



Thoughts Sparked by the Collapse of the Key Bridge

The Wired Word for the Week of April 7, 2024

In the News

On March 26, at 1:28 a.m. EDT, the container ship *MV Dali* struck one of the piers of the Francis Scott Key Bridge across the Patapsco River near Baltimore, Maryland, causing the main spans and the three spans nearest the northeast approach to collapse into the river. The accident pinned the bow of the ship under one of the spans and killed six members of an eight-man repair crew working on the bridge roadway.

The bridge, named for Francis Scott Key who penned the "The Defense of Fort M'Henry," the poem upon which the U.S. national anthem "The Star-Spangled Banner" is based, opened in 1977, and ran for 1.6 miles from Hawkins Point, Baltimore, to Sollers Point in Dundalk, crossing the Patapsco River, and carrying the four lanes of Interstate 695, the beltway around Baltimore. The two lanes of traffic in each direction were used by approximately 34,000 vehicles each day.

The river is a vital shipping route giving access to the Port of Baltimore, which is one of the busiest in the United States. In 2023, the port handled more than 444,000 passengers and 52.3 million tons of foreign cargo valued at \$80 billion. It was the leading U.S. port for automobiles and light trucks for the preceding 13 consecutive years. The port employed 15,000 people and indirectly supported 140,000 others.

The *MV Dali* is a 980-foot-long Singapore-flagged container ship. It is owned by Grace Ocean Private Ltd. of Singapore, and leased to the Danish shipping company Maersk. It passed two port inspections in 2023. At the time of the collision with the bridge, it was headed outbound from the Port of Baltimore, with two maritime pilots aboard (a pilot is a licensed local mariner with specific knowledge of a congested waterway who boards a ship to guide her safe passage).

Before coming to the bridge, the ship suffered a "complete blackout" and began to drift out of the shipping channel. The pilots and the ship's master sent a warning to the Maryland Department of Transportation that control of the vessel had been lost and that a collision with the bridge was possible, which led to traffic being halted at both ends of the bridge and accounts for why the victim count was not significantly higher.

The ship's crew also dropped its port anchor in an attempt to reduce the ship's speed.

At the time of the impact, the work crew members were on break, sitting in their vehicles. Two were rescued from the river, one having no injuries and the other critically injured. The other six were initially reported missing, but two bodies were eventually recovered. The other four are presumed dead, probably in their vehicles, which are now under many tons of steel from the bridge in locations that divers cannot safely reach until the wreckage of the bridge is removed.

The six workers who died were all immigrants, natives of Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. Some of them had come to the United States illegally, but all were working legally. *The Washington Post* reported that about 39% of the workforce in the construction industry around Baltimore and Washington, D.C. -- some 130,000 people -- are immigrants. These six were all family men who sent money back to their home countries, as well.

No one aboard the ship, which has a crew composed of Indian nationals and one Sri Lankan national, was seriously hurt.

Much of the Port of Baltimore remains closed to shipping as a result of the collapse. Wes Moore, the Maryland governor, called the event a "global crisis." President Biden announced he would ask Congress to fund the reconstruction, and the U.S. Department of Transportation has issued a downpayment of \$60 million to begin the work. The closure of the waterway is causing estimated losses of \$15 million per day and bodes a significant disruption of the global supply chain.

Workers cleared a second channel last Tuesday, allowing a limited amount of traffic to bypass the collapsed sections of the bridge. Work has commenced on clearing the main channel, which will allow larger ships through, but no estimated completion date has been set.

The accident is getting a lot of play among conspiracy theorists. *Wired* notes, "A non-exhaustive list of things that are getting blamed for the bridge collapse on Telegram and X include President Biden, Hamas, ISIS, P. Diddy, Nickelodeon, India, former president Barack Obama, Islam, aliens, Sri Lanka, the World Economic Forum, the United Nations, Wokeness, Ukraine, foreign aid, the CIA, Jewish people, Israel, Russia, China, Iran, Covid vaccines, DEI, immigrants, Black people, and lockdowns."

