

Do aliens exist?

Question

Some people wonder if intelligent life exists outside of planet earth. They talk about aliens who reside on other planets and vehicles that these aliens use to travel to earth, i.e., UFOs. What should we as Christians think about aliens and UFOs?

Response

Aliens are a very popular subject matter in movies, TV and novels. Many people have grown up watching Star Wars, Star Trek, etc., as well as reading science fiction books on space travel and alien life. Even in real life, scientists have come to recognise an entire discipline called “astrobiology”, the study of possible alien life.

In thinking about any idea, it is helpful to examine the source of the idea. Who came up with the idea? When did this idea become popular?

Where did this fascination regarding aliens come from?

The idea that aliens exist became popular after the general acceptance of the evolutionary worldview. The thinking is that if life could spontaneously begin and evolve on earth, then it could also begin and evolve somewhere out there in the universe.

This is why there is much interest in investigating how many planets there might be out there, what percentage of the planets can nurture life and more importantly, what percentage could possibly be host to intelligent lifeforms. The assumption is that if conditions for life were conducive, then life would inevitably arise.

Does science today support the idea of intelligent alien life?

No. Based on the best data currently available, good science concludes that life as we know it is unique to the earth.

In 1960, Frank Drake, an astronomer for SETI (Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence) reasoned that if intelligent life does exist elsewhere and they have developed civilisation to the point where radio communication is possible, then mankind could possibly eavesdrop on their communication.

He expressed the probability of finding other technologically advanced civilisations with his famous equation:

$$N = R \times f_p \times n_e \times f_l \times f_i \times f_c \times L$$

Where:

N = number of civilisations in our galaxy with which communication might be possible

R = average number of stars formed per year in the galaxy

f_p = fraction of stars that have planets

n_e = average number of planets that could support life per star

f_l = fraction of planets that could support life on which life actually develops

f_i = fraction of planets with life that go on to develop intelligent life (civilisation)

f_c = fraction of civilisations that develop technology (radio) that we can detect

L = length of time for which such civilisations release detectable radio signals

Many people consider Drake's equation to be good science. And based on the data currently available, science concludes that life does not exist elsewhere in the universe. Why? If even any one of the seven factors is zero, the product of the equation will be zero regardless of whatever values the other six factors may have. And n_e is zero (0).

	Data currently available
R = average number of stars formed per year in the galaxy	Can't be measured. It's a guess based on the belief of how stars might form.
f_p = fraction of stars that have planets	Estimates are that half of all stars have planetary systems, so 0.5.
n_e = average number of planets that could support life per star	Of the current known planets, none are readily conducive to life (except earth). So the number would be zero (0).
f_l = fraction of planets that could support life on which life actually develops	It's a guess based on one's assumptions and degree of optimism.
f_i = fraction of planets with life that go on to develop intelligent life (civilisation)	It's a guess based on one's assumptions and degree of optimism.
f_c = fraction of civilisations that develop technology (radio) that we can detect	It's a guess based on one's assumptions and degree of optimism.
L = length of time for which such civilisations release detectable radio signals	It's a guess based on one's assumptions and degree of optimism.

What do evolutionists think about this science? Evolutionists persist in their belief in life elsewhere, in spite of the best evidence now available. This is because their evolutionary beliefs are that life has spontaneously arisen and can spontaneously arise.

But is this what the Bible teaches? No, the Bible does not teach that life spontaneously came about.

Does God's Word in the Bible support the idea of intelligent alien life?

No. The idea that there are intelligent, extraterrestrial beings contradict certain passages in the Bible. Here are several examples.

1. Biblical perspective on the origins of life

The Bible is clear that Yahweh is the source of all life. Life on earth did not arise spontaneously. God created life.

Genesis 1:1, 11, 20–21, 24–27 (NLT)

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

¹¹ Then God said, "Let the land sprout with vegetation—every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came." And that is what happened.

²⁰ Then God said, "Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind." ²¹ So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that scurries and swarms in the water, and every sort of bird—each producing offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁴ Then God said, "Let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind—livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and wild animals." And that is what happened. ²⁵ God made all sorts of wild animals, livestock, and small animals, each able to produce offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image.
In the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

Of all the living creatures that God created, mankind has special status because God created mankind in His image. In fact, mankind is the climax of God's creative work.

