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# How Certain is

# Certain?

Can there really be something  
called certainty?

by

Dennis G. Crumb

The only thing certain in life is that nothing is certain. There are things we're pretty certain about, like the law of gravity. Jump off a cliff you will fall to the ground, unless you have a jet pack on and then other natural forces take over, that is, until the jet pack runs out of fuel and then the original law of gravity wins.

Whoever was that first man and woman they didn't find next to them when they became conscious a book called Laws of Nature. They were dumb as that rock they stood next to about how nature operates. Observation and experience began to give them clues, but even then they didn't see any universality in it all. When they threw a rock straight up in the air they began to get an idea of the law of gravity when that rock fell back down on top of their head. Finally, they learned to move when they threw the rock in the air, or to toss it on a different trajectory. Everywhere they went and tossed rocks in the air they always came back down. They began to experiment and tossed anything loose into the air with the same results. Now they began to understand that what goes up comes down. Since it happened every time they were pretty certain about this and passed this certainty on to their prodigy.

One day this original man and woman just stood still looking at each other. A gust of wind blew them backwards and then they just stood there, still, not moving. Another gust of wind caught them and they moved backwards again, and then just stood there. There was a small broken tree branch lying on the ground they had been observing and when the wind moved them it always moved the broken branch, then it, too, just sat there not moving. Interesting, they began to say to each other, unless something moves us we just stand here, like that tree branch. They passed this along until generations later Isaac Newton decided that this kind of action was so certain he formulated it as Three Laws of Nature. Unless something moved a body it just stood there in a state he would call inertia. For that body to move it took some kind of force to move it. And he observed that a body in motion would not change its velocity unless and until another force acted on it. It seemed certain because it always appeared to happen this way.

Then generations later Albert Einstein threw a small monkey wrench into the hubris of our certainty and we were forced to understand that what we observed wasn't always as we thought we observed it. Then quantum physics taught us that we are not just neutral observers, that in fact when we peer into things we actually change what we observe.

The Laws of Nature are nothing more than observations we make and when we think we see a consistency we call that a Law and we feel good because we have a sense of certainty.

Why do we need certainty? Because all of us from that first human to us today wake up finding ourselves on a gigantic round rock with a sky above us filled with massive burning gases, so many we can't even count. Wherever you are on this giant rock everything seems up to you and you wonder why people on the sides, and especially the bottom, don't fall off. But then, you don't know which are the sides and bottom of this giant rock because you have no context to tell up from down. This rock seems to be somewhere in space, and yet it doesn't seem to be falling or we would all be thrown off. We are at the mercy of all that is. How is it that this giant mass we now call earth has wa-

ter, dirt, rocks, trees, animals, and humans? We just came into this, no ancestor made it. It's possible that one day this rock will crumble, then what?

Inside all of us is this deep fear of uncertainty. We need certainty to be at peace. However, fascinating that everything is we see, nothing is more fascinating than the human person. The chemicals that are in this human are the same chemicals that are in the earth, the trees, the animals, even in the objects that are deep in space. It's like an artist that has a palette of several different colors. For each object he creates with his brush he arranges those colors in different orders thereby making each object uniquely different one from another using only those colors on his palette. For the Christian, this is understood. Adam and Eve were created from the "dust of the earth." They weren't brought in, aliens from a totally elsewhere.

That we are here, on this colossus ball, isn't our only commonness with all that there is, it's that we are on a rudimentary level one with each other; the rock, the tree, the dirt, the water, the lion, the eagle. We share not just life but the chemicals of life.

And yet there is something so fundamentally different between the human person and everything around them, something not shared. It's that we ask what is the meaning of things. Animals share in a consciousness, even a limited kind of self-consciousness; they share in an inquisitiveness; they build, they create, but it all is at a surface level when you compare this to persons. Some animals are very highly intelligent, yet when you compare the works of their hands, so to speak, with the works of humanity, what humans create is of a higher order and any comparisons can only be tangentially made.

Something about this human person gave him/her the ability to create beyond anyone's wildest imaginations. The human brain has the capacity to do this, limited only by the technology at one's fingertips. But even here, out of that capacity to create came the creation of technology that allowed humans to progress without limits.

The ability to look with wonder and awe contains with it the questions of how and why? That ancient ancestor sitting on an outcrop looking out across the multifaceted land below, then as the light turned to darkness considers the heavens and the millions of brilliant lights, and that overwhelmed him with the thought that he is just a speck in it all. He isn't frozen with fear, though it is frightful that he is just a speck in it all. First came awe and wonder. Then came reflection and out of reflection came the question of why, the question of meaning, questions that only human persons ask: Why this that I see and not something else? Why me?

If I can reflect on all that I see there must be some meaning to me. Even if this were a frivolous question asked, that it can be asked sets humans apart from everything around them. But it isn't a flip-pant question. We have the fundamental need to understand why we are here amidst all around us; below us, on our level, above us. It isn't curiosity that drives our questions, though curiosity is part of it. Self-reflection is rooted in meaning, that there is meaning in all things and we understand this. Things aren't just because they are. Everything is because meaning gave it reality. The first human persons, whoever they were, understood this though they surely couldn't articulate it. Not at first.

### A FIRST LOOK AT RELIGION

**T**he Hebrew Bible is very clear about its intent: that God is and there is no other; that all things came from God; that for whatever reason he created an entity like himself who would share in all his goodness; that this entity we call "Adam", or "man", generic containing both male and female, disobeyed God; that God considered man worthy enough to continue with him so shared a plan how disobedient man could come back to God, not by man's actions, but God's. The Hebrew Bible is about God and man and the Covenant God made with Abraham that through his ancestral line would come the redemption of the world (Genesis 17). The story continues in the Christian Bible. The greatest failure of the Israelites was that they internalized this Covenant God made with Abraham believing it ended with them. Paul, who as Saul before God changed his name, was caught up in this internalization but had that shaken from him in his encounter with God on the road to Damascus (Acts 9).

