

A Gamers' Guide to the Gospel

A pointer to the ultimate program and why you should care

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For my great-grandchildren

And those who will follow

“You don’t stop playing because you get old;

You get old because you stop playing.”

Preface

(from website home page)

Squeak wasn't her real name. As far as the tiny twelve year old half-elf knew, she had never been given one. Someone at the orphanage where she had been dropped off as a newborn pinned it on her and it stuck. At age ten she was on her own.

The raggedy, barefoot street urchin, pickpocket and thief was deep in the bowels of the ancient crypt, hoping to pocket enough overlooked coin and jewelry to buy a ride far away from the local guard. It wasn't safe to walk. Getting robbed wasn't the worst thing that could happen to a small girl alone on the road. Squeak was fast on her feet but not fast enough to outrun an arrow or a bandit's hound.

Dusty glass prisms embedded in the walls of the crumbling ruin gave her just enough light to see and move silently. Stealth was what she was good at but this wasn't a candle maker's shop in the hours before dawn. The undead tomb guardians were silent now; maybe their given abilities had long since faded away but the bones littering the floor served as a solemn warning and she stepped carefully through them without a sound.

Tears of disappointment filled her eyes. Previous looting seemed complete. Retracing her steps towards the hidden entrance, she spotted something beneath a skeleton: a fat coin purse! As she pulled it from beneath the bones and picked it up it fell apart in her hand, gold jingling to the stone floor followed by a shuffling sound from the next chamber---her only path out. Maybe she had frightened a rat. It didn't sound like a rat! Heart pounding, she scooped up what coins she could and ran.

As she rounded a corner the wight raised its axe and the last thing Squeak saw in this life was the headlights of a speeding vehicle. No hitting the F9 key in hardcore mode. (What?! At this point the webpage shows a screenshot of a fatal accident).

Poor Squeak. She didn't make it , but that's okay---she's not real. The picture above IS real and illustrates just how fast we and our friends and loved ones can lose the "ride" that we were born with. But, fast or slow, sooner or later it is time to either level up or face the ultimate fail.

Chapter List

Since some of the subject matter is continuously on the move, I expect to be doing subsequent revising. Therefore, the pages are not numbered. Sorry for the inconvenience.

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Introduction

“God is his name; the cosmos is his game.”

This little book is probably going to ‘piss off’ a lot of people, Christians included, along with atheists and those of other worldview belief systems. And when you start it off with a sentence like that, you just know that it’s not going to be another helping of your usual Christian cuisine. That’s okay. Jesus pissed off a lot of people himself. It’s written by a gamer for gamers, not the ladies sewing circle (although you might be surprised by what they talk about). If my occasional use of *mild* language overly offends you, then I suggest that you either stop reading or get over it.

I’m not going to climb into the rarified air of the academic elite so that you need to keep a search engine open just to know what I said (Dude, this guy must be smart! He uses big words!) Nor do I intend to confuse those outside of Christianity by gumming up the pages with Christianese. And, BTW, I’ll use poetic license as I see fit. Grammar police, you have been warned!

Just so you know, I’m a non-denominational Christian of nearly fifty years, raised in the Southern Baptist tradition. Personal experience, coupled with countless hours of study has convinced me that God is for real, that Jesus Christ is who he claimed to be and that the Bible is God’s Word, front to back, although it is very often misinterpreted, misunderstood and misapplied---even by those claiming to believe in it. I’m not a Young Earth Creationist and I will tell you why. So, no duping---you have this info right up front.

The second half of the twentieth century on down saw more and more people finding Christianity to be less and less relevant to their lives, starting especially with my own baby boom generation. They regard the Christian Bible as a mashed-up mix of unscientific myth, contradictions, invented and distorted history and bias. And the central figure, Jesus---a radical nice guy who may have thought that he was God and ended up paying for it. Why should anyone believe any of it, still less try to live by it?

Why indeed, when every version of the Bible that you pick up seems to say things a little bit differently and sometimes more than a little bit differently; when respected biblical scholars disagree over dating, content and meaning; when the majority of the intellectual elite snicker in its face.

