

# UNDERSTANDING ANCIENT UNDERSTANDING (AN ANALYSIS OF JOSHUA 10 BY MATTHEW DENTON)

[All Scriptures are taken from the ESV unless otherwise noted.]

## WHEN SCIENCE & CHURCH BELIEFS DO NOT AGREE

Down through history, it is evident that the only form of science that was practiced was the practice of simple observation. It was understood by ancient civilization that if an apple fell out of a tree it was going to fall down not up. Ancient civilization understood this concept, but they did not understand that the apple fell down from the tree because of gravity. It was not until 1687, when Sir Isaac Newton published his hypothesis on the law of universal gravitation, that the law of gravity was fully understood and accepted by the majority of the scientific world. Sir Isaac Newton was a Christian who wrote Biblical hermeneutics and died in his sleep at an old age. Before Newton had written about the law of gravity, the idea of gravitation had been in the scientific world through Galileo's theory of gravitation.

Like Newton, Galileo Galilei was a Christian scientist. Unlike Newton, Galileo was condemned and punished as a heretic by the Catholic Church because of his discoveries and subsequent beliefs. Although Nicolaus Copernicus was the first astronomer to formulate heliocentric cosmology (where the sun is the center of this galaxy), Galileo believed (just like Copernicus) that the sun did not revolve around the earth (geocentrism) but that the earth revolved around the sun (heliocentrism), just as Copernicus has theorized.

Galileo even dedicated his research and resulting work on heliocentrism to Pope Urban VIII (who once was a supporter of Galileo), but the same Church that Galileo dedicated his work to would later turn their back on him as he was later considered a heretic. Opposite Copernicus and Galileo, the majority of the scientific world believed that the sun revolved around the earth, and this belief came from simple observation combined with their interpretation of the Scriptures.

In the scientific days of Galileo, many tools and devices for research had been created (like the telescope). Much progress had been made in the ways of science, but most of the beliefs to that time were still based in simple observation and aided by face-value interpretation of the Scriptures. It is obvious how society could believe that the sun revolved around the earth because of how it is perceived with the eye, but if their observation went hand-in-hand with their belief of Scripture, where in the Bible did evidence come from that supported the once held belief that the sun revolved around the earth?

There are various passages that seem to indicate or teach the old belief system of geocentrism: "Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved" (Psalm 93:1; cf. Psalm 96:10 & 1 Chronicles 16:30). "He set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be moved" (Psalm 104:5).

With a face-value interpretation of Scripture, it is clearly evident why the people of Galileo's time believed that the sun revolved around the earth, because (from their point of view) passages like these indicate that the earth does not move. Even with simple observation, man had seen the sun rise on one side of the earth and set on the other.

It was obvious to them that the sun moved not the earth. It most likely became even more difficult for Galileo to convince people (the Catholic Church especially) that their belief in geocentrism was incorrect when their view of the Scriptures made it clear that the sun moved not the earth: "The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises" (Ecclesiastes 1:5).

With passages like these, how could someone like Galileo convince the Christian people otherwise? Galileo was not an ordained teacher of the Word. He was not a church leader. So how could Galileo convince the Christian people that their former belief was incorrect when it was based on supposed Scriptural teaching and belief?

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.), commonly known simply as Augustine, taught that not all Scripture should be taken at face-value but more as extended metaphor. Galileo also seemed to believe this form of interpretation. As Augustine was and is still held highly by the Catholic Church, Galileo advantageously took the same stand as Augustine on Biblical interpretation, arguing that passages like Psalm 93:1 and Ecclesiastes 1:5 should not be taken as a face-value, physical, scientific fact, but this did not help him.

Even though he tried to show that science and Scripture do not contradict, Galileo stood on trial for suspicion of heresy in 1633 and was found guilty. He lived under house-arrest as a heretic until his death in 1642. His discoveries did not die with him though. Research would later prove Galileo's theories as fact, accepted by all, even the Catholic Church.