He now clearly understood the Covenant God made with Abraham was to the nations of the world, not just to Israel, and that Jesus, the Messiah, was that message (Galatians 3). Redemption was for the whole world, not just a particular people chosen for a particular role in the Redemption process.

The Hebrew Bible has one message, the redemption of man. It is not a historical treatise on the world, not a scientific description of the Real, it has a singular narrow focus. But little tidbits get thrown in and we glimpse very briefly some things outside this narrow focus. When Cain killed his brother Able and God cursed Cain sending him away as a wanderer, Cain feared for his life. His fear was that others would kill him because he murdered Able, so God put a mark on Cain that would tell any who saw it they were to not take his life. Without constructing a whole cloth because all we have is a fragment we do understand that there are others outside the Adam/Eve family, and they must know things of the same God as Adam and Eve for how else would they understand the mark of Cain. But this makes sense because all things are created by God, and humanity, regardless of their name or where they live, are created in God's image just as we are told Adam and Eve were. So every person begins with the idea of God. What we understand from the fall of Adam and Eve is that "all men have sinned and fallen short of God's glory."

Now, the whole purpose for this Biblical discussion is to set the context for man's search for meaning, and the need for certainty. When meaning was lost certainty went with it. I'm going to use an arbitrary number here, but let's say that after 7 to 10,000 years of human history we are deciding there is no meaning in life and certainty is being constructed on this absence of meaning. Something always was, in and of itself, and this something blew apart causing formed suns and a few planets to be. By odd chance all things sort of stuck together in a way that kept them together, and for no rhyme or reason, on at least one planet was formed both inanimate and animate objects that made this one happenstance planet, let's call it earth, so fundamentally different from anything so far seen. Of the animate things formed on earth, one species developed that asked questions about meaning only to finally accept that there is no meaning and that is for certain, so we are now told. Great minds have declared that what you see is all there is and it is both foolish and a crime to continue thinking otherwise. Accept the certainty that there is no meaning. If this is true, the cruelest joke upon all humanity is that we lived and live. To steal the words of Solomon, better to never have lived at all.

### HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Now, that's a real dilemma because it takes a chicken to produce an egg, and it takes an egg to produce a chicken. Actually it takes two chickens; one a hen, the other a rooster—male and female.

"Homo sapiens, or human beings, have been around for nearly 300,000 years. For most of that time, however, they had no written history. During this time of "prehistory," humans spent most of their lives moving from place to place, hunting for food, building crude shelters, and protecting themselves from wild animals." (From "[Beginnings and Early Civilizations](#)".)

Who am I? That's the first meaning I'm looking for. Why am I? That's the second meaning I'm looking for. Was there some kind of primordial goo out of which things spontaneously sprang into existence? There was an old Western movie, "The Hallelujah Trail" starring Burt Lancaster, where a wagon filled with whiskey barrels fell into quicksand and years later those barrels of whiskey began popping up to the surface. Is this something like how we began; one day we just popped up into life? If we did, somehow we would have to come up from the goo male and female because mystery of mysteries we do not self-generate. Isn't that interesting!

That philosophical question, Why this and not something else? comes to mind. Why didn't that nonconscious goo form a self-replicating (or more technically, parthenogenesis) species over a more complicated male/female species? There does seem to be a few of those around, like some white

lizards, and giant prickly stick insects, and some python snakes. The Genesis story seems a bit more fitting when it says that God created all the creatures in the earth “after their kind” and said “let them be fruitful and increase in number.” Honestly, it’s easier to believe this than a nonconscious goo forming life, especially when you consider the intricacies of not just the human body but of all living forms. Trial and error over time is a very poorly conceived answer.

We are told by scientists that homo sapiens have been around for over 300,000 years. Some have concluded that it actually may be millions of years. If you ask “Google” how old is man you will find great stories about how we evolved from ape-like creatures, complete with drawings. Are they true or wishful thinking? Wishful thinking because they don’t want to conclude there was an intelligent mind behind creation. What real evidence is there? Bits and pieces, fragments from which those stories are constructed. If you ask an evolutionist of whatever form they are about their conclusions, they are absolutely certain about it. If you ask a Christian if they are right in the belief that God created all things they are absolutely certain about it. One or both is wrong. Both can’t be right, or can they? In his book, *The Phenomenon of Man*, French philosopher, theologian, paleontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, published after his death in 1955, merged creationism and evolution in that God created and used the form of evolution in man’s creation. In this respect, homo sapiens did not come fully formed, the picture we get in the Genesis account, but slowly evolved into the “us” we know. In the end that satisfies no one and raises more questions than there are answers. It could be that way, but it seems counterintuitive for a creative mind to do it this way.

When did this primitive person suddenly become self-conscious and form questions about why? One day they didn’t care? The next day they were filled with tears over the meaning of it all and how small a speck they were in the vastness of everything around them? Nothing was haphazard, everything was intricately tied one to the other. What we today would call an “ecosystem”. While they did not understand laws of nature they experienced them.

There has been a teaching in the Christian Church that God created ex nihilo, out of nothing. It’s not true. The words in Genesis 1:1 speak about a “formless void” that God took and shaped into creation as we experience. A primordial goo.

For many Christians God is a kind of magician; he speaks and voilà, something from nothing appears. Roy Clouser, Ph.D (University of Pennsylvania) is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the College of New Jersey, has a very interesting article in the *Journal of The American Scientific Affiliation* titled, “Reading Genesis.” He challenges what he calls “encyclopedic assumptions” on the part of most Christians in that they believe the Genesis story is an encyclopedic treatise on the nature of the Real. That is, it offers a scientific explanation of how things came to be and are and so seven days are literally seven 24-hour days, and Adam and Eve are the progenitors of all people. When we treat the Bible, especially Genesis, as an encyclopedic treatise we force God to say things he didn’t say. We ask and answer questions it, the Bible, doesn’t ask and therefore doesn’t answer. We have a difficult time accepting that the Bible doesn’t ask the questions we want answered outside of redemption. We want the Bible to give us a certainty that it doesn’t offer, not in terms outside redemption. In part this is because we are in competition with those who don’t believe in a creative intelligence. But also, in part, because inquiring minds want to know and not knowing with certainty is uncomfortable.