Since Yahweh is the Creator of all heavens and earth, and He created such that each of His creations would procreate after their same kind, it would therefore be consistent to believe that if life existed elsewhere in the universe, then God would have had to create it.

So the question is, did God create intelligent aliens?

2. Biblical perspective regarding earth

The Bible tells us that God specifically created the earth to be inhabited.

Isaiah 45:18 (NIV)

For this is what the LORD says—
he who created the heavens,
he is God;
he who fashioned and made the earth,
he founded it;
he did not create it to be empty,
but formed it to be inhabited—
he says:
“I am the LORD,
and there is no other.

God planned that planet earth would not just be suitable for life, it will have life. He created the earth in such a way so that mankind and the creatures He created would be able to live and thrive. The Bible does not say that about any other planet in the universe.

In fact, the psalmist made a distinction between earth and the rest of the universe.

Psalms 115:16 (NIV)

The highest heavens belong to the LORD,
but the earth he has given to mankind.

God has given the earth to mankind, but the highest heavens, referring to the totality of existence beyond the earth, He reserves for Himself. No mention is made about other intelligent life.

In Genesis 1–2, we see that God gave mankind the divine institution of responsible dominion. Mankind was to rule the earth and care for it as Yahweh’s representative on earth. Mankind is the under-lord. If indeed God created other intelligent beings on other planets, why would God say the highest heavens belong to Him alone? Why would He not have given these intelligent beings responsible dominion over their respective planets?

3. Other theological challenges

If we go with the hypothesis that God did create aliens, then here are some important questions we would need to answer.

- A. Are aliens made in the image of God as well?
- B. Do aliens have a capacity to have a personal relationship with Yahweh?
- C. Do aliens have eternal souls?

- D. Do aliens need salvation?
- i. If aliens need salvation, is it because of Adam's sin that they too are fallen?
 - ii. Or, if aliens need salvation, is it because they too, have their version of "Adam" on each of their planets who fell?
- E. If aliens need salvation, does Jesus' atonement on earth also benefit them? Or does Jesus have to be born as an alien, live and die and rise again on countless other planets?

The problem with the Fall

The Bible says that "all creation was subjected to God's curse" because of the Fall.

Romans 8:18–21 (NLT)

¹⁸ Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. ¹⁹ For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. ²⁰ Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, ²¹ the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay.

All of God's creation, meaning the universe, was impacted when Adam and Eve sinned.

If indeed God created intelligent beings outside of the earth, why would they have to suffer the consequences of Adam's sin? That would seem unfair and unjust of God to place His curse on another group of intelligent beings when one human man sinned.

It is akin to God placing the curse on human beings when some extraterrestrials living in some other planet rebelled against Him. At this point, we would have to question the character of Yahweh. Is He just? Can He be righteous if He did this?

What's worse for these extraterrestrials is that final judgement would also come on them. God would totally destroy their dwelling.

2 Peter 3:10 (NLT)

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.

So the question is, how can it be that human man's sin has affected the entire creation if there are other planets with beings who have the same properties that we have?

The “problem” with Jesus’ atonement

If aliens also need salvation, would Jesus have to become an alien to identify with them and then die for them?

The reason why God did not accept the blood of the animal sacrifices in place of humans is that they are not of the same value. Only a man can die for another man. So even though God instructed the Israelites to sacrifice animals as a sign of their trust in Him, the ultimate atoning sacrifice would have to be a man.

Hebrews 10:4–5 (NLT)

⁴ For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ⁵ That is why, when Christ came into the world, he said to God,

“You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings.
But you have given me a body to offer.”

If aliens need salvation, then they would need Jesus to become an alien and then live and die for them. But this is what Scripture says of Christ’s work for mankind.

Hebrews 10:12 (NLT)

But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God’s right hand.

This verse tells us that what Christ did for mankind is a single sacrifice. Jesus would die only once and never again. In fact, today, we know that Jesus is seated on the right hand of the Father, still as a God-man and He will be a God-man for all eternity. He will never give up being a representative of the human race. And Christ was handed authority by God the Father for the benefit of the church (which is made up of believing humans).

Ephesians 1:19–23 (NLT)

¹⁹ I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power ²⁰ that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms. ²¹ Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. ²² God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. ²³ And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.

