

INTRODUCTION

*In the beginning God created
the heavens and the earth.*

—Genesis 1:1

TENS OF THOUSANDS of words have been written about the first ten words in the Bible: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Ten simple words that have ignited a firestorm of controversy and much debate. Since the dawn of time, people have endeavored to interpret and understand this opening statement of the Bible and learn the truth about our origins on this planet and in the universe.

It’s absolutely amazing when you stop and think about it. We the human race have spent thousands of years trying to figure out this opening line of the Bible. It just goes to show you how much greater, grander, and wiser God is than us! It’s no wonder there have been thousands upon thousands of books written about the Bible and about faith in general. If we get stumped on the first ten words,

imagine the challenge of beginning to understand and decipher the remaining 783,127 words of Scripture.

What, Who, When, Where, or Why?

People generally get stuck on two questions about the opening verse of Genesis. The first question centers around the “when” of the text and the second is focused on the “how.” When did God create the heavens and the earth? A quick internet search will produce a plethora of possibilities and theories.

For some, the earth was created approximately five thousand years ago. This number is based upon the names and genealogies that are found in the book of Genesis. It’s definitely a possibility. The problem with this view is that you have to assume that Adam and Eve were created instantly and only five days after the creation of the universe. To be fair and reasonable, you have to account for the possible passing of time from when the earth was inhabitable for humans and from the time Adam took his first breath. Sure, only five days could have passed, but five eons could have also easily passed. This book by no means makes any attempt to settle the argument of the age of the universe, but the elephant in the room must be addressed.

For others, the earth was created billions of years ago. This, too, is a possibility. To better understand the Bible’s opening statement, it’s important to remember

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who wrote it. Its earthly author was Moses. This is almost an absolute certainty, as most scholars agree on Mosaic authorship. Who was Moses? When did he write this? Where was he when he wrote it? How did he get the information? These are very important questions that are seldom asked by the reader when trying to unravel the intricacies of the creation account. However, they are very important because they will help us establish a better framework of understanding.

Moses was the great leader of the Hebrew people, but we must remember where he spent the first part of his life: Egypt. There was nothing Hebraic or Jewish about Egypt. Being found and adopted by the pharaoh's daughter afforded him an incredible position that came with great prestige and privilege. The pharaoh at the time did not have a legitimate male child to take the throne after him. Moses, having been adopted into that family, became the legal heir to the throne. He would have received a pharaoh's education.

This means that Moses would have studied military tactics, ancient Near East philosophy, and religion. He would have learned mathematics, reading and writing, and, of course, astronomy and astrology. You don't have to dig too far into ancient Egyptian culture to discover that it was deeply steeped in astrology and religious mysticism. This belief system drove them to build the impressive and massive system of pyramids. It fueled

their interest in the afterlife and what happened to the soul beyond the grave. We see this in the meticulous construction of the pharaohs' tombs and burial chambers.

Ancient Egyptian mythology has been preserved both in manuscripts and through hieroglyphics found in caves and chambers. Egyptology reveals a great curiosity about the cosmos and its creation. The ancient Egyptian god Khnum is said to have fashioned creation in the same manner as a potter fashions clay—slowly but surely molding and shaping the clay into the image or shape desired. This is very important information to consider when we are attempting to understand why Moses selected certain words over others in his creation account.

Strong's Concordance is the go-to concordance that Bible scholars use when they want to find the original Hebrew or Greek word and its meaning. The fifth word of the opening verse of the Bible is the word *created*. The Hebrew word used there is *bara* (see *Strong's* number H1254). It means “to shape, to form, or to fashion.” The nuance of the word *bara* is not to create all at once but rather to set creation in motion. To fashion an object, and to take the time to perfect it.

Think of it this way. Even the tallest trees in the world—sequoias, a kind of redwood tree found in Northern California—grow to over 350 feet tall and yet begin with a seed that fits in the palm of your hand. Everything the tree would need over time was present at the very beginning.

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So, too, in the beginning, everything that was necessary for the creation of the universe could have been present from the very start. Today it's known as the "Big Bang."

I know, I just lost some of you. You hear that term and you think it's a secular explanation for the beginning of the cosmos. But what if I told you that wasn't the case? What if I told you that, historically, the Big Bang Theory was a Christian perspective that was used to explain the beginning of space and time? In fact, in 1927, it was a Belgian Roman Catholic priest named Georges Lemaître, who was also an astronomer and physics professor, who noted the expansion of the universe. That is to say, he was the first to observe that deep-space objects such as galaxies were moving not only away from each other but from a single point in space. Lemaître's observations ultimately led to the theory known today as the "Big Bang."

