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JOSHUA'S LONG DAY

—How Long Was It?

We have all heard about the time Joshua commanded the sun to stand still.

It is commonly believed that Joshua and his men fought the Amorites all through the day until late afternoon. Seeing the sun about to set, and realizing that additional hours of daylight would be required to complete the battle, he commanded the sun to stand still, and lo! the day was extended— not just for a few extra moments, but for almost a whole day. Some take this to mean the day was extended 12 hours; some think almost 24 hours.

But we all now know— as Galileo did— that the length of a day is not determined by the movement of the *sun*. It is the *earth* turning on its axis that makes day and night. Consequently, the account of the sun standing still has puzzled and embarrassed Bible teachers.

In an attempt to harmonize the story with scientific facts, they say it was actually the *earth* that stopped turning— that the only reason the biblical writer spoke of the sun standing still is because he used terms as they were understood at the time. It is pointed out that even today we use the terms “sunrise” and “sunset,” even though, technically, it is not the sun that is rising or setting. But I believe there is a better explanation.

We turn now to Joshua 10:12-14, quoting from the NKJV:

Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel:

“Sun, stand still over Gibeon;
And Moon, in the Valley of Ajalon.
So the sun stood still,
And the moon stopped,
Till the people had revenge
Upon their enemies.

Is this not written in the Book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day.

And there has been no day like that, before it or after it, that the LORD heeded the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel.

The expressions used in this passage about the sun or moon standing still are translated from two Hebrew words— *daman* and *amad* in the following places: “Sun, stand still [*daman*]...so the sun stood still [*daman*] and the moon stopped [*amad*]...so the sun stood still [*amad*].” The first word used, *daman*, is given in the margin as “be silent.” It has a root meaning of “to be dumb” and thus, by implication, “to stop” (*Strong's Concordance*, H1826).

The other Hebrew word, *amad*, is defined as “to stand” and is used in various ways literally and figuratively (*Strong's Concordance*, H5975). Within the book of Joshua it is the word used when the waters of Jordan stood upon a heap and when the priests, crossing this river with the sacred ark, stood still. Though the word is used in a variety of ways, the idea of “to stop or quit” is evident: the waters of Jordan stopped flowing, the priests stopped marching, etc.

Admittedly, both words— *daman* and *amad*— have the meaning of “TO STOP.”

But the question is: When Joshua commanded the sun to stop, did he mean for it to stop moving or *stop shining*? We believe he meant for it to STOP SHINING!

The Jerome Biblical Commentary (p. 135) says the Hebrew meaning, as used in this context, is “stop shining,” and refers to the darkening of the sun and moon.

The Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Cyclopaedia (pp. 1026, 1027) cites various viewpoints regarding this passage, including that which would take these words “to signify merely cease to shine.”

Years ago I heard that *Moody Monthly* magazine (issue for October 1920) had an article on this point. I asked a friend who was living in Chicago, close to the Moody Bible Institute, to

go there and find the article. He did, and the photocopy he obtained did confirm that the sun stopped shining, not that the whole solar system stopped for a day.

What caused the sun to stop shining? There was a massive hailstorm that moved in, the clouds of which caused the sun to stop shining on Gibeon a factor sometimes overlooked.

In various situations the biblical writers spoke of a thick cloud blotting out the light of the sun (Isa. 44:22), of turning a day into darkness (Job 3:4,5), of the heavens becoming black with clouds (1 Kings 18:45). Ezekiel spoke of God covering the sun with a cloud, resulting in darkness upon the land (Ezek. 32:7,8). During Paul's voyage toward Rome, for many days the sun was not seen because of storm clouds (Acts 27:20).

When Joshua commanded the sun to stop shining, the storm that moved in was of such density that it cut off the sunlight from Gibeon. The attacking Amorites may have considered this a bad omen, providing at least one reason why they fled from Gibeon in terror. As they fled the LORD cast down large hailstones from heaven on them...and they died. There were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the children of Israel killed with the sword (Josh. 10:11).

