

As the Stars.

We are all familiar with God's promise to Abraham that his seed should be as the sand on the seashore. He was also promised that they should be as the stars.

We find this in Genesis xv. 5, where we read that God brought Abram forth abroad and said to him, "Look now toward heaven and count the stars if thou be able to number them, and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be."

This is an aspect of the Truth we will dwell on for a short time.

Travellers tell us that it is impossible for those who have never visited the East to form an adequate idea of the exceeding beauty of the Oriental night. They tell us that constellations tremulous with excess of brightness sparkle in the heavens, conspicuous among them being Orion, with his blazing belt, and beyond that the Pleiades, or seven stars.

We can imagine Abraham gazing on this magnificent spectacle from some lonely spot in Palestine. The Patriarch was the recipient of great and precious promises, that his seed should be as the sand on the seashore, but he was growing old and his wife past the natural time of bearing, and who can say that doubts did not cross his mind, not that God could not perform what He had promised, but how? And it was in reply to Abraham's question that God brought him out and told him to count the stars, if he were able, as that was what his seed would be like—like stars.

When we remember that a matter of some 2,000 stars only are visible to the naked eye, and Abraham did not possess a telescope, it does not seem to us the number of the stars so much as their qualities or properties that were brought to Abraham's notice.

This idea seems to be borne out in that celebrated dream of Joseph. In Genesis xxxvii. 9 it is recorded that Joseph dreamed a second dream, and told his brethren, and said, "Behold, I have dreamed a dream more, and behold the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me." This is the first development of Abraham's seed, the eleven patriarchs, represented by stars.

The Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians tells us that our Lord Jesus Christ is Abraham's seed in the ultimate sense, and with this thought in mind we take a further step in prophecy.

In Numbers xxiv. 17 we have Balaam's prophecy, "I see him though he be not now, I behold him though he be not nigh. There shall come a star out of Jacob and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth."

The prophetic gaze of Balaam was fixed, not on the mass of people encamped beneath him, but on one who was to arise from their midst.

The star has among all nations served as a symbol of regal power and splendour, and this idea was current among the Jews, who accepted it as a well-understood emblem of the Messiah.

It is said that he should destroy all the children of Sheth, or, as it could be rendered alternatively, overthrow all the sons of tumult, and in this connection we remember David's words, recorded in 2 Samuel xxiii. 6: "The sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands. But the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron, and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place."

Jewish authorities refer “the children of Sheth” to Seth, son of Adam, and regard the phrase as equivalent to all mankind. Thus the passage imports that He, the Ruler that shall arise out of Israel, shall rule all mankind, and we know how true that is.

In Daniel xii., referring to the time when Michael, the great prince, shall stand up (the Star out of Jacob), it is stated that this will be accompanied by a time of such trouble as was never previously experienced, when all whose names were written in the Lamb’s book of life shall be delivered, and many now asleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. These are they who are spoken of by Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians as “We who are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord shall not precede those who are asleep. For Jesus Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall be caught up together with them, in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

In v. 3 of Daniel xii. We read that “they that be wise (they that understand, as chapter xi. V. 33) shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.”

Understand what? What but the Gospel of the Kingdom?

That they should shine as the brightness of the firmament was applied by Jesus to the righteous, those who believed and believe the Kingdom that he preached (Matthew xiii. 43).

They that turn many to righteousness are those who by the example of their own righteousness cause others to be righteous, and they shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.

What a prospect to look forward to, and it is brought within the reach of every one of us by the work of the One whom we are remembering, of whom it was said “by His knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities” (Isaiah liii. 11).

The same analogy is used by Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter xv.

There were some at Corinth who argued the impossibility of the resurrection. “How can bodies wasted in the flames, mingled with the winds, or mouldered in the grave, be restored to their original particles and live again?” Paul calls them “wretched reasoners.”

“Look at the very seeds you cast into the ground and you will find that the substance of the seed undergoes its own peculiar decomposition before it can vegetate afresh, nor is the seed you sow the same as the vigorous plant which rises from it, but a mere grain of whatever plant it may chance to be, to which God, in His own due time, gives its own just and peculiar development and figure.”