Eventually, several other notable scientists and observable, empirical evidence corroborated his theory. Initially, the scientific community rejected Lemaître's theory because it confirmed the first three words of the Bible: "In the beginning." Before this theory, many in the world of science and cosmology hypothesized that the universe never had a beginning, that it had always existed. But this new evidence confirmed that there was a beginning, and that the Bible got it right. Somewhere along the journey, the term *Big Bang* became secular in nature. What was once a beloved discovery and victory for the church

became a negative term, and those who declared faith in it were scorned as blasphemers and heretics. It's amazing what time can do. Time can heal all wounds, but it can also cause some of them.

It's a Big Universe

No matter which side of the spectrum you are on—young earth or old earth—we can all agree on the vastness of the universe. The truth is that we will never truly be able to understand how vast it really is. We can read all the facts and see all the pictures we want, but our human brains cannot fathom the reaches of the galaxy. We don't even understand the size of our planet, never mind the solar system. We can't even comprehend the size of our own star, the sun! How's this for some mind-blowing sun trivia: we could fit 1.3 million Earths inside of the sun! The sun makes up 99.86 percent of the total mass of the solar system, and yet it's called a "dwarf" yellow star. A dwarf! There are stars in the observable universe that are much, much larger than our own sun. For example, the largest detected star, to date, is VY Canis Majoris, which is Latin for "Big Dog." You could fit 9.3 billion of our suns in it! You can't even imagine it, can you? I know I can't.

NASA conservatively suggests there are anywhere from one hundred billion to four hundred billion stars in our Milky Way galaxy alone! That means there are about one hundred billion planets. It all seems so over-

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whelming. We hear these staggering numbers and our brain goes numb from trying to take it all in.

Let's start with something a little closer to home, something we may have a better chance of wrapping our heads around. Let's forget about the hundreds of billions of stars in the galaxy and focus on one: the nearest star to us. It's called Proxima Centauri, and it's a mere 4.22 light-years away. That doesn't sound too bad. Four is a small number. It should be fairly simple to understand its distance. Well...it doesn't sound like a lot, but of course, it is. That 4.22 light-years translates into forty trillion kilometers, or about twenty-five trillion miles. Some calculations suggest that at current rocket speeds, it would take us 137,000 years to get there, and that's just one way!

We haven't even left our own galaxy yet! Initially, NASA's Hubble Space Telescope estimated that there were approximately one hundred billion galaxies in the observable universe. But new data collected in 2016 by NASA now put that number at ten times greater—over one trillion galaxies! How's your head doing? My mind reels as I continue to research and discover more and more data about our universe. I'm trying, but I know I'm failing to convey how vast the universe really is.

So let's take another bite-sized look at things. We're unable to fathom hundreds of millions of galaxies, so let's look at just one. Let's look at the closest galaxy to us, Andromeda. It's considered to be the big-brother

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galaxy of the Milky Way. Our galaxy is 100,000 light-years wide, while Andromeda is approximately 220,000 light-years across—just over twice our size—yet it houses over a trillion stars, compared to our four hundred billion. Andromeda lies a mere 2.5 million light-years away from us, which, compared to the size of the universe, is right across the street. If we could travel at the speed of light, which is three hundred million meters per second, it would take us 2.5 million years to get there. Proxima Centauri at 137,000 years doesn't seem too far, does it?

The data above are precisely the reason why this is *not* a book about the when or how of creation. Hundreds of books on the subject have already been written by people who are much more qualified than I am. They are readily available, and if that area of research interests you, then go for it.

My area of interest and the focus and purpose of this book is to ask the question “Why?” Why create so many planets, stars, and galaxies? What purpose could they possibly serve? That's what I'll explore in the remaining pages of this book. Yes, we'll get theological and philosophical, but the answer is much simpler than all of that. The answer may surprise you. In fact, the answer *is* you! He made it all for you, and for me. As we will see, God went to extreme lengths to create, plan, and position all the heavenly bodies in the night sky. He did it to tell you a story. He placed a story in the stars—the story of faith, salvation, and redemption.

CHAPTER I

SIGNS

And 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.”

—Genesis 1:14

SOME SIGNS ARE region specific, while others are universal. I remember traveling through Australia in 2014 and seeing Kangaroo Crossing signs everywhere! That’s an example of a region-specific sign. If you’ve seen them anywhere else, let me know. I’ve traveled to several countries around the world. I’ve been to Israel over forty times, and all throughout Southeast Asia, Europe, Mexico, and the UK, and it didn’t matter which country I was in, I saw some universal signs. The most prominent was the stop sign. It didn’t matter what language the sign was in. In fact, in some countries, there was no writing at all. As soon as I saw that red octagon, I instantly

knew it was a stop sign. Not only did I recognize what the sign was, but I also knew what to do. I had to stop. That's it. No explanation or guidance was necessary. This is an example of an objective sign. You don't need to wonder about the meaning of a stop sign. The answer is clear and it is final.

