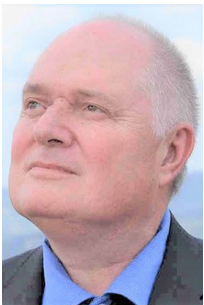


First Webb telescope pictures producing 'complete awe'

NASHVILLE (BP and local reports) – Within images released by the new James Webb Space Telescope, Christians can not only get previously unseen views of the cosmos but resounding confirmation of God's creative design and man's perspective in it.



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“My initial response was complete awe,” said Block, who also spoke about it on South African TV. “We are seeing extraordinarily rich, technical detail. It’s a marriage of science and art.”

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“I predicted [July 11] before they presented the first photo that they would show something saying they had found an Earthlike planet,” he said. “I was wrong, and surprised, because that would have been huge.

“They’re hoping at some point to detect an exoplanet that’s comparable to the Earth in size and might have the same kind of environment we have. ...I don’t think they’re going to find it, but that’s their motivation.”

The telescope

The 10-billion dollar James Webb Space Telescope was developed to utilize advanced infrared technology to extend and complement discoveries produced by the 32-year-old Hubble Space Telescope, which is still in operation. Launched on Christmas Day last year, the Webb telescope’s mission duration is to be an estimated 5-10 years.

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FIRST IMAGE – After months of calibration, the James Webb Space Telescope recently transmitted this first image as it looked out into the universe. Scientists at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), which headed up the \$10 billion project, described the image as the section of the universe that a person would see in front of a grain of sand held at arm's length. (Photo credit: nasa.gov)

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The Webb telescope is capable of looking 13.6 billion light years away, which is the time frame that secular theory holds the universe was created by a massive explosion called the Big Bang. A light year is the distance light travels in one year at 186,292 miles per second. The Milky Way galaxy in which the earth resides is approximately 100,000 light years across.

The Webb telescope gathers nearly 12,000 times as much light as the common 60mm telescope that most beginning astronomers use in the backyard, said Faulkner. It also is nearly three times larger and collects seven times as much light as the Hubble telescope.

Why Christians should care

Those dimensions and infrared imaging are bringing pictures of the most distant galaxies. The ensuing discussion is something to which Christians should pay close attention.

“We should listen to what’s being said and found,” Faulkner said, “and we should always interpret what we find in terms of God’s Word. That’s what Answers in Genesis is all about. We view God’s Word as the foundation for everything, and it’s the standard by which everything is compared.”

In Block’s career, he has been a visiting research astronomer at the Australian National University, European Southern Observatory in Germany, California Institute, and Harvard

University. He's returning to Harvard for another visit in January.

Like Faulkner, he hopes Christians take a healthy dose of perspective from the Webb telescope's findings as they relate to the Bible.

"Theologians could not control the geography of the heavens, as much as they wanted to," he said, referring to Bible scholars of the distant past who erroneously claimed Scripture taught geocentrism, the belief that placed Earth at the center of the universe.

"They were wrong," he said. "This leads us to a question of how to exegetically [critically interpret Scripture], correctly expound on... a beautiful harmony between science and Scripture. You have to understand Scripture contextually."

Block also agreed that despite the number of planets to be discovered, "we should not be surprised if we find that life on Earth is unique," adding that such a determination in no way diminishes God's role as Creator.

"God, in His providence, loves creating, just like flowers and daisies and fish. I wouldn't be surprised if God made billions of other planets, but ours is unique."

Creating believers

While believers may see the Webb telescope's images as undeniable proof of God's existence, Block said many will simply not see it that way. "In general, no matter what images you put in front of people who deny God's existence, they will choose to not see God's handiwork.

"Jesus Himself performed miracles right in front of the crowds and those crowds rejected the miracles. Coming to faith is a deeply personal experience."

For his part, Faulkner knows of people who believed in

creation before becoming believers. "One was an atheist who looked at the evidence and realized there must be a Creator. About a week later he had a moment of realization that if there was a Creator, He must expect something of him.

"If there's a Creator, we better pay attention to who He is because there are eternal consequences at stake. [The atheist] became a Christian shortly thereafter. Most scientists, I believe in their hearts, know that if they reach that conclusion that they have to take that next step. Most are so committed to naturalism that they can't bring themselves to that conclusion."

'Greater sense of purpose'

Faulkner believes in the young earth approach to Creationism, a position not shared by Block. Lexico.com defines young earth theory as a form of creationism which holds that the universe and living organisms were created relatively recently and within a comparatively short period of time. That time period is usually given as 6,000-10,000 years ago.

However, both men agree that the evidence for God cannot be ignored. "There are many Christian astronomers. We may disagree on the age of creation, but we respect each other and see God's handiwork," Faulkner said.

"I have secured an even greater degree of excitement in looking at these images towards God and His creation," Block said. "It gives me a greater degree of wonder, of mystery, of awe, and in this time of war and pandemic, a greater sense of purpose."