

UFOs, ETs AND THE NEW AGE: A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

By Doug Potter

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BACKGROUND

Terms, Statistics and Reality of UFOs

The term “flying saucer” was first used by the media to describe the sightings of unusual disklike objects that began to be reported in the late 1940s. Eventually the term “unidentified flying object,” or “UFO,” was used. This term was originally used to indicate that the object did not appear to be a known phenomenon or aircraft. Over time the terms have come to refer to extraterrestrials (ETs) and their spaceships. The term “UFO community” is often used to denote individuals linked by a common belief that some UFOs sighted were occupied alien spaceships from distant planetary systems.

A Gallup poll in 1978 and 1981 showed that most North Americans believe flying saucers exist and are controlled by beings from another world. A more recent Gallup poll, in 1990, revealed that about 14% or 12-15 million (one in every 10) Americans claim to have seen UFOs. A recent *Time* poll revealed that 34% of Americans believe intelligent beings from other planets have visited Earth. Of those, 65% believe a UFO crashed at Roswell and 80% believe the U.S. government is involved in a cover up.¹ It is estimated that six UFOs per hour are sighted world wide. Besides this, there are over 2000 cases of encounters with landed UFOs and around 700 instances where physical effects have resulted (e.g., burned trees or grass). UFOs have been intercepted and fired upon by jet fighters, and UFOs have given off electromagnetic charges causing engines and electrical devices to break down.

Famous people have seen UFOs. Some of these include Christopher Columbus (explorer), Andrew Jackson (president), John Gilligan (state governor), James McDivitt and Gordon Cooper (astronauts), and Jimmy Carter (president). No doubt, heightened public interest is also seen in the popularity of movies. Some of these include *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1970s), *ET* (1980s), *Independence Day*, the 7th highest grossing film (1990s). This summer it was *Men In Black* and *Contact* (1997). Some popular TV shows that deal specifically with UFOs include *Star Trek*, *Sightings* and *X-Files* which emphasizes the paranormal and the slogan: “The Truth Is Out There.” The subject of UFOs is also popular in books. A search of books in print reveals over 250 book titles concerning UFOs.

¹ Bruce Handy, “Roswell or Bust,” *Time*, 23 June, 1997, 62-7.

Beginnings of the UFO Phenomenon

The UFO phenomenon dates well back into ancient times. The papyrus annals of Pharaoh Thutmoss III (1600 BC) mention circles of fire in the sky. Hindu literature (1000 yrs. before Christ) and Tibetan books contain references to disk like objects with exceptional maneuverability. Roman historians (3rd & 4th Cent. BC: Pliny, Seneca, Tacitus, Lycosthenes, Titus Livius, Julius Obsequens) make references to “fiery shields” and “phantom ships” that swept across the sky. Curiously there are few reported sightings for the first 500 yrs. of Christianity. Similar reports of globes of fire in the sky continued from 583 AD to actual contact with strange men in 1491. On October 11, 1492, Christopher Columbus reported a glimmering light moving up and down in the sky. Astronomers of the 1700-1800s also reported many unexplained phenomena. The modern UFO movement is considered to have started in 1947 because of a large number of reported sightings and two events. First, Ken Arnold reported nine gleaming metallic “saucers” (hence, the term was born) in excess of 1000 mph. The second involved the alleged crash and recovery of a disk near Roswell, New Mexico on July 8, 1947.² The first known casualty occurred in 1948 when captain Thomas Mantell, a pilot, died while chasing a metallic UFO.

In 1947 the Air Force started its official investigation named Project Sign, that concluded some UFOs were interplanetary craft. This became Project Grudge (1948) which concluded that most sightings could be explained as tricks, hoaxes or natural phenomena. In 1950 two books caused a UFO craze: *Flying Saucers Are Real* by Donald Keyhoe and *Behind Flying Saucers* by Frank Scully. In 1951 the Air Force opened a new investigation, Project Blue Book, that concluded 29% of UFO cases studies could not be explained. In the summer of 1952, at 11:04 PM on July 19, seven objects appeared on radar buzzing White House air space. Jets were scrambled on at least three occasions when they appeared but as soon as contact was made the lights disappeared at speeds up to 7000 mph.

