

In The Beginning

Acts 17:24

Introducing God, Part 6

Imagine hiking in the Black Hills of South Dakota. As you round a hill, you come upon a sight that stops you in your tracks. In front of you and stretching up into the sky are four giant faces that look exactly like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Teddy Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln.

How in the world did these faces appear in the mountainside?

Maybe over millions of years they took shape by random accidents or earthquakes. Or perhaps over millions of years, wind and rain and rock slides combined to carve faces into stone.

Who would conceivably buy into those probabilities?

The truth is, those four faces reveal the three fundamental principles of design:

- **intention,**
- **planning and**
- **forethought.**

Mount Rushmore was the brainchild of John Borglum. He and his team wanted to carve the faces of these famous Americans – that **revealed intention.**

It would take 400 people to work with new inventive methods for removing 800 million pounds of stone created by all the dynamite blasting – **that was planning.**

Before any blasting took place, designers mapped out the size and shape of each president's face – their eyes were 11 feet across; their mouths were 18 feet wide; their noses were 20 feet long. If you think you have a long nose – be encouraged – theirs were 20 feet long. And the entire project **revealed forethought.**¹

You would never in a million years – no pun intended – ever think that Mount Rushmore came about as a result of the well-worn evolutionary formula that chance + time = design.

No: design equals forethought, planning and intention.

For more than half a century, Antony Flew was the most noted atheist in the world ... until he shocked the intellectual world in 2004 by publicly announcing that he had changed his mind and now professed faith in God.

As a philosopher, Flew was always prepared to go wherever the evidence led him, which toward the end of his life led him to argue that atheism is not logical.

In his book, entitled, **There Is a God**, Flew reflects on the argument regarding human origin that he had to deal with in his younger days.

He wrote, the argument runs like this: given enough time and chance, life on planet earth could have just happened without any design – certainly from a Creator God.

Researchers tried to provide an example of this "time + chance = life" theory with a well-known experiment that posed the following question: How long would it take for an infinite number of monkeys pounding away on an infinite number of typewriters to write out one sonnet by Shakespeare?

By the way, this became the basis for an actual experiment conducted in Great Britain.

A computer was placed in a cage with six monkeys, and after one month of hammering away at the keys ... the monkeys produced fifty typed pages—never mind that someone made the paper, the typewriters and loaded the pages into the

machines – but still, after one month, they produced not one single word.

This is amazing, considering that the shortest word in English could be a one-letter word such as the letter *a* or *I*. But a one-letter word is only a word if there is a space on either side of it, and not one was typed.

Flew pointed out that if one considers that there are thirty keys on a keyboard, the possibility of typing at least one – one-letter word was only one in 27,000.

So if these attempts could not even result in one one-letter word, what was the possibility that these monkeys could type the first line of one of Shakespeare's sonnets . . . much less, a simple sentence . . . like, See Jack run.

Yet contemporary scientists keep contending that monkeys can do it with enough time – and paper” Flew wrote; and he personally concluded that the entire universe – which is infinitely more complex than a Shakespearian sonnet – could not have been designed by allowing enough time + chance to work.

There had to be a Designer. Antony Flew’s arguments for atheism cracked and eventually crumbled away.ⁱⁱ

He joined a host of scientists who openly declared the same conclusion:

Nicolaus Copernicus wrote in the 16th century, “Who could live in close contact with the most consummate order and wisdom and not . . . adore the architect of all these things?”

Kepler, one of the world’s greatest astronomers wrote a century later, “My Lord and my Creator! I would like to proclaim the magnificence of your works to the extent that my limited intelligence can understand.”

Isaac Newton was the 18th century founder of classical theoretical physics – you know, I didn’t have any classical theoretical physics classes in school – I was more suited for spelling and recess. Newton wrote, “The arrangement and harmony of the universe could only have come from the plan of an omniscient and omnipotent Being.”

Allan Sandage, a 21st century astronomer and winner of the Crafoord Prize – equivalent to the Nobel Prize wrote, “I was practically an atheist in my childhood. Science was what led me to the conclusion that the world is much more complex than we can explain. I can only explain the mystery of existence by the Supernatural.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The truth is, we as human beings today have suddenly stumbled around a hill, as it were, and here we are staring into the face of an amazing world – and everywhere we look are the evidences of forethought, intention and design.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman believers that all who are willing to stop suppressing the truth will be drawn to marvel at the attributes of a Creator God.

This same Apostle, 1900 years ago, stood before the Supreme Court of Athens, on top of the wind swept Areopagus, and said to them, “There is a Creator – and I know who He is.”

Take your New Testament and let’s go back up that hill in Athens – Acts chapter 17.

And while you’re turning, let me remind you that the Greek and Roman world had their own theories of origins.

For instance, the Athenians believed that the semen of their god, Hephaistos, spilled on the ground in his failed attempt to rape their goddess Athena. And as his semen came in contact with another goddess – the goddess earth – known as Gaia, she ended up getting pregnant by accident and ended up delivering the human race.

That’s how the human race got its origin?!

