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God's Grand Design

Is human life merely a fortunate evolutionary accident? Is our future in the hands of blind chance? Or, is there a purpose to human life? Here's the remarkable evidence of a spectacular planned destiny for mankind.

by James McBride

"Everybody must wonder from time to time if there is any real purpose in life." So eminent astronomer Fred Hoyle begins his book, *The Intelligent Universe*. The notion that human destiny is governed by a purpose is, however, in our high-tech world considered impossible, naive.

Many professional historians, for example, fail to see any significance in history. D.M. Sturley, in his work, *The Study Of History*, writes: "...many eminent historians have been obliged to admit, after a lifetime of study, that they have been unable to distinguish any coherent pattern of events [in history]" (PG. 25). Even religious people are skeptical. Writes P.I.H. Naylor, "[Astrology] postulates some order in the universe, some divine planning - an idea that seems obnoxious nowadays to most [religious leaders] as well as to the layman" (*Astrology*, p.168).

Yet throughout history, other great minds have stepped back for an over-view of human life and have concluded that there is a plan for human existence; that man is not just flotsam tossed on the face of some surging universal ocean.

Before the US. Congress in 1941, Sir Winston Churchill reflected, "If you will allow me to use other language, I will say that he must indeed have a blind soul who cannot see that some great purpose and design is being worked out here below, of which we have the honor to be faithful servants." One-time Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin once commented, "The history of mankind is not a purposeless history. It is a manifestation of the divine purpose." And King George VI spoke of "fulfilling His high purpose."

A divine calling and purpose! A supernatural reason that makes sense of this weary life! Isn't that

something we all seek? Yet it seems so unrealistic and utopian in our fast-moving technological world of the late twentieth century. Isn't man more than a sophisticated accident? More than evolutionary caprice or some meaningless cosmic whim? We humans surely need some such assurance, some evidence, that all is not chaos. That somehow there is an understandable pattern being worked on the broad canvas of human experience.

Amazingly, there is such evidence! Man's history does make sense.

There is a grand design that may be discerned from man's observations and from nature itself. Let's look at some of the fascinating strands of that evidence.

The Mythical "Golden Age"

In all the great civilizations since the dawn of human history - Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome - there existed a peculiar recurring dream. The thinkers and philosophers of these ancient nations looked to a coming "Golden Age," a utopian paradise of peace and prosperity, an era of truth and justice, a release from life's unending problems. History is full of references to it!

The Latin poet Virgil, for example, extolled the universal longing for the return of the so-called "Day of Saturn" (*Eclogue, IV*). Mankind would return to a time of innocence and harmony. This was a "golden" time when Saturn ruled the earth. But since then, according to the mythical picture, things have gone from bad to worse. An inferior "silver" age overtook mankind, followed by a "bronze" age and then an age of "iron." However continues the poet, Saturn's Golden Age would come again. He would personally return to the earth to institute a benign rule. Peace and

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justice would be universal, and suffering would cease.

But that "Golden Age" has never materialized. The formula was never discovered. Not anciently - after Eden - and certainly not today. Human society has not yet implemented a plan leading to genuine, lasting success in government, in religion, in education, or in commerce!

Yet, within this fanciful-sounding concept of a "Golden Age" lies a vital kernel of dimly recognized truth. It filters down to us garbled by mythology and superstition, but it represents clear evidence of a universal awareness in ancient times of a plan for mankind. All nations of antiquity recognized at least something of this finitely-timed and divinely-executed plan.

It is solidly embedded in traditions, customs and writings worldwide!

7000 Years of History

Some ancient thinkers even understood the time scale. They expected that the Golden Age would come only after man had completed six thousand years on earth, and that the Golden Age was in itself one thousand years in length.

William Hales, in his monumental *Analysis of Chronology*, says, "Hesiod might have been acquainted with that early tradition of six millenary [1000-year] ages of the world which prevailed throughout the East..." (Vol. 1. p.44). Suidas records the same tradition among the ancient Etrurians. The Zoroastrians also looked for the end of man's rule after 6000 years (Ruhi Afnan: *Zoroaster's Influence on Greek Thought*, p. 43).

But the concept is perhaps most completely summed up by the Greek philosopher Plato. in his famous Utopian treatise, *The Republic*. Godfrey Higgins writes. "Plato maintained that the world would be destroyed at the end of six thousand years: that then the day of judgement would come..." (*Anacalepsis*. Vol. 1, p.202).