Signs are put in place to either tell us something or point us toward something. A speed limit sign on the highway is an example of a sign that's there to tell us something. A sign on the highway may tell us to turn right up ahead because it's pointing us toward something, such as the destination that we have in mind.

That's exactly what God has done with creation. Genesis 1:14 tells us that God created the sun, moon, and stars to serve as signs. Just like natural signs, God's heavenly signs are there to tell us something and to point us toward something or, in this case, toward someone! God's signs are also objective. Later in this chapter we will be looking at whom these signs point to, but right now I want to address what the signs are and whom they are for.

You

As I said at the end of the Introduction, *you* are the reason God made the signs. He put them there because He loves you and He wanted to make sure that every single person who ever lived, no matter where or when, regardless of age or language, would be able to see and

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understand the signs. After all, the Bible says in 2 Peter 3:9b, “Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

His desire is and always has been for every single person who has ever lived to be in a right relationship with Him. He wants you to have eternal life. Having you with Him for all eternity is so important that He fashioned the entire universe to serve as a sign for you. Imagine that, if you can. Remember the massive universe I described in the introduction? Yeah, that one. He carefully created and planned it with extreme precision. He planned it to align with very specific dates and times throughout history.

Let’s go back to the opening verse of Genesis 1:14. The “lights in the vault of the sky” described here refer to the sun, the moon, and the stars. They definitely serve a practical function. They divide the day from the night. They mark the days of the month. They basically serve as a celestial calendar. In ancient times, several cultures relied on the motion and phases of the moon to know when to plant and harvest their crops. But the text is telling us that they serve an even greater purpose. Unfortunately, we often miss this meaning because of the poor English translation.

A Word about Translation

English is a very restrictive and limited language when it comes to translating. As a person who comes from a

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Portuguese background, I have seen this countless of times throughout my life. So often the original meaning is lost when translating from Portuguese to English or vice versa. This is what we see happening here.

The greater purpose that the sun, moon, and stars serve is to mark “sacred times.” In English, it takes two words to convey the meaning of the original Hebrew word used in Genesis 1:14, which is *moed*. When read properly, the text tells us that the sun, moon, and stars serve as signs to mark *moeds*. So here’s the million-dollar question: What in the world is a *moed*?

In Hebrew, *moed* refers to the holy days mentioned in the twenty-third chapter of the book of Leviticus in the Old Testament. The holy days are also known as the seven Feasts of the Lord. In our vernacular they are: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles. These seven annual festivals were instituted by God as holy or sacred times. Although the English translation gets the words right, it fails to convey the significance of the holy days and what they represent.

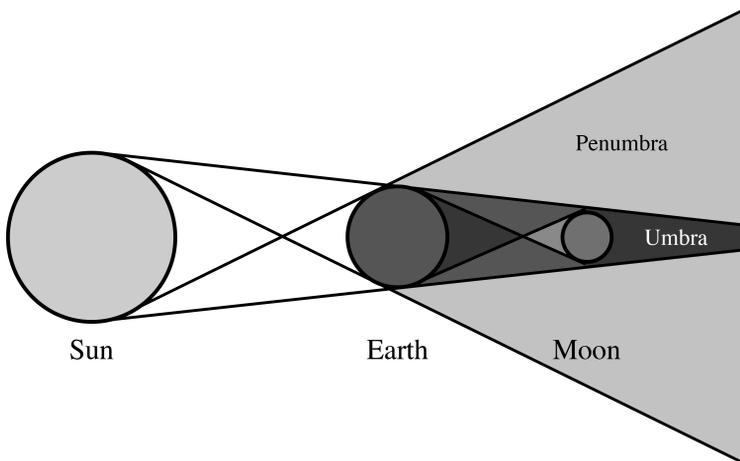
In essence, God said He would use celestial objects to serve as signs during these holy days. So it should be no surprise to see celestial signs during events like Passover or Tabernacles. They just show that God is doing exactly what He said He was going to do. As we will see,

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all throughout history, God has marked holy days with remarkable signs and wonders. For instance, to God, Passover is a sacred time, so He marks it with celestial activity: the first night of Passover is always marked by a full moon. This was so that the ancient Israelites would know exactly when the feast began.

Blood Moons

There was a lot of attention given to what the media called a tetrad of lunar eclipses during the years 2014 and 2015. These lunar eclipses are often referred to as “blood moons.” This is how some of the ancient cultures described a lunar eclipse. The term has taken on an ominous association and meaning.



