

## UK BIBLE STUDENTS NEWSLETTER

Reader Edition

February 1, 2009

*Unless noted otherwise, Scripture references are to the New International Version, Anglicised version (NIV-UK). When not quoted in full, you can read the entire Scripture text by clicking on its citation.*

### THE UNCAUSED CAUSE

**There is** one point at which both atheists and theists converge in a big Question Mark: the origin of the universe.

The ‘Big Bang’ is usually posited as the explanation for the formation of the universe. Although not without its detractors, it is generally regarded as the standard cosmological model. In vogue since the late 1960s,[\[fn1\]](#) it is an admittedly tricky concept to understand and efforts to explain it vary. [\[fn2\]](#) In essence, the theory asserts that all known matter, even space itself, was formed during the immeasurably quick expansion from a single, dense, fiery point, about fourteen thousand million years ago (14,000,000,000). The theory underpins the calculations which are applied to planetary motion, distance, and the speed at which the universe is expanding.

Whether or not the universe began with the Big Bang, the theory is usually presented in an atheistic context and thus suffers from the hubris of the assumption that an intervening mind had nothing whatever to do with it.

The *When?* and *Why?* of this Big Bang are queries for which no one has a scientifically demonstrated answer. In the absence of matter – or, to put it another way, the prevalence of Nothing – the question of Time is irrelevant. No sequence of events or external cause existed to frame the schedule by which the Big Bang should be set in motion. There was no Before, only an After.

### The First Cause

To Atheism the Big Bang is the closest approach it can make to the First Cause. It insists that there is no purposeful originator, no creator. Such a being cannot exist, it says, for if it did this would presuppose a cause for its own existence. That is, there must needs be a maker of the maker, and *ad infinitum* backwards into the void of Time.

This argument has shades of the traditional song[\[fn3\]](#) in which Henry complains to his wife, Liza, ‘There’s a hole in the bucket.’

‘So fix it’, says she.

‘With what shall I fix it?’

‘With a straw.’

‘But the straw is too long.’

Liza, sarcastically, ‘Then cut it, dear Henry.’

‘With what shall I cut it?’

‘With a hatchet.’

Henry doggedly persists. ‘But the hatchet’s too dull, dear Liza.’

‘Then sharpen it, dear Henry.’

‘With what shall I sharpen it?’

‘Use the stone.’

‘But the stone is too dry.’

‘Then wet it.’

Henry cries out plaintively, ‘With what shall I wet it, dear Liza?’

Liza, exasperated, shouting, ‘With water, dear Henry.’

‘In what shall I fetch it?’

‘In a bucket, dear Henry.’

Yes. . . you do know what’s coming . . .

‘There’s a hole in the bucket, dear Liza.’

The irony in this exchange tickles the funny bone. So there’s still a hole in the First Cause bucket but the atheist sees nothing to laugh at. But why is it intelligent and scientific to believe in an uncaused Big Bang, yet stupid and gullible to believe in an uncaused creator? Doesn’t it mean anything that we, as human beings, have minds competent to ask these questions in the first place? Could this not also imply the existence of some directing action operating in the formation and distribution of matter? Without it, we might suppose that every manifestation of intelligence, human or animal, is a mere accident – uncaused aberrations so numerous as to stretch credulity to breaking point. For even assuming the accidental formation of matter there is no satisfactory, testable explanation for the formation of the self-conscious mind, itself an agent of creation. The philosopher or architect invents ideas or designs buildings entirely in the sphere of imagination, an intangible world which bears little resemblance to the hard nuts and bolts of the material world around us. Only *after* imagination has laboured does it commit its product to the material world of ink and paper. This secondary sphere of cause and effect mirrors the Christian’s assumption that intelligent mind brought forth the material world: the God ‘said’ of [Genesis 1: 3, etc.](#)

---

**[fn1]** The term, ‘Big Bang’, was coined in 1950 by Fred Hoyle, the British astronomer, whose own, preferred model was the ‘steady-state theory’, which asserted that as the universe expanded new matter was formed in the resulting ‘voids’.

[\[return to text\]](#)

**[fn2]** The sources below explain the theory in laymen’s terms.

[\[return to text\]](#)

1. BBC Science and Nature: Space:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/space/origins/bigbang/index.shtml>

2. Cambridge Relativity Group:

[http://www.damtp.cam.ac.uk/user/gr/public/bb\\_home.html](http://www.damtp.cam.ac.uk/user/gr/public/bb_home.html)

3. All About Science:

<http://www.allaboutscience.org/big-bang-theory.htm>

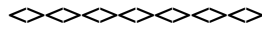
4. All About Science: Explanatory video

<http://www.allaboutscience.org/big-bang-theory-video.htm>

[fn3] The song was popularised in the 1960s by the Jamaican singer, Harry Belafonte, and the American folk singer, Odetta.

[\[return to text\]](#)

Lyrics: <http://www.songsforteaching.com/folk/theresaholeinthebucket.htm>



## THE MEANINGLESSNESS OF DOGS

**There are** a number of clever things said about dogs, such as how you should let them lie if they're sleeping, or how quick brown foxes jump over lazy ones. Then there's the dog's life, which is the life of Riley if you are a human.

