

DOES GOD EXIST?

Fourth Quarter 2023
Volume 50 Number 4

*A nonprofit effort to convince
mankind that God is real
and the Bible is His Word.*



THE HOLIDAYS WE CELEBRATE



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Does God Exist? Lectureships

No Lectures are scheduled,
but **visit us** at
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many materials are available
free of charge.

Rejoice always,
pray continually,
give thanks in all
circumstances;
for this is God's
will for you in
Christ Jesus.

— 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 NIV

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People have established all kinds of days to honor people or events of the past. Mother's Day, Memorial Day, Veterans Day, Independence Day, Martin Luther King Day, and Labor Day are just a few of the American culture's widely recognized special holidays. These holidays are good, but none of them are commanded by God.

Jesus Christ participated in special days and celebrations, as we can see in John 5:1. Many scholars believe that the unnamed feast was Purim, a celebration of the Jewish people's deliverance in Persia, as told in the book of Esther. Unlike the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (*Sukkoth*), Purim was not ordained in God's law delivered by Moses. The Feast of Dedication, or Hanukkah, is a celebration of the cleansing of the temple at the time of the Maccabean Revolt. It was not commanded by God, but in John 10:22, we see Jesus in Jerusalem during the celebration.

In Romans 14:5–8, Paul tells us that it does not matter whether or not we consider one day more sacred than another. What matters is that we live to the Lord. In verses 16–19, Paul tells his readers



that anyone who serves Christ is pleasing to God and will receive the approval of men. In verse 19, he writes, “Let us make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification.”

In Acts 21:20–26, Paul immerses himself in the Jewish purification procedure. In verse 26, Paul, who has shaved his head and gone through the seven days of purification, is recognized by the Jews and nearly loses his life. Paul had been opposing Jewish exclusionism, and God chose him to reach out to the Gentiles (see Acts 9:13–16). If we follow Paul’s example, we as Christians will do whatever it takes to produce “peace and mutual edification.”

This issue of the *Does God Exist?* journal covers the fourth quarter when our culture celebrates three major holidays—Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. The Thanksgiving holiday has its roots in the Christian tradition, and the New Testament clearly teaches that

Christians should be filled with thanksgiving (1 Thessalonians 5:18; Romans 1:21). Having a time when all Americans are encouraged to be thankful for our blessings and spend time with our families and loved ones is hard for even an atheist to criticize.

Halloween has a very different origin. It began as “All Hallows Day” and was celebrated at the end of harvest in Ireland. It was also a Celtic tradition with a feast and games revolving around food. It gradually became a part of Catholic teaching. In 606, Pope Boniface made it a celebration of martyrs, and in 825, Pope Gregory IV initiated praying for the dead. By 1200,



church bells rang people out of purgatory, and in France, Italy, and Spain, people left food beside the graves of dead relatives. In 1911, people in America began “guising” using costumes and making fun of Satan. Trick or treat began in 1915.

God has specifically told his people to avoid sorcerers, diviners, witchcraft, spiritists, consultants with the dead, and the like. In passages like Exodus 7:10–12 and Deuteronomy 18:10–12, we see this was not a simple or superficial issue. Even today, people have tried to use spiritism to control others and make money. Christians are obligated to oppose satanic activities.

That said, does a Halloween party or decorations mean we are endorsing destructive practices of the past? Colossians 2:16–23 tells Christians not to allow anyone to judge them on the principles of the world. Chapter 3, verses 1–13, tells Christians to “clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” The whole chapter of Romans 6 tells us how to live differently in the

exact opposite of the way of Satan and the world. Halloween can be a teaching device if we allow it to be. Children can dress up as an animal or a fictional character and not feel that they are endorsing anything. Portrayals of fictional characters are not dangerous in and of themselves, but we need to use some care and thoughtfulness during this holiday.

Christmas has no satanic component, but what the Bible says and what many Christians believe about the birth of Christ are miles apart. Jesus was certainly not born in December, and there is no biblical command to celebrate the birth of Christ. The star of Bethlehem was not a celestial star and was never seen by the Jewish shepherds or Herod. The star did not stand over the manger but over “where the young Child was” when the magi arrived. The magi were most likely Persian astrologers, and the Bible does not tell us how many there were. You can verify those things by reading Matthew 1:18–23 and Luke 1:26–2:20, the only New Testament references to the birth of Christ.

So, what should Christians do about Christmas? Christmas is a wonderful holiday that brings us great music and an economic boost for many. It also encourages giving to people in need. It is a time when people think about Christ and his entrance into our world more than at any other time of the year. Many traditions like Christmas

trees, Santa Claus, and gift exchanges do not have biblical support but can be teaching opportunities and times of enjoying relationships.

It is easy to find negatives, but that is not the attitude Christians should have. In the passage from Romans 14, Paul tells us to avoid judging others for esteeming special days. In 1 Thessalonians 5:22, he also warns us to avoid all appearances of evil. Christmas is not evil except when greed and selfishness creep into people’s minds, but that can happen anytime.

— John N. Clayton



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The Importance of Fellowship

Medical science has now shown that loneliness contributes to bad health. One of the benefits of being a Christian is what the Bible calls *koinonia*. That Greek word can be translated “fellowship” or “communion.” In Acts 2:42, the first-century church met in constant fellowship, and Hebrews 10:25 urged Christians not to forsake gathering together. We see in the scriptures that Christ’s disciples were together constantly.

Fellowship with people who share your values and beliefs is a significant contributor to good health. A study of 18,000 diabetic adults in the United Kingdom showed that “loneliness may be a bigger risk for heart disease in diabetes patients than a bad diet, smoking or a lack of exercise or depression.” Researchers found that over ten years, the chance of developing cardiovascular disease was up to 26% higher in patients with high loneliness scores. Dr. Lu Qi, a professor at Tulane University, said, “We should not downplay the importance of loneliness on physical and emotional health. I encourage my patients with diabetes who feel lonely to join a group or class and try to make friends with people who have shared interests.”