Lunar eclipse. *Illustration by Karen Amaral.*

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As we all know, it takes the earth approximately 365 days to go around the sun once. During a lunar eclipse, the earth comes between the sun and the moon so that the moon receives no direct light from the sun; the earth is essentially blocking the incoming light that would normally give the moon the bright color we are used to seeing. During a *total* lunar eclipse, also known as a blood moon, the moon moves fully into the earth's shadow, which is called the umbra. The umbra gives off the earth's natural red hue. From our perspective, the moon transitions from the bright white we normally see to a reddish-orange color. If you've ever seen one, it's easy to understand why the ancients would refer to it as a "blood moon."

The blood moon tetrad of 2014–2015 garnered a lot of attention. Books were written. Documentaries were produced. Sermons were preached. The supposed common denominator of this tetrad, it was said, was that it was a rare phenomenon and carried with it a doomsday type of message. Surely it must have been a bad omen that marked imminent destruction. I don't know what year you are reading this book in, but I'm fairly confident that the world is still spinning, the sun is still shining, and life is going on as it has for some time now.

All people had to do was go back to Genesis 1:14. Of course there were blood moons during Passover and

Tabernacles—it's exactly what God said would happen. The danger of not having the Bible at the center of all our celestial interpretations is that we rely on human ideas. And as far as I am concerned, that's a very dangerous thing to do.

Blood moons and planetary alignments are normal and natural. That doesn't mean they're not special or important. More often than not, God uses the ordinary when creating the extraordinary. We see this throughout Scripture. Look back at the Exodus story of the Israelites. All ten plagues seem supernatural at first glance, but as we look at them more closely, we see that all God did was simply put His "super" on the "natural." From frogs to locusts to darkness, He used the nature that He had created for His purposes. That's precisely what we see with the sun, the moon, and the stars.

Jesus and the Zodiac

Blood moons and full moons have always occurred and will always occur during feast days because that's when they are supposed to happen. God's system to mark these days with celestial objects has been tested and proven with the passing of time. Even Jesus understood this principle. He talks openly about it in the Gospels, but somehow, we have missed it. We have been missing it for over two thousand years. It's now time to understand

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what He said and why. Consider the words of Jesus: “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars” (Luke 21:25). Okay, I don’t think you read that properly, so let’s read it again. Jesus—the Messiah—said, “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars.”

I know you have read this before. I did, several times, as a seminary student during a Gospels course. I read it as a Bible teacher and as a pastor who had to prepare a new sermon every week. It wasn’t until God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, opened my eyes and illuminated this passage to me that I began to understand. When I got ahold of what Jesus was saying and connected it to what God said in Genesis 1:14, it all started to come together. It was like this ancient, massive puzzle was starting to make sense. The pieces were literally falling into place. When Jesus said that the sun, moon, and stars would make a sign, it was like a gigantic lightbulb went off in my head. The signs He was speaking of were the constellations in the night sky!

What did He mean by this? Could God, can God, does God actually use the constellations for His purposes? As we continue through the various chapters in this book, we will see that God clearly designed and positioned the constellations in the night sky as part of the story that He has written in the stars. I know that idea may be challenging right now, and you might find it difficult to accept. But the verse in Luke is not a onetime

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mention in passing by Jesus. He says it more than once. In fact, the sacred Scriptures speak about it over and over again.

When Jesus was asked about the end times and what kind of signs we could expect, He answered in this way:

Immediately after the distress of those days “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. (Matthew 24:29–30)

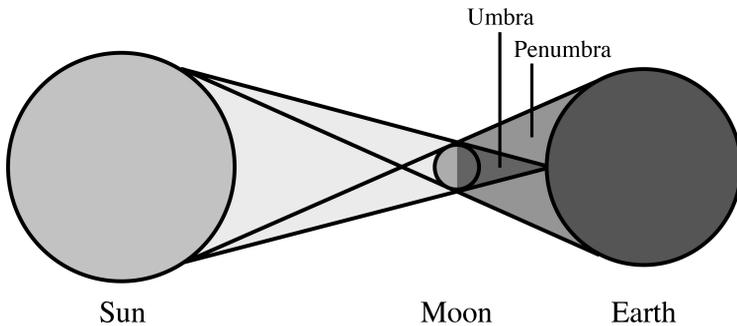
There is so much celestial activity going on in this passage that if we don’t stop and think about it, we will miss it. Let’s take a closer look at what He has mentioned here.

The first phenomenon He mentions is that the sun will be darkened. Before more recent times, with the advancement of science and research, many people believed that the signs in this passage were to be accomplished supernaturally. In a sense they are, because they have been designed by God. But in their truest sense, they’re perfectly natural events. I say they’re natural

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because they have been designed by God to operate in that way. This darkening of the sun is known as a solar eclipse. The most recent fully visible solar eclipse in the West was on August 21, 2017. Millions of Americans flocked into the streets to see this truly amazing celestial event.