According to the Catholic Church, the Church does not err, so the Catholic Church never seemed to truly show remorse for the unrighteous and unlawful act against Galileo, until they seemed to realize that there was nothing else they could do but face the facts. In October 1992, Pope John Paul II expressed regret on behalf of the Church and acknowledged that the Church had erred concerning the "Galileo Affair." It seems obviously clear that this was too little too late.

## DOES DISPROVED ANCIENT, SCIENTIFIC BELIEF IN SCRIPTURE CANCEL OUT INSPIRATION?

Because of the widely understood and accepted fact that this solar system is heliocentric, passages like Psalm 93:1, Psalm 104:5, and Ecclesiastes 1:5 are no longer taken at face-value. It is understood that they are metaphorical in nature; but during Galileo's time, there were other passages in the Scriptures (besides those already mentioned) that could lead one to believe that the Scriptures do indeed teach geocentrism. If this were true, does this mean that God's word is false or uninspired? What must be determined is if the Scriptures teach disproved scientific beliefs or the Scriptures just supply the scientific beliefs of the time in which those texts were written.

To answer this inquiry, it seems vital to analyze another account from the Hebrew text that those of Galileo's time could have used to prove that the sun revolved around the earth. This account will shed some light on facts surrounding the scientific knowledge of the times in which these texts were penned and the utilization of that intelligence when God's people penned the Scriptures.

## JOSHUA'S SUPPOSED LONG DAY

In Joshua 10, the king of Jerusalem, Adoni-zedek, heard that Joshua had captured Ai and that the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel. He became greatly afraid of all the warriors that now opposed him, so he summoned other kings to help him destroy Gibeon. Gibeon pleaded for Joshua's assistance, and Joshua complied:

So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor. And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands. Not a man of them shall stand before you." So Joshua came upon them suddenly, having marched up all night from Gilgal. And the LORD threw them into a panic before Israel, who struck them with a great blow at Gibeon and chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makedah. And as they fled before Israel, while they were going down the ascent of Beth-horon, the LORD threw down large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died because of the hailstones than the sons of Israel killed with the sword. At that time Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, "Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon." And the sun stood still, and the

moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jasher? The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day. There has been no day like it before or since, when the LORD heeded the voice of a man, for the LORD fought for Israel. (vv. 7-14)

It is obviously clear how those of Galileo's time could use such a passage as this to prove that God teaches that heliocentrism is false, but this conclusion can only be reached with a face-value interpretation of the account. With this interpretation, it seems that Joshua commanded the sun and the moon to stand still in the sky, thus the sun and moon's revolution around the earth was placed on hold. This means Joshua's army was allotted additional time and daylight to complete the battle. As a result, this account has been called by some "Joshua's Long Day."

#### ISSUES RAISED BY JOSHUA 10

Is this really the idea that this account of "Joshua's Long Day" conveys? Did the sun and moon really revolve around the earth at one point in time? If so, did the sun and moon really stop revolving at this battle? Are the Scriptures incorrect regarding the solar system, thus non-inspired? The question that could lead to an answer for all the previous questions is "did Joshua even really want additional daylight to complete the battle, as some believe this account teaches?" To answer these questions, the account must be analyzed by the terms used within the text and by the background of the account itself which includes the time in which it was recorded. If Joshua 10 does teach that Joshua *did* want additional hours of daylight, how should that idea be understood from this canonical account?

It is well understood today (even by the Catholic Church) that the earth does in fact revolve around the sun. Galileo was indeed correct. There is so much evidence on the side of heliocentrism that geocentrism is not even considered a possibility. With that in mind, the first question that arises concerning "Joshua's Long Day" is "why does the text say that the sun stood still?" This very idea has caused many teachers of the Scriptures problems when combated with questions of the divinity of Scripture. How could an almighty God and Creator not understand how his own creation worked and write it down for everyone to see? Did God forget that the sun was the center of this galaxy? Accounts like this (with its resulting questions) are used to discredit the inspiration and divinity of the Scriptures, and a face-value interpretation of the account will definitely lend a hand in the effort to do so.