Why did Joshua want the sun to stop shining upon Gibeon? We believe the Bible indicates this battle took place in the middle of summer and that Joshua was asking for relief from the extreme heat of the sun certainly not for more sunlight or an extended day!

Contrary to the idea that the sun was about to set and Joshua saw that he needed more hours of daylight to complete the battle the Bible says the sun was in the midst of heaven (Joshua 10:13).

The Pulpit Commentary says the Hebrew word used here (*chetsiy*), signifies literally, the half." It is translated over 100 times by the word *half*. The meaning is that the sun was overhead, it was high noon! *The International Bible Encyclopedia* (p. 488) makes this comment:

The sun to Joshua was associated with Gibeon, and the sun can naturally be associated with a locality in either of two positions: it may be overhead to the observer and considered as being above the place where he is standing or as a locality on the skyline and the sun rising or setting just behind it. But here, it was not the latter two, but at noon, literally in the halving of the heaven; that is to say, overhead. Thus Joshua was at Gibeon when he spoke.

It was at Gibeon that Joshua said: "Sun, stand still over Gibeon; and Moon, in the Valley of Ajalon." With the sun overhead at noon notice where the moon was. The description is quite precise. The moon was "in the Valley of Ajalon" not over, but in the Valley of Ajalon. This was a low pass, so that the declining moon appeared to be framed in the valley.

Many years ago, A. Lincoln Shute actually visited the area of Gibeon at the specific season when the sun and moon were

in the same positions as recorded in Joshua 10 the sun overhead at noon and the moon in the valley of Ajalon to the west.

With the sun and the moon in these positions, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 449) says the moon was in its third quarter, about half full, had risen at about 11 PM the previous night and was now within a half hour of setting. The sun had risen at almost exactly 5 AM that morning. It was summertime, Tuesday, July 22!

It is not necessary to complicate this paper with the technicalities of how these details are figured (based on the positions of sun and moon, the amount of degrees north of west the Valley of Ajalon is from Gibeon, the contour of the land, etc.); nor is it necessary to insist that it was exactly Tuesday, July 22.

For our present purpose it is sufficient to say it was summertime, it was the month we call July and, consequently, it was hot! It appears the reason Joshua wanted the sun to stop shining was to provide relief from its burning heat.

Protection from the sun's heat in that land was very important, so much so, that prophets commonly used wording about shade as a blessing:

"A shade from the heat...in a dry place...with the shadow of a cloud (Isa. 25:4,5); "The LORD is your shade...the sun shall not strike you by day (Psa. 121:5,6); "...under the shadow of the Almighty (Psa. 91:1); "...shade in the daytime from the heat (Isa. 4:6); "The shadow of a great rock in a weary land (Isa. 32:2).

Jesus spoke of the scorching heat of the sun (Matt. 13:6); the heat of the day being the most difficult time to work in the fields (Matt. 20:12); a time when workers earnestly desire the "shade" from the heat (Job 7:2). "The sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, so intense was the heat of the sun (Jonah 4:5,8).

Relief from the sun's heat would help Joshua's men, but a longer day would have put them at a disadvantage, as the following details show:

When the Gibeonites sent to Joshua for help, it was an emergency message: "Come up to us quickly, save us and help us (Josh. 10:5,6). There was no time for delay. "So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him and...came unto them suddenly, having marched all night from Gilgal (verses 7-9). This was an uphill march of about 20 miles.

Since there had been no advance warning, Joshua's men had no time to rest in preparation for this march. Instead, they had been up all day, marched all that night carrying weapons and supplies with them, and had engaged in a fierce battle until noon.

Being summertime with the temperature possibly as high as 120 degrees is it likely that Joshua wanted more hours of burning sunlight? Would another 12 hours (or 24 hours, as some say!) be to their advantage? It would not.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary (p. 218), published by Moody Press, points out that what Joshua deemed necessary for his troops, already tired from the all-night march,

was relief from the merciless sun.... God answered above all that Joshua could ask or think by sending not only the desired shade to refresh his army but also a devastating hailstorm to crush and delay his enemies.... The true explanation of this miracle, told in ancient, oriental, poetic style, tends to confirm the idea that Joshua was looking for relief from the sun.