Now, the Athenians were not atheists – no-god; they were polytheists – many-gods; but they were just as far from the truth on the origin of the universe and life on earth.

And they were still asking the same questions; Was the universe put together by random acts of gods and goddesses who created human beings by accident – or, some believed – to be toyed with or even tortured?

All of the above were believed by Paul’s generation.

Now in Acts chapter 17, as Paul begins to introduce the Unknown God to them, he effectively takes them all the way back to ***Genesis chapter 1 and verse 1. In the beginning God.***

And what is the first thing we learn in that verse beyond the existence of God – ***In the beginning God, created . . . the heavens and the earth!***

In other words, the heavens and the earth are the designed result of God’s intention, planning and forethought.

Let’s dive back into Paul’s exact words, in Acts chapter 17 . . . and let’s pick it back up in ***verse 24. The God who made the world and all things in it***

since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.

I have little doubt that as Paul made that last statement, he pointed to what they all could see from the top of that outdoor courtroom; surrounding them was Athens, dotted with temples and statues . . . they were everywhere.

Remember, from our last study, a plague had broken out in this region 600 years earlier and it had terrified the Athenians into believing one of their gods was angry with them.

Epimenides had led the city to let loose a flock of sheep from that very hill, instructing them to sacrifice the sheep whenever they lay down near a temple.

But when some of the sheep didn't lie down near a temple, they assumed that an Unknown God was angry with them. And now they were in trouble because they didn't know anything about that particular god.

So Epimenides instructed them to build temples and altars and dedicate them to "The Unknown God" and sacrifice the nearby sheep to Him.

Paul effectively says, "You're right – there is a God you don't know about – but notice how Paul informs them that this God doesn't need you to create something for Him – because He happens to have created all that is – for you.

Notice again, He is ***the God who created the world and all things in it.***

The word Paul uses for *world* – here in ***verse 24*** – is the word *cosmos* (κοσμος) which refers to the sum total of everything that exists.^{iv}

The word *cosmos* is carefully chosen by Paul the apologist; he actually uses a word that every Athenian philosopher on that hill would have known – it's the word that refers to the order and the arrangement of the political system in Athens.

Plato, a famous scholar of ancient Athens, used the word *cosmos* for that which is well ordered and arranged.

In fact, we happen to have one interesting illustration where Plato used the word *cosmos* to refer to the order and arrangement in which a woman puts on her makeup – first this layer and then that layer and then the next layer. He probably got into trouble with Mrs. Plato for using that illustration.

And I don't know who the philosopher was who said, "Well if the barn door needs painting. . . ." and

the reason we don't know who he was, was because they never found his body.

I need that guy in here who laughs really loud.

Cosmos actually gives us the English word *cosmetics* – it refers to the order and arrangement of the face.

And I'm not saying anything else about it. But what Paul is saying is that when you detect the universe having order and arrangement – somebody's brush strokes designed it that way.

The beauty and order of life in the *cosmos* is the cosmetic brushstroke of a Creator God.

For by Him – that is, Jesus Christ – Paul wrote later to the Colossian believers, ***all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible . . . all things have been created through Him and for Him. (Colossians 1:16)***

And Paul clarifies here – did you notice – ***He created the world – now notice – and all things in it.***

That's Paul's way of closing every possible loophole; aliens seeding the universe; billions or years eventually fashioning the human race.

And by the way, the Greek word translated "all things" – all things in it, refers to all that the world contains – all inanimate objects such as stars, mountains, rivers, seas, and all animate objects such as plants, animals, angelic beings, and the human race.

That doesn't mean God didn't set in motion the laws of nature for joining in God's ultimate intention by bearing a child or for plants and animals to produce after their own kind.

What it does mean is that everything that exists is the result of God's design: it's His divine forethought, His divine intention and His divine planning.

Listen to what Nehemiah wrote it in his journal, ***You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, the heaven of heavens with all the starry host – the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything (Nehemiah 9:6).***

This is exactly what Paul says, and then next, he adds the exclamation point that this Creator God, notice, is the ***Lord of heaven and earth.***

He is the Sovereign Designer and Creator behind the entire *cosmos*.^v

Charles Boyle, a brilliant thinker and devoted Christian was fascinated with Kepler's and Newton's discoveries about planetary motion and the intricate design of the universe.

Boyle hired a watchmaker to design an actual working mechanical model of the solar system that demonstrated the motion of the planets around the sun. They all moved mechanically according to the pattern of their orbit.

It was an incredible display of skill and precision. On one occasion Boyle was showing the model to an atheistic scientist, who was very impressed with the clockwork model.

The atheist said, "This is an incredibly impressive model. Who make it for you?" Boyle responded with a smile, "No one . . . it just happened."^{vi}

David the Psalmist writes:

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made; And by the breath of His mouth all their host – (the stars and planets)

He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke and it was done . . . the plans of His heart from generation to generation (Psalm 33:6-10).

You know what David is singing about? The forethought and intention and planning of our Creator God.

And he includes that little line – as if to say, when you understand Him as Sovereign Creator – then let all the world stand in awe of Him.

