

Is the Idea of Intelligent Extraterrestrial Life Compatible with [Conservative] Judaism & Christianity?

I. Introducing the Problem

A. Recognition of the Problem

The Brookings Report

"Anthropological files contain many examples of societies, sure of their place in the universe, which have disintegrated when they had to associate with previously unfamiliar societies espousing different ideas and different life ways; others that survived such an experience usually did so by paying the price of changes in values and attitudes and behavior" (p. 215).

"Fundamentalist (and anti-science) sects are growing apace around the world . . . for them, the discovery of other life - rather than any other space product - would be electrifying . . . If plant life or other subhuman intelligence were found on Mars or Venus, for example, there is, on the face of it, no good reason to suppose these discoveries, after the original novelty had been exploited to the fullest and worn off, would result in substantial changes in perspectives or philosophy in large parts of the American public, at least any more than, let us say, the coelacanth or the panda . . . If super intelligence is discovered, the results become quite unpredictable" (footnote on p. 225).

B. Explanation of the Problem

Anyone involved in the discussion of UFOs and intelligent ETs who also knows someone who is a serious professing Christian (most often of the "evangelical" or "fundamentalist" categories) or Jew (orthodox or ultra-orthodox) knows that many such (not all) people resist the idea that there could be aliens.

Objections fall into several categories:

1. The Notion of Intelligent Alien Life Undoes the Doctrine of the Inerrancy of the Bible (Christian and Jew).

2. The Notion of Intelligent Alien Life Undoes the Doctrines of the Incarnation and Redemption (Christian).

C. S. Lewis, articulating the views of such objectors, framed the difficulty this way:

"If the universe is teeming with life, this, we are told, reduces to absurdity the Christian claim . . . that to this one planet God came down and was incarnate for us and our salvation."

Hebrews 9:24-28

24 For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. 25 Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. 26 Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Hebrews 10:12 - But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

3. The Notion of Intelligent Alien Life "Proves" (or at least supports) the Theory of Biological Evolution.

The Idea of Panspermia is particularly offensive here, since it replaces Intelligent Design for Christians and Jews who are "Theistic Evolutionists".

4. The Notion of intelligent ETs would mean that humankind is not unique in the universe, which would mean the Bible is wrong, since only humankind is said to have been created in God's image.

5. Since all angels (including evil, fallen ones) are intelligent, have free will, and are non-terrestrial (or, extra-terrestrial), the very search for intelligent alien life may be dangerous - we could be trying to commune with fallen beings.

Stated in a syllogism, this objection reads as follows:

Premise A: Angels have free will, are intelligent, and are "non-terrestrial"

Premise B: ETs have free will, are intelligent, and are "non-terrestrial"

Conclusion: Angels are really ETs. (That is, UFO believers don't think there are angels - they think the Bible is erroneously identifying ETs as angels).

* **There are several flaws here**, but the syllogism "works" mechanically. Many Christians do hold such an opinion (and others that spring from it - see below).

The premises overlook important differences between descriptions of aliens and alien "testimony" channeled through abductees or contactees and Judeo-Christian descriptions of angels and their properties in the Old and New Testaments (see below). It is also apparent from the literature that many UFO believers still believe there are angels. Only those who are "Sitchin- esque" in their perspective would necessarily draw the above conclusion (and, in so doing, ignore the textual and testimonial disconnects between the two).

Another syllogistic possibility:

Premise A: ETs do nasty things to abductees

Premise B: The angels who sexually cohabited with women in Genesis 6 were evil (Genesis 6:14; II Peter 2:4; Jude 5-7)

Premise C: The message ETs bring (e.g., fostering human evolution, being involved in the crucifixion events, being the "ascended intelligence" behind the God of Israel or Moses or Jesus) is anti-biblical

Premise D: The New Testament clearly states that Satan himself can and appear as a beautiful being of light (his OT name is "Helel" = "Shining One", "Luminous One"; cf. II Cor. 11:14; Isaiah 14:12-15)

Conclusion: ETs (who, acc. to abductee testimony, sexually cohabit with humans or harvest reproductive material) are evil

C. Current Estimations of the Problem and Their Flaws

1. The NIDS (National Institute for Discovery Science)/ Victoria Alexander report

The following is from http://www.nidsci.org/articles/alexander/survey_religion.html

Abstract

The Alexander UFO Religious Crisis survey addresses just one of many problems facing the UFO Community: how would organized religions in the United States react to confirmation of contact with an advanced extraterrestrial civilization. The results of this pilot survey are straightforward and remarkably simple. The theologians surveyed would not feel their faith and the faith of their congregation would be threatened. The following results, **based upon a 23% return (230 surveys)** should have a significant and meaningful impact on the UFO Community, its doctrines and attitudes.