If we believe these passages in the Bible, then we will also see that a narrative that includes intelligent alien lifeforms, or people-like beings on other planets would be problematic. Jesus would never repeat His role in the plan of salvation throughout the universe.

God did not make other beings like mankind on other planets.

Having said that, it does not mean that so-called simple life like bacteria can’t exist. The point is that bacteria or simple life are not intelligent extraterrestrial beings.

What about Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs)?

Any object in the sky that people can't identify falls under the category of a UFO. However, we must not assume that just because it hasn't been identified, then it immediately must be a "flying saucer" or an alien spacecraft that extraterrestrial intelligent beings used to travel to earth.

In fact, in the past, when belief in extraterrestrials was not common, people did not interpret unusual phenomena in the sky in terms of flying saucers.

Interestingly though, in modern times, claimed sightings of alien spacecraft have increased. Why is that so?

We need to recognise that what people see is often what they expect to see. A person whose worldview includes intelligent alien life will more likely claim to have seen one, whereas a person whose worldview excludes intelligent alien life will likely seek other explanations for what they saw.

Conditioned by popular culture, evolutionary beliefs and other factors, there are people today whose worldview already unquestioningly includes intelligent alien life. It's part of their assumptions. Hence, it is very easy for some to interpret phenomena in terms of alien spacecraft.

However, many of the UFO sightings have historically been shown to be:

1. **Unfamiliar flying objects** such as a bright star or bright planet in apparent motion, experimental aircraft, certain aircraft that fly or display lights in a manner that is different from how people expect them to appear, weather balloons, satellites, satellite "flare", the International Space Station, etc.
2. **Natural causes** like meteors, aurorae (northern lights and southern lights), sun dogs, ball lightning, mirages, fata morgana (a rare type of mirage), a will-o'-the-wisp, earthquake lights, Brown Mountain lights, etc.
3. **Hoaxes**. Some sightings have been the result of hoaxes. But even when uncovered, some choose to persist in their belief in them. For example, in the late 1970s, crop circles began appearing in southern England. People started to interpret them as visitations from spacecraft. And then more started to emerge in other places. Finally in 1991, Doug Bower and Dave Chorley formed a crop circle using a plank of wood, rope and wire in front of a group of journalists. They later brought in "crop circle experts" who concluded that they were genuine "alien-produced" crop circles and they could not be manmade. It was at this point that Bower and Chorley admitted that in 1978, they started making these crop circles all over England. What happened after, though, was that other hoaxes figured out how to make them and joined in. Crop circles were unknown before 1978.

The immediate goal of any UFO sighting should be to identify it and make it an IFO, an Identified Flying Object.

But there remain a small number of UFOs that are still unidentified, and difficult to explain in terms of things we currently understand. It may be that there are more phenomena that have yet to be understood or documented.

We also recognise that in trying to identify the UFOs, a person not inclined to believe in alien visitations will likely keep investigating alternatives to it being a flying saucer, while a person who strongly believes in alien visitations will likely investigate it with a less skeptical eye and conclude it is a flying saucer.

Summary

Nearly all discussions regarding aliens and UFOs have been within an evolutionary worldview. As Bible-believing Christians, we reject the evolutionary worldview because it contradicts with Scripture (see Interlocked Lessons 1–4).

Today, even sincere scientists who lean towards the idea that the universe is teeming with life admit that there is as yet no evidence for intelligent beings and flying saucers.

But there are broader implications that we must not miss. The belief that there is intelligent life on other planets assumes a naturalistic, evolutionary origin of life. If life arose spontaneously on earth and other planets, then there is no Creator-God.

If there is no Creator-God, then we are not accountable to anyone since there is no ultimate or higher authority outside of ourselves. In that case, there is no such thing as sin because people determine for themselves what is right and wrong.

If there is no such thing as sin, then there is no need for redemption and no need for a saviour. The entire gospel of Christ is then meaningless and in fact, false.

As Christians, it is important that we think through what the Bible teaches and examine if indeed, believing in intelligent alien beings is compatible with the Bible. We must be careful not to undermine the biblical worldview by the way we think. We must be careful not to fall for deceptions.

Romans 12:2 (NLT)

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

2 Corinthians 11:3 (NLT)

But I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent.