

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

Sermon Title: Why Monday's Eclipse Was Not a Sign of God's Judgment But a Sign of God's Beauty, Joshua 10 and Revelation 19

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INTRODUCTION: Last Monday we saw the most incredible celestial event most of us will ever see in our lifetime. I've seen comets and falling stars, and I've seen some of the planets of our solar system through telescopes. Most of us here remember the first pictures and videos we saw coming from the moon. I once had an astronomy class where I learned that we really know very little about outer space. There are a lot of mysteries out there.

The eclipse Monday, August 21st is something I'll never forget. I had not paid much attention to the all the news building up to it, because I tend to block out media when they saturate the news with the same story over and over. And, last Sunday I stood up here and said I would be glad when it was over.

Our Wednesday night crowd knows that two weeks ago I received a package from Dr. Ming Wang with two pairs of eclipse glasses. Enclosed also was an article he wrote about the glasses and the eclipse. He said when the eclipse reaches totality, it would be OK to remove the glasses and look directly at the eclipse. I read this several times to make sure I understood it correctly. I was skeptical, but hey, an article from the world's expert himself couldn't be wrong.

I, along with others, watched through the glasses the moon slowly pass in front of the sun. When the totality hit, I took off my glasses. I was speechless except for the word WOW. It was truly God's show. It was something I'd never seen before and may never see again. I was so stunned my mind went blank and I thought of nothing else other than WOW and how we were witnessing God's precision handiwork at work.

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Before the eclipse, someone posted an article on the internet which showed a map of the United States and the northwest to southeast line of the eclipse. The map also showed the path of another eclipse several years from now which will cast the moon's shadow from northeast to southwest. The map showed an X across the country and proposed that perhaps the X meant God's judgement on America. I read the article and was not convinced. Then I began to think about the scriptures related to extraordinary events in the sky—both those that have happened and those prophesied for the future. In the next few minutes, I want to show you why Monday's eclipse was not a sign of God's judgement but of God's beauty.

The points I want to make today are the following:

1. Signs of God's judgment from the sky are not scientifically explainable.
2. We do not know when Christ will return; the scripture is clear about this.
3. God's beauty is revealed.
4. We will see the ultimate celestial phenomenon some day.

First, SIGNS OF GOD'S JUDGMENT FROM THE SKY ARE NOT SCIENTIFICALLY EXPLAINABLE.

In the Bible, there are numerous accounts of phenomenal happenings in the sky.

Example 1—The sun stood still over Gibeon.

SCRIPTURE: Joshua 10:12-14 *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!*

EXPLANATION: The earth and moon stood still. Joshua needed assistance. And, God’s judgment against his enemies was that the earth stood still for about a day while Joshua waged war.

While many listening to me might scoff at my belief that this *literally* happened, no amount of scoffing will convince me otherwise.

Let us consider: Since we have a creator who set the stars in motion, he owns them and can take them out of motion if he wants.

Also, let us consider: For the sun and moon to stand still means the earth stood still and this defies scientific explanation. The earth is spinning at just the right speed to not throw us off the planet in the way cake batter is thrown everywhere by the blades of a blender. The rotations of the earth and moon are in perfect balance. For them to stop would throw everything into utter chaos and mean death for everyone and everything.

No one can explain how the sun and moon stood still other than God did it.

Example 2— Elijah and the prophets of Baal met on the mountain.

Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a duel. Elijah challenged them to call fire out of Heaven. They called out to Baal all day long, and nothing happened. Then Elijah called fire out of Heaven. God’s judgment against the false prophets was fierce, precise, and unexplainable scientifically.

SCRIPTURE: I Kings 18:36-39 ³⁶ *At the time for the evening sacrifice, the prophet Elijah went near the altar. “LORD, you are the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel,” he prayed. “Prove that you are the God of Israel and that I am your servant. Show these people that you commanded me to do all these things.* ³⁷ *LORD, answer my prayer so these people will know that you, LORD, are God and that you will change their minds.”*

³⁸ *Then fire from the LORD came down and burned the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the ground around the altar. It also dried up the water in the ditch.*

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³⁹ *When all the people saw this, they fell down to the ground, crying, “The LORD is God! The LORD is God!”*

Example 3— In Matthew 2, wise men from the East went to Bethelhem and said they came to worship the king because they saw his star.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 2:7-10 ⁷*Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.”*

⁹ *When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy (NKJV).*

The star defies scientific explanation. This group of wise men traveled more than a thousand miles across inhospitable terrain, and we believe it may have taken them two years to make the journey.