This is a pointer to Christianity, but not in the traditional sense. That’s been done and done well over the centuries---for the few Christians willing to take the time to dig into it. Hey, let’s own it guys---most Christians have never even *read* the Bible, let alone studied it. I’m also convinced that the Christian church has allowed the presentation of these truths to become dated; that it is presenting a nineteen-forties witness to a twenty-first century Western world. But I’m

not pushing a ‘different gospel’, just another way of sharing the Gospel (heresy hunters and the faint of heart take note).

As I said, I’m a gamer and this is aimed especially at gamers; for those familiar with the genre and for all those who have come and are coming of age in a scientifically, technologically minded online culture. There just *might* be more than a little similarity between VR (virtual reality) and reality-as-it-is---beyond look-alike, beyond make-believe. And if my ‘what ifs’ turn out to be nothing but crap, at least some of them can make for good illustrations. You just can’t top Jesus’ teaching parables, but a lot of them go right over the head of a generation which is totally unfamiliar with life in biblical times. I recently used an illustration from Dungeons & Dragons to explain the concept of God’s foreknowledge, and a Wiccan girl’s eyes lit up and she exclaimed, “Yeah! Now I’ve got it!”

One potential problem with trying to make the Christian witness more understandable to the twenty-first century world by adding science, technology and gaming to the mix is that this stuff tends to have a ‘shelf life’. It changes rapidly. Today’s ‘bleeding edge’ technology turns into tomorrow’s unusable junk. Scientific theories get ‘patched’ and sometimes tossed aside as new information becomes available. So, keep that free advice up front.

I’ll get into subjects that are uncomfortable, if not off-limits, to most Christians but which have gained a lot of popular traction over time, including ghosts, angels and demons, reincarnation, UFOs (seriously) and other phenomenon under the so-called New Age umbrella, as well as the perceived bogeymen of science such as evolution, Big Bang theory, climate change, and some of the more bizarre concepts like time travel, extra dimensions and Multiverse Theory. I’ll also explain why *genuine* science and skepticism are neutral and necessary and not the enemies of the Christian faith that so many presume them to be.

We’ll get into the topic of NDEs (near-death experiences), why they often appear so much alike and yet so different, and what they may indicate, if anything, about life after death including the concepts of heaven and hell.

I have added a glossary of terms for certain gaming language not defined in the body of the book. I don’t expect everyone who reads it to understand these terms, including gamers coming into the genre after the terms go out of date (which they will).

The select bibliography at the end of the book includes theists, atheists and others who do not share a common concept of reality---in all fairness, if one is going to voice an opinion on a world view then he or she needs to pay reasonable attention to what all sides have to say.

This book is FREE (why pay more?) It’s a short read; under a hundred pages. Copy it, print it out, share it, whatever. Don’t sweat the copyright. Jesus said to his disciples that as they had received freely, so they should freely give (Matthew 10:8). I’ll buy that.

Skepticism

“Say it ain’t so!”

I’m a skeptic, and that includes being skeptical about skeptics---but skepticism gets a bad rap. Many people equate skepticism with atheism and they are not the same. True skepticism is less about being a “doubter” and more about using reason and critical thinking in an attempt to arrive at truth, wherever it leads. Atheism is disbelief or a lack of belief in God or gods which, for the present at least, can be neither proven nor disproven. Like theism and other ‘isms’ it is a position based on faith whether its adherents like the definition or not.

Bear with me a minute, so you’ll know where I’m coming from.

I grew up at a time in America when belief in God was an accepted given and deeply ingrained in the public sphere. We had Christmas and Easter activities and plays in public schools along with morning Bible reading and prayer until my sophomore year in high school when the Supreme Court put an end to it. Mom took me to Sunday school and church until at age eleven I witnessed an ugly display of racism by my Sunday school teacher outside of the church environment. Granted, this was Florida, 1958. He didn’t know that I saw him, but I refused to go back and, since my parents were not racists, they did not insist. So I came of age with a nominal belief in God, but I had not yet become a Christian.

At age twenty, while in the army, I was going to church with a Christian girl to spend time with her and, more or less, to stay on her good side. I wasn’t looking for God. After a few weeks of doing that, God called me. It wasn’t a gentle invitation; it was a powerful direct order. I was an American soldier. I knew what a direct order meant. So on that Sunday morning in Baltimore, Maryland I became a Christian---an ignorant baby Christian.