We find Him to be the object of our highest praise;

We find Him to be the hope in our deepest valleys; We find Him to be the answer to life's greatest mysteries.

Today, our country is mired in the latest theories of evolution that include the leap of faith proposed by Charles Darwin.

By the way, it takes as much faith to believe that species evolved from species and into other species – without one shred of evidence in the fossil record – that takes as much faith as it took the Athenians to believe the human race was the result of one of their gods accidentally impregnating earth.

And it takes faith to believe the propositional statement that God created the heavens and the earth.

The question is not, "Do you have faith?" The question is, "To what do you pin your faith?"

In the 1800's, Charles Darwin believed the cell – the smallest unit of life classified as a living being –

in Darwin's day it was believed to be a simple lump of carbon.

Trouble is, his theory was based on what he could not see. And he was honest enough to admit, and I quote, "If it can be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down." End quote^{vii}

That's exactly what happened with the invention of the electron microscope in 1930 – 48 years after the death of Darwin.

Mankind was finally able to see a demonstration of the complexity within a single living cell – it was staggering discovery.

Hidden from view all this time, locked inside the nucleus of each cell was a chemically coiled strand that would be named DNA.

Let me read from one description – something that Darwin didn't know that we now know: once the egg and sperm share their inheritance, the DNA chemical ladder splits down the center of every gene like the teeth of a zipper pull apart. DNA re-forms itself each time the cell divides – each cell having the identical DNA. Along the way, cells specialize, yet each cell carries the entire instruction manual of one hundred thousand genes.

Listen to this: your DNA contains instructions that if written out, would fill a thousand volumes, with each volume 600 pages long. A nerve cell may specialize according to information from volume four while a kidney cell may function according to information from volume 25, but here's the staggering discovery; all of the information of the entire library are carried within each cell. Not evolving and adapting – but immediately springing into existence, containing all the information.

The DNA is so compacted that all the genes in your body's cells could fit into an ice cube; however, if the DNA were unwound and joined together end to end, the strand could stretch from the earth to the sun and back again – more than 400 times.^{viii}

In other words, it has been demonstrated that a complex organ exists which could not possibly have been formed by numerous modifications.

So obviously the theory collapsed and mankind has been looking for another theory. No . . . not exactly.

You say, if only Darwin had owned an electron microscope. He didn't . . . but he did have this sermon by Paul, delivered on the Areopagus – and

Charles Darwin would have read this same chapter in the Book of Acts as he prepared, at one point in his young adult life, to be a minister in the Church of England.

But with what Darwin already knew, he was already troubled by the staggering discoveries and cosmetic arrangements of our world.

Darwin wrote a letter to a close friend, which was published after his death. He wrote, "I am conscious that I am in an utterly hopeless muddle. I cannot think that the world, as we see it, is the result of chance . . . again I say I am, and shall ever remain, in a hopeless muddle."^{ix}

Paul effectively warns his generation and ours – if you want to muddle along, deny the existence of a Creator God.

In Athens – and in America – the denials are commonplace. And because of it, mankind loses not only a Divine designer – he loses a purpose and design for his very own life.

For the believer, this is cause to glorify God all the more, right? Every discovery points an amazing Creator.

I came across this article recently – and we will wrap up tonight with yet another reason to stand in awe of our Creator. And with this I close.

You may feel as if you are sitting still right now, but it's an illusion of miraculous proportions. Planet Earth is spinning around its axis at a speed of 1,000 miles per hour.

Every 24 hours, planet Earth pulls off a celestial 360. We're also hurtling through space at an average velocity of 67,108 miles per hour. That's not just faster than a speeding bullet. It's 87 times faster than the speed of sound.

So even on a day when you feel like you didn't get much done, don't forget that you actually traveled 1.5 million miles through space! And to top things off, while we speed and spin along, our Milky Way is spinning like a galactic pinwheel at the dizzying rate of 483,000 mph.

If that isn't miraculous, I don't know what is. When was the last time you thanked God for keeping the galaxy in orbit and the earth spinning on course? I'm guessing you've never prayed, "Lord, I wasn't sure we'd make the full rotation today, but You did it again"!

If we can trust God to manage our universe and keep in in perfect arrangement according to His will – if we can trust God for the big things – let's trust Him for the little things; like keeping our own lives on course, according to His intention, His forethought, His plan and His design.^x

We worship You, our Creator God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/28/2016 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ J.P. Moreland & Tim Muelhoff, *The God Conversation* (InterVarsity Press, 2007)

ⁱⁱ Ravi Zacharias, *Has Christianity Failed You?* (Zondervan, 2010), pp. 52-53

iii Adapted quotes from Javier Ordoñas, *25 Famous Scientists on God*, Aleteia (6-26-14)

iv Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Acts* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 731

v Ibid

vi Ibid

vii From Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box* (The Free press, 1996)

viii Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* (Zondervan, 1980), p. 45-46

ix Roy Zuck, *Vital Apologetic Issues* (Kregel Publications, 1995), p. 123

x Adapted from Mark Batterson, *The Grave Robber* (Baker Books, 2014), page 19