I’ve heard several scientific explanations of the star of Bethlehem. Some believe several planets or several stars came together to form the star. Others believe a comet was actually the star. I do not believe any of this.

A group of men who knew the stars and observed them regularly would have known stars are far away and walking toward a star would be futile because of how the stars seem to move in reference to the rotation of the earth. If a telescope is on a tripod and focused on a star, you can walk away and come back in a few minutes and the star will no longer be in the line of sight of the telescope. You’ll have to move it in order to see it again. The only star that does not move is the north star because it is lined up with the north axis of Earth.

I believe the star of Bethlehem was put there by God for the sole purpose of fulfilling the prophecy and to guide people like the wise men. The star was also a

sign of judgment over Satan. It hovered there—fixed—and didn't move like other stars until it guided the wise men.

Let us consider: If God created the universe, and if the central hope of all creation was the coming of his son, Jesus Christ, then he could create a special star if he wanted.

King Herod was concerned that the wise men had come from so far because they had followed a star.

The only thing that would have convinced the wise men to make such a journey would have been an incredible sign from God— a star which they were convinced fulfilled the prophecy they knew already about. In fact, they were so convinced the Messiah had come, they brought him gifts.

I could talk more about this, and perhaps I will at another time, but let's move on to another example.

Example 4—Matthew 15 tells us as Jesus hung on the cross, the sky was dark for three hours. It could not have been a solar eclipse because the longest possible eclipse would have lasted for seven minutes and thirty-one seconds. We see God's reaction to his judgment of sin. It was dark for three hours in the middle of the day. No eyewitness said it was cloudy or hazy. It was dark. The son of God died on the cross, and nature's reaction was unexplained darkness.

We have other scientifically unexplainable phenomena in the Bible. These aren't signs of God's judgment, but they are miracles from God— the story of the ax head floating, Jesus walking on water, the healings, the miracles. They all defy human explanation.

I believe signs of nature revealing God's judgement are supernatural and cannot be explained by science, unless the Bible specifically says otherwise.

Let me move quickly –The author of the article I told you about suggested the X shadow, created by two separate eclipses, are signs of God’s judgment. In the scripture, there is no term “x-ing out” anything. The term we have is “blotting out,” which is an old form of erasing. Pslam 69, Collasians 2, and Revelation 3 all speak of “blotting out.”

Furthermore, did you know that the letter X in the language of the New Testament (which is Greek) is the sign for Christ. I’d rather see the X shadow as a symbol of Christ’s grace and mercy. Incidentally, one of my pet peeves is when people get all fired up every Christmas about the X in Xmas. X means Christ in Greek.

Here is another reason I do not believe the X shadow is a sign of God’s judgment—

Second, WE DO NOT KNOW WHEN CHRIST WILL RETURN. THE SCRIPTURE IS CLEAR ABOUT THIS.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 24:36 *“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only (ESV).*

Remember “Eighty-Eight Reasons Why Christ Will Return in 1988?” and other false predictions. The Bible tells us no one knows, not even Jesus himself. So, for us to have to wait seven years for there be another eclipse to get the second half of the shadow means we are saying Christ cannot return within the next seven years. So, in summary, to this point, I believe, according to the Bible, signs of judgment from the heavens are unexplainable scientifically and do not follow a predictable timeline.

Now let’s move on to—

Third, GOD’S BEAUTY IS REVEALED.

The sphere of the earth is the Lord’s. Ancient people did not believe there was a flat earth. The belief God put the heaven in place is a medieval concept. Isaiah 40 and five other verses reference the earth as round.

We have nine planets in our solar system (although Pluto goes on and off the list), and some of these planets have moons. I saw a photo from one of our spacecrafts on Mars which took a photo of an eclipse. The moon was too small and oblong for a total eclipse to happen.