And then my life just sort of went to hell. I’ll spare you the details but, since I felt that God had let me down, I went looking into New Age occultism for answers. I left the army, met and married another Christian girl who wanted nothing to do with my occultism, dragged her out of her church, had two kids and had another on the way. At that point my wife declared that, since she had personally dedicated our children to God, she was going to start taking them to church and I could either go along or stay home. I figured that she and the kids could go, while I would go a couple of times just to stay on her good side and then say that it wasn’t for me. That was my game plan.

So we went, and the totally unexpected happened. It was like God rushed up and threw his arms around me. I turned my back on the New Age, threw out all of my occult books and material, and never looked back. About a year later God called me into a ministry of the written word. With three kids under the age of four with a stay-at-home mom, I had no way to go to seminary so I

brought the seminary to me, piece by piece, with hundreds of books worth thousands of dollars over forty plus years---not only commentaries, histories, theologies and other subjects from a Christian academic perspective, but science (my favorite subject in school).

And I remain a skeptic. Unlike many of my fellow Christians, I am not afraid to stare science, philosophy, other belief systems including atheism, scientism and you name it in the face. I told God long ago that if I found anything that could knock him off the throne, then off the throne he would go. His response was, "Go for it." I went for it, I'm still going, and God's still there.

Skepticism and faith are at the heart of science---I'm not duping. The unrelenting search for truth no matter where it leads, including the willingness to modify or even toss out old theories and misunderstandings, coupled with the faith that the truth is out there and can be found. Likewise, skepticism and faith are at the heart of Christian doctrine in its true form. Many scientists, although in the minority, are also Christians.

Some atheists have taken the position that one cannot hold science and Christianity within the same mind without the result being *cognitive dissonance*, the short explanation according to Wiki being "*the mental stress or discomfort experienced by an individual who holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values at the same time, performs an action that is contradictory to one or more beliefs, ideas or values, or is confronted by new information that conflicts with existing beliefs, ideas, or values.*" Bullshit. Properly understood, there is no conflict. God stoops to address a very primitive culture in language that it can understand. Science compares the present with the past and sees itself riding the crest of the wave into an ever expanding future of knowledge and technology. True that, but there are some in the field who think that science has nearly "arrived" when it has only just begun ("Are we there yet?"). But in fact, *our* science is an infant and all that it has discovered thus far are its fingers and toes. Doubt that? By its own admission, science declares that a nanosecond ago in the span of cosmic time our humanoid ancestors were climbing down from the trees and now we have just about 'got it'. Right. To assume that we stand at the pinnacle of scientific knowledge, well, compared to 1100, 1750, 1930, perhaps we do; but what about 2075, 3131, 10,001? Let's not be naïve. Let's encounter another civilization a mere million year blink in advance of our own and see how much we *really* know.

The late scientist and popular explainer of science, Carl Sagan, advised us to be open-minded but "not so open-minded that our brains fall out". The other side of the coin is to not be so close-minded that nothing can penetrate.

Sagan called science a 'candle in the dark' and, used intelligently, it is. But there are those who hold the candle at arm's length, peer into the darkness beyond the little circle of light and confidently declare what is, and what is not, out there. Why is that not surprising? Man, the smart-ass, snug and smug in his own wisdom, usually thinks that he knows more than he actually does. Albert Einstein was not so bold. He once asked his physics students how much of reality that they thought the human race collectively possessed. They put their heads together and, to their credit,

came up with a little less than two percent. The great physicist said that he would accept that as an answer but thought that the figure was too high. Sagan asked in his *Demon-Haunted World*, pgs. 322-23, “What’s wrong with admitting that we don’t know something? Is our self-esteem so fragile?”

On the other hand, there are Christians who, by their own misunderstanding of the Bible and of what God is and has been about in his dealings with the creatures on this planet, cling to the simplified explanations given by God to a primitive people like a pit bull clings to a bone (spoiler alert---interference here is not for the faint of heart).