Methodology

On Tuesday, March 8, 1994 I mailed 1000 pilot surveys to randomly selected religious bodies in the continental United States. I obtained the names and addresses from PhoneDisc Reverse Fall 1993 (Data Base American Companies), which divides the country into five regions: Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Central and West. I addressed the envelopes to Monsignor/Father, Pastor and Rabbi. Included was a self-addressed, stamped return envelope. Based upon the figures presented below, 563 surveys were sent to Protestant churches (i.e., Presbyterian, Episcopal, Methodist, Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Lutheran, etc.), 396 to Roman Catholic Churches and 41 Synagogues.

Based upon the closing date figures, the total number of surveys returned was 230: 134 from Protestant churches, 86 from Roman Catholic churches and 10 from synagogues. Of the 230 respondents, 62 (Protestant), 36 (R. Catholic) and 4 (Jewish) filled out the "Comments" section of the survey, totaling 102 Comments. 141 respondents filled out the "Optional Information" section (86 from Protestant churches, 48 from Roman Catholic churches and 7 from synagogues). 81 Protestant respondents answered the "Approximate Size of Congregation" line, the numbers totaling 35,824 families; 45 R. Catholic respondents answered the "Approximate Size of Congregation" line, totaling 56,208 families and 6 Jewish respondents answered the "Approximate Size of Congregation" line, totaling 1,445 families. **Combined, the 230 respondent's answer to this question totals 93,477 families.** Of the 230 surveys returned, 119 requested a copy of the Pilot survey: 75

(Protestant), 37 (R. Catholic) and 7 (Jewish).

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP FIGURES AND GEOGRAPHICAL BREAKDOWN

The division of the 1000 Pilot surveys was estimated by using figures obtained in the 1992 U.S. Statistical Abstract of the United States published by the Census Bureau. According to Chart No. 76. Religious Bodies-Church Membership, 1960 to 1989, and Number of Churches, 1989, the figures for 1989 are as follows: Protestant membership-79,387,000; Roman Catholic Church-57,020,000 and Jews-5,944,000. **Based upon a U.S. population of 280 million**, Protestants represent 28% of the population and 54% of church membership; Catholics represent 20% of the population and 38.6% of church membership and Jews represent 2% of the population and 4% of church membership. The fourth highest religious body, Eastern Churches, represent 1% of the population and 2% of church membership. **These four religious bodies represent 52% of the U.S. population.**

Assessment:

- a. Less than 1/4 of the surveys were returned.
- b. There is no way to tell how theologically CONSERVATIVE the individual minister/priest/rabbi was who answered the survey. The more conservative (taking the Bible as the every-word inspired word of God) a minister/priest/rabbi, the MORE likely they are to feel troubled by the questions on the survey.

Several of the questions would have immediately raised suspicions or evoked hostile reactions among Judeo-Christian religious conservatives. For example:

5 - Genetic similarities between mankind and an advanced extraterrestrial civilization would challenge the basic religious concepts of man's relative position in the universe.

6 - If an advanced extraterrestrial civilization had religious beliefs fundamentally different from ours, it would endanger organized religions in this country.

#10 - If an advanced extraterrestrial civilization proclaimed responsibility for producing human life, it would cause a religious crisis.

- c. By the survey's own mathematical calculations and sources, and assuming a family = 4 people (couple with 2 children on average), then only 373,908 people are represented by the survey (93, 477 families x 4). **This amounts to a microscopic .0026 % of the RELIGIOUS BODIES polled!** (145,600,000 = the 52% of the U.S. population represented by the four religious bodies targeted by the survey; dividing 373,908 by 145,600,000 = .0026). This is hardly good news. The number would be even smaller were the appropriate conservative

congregations targeted.

2. The Statements of Msgr. Corrado Balducci

The following comments of Balducci are from <http://www.spiritweb.org/Spirit/balducci-boylan.html>; written by Richard Boylan's - posted 4/26/98)

Monsignor Corrado Balducci, a theologian member of the Vatican Curia (governing body), and an insider close to the Pope, has gone on Italian national television five times, including recent months, to proclaim that extraterrestrial contact is a real phenomenon.

