

The Gospel for a Pagan World – Part 1

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth

The Holy Spirit works in our lives. He does this by presenting various events that lead us to a door, a decision. Our only choice is to either walk through the door by faith or sin and not go forward.

So God set up some events which led me to this lesson. First, there is an audio clip of Charlie Clough which I will play in a minute. One of the points of that audio clip is that in a pagan world such as we are living in today, the concept of God and the need for salvation is either missing in school or is so badly distorted that it is impossible to communicate the gospel starting with the question, “Are you saved?” In the 1950’s most people knew what you meant if you asked that question. Now days God is not allowed in most public schools. Unbelieving parents rarely read Bible stories to their children. In some cases, the parents may say, “Let’s let Johnny decide what he wants to believe when he is all grown up.” By then, the lessons of God’s absolute righteousness and the concept of an absolute good and bad have been turned into what we have in the book of Judges: “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” If there is no God in society, then whatever feels good for a person is what is right. As a result, in order to give the gospel these days, it may be necessary to go back to the basics of who God is and that He created heaven and earth. Genesis chapters 1-11. The Apostle Paul did exactly that in Acts chapters 14 & 17.

Let us now listen to an audio clip from Charlie Clough from his introduction to the “Framework series.” This clip was extracted from the first mp3 file in the introduction. For those who attended/listened to the Wednesday night class, this is a repeat, but a useful repeat.

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<https://bibleframework.com/bible-framework-course/study-listen-online/message/01-the-bible-framework-strategy/read>

This audio clip, coupled with remarks by Robbie Dean about the difficulties of witnessing to children and teens today caused me to ask myself how would I connect to a teen who was interested in the gospel? Where would I start? Perhaps we start at Genesis 1:1, the beginning.

The second event the Holy Spirit put into my path was a TV interview with Eric Metaxas talking partly about his new book, “Is Atheism Dead?” The parts of this book I read fascinated me. So much so that I wanted to write down a review of it relating what he said to some Bible passages.

The third event was the need for someone to teach at the first service this morning. As a result, I was encouraged to complete my review quickly.

There was a fourth event that happened some two years ago. There was a telemarketer that called my house phone. Sometimes I respond to telemarketers by asking them if they are believers on the Lord Jesus Christ. Most of them say, “Of course.” So I respond, “Great, I’ll see you in heaven,” and hang up. But, there was one telemarketer who was a self-professed atheist who said he was not a believer. He only accepted as true what science told him was true. He only believed things that could be seen, measured or detected in some way. As a result, I had an interesting discussion for maybe five minutes on atheism and the gospel. He stayed on point until we got to the topic of death. It was obvious that he did not like the idea of there being nothing after death from an atheist’s point of view. Death is the end. Dust to dust. For an atheist, there is no eternal purpose. When you die... “The End.”

There is a phrase that goes through my mind from time to time. “Old men, when faced with the immanence of death, begin to ask, what

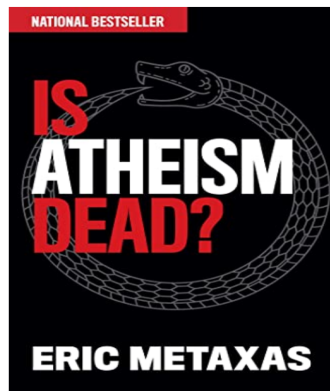
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happens when I die.” I know of two men when faced with certain death due to a terminal illness became believers. God gave them time to consider the alternatives in a condition that required immediate attention and people who gave them the gospel.

Most of the following lesson follows the five main points presented in Eric Metaxas’ book.

Eric Metaxas (born 1963) is an American Christian author, speaker, and conservative radio host. (Wikipedia)

In his most recent book, “Is Atheism Dead, published in October 2021 he references a Time magazine cover story from 1966 titled, “Is God Dead?” Even before then, Christianity in the world had been in decline. Like the book of Judges, knowledge of God has continued to decline. There are still people who call themselves Christians but have no faith. Eric Metaxas (a good Greek name; his father has Greek ancestry), in this book focuses on the problems with Atheism today.



