

SIGNS IN THE HEAVENS

On the fourth day of creation God said: **“Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years” (Gen. 1:14)**. One of the principal reasons why God put lights in the heavens was to serve as “signs”. It is obvious that God actually wants to communicate with us!

We should not be surprised, therefore, that from the very beginning people searched the heavens for “signs”. Job is thought by many to be the oldest book in the Bible. Here are several references in Job regarding constellations of stars that could be seen as “signs”:

- After acknowledging that God can shake the earth and speak to the sun so that it will not shine, Job states: **“He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion, Pleiades and the constellations of the south” (Job. 9:9)**.
- **By his breath the skies became fair, his hand pierced the gliding serpent” (Job. 26:13)**.
- **“Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades? Can you loosen Orion’s belt? Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons or lead out the Bear with its cubs? Do you know the laws of the heavens? Can you set up God’s dominion over the earth?” Job 38:31 – 33)**.
- Each constellation had it’s own special significance. The constellation Pleiades, for example, probably derives it’s name from the Greek word “plein” which means to sail. It was used by ancient mariners to know when it was safe to sail. The season of navigation began with the heliacal rising of this cluster of stars.
- The idea that people looked to the heavens for signs is prominent throughout the entire Bible. The Bible begins with a message about signs in Gen. 1:14. The Bible ends by identifying Jesus as the “Bright and Morning Star” (Rev. 22:16). Note that he book of Revelation begins with Jesus holding seven stars in right hand (Rev. 1:16). It also contains frequent references to the sun, moon, and stars to communicate what God was doing (See Rev. 6:13; 8:12; 12:1; 12:4; etc.)
- Amos 5:8 describes God as the One who made Pleiades and Orion. As we have said before, this is representative of many references in the Bible to “signs” in the heavens. Of course there is no greater authority on the subject than Jesus Himself. Our beloved Savior promised: **“There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars” (Lk. 21:25)**. Obviously Jesus expected us to look for these signs!

ASTROLOGY IS WRONG

The dictionary defines “astrology” as:”the study of the movements and relative positions of celestial bodies interpreted as having an influence on human affairs and the natural world”. In the Bible, however, astrology is condemned because it was associated with idolatry. Someone has said that sin is merely the misuse of good things. Sex, for example, is good in marriage but bad outside of marriage. Also God gives us good angels and the devil gives us bad angels. Similarly there are true prophets and false prophets. Invariably, when God gives us something good the devil distorts it into something bad. There is obviously a good way to study signs in the heavens. Remember! It was by the study of the stars that the Wise Men came from the East to worship Jesus.

The study of the stars, however, is condemned when it leads people to worship the “creation” more than the “Creator”. Please consider:

- **“And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars—all the heavenly array—do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.” (Deut. 4:19).**
- **“If a man or woman living among you in one of the towns the Lord gives you is found doing evil in the eyes of the Lord your God in violation of his covenant, and contrary to my command has worshiped other gods, bowing down to them or to the sun or the moon or the stars in the sky,” (Deut. 17:2, 3).**
- **“They will be exposed to the sun and the moon and all the stars of the heavens which they have loved and served and which they have followed and consulted and worshiped” (Jer. 8:2).**
- **“The houses in Jerusalem and those of the kings of Judah will be defiled like this place, Topheth—all the houses where they burned incense on the roofs to all the starry hosts and poured out drink offerings to other gods.” (Jer. 19:13).**
- **Moses warned: “When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord; because of these same detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God” (Deut. 18:9 – 13).**

DANIEL DID IT RIGHT

The Babylonians were famous for their knowledge of astronomy. Cuneiform records on clay tablets dating back to over 3,000 B.C. confirm their expertise in studying the stars. Daniel, as you know, was taken captive to Babylon in 606 B.C. Since he and his three Hebrew friends showed an aptitude for every kind of learning, the king ordered that they be taught the “language and literature of the Babylonians” (Dan. 1:4). After completing these studies Daniel became part of a group of “magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners” (Dan. 4:7). In fact, he was “chief of the magicians” (Dan. 4:9).

Daniel, however, was different from all the others. He was the only one who worshiped the “God of heaven”. His study of the stars and his interpretation of dreams came from God (Dan. 2:18). Daniel is unique in world history in that he rose to prominence in two different world empires. (The Babylonians and the Medes and Persians) It was his faith in the One True God that distinguished him from all the other advisors to the king. Remember! Daniel chose to be thrown into a den of lions rather than renounce his allegiance to the One True God (Dan. 6:1 – 24).

The influence of Daniel on these these two world empires was significant.

Here is the way the King of Babylon expressed it: **“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (Dan. 4:37).**

Here is the way that Darius the King of the Medes and Persians expressed it: **“Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth: “May you prosper greatly! I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.” (Dan. 6:25 – 27).**

It is logical to assume that the wise men from the East who saw the star of Jesus were influenced by Daniel (Matt. 2:1 – 12). Why else would they travel 700 miles to worship the “king of the Jews”?

PETER’S SERMON ON PENTECOST

As we have mentioned before, these ancient peoples were far more interested in “signs in the heavens” than most are today. In the absence of television and other distractions, they searched the heavens for signs on a daily basis. It is significant, therefore, that among the many things that Peter said on Pentecost was this quotation from the prophet Joel:

“I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Acts 2:19 - 21)

I am indebted to Rick Larson in his excellent video on the Star of Bethlehem for the following insight. Joel’s reference to the moon turning to blood immediately brings to mind a solar eclipse. This is when the moon turns red like blood. Rick observes that the only time during the life of Jesus when the Friday of Passover week coincided with the solar eclipse was April 3, 33 AD. He believes that it was on this day that Jesus died!