Balducci provided an analysis of extraterrestrials that he feels is consistent with the Catholic Church's understanding of theology. **Monsignor Balducci emphasizes that extraterrestrial encounters: "are NOT demonic, they are NOT due to psychological impairment, they are NOT a case of entity attachment, but these encounters deserve to be studied carefully."** Since Monsignor Balducci is a demonology expert and consultant to the Vatican, and since the Catholic Church has historically demonized many new phenomena that were poorly understood, his stating that the Church does not censure these encounters is all the more remarkable.

Assessment:

- a. Msgr. Balducci may purport to be a demonology expert, but he seems completely unaware of the presence of the Watchers (The Book of Enoch's terms for the sons of God in Genesis 6) in biblical literature, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and other Second Temple Jewish Literature. He is either quite uninformed in regard to textual / theological demonology, or is concealing the information from the lay public.
- b. Msgr. Balducci seems completely unaware of the work of other Catholic theologians and modern scholars (Jacques Vallee, John Keel, and Dr. Greg Little) who have culled a great deal of data demonstrating a variety of clear links between modern abductee testimony and testimony of people in medieval times who claim to have been abducted by fairies and demons (and even if they were mistaken, the experiences were violative and not considered favorably). It makes me wonder for whom Balducci is speaking.
- c. A very large number of evangelical and fundamentalist Christians believe that the Vatican (and Catholicism in general) is a religion of idolatry and perhaps even the institution behind the "Great Whore" symbology of the book of Revelation. In short, Balducci's statements would be anything but comforting to millions of Christians.
- d. In view of the still extant tension between the Vatican and orthodox / ultra-orthodox

Judaism, the same could be said for conservative Jewish reaction to Balducci.

II. Addressing the Objections

A. On the Undoing of Biblical Inerrancy

This objection lacks weight because the Bible issues no statement declaring that there ISN'T life elsewhere. The Bible doesn't tell us about microwaves, but that doesn't mean they aren't real.

In fact, theological debate all the way back to Aquinas considered the possibility on the ground that it was possible that an omnipotent God COULD create life elsewhere (though Aquinas did not think God did create other worlds).

B. On the Notion that Intelligent Alien Life Undoes the Incarnation and Redemption.

The New Testament is very clear that the incarnated Son of God (Christ) is "in a class by himself" - hence an intelligent ET does not usurp any of the incarnation's uniqueness:

Hebrews 1:1-8

1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. 4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. 5 For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"? 6 And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." 7 In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire." 8 But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.

The Bible itself is clear that there are intelligent species (angels) who were not included in salvation / redemption

Hebrews 2:9-16

9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. 10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make

the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. 12 He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." 13 And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." 14 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--15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. 16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants (NOTE: This last phrase refers to all believers, not just Jews – cf. Galatians 3:26-29).

The "angels that fell are clearly not given the chance of salvation (Psa. 82; II Pet. 2; Jude). The point is that an intelligent species other than humankind need not have anything to do with the atonement or judgment.

C. On the Notion that Intelligent Alien Life Supports or Proves Evolution

This objection ignores several facts:

1. Many orthodox Jews and evangelical Christians have embraced the idea of theistic evolution (God either initially created life or, like Steven J. Gould's "punctuated equilibrium," created life in a series of acts, all the while instilling in life the capacity and propensity to evolve). Throwing ETs into this mix would not change anything necessarily. **HOWEVER**, the idea that ETs themselves are responsible for creating the universe or humankind (a variety of panspermia) **WOULD** be unacceptable.

NOTE: An intelligent ET reality does not necessarily even support non-intelligent panspermia.

For example, the meteorite that allegedly (they're still arguing about it) contains alien microbial life is supposed to have come from Mars. How did it get to Earth? It is hypothesized that a large meteorite crashed into Mars throwing up lots of debris into space, some of which finds its way to Earth. As one Christian astronomer, Dr. Hugh Ross (Ph.D., U. of Toronto; former Research Fellow, Cal Tech), contends, the same scenario may just as well have happened in reverse:

"Meteorites large enough to make an [impact] crater greater than 60 miles across would cause Earth rocks to escape Earth's gravity. Out of 1,000 such rocks ejected, [say that] 291 strike Venus, 20 go to Mercury, 17 hit Mars, 14 make it to Jupiter, and 1 goes all the way to Saturn. Traveling the distance with these rocks will be many varieties of Earth life." (Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos*, p. 155)

2. The presence of intelligent ETs does not answer the question of where THEY came from. They are not, to borrow from Aristotle, the "Unmoved Movers," and so their existence doesn't prove a strictly naturalistic- evolutionary model.