“Again,” the apostle says, “all flesh is not endowed with the same identical characteristics, but there is one kind that belongs to men, another to beasts, another to fishes and another to birds.

“There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly bodies is one thing, and the constitution of earthly bodies is another thing.

“Again the splendour of the sun differs from that of the moon, and the splendour of the moon from that of the stars.

“The stars also themselves have their various degrees of beauty and brilliance. Star differeth from star in glory.”

In Psalm clxvii. 4 the Psalmist, to exalt the power, majesty and infinite knowledge of God, says He numbers the stars (a feat impossible to Abraham) and calls them by their names.

He is described as a king taking a review of His army, and He gives to every one of His soldiers a name as He thinks fit.

Similarly, He who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, with the seven stars in His right hand, in His messages to the Ecclesias, makes the following promise: —“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”

Names in Scripture denote more than they do with us. Present-day usage is merely a convenient means of being distinguished, but the Scriptural method of names is different; they are prophetic or descriptive of character. If found worthy we shall receive one of these new names.

In connection with the names of stars, God asked Job this question, “Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades or loose the bands of Orion?” and the prophet Amos exhorts the house of Israel to seek Him who made the seven stars and Orion. (Job xxxviii. 31.)

We cannot imagine the Almighty Creator giving such names to the stars. They are the Greek equivalents of the Hebrew names, taken from Greek mythology, which is obnoxious to God.

The Pleiades are a group of seven large stars, with many smaller ones, which from the singularity of their appearance were so called by the Greeks, from “plein,” meaning to sail, because they indicated the time when sailors might hope to undertake a voyage with safety.

The Chaldee name, which we think was more likely to be the name given by the Creator, is “Chimah,” meaning a hinge, pivot or axle, which turns round and moves other bodies with it.

This group of stars has been ascertained by independent calculations (in ignorance of the meaning of the name) to be actually the hinge or axle around which our solar system revolves. Alcyone, the brightest star of the Pleiades, being the centre of gravity of our vast solar system, the luminous hinge in the heavens around which our sun and his attendant planets are moving. Vast as the distance is that separates our sun from this group, a distance 34 million times greater than the distance between the sun and the earth, so tremendous is the force exerted by Alcyone that it draws our system irresistibly round it at the rate of 422,000 miles per day, in an orbit taking many thousand years to complete.

With this explanation, how remarkably striking and appropriate does the original word for Pleiades appear? What significance does the question take on? Can you arrest, or in any degree modify, that attractive influence which it exerts upon our sun and its attendant planets, whirling them around its pivot in an orbit of such inconceivable dimensions and with a velocity so bewildering?

In accordance with this higher interpretation, the influences of Pleiades may well be called sweet, as indicating the harmonious operation of those great laws by which our system revolves around them.

In this vast and complex arrangement not one wheel jars or creaks, not a single discordant sound disturbs the quiet of the night; smoothly and silently each star performs its allotted task.

Although our system is composed of so many bodies, differing in size, form and consistence, they are all so exquisitely poised in space in relation to one another and to their common centre, their antagonistic forces so nicely adjusted as to keep every orb in its destined path and preserve the safety and harmony of the whole.

Can this not give us a very faint idea of the glories of the Kingdom, that state of happiness and peace, when those who have understood and turned many to righteousness will shine like stars,

and not only glorify God by their glory, but will work together perfectly, silently and harmoniously. Would that we could experience such ideal conditions now; but we suppose that then we should be too satisfied with our lot.

Orion, or the Giant, is so-called because it roughly resembles the outline of a gigantic human figure. The Hebrew name was “Kesil,” meaning foolish or impious. It is composed of four very bright stars, with three equidistant stars in a diagonal line in the middle, forming the belt or girdle. The whole consists of 17 stars visible to the naked eye, and 78 when viewed through an ordinary telescope. The Equator passes through the stars of the belt, which are strung like diamonds on its invisible line. Now it is a striking fact that the three stars forming the belt or bands of Orion never change their form; they preserve the same relative position to each other and to the rest of the constellation from year to year and from age to age. They present exactly the same appearance to us as they did to Job, and they afford us one of the highest types of immutability in the midst of ceaseless change.