In 1953 Gray Barker’s book, *They Knew Too Much about Flying Saucers*, testified to the existence of a government cover-up and of “UFO silencers” or “men in black” that made threats against people involved in UFO research. This theme continues to endure. Also, further claims of abductions became more popular. Betty and Barney Hill claimed they were abducted in 1961 while driving in Canada. By the Mid-1970s abductions and contact with UFOonauts become more popular and turned the movement into a religious following. In the 1980s and 90s the theme of a government conspiracy and the spread of world wide UFOlogy flourished.

THE IMPORTANT ISSUES

There are two important issues that need to be addressed. First, there is a growing religious trend in the UFO movement related to New Age occultism that is even infiltrating the church. Second, something does seem to be happening. What is it? Many reports come from credible

² Ibid.

sources that are not easily discounted.³ Further, many people, even Christian teenagers, get hooked into the New Age movement as a result of their interest in the possibility of UFOs and ETs. What is the Christian response to the New Age and the possibility of alien life?

NEW AGE & OCCULTIC CONNECTIONS

Connection with New Age Beliefs

In the late 1980s a number of UFO enthusiasts joined the New Age movement. Two of these New Age enthusiasts are Shirley MacLaine and Brad Steiger who claim aliens have chosen them to announce the coming New Age. Although the movement is not unified, most UFO enthusiasts talk about a second coming of a common teacher. Most believe the earth is in the last days before a coming new age. Often they use Christian terms such as Armageddon, tribulation or cleansing to describe when the earth will be cleansed of the wicked and a time of blissful new age will result.

Brad Steiger (a.k.a. Eugene Olson), for example, believes UFOs do lead into the new age. According to Steiger the second coming “refers to the entire race as it experiences its second opportunity to express Christ or cosmic consciousness on the Earth, as before the fall of man into physical matter.”⁴

Another belief of most New Age UFO enthusiasts is that humans can become divine or like God. Some even claim to have received messages from Jesus Christ or about him. For example, UFO contactees Moi-Ra and Ar-Ja Dove claim Jesus was not the Christ by himself. YHWH and Jesus never “really ever proclaimed themselves as the ultimate one GOD! . . . No! They have always proclaimed themselves as but aspects of the one God, just as you are!”⁵ (cf. Matt. 24). Citing John 10:34 as proof UFO speakers say Jesus affirmed godhood for all.⁶

Connection with Occultic Practices

Many involved in the New Age UFO connection are practicing occultic rituals. Much of the literature regarding UFOs involves mysticism, mediums, channeling aliens, automatic writing, telepathy, clairvoyance, and heightened psychic abilities on the part of contactees. UFO reports involve symptoms similar to demoniac possession and psychic phenomena. Crimes associated with the occult have also been associated with UFOs, e.g., racism, illicit sex, drug abuse, etc. Also, there are a high number of deaths, suicides, and insanity rates that are observed among UFO contactees and researchers. In addition to this a number of cults, the most recent and well known being Heaven’s Gate, have adopted belief in UFOs and ETs as essential to their theology.

³ Patrick Huyghe, “Scientists Who Have Seen UFOs,” *Science Digest*, November 1981, 86-94.

⁴ Brad Steiger, *Gods of Aquarius* (New York: Berkley, 1983), 115-16 as cited in William A. Alnor, *UFOs in the New Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 31.

⁵ Brad Steiger, *The Fellowship* (New York: Ballantine, 1989), 187 as cited in Alnor, *UFO’s*, 34.

⁶ For a refutation see Norman Geisler & Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask*. (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1992), 417.