“Around 5000 BCE, things slowly began to change. For the first time, humans started to settle down in one place. They began growing their own food and building permanent homes. The first cities were formed. People began using metals, such as copper and bronze, instead of stones to make tools. Then, around 3000 BCE, they created a system of letters and began to write. This new form of living was called civilization.” (From “Beginnings and Early Civilizations”.)

“So Cain went out from the Lord’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain made love to his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building

a city, and he named it after his son Enoch.” (Genesis 4: 16-17 NIV.)

The making of cities and “civilizations” did not change the nature of homo sapiens prior to this, but it did represent a fundamental change in how they saw themselves and nature around them and how they would go forward in life. And it would change how they found meaning and certainty. At the heart of all early civilizations was both the idea of a God, or gods, in control of life and an organized response to that called “religion.” The acknowledgement of a God did not come out of the creation of cities and civilizations, it was already in the hearts and minds of those who at some point in their wandering life stopped and took root.

While we are not treating the first four chapters of Genesis in an encyclopedic way there are some curious historic overlays. The physical setting for the Garden of Eden is believed to be in today’s Iraq. It is this same geographical area where the first civilization had its beginning, the Mesopotamian civilization which formed around 3,300 BC. It would be wrong to play time games here because time is not important (including the “days” spoken of in creation) here, events are. We just don’t know timeframes, like how long did Adam and Eve live in the Garden before they were kicked out? How long did they live outside the Garden before Cain killed Abel?

Beginning in Genesis 5 we are given some life cycles of various people and this has been used to count backwards to a supposed time for the Garden of Eden and the time of the earth. However, this was not the concern of those Hebrews looking back in history so it wasn’t a question they were asking. What was important was the genealogy of the line that would lead to Abraham establishing that he wasn’t just picked at random by God for the next phase in redemption. The idea of genealogy has always been crucial for the Hebrews, as for others.

### THE BIG PICTURE

Was there a real Garden of Eden or was it a story, a metaphor—a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else, especially something abstract—or was it a real event used as a metaphor? For it to be real and a metaphor is not a contradiction, unless you want to make more of the real than we are given, that encyclopedic view. For it to be both real and a metaphor does nothing to destroy the fact that God created all things, including humans in his likeness. This is, after all, the essence of the Eden story, including the disobedience of male and female that represents the failure of us all.

Could Adam and Eve have been the progenitors of all mankind? Yes. But not probable. But then this isn’t in the story, it’s something we have projected into it. Others were alive and living in the geographic area. This tidbit is thrown in without explanation because it isn’t germane to the purpose of the writing of Genesis. So where did the people, including the wife Cain took to himself, come from? Did, in fact, God create a lot of Adam and Eve’s, from which two were chosen and placed into a garden setting?. In Genesis 2:8 we read this: “Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.” In making the Garden story an encyclopedic treatise on the Real we’ve assumed that Adam and Eve were created inside the Garden. Is it unthinkable that Yahweh created multiples of humans? Does this make him any less God? What was the earth like outside the Garden of Eden? Were those God created outside the Garden story the primitives that we’ve decided were humanoids though they were very apelike? Would God create such a primitive being that took thousands, if not millions of years to finally arrive at the likeness of God? Was evolution his method of creation? If not, who were these creatures? We’ve made the leap of faith that they were early versions leading to humans, but that is more a conclusion we’ve drawn because we want it to be so. So we’ve taken bits and pieces and fragments and fashioned a story, mostly because it fits our belief that there is no God and we are just part of an unconscious evolutionary process and we will at some point evolve into something entirely different from who we are today. But this was not the story for thousands of years, it’s a modern story.

If God created humans, and did so in his likeness, then those living outside the Garden of Eden are his creation, not just Adam and Eve we find in the story. God would not have been exclusively inside the Garden of Eden, but living amongst those outside the Garden, as well. They would have known God as did Adam and Eve. And the failure of Adam and Eve inside the Garden to keep God's commands would be the failure of those outside the Garden, making the Garden story as much a metaphor as a reality. You cannot conclude otherwise unless you want to believe that this crude, primitive creature that began to evolve into what would one day be called homo sapiens, and that God, for whatever reason, decided to place something of himself in this creature.

Every human person knew something of God. And it was the same God Adam and Eve knew inside and outside the Garden. Yet along the way one group of people kept this image of God true and the other group of people began to pervert the image of God they had. If the Hebrew idea of God is the correct one, why did he persevere with one group of people and not the other? Or could it be turned around, why did one group persevere with God and the other didn't? Here is a speculative answer and this is all it is: Cain was mad at God. Because of his anger he no longer had a relationship with God, yet he knew that God existed and was real. He let his anger redefine God and he spread this new idea of God wherever he went refocusing both theology and religious practices to fit his conception of God. The sin nature in man easily grabbed on to this new vision and various groups began to revise their theology and religious practices. They still knew there was a God and that from this came their meaning, so their theology and their religious practices was their attempt to relate to God, they just over time lost more and more of who God was and what he expected of them.

In one sense, one could say that God lost control over much of his "mankind" creation as for more than not their sin natures took control over their lives. By the time of the Noah story in Genesis 6, the "lost" had lost all real sense of meaning devolving into perversions of every kind. The Noah flood story was about a reset, a do over, if you will. As God said to Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth," so he said again to Noah, "Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth."

If the Bible, and in this case Genesis, is not an encyclopedic account of the Real, but is foremost the story of God and man and man's sin and God's redemption, then the key truth in this story is not the flood. Whether you believe it never happened, or only regionally happened, or was spread over the entire globe, the creature that God created in his image to share in his glory as no other creature of God was worth keeping and redeeming, proven by Noah and his family. This was the message of Genesis to the Hebrews, and to others, as it reveals God's plan beginning with the descendants of Adam and Eve leading to Noah, and finally to Abraham, and later to Jesus of Nazareth.