God’s statement that “it is not good for man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18) should not be restricted to the marriage relationship. Loneliness contributes to bad health, and God knows what humans need for good health. I have observed that men who lose their wives and live alone have a reduced life expectancy, but the church provides a remedy for that loneliness. On a personal note, I remember vividly the negative effect my wife’s death had on my health. My relationship with other Christians in the months following her death contributed to my living to see my 85th birthday.

—JNC



What Jesus Looked Like

What did Jesus Christ look like? In my travels, I have seen pictures of Jesus with Asian features, Caucasian features, Hispanic features, and features of people of color. We do not know what Jesus looked like, and we really should not care. The fact that he could slip through a crowd unnoticed (Luke 4:28–30) and Judas had to use a kiss to identify him (Matthew 26:48–49) indicates that he must have looked pretty much like a typical Jewish man of his time.

The important thing about Jesus is not his appearance but his message. If you read Matthew 5, 6, and 7, you will not see a picture of Jesus, but you will get a good look at the uniqueness and practical value of his teachings. The August 24, 2023, issue of *Time* magazine reviewed the various cover images of Jesus they had published over the years. They would have done better to publish what Jesus taught in those chapters of Matthew's gospel, since that is what our society needs today.

Read Acts 2:37–42 and notice how the people who listened to Peter's message about Jesus responded to God's invitation. They were not concerned about what Jesus looked like. They were changed by what Jesus taught and what he did. They were baptized, not as an emotional response to a speaker but to receive the gift God offered to them through Jesus.

Read Romans 6 and notice what baptism is about. It is not like joining a club and is not dependent on hearing a preacher. Baptism is a personal response to God and a change in one's life. It is also the way to bring God's Spirit into our feeble human existence so we can live a new life. Reading and acting on God's Word can make an incredible difference in our lives and future.

—JNC



Willful Blindness

In his book *Reflections on the Existence of God*, Richard Simmons used the phrase “willful blindness” to describe many people’s rejection of God and the Bible. This phrase is not confined to people who reject God because they are ignorant. Even scholars and scientists are guilty of willful blindness.

Thomas Nagel, a philosopher at New York University and a promoter of atheism, described his willful blindness well: “I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and naturally hope there is no God! I don’t want there to be a God. I don’t want the universe to be like that.”

Years ago, a young man attending my presentations at Purdue University asked many questions. When he became silent, I asked him, “What are you going to do with all of this evidence?” He responded, “I don’t want to quit having sex with my girlfriend, and so I am going to ignore it.”



Richard Dawkins, considered the world’s leading atheist at the time of this writing, says, “Even if there were no actual evidence in favor of Darwinian theory ... we should still be justified in preferring it over all rival theories.”

Agnostic astronomer Robert Jastrow has made this observation: “Scientific reactions provide an interesting demonstration of the response of the scientific mind—supposedly a very objective mind—when evidence uncovered by science itself leads to a conflict with the articles of faith in our professions. It turns out that scientists behave the same way the rest of us do when our beliefs are in conflict with the evidence. We become irritated, we pretend the conflict does not exist, or we paper it over with meaningless phrases.”



Recently, a reader asked why we continue to tell people that God exists.

He said that, in his experience, people are not going to be confused with the facts and that we were wasting our time by presenting evidence for God. I asked why he continues to read the things we publish. He responded that he knew his arguments for rejecting God were getting weaker and weaker as he read how much good evidence is in our materials.

The fact is that, in time, being guilty of willful blindness will bear destructive fruit. I suspect my young friend at Purdue is no longer sleeping with his girlfriend. I feel for him, knowing he missed the full joy of sex as God

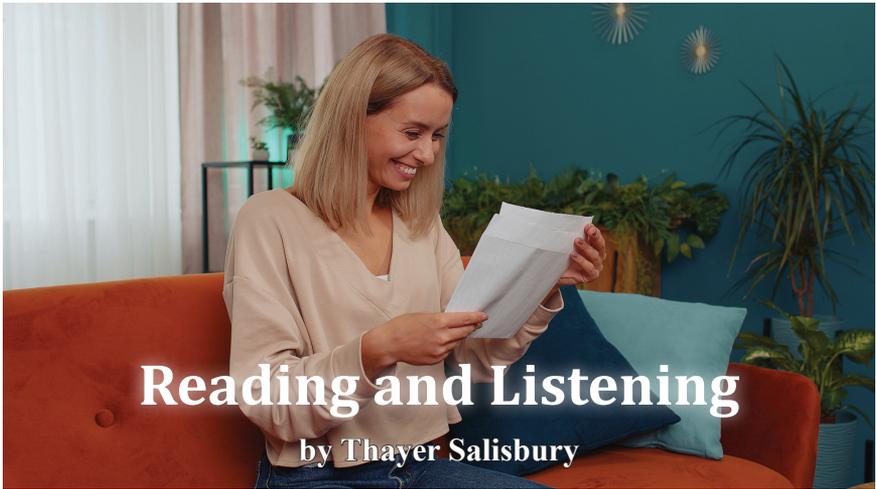


intended. I also feel for those like Dawkins and Nagel who cannot tell you why they exist or the ultimate purpose for their lives. Having no eternal purpose for life leads to disappointment and frustration. Jesus said he came to give life and to give it more abundantly (John 10:10). Acting on evidence is a first step in allowing God’s Spirit to influence our lives (Acts 2:38).

—JNC



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Reading and Listening

by Thayer Salisbury

The late Mortimer Adler was a fascinating man, a highly successful professor, editor, and author. He taught history and philosophy at the University of Chicago. He edited the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the *Great Books of the Western World* series. As an author, his most famous works were *How to Read a Book* (1940) and *How to Think About God: A Guide for a Twentieth Century Pagan* (1980). In 1983, Adler published a sequel to *How to Read a Book*. Titled *How to Speak, How to Listen*, the sequel was intended to do for oral communication what the earlier work had done for reading.