Professor E. W. Maunder, who was for forty years superintendent of the Solar Department of the Royal Observatory at Greenwich, put it this way:

From what was it then that Joshua wished the sun to cease: from its moving or from its shining? It is not possible to suppose that, engaged as he was in a desperate battle, he was even so much as thinking of the sun's motion at all. But its shining, its scorching heat, must have been most seriously felt by him.

At noon, in high summer, southern Palestine is one of the hottest countries of the world. It is impossible to suppose that Joshua wished the sun to be fixed overhead, where it must have been distressing his men who had already been seventeen hours on foot.

A very arduous pursuit lay before them and the enemy must have been fresher than the Israelites. The sun's heat therefore must have been a serious hindrance, and Joshua must have desired it to be tempered.

And the LORD hearkened to his voice and gave him this and much more. A great hailstorm swept up from the west, bringing with it a sudden lowering of temperature. (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 448).

That the storm clouds that moved in cut off the extreme heat of the sun and lowered the temperature is clear. Hailstones form in clouds with a temperature that is below freezing (32° F). Once large enough to begin falling, they speed toward the Earth as fast as 90 mph. They range in size from small pea-sized pellets to hailstones as large as grapefruits and can cause extensive damage. Some of the most destructive hail events have occurred at the height of summer.

The Earth completes one rotation on its axis in 23 hours, 56 minutes, and 4 seconds. This means that the surface of the earth at the equator is traveling over 1,000 miles an hour. If the earth suddenly stopped causing the sun to *appear* to stand still, as some explain it the chain reaction of events world-wide would have been tremendous.

Millions of people, animals, and loose objects would be thrown forward. Oceans would be flung onto land, coastal towns would be devastated, ships at sea would be swallowed by vast waves, and buildings would crumble!

Why would thousands of people living in Italy need to be killed with waves, or the population of Japan terrified with a night twice as long, just so Joshua could defeat a comparatively few Amorites at the tiny town of Gibeon?

Make no mistake about it, God is all-mighty and could provide invisible seat belts for all people, hold back the ocean from the coastlines, protect the ships at sea, keep buildings from toppling over and millions of other miracles as he stopped this planet from turning! But why such *complex* and overwhelming measures in order to accomplish one *simple* purpose?

If God suddenly stopped the earth from turning and performed multiplied millions of protection miracles world-wide because of Joshua's words the events at Gibeon would fade into insignificance in comparison!

It raises a question. The New Testament mentions many phenomenal events in Old Testament history, but never says anything about what would have been a miracle of much greater magnitude: the stopping of the entire solar system.

According to Genesis 8:22, day and night would be *uninterrupted*: "While the earth remains... day and night shall not cease." Significantly, the word translated "cease" is *shabath*, the word from which Sabbath is derived, expressing the idea of intermission, to rest, to cease (*Strong's Concordance*, H7673, H7676).

In other words, as long as the earth remained, day and night would not cease, would not take a sabbath. But if at the time of Joshua night did not come at its normal time, then the cycle of day and night did indeed take a rest!

Even more to the point is Jeremiah 33:20,21: "Thus says the LORD: 'If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season' then my covenant may also be broken."

Jeremiah, who spoke these words, lived *after* the time of Joshua. If he believed the cycle of day and night was interrupted at the time of Joshua, his analogy would not be valid.

For quite a few years now, well-meaning people have circulated a story that NASA scientists, using computers to calculate orbits for the Earth and Sun, discovered the "long day of Joshua." That is simply not true and has been disproved over and over.

Once a person has been taught that the day was extended many additional hours, a verse like Joshua 10:14 tends to support that idea: "There was no day like that before it or after it." But expressions like this were proverbial; simply a way of stating that what happened was out of the ordinary, unusual. A number of similar verses can be quoted on this point.

What made this day unusual is explained as we continue reading: "There was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD heeded the voice of a man."