Here’s a truth statement that you can take to the bank: “What is, is. What isn’t, isn’t--- whether we know it or not; whether we understand it or not; whether we believe it or not; whether we like it or not. “What is, is; what isn’t, isn’t.” Switch out “was, wasn’t” for “is, isn’t”, same difference.

Want to hear another one? Let me tell you another one. “There is no such thing as the supernatural.” If something, including an ultimate creator God, does not conform to reality-as-it-is (not as we *think* it is, or want it to be), then it is not natural, nor is it supernatural---it is nonsense. We may not ‘get it’ because our collective human minds and our primitive science and technology are not yet capable of getting us there, but, trust me guys, the truth is out there.

My high school journalism teacher made us memorize this old, well known poem by Rudyard Kipling and to keep it up front while chasing a news story. Thank you, Miss B, wherever you are.

“I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.”

Here are a few ‘quotes from my notes’:

“A point of view is open to discussion on the basis of evidence. Bias, on the other hand, is a prejudice that filters out everything that doesn’t fit a preformed conception.” Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Exposing Myths About Christianity*, Pg. 17.

“... physicalists shift from science to metaphysics when they assert that only what science can investigate is real. This is a simple declaration of a philosophical worldview, not a scientific proposition.” Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Exposing Myths About Christianity*, Pg.132.

“The cure for a fallacious argument is a better argument, not the suppression of ideas.” Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World*, pg. 429.

“... at the heart of science is an essential balance between two seemingly contradictory attitudes – an openness to new ideas, no matter how bizarre or counterproductive, and the most ruthlessly skeptical scrutiny of all ideas, old and new. This is how deep truths are winnowed out from deep nonsense. The collective enterprise of creative thinking and skeptical thinking, working together, keeps the field on track.” Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World*, pg. 304.

“We cannot put our minds in a lockbox.” Sez Hoo??

“We may be entitled to our own opinions, but we are not entitled to our own facts. Believing a statement is one thing; that statement being true is another.”, Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, pg.124.

“The great tragedy of science---the slaying of a beautiful hypothesis by an ugly fact.” Thomas Henry Huxley

“Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away.” Philip K. Dick, quoted by Jim Baggott, *Farewell To Reality*, pg.6,

“...although everyone has access to the same evidence, the presuppositions implicit in a person's philosophy determine the perspective from which he or she views the data, leading to different conclusions about which explanation best fits the evidence.” Gerald Rau, *Mapping the Origins Debate*, pg.20.

“The most sophisticated deception of all is self-deception.” Thomas Georges, *Digital Soul*, Pg. 90.

“I wish there were a genuinely skeptical community. I'm afraid that just about every skeptic I've ever met is a pseudo skeptic. A real skeptic says, 'I don't know about parapsychology and PSI, and the explanations we have so far don't satisfy me. I want to look at the data!' But the skeptics I've encountered claim to know already that there's nothing to it, and then they break all the rules of scientific procedure to go about their debunking. Skepticism, as it is generally practiced, is neither legitimate science nor legitimate skepticism.” Charles Tart quoted in *Closer to Truth: Challenging Current Belief*, Pg.73, Robert L. Kuhn, editor.

“Our science is a drop, our ignorance a sea.” William James quoted in *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?*, pg. 331, edited by Paul Kurtz.

“Despite advertisements to the contrary, science is not a juggernaut that relentlessly pushes back the frontiers of knowledge. Rather, science is an interconnected web of theoretical and factual claims about the world that are constantly being revised and for which changes in one portion of the web can induce radical changes in another. In particular, science regularly confronts the problem of having to retract claims that it once confidently asserted.” William A. Dembski, *No Free Lunch*, pg.316.

“It is an outworn myth, moreover, to represent science as a presuppositionless description of reality.” Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority, Vol.1*, pg.255.

“Experience proves this, or that, or nothing, according to the preconceptions we bring to it.” C.S. Lewis *God in the dock*, quoted by Colin Brown in the introduction to *Christianity and Western Thought*, pg.9.

“Facts must control dogmas, and not dogmas facts.” Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume 7, preface.