Some conspiracy theorists are even calling the collision a "black swan" event. That term is usually saved for a major global event, usually in the financial markets, that can cause significant damage to a country's economy. But more recently, the term has been fixed on by some of the conspiracy-minded to describe "an event triggered by the so-called deep state that would signal an imminent revolution, a third world war, or some other apocalyptic catastrophe," *Wired* said.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Crews Work to Open Temporary Channel Near Baltimore Bridge Collapse for Essential Vessels. *CNN*](#)

[The Baltimore Bridge Collapse Is About to Get Even Messier. *Wired*](#)

[Maryland Governor Praises Ship Crew in Bridge Disaster. *Jolt of Joyful*](#)

[Bridge Collapse Brings Stark Reminder of Immigrant Workers' Vulnerabilities. *The Washington Post*](#)

[Online Conspiracies About the Baltimore Bridge Collapse Are Out of Control. *Wired*](#)

[Ships Have Become Supersized Since Baltimore Bridge Was Built. *The Wall Street Journal*](#)

The Big Questions

1. How do accidents and chance calamities fit into the world God has made?
2. What might it mean for how you live your daily life that no individual, group or government can guarantee favorable outcomes?
3. What role does your trust in God play when faced with a personal catastrophe?
4. Why do you think the ship's collision with the bridge has triggered so many conspiracy theories? What causes some people to jump to such theories when available evidence indicates a simpler and less sinister explanation?
5. How do we/they manage when we know a lot, but it is still not enough in unexpected situations? How do we accept our human limitations?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Ecclesiastes 9:11-12

Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful, but time and chance happen to them all. For no one can anticipate one's time. Like fish taken in a cruel net or like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them. (For context, read [Ecclesiastes 9:1-12](#).)

From what we know of the crash of the ship into the bridge, the whole incident appears to be an accident that might not have been able to be headed off in advance. The ship, which had passed recent inspections, lost total electrical power from its two diesel generators for a reason or reasons not currently known. Video indicates that power was restored for a short time, but it is not known if this was from the back-up or main diesel generators. The captain, crew, and the pilot (and his apprentice) apparently followed established emergency procedures. They issued warnings that caused the bridge to be closed to traffic, but there was no provision to get a warning to the workers on the bridge roadway.

The National Transportation Safety Board indicates that the [Key Bridge, opened in 1977, was constructed prior to the introduction of redundant support structures](#), which are now widely used in modern bridges, and would have prevented such a collapse. And [today's container ships, including the *Dali*, are supersized compared](#) to those in service when the Key Bridge was built.

Thus, the observation of the writer of Ecclesiastes that "time and chance happen to ... all" causing "mortals [to be] snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them."

Questions: What might "preparedness" -- both physically and spiritually -- mean for the chance mishaps of your life? What do you think God might want us to learn from the uncertainty of life?

1 Kings 9:15-23

This is the account of the forced labor that King Solomon conscripted to build the house of the LORD and his own house, [several cities,] and whatever Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion.

All the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, who were not of the people of Israel -- their descendants who were still left in the land, whom the Israelites were unable to destroy completely -- these Solomon conscripted for slave labor, and so they are to this day.

But of the Israelites Solomon made no slaves; they were the soldiers; they were his officials, his commanders, his captains, and the commanders of his chariotry and cavalry. These were the chief officers who were over Solomon's work: five hundred fifty who had charge of the people who carried on the work. (No context needed.)

During the reign of King Solomon over Israel, he carried on a great number of construction projects, including the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, a palace for himself and numerous cities throughout his kingdom. Here, the writer of 1 Kings reports that Solomon enslaved "All the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, who were not of the people of Israel," to do the construction work under the supervision of Israelites "who had charge of the people who carried on the work."

(This isn't quite the whole story, however, for in 1 Kings 5:13-14, the writer had already written that "King Solomon conscripted forced labor out of all Israel; the levy numbered thirty thousand men. He sent them to the Lebanon, ten thousand a month in shifts; they would be a month in the Lebanon and two months at home")

In any case, it appears that in addition to the Israelites who were subject to forced labor and heavy taxes to support Solomon's projects, many enslaved foreigners were involved in the construction work as well. From the chapter 9 reading, we gather that the primary difference between the Israelite workers and foreign workers was that the Israelites, though forced to labor, were not enslaved.

However, while not spelled out in the scripture, it's likely that when it came to dangerous tasks where the workers' lives were at stake, those jobs were assigned to the foreigners. After all, they were described above as those "who were still left in the land, whom the Israelites were unable to destroy completely." In other words, they were expendable.

We are not suggesting that anyone was treating the immigrant workers on the bridge as expendable, but there is a common perception that immigrants will often work for lower wages (as well as accept poorer working conditions) than native-born Americans are accustomed to.

Questions: Are there any lessons to be drawn from the loss of life among the immigrant workers during the bridge collapse? If so, what are they? If not, why do you think this question arises?

Isaiah 8:11-15 (The Message)

GOD spoke strongly to me, grabbed me with both hands and warned me not to go along with this people. He said: "Don't be like this people, always afraid somebody is plotting against them."

Don't fear what they fear. Don't take on their worries. If you're going to worry, worry about The Holy [God]. Fear GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies. The Holy can be either a Hiding Place or a Boulder blocking your way, The Rock standing in the willful way of both houses of Israel, A barbed-wire Fence preventing trespass to the citizens of Jerusalem. Many of them are going to run into that Rock and get their bones broken, Get tangled up in that barbed wire and not get free of it." (For context, read [Isaiah 8:1-15](#).)

This is part of a decree from God during a time when the kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and of Aram (Syria) were threatening the Southern Kingdom of Judah. God, through Isaiah, was warning Judah's King Ahaz that he should not seek an alliance with powerful Assyria but should rely on the Lord alone for Jerusalem's defense. Here God tells Ahaz "Don't be like this people [Ahaz's subjects] always afraid somebody is plotting against them. Don't fear what they fear. Don't take on their worries."

For clarity of reading, we have quoted this passage from *The Message*, which is a paraphrase of the biblical text. Reading the underlying Hebrew literally, the statement "Don't be like this people always afraid somebody is plotting against them" reads "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy. ..."

God wasn't urging Ahaz to be naive, but neither was God calling for Ahaz to be driven by his fears and a suspicious nature.

Questions: Why do you think the bridge accident has spawned so many conspiracy theories? What suspicions and fears underlie conspiratorial thinking? How can we tell when our suspicions and fears are pushing us too far? When have suspicion and fear served us well?

John 16:33 (NIV)

In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (For context, read [John 16:25-33](#).)

Jesus made this statement to his disciples in the week leading to his crucifixion. His words were intended to prepare them for the time after his departure when they would face persecution for proclaiming the gospel. He was not referring to natural disasters or accidents, but to the deeds of hostile individuals. Still, his warning has an application to all aspects of life on earth. He said, "In this world you will have trouble." Not, "You may have a few problems." Not, "You may have an occasional irritation." Not, "You may have a few sad moments." But, "You will have trouble." Let's not gloss over that assertion: *You will have trouble.*

Notice that Jesus does not offer them even one suggestion on how to escape that trouble. He does say, "But take heart! I have overcome the world."

The bridge collapse reminds us that many troubles are not easily or quickly fixed. Likewise, our catastrophes -- the death of a loved one, a home-destroying storm, marital unfaithfulness and breakup, a feared medical diagnosis, etc. -- don't end so quickly.

Questions: How do these words of Jesus help you when you are facing personal loss or other troubles? What resources does our faith provide to carry us in such long and trying times?

