady barrage of speculative literature, talk-shows, and space-theme motion pictures has created a consciousness of life on other worlds.

But how accurately do the speculations of Hollywood celluloid and the imaginations of science-fiction paperbacks describe other worlds and their inhabitants? Accurate or not, it is the conception of life in space as popularly portrayed by the media that saturates the public imagination, and many may have already accepted this fictional picture as a reality. "Much of the population," writes New York Times science editor Walter Sullivan, "has been conditioned by science-fiction tales of evil genius at work among stars, of death rays and battles between galaxies." (We Are Not Alone, p. 279)

And so it is. Life in space, as popularly perceived, is a place of stark contrasts, mystery, and dramatic adventure. Advanced civilizations cruise the universe in giant, life-support starships, which hurtle through "space warps" to explore the unknown planets beyond. They rely on computers, androids and robots to handle many of their physical and mental tasks. Theirs is a world of force fields, laser guns, unseen enemies, black holes and swift intergalactic travel.

But is this make-believe really the way it is in space? Or is it possible that we have simply extended into the cosmos the grim realities of our own soiled systems, adding a few fanciful inventions of unfettered imagination for extra excitement?

If our accepted stereotypes of life in space are badly warped - if, through our ignorance of space reality, we have merely manufactured a replay of

our own sorry predicament here on earth - what, then, is the true reality?

3. Solving the Mystery

If our astronauts were able to visit another inhabited world, what would they find? The answers certainly appear difficult, but yet, they may be within reach. But where do we turn for credible answers to such cosmic questions?

Today's science - especially such disciplines as astronomy, exobiology, cosmology, and astrophysics - must be credited with being among the most seriously interested in providing a climate for answering this question.

But modern science continues to face the limitations of time and enormous distances in space in order to verify its expectations. While it has daringly begun to explore the cosmos, science may, at best, need to hope that an intelligent source out in space will attempt to contact us first. And many believe that such contact has already happened.

4. Contact from Space

William Herschel, regarded as the father of modern astronomy, died in 1822. On the grave at the church of St. Laurence near Slough, England, are inscribed these words: "Lift up your eyes on high and behold who hath created these things." (Isaiah 40:26)

Could this book, the Bible - residing quietly in our hands for centuries and claiming its revelations are of extraterrestrial origin - have the answers to the questions of life in the universe? Many in the past have thought so.

"To think that there may be more worlds than one is neither against reason nor Scripture," wrote Bernard de Fontenelle, secretary for the French Academy of Sciences during the 18th century. "If God be glorified by making one world," he continued, "the more worlds He made, the greater must be His glory."

Other early scientists, too, believed that the author of the physical universe was the author of the ancient Book as well. And there may be even more good reason today for us to share their view. The

scientific statements of the Bible have repeatedly proven their credibility. Long before they were generally accepted and scientifically verified, the Bible spoke of (1) earth's suspension in space (Job 26: 7) (2) air as having weight (Job 28: 25) (3) earth as a sphere, not a flat surface (Isaiah 40: 22) and (4) atmospheric air currents. (Ecclesiastes 1: 6, 7)

"All human discoveries," said Herschel, "seem to be made only for the purpose of confirming more strongly the truths that come from on high and are contained in the Sacred Writings."

If this is so, does the biblical record contain statements about life in the universe that science will eventually confirm? Could the Bible, with its impeccable scientific score, really be our most reliable index to the true nature of life amidst our galactic neighbors?

5. Myriads of Inhabited Planets

Contrary to the evolutionary views of modern science, the Bible takes the position that the entire universe, and all life in it, has been created by God. "God . . . hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, . . . by whom also he made the worlds." (Hebrews 1: 1, 2) According to the Bible, there are, indeed, other worlds! - worlds made by *fiat* creation, not by the random processes of evolution.

If divine creation is the norm throughout the universe, then the possibilities for life could stagger our greatest expectations. In fact, any galaxy could well contain myriads of inhabited planets teeming with intelligent beings. Ten billion worlds may be a drop in the bucket!

Who but a magnificent Creator could superintend such a vast family of worlds - "I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded." (Isaiah 45: 12)

The evidence from Scripture continues to grow. In the book of Revelation these words appear: "Rejoice, ye heavens [the starry universe], and ye who dwell in them . . ." (Revelation 12: 12, emphasis supplied) And other verses such as Nehemiah 9: 6 and Isaiah 40: 15 and 1 Corinthians 4: 9 support the existence of intelligent, created beings on other worlds.