Adler makes the point that good listening is difficult, yet we spend little effort teaching it or trying to master it. He points out that we read and listen well occasionally, but we often fail to do our best as readers and listeners. Two illustrations of this point stood out to me.



Mortimer J. Adler

First, Adler points out that a lover reading a letter from his beloved reads very carefully and repeatedly. Later, he points out that if we know our lives depend on our listening, we can listen well. He asks the readers to imagine that they are passengers on an airplane traveling over water.

“The pilot comes on the intercom and says, ‘This is your captain speaking from the cockpit. We are compelled to make an emergency landing twelve minutes from now. I will describe the procedure and prepare you for it. Please listen carefully. When I am finished, the cabin attendants will walk down the

aisle. There will be plenty of time left for you to ask questions. Do not panic. If you understand and follow instruction, there need be no injuries or loss of life.”

Adler then concludes, “Would you not listen with rapt attention and try to understand perfectly, or, failing that, would you not try to ask clear questions and listen to the answers given?”

As I read these two paragraphs, it occurred to me that Adler has, inadvertently perhaps, identified why so many people do not read the Bible and do not really listen to sermons. Do you see it?

The lover reads carefully. The person who believes that his life depends on listening well listens carefully. It is the person who does not love the author who does not read well. It is the person who does not really believe that his life depends on it who ignores instructions.

Those who love the Lord will study his word as a lover reads a love letter. Those who believe that their eternal destiny depends on God’s instructions will listen carefully and ask questions regarding any critical point that remains unclear.

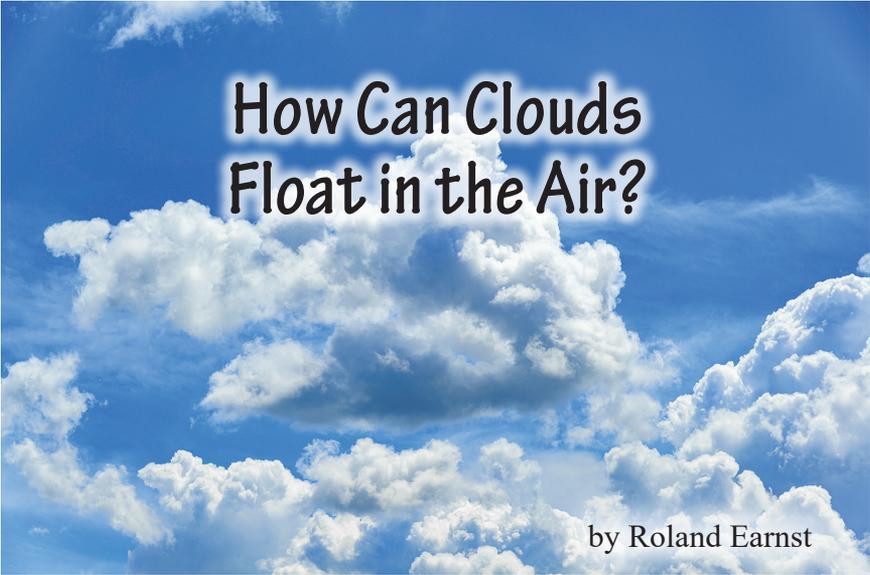


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How Can Clouds Float in the Air?

by Roland Earnst

The sky is falling! Well, not exactly. Actually, the clouds are falling. Clouds are made of water, and everyone knows water is heavier than air, so how can clouds float in the air? Have you ever thought about that? Are clouds floating, or is it an optical illusion?

Before we answer that question, here is another one. What does the Bible say about clouds? Clouds are mentioned many times in the Bible. God gives us a creation story in the book of Job that expands on the Genesis account. These are some of the words God used to challenge Job and his friends in Job 38:8–9 (NKJV):

Or *who* shut in the sea with doors,
When it burst forth *and* issued from the womb;
When I made the clouds its garment,
And thick darkness its swaddling band;
When I fixed My limit for it,
And set bars and doors;
When I said,
“This far you may come, but no farther,
And here your proud waves must stop!”

In this poetic account, when the early Earth was a water world, God shut up the ocean “with doors” and told it, “Here your proud waves must stop!” I love that word picture of the creation process! God speaks, and the seas listen!



In this Job passage, God explains something we wonder about in Genesis 1:1, where it says, “darkness was on the face of the deep.” The garment of clouds explains the darkness covering the oceans. Otherwise, we have to wonder why the first part of Genesis 1:1 tells us, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” The heavens would have to include the Sun, Moon, and stars, as well as all of the galaxies and everything in them. Why, then, was there darkness on the water-covered Earth? God answers that question by saying: “I made the clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band.”



Genesis tells us that God divided the water covering the land from the water in the sky, meaning the clouds (see Genesis 1:9–10). We read further in Genesis 1:14–18 that God caused the clouds to clear up enough to allow the Sun and Moon to be fully visible “for signs and seasons, and for days and years” and to “give light on the earth.”

We see that God’s description of the creation process in Job clarifies some questions that the Genesis creation account leaves unanswered. But that is not all God said about clouds in Job 38.

God challenges Job with this question in verse 34:

Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
That an abundance of water may cover you?

God verifies that clouds are made of water, and as Genesis tells us, God divided the water on the surface from the water in the air. So, how did God make the water float in the air? Are the clouds defying gravity, or is this an optical illusion? Is God breaking his own laws of physics, or is he fooling us? The short answer is clouds do not float on air — at least not exactly.

We have two things to learn. The clouds are falling, and only God can tell the clouds what to do. Let us return to where we left off in Job 38, where God speaks of clouds as he challenges Job and his friends. These are God's words in verses 34–38:

Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
That an abundance of water may cover you?
Can you send out lightnings, that they may go,
And say to you, "Here we are!"?
Who has put wisdom in the mind?
Or who has given understanding to the heart?
Who can number the clouds by wisdom?
Or who can pour out the bottles of heaven,
When the dust hardens in clumps,
And the clods cling together?