For Further Discussion

1. Read and discuss this article: [The Baltimore Bridge Collapse Is About to Get Even Messier.](#)
2. Respond to this: It's not that uncommon for one or more workers to die during major construction projects. Five workers died during the construction of the Empire State Building, 20 constructing the Brooklyn Bridge, 96 building the Hoover Dam and approximately 1,200 building the Transcontinental Railroad. There has been some decrease in numbers dying in more recent times due to better safety regulations, improved labor rights and better equipment, but still, construction remains a dangerous occupation. In 2022, 1,069 construction professionals died while working, a rate of 9.6 fatalities per 100,000 full-time workers, according to a report released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
3. Respond to this from TWW consultant (and retired Navy officer) James Gruetzner. "After reading the list of 'conspiracy theories' from *Wired*, I think that a better term would be 'initial speculations.' Most of these were quickly ruled out, and didn't spread much. For example, the speculation that Ukraine caused the mishap was based upon information that a Ukrainian national was master of *MV Dali*: It was quickly noted that it was back in 2016 -- for five months -- that the man was master. ('Master' is the correct term for the person in charge of a merchant vessel, while the 'captain' is in charge of a military vessel.) However, the use of the term 'conspiracy theory' can easily be misused. Since conspiracies -- and underhanded dealings -- really exist, labeling something a 'conspiracy theory' can cause people to shy away from investigating -- or even considering -- the underlying claim. So, if you're ever conspiring to do something illegitimate, be sure you quickly label anyone who detects what your group is doing as a 'conspiracy theorist.' They're likely to stop investigating -- and anyone reporting on the idea is likely to be dismissive of the possibility. It's effective propaganda."
4. Consider this: The crew is still on the *MV Dali*, and, while they have food and water and relative safety, they are from India and their families/communities rely upon the relatively strong pay they send or bring home. Many among the crews of other ships trapped in Baltimore are also from overseas and are now in limbo concerning their future.

Responding to the News

1. Most American port cities have organizations to assist visiting merchant ship crews. Two local Baltimore organizations have been prominent in assisting in this time of crisis. Should you desire to donate to help, their websites are:
 - [Baltimore International Seafarers' Center](#)
 - [Apostleship of the Sea](#)
2. What has your congregation done to prepare for some unexpected catastrophe? Fire? A shooting attack during a worship service? A collapse of part of the building? Several staff

members dying in a car wreck? These things happen. Is your congregation financially and spiritually prepared for such disasters?

3. We are told "to plant a tree is to hope, as well as to live each day like it is our last." What hopeful things will you do and say today?

Prayer

Almighty God, you are a firm foundation for us, in every time and situation. Help us to build on the rock of your word, and to live faithfully as disciples of your Son. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Other News This Week

Experts Urge Caution While Viewing Solar Eclipse

The Wired Word for the Week of April 7, 2024

In the News

On the afternoon of April 8, when sighted people look heavenward to view a total solar eclipse, they must take precautions to protect their eyes from the harmful rays of the sun. Blind or visually impaired people won't have the same challenges, but they haven't always been able to experience celestial events in ways that make sense to them. Now, thanks to new sound and touch devices, they can hear and feel the eclipse for themselves.

"Eclipses are very beautiful things, and everyone should be able to experience it once in their lifetime," said Yuki Hatch, a senior at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Austin, Texas. Her dream is to one day work as a computer scientist for NASA. On eclipse day, she plans to listen to a LightSound box translate bright light into high flute notes, dimming light into the sounds of a clarinet, and darkness into low clicks.

Wanda Díaz-Merced, an astronomer who is blind, and Harvard astronomer Allyson Bieryla, developed the LightSound handheld device, which launched for the 2017 total solar eclipse. This year, they hope to distribute some 750 devices across the path of totality in Mexico, the United States and Canada.

"The sky belongs to everyone. And if this event is available to the rest of the world, it has to be available for the blind, too," said Díaz-Merced. "I want students to be able to hear the eclipse, to hear the stars."

The Cadence tablet from Indiana's Tactile Engineering is designed to make experiencing the solar eclipse accessible through the sense of touch.

"A student can put their hand over the device and feel the moon slowly move over the sun," said Wunji Lau, a spokesperson for Tactile Engineering..

A solar eclipse occurs when the moon passes directly between the sun and the earth, keeping the sun's rays from reaching the earth's surface. Depending on where you are on the planet, you may experience a total solar eclipse, when the moon completely blocks the sun, or a partial eclipse, when the moon covers part of the luminary. Weather permitting, people in the path of totality may see the sun's outer atmosphere (the corona), which is not usually visible, because the surface of the sun below it is so much brighter.