A solar eclipse occurs when the moon passes between the sun and the earth and blocks the sun. I remember seeing video footage of the last solar eclipse from Nashville, Tennessee. It was amazing to see how dark it became in the middle of a sunny day, and how quickly it happened. This is exactly what Jesus was referring to in the Matthew passage. Now, a solar eclipse alone is not the sign of the end of all things. If you keep reading the passage, you will discover that several things need to occur at the same time.



Solar eclipse. *Illustration by Karen Amaral.*

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One more note about a solar eclipse: this can only happen on Earth. No other planet in our solar system was designed to have a solar eclipse. This is because of the size of our moon compared to the size of the sun, as well as the sun's distance from us. The diameter of the sun is approximately four hundred times larger than the diameter of the moon, and it is approximately four hundred times farther from us than the moon is. These conditions make it appear as if the sun and the moon are the same size in the sky. Some would suggest that this is simply a happy coincidence. Others, like myself, would suggest that it is too perfect to be accidental. It definitely screams intelligent design.

Shooting Stars

Jesus continues with three quick mentions of other celestial activity. First, He mentions that the moon will not give its light. This is a lunar eclipse, which we spoke about earlier. He then refers to the stars falling out of the sky. Stars in the sky are actually other suns in the galaxy. Our sun is also a star. Stars are fixed objects, meaning they don't move. Our sun is fixed. For centuries humans thought that the sun revolved around us, but with the advent of telescopes we quickly realized that it was the other way around. We revolve around a star. So, if stars are fixed in space, how can they move at all, let alone fall out of the sky?

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Let me explain it this way. Have you ever been in a remote location? Perhaps on a camping trip or at a cottage far away from the bright city lights. The sky views are spectacular. The farther away you are from light pollution, the more objects you are able to see in the sky at night. We've all seen what we call a "shooting star." As a kid, I thought what I was seeing was exactly what the name suggested, that an actual star was falling out of the sky. We know this is impossible. Stars are millions and billions of times larger than the earth. If a star were actually "falling" from the sky, all life on the planet would be instantly wiped out. So what is it? What causes the streak in the sky that we call a shooting star?

The answer is a bit anticlimactic compared to a star actually colliding with our planet. Space is filled with incalculable amounts of debris. This debris is made of meteors, space rocks that range in size from a speck of dust to the size of a golf ball. As our planet orbits the sun, it runs into these rocks, which collide with our atmosphere at incredibly high speeds. When they travel through our upper atmosphere they begin to heat, glow, and then burn out. This is what happens when we see what we call a shooting star.

Because of the precision of our orbit around the sun, we always pass through the same region of space where comets have left behind a massive amount of debris. As we travel through it, we can see hundreds of fragments

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burning up in our atmosphere. This is what is known as a meteor shower. From our perspective, the stars appear to be falling out of the sky. So in the passage from Matthew above, we see that Jesus was referring to a meteor shower.

So He mentions a solar eclipse, a lunar eclipse, and now a meteor shower. What do we have involved here? The sun, the moon, and the stars. And He says that they serve as signs. That's exactly what He said in Luke 21:25 and what God said back in Genesis 1:14. He concludes the Matthew 24:29–30 passage by saying these objects will serve as the sign of the Son of Man. What objects in the sky are made up of these things? The constellations.

Let me give you just two examples of how the constellations have served as signs for the coming of the Son of Man. In fact, they continue to serve as signs to this very day—that's the nature of the stars. They were created to worship Him and reveal who He is. This is precisely what Nehemiah wrote about: "You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you" (Neh. 9:6).

If you stand outside on several clear nights in a row and look up at the night sky, you will notice a pattern. Every night is slightly different from the night before. It appears as if the stars and constellations are moving

a bit farther apart each night. As we said earlier, stars don't move. The earth does. As we continue on our endless orbit around the sun, it gives the appearance that the stars are moving. Where we are on our orbit determines what we are able to see in the sky on any given night.