God asks Job if he can tell the clouds what to do, sending rain when the ground is dry. Of course, the answer is "No." Human wisdom and understanding cannot do that, but God can. Before God spoke to him, Job seemed to believe that sometimes God used rain as a form of punishment (Job 37:13). God did withhold rain from Israel for years because of the evil leadership of Ahab and Jezebel, but Elijah's prayer brought it back.

So, does God make a practice of withholding rain as a punishment? Not according to Jesus. He told us to love our enemies, "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:44–45).

We cannot tell the clouds what to do, whether we want it to rain or not rain. Only God can do that, but he is not a punishing old man in the sky ready to withhold rain or zap us with lightning if we misbehave. Many people have that confused idea, but the Bible does not support

it. God sends sunshine and rain on the just and the unjust through the weather system he created. All weather conditions occur naturally according to God’s designed system, except in rare cases when he intervened with a timing miracle.



Let us get back to our original question about clouds. They are water and sometimes ice, so how can they float in the air? The answer is that they do not float. They are falling very gradually. Any unsupported object will fall to the ground because of Earth’s gravity.

As it falls faster, the friction of the air molecules increases.

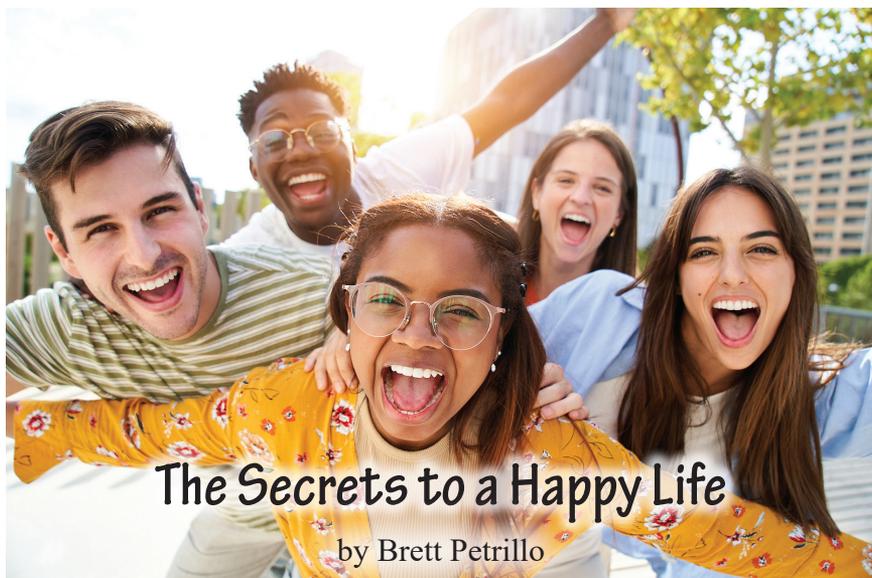
Any falling object will eventually reach terminal velocity when the friction force equals the pull of gravity. We can ignore the air friction for a bowling ball because it is minuscule compared to the ball’s weight. However, the weight of a water droplet in a cloud with a diameter measured in microns is minuscule, so the terminal velocity may be less than a hundred feet per hour. When you consider that clouds are thousands of feet in the air, their “falling” is too slow for us to notice, and the water droplets may “dissolve” into the air before they fall very far. When they converge into larger droplets, they fall more quickly as rain.

The bottom line is, yes, the clouds are falling, but you will only notice it when they fall as rain. The more important point is that only God can tell the clouds what to do. Remember that God’s love sends sunshine and rain for everyone, even those who refuse to recognize his existence. That is the kind of love we should show to everyone.



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The Secrets to a Happy Life

by Brett Petrillo

1. Learn to laugh with others, and at yourself. —Proverbs 17:22
2. Spend some time with older people; learn from their wisdom. —Proverbs 19:20