Tyler Nordgren, an astronomer at the University of Redlands, said a total solar eclipse "is this incredible multi-sensory experience that absolutely no photograph can do justice." Experts suggest skywatchers may want to bring a blanket or coat, since temperatures drop precipitously as the moon covers the face of the sun. People should also keep their ears open for the sounds of nocturnal wildlife who may wake up, thinking it's nighttime, while animals normally active during the day may head off to bed.

Although total solar eclipses happen every year or two somewhere in the world, many aren't seen because they happen over oceans, unpopulated deserts or mountainous regions. The last total solar eclipse in North America happened in 2017, and the next won't happen until August 23, 2044.

The 2017 total solar eclipse was the first to happen over the United States since 1979 and the first one since 1918 to span the entire continent.

The Great North American Eclipse (as tomorrow's solar eclipse has been dubbed) will be visible across parts of Mexico and move northeastward, passing over 13 U.S. states from Texas to Maine into the maritime provinces of Canada before exiting over the Atlantic Ocean. Those who are in the path of the eclipse may experience total darkness up to four minutes, 28 seconds, depending on their location. In 2017, the longest period of total darkness occurred near Carbondale, Illinois, for two minutes, 42 seconds.

That year, the path of totality ranged from about 62 to 71 miles wide. During this month's eclipse, the path over North America will be between 108 and 122 miles wide and pass over more densely populated areas, where an estimated 31.6 million people live. Another 150 million live within 200 miles of the path of totality. That means nearly everyone who lives in the United States, including parts of Alaska and Hawaii, will be able to see the partial or total eclipse from their homes. In 2017, only about 12 million lived within the path of totality, with another 40 million within a few hours' driving distance.

If you plan to join the millions of skygazers, you must take precautions to protect your eyes with ISO-certified eclipse glasses compliant with the ISO 12312-2 international safety standard or specialized solar lenses for cameras, binoculars or telescopes. Ordinary sunglasses are not sufficient.

According to Matt Bothwell, a public astronomer at Cambridge's Institute of Astronomy, "Looking at any amount of sun is really dangerous, so you should be getting eclipse glasses to watch the progress of the moon over the face of the sun."

Looking directly at the sun without proper eye protection can cause severe and permanent damage to the eyes.

The only time eclipse glasses can be safely removed is during the few minutes when the moon totally covers the sun. Skywatchers must cover their eyes with safe solar viewing glasses or a safe handheld solar viewer at all times to view the partial phases of the solar eclipse. Another way to experience a solar eclipse is to use an indirect viewing method, such as a pinhole projector.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[How to View April's Total Solar Eclipse, Online and In Person. *Wired*](#)

[How the 2024 Total Solar Eclipse Is Different Than the 2017 Eclipse. *NASA*](#)
[Eclipse 101. *NASA*](#)

[Blind People Can Hear and Feel April's Total Solar Eclipse With New Technology. *AP News*](#)
[Suppliers of Safe Solar Viewers & Filters. *American Astronomical Society*](#)

Applying the News Story

Scientists strongly caution skywatchers of the need to respect the power of the sun's rays. No one should gaze directly at the sun without the right eye protection, since immediate and permanent damage to the optic nerve can result.

People in some ancient cultures taught their children to stay indoors during a solar eclipse, because they had learned that the sun was both beneficial to them and also potentially dangerous.

Paul taught that the sun has a particular glory, as do other heavenly bodies, such as the moon and stars ([1 Corinthians 15:40-41](#)).

If it is wise to respect the forces of nature God created (whether the sun, wind, ocean waves, gravity, plants and animals large and small, etc.) because they have the potential to help or hurt us, it is even wiser to respect the God who made the universe. Biblical figures understood this, even though they didn't always act on that understanding.

Our scripture section focuses on the human desire to see the glory of God, and the recognition that, barring divine intervention on our behalf, we can't see the fullness of God's glory and live.

If looking at the created heavenly body which is our sun can blind us, what would happen if we were to look straight into the face of God? Yet in the face of Jesus, we do see God revealed, and we are not destroyed.