Connection with Christian Teaching

One of the most grievous aspects of the UFO movement is that it is not limited to religious teachers outside the Christian church. Unfortunately some so-called “Bible” teachers have argued that UFOs are good angels. They teach that UFOs performed miracles in the Bible and that they are here to help us today. One such teacher, Frank E. Stranges, is president of International Evangelism Crusades (Van Nuys, Cal.) and considers himself a full gospel minister. He makes the claim, although undocumented, to have contact in the Pentagon with a Bible quoting, sinless man from Venus named Val Thor. Besides this, he does the unbiblical task of setting dates for the millennium. He introduces occultism and Hindu-New Age concepts and preaches a false gospel of prosperity and word-faith. Dr. Barry H. Downing, another UFO promoter and Presbyterian Minister, authored *The Bible and Flying Saucers*. Researchers have noted that he fails to give clearly his view of the person and nature of Christ. But he believes UFOs are angels of God and the Christian tradition can be saved by UFO contactees who are giving new revelation (“UFO canon”) from extraterrestrial.

Evaluation of New Age

The New Age assertion that humans can become divine or God is false. First, unless our senses are totally deceiving us, other persons and things exist. If I am not other things or persons, then I am not all that exists. If the New Ager is right why do they make subject-object distinctions such as referring to *myself*? Further, I cannot be God, a budding God, or part of God. All New Agers admit there was a time when they were not New Agers, thus there was a time when they were unenlightened and limited. God, according to New Age theology, is absolute, infinite and unlimited. A New Ager as God, cannot be both unlimited and unenlightened. God, who is unlimited, would always know that he was God and would never need enlightenment. Thus, the assertion of human progression toward divinity is untenable.⁷

Second, the Bible prohibits occultic practices. Divination is foretelling of the future or discovering hidden knowledge through occult means. Such practices are strictly prohibited (Deut .4:19; 18:10-12; Isa. 47:13-15; 44:24-25; Zech. 10:2). Visualization or the manipulating of reality through the mind, the use of Spirit guides, and contacting former human beings are also warned against (Deut. 18:10-12; Lev. 19:31; 20:6-21; 1 Chr. 10:13-14 cf. 1 Sam. 28:3, 7-15).⁸

Third, the New Age use of the Bible to support their beliefs and even the assertion that the Bible mentions UFOs is unfounded. The claim to deity by Jesus Christ is totally different than the New Age understanding of it. Jesus is the unique Son of God with an eternal relationship with the Father. Believers are children of God as a result of God’s grace. All efforts to find UFOs in the Bible are esoteric and examples of isogesis (reading into the text what is not there) as opposed to exegesis. One example is Ezekiel’s vision of a “wheel within a wheel.” This however

⁷ J. Yutaka Amano & Norman L. Geisler, *The Infiltration of the New Age* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1989), 15-29.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 31-9.

was not an extraterrestrial UFO. It was a vision seen only by Ezekiel. The passage clearly states it was an appearance of the glory of the Lord (1:28).⁹

QUESTIONS ABOUT UFOS AND ETS

What are UFOs?

J. Allen Hynek (1972) was the first to categorize UFO experiences as 1) first encounters-- an observing of day or nocturnal lights; 2) second encounters-- a finding that leaves some physical results; and 3) third encounters-- when the encountering of an alien is claimed.

Concerning first encounters, some scientific investigations have concluded that between 90-95+% of investigated UFO encounters have natural explanations. Some of these natural explanations include hoaxes, satellites, temperature inversion, light refraction, high-altitude weather balloons, mirages, shooting stars, marsh gases, ball lightning, top secret military aircraft, etc. We have yet to explain all natural phenomena (e.g., we recently learned about migrating birds with glowing phosphorus under their wings). UFO researcher and scientist Hugh Ross¹⁰ has identified several points to consider when investigating UFO reports. First, we should remember that our senses can be deceived. Second, instruments can malfunction and deceive or give false readings. Third, not everything reported or printed (newspapers, etc.) is true. Fourth, records can be incomplete. Fifth, no artifacts or any case of physical contact has ever been proven. Sixth, intelligent intervention is needed for life; it cannot originate on its own. And seventh, most unexplained UFO phenomena appear to involve the manipulation of matter and energy.