3. Enjoy the innocence and purity of children. —Matthew 18:1–6



4. Work with all your might. —Ecclesiastes 9:10



5. Live life like you will live forever, because you will. —Ecclesiastes 3:11



6. Plan as though you will die tomorrow, because you might. — James 4:14

7. Say something encouraging to someone; be specific and genuine. — Hebrews 3:13



8. Give something away with no strings attached. — 2 Corinthians 9:7



9. Help someone in need; expect nothing in return. — Matthew 25:35–40



10. Forgive others as many times as needed. — Matthew 18:21–22

11. Ask for forgiveness; a clean conscience makes for a soft pillow. — 1 John 1:9

12. Pray often and be specific. — 1 Thessalonians 5:17



13. Count your blessings (you might lose count). — Ephesians 1:3



14. Love God, love your neighbors, and love yourself. — Matthew 22:37–39

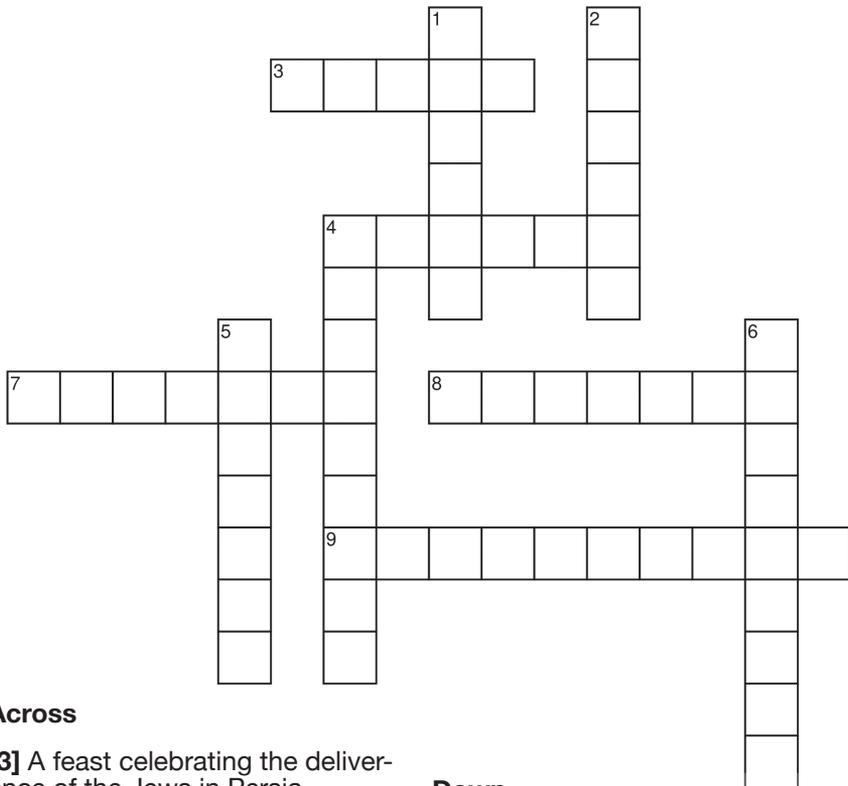
15. Bow to the Lord; better now than later. — Philippians 2:10

16. Obey God's commands. — Matthew 7:21–27

Reprinted from “16 Tips to Live Happily” in *House to House – Heart to Heart*, January 2022.

Does God Exist? 4th Quarter 2023 Crossword

Solve this puzzle based on the articles on pages 3–17



Across

[3] A feast celebrating the deliverance of the Jews in Persia.

[4] Darkness covered the early water-world Earth because of _____.

[7] The important thing about Jesus is not what he looked like but his _____.

[8] Those who ignore evidence are guilty of _____ blindness.

[9] _____ contributes to bad health.

Down

[1] A clean conscience makes for a soft _____.

[2] God sends sunshine and rain on the just and the _____.

[4] The lover reads a message _____.

[5] The clouds are _____, and only God can tell them what to do.

[6] Count your _____.

(If you get stumped, read to the end of this issue for answers on page 30.)

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We invite you to read our daily posts on:

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Much of the material in this publication appeared earlier on that website.

You can watch our videos or listen to our audios by going to:

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You can find archives of our magazine and other printed materials at:

DOESGODEXIST.ORG

We reach out to a larger audience with examples of design in nature on our Facebook page:

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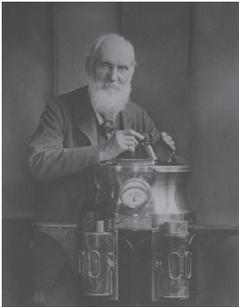
York University Announces that the
CLAYTON APOLOGETICS READING ROOM
will open in March of 2024.
See page 22 for details.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST
AND SUPPORT!

SCIENTISTS AND GOD

Editor's note: Atheists attempt to suggest that scientists are intelligent people who have rejected faith and do not believe in God. The fact is that some of the most productive scientists who have ever lived were believers in God. We share some of their thoughts with you in this column.

Sir William Thomson (1824 -1907) and James Joule (1818 -1889) British Physicists and Mathematicians



Lord Kelvin



James Joule

As a high school and college physics teacher, one of my heroes was “Lord Kelvin,” whose birth name was William Thomson. Thomson is known for his work in thermodynamics. His research on the laws governing the relationship between temperature and heat is a major topic for any physics student. Working with James Joule, Thomson developed the absolute temperature scale and helped formulate what happens to matter when all heat is removed.

We measure heat in BTUs (British thermal unit) and temperature in degrees. One BTU is the amount of heat needed to raise the temperature of one pound of water one degree Fahrenheit. (In the metric system, one calorie is the heat required to raise 1 gram of water 1 degree Celsius.) James Joule, who was also a believer, measured the relationship between mechanical energy and heat. He determined that it takes 772.55 foot-pounds of energy to raise one pound of water one degree Fahrenheit.

Thomson was raised as a believer in God, but his studies in science and the behavior of matter as temperatures rise and heat is distributed led him to faith. Thomson said, “If you study science deep enough and long enough, it will force you to believe in God.” These two men provided the basis of heat use and measurement in all of science. The design they saw in what they measured and how it related to God’s creation led both of them to faith. James Joule’s headstone bears a quote from John 9:4, “I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night comes when no man can work.”

—JNC

Cynthia's Corner

HOLIDAYS CHRISTIANS CELEBRATE



At Easter, we celebrate the resurrection from the dead of a man Christians believe to be God's Son. Believers have a reason to celebrate Easter because he died for our sins to reconcile us to God and then conquered death for us. Some Christians celebrate the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's Son, every Lord's Day, Sunday, as we partake of the Lord's Supper. That is because it is the day Jesus rose from the grave, and the early Christians came together to worship God and have Communion on that day.

Jesus gave us the Communion, or Lord's Supper, before he was crucified (Luke 22:17–20; Mark 14:22–24; Matthew 26:26–28). The apostle Paul taught it to the early church in 1 Corinthians 11:23–29. The Lord's Supper was observed every Lord's day by disciples who came together to worship God and remember what Jesus had done for them.

At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, God in human form (John 1:1–14). Although December 25th was not the day Jesus was born, and many people celebrate Christmas for other reasons, it is still a time when we remember the birth of Christ. In a way, Christians remember the birth of Jesus every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper because it reminds us that he surrendered his physical body to crucifixion on the cross. He was, at the same time, a human man and proven to be the Son of God. Only he could atone for our sins because he was sinless (John 3:16, 17).

Another holiday that reflects the heart of Christianity is Thanksgiving. It is a day set aside to be thankful for what we have. Even though this holiday has taken on a secular flavor, being thankful for all of our blessings is at the heart of Christianity. We thank God for sending his Son to save us. We thank God for being with us. We thank God for our material blessings, for the blessing of family and friends, and for health. Most importantly, as Christians, we thank God for our spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 3:15–17; 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).