When we feel depressed by the continual change around us, where the most enduring things are doomed to pass away, it is comforting to meditate upon these jewels of the sky that remain unmoved amid all the ceaseless change, and reflect that God’s purpose is as immutable, and we are related to that purpose, related to great and enduring things.

What answer could Job or any human give to God’s question?

Can man separate these stars one from another, or alter their relative positions in the slightest degree?

How sublime the thought that He who keeps the starry bands of Orion keeps His children.

The apostle Paul says that star differeth from star in glory.

In this connection it is interesting to note that the star Rigel, which forms the right foot of Orion, is very bright and beautiful to the eye. If viewed through a telescope we find that it is a double star, one example of many in the heavens, there being over 6,000 double stars. These revolve round each other or round a common centre, and exhibit the extraordinary spectacle of sun revolving round sun, instead of planet round sun, as with our system. These double and multiple stars shine with different-coloured light, all colours of the rainbow being found.

Without any optical aid one star will be seen to shine like an emerald, another like a ruby, a third like a sapphire, and a fourth like a topaz, the whole heaven sparkling with a blaze of jewels, only to be compared with the jewelled breastplate of the Jewish high priest.

Then we remember that each of the jewels in Aaron’s breastplate was engraved with the name of one of the tribes of Israel, the twelve heads of which tribes were represented by stars in Joseph’s dream.

In the Book of Revelation, chapter ii. verse 26, in the letter to the Ecclesia at Thyatira, there is a promise given to he who overcomes that he shall have power over the nations and will receive the morning star. “I will give him the morning star.”

Bro. Dr. Thomas tells us that the morning star is the star belonging to the morning, the morning being the one spoken of in Genesis xlix. 27. This records Jacob blessing his sons, and in connection with Benjamin he refers to Benjamin as a wolf, and says that he shall tear in pieces. In the morning he shall devour the prey and in the evening he shall divide the spoil.

In these words of Jacob's prophecy of what shall happen in the last days to Israel, we are instructed to look for a period in which Benjamin shall devour his enemies instead of being himself devoured.

This is styled the morning, the era of triumphal conquest for Israel, as indicated by his devouring the prey and dividing the spoil.

The morning is the beginning of the day or the time of the sun's rising, and true whether the sun be the day-star of the material or the political heavens. David referred to this morning. —2 Samuel xxiii. 4.

In the 22nd chapter of the Revelation, at verse 16 (quoting Dr. Thomas), the eternal Spirit through Jesus says, "I am the root and offspring of David and the bright and morning star."

When the body of Jesus was raised from among the dead, it was transformed into spirit body.

This became a bright star, the bright particular star of that galaxy of stars pertaining to the morning when Israel shall do valiantly. This bright and morning star, the eternal Spirit glorified in Jesus, promises to give the morning star to "he who overcomes." He shall become a glorified constituent of the One Body when it is adopted at the manifestation of the sons of God. He or she will then be a star pertaining to the Millennial Dawn—a morning star.

The redeemed are then in the aggregate a cloud of morning stars. We look for the bright and morning star from heaven, that He may change our vile bodies and fashion them like unto His glorious body.

John says we are now the sons of God, and when He shall appear we shall be like Him—we shall all be morning stars, stars that come forth as dew from the womb of the morning, shining in all the glory of the Resurrection state.

Of all the stars of the new heavens, Jesus is the brightest, for in all things it is the Father's will and pleasure that not only all fulness shall dwell in Him, but that he also shall have the pre-eminence.

There is one glory of the sun, our Lord Jesus Christ, another glory of the stars, the glory of the brethren and sisters individually, and another glory of the moon, the glory of the companions collectively. As His bride they look forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners.

There is, however, a warning.

Jude speaks of wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever—an eternal grave.

There is no need to go into details of the deeds which will exclude us from the Kingdom; we are here to remember Jesus, who overcame and is set down at the right hand of God until God reveals Him to the world as its universal king.

If we continue faithful, it will be given to us to be one of these splendid ones, sparkling in all the glory of the great and fearful Name of Yahweh Elohim.

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