To avoid claims and accusations of non-inspiration, many teachers and scholars are forced into the position that the writer of this account wrote it down *in the fashion of which the event was perceived*. This means that the writers of this time recorded events using terminology that described the knowledge of the workings of the world to that point in time.

If the ancient Hebrews of Joshua's day only understood how the earth and sun interacted with one another through simple observation, this is exactly how it would be perceived and recorded. If they perceived that the sun arose on one side of the earth and set on the other using simple observation, than it would make perfect sense to record the event of the standstill of the sun in those terms. The terms "sunset" and "sunrise" are still used today even though it is acknowledged that those terms are not scientifically correct. They are simply terms to describe man's perception of the world. As a result, Joshua 10 does not teach geocentrism and the integrity of the Word is still kept whole. As a result, YHWH<sup>1</sup> is still the one true God.

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<sup>1</sup> This is God's name written in ancient Hebrew. In ancient Hebrew, there were no vowels, so in English letters, it is written as YHWH. It is sometimes written as "Yahweh," so it can be pronounced the way the majority of the Christian world believes it is pronounced.

To illustrate a principle of hermeneutic,<sup>2</sup> let it be assumed for the moment that the traditional view of Joshua 10 (concerning the “standing still” of the sun from man’s perception) is correct. When Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, God did not respond by saying, “Did you mean that you want the earth to stand still?” God did not explain to Joshua how he was incorrect in his knowledge of the workings of the solar system. God has never been concerned with teaching man how his creation works. God has left that up to man. This is how it is throughout the Scriptures. The Scriptures exist for the sole reason of man’s redemption, not to teach him how the solar system works, how new species of animals have come into being, or how the earth has changed geographically. When Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, God knew exactly what Joshua wanted, and he granted it, whether Joshua’s understanding of the event was correct or not. God knows what is needed or desired before it is even asked (Matthew 6:8).

As it will become evident, this account does not seem to teach that Joshua wanted additional hours of daylight by his commanding the sun “to stand still,” but the principle at hand by example of the traditional view of Joshua 10 is still applicable to the rest of God’s Word. When the Scriptures were recorded by inspiration through man, they were recorded in such a way that man of *that time* could understand it. One has to remember who these writings were written to. God did not give the writers of the Scriptures God-like knowledge of science when the texts were penned. If he had, how confusing would that have been for all who read the writings without any sort of divine inspiration? They only understood so much in the ways of science.

If Joshua wanted additional hours of daylight, the earth would have had to remain still. If God had the writer of this account record the event to say that the *earth* stood still so that Joshua’s army could have more time and daylight, who of that time would have been able to understand it? Could the ancient peoples of that time who heard or read this account understand that the *earth* had to stand still for more daylight or would they discount YHWH as a true god because “everyone knows that the sun moves not the earth”? When studying Scriptures like this, it must be kept in mind who these writings were written to and that they were written in a way that those recipients would be able to understand it. This is the case in all Scripture, and many scholars and teachers of hermeneutics acknowledge this fact. One author explicitly stated in his work *Hermeneutics*, God “has spoken in the language of men.”<sup>3</sup>

This principle of hermeneutic should always be considered when studying Scripture that is or has been used as proof texts for scientific belief or opinion. The Scriptures are not concerned how God’s creation works or operates. If it was, Joshua 10 would have been stated much differently. God’s creation is only used or referenced from man’s perspective of the world and perception of its workings to aid in the accounts in various ways and forms. When studying an account from Scripture, there is a question that should always be asked no matter the query: “what did they believe in that point in time?”

It seems that Joshua 10 was just another misunderstood passage like that of Psalm 93:1 and Ecclesiastes 1:5. If people of Galileo’s time wanted to use this passage to defend an old traditional belief like geocentrism, not only did they misunderstand it but used it out of context to prove their position and support their belief.