On this last point, there is good evidence that some unexplained UFO sightings have a cause outside the physical realm. Often UFOs are seen but not photographed or photographed but not seen. Pictures or video of them are often blurred. No high-resolution images have ever been taken. Sometimes UFOs are tracked on radar but not seen or seen but not tracked on radar. They often are reported to violate physical laws. They make hard right turns, sudden stops and accelerations as well as speeds of up to 15,000 mph., with no evidence of air friction. Also, UFOs change size, shape and color at random (i.e., transmogrification). There is no physical uniformity to their shape. In fact, one researcher catalogued 32 distinct varieties. Over time, sightings have generally changed from cigar shape to disk to triangles (over 2,600 triangles sightings in 1989). UFOs may disappear and reappear at will and no known UFO artifact or crash debris has ever been recovered. All this would seem to suggest a non-physical (or spiritual) cause of UFOs.

This evidence has led some Christian researchers to suggest that UFOs are caused by the demonic.¹¹ Interestingly, some non-Christian UFO researchers have reached this conclusion. Researcher Lynn Catoe says, "Many of the UFO reports now being published in the popular press recount alleged incidents that are strikingly similar to demonic possession and psychic

⁹ Geisler, *When Critics Ask*, 283.

¹⁰ Hugh Ross, *Et's and UFO'S* (Pasadena: Reasons To Believe, 1990), cassettes A8912.

¹¹ Norman Geisler, *Signs and Wonders* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1988), 99.

phenomena which have long been known to theologians and parapsychologists”¹² Another UFO researcher, John Keel, suggests that UFOs may be “actually a staggering cosmic put-on; a joke perpetrated by invisible entities who have always delighted in frightening, confusing and misleading the human race.”¹³ Some Christian UFO researchers have even suggested why and how such a phenomenon could be accomplished by demons. One theory suggests that demons can work from the spiritual realm, or another dimension, and manipulate matter and energy in the atmosphere to produce apparent violations of physical laws.¹⁴

Second and third encounters, although not as common, could also have natural, supernormal (i.e., demonic),¹⁵ explanations or both. Demons can possess unbelievers as identified in Scripture and are capable of causing physical effects on and through people (Mt 9:33; 12:22; 17:15-18; Mk 5:4-5; 9:20-22; Rev 9:14-19). However, demons cannot do what only God can do such as create. This would exclude the possibilities that demons create alien bodies or any other kind of bodies. Claimed experiences of the third kind, if they are genuine, must therefore be hoaxes, visions, vivid dreams or hallucinations. Some who claim abductions have connections with the occult or are in environments, such as support groups, that encourage their view of aliens and what they believe has happened to them. This type of environment fosters and reinforces their belief about UFOs. Some of these people as a result of their experience adopt, and some teach, doctrine that is directly opposed to Christianity.¹⁶ The media and numerous UFO groups and cults also feed this frenzy.

What Happened at Roswell and is There a Government Cover-up?

The incident at Roswell (July 1947) should be understood in the context of UFO influence that was quickly growing. The media influenced people through movies, radio (e.g., Orson Welles’s “War of the Worlds” broadcast in 1938) and books about aliens and UFOs. There is, however, a historical core to what has become an evolving myth. The initial release was that a disk crashed. This was quickly changed the next day to a weather balloon with pictorial evidence. For the next 33 years, with the exception of a few references, the incident was never mentioned again. In the late 70s the incident at Roswell began to be connected with UFO reports and documentation. From 1980 to 1994 at least six versions have been created, all involving some historical details with distorted events and stories of supposed eyewitnesses or their relatives. Recently (1994) the government, at the insistence of a U.S. congressman, conducted an extensive investigation of classified files. Their explanation has agreed with the historical core of information and offered the additional notion that a cover story may have been promulgated to

¹² Mark Albrecht & Brooks Alexander, “UFOs: Is Science Fiction Coming True?” *SCP Journal* 1 (August, 1977) : 19.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 20-2.

¹⁵ Geisler, *Signs and Wonders*, 95-108.