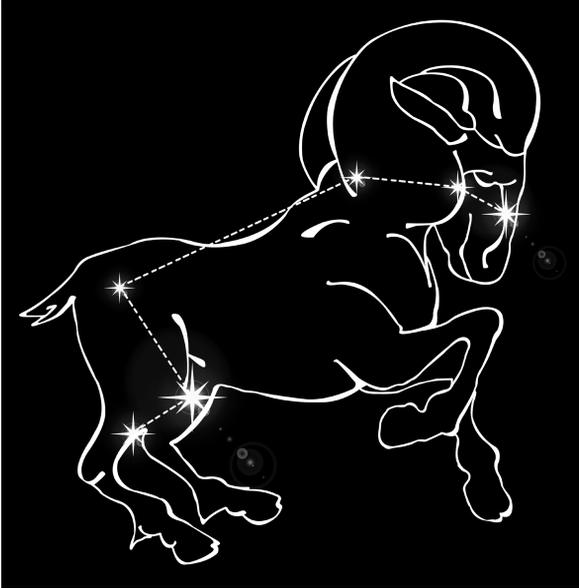
We take for granted what is in the sky each night. We assume the stars will be there, the moon will be there, and all will be as it should be. But have you ever taken the time to evaluate what stars are in the sky during certain seasons and, in turn, what constellations are in the sky? We know that Orion's Belt, for instance, is part of the greater winter constellation of Orion. What if the constellations in the sky are not random? What if specific constellations appear at the exact same time for all eternity on purpose?

Aries and Passover

Let's take two examples from the spring and autumn constellations. Every year during the months of March and April there is one dominant constellation in the sky: Aries. What is Aries? What figure represents this spring constellation? It's a ram. It has always been a ram. And it has always been in the night sky during this time of the year. At first you might say, okay, that's cool, but what does it have to do with worshipping God or pointing to the sign of the Son of Man? Aries in the night sky just

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happens to coincide with the Feast of Passover every year. Now, after all, God did say that the sun, moon, and stars would serve as signs to mark holy days and the feasts. Passover is the first feast mentioned in Leviticus 23.



Constellation of Aries

Think about this. During the Exodus of the Israelites, God told Moses to slaughter a lamb, or ram. The blood was to be applied to the doorposts of Hebrew homes to serve as a sign for the angel of death. Go back even further, to the time of Abraham. God supplied a ram at Mount Moriah in Jerusalem as a substitute to die in the place of Isaac. These events happened in the

spring. As they celebrated and commemorated these events on earth, Aries—the ram—was in the sky reminding the people of what God had done for them, that He had provided a sacrifice in the past and that He would ultimately provide the sacrifice to end all sacrifices.

Now fast-forward to the time of Jesus, who was called the Lamb of God in John 1:29 by John the Baptist and in Revelation 5:12–13. As Jesus, the Lamb of God, was being nailed to a tree as our Passover Lamb, Aries was in the sky, reminding both the ancients and us that the long-awaited Lamb had finally come . . . not just for them, but also for us. Next Passover, take the time to look up and you will see the sign of Aries in the sky, reminding you that Jesus—the Lamb of God—took our place and became our sacrifice.

As if all that wasn't enough . . . wait for it . . . there's more! Genesis 1:14 tells us that the sun, moon, and the stars not only mark feast days but are also used to mark days and years. In fact, as we will see, they were used to mark the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

Astrology vs. Astronomy

Notice that I didn't mention the return of Jesus. That wasn't an oversight on my part. It was done on purpose and for a purpose. Constellational and planetary alignments should never be used in a predictive

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manner—meaning, don't try to figure out the future based on where the constellations and planets are. Not only is that nonsense, but it's also forbidden by God in several places throughout the Scriptures. It falls into the realm of astrology and borders on witchcraft. Deuteronomy 4:19 and Jeremiah 8:2 clearly command us to refrain from consulting and worshipping the sun, the moon, or the stars.

Let's take a closer look at the warning of Jeremiah 8:2: "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. They will not be gathered up or buried, but will be like dung lying on the ground."

Perhaps you're reading this right now and are wondering if this verse is still applicable today. After all, wasn't worship of the sun and idols a thing that was only done in the past? Are people still doing this today? Well, people may not be worshipping the sun, the moon, or the stars, but they are certainly consulting them. It's called astrology or, in modern-day nomenclature, horoscopes. Many people, including Christians, check their horoscopes every morning. They don't see any harm in it, or they think it's just something fun to read.

As we can see from this passage, consulting the stars is no laughing matter to God. He says that if you do so, you are like dung on the ground. Wow, that's a pretty vivid

image. But what's so bad about astrology? The focus. People look to the stars and their positions in the night sky during certain months and rely on them for direction and counsel. Many people find their identity in their astrological sign. How many times have you heard people say something like, "That's such a Libra thing to do"?

The stars weren't created to counsel us or to speak to us about our lives. They were designed to reveal to us Jesus, who is the Bright Morning Star. We are to look to Him for counsel. It is in Christ and Christ alone that we find our identity. So don't get left behind like poop on the ground. Instead, fix your eyes on Jesus and look to the heavens for the sign of the Son of Man.

So then, we see that the heavenly alignments are reflective in nature, not predictive. We can look at key points in the life of Jesus and see how they were marked by celestial activity. But that activity should never be used to try to predict events—most of all, the return of Jesus.