Indeed contemporary scholars recognize that civilization has existed, to date, no more than about six thousand years. Writes Jacques Boudet in the preface to *The Great Works of Mankind*, "...the first rudimentary traces of man acting on his surroundings are barely seven thousand [years old]." And the eminent historian Arnold Toynbee writes of "...the five or six thousand years that have elapsed since the first emergence of representatives of the species of human society that we label "civilization" (*Civilization on Trial*, p.19). As the famed John

Glubb, Mid-eastern historian, writes, "Real history only goes back to 6000 years BC."

A Strange Modern Custom

But where did the concept of a divine plan originate? Was it just the eternal "dreamer's solution" to mankind's universal problems? Indeed, no!

Surprisingly, it is expressed in an ancient custom that we still observe in the twentieth century. In your own life you perpetuate the very foundation pattern of this plan - the seven-day WEEK!

Just about every nation on earth observes a week of seven days. Recourse to this "septenary cycle" for time-keeping is common practice all over the globe.

But did you ever stop to ask why?

It is one of those life patterns we take for granted. Yet there is absolutely no scientific or astronomical reason for its observance! The earth revolves around its axis once, and we have the day. The moon circles the earth once, creating the true month. And in one year the earth compasses the sun.

But there is nothing to account for the week!

The seven-day cycle cuts across every argument of logic. It has no rhyme or reason in scientific terms. It overlaps months, spans years. It's an intruder in the orderly, scientific arrangement of the calendar. Or, as the *Britannica* notes, "...having no reference to the celestial motions" (11th edition, Art: Calendar).

Yet the weekly seven-day cycle is hallowed by antiquity. Very early calendars are known to have been divided into seven-day sections. It was standard practice in Babylon. Assyria, China, India. and even among the Druids and the Goths. It is a remarkably strong tradition, worldwide.

The custom has not, however, been unchallenged. Even in ancient times local variations were introduced. As recently as 1931 a "World Calendar" was presented to a League of Nations conference. Its main aim was to break the traditional cycle. One of the primary arguments is the apparent "chaos" of the seven-day system! But despite tremendous pressures brought to bear by prestigious organizations and even governments, the septenary cycle - the seven day week - still holds sway.

But why should such a custom have taken hold universally? Did all nations just stumble upon it by accident? Or is there real significance to its observance?

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The ancients knew the answer. The week was clearly symbolic of the Creator's master plan for all time - a scale in miniature encompassing the entirety of human existence. It was a microcosm of the divine seven thousand-year plan.

Ancient literature portrays each day of the week as representing an "age". The length of each age varied in national tradition but the general trend was that each represents one thousand years in the panorama of human history. Franz Cumont says each day was ruled over by a particular planet, each of which had dominion over a period of one thousand years (Astrology and Religion, p.91). George Stanley Faber adds. "...among the ancients, millenaries and days appear to have been used convertibly, perhaps from an idea, sanctified even by revelation [i.e.: the Bible], that a thousand years constituted a great day of the Creator" (Pagan Idolatry, Vol. 1, p.233).

The Universal Rest Day

Besides this, many sources inform us of a special veneration for the seventh day of the week.

Mythologically it was the day ruled over by Saturn. In English we call it Saturday or "Saturn's Day." T.W. Doane has this to say about the seventh day, "...all the principle nations of antiquity kept the seventh day of the week as a holy day... [It] was sacred to Saturn from time immemorial. Homer and Hesiod call it the Holy Day" (Bible Myths, p.3921).

The author then cites numerous examples of peoples who observed the seventh day rest. Even today the implication of a special "rest" day is inherent in the name given in various languages to the seventh day. In Hebrew the basic word is Shabbat (rest). In Russian it is Subbata, in Polish it is Sobota, Spanish and Portuguese, Sabado. Etc.

The ancient Accadians kept holy the 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th days of the month as Salum (rest), on which certain works were forbidden. Doane also records how the Assyrians, in their religious calendar, marked out the seventh day or Sabbath as a time when no work should be undertaken. Confucius, commenting on earlier Chinese texts, remarks of the Emperor Ouen—ouang of the 12th century BC., "The seventh day was observed by him as a day of reflection and self-correction" (1. Greswell: Fasti Temporis Catholicus, Vol. 1, p.405).

But why refrain from work on the day of Saturn?

Why a rest day?