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CLAYTON APOLOGETICS READING ROOM

The **Does God Exist?** ministry and York University are dedicating the Clayton Apologetics Reading Room as a part of the York Bible Department Equip Conference 2024. The name of the conference comes from Ephesians 4:12 because it is designed to equip congregations to strengthen and grow. It features special sessions with Dr. Carlus Cupton, Dr. Lance Hawley, Scott Lambert, and several other speakers and teachers.

The Clayton Apologetics Reading Room is an addition to the Clayton Museum of Ancient History. Over the 56 years of the **Does God Exist?** ministry, John Clayton has subscribed to virtually every atheist and apologetics periodical in existence. In addition to his collection of over 1,000 periodicals, he has built a library of books dealing with apologetics. Some of the books date to the 1800s and have historical significance. The Clayton collection includes books by skeptics and atheists, well-known scholars of apologetics, and leading Church of Christ evangelists. All of the books deal with questions of God's existence, how we know the Bible is the Word of God, and how we know Jesus was a historical person and the Son of God.

In our age of skepticism, atheism, agnosticism, naturalism, and doubt, York University and the **Does God Exist?** ministry wanted to provide a place where anyone could research the erosion of faith in America and the apologetic answer to it. The reading room will feature all of the Clayton collection of materials and provide a comfortable place for study and research. The Clayton Apologetics Reading Room will also continue to stay updated on the latest and best books and resources for promoting faith in our world of skepticism.

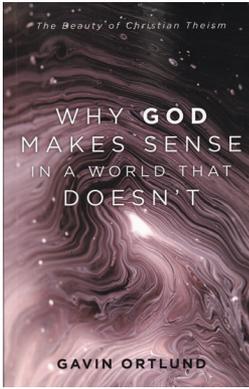
You are invited to attend the Equip Conference on March 11 – 12 and the dedication of the Clayton Apologetics Reading Room on March 11 at 2:00 p.m. For more information and to register for the activities, go to york.edu/equip or call 800-950-YORK (402-363-5600) or e-mail Garrett Best at gbest@york.edu.

York University, 1125 E. 8th St., York, Nebraska 68467

Why God Makes Sense in a World that Doesn't

by Gavin Ortlund, Baker Academic © 2021

\$22.99 paperback, 225 pages, ISBN: 978-1-5409-6409-0



Many of our readers are familiar with John Clayton's book *The Rational God: Does God Make Sense?* John's book is an excellent introduction to why it is reasonable to believe in God without acting on "blind faith." Gavin Ortlund takes that concept to the next level in his book, *Why God Makes Sense in a World that Doesn't*.

Ortlund introduces the "Beauty, Story, and Probability in the Question of God." In a time when some best-selling authors are writing things such as "religion spoils everything," Ortlund sets out to show that faith in God is true and desirable—even "beautiful." Using

the concept of "story," he explores the probability that the world had a beginning and that it has meaning, conflict, and hope. He explores those four things in the book's four chapters: The Cause of the World; The Meaning of the World; The Conflict of the World; and The Hope of the World.

When considering that the world must have a cause, Ortlund confronts the often-asked question, "What Caused God?" He answers the arguments of atheists and skeptics. In dealing with the meaning of the world, he says that "things like math, music, and love make more sense if there is a God." He says that "mathematical truths exist independently of human minds," and the fine-tuned constants that allow the world to exist cannot be explained by chance.

In dealing with the conflict of the world, Ortlund points out that the conflict between good and evil shapes the plot of every story in books and movies. He summarizes it as: "Good and evil clash, good struggles and suffers for a while, eventually, good defeats evil." That leads to the last chapter on the hope of the world. Ortlund writes, "While most religious figures claimed to manifest or offer the way to spiritual reality or God, Jesus claimed to be God." His resurrection confirmed that. Through Christ's work, Ortlund says, "God will not merely end pain and evil; he will mend them."

The conclusion is that "the Christian story makes sense of the fact that the world does not make sense." I recommend John Clayton's book if you have not read it. However, if you want to go even deeper into "Why God Makes Sense?" read Gavin Ortlund's book.

—Reviewed by Roland Earnst

The books that are reviewed in the Book Reviews section are not available through us, but can be obtained from a local bookstore or through many online bookstores.

DANDY DESIGNS

Reindeer and Santa



Reindeer, or caribou, are designed to live in very cold places. Most mammals in your backyard have a layer of fur, but reindeer have two layers of thick, furry, brownish-gray hair. The layer close to their skin is dense, woolly, and soft. On top are long, hollow hairs called guard hairs. Air gets trapped in this structure, and air is a poor conductor

of heat. This arrangement holds in body heat and keeps the reindeer warm in even the coldest climate. This structure also makes the reindeer buoyant so they can float and are excellent swimmers. Reindeer legs do not have the thick fur coat. In cold weather, blood vessels in the legs constrict, causing less blood to flow to avoid heat loss through contact with ice and snow.

Reindeer eyes show incredible engineering to allow them to see as they live in darkness for six months of the year. Reindeer are uniquely able to see ultraviolet light, allowing vision in very dark conditions. They also have an acute sense of smell, allowing them to locate food even under a heavy blanket of snow. Their primary food source is lichen, a simple growth found on tree trunks and rocks everywhere on the planet. Reindeer do not need to hibernate because their food is always available.

Reindeer have incredible stamina, able to travel 35 miles in a single day. They have been clocked at 50 miles per hour, meaning they can outrun any predators in their Arctic environment. Those who invented the Santa Claus myth included reindeer because they had observed these animals in their natural habitat. God has designed animals for every environment on this planet. When you see Christmas decorations showing reindeer pulling Santa's sled, use that image to teach children about the design God has built into all living things, including reindeer.

