



February 23, 2024

### **Astronomical Events**

Warm hellos once again friends, brethren, fellow laborers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God from here on the Gulf Coast. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

Over the years in sermon messages I've discussed the background of David as a shepherd. While caring for the flock he oversaw David talked with God in prayer, and also mused, meditated, and pondered the heavens, stars, and how small in comparison man indeed is. (Psalm 8:3-7) No doubt most of us have done the same at some point in our Christian lives.

We live in a time when not only are movies popular but many write and speak about what's going on in the heavens, as well as the galaxy around us.

Astronomical events have captured the attention of people over the centuries. Remember the visit of the Hale Bop Comet? It was perhaps the most widely observed comet of the 20th century and one of the brightest seen for many decades. It was visible to the naked eye for a record 18 months, twice as long as the previous record holder, the Great Comet of 1811. There were some in the religious realm who made some rather outrageous claims about the Hale Bop Comet and its significance.

In 1799 events in the heavens caught the attention of people in Northeastern U.S. The sun was greatly obscured, the moon took on a bloody red color and stars appeared to fall from the sky. A number of ministers were quick to connect the unusual events to prophecies in the bible. In reality, the dark day was caused by the buildup of soot and other particles in the upper atmosphere as a result of large forest fires. In addition thick fog and cloud cover contributed to the phenomenon of the darkness. The red moon which followed was as a result of the

same atmospheric conditions. In 1799, there was a significant meteor shower, the Leonids, which occurs every 33 years, and appeared to many observers to be “stars falling”.

You may have heard of the Leonids. The Leonids is a prolific meteor shower associated with the comet Tempel-Tuttle. The Leonids get their name from the location of their radiance in the constellation Leo: the meteors appear to radiate from that point in the sky. They peak in the month of November. The Leonids are famous because their meteor showers, or storms, can be among the most spectacular. Over a three-night span from November 10th through November 12th, 1833, people looking skyward witnessed what is still considered to be one of the greatest astronomical spectacles in recorded history. On November 11th and 12th of that year countless meteors shot across the night sky, catching many people's attention and interest. People knelt down and prayed or flocked to churches, thinking that the “Day of Judgment” was at hand.

Although not always a completely accurate source, in this case Wikipedia states, "The meteor storm of 1833 was of truly superlative strength. One estimate is over one hundred thousand meteors an hour, but another, done as the storm abated, estimated in excess of two hundred thousand meteors an hour over the entire region of North America east of the Rocky Mountains. It was marked by the Native Americans, abolitionists like Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass and slave-owners and others. Near Independence, Missouri, it was taken as a sign to push the growing Mormon community out of the area. The founder and first leader of Mormonism, Joseph Smith, noted in his journal that this event was a literal fulfillment of the word of God and a sure sign that the coming of Christ is close at hand."

These events influenced and helped launch the teachings of William Miller. He made a study of the prophecies of Daniel 8 and Revelation and became convinced that the coming of Christ was likely to occur about the year 1843. During one of his messages, and shortly following the 1833 Leonid display, Miller stated, "We pronounce the raining of fire which we saw on Wednesday morning last, an awful

type, a sure forerunner - a merciful sign of the great and dreadful day which the inhabitants of the earth will witness when the Sixth Seal shall be opened. The time is just at hand described, not only in the New Testament, but in the Old. A more correct picture of a fig tree casting its leaves when blown by a mighty wind is not possible to behold." (Connecticut Observer, November 25, 1833) He went on to state, "between March 21, 1843, to March 21, 1844, which was the beginning and ending of the Jewish year, a great trumpet from heaven would sound; Jesus Christ would catch up the faithful, and those left behind would be destroyed by fire." (Apocalypse Now? Part I - The Great Disappointment)

March 21st, 1844, passed without significant events. Miller lost credibility. Still many thought they were living at the time very close to the return of Christ. However, one of Miller's associates, Samuel Snow, reexamined the prophecy in Daniel and he was convinced that Miller was off by one year in his calculations. Snow was now convinced that Christ would return on October 22, 1844, which he erroneously considered the Jewish Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement fell on September 23 that year. Miller supported his conclusions and again predicted Christ was about to return. Again, October 22, 1844 came and went with no appearance of Christ or ascension of the waiting faithful. This failure of the prophesied events to take place became known as the "Great Disappointment."

Scriptures do describe some profound astronomical events that will take place, including the moon turning to blood. "*The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.*" (Joel 2:31) What causes the moon to be turned to blood or rather its appearance to take on a reddish color? Is it caused by a total eclipse of the moon or by some other circumstance? We will continue with some thoughts next time...

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.



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