¹⁶ Alnor, *UFOs in the New Age*.

protect a military secret project.¹⁷ The suggested explanations of the government include top secret balloons that gathered atomic intelligence (project Mogul), an airplane tanker crash and a balloon used to test the effects of high altitude jumps using dummies.¹⁸

Ultimately, what one believes happened at Roswell, conspiracy or no conspiracy, will be determined by your belief about extraterrestrials. If your world view, as will be argued here, makes the existence of physical alien beings very unlikely, then the explanation must have a normal or supernormal cause. Further, conspiracy theories, as presented by most UFO enthusiasts, are almost impossible to falsify because any evidence offered against them is claimed to be a part of the conspiracy. Reason and the Scriptures teach us to believe what can be proven, not what cannot be disproved. Since there is no physical evidence, and many of the stories and witness are contradictory, it is plausible to posit a natural (or supernormal) explanation.

Could There Be Life in Outer Space?

With the recent discovery of possible planets around another star and the possible discovery of life (or life ingredients) on a rock from Mars, this question draws considerable interest. Concerning the existence of planets outside our solar system it should be noted that not all are convinced they are planets. “[M]any experts think it is technically a brown dwarf--a star that never got big enough to ignite--rather than a planet.”¹⁹ Even if planets are found, the odds are very much against life existing on them. Astronomer Hugh Ross cites forty-one parameters that must be fine-tuned for any conceivable kind of life to exist. He concludes that the probability for the occurrence of all forty-one parameters is 10^{53} . The maximum possible planets in the universe is 10^{22} . Thus, he concludes that “much less than one chance in a million trillion exists that even one such planet would occur anywhere in the universe”²⁰

Concerning life on a Mars rock, not all are convinced of what the evidence indicates; and even if it suggests life it does not follow that it originated on Mars. It could, more than likely, be life from earth that was transported to Mars via solar winds.²¹

It can be argued that it is improbable that aliens, in the popular sense of the term, could or would get to earth. For example, assume one million civilizations advanced enough to originate exploratory spaceships. For one UFO to visit earth each year, each of the million civilizations would need 10,000 launches per year.²² The great distances in space would mean that any

¹⁷ Benson Saler, Charles A. Ziegler & Charles B. Moore, *UFO Crash at Roswell: The Genesis of a Modern Myth* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 16-29.

¹⁸ Handy, “Roswell or Bust.”

¹⁹ Michael D. Lemonick “Is There Life In Outer Space?” *Time*, 5 February, 1996, 56.

²⁰ Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1993), 144.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 154-5.

²² Albrecht, “UFOs: Is Science Fiction Coming True?”, 16.

physical beings visiting earth would have to travel faster than the speed of light. Thus, this view contains some statistical improbabilities.

Further, there is no indication in Science or Scripture that life exists elsewhere. God made the heavens for signs, seasons, days, and years. In fact, science understands that the Universe must be the size it is, with the formation of galaxies as they are, to support life on the earth (see Ross, 1996, 1993). According to Scripture the second person of the Trinity incarnated as a human man (Jesus) to redeem humans. Hebrews 2:14-18 says,

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death -- that is, the devil -- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (NIV).

Reports of abductions usually include moral evils committed by the aliens such as being taken against one's will, rape and other sexual abuses. If these alien beings are real, this would indicate that they have a need of forgiveness and redemption. But Scripture indicates that no one other than humans are in need of forgiveness and redemption.

Is it Dangerous to Pursue UFOs?

Researcher Bill Alnor in his book on UFOs comments: "Every 'angel' discussed in these pages has failed to affirm Christ came in the flesh as the only way of salvation of human kind"²³ Gal 1:8 says, "even though . . . an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you let him be accursed" (NIV). Alnor also says: "In more than 20,000 miles of travel, in reading thousands of messages from aliens, and from listening to many contactees, I don't know of a single case where an extraterrestrial message passed the 'Jesus test.'"²⁴ Eph 5:11 says "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them" (NIV). Further, flying saucer watching is addictive and a waste of time. It leads to a suspension of disbelief. Many have become desensitized by the strangeness and lost their sanity. Thus, the dangers in pursuing UFOs are spiritual and physical. Alnor wisely notes: "The longer one makes a commitment to UFO research, the closer he or she is to dying and giving the God who made the planets an account of his life. It is a sin to waste time on unprofitable things."²⁵ Jn 9:4 says "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work" (NIV).

²³ Alnor, *UFOs in the New Age*, 241.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 238.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 230.