Earlier, we noted Jesus' teaching about the celestial signs regarding the end times. A few verses later He confirms that we are not to try to predict or calculate when these things will occur. He puts it this way: "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matt. 24:36).

So although we know that everything Jesus said will come to pass, we live in anticipation of those events without trying to pinpoint their exact dates or times.

Instead of trying to look forward, let's continue to look back and see how God marked the heavens when Jesus was crucified. As we do that, we see how God marked the death of Jesus during Passover in the sky. Not only was Aries present on the day of crucifixion, but another alignment took place in the same constellation that was nothing short of spectacular. But before we look at this amazing celestial event, it's important to determine the date of the crucifixion.

Date of Death

Our modern Good Friday celebration was established by the Roman emperor Constantine in the fourth century as the day to commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus. Different orthodox denominations celebrate it on various other days. The answer has eluded them all. The Scriptures are very clear about the date: Passover. That's it. No need for bizarre calculations or speculation. The Bible tells us it was Passover—plainly and simply.

Don't believe me? Believe Jesus. This is a direct quote from the Messiah Himself: "As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified" (Matt. 26:2). When will He be handed over to be crucified? Passover. Here's another verse: "And he said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer'" (Luke 22:15). What suffering was He referring to? The crucifixion. He was

eating the customary Passover meal on the night before the lambs were sacrificed, called the Seder.

In Leviticus 23 we are told that Passover begins on the eve of Nissan 14, when you are to eat the meal. Nissan is the first month of the Hebrew religious calendar. The morning of the fourteenth day of Nissan was when the Passover lamb was to be sacrificed. So Jesus did as the Scriptures instructed. He ate the Passover meal with His disciples on the evening of the fourteenth, was arrested later that evening, and was crucified as the Lamb of God the very next morning.

How could it be the fourteenth of Nissan in the evening, when Jesus celebrated Passover *and* on the morning of the next day, when He was crucified? That's because, according to Genesis, a biblical day is from sunset to sunset. Therefore, it was the fourteenth for the meal and still the fourteenth for the crucifixion.

So we know Jesus was crucified during Passover, but how can we know which year it was and what day of the week it was? Those are great questions. Thankfully, God did what He said He would do. He marked the crucifixion with celestial activity.

In order to arrive at the date, we look to the text to tell us what happened in the heavens the day He was crucified. Matthew 27:45 tells us that "from noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land." That's a pretty remarkable and clear celestial sign. If

total darkness covered the land for three hours, then we should expect there was a solar eclipse, but historically we know that didn't occur. Nor did it need to. Again, if we simply read the text, it speaks for itself.

Solar Eclipse vs. Lunar Eclipse

In the original language, the Bible didn't say there was total or complete darkness, just darkness. That may not sound like a big difference, but it completely alters our understanding of what took place in the sky that day. As we research the original language, we find that the word used for darkness in this text is the Greek word *skotos*, which comes from another Greek word, *skia*. This word literally means "shade caused by the interception of light." Notice that *shading* of light occurred—not complete darkness. With this understanding, it sounds more like a lunar eclipse, which is caused when the earth comes between the sun and the moon and intercepts the light.

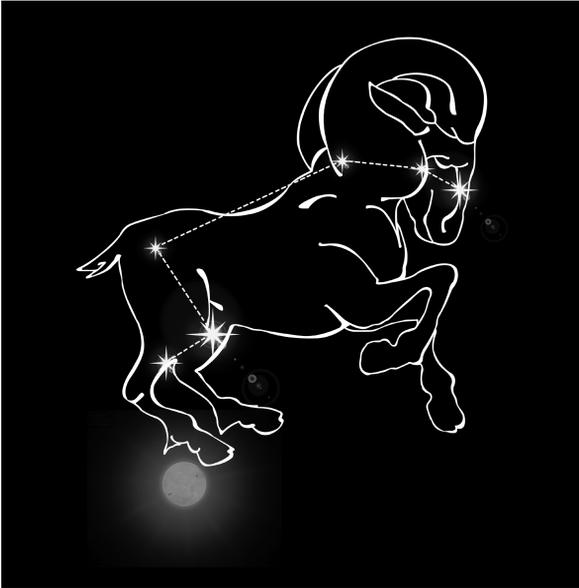
So a solar eclipse didn't mark Jesus' crucifixion but rather a lunar eclipse. Thanks to modern astronomy software and an online database archive, we have a date when this occurred. NASA confirms that on April 3, AD 33 (according to our modern-day Gregorian calendar), a partial lunar eclipse took place that lasted for two hours and fifty minutes. This seems to match and fit the three-hour description of the Gospels.