Visit: [Facebook.com/evidence4god](https://www.facebook.com/evidence4god)

Feathers

Feathers are made of the protein keratin and are connected to blood vessels, similar to how our hair is connected to our vascular system. Once a feather reaches its final stage, it disconnects from the blood vessel that has nourished it, thus reducing its weight. When molting occurs, and old feathers are discarded, tiny muscles reconnect the vascular system to grow a new one.



Feathers serve the bird by providing insulation, waterproofing, color, display, and flight in remarkable ways. Peacocks can present colorful displays, but so can parrots, pheasants, and various tropical birds.

Feathers provide insulation by trapping air, which is a poor conductor of heat. Down feathers trap air efficiently while adding very little weight to the bird. This same feature gives waterfowl their buoyancy as well as insulation. Birds preen their feathers, treating them with oil from a gland just above the bird's tail. The tight interlocking barbules in a bird's outer feathers make them

impenetrable to water. Birds use down feathers to produce an environment that allows eggs to hatch and to keep chicks safe.

Flight is possible because each wing feather has the shape of an airfoil to provide lift and minimize drag. Since the feathers are flexible, they can move to reduce drag, and their tips are designed to minimize turbulence, making smooth flight possible. They really are complex structures of ingenuity.

Color in bird feathers is accomplished in several ways. For some feathers, melanin gives color to the feather's keratin, and the bird's diet can control its color. A flamingo's pink color comes from eating algae that contain carotenoids. Rather than using pigments, many brightly-colored bird feathers use structural color produced by manipulating light waves to create blues, greens, and iridescent colors. Considering the complex structures we know as bird feathers brings to mind Psalm 9:1, "I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart; I will show forth all your marvelous works." Feathers are among those marvelous works.

For documents and archives of this journal plus booklets and more: www.doesgodexist.org

News and Notes

STAY UP-TO-DATE ON NEWS AND NOTES: The stories in News and Notes are condensed from articles previously published on our website www.DoesGodExist.today. You can use the QR codes with each of these articles to see the original posts for more details and references. There are also many other interesting and informative articles on that website each day. We encourage you to follow us daily on “Does God Exist? Today.” On that website, you can also subscribe to our free weekly e-mail update. We call it “The Best of the Week from DOES GOD EXIST?” It contains links to the most popular of our posts on DGE? Today and our Facebook page (Facebook.com/evidence4god/).

ASTEROID STRIKE: NASA has plotted 1,000 known Potentially Hazardous Asteroids (PHAs). These are documented boulders of rock and ice over 140 meters across that will pass within 7.5 million kilometers of Earth (about 20 times the distance to the Moon). Were a giant asteroid to strike Earth, the result would be catastrophic. There is evidence that this has happened in the past, probably causing mass extinctions on our planet.

NASA has concluded that none of the asteroids known to astronomers will strike the Earth for at least the next 100 years. God created our planet in such a way that we are protected from destructive agents from outer space.

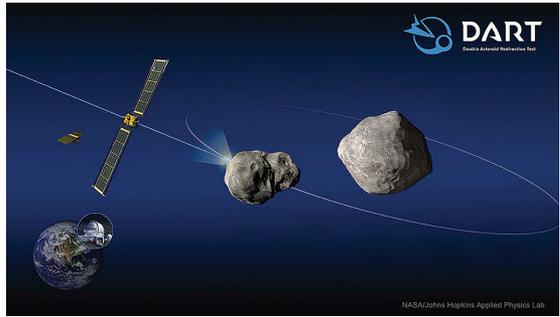


The more we learn about space, the more we see the design and planning involved in creation. Human self-destruction is far more likely than a catastrophic asteroid strike from space.

A LESSON FROM THE DART EXPERIMENT: In September 2022, NASA steered the Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART) spacecraft into an asteroid named Dimorphos, attempting to alter its orbit. The experiment was designed to see if we could change the path of an asteroid moving toward a collision with Earth.

It sounded like a good way to protect our planet from an asteroid impact. The collision did alter the orbit of Dimorphos, which is comforting to know. However, it also caused more potential problems. The Hubble Space Telescope observed 37 previously unseen

objects accompanying Dimorphos in its orbit around the Sun. These are boulders probably blasted off from Dimorphos by the DART collision. They are not just little pieces of rock or dust. Some of the boulders are as large as seven meters in diameter.



Calculations show that the weight of the 37 boulders adds up to 5,000 metric tons — the weight of 300 gravel-filled dump trucks.

Humans can learn a lesson from this incident. We are not God, and our wisdom and knowledge are incomplete. As God said to Job (Job 38:2), “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” In our day of rejecting God and his Word, we must be reminded that altering the design God built into the creation of everything from galaxies to viruses can have tremendous consequences.



SEARCHING FOR ALIEN LIFE: The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is searching for signs of alien life in the universe. Life is everywhere on Earth, from frigid climates to arid deserts and ocean depths to mountaintops, but does it exist anywhere else?

Currently, NASA is searching for microbial life on Mars with two robotic rovers, Curiosity and Perseverance. Those rovers are exploring rocks in fossilized waterways on Mars, seeking any indication that microbes once lived there. NASA and the European Space Agency (ESA) are working to develop a Mars sample return mission to bring rocks back to Earth for closer examination.



Perseverance Rover
Tire Tracks on Mars

Astrobiologists are hopeful that Enceladus and Europa, moons of Saturn and Jupiter respectively, might support some form of life now or in the past. The new James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) is also involved in the search for alien life. It can detect “biosignatures” around exoplanets outside of our solar system. In all these ways, NASA is searching for signs of alien life in the universe.

Heather Graham, a NASA astrobiologist at the Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland, says, “We don’t actually know yet how

life on this planet began” Of course, NASA is looking for some natural explanation of how life began. Graham said we must “roll back that clock to see how life began.” Perhaps some are motivated to search for signs of alien life to show that God is unnecessary. Will science someday find that there is life, even microbial life, elsewhere in the universe? Perhaps, but if there is, God created it since he created the universe.