What follows is part book review and part relating what he says to what Bible passages say on these topics. The following quoted passages are from that book.

Here is perhaps the motivation for that book:

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“Since the Time article in 1966, roughly five things have arisen to challenge—and I will argue, to overturn—the secular consensus that formed in the wake of that article.”

My plan of attack is to outline the five “things” Eric Metaxas writes his book around. Then I will explain in some detail these five things with quotes from his book and other sources. I will at various points quote from the Bible to illustrate his points from a biblical viewpoint. The quotes without attribution below are all from Eric Metaxas’ book.

1. The Big Bang Theory

“The first is the discovery of what we call the Big Bang—and the proof of the Big Bang, which settled the question once and for all whether the universe always existed or didn’t.”

2. Fine Tuning

“The second thing—which we have already mentioned—is our discovery in the last decades of the increasingly overwhelming evidence of so-called “fine-tuning” in the universe.”

3. Abiogenesis

“The third major shift in the last decades has to do with our views on how life emerged from non-life on the early earth, often called “Abiogenesis.”

4. Archaeology

“The fourth thing that has happened over the last decades concerns archaeological discoveries in the Middle East.”

5. Atheism

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“The fifth thing that has changed in recent years is our knowledge of what atheism is, both theoretically and practically.”

So, let us start with the first topic that Eric Metaxa presents. I made a conscious choice to attempt to simplify explanations were possible.

I. The Big Bang Theory

Originally, I used a quote from Wikipedia to explain what the big bang theory is, thinking that would be a simple definition and explanation of this concept. Instead I found that a NASA website for children is much easier to understand. <https://spaceplace.nasa.gov/big-bang/en/>

“The big bang is how astronomers explain the way the universe began. It is the idea that the universe began as just a single point, then expanded and stretched to grow as large as it is right now—and it is still stretching!”

“In 1927, an astronomer named Georges Lemaître had a big idea. He said that a very long time ago, the universe started as just a single point. He said the universe stretched and expanded to get as big as it is now, and that it could keep on stretching.”

In other words, the universe, space and time came into being in an instant starting from a point. I can't say it started from a point in space, because space itself came into being. Notice, of course, there is no mention of God or the similarities to the Genesis account. In the Bible, God caused the universe to come into being “ex nihilo,” or out of nothing.

This theory got its start in the early 1900's. Yes this is a fairly recent development. The previously accepted theory was called the “Steady State” Theory. Essentially, this theory states that the universe always existed, is expanding and constantly creating new matter to keep the density the same throughout time. There was no beginning. From an

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atheist perspective, if this were true, then Genesis 1:1 would be wrong. The first word in the Hebrew of Genesis 1:1 is “In the beginning...”

When first proposed in the early 1900’s, there were influential scientists who rejected the Big Bang Theory.

Without getting technical, people like Einstein and Hubble and others were involved in the acceptance of the Big Bang Theory. You can look up the history of it. That is not the need here. The point is that the big bang theory rejected another theory that was hostile to the Bible to one that in spite of their protestations is closer to what the Bible says. Science, when it is a search for the truth, eventually will take us to the biblical observations on the heavens and the earth.

Another note: I understand there are some who when they hear the word science or mathematics turn away in fear. There is no math in this presentation. Any science presented, I will try to relate to Bible passages. The Bible is not a science textbook, but it is inerrant and accurate whenever it talks about things we might call science.

Again from Metaxas: “So the story of the expanding universe—or “Big Bang”—would inevitably lead scientists backward to a beginning for time and space, but as we continue telling the larger story, we must say more about why many scientists found the idea so distressing.”

Again from Metaxas:

“In the famous conclusion to his book “God and the Astronomers,” Jastrow puts it memorably well, so much so that what he said may serve as a fitting end to our discussion.