Let's do a quick recap before we move into the next

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celestial sign during Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus was crucified on the morning of Passover; during His crucifixion a lunar eclipse took place and the constellation of Aries was in the sky. Does this sound familiar? Remember when we began in Genesis 1:14? God said He would use the sun, the moon, and the stars (or constellations) to serve as signs to mark the holy days. I love how God is always right on the money—not just close or approximate but 100 percent accurate and on time.

With the use of astronomy software, we can go back to April 3, AD 33, and see exactly what the sky looked in Jerusalem on the day of the crucifixion. At 3 p.m., when



Sun under the foot of Aries

the Gospels say Jesus died, there was a lunar eclipse rising over Jerusalem and Aries was in the sky as the sun was passing through it. At 3 p.m., the sun was under the foot of Aries—a clear and moving sign that the Son, who was the Lamb, was being crushed.

This is what Jesus referred to when He said there would be signs with the sun, moon, and stars. This is also what He meant when He said we would see the sign of the Son of Man in the heavens. Remarkable. Absolutely remarkable. No wonder the prophet said, “‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isa. 55:8–9).

Aquarius and Tabernacles

The first example of a constellation that we looked at that coincided with an event in the life of Jesus was Aries during Passover. A second example involves the constellation Aquarius, whose name means “water carrier.” You’ve probably heard of this one and already know what image is used for this sign. Aquarius is always represented by a man holding a jug that is spilling water into the mouth of the fish in the constellation *Piscis Austrinus* in the southern hemisphere. Let’s see how God used this sign to mark a feast day and a significant event in the life of Jesus.

STORY IN THE STARS



Constellation of Aquarius

To make this connection, we will turn our attention to a story that is recorded in John 7:37: “On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.’” A powerful portion of Scripture. To make the connection between the sign of Aquarius and John 7:37, some cultural background significantly helps in understanding the relation between the two. The first thing to identify in this passage is what is going on culturally. John mentions a festival. He doesn’t name it, but he makes a remark that is a dead giveaway if you understand the religious cycle of the people living at that time.

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John remarks that Jesus makes this statement “on the last and greatest day of the festival.” According to Leviticus 23, there is only one festival that has a “last and greatest day”: the celebration of Tabernacles. There were unique ceremonies that took place each day during this festival, but it culminated with a special ceremony on the last day that was not only spectacular, but it was also unforgettable.

The priest would leave the temple area carrying an empty jug. That’s interesting. He would go down to an area called the Pool of Siloam, a spring-filled pool used for ritual cleansing. There are only three sources for living water: rain, rivers, and springs. Because it was spring-fed, it qualified as a source of living water. The priest would dip the empty jug into the Pool of Siloam and fill it to the brim with this living water. He would then carry it back to the temple courts, where, during the ceremony, he would spill the water out onto the altar.

The Feast of Tabernacles takes place in the fall, during late September and early October. It’s the final of the seven feasts mentioned in the Old Testament. The land of Israel would have just gone through the dry season (the rains would start in November), so it would not have rained for several months leading up to this event. The pouring out of the water was a symbolic gesture. It was an outward sign of an inner prayer request for God to send the winter rains. As already mentioned, rain was a form of living water—in fact, it was the purest of the

three. So as the people were praying and asking for living water, Jesus appeared in the temple, right on cue.

Earlier in John, the Bible says that Jesus timed his departure from Galilee to arrive in Jerusalem at the precise time the request for living water was being made. When He made the claim to be the living water that people were looking for, the connection was obvious to everyone there. As the sun began to set over Jerusalem, the stars began to shine. Just imagine it. With zero light pollution two thousand years ago, the sky would have been dazzling and bursting with stars. As the festival was coming to a close, people saw the priest with a jug pouring out water, and Jesus made the claim to be the living water. In the sky, at that exact moment, was the constellation of Aquarius, pouring out his living water into the mouth of the fish! The timing was impeccable. Only God could do such a thing.

As we close this chapter, let us remind ourselves why the sun, the moon, and the stars were created: they serve as signs, both then and now. Whether it was Aries in the sky during Passover or Aquarius in the sky during Tabernacles, these constellations marked not only the holy days but also significant events in the life of Jesus. God did all this because He wants everyone to know who His Son is—that Jesus is the promised Messiah. That Jesus is the one who died for our sins. That Jesus is the one who can restore and refresh our souls with His living water.

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The next chapter will encourage you as you see how God went to incredible lengths to create and position the universe to tell the story of His salvation. But before we get there, let me leave you with this reminder from Scripture: “They know the truth about God *because he has made it obvious to them*. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God” (Rom. 1:19–20 NLT, emphasis mine).

He wanted you to know Him. So He placed a story of epic proportions in the stars.