D. On the Notion that intelligent ETs would overturn humanity's uniqueness as being "in the image of God"

Although it is quite common (and has been so for decades, even centuries), the image of God should NOT be understood as intelligence, since that faculty is NOT unique to humankind, and does not conform to what Genesis 1:26-27 describes for us. The same is true of communication ability, possession of a spirit or soul, a conscience, a free will, etc.

Genesis 1:26-27

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Textually and theologically speaking, three things must be true of any CORRECT definition of the image of God:

1. It must make humankind **distinguishably and certifiably unique** in relation to any created thing that makes the physical universe its home.
2. Every member of the human race must possess this "image" **equally and to the same extent (it is not obtained incrementally), as well as actually, not potentially.**
3. It must be **something shared with the God's own being and nature**

The Image of God - An Alternative Perspective

In Hebrew, the phrase "in the image" is expressed by the noun for "image" (tselem; מִלְּצֶלֶם) prefixed by the preposition "b" (בְּ). Thus the English phrase is actually one word in Hebrew, "betselem" (בְּצֶלֶם).

As in English, prepositions in Hebrew are used to denote different ideas. In other words, English "in" doesn't always mean the same thing - it depends on the context of our usage. To illustrate:

"put the dishes **in** the sink" (**location**)

"written **in** pencil" (**instrumentality**)

"we're alike **in** some respects" (**limitation**)

"I want membership **in** the club" (**inclusion**)

"he broke the statue **in** pieces" (**result**)

"here's what you say **in** reply" (**purpose**)

In the same manner, **b** has many different uses, and how one translates the preposition depends on the context in which it is used. **b** can be used in all of the above ways, but none of these possibilities fit in Genesis 1:26-27.

There is a special use of b that several Hebrew grammarians believe is the point of the author in Genesis 1:26-27 - the meaning of "functioning in the capacity of." Usually, English translates this idea with one word - "as". For example, this would be the meaning of "as" in the following sentences (with hypothetical Hebrew illustrations):

"I served AS conference organizer" ("**b**-conference organizer"); "I worked AS an editor" ("**b**-editor")

My contention is that **we should understand the phrases with b** attached to the word "image" in Gen. 1:26-27 as mankind being created "to function in the capacity of the image" of God.

This would require **viewing the image of God in a FUNCTIONAL sense** (i.e., we are created to serve "as" God's image; to "image" God) **as opposed to a**

QUALITATIVE sense (as though the image is some quality or ability given to us; i.e. the image is some **possessed** attribute).

But What Does That Mean - and What Difference Would it Make for Jewish and Christian Theology in Regard to the ET Question?

1. The practical result of this shift in perspective brought on by careful attention to this point of grammar is that, **while ALL humans are uniquely God's "imagers" on the earth** (they are his representatives and stewards, given the context of Gen. 1:26-28), **this status applies ONLY to humans** - and not to any other created thing.

2. The effect of this idea would be that it matters not that there are ETs or that they are intelligent (and even superior) - their existence has no bearing whatsoever on humanity's creation as God's image. **Therefore, there is no need to theologically resist the idea of intelligent ETs on the basis of the divine image.**

E. On the Notion that intelligent ETs are Fallen Angelic Beings, and are Therefore Evil.

NOTE: It is at this point that the most substantive objection to intelligent ETs arises. All that has preceded above should demonstrate that conservative Christians and Jews **NEED** not feel theologically compelled to resist the idea of "contact."

What is needed at this point, however, is to **DEFINITELY** separate the beings to which contactees and abductees testify and the "sons of God" (i.e., The Watchers) of ancient Jewish texts. If this can be done, conservative Christians and Jews could be encouraged to embrace an ET reality should such a reality be proven beyond question. If it cannot be done, then they have every reason to fear - as does every human being.

The 2 Key Questions that remain, are:

1. Can ETs be identified with angels at all - especially the "good" angels - and so separated from the evil ones? In other words, is there evidence for the

premise that ancient Jewish and Christian writers mistook extraterrestrial travelers for "good" angels?

