



Joshuah Ordering the Sun to Stand Still (1743-1744),
Joseph Marie Vien in Musée Fabre, Montpellier, France.

Surprise in the Skies

Joshua 10:6-14

Sunday, April 7, 2024

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This is going to be a different type of sermon from those that I usually preach. If you were in worship on Easter Sunday, you heard me preach a message entitled, “The Science of Resurrection.” You’ll recall that I cited an article from MSN.com which stated many atheists say they don’t believe in God because they find science and religion to be incompatible with each other; “they reject religion due to its unscientific and unfounded claims.”¹

You’ll also recall that I said, “The more I study the Bible and the more I learn about our world, I don’t see a conflict between science and the Bible.” That’s what I said, but that’s not what I had in my notes. My notes read that I don’t see a conflict between science and *religion*.” I changed the word *religion* to *Bible* as I was preaching last week, because religion is how we interpret the Bible, and sometimes religion gets it wrong, and that’s what makes atheists (and others) scratch their heads at us. Our children shouldn’t have to go to school and hear one thing in science class and then be told that our science is wrong because of what the Bible says. Both science and the Bible are rooted in truth, and truth will agree with truth.

¹ [19 Reasons Why Atheists Say They Don't Believe in God \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/atheism/19-reasons-why-atheists-say-they-dont-believe-in-god). Accessed March 18, 2024.

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As we explore the truth today—not only in the Bible, but also in science—I hope to build your faith. And by the end of the sermon, I hope to demonstrate four things:

- The Priority of Neighbor
- Constancy of Science
- The Believability of the Bible
- The Synchronicity of God

Old Testament Lesson, Joshua 10:6-14

With that in mind, let me draw your attention to Joshua 10:6-14—

⁶ The Gibeonites then sent word to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal: “Do not abandon your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us! Help us, because all the Amorite kings from the hill country have joined forces against us.”

⁷ So Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men. ⁸ The LORD said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you.”

⁹ After an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua took them by surprise. ¹⁰ The LORD threw them into confusion before Israel, so Joshua and the Israelites defeated them completely at Gibeon. Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makkedah. ¹¹ As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the LORD hurled large hailstones down on them, and more of them died from the hail than were killed by the swords of the Israelites.

¹² On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: “Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and you, moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.” ¹³ So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar.

The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. ¹⁴ There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a human being. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel!

First, let us consider **The Priority of Neighbor**. To do so, we have to look at the context, for is crucial. When the Hebrews entered the Promised Land, they were directed by God to remove all the evil influences of the Canaanites. And they began doing so, first at Jericho, then at Ai.

When the news of the victories of Israel reached the people of Gibeon, they formulated a plan to establish a peace treaty with the Hebrews so they would not be destroyed. They dressed themselves in such a way as to make Joshua believe that they lived far, far away from the Promised Land. And then they secured Joshua's promise that he and the Hebrews would not only spare them but protect them. But just three days later, Joshua learned that the Gibeonites were their neighbors. And in chapter 10, five Canaanite kings went to war against the Gibeonites. They, in turn, cry to Joshua for protection. True to his word, Joshua led the Hebrews into battle to protect the Gibeonites. That means that one of the most unique victories

you'll ever find—not just in the Bible, but in history itself—happened because Israel stood up to defend a neighboring city, even though their peace treaty was fraudulently obtained.

The question for us is, Will we have the integrity of Joshua to defend our neighbors—especially our weaker neighbors? This is one of the great themes of scripture: Will we love our neighbors as ourselves? Will we be Good Samaritans to someone in need? Joshua and the Hebrews did, and when they did so, they experienced one of the greatest victories in their history.

Number two: **The Constancy of Science.** That greatest of victories came about when the Bible says that the sun and the moon “stood still.” I’ve been watching “The Universe” on Netflix lately; it’s narrated by Morgan Freeman, so you know it’s got to be good. Anyway, that series has had me thinking in scientific terms over the past few weeks, and it seems clear to me that there is no way that the earth, or the sun, or even the moon could possibly stop spinning long enough for Joshua to be victorious in battle. If it did, the results would be catastrophic, to say the least. And Joshua would go down in history—if there were any history left to be recorded—as the most narcissistic man in history. He was so narcissistic that he made the sun and moon stop at his command.

