

# FOCUS ON FAITH

Stephen G. Derges, Pastor of Bridgnorth Baptist Church



## WAY OUT THERE

Recently I've been thinking a great deal about space. Not just the space around me every day – that seems to get cluttered with more and more paper and I really must do something about my filing system (or lack of it!). No, I mean space as in what we know about the universe.

It started because my daughter gave me a book for my birthday written by scientist who, though he claims not to be a Christian, believes that the explanation in the Bible about creation fits with current evolutionary thinking. I can't tell you yet if I agree with him because I haven't finished the book (its hard going for someone with my thinking capacity). And last week with some friends, I was watching a DVD by an American pastor talking about the vastness of the cosmos. I'd seen this DVD on a couple of occasions before but it was amazing to see the reaction of my friends as they contemplated the incredible vastness of creation.

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Now I'm not a scientist – I remember one teacher at my senior school commenting that deep space was the unknown area between his pupils' ears – but I am fascinated by life as we know it and of course what happens after our lives end. As a Christian I believe God has a greater plan for us than we experience here on earth – that we have an eternal destiny of which our human lives are merely a part.

However, let's park that for a moment and think about what we know about the universe. Here are a few details of what scientists have discovered:

- The Milky Way is the galaxy which is the home of our Solar System together with at least 200 billion and possibly 400 billion other stars (the Sun being a fairly typical example) and their planets. That's more stars than there are grains of sand on all the beaches on the Earth.
- It is estimated that the diameter of the Milky Way is around 100,000 light years. As defined by the International Astronomical Union light travels 299,792,458 metres per second which means in one year light travels approximately 5,878,630,000,000 miles so you can do the maths to work out how big that is!
- Just to help us understand that a little better – the Sun (the centre of our part of the universe) is some 93 million miles from us yet light from the Sun travels to Earth in just 8 minutes 19 seconds!

Have you noticed that whenever astrophysicists talk about space they refer to the "known universe"? Prior to the launch of the Hubble Space Telescope in the early 1990's,

no-one knew about planets around other stars outside our solar system – now we know there are over three hundred. We can only observe a small part of the universe – at present about 14 billion light-years worth. Researchers at Hubble have detected 3,000 visible galaxies but they estimate there could be over 125 billion galaxies out there. A recent German supercomputer simulation reckons there could be 500 billion galaxies – in other words, there could be more galaxies out there than the number of stars in the Milky Way.

Now some people may think I'm a little on the simple side but with all this vastness and greatness around us I'm convinced that there is a Creator and a plan behind all of this. Otherwise for me it just doesn't make sense. Especially when you consider that Earth is in what's known as the "Goldilocks Zone".

I said earlier that Earth is 93 million miles from the Sun. The "Goldilocks Zone" is neither too hot nor too cold – just the perfect distance away from our heat source. If Earth was 5% closer, searing temperatures would wipe everything out; 5% further away and Earth would turn into a frozen wasteland covered with glaciers miles thick.

So far science has not come up with any other planet with these perfect conditions for life. Is that a co-incidence I wonder to myself? When I read in Psalm 121 verses 5-6, ***"The LORD watches over you – the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night"*** I think not!

Psalm 19: 1-2 says, ***"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge."*** And Psalm 8: 3-4 says, ***"When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers – the moon and the stars you set in place – what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them?"***

But I believe God does just that. He is concerned about us – each one of us – and He has a purpose for us. Psalm 103:11 says, ***"For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great are His mercy and loving-kindness toward those who reverently and worshipfully fear Him."***

On a human scale we can see just a small part of the heavens on a clear night but God's love for us is way out there yet as close as we want it to be.

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