Again, the answer is plain. The time depicted by the day of Saturn was none other than the Golden Age of

happiness, purity, simplicity and abundance! It represented that future time when man could rest from his labor of suffering, war, poverty and disease. After six thousand years of human efforts to attain Utopia. there would follow one more 1000-year "day" of peace and prosperity. It is Virgil's "day of Saturn" and the "Golden Age." Or, as Godfrey Higgins says. it was "none other than the Jewish and Christian Millennium". It was the culminating one thousand years of the overall 7000-year plan of God.

Jewish Tradition

The writings of the Jewish prophets in the centuries just prior to the time of Jesus Christ are full of the concept of a grand design for mankind. Talmudic traditions filtering down from the time of Enoch through the prophet Elijah were rich in references to a 7000-year plan of God. The Jewish Encyclopedia summarizes. "The six thousand years of the world will be concluded by the seventh thousand of the Messianic Kingdom... The Sabbath corresponds to the seventh thousand" (Vol. 8, Art. Millennium). Representative of Jewish sources is the Book of the Secrets of Enoch (early 1st Cent. AD) which states "And I blessed the seventh day which is the Sabbath...God shows Enoch the age of this world, its existence of seven thousand years".

Also of significance are the national traditions of the ancient Israelitish peoples - particularly their religious worship in the annual festivals.

At the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. ancient Israel was also commanded to observe seven annual holy days or festivals. The details are recorded in the 23rd chapter of the book of Leviticus. To this day they largely constitute the yearly Jewish - and, indeed, the true Christian tradition festival routine. Of special interest is the symbolic evidence they contain for a divine plan for mankind.

The spring Passover festival in symbol depicts the divine protection of national Israel by God's "passing over" (or, literally "hovering over" in protection) them in the plagues of ancient Egypt. It emphasizes that the Creator actively intervenes in human history as He pleases - a notion rejected by most historians!

A cluster of holy days at the time of the main harvests in autumn are celebrated with feasting and rejoicing - an obvious representation of the happy Golden Age of mythology. For a full explanation of the significance of these festivals you are invited to write for our study of Christian Holy Days.

The Millennium

The first Christians, too, were well aware of this plan

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stretching over seven millennia. In fact, it is referred to by almost every Christian author of the first two or three centuries. The author of Bible Myths clearly summarizes the early church teaching: "As the works of creation had been fixed in six days, their duration in the present state was fixed to six thousand years. By the same analogy it was inferred that this long period of labor and contention, which had now almost elapsed, would be succeeded by a joyful Sabbath of a thousand years" (p.240).

Clement of Rome, Barnabas, Papias, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Eusebins are among the "Church Fathers" who wrote of this almost universal belief. Irenaeus, in the latter half of the second century, wrote, "For in as many days as this world was made, [i.e. seven - a reference to Genesis Ch. 1 and 2] in so many thousand years shall it be concluded" (Against Heresies, Book 5, Ch. 28). And the so-called Epistle of Barnabas - written about 130 AD. - refers to "the future Sabbath that God will establish in the seventh millennium" (15:4-5).

Even as late as 1552 Bishop Latimer wrote, "The world was ordained to endure, as all learned men affirm. six thousand years." And Thomas Burnet at the end of the 17th century notes, "Nothing yet appears either in nature or scripture or human affairs repugnant to this supposition of six thousand years [of man's rule], which has antiquity and the authority of the fathers on its side" (Tatford: Will There Be a A Millennium? p.201).

God's Plan

So the record of history is clear. From earliest times, the basic pattern of God's seven thousand year plan was understood. Man's "rule" on earth will be limited to six thousand years. And it will be followed by a divine one-thousand year rule of peace. Only in our "enlightened" day of valueness materialism and doubt has understanding of the plan been almost totally lost.

The Encyclopedia Britannica comments, "these expectations were gradually thrust into the background... Neo-Platonic mysticism triumphed over the early Christian hope of the future" (11th ed.. art Millennium).

The Scriptures - both Old Testament and New - cumulate evidence for this divine plan. For it was God, the Almighty Creator of the Universe, and not man, who set the plan in motion. It was God who decreed that man should observe a six day work week followed by a day of rest: " And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it [set it apart for observance]: because in it God had rested from all His work which God created and made" (Genesis 2:2).

The author of the letter to the Hebrews emphasizes that the seventh day of the week was symbolic of the coming wonderful 1000-year, millennial rest (Hebrews 4:4-11).