Of all the planets and all the moons, we live on the **only** planet with a moon that is 400 times smaller than the sun and 400 times closer to earth, therefore creating an absolute and perfect eclipse. In fact, it is so perfect that close observation through a telescope will show sunlight passing through the moons mountains and valleys just before totality. In fact, it is SO PERFECT we can take off our glasses and look directly at the sun's corona with no fear of going blind. If the moon were slightly closer to earth or the sun were slightly larger, there would be no totality. If the moon were slightly farther away from earth or the sun were slight smaller, there would be no eclipse. But the exact precision of it all is absolutely mind-blowing. The mechanical cogs and springs of a windup watch are quite incredible, but they are nothing compared to the precision of God's handiwork.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 19:1 ¹ *“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (ESV).*

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 1:16-17 ¹⁶ *“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (ESV).*

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:3 ³ *“By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” (ESV).*

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 8:3 ³ *When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,*

What if we did not have that precision? What if we found out that another planet had such precision and experienced an eclipse we would never experience? We'd feel short-changed. Listen, God provided his show for the world to see what the Bible tells us – precision and intentional order of all things. Seeing it with my own guys gave me a new respect for God's precision in his order of things.

I was with some kids, and I told them not to look without their glasses. When the totality happened and we took off our glasses, we were stunned. Your preacher ran out of words except for WOW! Around the neighborhood, I heard cheers. Later I thought about the joy God must have when one part of his creation (us) cheered at another part of his creation. There was excitement that even came from non-believers.

You know, while it was happening, no one could have stopped it. Man had absolutely no control whatsoever over what was happening in space. All of man's knowledge, wisdom, and power could do nothing more than stare in awe. It was God's show in all his splendor. I'm glad I didn't miss it.

Lastly, WITH EVERYONE LOOKING UPWARD, I THOUGHT ABOUT THE ULTIMATE CELESTIAL PHENOMENON WE WILL SEE SOME DAY.

The book of Revelation predicts scientifically unexplainable things happening in the sky. Since the early believers received the Revelation from John who was exiled on the island of Patmos, people have pondered its meaning. I tend to believe the earlier Christians understood it better than we do, but there is a particular celestial phenomenon that will happen someday. It will defy scientific explanation, and it will usher in joy for believers and the impending judgment over Satan.

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 19:11-16 ¹¹ *And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.*

¹² *His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.*

¹³ *And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.*

¹⁴ *And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.*

¹⁵ *And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.*

¹⁶ *And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. (King James Version)*

CALL TO ACTION: While looking upward, I thought of the return of Christ. I stood there with children. But, there will be a huge difference between Monday's eclipse and Jesus' return. Last Monday, everyone was awestruck and amazed. I didn't hear one negative comment. There may have been a curmudgeon somewhere who was unimpressed and if so, there is no hope for him.

When Jesus returns, believers will know it. We will be excited, and non-believers will try to run and hide. In the same way, no one could have stopped Monday's eclipse. Absolutely no one will be able to stop the return of Christ.

As I told you earlier, I was rather unprepared for last Monday and almost missed it because my mind was full of the events of the week. Even though it was predicted down to the last second, I hadn't paid any attention until Monday morning. Had I educated myself and been better prepared, I would have enjoyed and appreciated it more.

But, with the return of Jesus, I am as prepared as I know to be. I trust Jesus to be my Savior. On the day of Christ's return, I won't "almost miss it" because no one will miss it. We know he's coming, but we don't know when. He gives us signs—wars

and rumors of wars, earthquakes, and so on. A list of signs in the Bible is not hard to find.

Regarding the second coming of Christ, you might be like I was about last Monday. You may have heard about the return of Christ someday, but maybe you've not paid much attention to it. The trouble for you is... that day will be dreadful if you are not prepared.

Monday, we knew right down to the last second when the eclipse would occur, and we had a long time to prepare. With the return of Jesus, we don't know when he will return, but we have a lifetime to prepare. You may have listened only peripherally about the return of Jesus, but today you've heard the truth—Jesus will return someday. Will you be ready?

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Nashville, Tennessee
USA