In the Biblical story of man we get a glimpse of humanity outside the faithful line following the true God of Adam and Eve and it isn't pretty. Even after the reset in the Noah story we get another glimpse of the larger family of man in the Tower of Babel story and again it isn't pretty.

### A NEW WORLDVIEW ENTERS

I've followed the teaching of Yahweh found in the Hebrew teaching in searching for meaning because for me it is the cleanest doctrine with the least mythological trappings that best answers the search for meaning. All well and good, it will be said, but what if you don't believe in Yahweh, you believe in some other God; and what if you don't believe the need for a God, at all?

This last point doesn't come about until the Renaissance that began in the 14th century and lasted until the 17th century, at which time a new era began called the Enlightenment. The Renaissance (rebirth) ended the period of the Middle Ages where much in the Middle Ages was internalized. The Renaissance was a break out of this stagnant period with a return to classic philosophy, art that was more true to life, especially in the form of humans, and new explorations into new lands.

It began with the influence of one man, Petrarch (July 1304-July 1374) who was an Italian poet, but not just a poet expressing beautiful thoughts through picturesque words, he was a philosopher using poetry to say something about the nature of life. He made extensive trips throughout the world of Eu-

rope and the Middle East in search of classical literature seeking out the wisdom of the past and what it says about the present. Petrarch was driven by two events in his life; the death of his mother and an unrequited love for a woman, both of which kept him unsettled.

“The hallmark of Petrarch’s thought was a deep consciousness of the past as the nutriment of the present. His abiding achievement was to recognize that, if there is a Providence that guides the world, then it has set man at the centre. Petrarch provided a theoretical basis for the enrichment of man’s life. But, even more important, the humanist attitudes of the Italian 15th century that led into the Renaissance would not have been possible without him.” (Encyclopedia Britannica.)

Up until now, in every civilization, God played an important role in who man was and how he defined himself. The Renaissance gave birth to a humanism where man, not God, was the center of life. This wasn’t an outright rejection of God, as it has become in today’s humanism, more that God was moved out of the center and man replaced him in that position.

The mistake that modern humanists make is that they believe when Ancient Greek philosophers, like Miletus, Xenophanes, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, to name just a few pre-Socratic philosophers, in their rejection of myth and findings that the universe operated independent of myth, and in a knowable way, they at the same time rejected God as having anything to do with it. This is not true. The wild mythology of the Greeks and Romans were taken out of the equation of life, not God, though philosophy is not about naming God, only looking at and interpreting his handiwork. These ancient thinkers realized that incantations and wild behaviors to cajole the gods did nothing because it was based on a totally illusory picture of the Real. The Real (nature) operated on constant principles and laws that were the same wherever you went. But even more, we could discover those principles and laws and work with them to better our lives. An understanding of the meaning of our life, at least partially, could be found here, and an idea of certainty could also be found here in the orderliness of things and the consistency of things.

The Apostle Paul says the same thing in two different settings to the Romans. In a letter to the Roman church he writes: “since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” (Romans 1:19-20 NIV.) To a group of Romans on Mars Hill, after pointing to an inscription “To an unknown God”, he says: “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.” (Romans 1: 24-25 NIV.)

In our search for meaning (ultimate meaning) and certainty we have two choices; God or not-God. It doesn’t matter that over time and over distances the theology and religious practices of people differed, and did so greatly in some cases. Life didn’t make sense otherwise without God. We moderns driven by psychology and technology have peered into the brain and concluded we have found a “God spot”. It’s bad news, though, at least for we moderns. From an article in the Daily Mail we read this:

‘That suggests that religion is not a special case of a belief system, but evolved along with other belief and social cognitive abilities,’ said Jordan Grafman, a cognitive neuroscientist at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke in Bethesda, Maryland.

“Scientists, philosophers and theologians continue to argue about whether religious belief is a biological or a sociological phenomenon.

“Some evolutionary theorists believe a belief in a religious power may have helped our ances-



tors to survive great hardship compared to those with no such convictions.  
"Others argue that it arises from the structure of the highly adaptable brain itself."

It appears we all along have made up our ultimate meaning to deal with the oppressive knowledge that we are just a speck in an endless vastness that overwhelms us. It fits our modern thinking on thinking, that it is nothing more than neurons firing, a biological reaction going on inside the physical brain.

So, as far as we moderns believe, there was only one choice which isn't a choice, not-God. German philosopher Frederic Nietzsche tried to tell us this in "The Parable of the Madman," which I extensively quote here:

"Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market-place, and cried incessantly: "I am looking for God! I am looking for God!"

"As many of those who did not believe in God were standing together there, he excited considerable laughter. Have you lost him, then? said one. Did he lose his way like a child? said another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? or emigrated? Thus they shouted and laughed. The madman sprang into their midst and pierced them with his glances.

"Where has God gone?" he cried. "I shall tell you. We have killed him - you and I. We are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained the earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not perpetually falling? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is it not more and more night coming on all the time? Must not lanterns be lit in the morning? Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, murderers of all murderers, console ourselves? That which was the holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us? With what water could we purify ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we need to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we not ourselves become gods simply to be worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whosoever shall be born after us - for the sake of this deed he shall be part of a higher history than all history hitherto."

"Here the madman fell silent and again regarded his listeners; and they too were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern to the ground, and it broke and went out. "I have come too early," he said then; "my time has not come yet. The tremendous event is still on its way, still travelling - it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time, the light of the stars requires time, deeds require time even after they are done, before they can be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the distant stars - and yet they have done it themselves."

"It has been further related that on that same day the madman entered divers churches and there sang a requiem. Led out and quietened, he is said to have retorted each time: "what are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?"

