

THE HEAVENLY CATHEDRAL

By Michael J. Caba

I can recall times while working at a public astronomical observatory that I would hear people express their overwhelming feelings of wonder and awe at the splendor of the heavenly cathedral displayed above them. At times the sight of such objects as Saturn or Jupiter even elicited joking accusations from viewers that the view was not actually real, that the staff was providing a pristine but artificial look at the celestial orb. Further, some urban dwellers were pleasantly astonished to actually see for the first time the stream of the Milky Way stretching across the dark night sky. Further still, it was not uncommon for those who partook of these spectacles to express feelings, or to ask questions, that had spiritual—or even tangibly religious—overtones. Interestingly enough, these types of sentiments strongly resonate with Psalm 19:1, which says, “The heavens declare the glory of God.” Let us then embark on an exploration of the glory of God as it shines through His manifold witness in the stars.

Ancient and Modern Viewers

To begin with, it should be noted that ancient and modern viewers have encountered similar but nevertheless distinct views of the sky. The views are similar in the sense that the same objects have been available to the unaided eye for both groups of people. For example, modern observers can readily see the Pleiades star cluster and the Orion constellation, and the Scriptures called out these same two entities for ancient observers: “He who made the

Pleiades and Orion, . . . the LORD is his name” (Am 5:8).¹ Thus, modern and ancient people have shared a common heavenly scene. On the other hand, earlier people had the distinct advantage of very dark skies whose grandeur was not diminished in any manner by electrical lighting, while present-day people have fantastic instruments that can reach into depths of space never grasped or even imagined by our forebearers.

Lift Up Your Eyes

Many people who have entered a dark-sky area far from city lights, perhaps on a camping trip, can recount the experience of looking upward to observe the vastly increased quantity of stars as compared with the token number visible in well-lit cities. This heightened view often calls forth exclamations of surprise and even joy; yet, for premodern viewers this celestial cathedral was a nightly occurrence. Accordingly, through the ancient prophet Isaiah the Lord said,

Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:

Who created all these?

He who brings out the starry host one by one
and calls forth each of them by name.

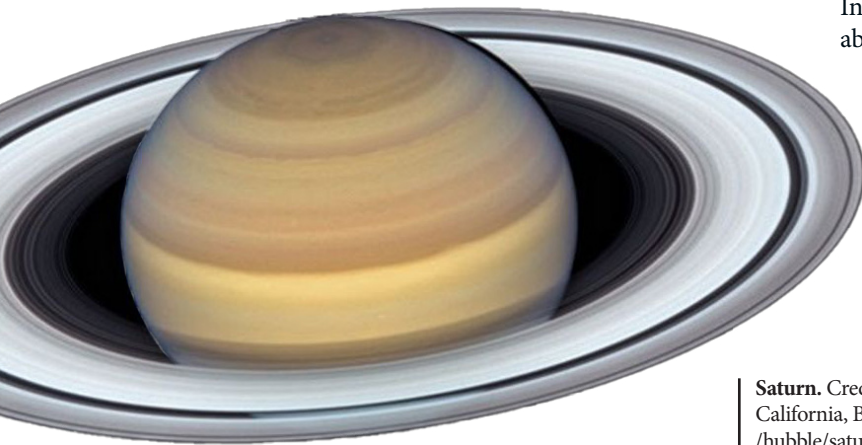
Because of his great power and mighty strength,
not one of them is missing.

(Is 40:26)