“It is error only, and not truth, that shrinks from inquiry.” Thomas Paine

The Cosmos

“Turtles all the way down”

Surprisingly enough, theists and atheists come to very similar conclusions as far as the origin of *reality-as-it-is* is concerned. To the theist, it is a self-existing everlasting creator; “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1). To the atheist, with nature as his/her god substitute, reality just ‘is’. Victor J. Stenger, in *God and the Multiverse*, states “Indeed, no law of physics was broken in bringing our universe into existence. And, of course, no law of physics was broken in bringing the multiverse into existence, since it always existed”. Stenger goes on to quote the eminent physicist Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow in their 2010 book *The Grand Design*, “Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going.” Carl Sagan, in his renowned *Cosmos* series, stated “The Cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be.” Magic! OK, that wasn’t nice. But the above *are* all faith statements without an ounce of concrete scientific evidence to back them up.

Then there are those like the late *former* atheist, Antony Flew, who, while not becoming a Christian, finally came to a position of belief in a creator God after a lifetime of examining what evidence there was. Poor Antony Flew. Most of the aggressive New Atheists of recent days do not even mention the name of their one-time champion.

The theist’s position is that God has engaged with, and revealed himself to, an infant race of intelligent creatures, either personally or through chosen representatives or both. The atheist’s position rests on the brainpower and technology of an infant race of intelligent creatures to come up with answers on their own. Honest theistic philosophers, theologians and scientists attempt to arrive at solutions by viewing the data from all sides.

Theists are often accused of relying on the so-called *God-of-the-gaps* solution to resolve the ultimate origins of the cosmos and everything therein. Can’t explain it? Not a problem---God did it, end of story. “The Bible says it; I believe it and that settles it!” Atheists don’t buy that for a moment. They just know that however it came about, ‘God’ did *not* do it. “Science doesn’t say it; I don’t believe it and that settles it!” Then they turn around and pull a *nature-of-the-gaps, all by itself* response out of the proverbial hat. But that’s just kicking the can down the road.

Once upon a time, not so long ago, scientists in the know held that the universe was static. It had no beginning. Neither did it have an end. It was just ‘there’ and it didn’t change much, except at the local level. General relativity and the observed expansion of the universe nixed that idea but, under the Steady State theory, the universe was still held to have neither beginning nor end. Then came the discovery and confirmation of the Big Bang. Oops! The universe *did* have a beginning after all, roughly 13.8 billion years ago (according to *our* spacetime) and the details could be

traced back to within a minute fraction of a second after the event. Jesuit priest and scientist George Lemaitre, father of the Big Bang Theory, called it “a day without yesterday.” Believers in a divine creation rejoiced, sort of, although a lot of them abhorred the details. God did it! Yay! “Bah!” said scientists, and like Winnie the Pooh contemplating a good bit of rising water, decided that they must “have an escape”. Enter Multiverse Theory.

Multiverse Theory is a fascinating fruitcake of disparate but sometimes complementary speculations on reality as it is, and particularly *why* it is as it is. It is especially concerned to explain the ultimate origin of *our* universe in particular, and why it seems to appear finely tuned to support life, without the need of a designer/creator. It has its big-name fans within the scientific community and also its detractors. As some have pointed out, it is not testable, at least not at our present level of technology and expertise, it is not falsifiable, and therefore it is not even science---best left, perhaps, to the ruminations of philosophers and theologians and the brainstorming of science fiction writers. Scientist and science writer Jim Baggott in *Farewell to Reality* called some of the speculative theories of theoretical physics including the multiverse, superstring theory and supersymmetry as being examples of “fairy tale physics”, “abstracted, theoretical speculation without any kind of empirical foundation” and “not science.” But that’s okay. Science grows out of speculation---just don’t lay it onto students and the general public as scientific fact without the proof, for that is just another glaring example of *scientism* (Google it up, kids, and share it with your science teacher for extra credit---just kidding). Nobody has been “blinded by science”---scientism is another matter.