It wasn't that God physically died. He wouldn't have been God if he had died. It was the idea of God that died, the idea that there ever was a God. Nietzsche tried to give us a more realistic ultimate meaning, one we made for ourselves. Jean-Paul Sartre, French philosopher and founder of Existentialism, was right, I suppose, that we come from nothing, we exist for a brief time, then go back to

nothing. Evolution of man took a sour turn when in this unconscious changing there seeped up into consciousness a need for meaning and certainty about ourselves believing there had to be more than what we just see. How evil and cruel of evolution! And how smart we have become, so much more intelligent than our ancient ancestors in that we know there is no meaning. How regretful that they had to languish over something that wasn't there, just wishful thinking. Ah, but thinking isn't thinking, is it? Wow, have we become smart. This makes Genesis in the Hebrew Bible a clever fable, intended, no doubt, to give the ancestors of Abraham something positive and meaningful in their life, a hope for their future. A false hope, but a hope. But a false hope is not a hope, more a nightmare when it is discovered to be false.

### CONTRADICTIONS

We don't live very well with contradiction, or contraries, for that matter. Contraries in the philosophical world are only seemingly contradictions, or opposites. For instance, when Jesus says to his disciples: "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it", it sounds like a contradiction but it is a contrary because there is a third circumstance that redefines the meaning of both. (Matthew 16:25 NIV.) There is a third meaning that takes them out of contradictions into a new truth.

But a contradiction goes like this: The only real truth is there is no truth. The only certain thing is that there is no certainty. There is no ultimate answer to "why?" Something came from nothing. The complexity of the human body is a happy accident. We are just biological material and we confuse things like consciousness and thinking as something more than the working of a biological/physical brain. Because we can see things like feelings, thinking, sorrow, happiness light up different areas of the brain, we've concluded that this is all it is, our brains, that physical matter, causing those various sensations.

Ancient Greek philosophers looking at the universe saw that it acted on its own through what they would call laws but didn't conclude that therefore there was no God. In fact, they concluded there must be an intelligent mind (of some kind) to create such a universe. Their role was not to go there but to keep their focus on his handiwork. We mistake their not going into this "other" world as they didn't believe it existed. The role of science for them was to examine what they saw, what they touched, never for a moment believing that this was all there was. It was not for them a contradiction to believe in a creative force behind all things and the things they saw. For these ancient thinkers, they would agree with Paul that nature tells the story of God, it just wasn't their role to define this God behind all.

The tools, the methods of science cannot reach into the "spiritual", or phenomenal world, therefore for many modern scientists this world doesn't exist. All there is, is what can be seen and put into a test tube and replicated to prove it exists. God does not exist because they cannot through their methods prove there is a God or that there is a spiritual side of man that is more than his body.

Militant atheist Richard Dawkins in his book *The God Delusion* wants us to believe that something can come from nothing, that intelligent design can come from unintelligent goo. We don't need a god to explain what we see and find. "The designer process," he tells us in his book, "raises the larger prospect of who designed the designer." You see, certainty is built upon what we can see, not something we cannot see.

There is an interesting account of "seeing" and "not seeing" found in John 20: 24-29. It is the story of one of the disciples, Thomas as he had come to be called. Thomas was missing when the disciples first encountered the risen Jesus. He listened to their story but didn't believe it and said to them; "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." If I don't actually up close and personal see it I won't believe it. The next week, when the disciples were again in the upper room and Thomas was with them Jesus appeared to them. Jesus invited Thomas to touch him and touch his wounds to verify he was alive. Then Jesus

concludes with this: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Christians tend to make a big negative deal out of Thomas' doubt, but Jesus' final words were not a scolding of Thomas but a recognition of something we all face and a truth we must all live through. Certainty is best built on seeing and touching, but certainty must also be built upon the unseen. Thomas had the experience of seeing and touching, but he would go out into the world and tell others about what he saw and touched and ask them to believe when they wouldn't experience Jesus as he had.

### **TWO REALITIES, A CONTRADICTION OR CONTRARY?**

That ancient man and woman sitting on an outcrop looking at the expanse of the earth below them and the vastness of the heavens above them asked, "Why this and not something else?" "Why me?" "What is the meaning of life?" "What is the meaning of me?" I'm sure if one had a brain scanning machine and placed it over their heads as they had these thoughts, different areas of their physical brain were lighting up. We, today, would write their questions off as nothing more than the activity of the physical brain misinterpreted with more meaning than there is. But how can we misinterpret? Isn't that a contradiction. It's almost like there is something greater than the physical brain at work here. But since we (moderns) only want to believe what can be seen and touched we try to do away with this contradiction simply by not believing it. But then, wouldn't belief be something greater than the physical? Unquestionably, we want to say even this is nothing more than the physical brain, but we are doing nothing more than going around in circles.

Which comes first, the chicken or the egg? Which comes first, the thought or the excited neurons of the brain? Who caused the First Cause? Who designed the designer? We get stuck here because these are questions science can't answer, and because they can't answer them they therefore deny them. Interesting. But don't forget, ultimate meaning rests on God or not-God. In our arrogance, if we cannot scientifically prove God then we have proved not-God.

Ancient man understood, not in any scientific way but through personal experience, that there were two realms: a heavenly realm and an earthly realm. That most idyllic picture of man, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, gives us an interesting glimpse into this. We see God coming to the earthly realm and meeting with and talking to Adam and Eve. We never see Adam and Eve going into the heavenly realm. The meaning of life and the certainty of that meaning for both Adam and Eve, and those others God created outside the Garden, though created in his (God's) image, participated in a limited relationship with God. And yet, it would seem their experience of an idyllic life and conversations with God was enough, though it was not complete leaving open an access to doubt, which the serpent in the Garden took advantage of.

The idea of a heavenly realm, one that we cannot go into with our test tubes and hypothesizes, seems utterly fantastical—"conceived or appearing as if conceived by an unrestrained imagination; odd and remarkable; bizarre; grotesque." (Dictionary.com.) The fantastical is certainly where many farfetched mythologies got their start.

Over time, both in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible we are given brief glimpses into this heavenly realm and it certainly has shades of the fantastical. Isaiah would become a great prophet among the children of Israel who began his role sometime in the 740s BC and would remain a prophet for some 64 years. In chapter 6 (of 66 chapters) covering his time as prophet of Israel, he describes how God chose him to be prophet over Israel:

"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.