It seems logical that the writers of the Scriptures would record events in terms of which they perceived and understood the event. Thus, it would make sense that Joshua would command that the sun to stop moving for the allowance of additional hours of daylight. The account clearly illustrates (from the traditional view point) how the writers of the Scriptures recorded accounts and events with the knowledge that they had personally obtained up to that point in time.

But the same question arises: is this really what was asked or even desired by Joshua? By further investigating this issue, another vital point will be brought to light concerning the writers of the Scriptures. God fulfilled his will through people and naturally occurring events.

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<sup>2</sup> Hermeneutics, which include Biblical hermeneutics, refers to the study of methodological principles of interpretation concerning written texts like that of literature, law, and religion.

<sup>3</sup> Dungan, Prof. D. R. (n.d.). *Hermeneutics*. Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company. 82.

## EXECUTING HIS WILL

It should also be understood *how* God executes his will utilizing naturally occurring events and people throughout Scripture. In Judges 4, Israel was under the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan, and “the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help, for he had 900 chariots of iron and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years” (v. 3). Sisera was the commander of Jabin’s army:

When Sisera was told that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera called out all his chariots, 900 chariots of iron, and all the men who were with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon. And Deborah said to Barak, “Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the LORD go out before you?” So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him. And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword. And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot. And Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left. (vv. 12-16)

Shortly after Sisera ran away, he was killed by a tent peg through his head by the hand of Jael the wife of Heber (vv. 17-22).

After this event, it was recorded that “on that day God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the people of Israel” (v. 23), but it seems clear that the Israelites conquered Jabin’s armies, not God. Even Sisera was killed by the hand of a woman. If this was all done by the hand of man, why does the text say that “God subdued the king of Canaan before the people of Israel”?

God was answering the cry of his people. He used the very ones crying out for help to defeat the nation that was oppressing them. God executed his will through people—his own people in this case. This is how God subdued Jabin. The song of Deborah and Barak even depict God as the one who faced the army on that battlefield:

Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day: “That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the LORD! “Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the LORD I will sing; I will make melody to the LORD, the God of Israel. “*LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water. The mountains quaked before the LORD, even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel.* (Judges 5:1-5) [Emphasis added]

It is true that the people of Israel won the battle and subdued the king of Canaan (4:24), but they could not have accomplished this if God had not been on their side. YHWH did not physically go “out from Seir” or march “from the region of Edom.” This was just apocalyptic language (also seen in phrases such as “the earth trembled and the heavens dropped”) used to describe how God answered the plea of his people and conquered the enemies of his people. God gave this enemy into their hands (vv. 7 & 14). They “offered themselves willing” (5:2) as a tool for the implementation of God’s will.

Not only did God use people to fulfill his will, it was even understood by the ancient Hebrews that God used naturally occurring events like clouds and the different elements of storms to not only represent the awesome power of the one true God but to also represent his presence or symbolize his coming judgment. In Exodus 19, although they could not physically see him with the human eye, the people of Israel understood that God’s presence was upon Mount Sinai because of the great, dark storm with thunder and lightning that had come upon the mountain.

Earthquakes, clouds, hailstorms, thunder, and storms with great lightning (often times referred to as fire from the sky or clouds) were commonly used to represent the presence of God or his judgment. In Exodus 14, as Israel crossed the Red Sea, God (represented in “a pillar of fire and of cloud”) “looked down on the Egyptian forces” and threw them into a panic (v. 24). In Exodus 16:10, the “glory of the

Lord appeared in the cloud.” This does not mean that everyone saw YHWH with the human eye. This just implies that they understood his presence was near (cf. Leviticus 16:2 & Numbers 11:25).