Phlegon was a Greek historian who wrote an extensive chronology around AD 137. He observed that in the fourth year of the 202 Olympiad (which would be AD 33) there was an eclipse of the sun that caused the sky to turn so dark on the sixth hour of the day. In fact, it was so dark that the stars could be seen. He further noted that there was an earthquake in Bithynia and that many things were overturned in Nicaea. Dr. Paul Maier of the Western Michigan University notes that: “This phenomenon, evidently, was visible in Rome, Athens, and other Mediterranean cities”. Tertullian wrote to skeptics: “At the moment of Christ’s death, the light departed from the sun, and the land was darkened at noonday, which wonder is related in your own annals, and is preserved in your archives to this day”.

Remember, Pentecost came only 50 days after these remarkable events. Here is a brief list of some of the things that would have been fresh in the memories of those who heard Peter preach:

- **“At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour” (Mk. 15:**

- When Jesus died: **“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split”** (Matt. 27:51).
- Then **“the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people** (Matt. 27:52, 53).
- Then, **“When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”** (Matt. 27:54)
- If there was a “blood moon” that night it would have added another significant “sign” in association with that remarkable day.
- On Sunday morning there was another earthquake. Note: **“After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.”** (Matt. 28:1 – 4)
- These remarkable events obviously affected everyone in Jerusalem.

WATCH

- Jesus said: **“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”** (Matt. 24:42)
- **“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”** (Mk. 13:28 – 31).
- **“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”** (Mk. 13:32 - 37)
- These admonitions to diligence can easily be expanded. If we “watch” and are “diligent” we will not be surprised when Jesus comes. Note: **“ Now, brothers and sisters, about times and**

dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” (1 Thess. 5:1 - 11)

DON'T BE LIKE THE HORSE OR THE MULE

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.” (Ps. 32:8, 9)

God wants to guide us with His eye. He does not want to guide us with force like horses and mules. Unfortunately, the Bible gives many examples of people who behaved like horses and mules. Many of them saw the hand of God at work but deliberately paid no attention.

- Probably no generation has ever seen more miracles than that of Moses. They saw the Ten Plagues with their own eyes. They saw the Red Sea part and the Egyptian army destroyed. They ate the manna that fell from heaven on a daily basis and drank miraculous water from the rock. Yet, virtually all of them died in the wilderness because they rebelled against God (See 1 Cor. 10:1 – 13; Nu. 14:26 – 35; Heb. 4:1 – 5, etc.)
- Later God chastened Israel with “empty stomachs”, “no rain”, “blight, mildew, and locusts”, “plagues” like those of Egypt, and “destruction” like that experienced by Sodom and Gomorrah. In spite of everything God did, however, the hard hearted Israelites never associated what was happening before their very eyes with the hand of God (Amos 4:1 – 12).
- There was a time when King Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful man on earth. He promoted or humbled anyone he wanted to. **“But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes.” (Dan. 5:20, 21)** His son, Belshazzar knew all this but didn't learn a thing from it. That's why God wrote his doom on the wall, took his life, and gave his kingdom to the Medes and the Persians (Dan. 5:22 – 31).

- The book of Revelation reminds us that there will be many who watch others die as rebels to God yet still refuse to repent (Rev. 9:18 – 21; 16:8 – 11).
- As Jesus said, we need to continually “watch” for what God is doing. Balaam knew it was not normal for a donkey to talk with a human voice, that’s why his eyes were opened to see the angel (Nu. 22:21 – 35). We also need to watch for unusual things for it just might be God trying to get our attention.
- When the people at Pentecost heard the rushing mighty wind, saw the tongues like fire, and heard Galilean fishermen speak in foreign languages, they knew that God was involved in what was happening. 3,000, as you know, repented and were baptized that very day (Acts 2:38 – 41).
- The fact that Peter reminded them that what they were witnessing was a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy helped to open their hearts to hear and obey the Gospel.

STUDY THE BIBLE

Those who believe the Bible know that God loves the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son to save us (Jn. 3:16). As we have said, God has always wanted to communicate with us. Today the major way He communicates with us is through the Bible. In olden days God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at various times and in various ways. Now, however, God speaks to us through His Son (Heb. 1:1, 2). What Jesus says makes clear the message of the prophets and makes it easier to understand. We do not understand Jesus by the prophets, we understand the prophets by Jesus. Remember that on the Mount of Transfiguration Peter wanted to build 3 tabernacles, one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus. Peter’s error was so great that God interrupted from heaven and said: **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!” (Matt. 17:5).** This is an important principle. If we listen to Jesus He will explain the Law and the Prophets. It is the New Testament Scriptures that clarify the Old. Even outside of the Scriptures, of course, we have better ways of forecasting the weather than by looking at the stars.

The point is, time spent studying the Bible is far more profitable than spending time trying to understand the stars. Remember! **“the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them 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 Pet. 1:10 – 12).** Note that what God wanted us to know was “revealed”. Even the angels couldn’t figure it out on their own. This “revelation” which was once as “mystery” has now been made known (Eph. 3:2 – 13). Please make Bible study a priority in your life, for man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).

WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE OUGHT WE TO BE?

“Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.” (2 Pet. 3:3 - 18)

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