And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

“At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”

“Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

Isaiah did not go into this heavenly realm, he saw a vision of it and this vision is not an encyclopedic treatise on heaven, just a snippet for the single purpose of anointing Isaiah as prophet.

Before we learn of the Seraphim, we encountered another creature from God’s realm: “After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Genesis 3:24 NIV.) We encounter these Cherubim again, this time in the commission of another prophet, Ezekiel. Here is, in part, his story:

“In my thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Ke-bar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. . .

I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human, but each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. All four of them had faces and wings, and the wings of one touched the wings of another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved.

Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a human being, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. They each had two wings spreading out upward, each wing touching that of the creature on either side; and each had two other wings covering its body. Each one went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, without turning as they went. The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright, and lightning flashed out of it. The creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning. . .

He said: “Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day. (Ezekiel 1:1; 4-14; 2:3 NIV.

In Ezekiel there are further images of the Cherubim. Note again, however, Ezekiel didn’t actually go into God’s realm but saw a vision with a specific purpose for the vision which was not an encyclopedic revelation of this heavenly realm. In Psalms 80:1, and 99:1, David gives us an image of God sitting on his throne that is between two groups of Cherubim.

Now jump to the book of Revelation, written by the Apostle John while on the Isle of Patmos:

“After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and

peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits[a] of God. Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

“In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,’ who was, and is, and is to come.” (Revelations 4:1-8 NIV.)

Notice that here again we are not given an encyclopedic look at “heaven”, but John is invited to see something for a specific purpose: the end times. And he uses the term “like” to describe what otherwise is undiscernible because what he sees has no reference on earth. While these peeks into the heavenly realm are saying something about the heavenly realm they are never intended to give us enough material that we can construct what this heavenly realm actually is.

Now there is another class of creature we are somewhat introduced to; angels. Something is said about angels in Job 38, right after God questions the arrogance of man challenging him over creation and its meaning says: “and while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?” Angels are not described but we are told there were with God when he created and “shouted for joy.” (Job 38:7 NIV.)

David in Psalms 148:1-2, in a moment of ecstasy writes: “Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts.”

In a series of New Testament verses we read this about angels:

“I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God.

But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God.

Luke 12:8-9

In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Luke 15:10

He then added, “I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

John 1:51

“See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

Matthew 18:10

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Matthew 24:36

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

Hebrews 1:14

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

Psalms 8:4-5

“And now your servant says, ‘May the word of my lord the king bring me rest, for my lord the king is like an angel of God in discerning good and evil. May the LORD your God be with you.’”

1 Samuel 14:17

My lord has wisdom like that of an angel of God—he knows everything that happens in the land.”

1 Samuel 14:20

It was revealed to them [God's Prophets] that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

1 Peter 1:12

There are many other things said about angels, but again they are snippets and while we can construct something about angels it would be foolish to conclude we have a full understanding of angels in the heavenly realm.

The purpose for this foray into the heavenly realm as we are given it in the Hebrew and Christian Bible is to acknowledge there is a heavenly realm, and while we are given some fantastical images of creatures that could border on mythology, though in comparison to the mythologies of the ancient world, there is no comparison.

### FINDING CERTAINTY

In our search for meaning, our search for certainty, we need information that ties us to this vastness we are in that answers more meaningfully our questions than not. But in this search we must begin with God speaking to Job in chapter 38 when he says, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?" Read all of Job 38 because it destroys any hubris we have over our intellectual understanding about the Real. Even if you believe not in God, or an intelligence behind it all, this speaks to you as well. Scientists like to project back millions of years and say this is how it was and they have found no heavenly realm so there is no heavenly realm.

Here is a Judeo/Christian truth: from the very beginning, from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, we've never had access to this heavenly realm. We are locked out of "God's world." This changes at the "end of times." We learn this from John in Revelation:

"Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" (Revelation 21:1-4 NIV.)

Earlier Jesus said this to his disciples:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." (John 14:1-4 NIV.)

This is not intended to be a sermon on Christian theology, but for those who believe in God, or a higher intelligence, as I wrote earlier, Yahweh answers more intelligently the questions I have over ultimate meaning.

There is, in this way of thinking, a meaning for everything: in the beginning God created. It wasn't something from nothing, it wasn't a happy accident, all that is has a purpose from which we can learn meaning. King David in one of his praises to God wrote this which was also picked up by Paul in writing to the Hebrews:

"When I consider your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars,  
 which you have set in place,  
 what is mankind that you are mindful of them,  
 human beings that you care for them?  
 You have made them a little lower than the angels  
 and crowned them with glory and honor." (Psalms 8: 3-5 NIV.)

We don't really understand eternal because everything we know has a beginning and an end. It is this "end" that challenges our sense of certainty that then places in jeopardy meaning. When Adam and Eve are being expelled from Eden, we read this: "And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." (Genesis 3:22 NIV.) Humans, we can deduce, were not created to be short-term creatures, and aren't except for their time in the earthly realm. And that due to the curse placed on them for disobedience.

This raises a lot of questions. If God is my ultimate meaning, if being with God and like him is my ultimate meaning, why was humanity (me) not allowed into the heavenly realm even when they lived an idyllic life in Eden? Quite honestly, any answer or answers we draw will necessarily be speculative. Unqualified certainty is to be found in the heavenly realm, which we are excluded from. That leaves qualified certainty, which doesn't in itself deny reality. It's the difference between Thomas touching Jesus and his scars after he was raised from the dead, and everyone else who must believe on that testimony without that personal touching and seeing.

Now you can choose not-God, but you will not have ultimate meaning to make you feel like you belong. All that is available are temporary meanings that you give things and experiences and relationships, and they might make you feel good, but it will never answer that deeper question inside you even though you try to deny it exists.