After the exodus out of Egypt, the setting up of the covenant, and the receiving the inheritance of the land, every writing thereafter used this imagery metaphorically in reference to God’s presence, anger, wrath, or coming judgment. Psalm 18:7-15 is a good example of this very concept:

Then the *earth reeled and rocked*; the *foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked*, because he was angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; *glowing coals flamed forth from him*. He bowed the heavens and came down; *thick darkness was under his feet*. He rode on a cherub and flew; he came swiftly on the *wings of the wind*. He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him, *thick clouds dark with water*. Out of the brightness before him *hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds*. The LORD also *thundered in the heavens*, and the Most High uttered his voice, *hailstones and coals of fire*. And he sent out his arrows and scattered them; he flashed forth *lightnings* and routed them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils. (ESV) [Emphasis added]

This passage has many of the elements already considered in the various passages of Exodus—fire, smoke, clouds, earthquakes, hailstones, lightning, etc. Unlike many of the passages in the Exodus account, the immediate context of Psalm 18 is metaphorical. These are apocalypics formed by the inspiration of the events witnessed by the ancient Hebrew people of the exodus generation out of Egypt.

There are other prime examples seen throughout the Hebrew Scriptures that use this very same language:

He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters; he makes the *clouds* his chariot; he rides on the *wings of the wind*; he makes his messengers winds, his ministers a flaming fire. (Psalm 104:3-4)

Behold, the Lord is riding on a *swift cloud* and comes to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at *his presence*, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them. (Isaiah 19:1)

Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near, a *day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!* Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people. (Joel 2:1-2)

The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in *whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet*. (Nahum 1:2-3)

The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of *darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness*. (Zephaniah 1:14-15; cf. Ezekiel 30:3) [All emphasis added]

It is evidently clear how the descriptions of naturally occurring storms and events are used in reference to God’s presence, wrath, and coming judgment. Even the apocalyptic prophecies concerning the first destruction of Jerusalem which occurred in 586 B.C.E was in the form of apocalypics. Those prophecies did not occur exactly how they were stated, evidently so as God did not physically come down riding an

actual cloud. Those prophecies were not physical in nature. History attests that those prophecies were fulfilled through one of God's many tools—men.

The prophecy of Isaiah 19 is the same. In the form of apocalypics, the prophecy states that YHWH was going to ride into Egypt on a cloud and everyone would tremble at his presence (v. 1). This did not actually happen. This prophecy was not physical in nature. God was not going to physically ride a cloud into the city, but this does not mean the prophecy was not fulfilled. It just happened in a more logical way. The miracle of it was the prophecy itself, not the manner in which it was fulfilled.

This exact form of Hebraic idiom and apocalyptic continues into the Greek Scriptures through Jesus (cf. Luke 21:27, Mark 13:26, & Matthew 24:30-31 & 26:64). These very ideas are realized and confirmed by various scholars:

...[I]n the first generation of the Jews' beginnings God came down in clouds and frightened His people as He gave the Law which brought death (Heb. 12:18-21 & Exo. 19-20); afterwards the coming of God in clouds became an idiom for judgments by God against men, judgments in which He acted thru the agency of other men; i.e., He didn't literally come down from Heaven in these instances. Should we therefore take this Jewish idiom (Hebraism) and literalize it when we come to the times of Jesus (still under the OT, mind you) when Jesus the Jew spoke of such to His Jewish brethren? Surely not.<sup>4</sup>

These texts do not necessitate God's actual embodiment or physical representation, but it is understood that the glory of the one true God was present. This seems to be the same case regarding Joshua 10 and the answers to the questions of the account's traditional understanding of Joshua's desire for additional hours of daylight.

#### “STAND STILL” OR “NOT SHINE”

From the traditional view, in Joshua 10, YHWH did two things to give the Amorites into the hands of the Israelites: a hail storm (v. 11) and granting Joshua's command for the sun to “stand still” (vv. 12-13). Two words must be noted in this passage—*damam* and *amad*:

“Sun, stand still [*damam*] at Gibeon, and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon.” And the sun stood still [*damam*], and the moon stopped [*amad*], until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped [*amad*] in the midst of heaven. (vv. 12b-13a)

The Hebrew word *damam* means to be dumb, implying to cease or to stop. The other word used in this passage, *amad*, means to “stand still,” but the implication can also mean to stop:

The other Hebrew word, *amad*, is defined as “to stand” and is used in various relations literally and figuratively (*Strong's Concordance*, 5975). 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 riverbed 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.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Denton, T. E., September 2008. “Christ's Coming In or With Clouds.” *AsitefortheLord.com*. August 9, 2011. <http://asitefortheLord.com/id15.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Woodrow, R. (1984). *Noah's Flood, Joshua's Long Day, and Lucifer's Fall*. Palm Springs, CA: Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, Inc. 80.