One version of Multiverse Theory, distilled from the bong water of theoretical physics, has the cosmos birthing universe after universe and universe from within universe, splitting off ad infinitum, no beginning and no end; baby universes popping into existence by means of quantum fluctuations in the cosmic vacuum and rapidly expanding/inflating. Right. No room for God here. Truth is indeed often stranger than fiction, but try wrapping your mind around that one. Then again, there’s “nothing new under the sun”. One version of an old cosmological fable had a primitive tribesman explaining to an explorer that the earth rested on the back of a giant turtle. When asked what the turtle was resting on, he replied, “Another turtle”. Hoping to cause him to think through the implications of his belief, the explorer then asked him what *that* turtle was resting on. Growing annoyed with the thick-headedness of the explorer, the native replied, “It’s turtles all the way down!” As Roy Abraham Varghese pointed out in Antony Flew’s *There Is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, “Absolute nothingness means no laws, no vacuums, no fields, no energy, no structures, no physical or mental energies of any kind---and no ‘symmetries’. It has no properties or potentialities.”

Welcome to the magical realm of *Neverwas*. You can’t really go there, except in your head, because it is not and never was. No quantum fluctuations can arise there, for there is no *there*, real, virtual or potential for them to arise from.

Nonetheless, I'm going to indulge in some speculation myself (told you I did), that what we perceive as the universe may indeed be part of a multiverse and reside as a type of instance, to use game terminology, within the mind of God. But that's for another chapter.

How 'big' is the universe/multiverse? We don't know. Like minnows swimming in an ocean of spacetime, or the inhabitants of Dr. Seuss's Whoville (*Horton Hears a Who!*), it's big to *us*. And what most of us really want to know is how *we* fit into the big picture. Until fairly recently, the best that science could deduce was that Earth was the center of the universe and sun, moon and stars revolved around it. There are those who *still* believe it. Man was the *measure of all things* and all creation revolved around him. Theology put heaven and God at the center, with Earth the 'playing field' where the action was taking place (the really important stuff anyway).

Little did 'those in the know' know that the sun was a star, a very ordinary star, and that the earth and other planets revolved around it; that the sun was roughly 30000 light years from the center of a galaxy of 200 billion or more other stars, many with earth-like planets (ELPs) of their own; that this galaxy was only one of at least 100 billion galaxies in the *observable* universe; that all this only accounts for about five percent of 'stuff' that science can account for, the other ninety-five percent being still unidentified *dark matter and dark energy*.

Whether you think God or the Great Turtle of atheistic cosmology did it, what are the odds that we are all by our little lonesomes out here in the cosmos?

FUBAR

“Mos Eisley Spaceport. You will never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy.”

Obi Wan Kenobi to Luke Skywalker, *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*

FUBAR---a U.S. Military acronym for “messed up beyond all recognition” (Okay, I changed the first word out of respect for your Great-Aunt Minnie, but you know what it is). And that pretty well describes the planet we all know and love; if it was created or terraformed to be in the state in which it is and was in the past, then somebody did a piss-poor job. I’ll have to side with Charles Darwin on this one; watch what your kitty does with a mouse and then conclude that a good God designed it this way. And that’s just for starters. It’s butt-ugly, guys, and all the theological squirming you can toss at it is not going to clean it up. There may be a “peaceable kingdom”, populated by happy creatures that don’t kill and eat one another somewhere out there among the stars but it’s not Earth.

Here is a sample of possible explanations for how our world came to be the way it is, some more plausible than others.

- God created a beautiful, perfect world, and man and Satan messed it up. Well, there is no doubt that man can mess it up and, if he had a little help from some ‘frenemies’, the result would compare to what a group of unsupervised three year olds could accomplish in the kitchen. The fly in this soup, however, is that there is absolutely no scientific evidence that Earth has *ever* been in a pristine state.
- Aliens were trying to terraform the place and achieved a less than hoped for result. Maybe they gave up and left. Maybe they had a picnic and forgot to clean up. Maybe it’s a biolab in this little backwater of the galaxy. Maybe some other aliens crapped on the experiment. Maybe they just tinker with it off and on. Maybe they tossed in a few critters. Hey, a lot of people, including reputable scientists and not just sci-fi writers, have tossed out these ideas but, so far anyway--- no scientific proof.
- The history of the planet is about what one would expect to find if nature took its course and things evolved on their own---natural ‘happenings’, including some catastrophic ones, taken into consideration. This is the current scientific theory for earth and other habitable planets that no doubt abound in the cosmos.
- Some combination of the above, including theistic evolution with modification. That is to say that evolution is but one tool in God’s toolbox and that he can and does step in any-time, anywhere in the cosmos to do whatever he pleases either personally, as Jesus demonstrated, or through agents at his disposal.

