

# 1: Introduction to Module One

## The Five Mysteries

Ralph D. Winter

### Introduction

The first day of any course is usually a little different from the rest of the days, so it will not be until the next lesson that you will begin with a sequence, which will hold steady for the rest of the course. In this lesson you will be introduced to the course itself as you read the introductory material. My purpose right now is to say a word about the theme of the next two weeks.

We have referred to “Five Mysteries” in our introductory materials, and it is important for us to understand what a “mystery” is. The Bible actually speaks of the Great Commission as a mystery—something that was not understood properly or correctly. *But it was not supposed to have been a mystery.* The Jewish people, as with Gentile nations since, did not understand that they were blessed by a God of love, who sought to bless all the nations of the world through them. Paul did not even begin to understand this until his Damascus Road experience. For much of his life and for most of his hearers it was a “mystery.”

There are some mysteries, however, which we may never fully understand. Thus, the important thing for people of faith is simply to recognize that God knows more than we know, and that some of the things He knows will always be, in this life, mysteries to us.

The first mystery, we will be taking up, is simply the appearance of matter itself. The universe—where did it come from? Where did matter come from? The latest theories are really quite spectacular.

Some scientists, who may not be eager to be accountable to a living God, have somewhat resisted the idea that there is any such a Person. It is true that in current scientific circles one does not easily talk about God. On the other hand, of all the things that people have found difficult to believe about God, they have found it most difficult to believe is that there is no God. Or, as is current in scientific circles, that the whole universe, all the vast billions of stars in our one galaxy, and the billions of galaxies, just simply exploded out of a tiny little particle, so tiny you couldn't see it. If you can believe that, you can believe anything! And that is actually where scientific leaders really are

today. They are finding it easier to believe that things are more complicated than they thought.

In an article published in *Time* magazine, entitled “Science, God, and Man,” Robert Wright wrote,

One intriguing observation that has bubbled up from physics is that the universe seems calibrated for life's existence. If the force of gravity were pushed upward a bit, stars would burn out faster, leaving little time for life to evolve in the planets circling them. If the relative masses of protons and neutrons were changed by a hair, stars might never be born, since the hydrogen they eat wouldn't exist. If at the ‘Big Bang,’ some basic numbers—the ‘initial conditions’—had been jiggled, matter and energy would never have coagulated into galaxies, stars, planets, *or any other platform stable enough for life as we know it.* And so on (1992:40; italics added).

But who did the “calibration?” Wright continued,

There was a time when the emergence of life wasn't thought too amazing. With Darwin having explained how specks of life became us, the question of where the specks came from seemed minor, such a small step compared with the ensuing big ones. Presumably, if you let simple molecules reshuffle themselves randomly for long enough, some complex ones would get formed, and further reshuffling would make them more complex, until you had something like DNA, – a stable molecule that just happened to make copies of itself.

But more recently, more careful analysis suggests that even a mildly impressive living molecule is quite unlikely to form randomly (1992:40).

So the plot thickens. And our final quote from Wright:

Deism<sup>1</sup> is, in many ways well suited (as religions go) to an era as scientific as this one.

---

<sup>1</sup> Deism is the idea that God created the universe and then walked off while we all watched it perk along by itself.

But 20<sup>th</sup> century science sketches *a universe stranger than the one the deists imagined*. It is a universe that seems not to run as predictably as a clock, a universe *whose inmost workings may not be fathomable*. *The deeper our insight, the more baffling things become* (1992:43; italics added).

Now that's a rather awesome thought. Others have put it differently, that the diameter of our knowledge increases, and perforce, the circumference of our ignorance increases more than three times as fast as the diameter. So the more we know, the less we know. And this isn't exactly what many scientists would like to believe. However, one of the most sensible things in this whole issue of *Time* magazine was a statement made by Mustafa Mahmoud, a Muslim from Cairo, "God, the creator of the universe, can never be against [our] learning the laws of what he has created (Ostling 1992:43)."