But it's not all just about sleeping and being jumped over by foxes. There is that quality of being *dogged* – the very British trait of determined, steadfast, plodding in the face of impossible odds and all that. A good word, unless you are *being* dogged – hotly pursued by somebody (or, perish the thought, some *thing*) you don't wish to be caught by. (Perhaps this says more about the English language than the canine species, but it does help to demonstrate that dogs show up all over the place. Even in your mouth: having a canine tooth is very human.)

Expressions which feature dogs are rarely complimentary. 'Like a dog's hind leg' is not what you wish to produce when you're sawing a piece of wood or, worse yet, painting lines down the middle of a main road. In America they have an expression, 'doggone'. You might think this describes an absent canine, but it seems to be an exclamation of surprise or irritation: 'doggone, that wasn't supposed to happen', or 'just a doggone minute'.

In restaurants we take home our uneaten food in a doggy bag, swim with a doggy-paddle, and write awful poetry in doggerel. And if you wind up in a poor job you may get to be a dogsbody – which is to say, almost a nobody.

As the ultimate pet, the dog lives for his master or mistress, and gives great satisfaction. His loyalty, his protective nature, and his zest to please are delightful. And in a surprising, if mildly derogatory, way the dog is better than a lion – but only if the latter is dead. Or so says Ecclesiastes (9: 4). In a reverse sort of way Ecclesiastes is saying that the life of a dog is not much. For all his noble traits the dog has no future: he has not the stamp of eternity on him. This is true of all animals.

Some insist that this is true of Man, too.

### A Bleak Assessment

In chapter 1, verse 2, of Ecclesiastes, the writer exclaims, 'Meaningless! Meaningless! . . . Utterly meaningless!' And if you didn't get it the first time, he adds, 'Everything is meaningless.'

Now one does not expect to read a sentiment like this in holy Scripture, and you could be forgiven for wondering, 'what's going on here?'

Looked at from the point of view of one who is destitute of hope and purpose, life is like this: man is born, lives, dies and, cheerio – the memory of him is forgotten. Or so it seems. In fact, there are quite a few around today who make a living out of telling the rest of us that this is so – or most likely so, like those posters on the side of buses in London or Toronto, which proclaim that God is 'probably' dead, so you'd better get on with your life and enjoy it.

The trouble is, for most people it would be very difficult to enjoy life if they were persuaded that

God is dead. It would all seem so, well, meaningless. When Christopher Hitchens, the British writer and sometimes philosopher, tells his audiences that life is without meaning, at least he's being Biblical, as far as Ecclesiastes is concerned.

But one might wonder, if Mr. Hitchens and his associates really *do* believe life is without meaning, why do they take the trouble to tell the rest of us about it? They evidently believe in the force and truth of their message and deem the spreading of it as an important endeavour. They are on a crusade against credulity. Ironically, this means that their own lives are not without meaning, at least as far as that goes.

But what would it matter, though life be pointless, if one chooses to believe in God? What difference should it make to the atheist? Why badger the believer? Why not let the Christians enjoy their fruitless existence in happy delusion? In the words of the popular song, 'Don't worry, be happy.' Just like that sign on the bus.

But is Ecclesiastes right? Is it all pointless, a dog's life? The viewpoint of Ecclesiastes speaks for the unbeliever, the jaded, the discouraged, the disheartened, the atheist – and all who regard life only as unremitting drudgery with a terminus on the near horizon.

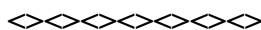
### **The Triumph of Purpose**

The Apostle Paul writes, 'If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men' (1 Corinthians 15: 19). Paul raises the horrible spectre of a Christ-filled life without Christ at the end of it, a futile godly existence without eternal promise, a damp squib, a terrestrial dud.

Answering his own question, the Apostle quickly assures us that Christ is not merely for this life. He affirms the glorious reality, that his hope, and ours, is not the finite piety of the here and now, goodness for an hour, but is transcendent beyond the sting of death, securely positioned not only on the death of Christ, but on His resurrection! 'But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep' (1 Corinthians 15: 20).

As for the writer of Ecclesiastes, he might well be Christopher Hitchens or Richard Dawkins, or any number of people who put agnostic posters on double-decker buses, or who feel it is their solemn duty to disabuse the minds of believers, for whom a life without God is unthinkable, unsatisfactory, joyless, meaningless.

Just as the atheist cannot understand why the Christian finds a belief in God to be a source of exquisite joy, so the Christian cannot fathom the passion for unbelief. But the effects of the Curse fall indifferently on all and the results are often surprising. And so not all people can exercise faith ([2 Thessalonians 3: 2](#)). In this peculiar way has God fashioned an education for the world, which passively and unwittingly awaits the Kingdom of God. In due time, when the facts are known, the details revealed, all will say, 'Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. . . let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation' (Isaiah 25: 9).