### **Two Realms, One Truth**

The realm of Heaven touches the realm of Earth and this is seen throughout both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible (which contains the Hebrew Bible now called the Old Testament). One class of creature in the Heavenly Realm we know as Angels interact with humans at various times chosen by God, not man. It would appear, from what little we read about them in the Bible, they were the highest creature created by God. That is, until man, though as we read in the Psalm from David, for a time we are put beneath Angels.

One of the uniqueness's of humans is their love of speculation, that inquiring minds want to know. Actually, this isn't a bad quality because it is part of our search for meaning. Where we get into trouble is when we allow speculation to become "fact" and treat what we surmise as encyclopedic truth. Because we intuitively know that ultimate meaning comes from the Heavenly Realm, any nugget of information we glean from there solidifies our certainty.

Nature, it is said, abhors a vacuum, that is, empty spaces need to be filled because empty spaces are unnatural. A mind empty of understanding must be filled with understanding because it is unnatural not to know. So we take bits and pieces and fragments and make whole cloths, or stories, to act like understanding.

Every single person born into this world knows at an early age it is an imperfect world and we are imperfect people. Isn't it interesting that you don't have to teach a baby to cry but you do have to teach him/her to laugh? Just an observation I've made with my grandchildren. If the Real is nothing more than the happenstances of time and blind luck and chance, imperfection is built into the fabric of what we call the Real. It can be no other way. Trial and error produces a lot of error before something workable is found. Modern humanistic science wants us to believe this is just the way it is, and always was, and always will be. There is nothing we can do about it except learn to live with imperfections.

And yet, we can't do that. This push to machines to replace humans is an attempt to overcome the flaw of humanity with the perfection of the machine. Somehow we've convinced ourselves that a flawed person can create a flawless machine, like a driverless car that will never get into an accident because the human driver is distracted or drunk or a multitude of reasons that lead to crashes. The machine will know perfectly everything around it and make the most perfect decisions that never puts it (and you the passenger) into compromise that leads to a crash. It's our attempt to correct the natural flaws of nature. We are searching for meaning, but our search is now outside ourselves.

We are trapped in a dualism between two realms of reality. Is there one truth that fits the two together, or two truths that compete? The early Christian church, and it reaches first into the messages of John, saw a new religious system rise called Gnosticism, from the Greek *gnosis*, or knowledge. Through special knowledge we transcend our earthly trappings and enter the divine realm. We must do this because there is no meaningful connection between the two and this world isn't God's creation but was created by a demiurge, a lesser angel who created the physical world, a flawed representation of the Real spiritual world.

The theology of the Jews, and then Christians, was not leading us to perfection so there must be another truth that we are missing. Mysticism came into play to solve this dilemma. "The term 'mysticism,' comes from the Greek *μυσω*, meaning "to conceal." In the Hellenistic world, 'mystical' referred to "secret" religious rituals. In early Christianity the term came to refer to "hidden" allegorical interpretations of Scriptures and to hidden presences, such as that of Jesus at the Eucharist. Only later did the term begin to denote "mystical theology," which included direct experience of the divine. Typically, mystics, theistic or not, see their mystical experience as part of a larger undertaking aimed at human transformation." (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.)

The two realms of reality are accepted as true, as well it is accepted that we can escape this earthly reality with its flaws and become part of the divine reality in its perfection. If our ultimate meaning lies in the divine realm, how do we get there? Not happy with the Judeo/Christian answers, not with any religions answers, it was concluded there were ways into the divine realm by escaping this earthly life through mental manipulations. Mystics accept what Paul said about knowing God through nature, it's just that his is a general knowledge and mystics believe in a special knowledge, a higher knowledge that is revealed through the interplay of the mind. Through mysticism one can enter the Divine Realm breaking down the barrier that keeps us out.

Of course, it's much simpler to just deny the Divine Realm as real, and this is what humanists do. If you go the not-God route you just have to accept that there is no ultimate meaning, that God is a false premise, and accept that you come from nothing and go back to nothing. If you accept the idea and reality of God, then it gets complicated because we've made it more complicated. In the not-God world we try to build our certainty on things we define as certain, the physical world: it was there before us and will be there after us. Wow! This doesn't do much for meaning. But there is no meaning, there just is what is. Well then, let's join in the words of Solomon; let's eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die. All is vanity.

"Meaningless! Meaningless!"

says the Teacher.

"Utterly meaningless!

Everything is meaningless."

What do people gain from all their labors

at which they toil under the sun?

Generations come and generations go,

but the earth remains forever." (Ecclesiastes 1:2-4 NIV.)

After all his lamentations over the flaws of mankind, especially his two sons that after him would



divide the Kingdom, he concludes:

“Now all has been heard;  
 here is the conclusion of the matter:  
 Fear God and keep his commandments,  
 for this is the duty of all mankind.  
 For God will bring every deed into judgment,  
 including every hidden thing,  
 whether it is good or evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 NIV.)

We live in two realms but there is only one truth: our meaning is found in God, the God who created us in his image, and though we rebelled he has a plan to merge the two realms into one where he will be our God and we will be his people.

### **Wrapping It Up**

In the Judeo/Christian experience God has always in various ways involved himself in our world. We've had encounters with and experiences with the Divine Realm so it isn't that we have been abandoned.

In the story of Abraham and his son Isaac (Genesis 22:1-18) it begins with God saying to take his son Isaac and sacrifice him. As Abraham is about to plunge the knife into Isaac we hear: “But the angel of the Lord . . .” told him to stop. Whether it was God and one of his angels, or the angel was both voices, God entered our earthly realm and interacted with Abraham.

Later on in Genesis 28:10-17 we have the story of Jacob who in a dream saw a “stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.” In this dream God told Jacob that he was giving the descendants of Abraham the very land he was on.

Jumping into the Christian Bible in the story of the birth of Jesus we see a named angel, Gabriel, give the news to Mary that she will have a baby. (Luke 1:26-38). And at the birth of Jesus angels went to shepherds in the field to announce Jesus' birth. (Luke 2:8-18). An angel came to Phillip, one of the early Christians, and told him to go meet with an Ethiopian eunuch who would play an important role. (Acts 8:26-40.) We have the story of an angel coming to a Roman soldier, Cornelius, to meet with Simon Peter and in this meeting Peter would understand that the redemption of God was for all men, not just Jews. (Acts 1.)