6. Those Sons of God

Another Bible statement provides even more specific clues. In the form of a rhetorical question, God asked a man named Job: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38: 4,7)

Who were these "Sons of God" who spontaneously welcomed the creation of planet earth? The implication from Scripture (see Job 1:6 and 2:1) is that these were representative governors of loyal worlds who assembled before God on later occasions along with Satan, the self-styled hijacker-ruler of this fallen planet.

Implied here, as well, is a reality we have only dreamed of until now - nearly instantaneous interstellar travel and communication. How did these "Sons of God" arrive so promptly at their destination perhaps hundreds of thousands of light-years from their island homes? How did they receive so quickly the invitation to come?

If such a technological reality exists - a reality dwarfing our most advanced understanding - would it not then be possible for its creator to use the method of his own making to relay to someone on earth a mind-picture - a profile in living sound and color - of life on another world perhaps thousands of light-years away?

7. Visit to Another World

Such a view of life elsewhere may already have been transmitted. This description is penned by Ellen G. White, a religious leader and visionary seer whom many believe to have been singularly inspired:

"The Lord has given me," she wrote, "a view of other worlds. Wings were given me, and an angel attended me from the city to a place that was bright and glorius. The grass of the place was living green, and the birds there warbled a sweet song. The inhabitants of the place were of all sizes; they were noble, majestic, and lovely. They bore the express image of Jesus, and their countenances beamed with holy joy, expressive of the freedom and happiness of the place . . . Then I was taken to a world which had seven moons . . . I begged of my attending angel to let me remain in that place. I could not bear the thought of coming back to this dark world again . . ." (Early Writings, pp. 39, 40)

What a contrast between such descriptions and the common portrayal of television, movies, and science-fiction paperbacks. If a vast network of worlds live in unbroken harmony and mutual allegiance - untouched by malice, and death, unspoiled by pollution and violence and greed - then what has been the undoing of earth?

8. Space Plague

Is it possible that the suspicions we have intuitively sensed about ourselves - our lonely planet - are true after all? Is our planet alone paralyzed with an incurable space plague?

This is the amazing assertion of the Bible. In Jesus' parable of the one-hundred sheep (Matthew 18: 11-13), only one strayed away. Might not this parable refer to our own world - the one fallen race in the entire universe? Could it be that earth - third planet of Sol - is the only graveyard the universe has ever known? Is it here only that sensuality, hatred, war, and selfish pride poison the mind? Is this the only spot where beings lie an cheat and steal - where life is cheap?

And is it altogether possible that earth - a floating cancer in space - has been quarantined from un-fallen life on other planets? Of the vast distances separating earth from other worlds, C. S. Lewis said: "They prevent the spiritual infection of a fallen species from spreading."

9. Space War

How did it happen? The biblical facts of earth's tragedy are clear. The universe was once entirely free from the crippling infection called sin. Upon earth's creation an intelligent, rebel angel - jealous to unseat the Creator Himself -wrestled from Adam the governorship of this world. From Adam's broken loyalty, sin's infection was transmitted to every generation on earth.

But if Adam lost his right to superintend this planet, another has won it back. Said Jesus: "The Son of man is come to seek and save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10) Is it possible that we are more indebted to this extraterrestrial visitor than we have been willing to concede?

Did our world's plight move this Creator's love to its most crucial test? Risking His own destiny with vast systems of worlds, did He, Himself,

become the ransom price, defeating man's enemy and winning the right to heal this hijacked planet?

We may well be approaching to critical climax in this unfolding drama in space. An air of finality hangs over our world. And according to the Bible's last book, this sad, pathetic earth - worn and exhausted by its troubled journey through time - is soon to be cleansed and then restored to its original innocence and beauty:

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth," wrote John, "for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new . . ." (Revelation 21:1-5)

Neither science-fiction, nor science fact, could ever conceive of - much less promise - a future so much to be desired.

10. Epilogue

What is ahead for the human race? Because of the daring rescue provided by Jesus from the plague of sin, there is a new course charted for this planet. It is possible to grasp to a limited degree the scope of man's amazing future in space.

Nowhere in the galaxies has a planet fallen into such self-destructing chaos as has ours. At no other time has an inhabited universe watched its creator so daringly unite Himself with the tragic plight of a dying civilization. When the final chapter on this blood-stained battlefield is closed, rescued humans could well be the most prized of all wonders to a vast dominion of loyal worlds.

Is it possible that humans, wearing the badge of redemption, will soon trek to these unnumbered worlds? Are countless orders of beings eager to host this marvel of all time? Will cosmic audiences forever request -

and ransomed humans eternally tell - the exhaustless story of the Creator's self-sacrificing love?

The possibilities are stunning. The universe is ready to celebrate the human family's new status. It is difficult to imagine that anyone on earth could fail to be interested in having a part in it! Will you not make this future yours?