

Extraterrestrial Life in the Jewish Tradition

Jesse Grauman

1. The X-Files, Season 9, Episode 10

Reyes: “Agent Scully, I know you've become more open-minded about these things... but do you know what it is you're saying here? If it were true, these symbols wouldn't just be words... they'd be the very word of God on the surface of an alien spacecraft.”

Scully: “It'd mean that everything mankind believes in...is in question.”

2. Rabbi Norman Lamm, “Extraterrestrial Life”

No religious position is loyally served by refusing to consider annoying theories which may well turn out to be facts. Torah is “a Torah of truth,” and to hide from the facts is to distort that truth into a myth. Of course, it must be repeated that the theories here under discussion have not (yet) been established as true. But they may be, and Judaism will then have to confront them as it has confronted what men have considered the truth throughout the generations...

[The portions of Genesis which discuss Creation] has always been accepted, in the Jewish tradition, as containing hidden doctrines, i.e., the text was never meant to be taken as a literal history...hence, if the literal reading of this portion...contradicts what reason tells us to be the truth, it means that we have not properly understood the divine teachings and must return to the sacred text and probe deeper into it in order to discover what is, after all, a single and unified truth.

3. Psalms 8: 4-9

When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars that You set in place, what is man that You have been mindful of him, mortal man that You have taken note of him, that You have made him little less than divine, and adorned him with glory and majesty. You have made him master over Your handiwork, laying the world at his feet, sheep and oxen, all of them, and wild beasts too; the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, whatever travels the paths of the seas.

4. Talmud Bavli, Tractate Brachot 32b

The Holy One, blessed be He, answered [Israel], My daughter, twelve constellations have I created in the firmament, and for each constellation I have created thirty hosts, and for each host I have created thirty legions, and for each legion I have created thirty cohorts and for each cohort I have created thirty maniples, and for each maniple I have created thirty camps, and to each camp I have attached 365,000's of myriads of stars, corresponding to the days of the solar year, *and all of them I have created only for thy sake...*

5. Midrash, Kohelet Rabbah, 7:13

When God created the first man, he took him and showed him all the trees of the Garden of Eden and told him, “See how beautiful and praiseworthy my creations are, and *everything I created, I created for your sake*; be careful that you do not spoil and destroy my world...”

6. Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, 3:12

The whole mankind at present in existence, and...every other species of animals, form an infinitesimal portion of the permanent universe...it is of great advantage that man should know his station, and not erroneously imagine that the whole universe exists only for him.

7. Judges 5:23

“Curse Meroz!” said the angel of the Lord. “Bitterly curse its inhabitants, because they came not to the aid of the Lord, to the aid of the Lord among the warriors.”

8. Talmud Bavli, Tractate Moed Katan 16a

Some say Meroz was [the name of] a great personage; others say that it was [the name of] a star, as it is written [in Judges 5:20], “They fought from Heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.”

9. Talmud Bavli, Tractate Avodah Zarah 3b

What does [God] do by night? If you like you may say, the kind of thing He does by day; or it may be said that He rights a light cherub, and floats in 18,000 worlds...

10. Talmud Bavli, Tractate Sanhedrin 100a

They say in the West (Israel) in the name of Raba the son of Mari, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will give every righteous person 310 worlds, as it is said [in Proverbs 8: 21], "I endow those who love me with substance; I will fill their treasuries." [The Hebrew word] *Yesh* in gematria is 310.

11. Rabbi Chasdai Crescas, Or Hashem

As it was, so it is – namely, that, as has been explained, none of the reasons we have cited, either in favor or against [the existence of other worlds], can be proven to be true, and what can be understood from them is only the *possibility* of a multitude [of worlds]. It is appropriate, then, that we do not stray far from the explanation of some of our rabbis. It is written in the first chapter of Avodah Zarah, "He floats in 18,000 worlds." And the meaning of this, is that his *hashgachah* (attention?) floats among all of these worlds.

12. Rabbi Pinchas Halevy Horowitz, Sefer HaBrit

It is my belief that there is no doubt that [the stars and planets] were not created for nothingness, but to be inhabited, and they have inhabitants...and this is mentioned in the Zohar in numerous places and in the Talmud [he quotes the passages from Sanhedrin and Avodah Zarah]...I have also seen proof for this in what [the rabbis] wrote about the verse "Curse Meroz"...according to the opinion that said [Meroz] is a star, it also says "Curse its inhabitants" – from this it appears that [the stars] have inhabitants, and [the song] curses the star and its inhabitants because they did not come to the aid of the Lord as did the other stars, because every one, from its place, was aiding in Sisera's demise...therefore, it is my opinion that they do have inhabitants, and they are worlds...

There are those who believe that [the other worlds] and everything in them is exactly like this world, and that they have people with free choice, and animals, plants, and inanimate objects...these people have spoken likes...and one who believes this is a fool who will believe anything, because why would many worlds be necessary simply to have more people and animals – this world could simply be larger until it could hold everyone and everything! Would this be impossible for God to do?...Instead, each of them is different from the others, both in themselves and in their inhabitants...

There is no doubt that none of [the other worlds] have humans which resemble us or have free choice – although they could be intelligent – because we know that free choice exists only for humans on this earth...therefore, there is no place for Torah or [Temple] service but in this world, because Torah and [Temple] service do not belong in a place with no free choice, and therefore, God gains pleasure only from this world...and therefore, it is the purpose of the entire Creation and the preferred of all worlds. Even the high and lofty [spiritual] worlds were only created for this world, even more so, these other worlds! [cites Brachot 32b]...And because it is the purpose of all the other worlds, this is why God chose to dwell in a thick cloud in this world...with the heavens as a canopy for his glory...and commanded to build for him a Tabernacle and a Temple among those who dwell on low...this is His majesty and glory.

13. Rabbi Norman Lamm, "Extraterrestrial Life"

The anticipated shock from the possible discovery of extraterrestrial intelligent life has...served, even before such discovery has yet been made, to enlarge the gap between man and God...what we have attempted to show is that such conclusions do not necessarily follow from the premises. A God who can exercise providence over one billion earthmen can do so for ten billion times that number of creatures throughout the universe. He is not troubled, one ought grant, by problems, in communications, engineering, or the complexities of cosmic cybernetics. God is infinite, and He has an infinite amount of love and concern to extend to each and every one of His creatures.

Bibliography:

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