“[The discovery of a definite cosmic beginning] is an exceedingly strange development, unexpected by all but the theologians. They have always accepted the word of the Bible: In the beginning God created

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heaven and earth.... It is unexpected because science has had such extraordinary success in trying the chain of cause and effect backward in time. For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.”

Here are some key takeaways:

1. Science, in the Big Bang Theory, agrees with the Bible (Genesis 1:1) in that there was a beginning to the universe.
2. Time is finite. Scientists calculate, based on observations, that the universe is about 13.8 Billion years old. It is not infinitely old.
3. The implication is that “evolution” only had that amount of time to develop from nothing to the complexity of earth and the human being today.
4. Science changes based upon updated observations. Newton’s laws of physics are correct only up to a point. There are some situations in which they do not work. There are “facts” which we now know which were unknown 200 years ago, like the photoelectric effect. Science has a lot to learn.
5. Paul in witnessing to pagan non-Jews went back to Genesis 1:1 and the creation of the heavens and the earth to connect with various people. Perhaps we should read Acts 14:8-20 and Acts 17:16-33.
6. In a similar vein, the Catholic Church taught using something called the Baltimore Catechism. I know, because that is what I used when I was studying for “confirmation.” From the Britannica website, “**catechism**, a manual of religious instruction usually arranged in

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the form of questions and answers used to instruct the young, to win converts, and to testify to the faith.” Look at the first question and answers used in this manual:

1. Q. Who made the world?

A. God made the world.

The "**world**" here means more than the earth-more than is shown on a map of the world. It means everything that we can see-sun, moon, stars, etc.; even those things that we can see only with great telescopes. Everything, too, that we may be able to see in the future, either with our eyes alone, or aided by instruments, is included in the word "world." We can call it the universe.

2. Q. Who is God?

A. God is the Creator of Heaven and earth, and of all things.

Creation. When your gospel audience is unable to understand Jesus and salvation, you may need to start with who God is and His creation.

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2. The Fine Tuned Earth

Job 38:1 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said,

Job 38:2 “Who is this that darkens counsel By words without knowledge?”

Job 38:3 “Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!”

The second point of Eric Metaxas’ book is the “fine-tuned” argument.

“But what exactly is the fine-tuned argument? It is simply that there are certain things about our universe—and about our planet—that seem to be so extremely perfectly calibrated that they can hardly be coincidental. If these things were even slightly different, life would not even be possible.”

Basically, if everything had not been designed the way it is, from the distance between the earth and the sun, to constants used in scientific equations, life would not have been impossible. And this list of things that had to be just so, is getting longer each year.

Here is an article by Eric Metaxas on the subject in 2014 before he wrote the recent book:

“Here’s the story: The same year Time featured the now-famous headline, the astronomer Carl Sagan announced that there were two important criteria for a planet to support life: The right kind of star, and a planet the right distance from that star. Given the roughly octillion—1 followed by 27 zeros—planets in the universe, there should have been

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about septillion—1 followed by 24 zeros—planets capable of supporting life.”

“With such spectacular odds, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, a large, expensive collection of private and publicly funded projects launched in the 1960s, was sure to turn up something soon. Scientists listened with a vast radio telescopic network for signals that resembled coded intelligence and were not merely random. But as years passed, the silence from the rest of the universe was deafening. Congress defunded SETI in 1993, but the search continues with private funds. As of 2014, researchers have discovered precisely bubkis—0 followed by nothing.”

“What happened? As our knowledge of the universe increased, it became clear that there were far more factors necessary for life than Sagan supposed. His two parameters grew to 10 and then 20 and then 50, and so the number of potentially life-supporting planets decreased accordingly. The number dropped to a few thousand planets and kept on plummeting.”

There is a list, or perhaps a partial list since the list continues to expand at various websites that lists some of these requirements for life. You will notice that the name Jay Richards figures in these lists.