Before this, going back into the Hebrew Bible again, we have the story of the city of Sodom where two angels arrived to find the city fully depraved. The angels said to Lot, the only uncorrupt one in the city; “The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it.” (Genesis 19:1-29.) Jumping into the future, King Herod, who ruled Israel under Roman occupation, angered God with his pride and we read: Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. (Acts 12:21-23.)

Angels, we learn in these, and other encounters, are messengers, sometime avengers, sometimes guardians.

There are stories of angels acting as guardian angels and I will offer just these few verses:

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

Hebrews 1:14

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

Psalm 34:7

If you make the Most High your dwelling - even the LORD, who is my refuge - then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;

Psalm 91:9-11

“See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven...”

Matthew 18:10

The sole purpose of discussing angels is not to create an angelology, that encyclopedic knowledge we would like in our search for meaning and certainty. It is to understand that we, in the earthly realm, are not abandoned, forgotten, and though there is a prohibition of us entering the Divine Realm—while alive here on earth—does not preclude God from entering our world and interacting with us.

There are some truths, and not all are easy truths, to hear, that we must accept.

1. We have no idea who God really is. We have had some things said about him. We have had some peeks into his Realm. We do have enough to build meaning and certainty on, but not more than that.

2. If God did create humans and did so in his image to live and rule with him (whatever that means), why must we suffer so much and for so long? I do not have an answer for this, only limited speculation. If the Judeo/Christian idea of God is correct and there are no demiurges that created the physical in competition with the spiritual, then we alone are really like God more than any other of his creation. Beneath us, in terms of having some freedom, are angels and some of them rebelled wanting more than God gave them:

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon [Satan], and the dragon and his angels fought back.

But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven.

The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Revelation 12:7-9

His [Satan's] tail swept a third of the stars [angels] out of the sky and flung them to the earth...

Revelation 12:4

Given this story it does not seem unreasonable that God, in creating man, would want to first put man to the test before he had any position in the Heavenly Realm. That philosophical question comes up; “Why this (man not totally perfect) and not something else?” It can be answered that man is the best of all possible options given that he/she is created in God’s image. But we are not God, and we must learn that before we can rule, or whatever we will be doing. Therefore, the test in the Garden that both Adam and Eve, and in them we all, failed. Our temptation is that we want to be God. The test was to show us that while we are next to God, we are not God, and until that becomes the basis of who we are we cannot take our so-called rightful place. Okay, sounds plausible. Knowing that we would fail, God from the beginning had a plan of redemption that would both keep us as part of his kingdom and the issue of rebellion would never come up again. But after, if you want to call it this way, ten thousand years of human history, why is it taking so long for the fulfillment of this plan? The vision John had and wrote down in the book of Revelation tells us that there will be an end, just not the comfort of when this will be.

3. Most of us will never have a dream where we see an angel. None of us will touch Jesus and put our hands on his scars. For most of us, stories of God coming into our world will be anecdotal, someone else had that experience, we just heard of it. For many, when Jesus died and the veil at the entrance into the Holy of Holies was rent in two making the statement that mankind had direct access to God and didn’t have to go through an intermediator, it also opened the door to the Heavenly Realm. It didn’t. For most of human history, intuitiveness (I know that I know) was accepted as

knowledge. It began to lose its place in our ways of knowing when we began doubting the non-physical as meaningful, and ended up declaring all there is, is the physical.

4. Having said this, the majority of us are not left to ourselves. For those who believe God is their ultimate meaning those encounters others have with God, and he chooses when and for what reason they happen, we collect those stories and put them into our box of "Encounters with God." Because we didn't have them doesn't mean they didn't happen. For most of us, because God doesn't enter our personal world in a dramatic way doesn't deny that he enters our personal world. It really would be something to hang our certainty on if he did act dramatically with us, and often. We would be Thomas touching Jesus taking away all doubts. Our problem is we want to be sheep. We don't want to be Kings and Queens making decisions, we want to have decisions made for us. We want God to tell us every move we make: what job, what boy/girlfriend, what food, what clothes, what this and that. This is totally an unrealistic image of who God is, even in the limited knowledge we have of God, this isn't who God is. God comes to us in different ways at different times with no real consistency, though consistency is what we want to hang our certainty on. You had an experience where you know that you know without explanation that something just happened that was greater than you. That was God coming into your world and you put that into your collection box so that on days when doubt seems to overwhelm you, you can go into it and see that, yes, things of God do happen.

5. Why would a loving God let man suffer, especially children? This is the greatest charge we lay against God that makes us doubt he is real. It's easier to believe in not-God accepting that all the sorrow in the world is because the evolutionary process of life is flawed and it is what it is. Sorrow is just with us. We must make the best of it. And we believe that we can manipulate this evolutionary process and create a perfect world and a perfect man, woman, child where there is no sorrow. Meaning and certainty is something we create. We want to know more about the Heavenly Realm, we need to know more about the Heavenly Realm to give us certainty in our hanging our meaning on God. We want to tell God how to conduct his and our world. On the "other" side we will know. It's an answer but not a happy answer.

6. Knowing what we do know, that the battle between good and evil taking place in the earthly realm, how it goes depends on those who believe in God. If we don't get lost in this world but remember who we are and act like who we are, while there will always be trials and tribulations good does overcome evil. It's a matter of sticking with it. We don't have the answers to a lot of the "why's" we ask, though there are those who think they do. We have to live in the uncomfortable world of this truth. But there is that other truth, that though we cannot go into God's Realm, he does come into ours. We are not privy to his reasons for all that he allows to happen, but while we have a beginning we have no end. That is his plan that we know.

Where do we find meaning and certainty? The choice is ours where we find it for ourselves. But this isn't just an intellectual or academic choice we make. We can trust the evidence we have or doubt it as real. Like it or not, we all need meaning and certainty in our life.