Well, let's take a look at the different mysteries here. First of all, there is the mystery of the origin of matter itself. That so-called "small step" now is recognized to be a very, very massive and totally unfathomable step. The only explanation is really a non-explanation: It came out of nothing. It came out of a tiny little particle, which is essentially nothing. Now that is as close to a non-explanation as anyone could propose.

But however the entire universe came into being, its mere existence would not necessarily imply the further incredibly complex event, the appearance of life itself. Now whether you're talking about a plant, an insect, or a dinosaur, they all are born out of a DNA molecule, which is very, very tiny, but very, very complex. One such molecule, found in every human cell and every cell of any kind of life, has two billion atoms in it. It is an organization of incredible intricacy in what is called a double helix. And there are billions of these molecules in any form of life. This is so complex as to boggle your imagination. Its origin is a real mystery.

In *The God Who Would Be Known: Revelations of the Divine in Contemporary Science* by John Templeton,<sup>2</sup> and Robert Herrmann<sup>3</sup> devote 13 pages to a description of the DNA

<sup>2</sup>John Templeton gives an annual prize for progress in religion, which is larger than the Nobel Prize.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Herrmann is adjunct professor of chemistry at Gordon College and the executive director of the American Scientific Affiliation, an evangelical association of professors of science.

phenomenon—enough to boggle your imagination for the rest of your life (1989:87-99). They go on to say that the neural connections in one human brain, which is a very small item when compared to this planet, or this solar system, or our galaxy, or the mass of galaxies out there, yet they probably outnumber all of the stars in the universe (1989:11, 38). So, with the phenomenon of life the tiny things, are just as complicated as the big things. So, the appearance of life is the second of the great and unfathomable mysteries.

The third mystery is the appearance of a special kind of life: thinking, feeling, sensible and reflecting life, namely, the human species. This also seems, like the other things that are so baffling, to have been very sudden in its appearance. The so-called discontinuities of earth's geologic record are as perplexing as the parts that are explainable. Suddenly, things happen! The evolutionary suppositions of gradual progress fall to the ground in the face of the evidence, and this is more and more troubling to all kinds of scientists, both people who are Christians and those who are not.

And now we see another form of complexity, not the complexity that a human being represents, but the complexity of associations of human beings. Once again, in a sort of discontinuous, sudden appearance, all over the planet very complicated civilizations appeared, civilizations that, in some instances, possessed scientific insights that rival those of today; civilizations that created calendars that are superior to our own; and so on. The amazing, perplexing and, really infuriating thing is that these civilizations are everywhere noticed in their decline. There doesn't seem to be any record of build-up. For example, in Egypt the most advanced architectural achievements, the pyramids, the Sphinx, and so forth, were made in the earliest appearances of Egyptian civilization. Nothing that followed involved anything equivalent to the complexity of accomplishments that existed in the earlier period.

Or take a single monument in England, the Stonehenge monument. The best that scientists can do is still very puzzling. Indications are that the earliest form of that astronomical observatory was more sophisticated than the later one created, when great huge stones were added to fix it up. It was like the designer of an automobile, who knew exactly how the car worked, but turned it over to some young person who took it apart and tried to patch it back together. But after that it never quite worked the way it was intended to. Here we have evidence of an earlier, more sophisticated people, and a later people, who had forgotten what the

earlier people had once known. They lived in the same place, viewed the same monument, and yet could not understand how it worked. Thus, civilization itself is a mystery. Now that's mystery number four.

The fifth mystery is the one we mentioned as we began. It is what the Bible itself refers to as a mystery. The Bible introduces the concept of evil, of things that have gone wrong because of some intentional opposition to the purposes of God. And this is where the Bible comes into the picture. It comes in suddenly. All of a sudden, we know more about a man called Abraham than we know about any other man who ever lived that long ago. A sudden spotlight of detail!