That brings me to Number three: **The Believability of the Bible.** Some years ago I attended a workshop on the Book of Judges conducted by Lawson Stone who wrote an excellent commentary on Judges. His scholarship is recent; his commentary is published in 2012. He writes that the Hebrew verb for stand or stood is *damam* and it means “to be silent.” He adds that the sun and moon were Canaanite deities, so commanding the sun to *damam* would make a tremendous impression upon the Canaanites, for not only was Israel’s God dominant over the Canaanite gods of sun and moon, but Israel’s God even listened to Joshua and silenced the sun at his request.²

Several years ago, I read an article in which some government agency claimed to have “found” this “lost day.” However, Lawson Stone points out that that is nothing more than a baseless story making the rounds. Somebody was trying to prove the reliability of the Bible.

So what was going on in Joshua 10? Did the sun and the moon actually stand still?

In 2017, researchers at the University of Cambridge in Great Britain announced that they had pinpointed the date of the biblical account of Joshua stopping the sun. The sun “stopped,” they said, on October 30, 1207 BCE, exactly 3,231 years ago this coming October.³

How could researchers be so certain of the date? First of all, they weren’t trying to prove the reliability of the Bible. Rather, they were researching past movements of the sun and moon, and they discovered that Canaan experienced an eclipse on October 30, 1207 BCE.

Joshua 10 tells us the sun *stopped*. Stopped what? Stopped moving? No! That’s impossible. It stopped *shining*. The moon also stopped: it stopped in front of the sun, blocking its light. That means Joshua 10 gives us the earliest record of an eclipse.

And that brings me to my final point: **The Synchronicity of God.** Synchronicity is not just an album by The Police. Synchronicity is the simultaneous occurrence of two or more

² Lawson Stone in *The Cornerstone Commentary*, Vol. 3, pg. 102.

³ [‘Joshua stopped the sun’ 3,224 years ago today, scientists say | The Times of Israel](#). Accessed April 1, 2024.

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events which come together at just the right time, but otherwise have no discernible connection between them. Simply stated, it's a God Wink.

I imagine Joshua in battle, noticing the moon as it appears to cross the sun. And he sees a military advantage in its movement because he knows that the Canaanites revere the sun and the moon as gods. So if Joshua can demonstrate that his God Yahweh controls the sun and moon it would shake the five kings to their cores. But first, there was a violent hailstorm which claimed more lives than the swords of the Hebrews. Imagine a hailstorm raining down destruction on the Canaanites then suddenly clearing, only to be followed by an eclipse! How frightening that must have been! How sudden! And you thought the weather in the Midwest changed quickly! But the Hebrews interpreted the hailstorm and the eclipse as God intervening on their behalf, even though both events occurred naturally. But in the synchronicity of God, they happened when the Hebrews needed them the most.

Let me say a word to our atheist friends: We Christians do not have to make unscientific or unfounded claims about the Bible. However, we are claiming a mighty big God Wink. I will admit that we Christians oftentimes misunderstand the very Bible we proclaim and some of us have said ridiculous things like the sun and the moon stopped in their respective orbits. But as we better understand the language of the scriptures and the science of nature, we figure it out. That's not to say we don't believe in miracles: our faith is founded on the miracle of Christ's resurrection. But as we learn more about the Bible and science, we discover that they do not conflict with one another; rather, they complement one another. They blend together as one.

Here's the lesson for us, and it's bad news as well as good news. The bad news is that God will not stop the sun from rotating just because you asked him to. God will not stop the moon from orbiting the earth just because you want it to. But God can bring together some remarkable natural occurrences in a seemingly unrelated synchronicity to remind you that God is still in charge. God still has his eyes on you. And God still loves you and cares for you.

In a way, I find the timing of that eclipse on October 30, 1207 BCE which came right when Joshua needed it even more miraculous than if God had actually stopped the sun and moon from rotating and orbiting.

And tomorrow, as you experience the eclipse, let it remind you of Joshua 10 and the synchronicity of God. And be aware of God Winks in your own life.