And John specifically prophesied that after the second coming of Jesus Christ there would follow a glorious kingdom on earth lasting about "a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4). This in fact, is the core message of the original Gospel (or "Message") taught by Jesus Christ.

The apostle Peter similarly says that a "day" is as a thousand years, and a "thousand years [of human civilization] is as one day" (2 Peter 3:8).

Here, then, is the "Golden Age" of mythology. Here, in the Scriptures is the background and the substance of the utopian concept which was dimly seen by the ancient pagan philosophers. The divine plan of the ages has been distorted by human interpretation, buried in myth - and rejected by twentieth-century skeptics.

But God's plan is still on schedule despite human ignorance, doubt, and skepticism!

Lessons of History

But why seven thousand years? Why did the Creator allot this finite time to complete this phase of His "vast eternal plan"? Could His purpose not be achieved without the last six thousand years of pain, suffering, oppression, famine, plague, and what have you? Is God some kind of monster?

The answer is clear. It didn't have to be this way!

At his creation, man had opportunity to enter the "promised land" of peace and abundance that his heart desired. Indeed, Adam and his family briefly enjoyed the fabulous fruits of utopia. For a short time seven years, according to Jewish tradition - they experienced the "Golden Age." Every good thing they wished for was to hand: a perfect ecologically balanced environment, dominion over nature, harmonious relations with every other human, flawless genetic inheritance and perfect health, boundless resources. Above all, an open, unsullied personal relationship with the Creator with whom they spoke face to face.

This spiritual dimension was the key to the awesome purpose for which he was created! Because the Creator in intimate face-to-face conversation, instructed the first man as to how such utopia could continue. God explained the "setup" - the laws [torah] which would perpetuate the perfection in which man

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found himself Like the instruction for some sophisticated instrument, this guidance from the Creator showed our first parents how to achieve optimum performance.

Our first parents, however, were smarter than God - they knew a better way”!

Or so they thought. And God allowed them the privilege of free choice, of going their own not-so-sweet way. For nearly six thousand years He has permitted mankind to taste the bitter fruit of our chosen life-style. Where that choice is leading is vividly clear, as we toy with global suicide. “Today”. muses Rolf Edberg in his seminal book *On the Shred of a Cloud*, “a man would almost have to be insane, or perhaps simply stupid or ignorant, not to wonder at times about the ability of genus homo to last out the century”.

Human Prediction

In his book *Utopia or Else*, noted French agronomist Rene Dumont gloomily paints the contemporary scene after six thousand years of “civilization”. He cites resources incapable of supporting a world population which is still out of control, depletion of renewable resources, accumulation of nuclear waste, the collapse of the “green revolution” leaving millions dying or malnourished, misuse of vital agricultural land, acute fresh-water shortage, abuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, air and water pollution, potential nuclear fall-out [it hasn't gone away - remember Chernobyl?]. dangers of third world revolution....to name a few!

And all this at a time when scientific and technological knowledge is doubling every ten years or less!

Our technological “golden age”, however, is drifting out to sea on the polluted tide of our late twentieth century lifestyle. A growing number of experts predict, as does an editorial in a national daily, “For the human race, the end of the world has begun. It is not a religious prediction; it is a scientist's calculation that within fifty years we will have squeezed and poisoned ourselves off the face of the earth”.

We live today, not in utopia, but in a fool's paradise where we blindly assume “it will be all right on the night”.

In our chequered six thousand years lived almost free from the “restraints” of the Creator we have tried every imaginable path to utopia. Except God's way! Like faint stars in the night sky all man's efforts have reached their zenith and disappeared beneath a murky horizon. Babylonian splendor, Greek philosophy, Roman might, medieval religious intolerance and twentieth century technological brilliance have failed to usher in our longed-for paradise.

The lesson of history is that man will never learn from history!

New Hope

Only direct intervention from God will avert the predicted “total collapse of our civilization during the twenty-first century” - a warning from the “Club of Rome” report *Limits to Growth*. That intervention by an all-loving and all-powerful God spells man's only hope for survival. As the hands of the “atomic clock” move to the midnight of mankind's annihilation, Almighty God will send Jesus Christ to halt our madness.

Yet man has a future that far transcends even the peace and prosperity of the predicted “Golden Age”. You can have a part. For God's plan is that you live for ever. But, as with our first parents, it is your choice.

[Write for the articles “What Do You Mean - “Repent”?” and “Coming To Baptism” to find out how you may become involved in God's Grand Design.]

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