### **The United States: A New Beginning?**

The exuberance at home and abroad which greeted the inauguration of Barak Obama as President of the United States was, perhaps, compounded from a range of emotions. That a black man could be elevated to that prestigious office is noteworthy evidence that the U.S. has excised the demons of slavery which have haunted its collective conscience for generations. The celebratory mood was

augmented with widespread relief at the official departure of George Bush, whose presidency is generally blamed for the undermining of constitutional law and as broadly detrimental to international relations.

A pervading disquiet over the chronic problems besetting the U.S. and the broken state of its economy snaked its way through the President's hopeful but sober address to the massive crowd, many of whom are facing the gritty realities of shuttered homes and businesses and pinched incomes.

The President's assertion that the U.S. will lead the world out of the financial crisis may strike a discordant note in some quarters, especially in foreign capitals, considering that a flamboyant U.S. precipitated the crisis in the first place. Then, too, the President must be acutely aware that America is not what it used to be. Exaggerations aside, a declining standard of living, heavy personal and public indebtedness, a dodgy dollar, and steady erosion in the manufacturing and financial sectors, have undercut the nation's prosperity and generated a querulous social divide along lines of wealth and class.

Although Obama's election has, for good reason, been well received by Americans of all political stripes, not all are enamoured of his social policies. Evangelical Christian groups and social conservatives are troubled by his civil rights agenda which, if implemented, will impart a decidedly liberal slant to American society.[\[fn1\]](#)

Obama's attempts to restore confidence in the domestic banking system and the credit markets will be hampered by the nation's debts relative to the scale of its commitments on the home front and overseas. The much-touted 'stimulus' measures, already underway, in which thousands of millions of dollars are being disbursed to a variety of financial entities and industries, come with no guarantee of success. Nor can the U.S. continue to count on borrowing massive amounts from other countries, who are in similarly difficult circumstances.

The first foreign tour for President Obama will be to Canada. The trading partnership between the U.S. and Canada is the largest in the world. Canada's natural gas reserves and the tar-sands of Alberta supply about one-fifth of America's energy needs, oil imports alone exceeding those from Saudi Arabia. Canada is a staunch ally in the war in Afghanistan, to which it has committed thousands of troops. It is, perhaps, significant that this will not be a state visit.[\[fn2\]](#) Obama's meetings with Prime Minister Stephen Harper will likely be of the rolled-up sleeves variety, touching on the shared interests of the two countries, territorial disputes over the Arctic, emerging protectionist trade legislation in the U.S. Congress, climate change, and the deepening recession in both countries.

---

**[fn1]** President Obama has expressed his determination to press Congress to legislate for same-sex civil unions or marriage and the introduction of various statutes to advance the legal rights of homosexual groups in American society. Such changes, if enacted, would mirror those introduced in recent years in the United Kingdom and Canada.

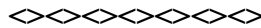
[\[return to text\]](#)

Source: [http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/civil\\_rights/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/civil_rights/)

**[fn2]** The President of the United States is both Executive head of state and the country's chief politician. A 'head-of-state' visit to any country is usually marked by lavish ceremony and is hosted by the other country's head of state, who may be a president or a monarch. Queen Elizabeth II is Canada's head of state; she is represented in that country by a Governor General, currently Michaëlle Jean. Prime Minister Stephen Harper, as leader of the party in power, the Conservatives,

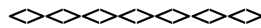
is the political head of the federal government.

[\[return to text\]](#)



### **Memorialising the Lord's Supper**

For those of our subscribers who choose to commemorate the Last Supper once a year, the date falls this year on Wednesday, April 8, beginning at 18:00 (6 p.m.). For details on how we have calculated this and for background information, go to our Website and read or download the [.pdf](#).



### **DRAG-NET**

#### **Items of interest from the Web**

##### **Army Worms**

Liberia, the West African country founded by freed American slaves in 1822, has been ravaged by a frightful invasion reminiscent of [Joel 1: 4](#).

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7842167.stm>

##### **Mum's the Word at the BBC**

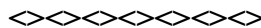
Jeremy Vine, presenter of BBC radio and television programmes, says in an interview with *Christian Today* that as a Christian he feels reluctant to discuss his faith on air.

<http://www.christiantoday.com/articledir/print.htm?id=22337>

##### **Davos**

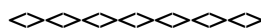
A revamp of the global economic system may be in the offing – if anyone knows how to do it

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/davos/7863684.stm>



### **A New Feature on Our Site**

Early discourses from some convention and circuit speakers are now available [here](#).



**UK Bible Students** will not give away or sell your name to anyone. See our [Privacy Statement](#).

You are receiving this newsletter because you subscribed to it. To remove your name from the list, please go [here](#).

You can view or retrieve previous Newsletters in pdf [here](#).

*Contents copyright January 2009* [ukbiblestudents.co.uk](http://ukbiblestudents.co.uk)

You may reproduce any of our materials, but please let us know if you do, and link to our site, if possible.

*Postal Address:*

Post Box 0195, Brough, East Yorkshire, England