<https://intelligentdesign.org/articles/list-of-fine-tuning-parameters/>

<https://www.discovery.org/m/securepdfs/2018/12/List-of-Fine-Tuning-Parameters-Jay-Richards.pdf>

Cosmic Constants

- (1) Gravitational force constant
- (2) Electromagnetic force constant
- (3) Strong nuclear force constant
- (4) Weak nuclear force constant
- (5) Cosmological constant

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Initial Conditions and “Brute Facts”

- (6) Initial distribution of mass energy
- (7) Ratio of masses for protons and electrons
- (8) Velocity of light
- (9) Mass excess of neutron over proton

“Local” Planetary Conditions

- (10) Steady plate tectonics with right kind of geological interior
- (11) Right amount of water in crust
- (12) Large moon with right rotation period
- (13) Proper concentration of sulfur
- (14) Right planetary mass
- (15) Near inner edge of circumstellar habitable zone
- (16) Low-eccentricity orbit outside spin-orbit and giant planet resonances
- (17) A few, large Jupiter-mass planetary neighbors in large circular orbits
- (18) Outside spiral arm of galaxy
- (19) Near co-rotation circle of galaxy, in circular orbit around galactic center
- (20) Within the galactic habitable zone
- (21) During the cosmic habitable age

This sounds like the “Intelligent Design.” Indeed, it is apparently aligned with it. That broader category of theory will not be covered here. I am trying to stay on track following Metaxas five points.

“Scientists are slowly waking up to an inconvenient truth—the universe looks suspiciously like a fix. The issue concerns the very laws of nature themselves. For 40 years, physicists and cosmologists have been quietly collecting examples of all too convenient “coincidences” and special features in the underlying laws of the universe that seem to be necessary

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in order for life, and hence conscious beings, to exist. Change any one of them and the consequences would be lethal.”

““It would be very difficult to explain why the universe would have begun in just this way, except as the act of a God who intended to create beings like us.””

So, again, Science as a search for truth seemingly points back to the biblical narratives, if only by tripping over them.

There is an application to the gospel from history. Let us take one man who was a Communist party member and Soviet spy: Whittaker Chambers. He became disillusioned with Stalin’s purges and had an encounter with the complexity of life in his daughter’s ear which led him to consider Christianity and eventually become a Christian. Here is a short version of that story:

“Whittaker credits his conversion from Communism to Christianity in a most illuminating fashion. His epiphany stemmed from a simple observation made early one morning at the breakfast table. While boarding his family in Hiss’s Washington apartment, Chambers serendipitously notices his daughter’s ear as she eats breakfast in her highchair: “No, those ears were not created by any chance coming together of atoms in nature (the Communist view). They could have been created only by immense design.””

<https://www.acton.org/pub/commentary/2017/01/18/god-or-man-whittaker-chambers-witness-65-0>

There are others who were atheists who became Christian through their own journey. For instance, there was C. S. Lewis in his search for “Joy.” And others. There is a long list.

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Job 38:4 “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding,

Job 38:5 Who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it?

Job 38:6 “On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone,

Job 38:7 When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy?

Job 38:8 “Or who enclosed the sea with doors When, bursting forth, it went out from the womb;

Job 38:9 When I made a cloud its garment And thick darkness its swaddling band,

Job 38:10 And I placed boundaries on it And set a bolt and doors,

Job 38:11 And I said, ‘Thus far you shall come, but no farther; And here shall your proud waves stop’?

Science has much to learn.

This lesson has only covered two of the five topics. There are three others that I will attempt to cover next week.

3. Abiogenesis

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“Some people believe God was involved in how all life forms came into being, that he intended to create all life, including us humans, and did; while others believe there is no God, so everything happened by accident, randomly evolving from a single cell all the way up to all the life that now exists.”

“The second question is simply this: What happened to bring life into existence in the first place? How did the first life on Earth come into being out of non-life?”

4. Archaeology

“It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.” Rabbi Dr. Nelson Glueck

5. Atheism

“The single argument—or thesis, really—that the New Atheists hammered almost to the point of excluding others was that all religions are fundamentally irrational, while “science” and atheism are rational. And since all religions are utterly irrational, all religions are therefore equally evil.”