The Big Questions

1. Do celestial events such as eclipses have any meaning beyond the movement of the planetary system? What meaning do you attach to celestial events such as eclipses? What questions do they raise for you?

2. Why might events like an eclipse inspire the fear or awe of God, or a greater respect for God in people? What other feelings might such events evoke?
3. How might your faith give you a sense of your place in the universe? What thoughts arise for you when you "look at [God's] heavens, the work of [God's] fingers" (Psalm 8:3)?
4. Why do some people view a grand event in nature and see only the wonder of nature while other people view the same event and see the glory of God? What changes one's perception?
5. How have you seen God's nature revealed through creation?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Exodus 33:18-23

Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you the name, 'The LORD,' and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one shall see me and live." And the LORD continued, "See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen." (No context needed.)

When we read a passage in which the writer uses anthropomorphic terms, we must remember that God is spirit ([John 4:24](#)), and as such, cannot be adequately described using such language. But the metaphors (God's face, back and hand) are meant to teach us something about God in words we can understand, at least in part.

Moses desired to know God more fully, and he realized that could only happen if God was willing to reveal more of himself to him.

Questions: What might it mean when God declines to give us what we ask for in prayer, and gives us something different? How might seeing the Lord's face be similar to gazing at the sun? What protection did God provide Moses so that he would not be harmed by seeing more of God's glory? How does God protect us when we ask for things that could cause us injury?

Judges 6:22-24

Then Gideon perceived that it was the angel of the LORD, and Gideon said, "Help me, Lord GOD! For I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face." But the LORD said to him, "Peace be to you; do not fear; you shall not die." Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, "The LORD is peace." To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites. (For context, read [Judges 6:11-24](#).)

In this passage, the angel of God commissioned Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites. Gideon had a rather timid nature, and needed confirmation that it was really God speaking to him before he could feel confident enough to take on the Midianites. So he asked the angel for

permission to prepare a meal for him. When it was ready, he brought it to the angel, who touched the meat and unleavened cakes with his staff, setting them on fire, before he disappeared from Gideon's sight.

Realizing that he had been visited by the angel of the Lord, Gideon thought he would surely die, and he called out to God for help. Just as God had shown mercy to Moses, he reassured Gideon that he would not die, though he had seen the angel of the Lord face to face. The name Gideon gave the altar he built is evidence of the comfort and peace he found in the words of God.

Questions: When, if ever, have you had an encounter with God that filled you with fear? What, if anything, allayed that fear, so that you could accept God's commission to serve the Lord?

Psalms 19:1, 3-6

*The heavens are telling the glory of God,
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. ...
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth
and their words to the end of the world.
In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
Its rising is from the end of the heavens
and its circuit to the end of them,
and nothing is hid from its heat.*
(For context, read [Psalm 19:1-6](#).)

The Hebrew title for the book of Psalms is *Tehillim*, which is translated as "praises." Together, this collection of praise songs served as the hymnbook of the people of Israel. Psalm 19 begins by saying that the "heavens are telling the glory of God," making the point that the heavens themselves are praising God. In addition, "the firmament" (arch of the sky or space) proclaims God's handiwork. The heavens speak of God without words, "yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world."

During a total solar eclipse, the Earth is momentarily "hid" from the sun's heat. Perhaps that is one reason eclipses have at times struck fear into the hearts of Earth's inhabitants.

Questions: How have you experienced the heavens "telling the glory of God," and, if so, when? What is the message of God's vast universe to you, a message that is spoken without words?

Isaiah 60:1-2, 19-20

*Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth
and thick darkness the peoples,
but the LORD will arise upon you,*

*and his glory will appear over you. ...
The sun shall no longer be
your light by day,
nor for brightness shall the moon
give light to you by night,
but the LORD will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.
Your sun shall no more go down
or your moon withdraw itself,
for the LORD will be your everlasting light,
and your days of mourning shall be ended.*

(For context, read [Isaiah 60:1-5, 19-20](#).)

Revelation 21:23

And the [holy] city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. (For context, read [Revelation 21:10-11, 22-27](#).)

