

# Pastor: UFOs have biblical significance

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By George Cornell  
AP religion writer

NEW YORK — Smile indulgently about it if so inclined. That's OK with the Rev. Barry H. Downing. But he firmly maintains that UFOs are real and that they have key religious significance.

Recognizing the existence and operations of unidentified flying objects could strengthen faith and renew confidence in biblical accounts, he says.

"It would establish scientific plausibility for the whole biblical field," he says. "It would reinforce faith and make it possible in a scientific context."

Downing, a Presbyterian pastor with a scientific bent, says government equivocation has caused skepticism about UFOs and so he expects some scoffing at his views.



**BARRY DOWNING**

"You have to have a good humor about it," he says. "I can't prove I'm right but there's lots of evidence for it, and until it wins

out, some people are just going to have to laugh."

He theorizes that activities of UFO-borne "higher beings" or "angels," likely from another dimension rather than other planets, are indicated in biblical events ranging from guiding the Israelites from Egypt to Christ's ascension.

Postulating such activities in forming biblical faith would open a middle ground between fundamentalist literalism and liberal theology's "demythologizing" of supernatural events as only symbolic, he says.

"It would cut down the distance between liberals and fundamentalists, and serve as a mediating force between the two extremes," he says. "The mythological concepts would have to be re-examined, which would be important for the liberal wing. The conservative wing, which stresses certainty and wants ev-

erything locked up tight, also would be impacted.

"This would mean unlocking things."

Downing, 50, an Endwell, N.Y., pastor, has a bachelor's degree in physics and a doctorate from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland on the relationship between science and religion.

He details his ideas about UFOs and about eternity as a coexisting universe, based on Einstein's relativity theory, in a new paperback edition of his book, "The Bible and Flying Saucers."

"What is clear through the biblical material is that God's will for the Jews, and eventually for all mankind, was revealed by beings from another world," he writes.

"Usually these beings looked very much like ordinary human

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## \*Pastor says UFOs biblical

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beings (they almost never have wings) ... Once the 'package' of biblical religion had been delivered, man became responsible for the distribution of the contents."

Downing says a hovering, UFO-like "cloud" by day and glowing "pillar of fire" by night guided the Israelites out of Egypt, projecting some propulsive force that parted the Red Sea, leading them for years across the desert.

Other events he sees as carried out by UFOs include the fire-like phenomenon on Mount Sinai in which Moses received the Ten Commandments, the prophet Elijah taken to heaven in a fiery chariot, the star of Bethlehem, the engulfing light of Jesus' transfiguration, his ascension into heaven and the blinding visitation of Paul while he was on his way to Damascus.

"All these were UFO types of reports," Downing says.

Downing, pastor for 22 years of Endwell's Northminster Presbyterian Church, also is theological consultant to the Mutual UFO network, based in Seguin.

SCOTT PARKER via COUD-I