I have friends (for now, anyway), including those in ministry, who adhere to some version of Young Earth Creationism (YEC). Sorry guys, but that's not going to fly *unless* we really are living in some sort of simulation---and that notion has been put out there as well. Scientific knowledge is necessarily a work in progress, but current theory places the sun and its planets at roughly 4.6 billion earth years, and that of *this* universe at roughly 13.8 billion earth years. This is way beyond the six thousand, ten thousand, forty thousand, whatever date proposed by YEC.

YEC adherents further propose that dinosaurs co-existed with our human ancestors and, along with other extinct species and corrupt humans, perished in a world-wide flood. While there is a widespread racial memory of a flood, the scientific evidence certainly does not bear out an event global in nature. A large number of prehistoric wildlife *did* live alongside early man, including *possibly* pockets of late dinosaur types such as the flightless raptor species *Terror Bird*, but certainly not the likes of T-Rex and its 'friends'.

Proponents of YEC, in their desire to uphold a literal interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis, have unintentionally brought the Bible as God's word into disrepute. This is beyond unfortunate and totally unnecessary, considering the damage done to the Christian message and witness and to those impacted by it, but we will deal with this in a later chapter.

As far as strictly atheistic science is concerned, humans appear to be the highest form of intelligent life operative on this planet and perhaps the universe. They are (somewhat) clever animals evolving from earlier primate ancestors, totally material in nature. The mind, the sense of self and free will remain nebulous but appear to arise from within the brain/body construct in contact with its surroundings. There is no soul and no afterlife to pass into at death. To be sure, this is an assumption based on faith, given the incomplete knowledge that we possess, but it is the best that science can come up with on its own for now given the current state of the art at its disposal. Okey-dokey, but science doesn't have all the cards---and when you don't have all the cards you are definitely not playing with a full deck.

Genesis 1-11

“The world is changed. I feel it in the water. I feel it in the earth. I smell it in the air. Much that once was is lost. For none now live who remember it.”

“And some things that should not have been forgotten were lost. History became legend, legend became myth.”

J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings (film)*

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). And in seven literal earth days! Sweet---that settles that, right? Until fairly recently, nearly everyone in the Western world was familiar with that account and most believed it whether or not they thought it through. But like a child’s Mylar birthday balloon a week after the party, it’s been looking kind of beat down. It’s been floating a foot off the floor, getting picked on by the cat and now maybe it’s about time to give it the steak knife and slip it into the trash while the kid’s not looking. Or flatten it out and hang it on her wall for awhile, so she doesn’t throw a fit.

I had a talk with a first year Christian college student recently who was conflicted to the point of depression between her chosen field of medical science and her and her family’s long-held belief in Young Earth Creationism. Her professors and fellow students were giving her grief about her faith and implying that she was not going to go far in the field unless she adjusted her beliefs; while her pastor, family and church friends urged her to remain true to God and the Bible. Long story short, my explaining that she really *could* have the cake and eat it too fell on deaf ears---as it usually does---and she went away holding back tears.

As I stated in the introduction, I agree with most Christians that the Bible is God’s word, preserved through the guidance of God’s spirit and valid for all time. Young Earth Creationists aside, however, the accounts of primeval history in Genesis 1-11 often come across as an embarrassment to scientifically aware Christians and as proof to non-believers that the Bible is a collection of biased and distorted history, myth and just plain nonsense. But this comes from a misunderstanding.

There was once a baby born to Hebrew slaves in the land of ancient Egypt, forced to be abandoned by his mother and rescued by an Egyptian princess. Raised and educated in the lore and tradition of his adopted family, he was ultimately called by the God of his birth parents to head a rebellion and to lead the Israelite slave nation out of Egypt to the land long promised by God to their forefathers. This man, Moses (a good Egyptian name), is credited with recording and/or

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