LOSING HOPE: One serious problem facing our society today is a lack of hope. Polls show that most Americans think the country’s best days are behind us. When asked if the country is going in the right or wrong direction, the vast majority say it is going in the wrong direction. Losing hope creates a downward spiral that only gets worse.

Hope is what you have when you are looking forward to something better. It involves waiting in anticipation of a better day. When people lose hope, they become discouraged because they fear what tomorrow might bring. They may even become angry and vent their frustration on others or themselves. We see that especially among young people.

When young people are being taught that they are mere accidents of evolution and their life has no ultimate meaning, it is not surprising that they are losing hope. When they see no purpose in life and no hope for a better future, we should not be surprised to see them take out their anger on society.

What a difference it can make in the lives of young people if they have the reassurance that they are loved and that their lives have purpose and meaning. However, adults cannot give hope to young people if they do not have it themselves. That is something that Christianity can give. A Christian can look forward to a better day regardless of present circumstances. We know that God is in control and that he loves us, as Jesus taught and demonstrated.



THE GROWING SUICIDE PROBLEM: On August 11, 2023, the Centers for Disease Control released data for 2022, showing 50,000 suicides, a 2.6% increase over 2021. The governmental response to the growing suicide problem has been chiefly hand-wringing, with no reasonable attempt to understand why it is happening. Those of us who work with young people and talk with them regularly can see several causes.



Mental health issues begin at an early age. Children are born with no control over the actions of their parents or the condition of their home situation. The life plan Jesus gave, and which the Bible clearly teaches, is the nuclear family with a mother and father having clear-cut responsibilities in a loving, stable relationship. It is difficult to misunderstand passages like Ephesians 5:28–6:4. We hear “experts” and popular figures saying marriage is an outdated tradition. Still, collateral damage from alternatives to the nuclear family includes badly disturbed children, leading to the growing suicide problem.

Kids react to the instability in their homes in various ways. Some want to change their gender thinking that will improve their lives. Others rely on substances that affect their mental state. Whether marijuana, alcohol, or a hard drug, the effect is temporary, and the damage is long-lasting. Kids without a stable family at home look for a substitute at school, in a club, or a gang of peers with the same problems. Those choices are temporary and, in most cases, a dead end. For many, suicide is an easy option.

Instead of supporting the efforts of Christians to address these issues, the government is making it harder for churches to do what Jesus has called us to do. Even prison ministry, which we are heavily involved in, is being subjected to increasing rules and requirements. Governments are regulating Christian adoption and foster care programs out of existence by conditions that violate Christian principles.

Voters must start asking questions about the beliefs of political candidates and how they will address the needs of families and young adults. The alternative is a continually growing suicide problem and other social issues among our young people.



AN ASTRONAUT WHO BELIEVES THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE: Astronaut Victor Glover served on the International Space Station and will pilot NASA’s Artemis II Mission to the Moon in 2024. Glover is an astronaut who believes in the Bible and science. He talks about how the creation gives evidence for the existence of God.

In *The Christian Chronicle*, Glover explained his faith in these words:

“The Moon is a time capsule for the Earth, and we think it’s old—about 4.5 billion years. And my preacher used to say



to me, ‘Yeah, but NASA is wrong because I know the Earth is about 10,000 years old.’ I said, ‘How do you know that?’ He walked me

through the lineages in the Bible, and I said, ‘But that doesn’t mark any specific time period.’ And it doesn’t need to because the power of the Gospel is not in a timeline. It’s in that message, in that promise, and that promise being kept. So they don’t actually work against each other like some people like to claim that they do. I had to navigate that because of my faith and my belief in science. I believe in both, and I don’t find them to be in conflict. And I think it’s helped me to be an ambassador to both sides.”

For 55 years, the **Does God Exist?** ministry has shown that science is a friend of faith. We have seen much opposition from the religious establishment as we struggle to undo the collateral damage of the rejection of science. Physical evidence continues to reveal the truth of the Bible. Even when it conflicts with human religious tradition, science is in total agreement with what the Bible says. Let us all pray that some who will not listen to us will listen to an astronaut who believes in the Bible and science. Many young souls are at stake in this false conflict between science and faith.



EXTRAORDINARY CLAIMS REQUIRE EXTRAORDINARY EVIDENCE: It is known as the Sagan standard and abbreviated ECREE. Carl Sagan, an American scientist and agnostic, hosted the PBS program *Cosmos* in the 1980s. He said in the series, “I believe that the extraordinary should be pursued. But extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.” He was talking about claims that aliens from space had visited Earth. But we can apply the principle to more than alien visitations.

What does the Sagan ECREE standard mean? It tells us that when we make an extraordinary claim, we must back it up with extraordinary evidence. How about the extraordinary secularist claim that everything we see came from nothing by means of nothing? If matter, energy, time and space all originated at the “big bang,” and nothing existed before that, where is the extraordinary evidence to back up that claim? Could an eternal God existing outside of time and space be a better explanation for the universe?

If one claims that life originated from non-living chemicals without intelligent guidance, what is the extraordinary evidence for that? Even if scientists succeed in creating life from non-living chemicals in the laboratory (and they are far from doing that), it would merely prove that intelligence can create life from non-life. That is what the Bible has said for thousands of years.



ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD PUZZLE ON PAGE 18

DOWN: 1-pillow; 2-unjust; 4-carefully; 5-falling; 6-blessing
ACROSS: 3-Purim; 4-clouds; 7-message; 8-willful; 9-loneliness

As we begin the new year of 2024,
we thank you for your support
and pray that this will be
a great year for you and your family.

John and Cynthia Clayton
Roland Earnst
Linda Glover
Karl Marcussen

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*It's scientists vs. preachers,
not science vs. the Bible.*

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