The point being, as Maunder wrote (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 448):

Joshua had spoken, not in prayer or supplication, but in *command*, as if all Nature was at his disposal; and the LORD had hearkened and had, as it were, obeyed a human voice: an anticipation of the time when a greater Joshua would command even the winds and the sea, and they would obey him.

After reading that there was no day like this before^o that the LORD heeded the voice of a man^o we read: ^oFOR the LORD fought for Israel.^o What did the LORD do? ^oThe LORD cast down large hailstones from heaven on [Israel's enemies] as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the children of Israel killed with the sword^o (Josh. 10:11).

We have stated that Joshua wanted relief from the heat of the sun^o not more hours of sunlight. There is the direct scriptural statement about the hailstorm that moved in which caused the sun to stop shining on Gibeon. And there is, of course, the basic fact that stopping the sun would not make an extended day.

But, coming to verse 13, we read that the sun ^odid not hasten to go down for about a whole day,^o which, in our English version, does indeed seem to teach that the day was extended. But these words ^ocannot be proved to have this meaning,^o says the *Pulpit Commentary*.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary (p. 218) gives the following translation: ^oFor the sun ceased [shining] in the midst of the sky, and [i.e., although] it did not hasten to set about a whole day.^o

Often when the Bible uses the word ^osun,^o it means more precisely the *light* of the sun, as when we read that the fruits of the earth are ^obrought forth by the sun^o (Deut. 33:14). If it is the light of the sun that is primarily meant in verse 13 (and not the sun itself), it could be said that the light of the sun did not go down^o did not shine on them^o until the day was almost completed.

If it was the *light* of the sun intended here, not the sun itself, some might question why the passage does not say ^ocome^o down, rather than ^ogo^o down. The Hebrew does *not* make this distinction. A check of *Strong's Concordance*, H935) shows that the word translated ^ogo^o is the *same* word that is translated ^ocome^o most often as ^ocome.^o

Commentators, including those who hold the common view, all acknowledge that the portion of Joshua 10 about Joshua's command for the sun to stop is *poetic* in nature. Most translations set it apart from the usual text with indentation. *The Pulpit Commentary* (pp. 166,167) says:

The poetic form of this passage is clear to everyone who has the smallest acquaintance with the laws of Hebrew poetry [and that these words] belong rather to the domain of poetry than history, and their language is that of hyperbole rather than of *exact narration of facts*.

Poetic passages such as this do not require a literal meaning for each word or expression used. It was not uncommon for songs or poetic sketches about Israelite victories to be written using non-literal expressions:

After the defeat of the Egyptians at the Red Sea: ^oThen sang Moses...to the LORD...he has dashed in pieces the enemy...the earth swallowed them^o (Exod. 15).

^oWhen Israel went out of Egypt...the sea saw it and fled...the mountains skipped like rams^o (Psa. 114).

Concerning the defeat of Sisera: ^oThen sang Deborah...the earth trembled...the mountains melted...the stars in their courses fought against Sisera^o (Judges 5).

When David escaped from Saul, he ^ospoke unto the LORD the words of this song...The earth shook and trembled, there went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth ...he did fly upon the wings of the wind...he drew me out of many waters^o (Psa. 18).

In all of these examples, the Bible records the actual *historical* account of what happened. These same events are then told *poetically*. Bible scholars of all persuasions recognize that when we have a historical account and a poetic account of the same event, we always take the historical account to explain or clarify the poetic^o *not* the other way around.

Because the wording about Joshua's command to the sun is contained within the poetic portion of Joshua 10, some have understood it simply as a poetic way of saying that ^oGod and all Nature fought on the side of Joshua, so that the work of two days was accomplished in one.^o

While a conclusion such as this is certainly possible when dealing with poetry, the fact that the historical portion mentions a massive hailstorm provides strong reason to believe that the literal sun was involved, its light being stopped by the storm in the area around Gibeon.

So there you have it. Space will not allow more details, but when it is all studied out, I believe the explanation presented here has merit. Nevertheless, I am not trying to force it on anyone. It is not a salvation issue. I have shared this information ^oas a study^o and am content, in the words of Paul the apostle, to let every man be persuaded in his own mind (Rom. 14:5).
—RW

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