The prophet Isaiah described "thick darkness" that covered the earth, perhaps the way the earth is covered by darkness during a total solar eclipse. But just as a solar eclipse does not last forever, Isaiah declares that "the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory shall appear over you," the way the sun rises in all its glory.

The physical celestial bodies of the sun and the moon will not be the source of light for God's people, but the Lord himself promises to be their light and their glory for eternity. The passage from Revelation seems to build on Isaiah's prophecy, and on the statement in [1 John 1:5](#) that "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all."

Questions: What does it mean to you that "the LORD will be your everlasting light"? What might it mean that Isaiah repeated that statement? In what area of your life do you most need the light of the Lord right now?

For Further Discussion

1. For proof that experts do sometimes make mistakes, read ["Eclipse Path and Date Miscalculated"](#) from The University of Vermont Department of Physics.

2. "Imagine standing in one of these gorgeous locations with tens of thousands, if not potentially 100,000 people in the area, and all of us looking up at the sky in unison and going 'wow,'" Tyler Nordgren, an astronomer at the University of Redlands, said in anticipation of the 2017 total solar eclipse that swept across the United States from coast to coast.

"Not since the space program, not since the moon landing, ... has [there] been a [comparable] moment of shared joy, awe, and wonder," Nordgren continued. "It doesn't matter who you are, where you live, what you believe or who you voted for, this is going to be something that we all get to share together. It will be awe-inspiring and I mean that 'awe' in the original, moving-you-to-tears sense of 'awe.'"

When, if ever, have you felt a sense of communal "joy, awe, and wonder"? What was the

occasion? Was the experience ephemeral, or did it leave a lasting impression on you and others? What did you take away from that experience?

3. TWW team member Frank Ramirez writes, "I'm looking forward to this year's eclipse. We drove down to Kentucky for the last one, and I have to say it was a deeply religious experience. ... I had a real sense of our Earth in its orbit, a sense of cosmic immensity and, *a la* [Psalm 8](#), deep gratitude that God is mindful of us and helps us discover and appreciate our place in the universe."

When have natural wonders caused you to rethink your own place in the world? When have they helped you see your role as one of God's creations?

4. Comment on this: A TWW team member who was keeping bees in the 1990s said that when an eclipse occurred, the bees seemed to fall asleep. They simply ceased to do work until the eclipse ended. Bees see in the ultraviolet range so that they are able to navigate by the sun on a cloudy day, but, says our team member, "I was fascinated as a beekeeper that the bees evidently were blinded into thinking the sun had set."

5. The gospel writer tells us in John 1:6-9 that "came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."

In other words, John the Baptist was the "moon" to Jesus' "sun." Further on in this gospel, John, referring to Jesus, also said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Essentially, the moon's role is to reflect the light of the sun. It has no light of its own. So there is a sense in which during a solar eclipse, the moon is going rogue, where instead of reflecting the light of the sun, it is blocking it.

When might we, like the moon, go rogue, and instead of reflecting the light of Christ, block it? How might we get in the way of the light God is shining on the Earth, so that we eclipse the warmth of God's love?

Into what place of darkness do you have the opportunity to reflect the light of Christ? How do you do so?

6. Reflect on this, from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, by C.S. Lewis:

"Aslan is a lion -- the Lion, the great Lion."

"Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he -- quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

Responding to the News

1. You may wish to worship the Creator by singing a hymn such as "All Creatures of Our God and King," "Fairest Lord Jesus" ("Beautiful Savior") or "Earth and All Stars."

2. How might we react if eclipses lasted longer than hours or minutes? If natural phenomena can cause humanity such concern, imagine what would happen if God withdrew his light and love

from the world. Consider taking time during the eclipse to thank God for the many ways he provides for Earth's inhabitants and sustains the systems that make our existence possible.

Prayer

Creator God, as we gaze into the heavens and marvel at the wonders of the universe, give us a healthy respect not only for nature, but for you who made it all. Help us not to get in the way of your light, but instead reflect your light to those in darkness. In the name of Jesus, the Light of the world. Amen.

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