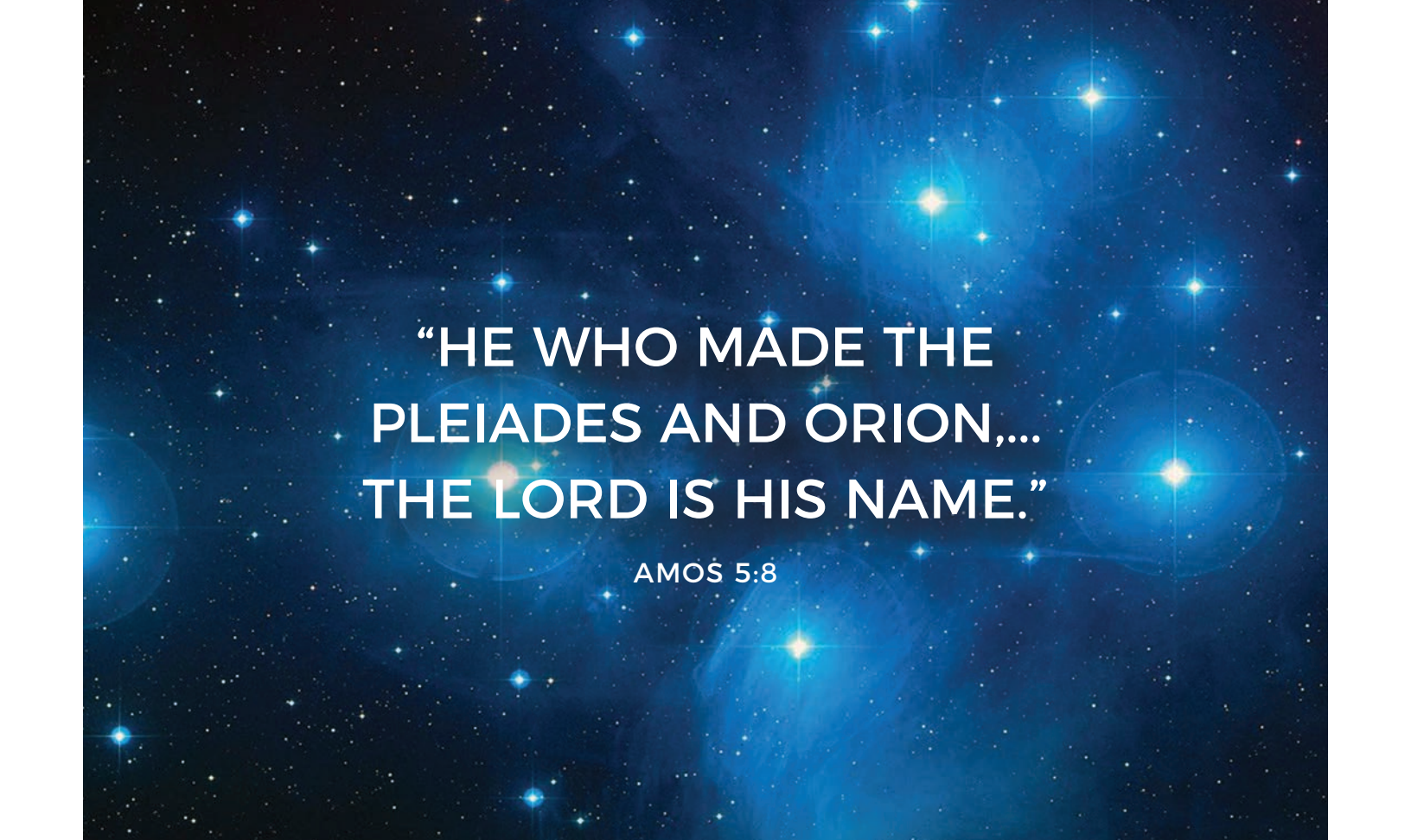
In these words, the Lord instructs all people to ponder the heavens above as a means of enhancing their understanding of His nature and work. It’s as if mankind can gain an enhanced glimpse of God’s greatness through stargazing—such a gift!

Revealing Knowledge

Indeed, the gift of the material heavens is perhaps the best aid available to us earthly beings in directly intuiting the divine majesty. Earthly objects can of course be wonderful, but the starry host presents us with a qualitatively different



Saturn. Credit: NASA, ESA, A. Simon (GSFC), M.H. Wong (University of California, Berkeley), and the OPAL Team, <https://science.nasa.gov/asset/hubble/saturn-2019/>.



“HE WHO MADE THE PLEIADES AND ORION,... THE LORD IS HIS NAME.”