In this abrupt, biblical picture, we see a plan set in motion to correct the evil, to confront that evil, to push back the prince of darkness and disorder on this planet. The fall of man is the entrance of that evil into the earthly situation. The fall of man, and then the confusion, the hopeless result, is the introduction to the Bible, Genesis 1-11. But then in Genesis 12, right at the beginning of the Bible this plan is presented. This plan is what we refer to as the "Great Commission", when it appears later in the Bible. This commission in Genesis 12 reappears, as Jesus restates it with ultimate authority.

This plan was obscured by the very forces, which it was designed to counteract. But remember the verse, "the gates of hell cannot defend themselves against the work of God," the kingdom of God, the Church. Yes, gates of hell will not be able to defend themselves against that outreaching, extending kingdom and power of God. And so, trying to understand this is itself battling with a mystery. This is the one mystery of the five, which we can at least partially grasp. Maybe God did not intend for us to understand the other four so completely at this stage in our existence. But this fifth mystery, which is the mystery of the Bible itself, a book which most people don't understand as a thrilling, single story of God's re-conquering, what some have called "the dark planet," a planet that was out of fellowship with God. The unfolding of this mystery begins to bring meaning into all else.

So, these are the five mysteries, which we are going to look at. The first four will be coming up in the first two weeks, and the fifth will take the entire rest of this module, and in fact the rest of the other three modules. So hang on; we have five mysteries, and the first four will be covered in the first two weeks.

Now, in the normal sequence of each lesson, there will be a brief introduction like this one.

Following the introduction you will be grappling with questions, called Reflection Questions, as you read the assigned readings. So, as you do your readings keep in mind the Reflection Questions and write down your answers. Then your final activity for the day, each day, will be to sit back ask yourself, has God said anything to you today? Is there anything that was really exciting or astounding, or disturbing, or whatever? Write down your response. We do not want this to be lengthy; we want it to be very personal. You cannot write the wrong thing, so don't worry about it.

### Review

More than at any time in human history, the scientific community could be referred to as being in the era of the "dumbfounded scientist." We know so much that we did not know before, and as a result know so little, or there's so much we don't know, that scientists, if they are honest at all, are truly and profoundly dumbfounded.

Now, for a Christian, there's no problem in being dumbfounded at God's greatness. That should not surprise us. We ought to welcome the realization that God is bigger than we are, and that many things that He knows, we do not know. It should not be a threatening discovery that we are out of bounds in every area of science. It should be an exciting and wonderful thing, even though we probably will not ever know in this life the answers to all these things. In the readings we will be doing in the next few lessons, you will find out just how dumbfounded, how marvelously dumbfounded, scientists are today. Whether they are looking through telescopes or whether they are looking through microscopes; whether they are looking back in history or they are looking around the world, trying to understand what is going on today, they face the baffling confusion of constantly increasing complexity.

One of the unique features of our generation is that there are more people on the earth. More studying is being done. For example, there are 20,000 sites today where dinosaurs have been dug up. In almost all cases, some new form of dinosaur life has been discovered. As we look out into the cosmological wonders, our newspapers almost daily inform us of new things that we now understand less—because of new things we have learned.

And so this is in a most amazing period. They say there are more scientists alive today than have ever lived in all of human history, simply because the exploding global population—and relative peace—makes that possible. So we are in very

unusual circumstances. We are in for great excitement, both in our studies together and in the world in which we live. We need to have our hearts open for whatever God wants to reward us, and to tell us about. That's where we are today.

### References Cited

Ostling, Richard N.

1992 Galileo and Other Faithful Scientists.  
*Time*, December 28, 1992, 42-3.

Templeton, John and Robert Herrmann.

1989 *The God Who Would Be Known: Revelations of the Divine in Contemporary Science*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.

Wright, Robert.

1992 Science, God, and Man. *Time*,  
December 28, 1992, 38-4