There are 4 problems for UFO / ET believers with identifying ETs with angels:

a. Jewish and Christian texts clearly teach that angels are immortal and do not have determined lifespans (cf. Mark 12:25, e.g.). **Mortality would be required of ETs if there are indeed bodies of crash victims stored away somewhere.**

b. Angels (Hebrew, mal'akim - Myk) l m) are ALWAYS depicted in human form (i.e., there is no mal'ak ever depicted in non-human form). The creatures of Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1 and 10 are tseraphim (Myprc) and cherubim (Mybwrk) respectively. They are not called mal'akim (there was, throughout ANE texts and religions, a semantic and "otherworldly" bureaucracy). **Nothing resembling the creaturely appearance of most ETs matches anything in the Old or New Testaments.** Only the "Nordics" resemble the way angels are described in the Bible.

c. Angels are never said to need flying craft to get from one place to another. They are truly "extra-dimensional" beings. As leading theoretical physicists have told us, if one could move in and out of dimensions, then space-time is not only relative, it is moot (distance and speed are concepts that can be bypassed). Michio Kaku, for example, has claimed that the myriad of dimensions are only "a millimeter" apart. This would rule out the need for craft (despite what many UFO researchers claim). You only truly NEED craft and speeds approaching light-speed if you NEED to travel great distances.

NOTE: One could rebut this point by referencing the Merkabah (hbkrm) of Ezekiel 1 and elsewhere. However, given iconography from the period of Ezekiel, it is quite unlikely that this "craft" was actually a flying craft (i.e., a craft constructed to enable flight). Second, the Old and New Testaments are very clear that God and his entourage are omni-present. Hence the fiery chariot (and it WAS physical - cf. Elijah) may just be a show of power or "point of origin." If the Merkabah analogy be embraced by UFO researchers, then logic (and methodological consistency) requires that this proposed explanation may ALSO be behind the modern UFO craft. As Vallee pointed out decades ago, though these craft have physicality, many would be deemed un-flightworthy by even our primitive engineering knowledge. They may serve another purpose - to elicit artistic awe, worship, or deception designed to shape humanity's imagination. Their "cultural adaptability" is also a factor to consider (Passport to Magonia,

139-152).

d. If ETs were to be "misidentified" in New Testament texts with ETs, then logic would compel us to accept whatever else the New Testament says about these beings (ETs). **In other words, it is methodologically inconsistent to accept that an ET reality is provable "from the NT" and then to turn around and reject New Testament testimony regarding the "angels" (ETs) in other respects.** I doubt whether many UFO enthusiasts (and they would likely NOT be theologically conservative Christians or Jews - this is the point of the whole problem we are discussing) would be willing to embrace the following:

- Angels (ETs) gather ONLY followers of Christ at the Rapture (Matt. 24:31; I Thess. 4:16-18; II Thess. 1)
- Angels (ETs) announced that Jesus was in fact the Messiah (Luke 2:10-15)
- Angels (ETs) are inferior to and are subject to Jesus Christ (I Peter 3:21-22)

- Angels (ETs) carry out the wrath of God on the earth and unbelieving humanity at the time of the Apocalypse (Rev. 14:17-15:1)

2. If ETs cannot be successfully "segregated" as angels or good angels per the difficulties above, does this mean:

A. Angels and ETs are COMPLETELY different entities (but both exist), OR

B. There are no genuine "interplanetary" ETs - only angels, good and evil

This is the question to which most conservative Jews and Christians would come, given the above - and even given their willingness to embrace an ET reality completely

In this regard, the main touchpoint (in my mind) between fallen angelic beings and today's ET phenomenon is the sexual element of abductions. It is very clear from both the Bible (Gen. 6:1-4's "sons of God" / "Watchers"; II Peter 2, Jude) and abductees that "non-terrestrial" beings have had sexual relations with them or used them for sexual experimentation.

If a theologically conservative Christian or Jew divorces ETs and fallen angelic beings, then they COULD embrace an ET reality - albeit one that seems amoral, given the exploitation of intelligent (human) life (as we would view intrusive and violent procedures done on intelligent animals), regardless of the "altruistic motives" (Why not intellectually contact us and convince us first how great will be

our benefit, before kidnapping and raping us? Which is more enlightened?).

On the other hand, the sexual activity from both data pools has clear precedent in ancient texts for an evil presence and agenda. This is a more substantive emotional, intellectual, and theological battleground.

Put in the form of a Question:

Does the evidence presented to us ON BOTH SIDES (abductee testimony and ancient texts) argue for a separation of the aliens FROM the Watchers, or an identification WITH the Watchers?