AMOS 5:8

experience. There they are, twinkling above us in a fully observable manner, but remote and untouchable—a truly exalted otherness. They gleam at us from a different, yet visually accessible, realm that suggests to us by analogy that a higher spiritual realm above the natural world exists. Indeed, about the heavens, the psalmist says,

Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
(Ps 19:2–4a)

It seems as if God has arrayed the material heavens above us to “reveal knowledge” as a type of first step on an ascending stairway to the true spiritual heavens above.

The Creator

The grand extent, and yet consistent character, of the heavens often induces the human heart to ponder the origin of the cosmos—to ask, “From where does this all come?” or, perhaps even more appropriately, “Why is this here?” Truly, these questions frequently arise when we humans are exposed to the grand spectacle above us. Moreover, in the text quoted earlier from Isaiah, we see God Himself directing us to this very type of query as He asks in point-blank fashion, “Who created all these?” In essence, in Scripture the Creator asks His creatures to ponder the creation in a manner consistent with the creatures’ natures,

Pleiades star cluster. Credit: NASA, ESA and AURA/Caltech, <https://science.nasa.gov/asset/hubble/hubble-refines-distance-to-the-pleiades-star-cluster/>.

resulting in a divinely inspired resonance in the human heart as the celestial circuit completes itself in its revelation of the Holy One.

Mighty Strength and Power

Much more along these lines could be offered to enhance our wonder, but what can we say specifically concerning modern viewers, who have the tools to peer farther than anyone before into the habitat of the starry host? Turning again to the verse in Isaiah, we note that it teaches us that “because of [God’s] great power and mighty strength, not one of them [the stars] is missing.” Indeed, it does take vast power, far beyond human understanding, to both create and sustain the universe arrayed before us.

To illustrate, the universe, whose full extent is actually unknown, is so vast as to compel a cognizant human observer at times to simply sit in silence before it all. Consider, for example, a single light-year, which is the distance a beam of light can travel in one year, or about six trillion miles. Then consider that the farthest craft humans have ever launched into space, after approximately 48 years of travel (as of the publication of this article), is not even one light-day from Earth.² The Voyager 1 spacecraft was launched in 1977 and has traveled at over 35,000 miles per hour since. Still, in celestial terms Voyager 1 is not even a hair’s width away, considering that our home galaxy, the Milky Way, spans about 100,000 light-years, and that the “nearby” Andromeda Galaxy is about 2.5 million light-years away. Further, these galactic

distances are merely trivial when compared with the universe as a whole, which stretches for literally billions and billions of light-years. And all of that was brought into existence from the empty void of nothing-nothing³ by our Lord. Mighty strength and power indeed!

Calls Forth the Stars by Name

Or ponder what the immense number of stars arrayed in the heavens can further tell us about the nature of God's omniscience, His all-knowing nature. An observer scanning the night sky with the unaided eye—assuming he or she is not in a brightly lit area—can see about 5,000 stars, which is not even close to a drop in the cosmic bucket. Our local island of stars, the Milky Way Galaxy, is estimated to have several hundred billion stars, and the Milky Way is just one of billions upon billions of galaxies in the observable universe. We do not even know the full number of galaxies that exist, let alone the total number of stars in those galaxies—yet the Lord does. Indeed, as the prophet Isaiah says, God “calls forth each of them by name.” For sure, the apostle is correct when he asks rhetorically, “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” (Rom 11:34).

Our Response

Of course, we could go on, but at this point words should meld into full worship, the natural state of humans before such a majesty as the Creator of the heavenly cathedral.

O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed,

Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

Let me suggest that you find a full version of this great hymn, either written or in audio format, and enjoy it to its fullest, perhaps while peering up at the stars—for indeed, “the heavens declare the glory of God.” ☞

Endnotes

¹All Scripture quotations in this article are taken from the NIV.

²“Where Are Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 Now?,” National Aeronautics and Space Administration, last updated April 7, 2025, <https://science.nasa.gov/mission/voyager/where-are-voyager-1-and-voyager-2-now/>.

³A term coined by Francis Schaeffer (see *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972], chap. 1).

Andromeda Galaxy. Credit: Luc Viatour, CC BY-SA 2.5, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=150485855>.





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HOW GREAT THOU ART
AUTHOR: CARL BOBERG