With this understanding, did Joshua command the sun to “stand still” or to “stop shining”? It seems much more likely that Joshua wanted the sun to stop shining.

#### JOSHUA’S ACTUAL LONG AND VERY HOT DAY

Why would Joshua want the sun to stop shining? A fitting answer to the question would be because of the heat of the day. When Joshua made his command, it seems that it was about noon, because the “sun stopped in the midst of heaven” (v. 13). This could very well have been about the hottest time of the day, but this does not necessitate that this particular day was hot. The next step would be to pinpoint the season.

Joshua commanded the sun to stand still (or stop shining) at Gibeon and the moon to stand still in the valley of Aijalon (vv. 12-13). The positioning of the sun and the moon can give a rough estimate of the date to determine the season in which this battle was taking place:

The moon was setting in the valley of Aijalon, west of Gibeon. The sun was over Gibeon—in the half of the sky—at noon. With the sun and the moon in these positions, it has been determined that 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 5 AM that morning. It was summertime, Tuesday, July 22!<sup>6</sup>

Some may believe that this is a stretch, and maybe it is. Maybe the day of the battle was not exactly on Tuesday, July 22. Whether it was or not, it seems pretty clear what season it was—summer.

The hot summer sun has always been dangerous for those underneath it. Many die each year from the summer heat, and many of those deaths were people who were not even under the sun. There are even examples of the dangers of the sun in the Scriptures. After Jonah had left the city of Nineveh “the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die” (Jonah 4:8). Even Jesus spoke of the heat of the day and the scorching sun (Matthew 13:6 & 20:12).

It is evident that during that day of battle it was hot, and the sun was beating down on Joshua and his army. This was draining their bodies and was possibly making them faint, for they already had to have been tired; because after Joshua had received word that Gibeon needed help, Joshua and his army marched all night from Gilgal (v. 9). When Joshua’s army encountered the Amorites, they began fighting. Joshua and his army marched all night and was fighting throughout the day until and after Joshua commanded the sun to “stand still.” It seems that their day was already long enough.

They were tired, hot, drained from the sun, and most likely faint. It does not seem logical for Joshua to command the sun to stand still for the allowance of additional hours of daylight and scorching heat. They would not have needed any additional hours of daylight to finish the battle anyway, for YHWH was on their side and had already given the Amorites into their hands (v. 8). They did not desire more scorching-hot, body-draining sun. They desired shade, and that is what they received.

#### KILLING TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE

It was mentioned earlier that God did two things for Joshua from the traditional view: the hailstorm (v. 11) and granting Joshua’s command (vv. 12-13). In actuality, God did one thing—grant Joshua’s command. The hailstorm was a result of granting Joshua’s command. Joshua desired relief from the sun for him and his army, so he commanded that the sun “stop shining.” As a result, God provided shade—clouds. It is true that the account does not say anything about clouds, but clouds are implied to be present

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 84.



within the text. If they were not, where did the hailstones come from? Hailstones come from storms which are *naturally occurring events*.

Through this hailstorm, clouds were present to shield Joshua and his army from the scorching rays of the sun, and the Amorites were killed by the large hailstones. God did exactly as he said he would—he gave the Amorites into Joshua’s hands (v. 8). God essentially (as the English idiom goes) killed two birds with one stone: by these clouds, he granted Joshua’s command for relief from the sun and aided Joshua’s army in taking vengeance on their enemies, for “there were more who died because of the hailstones than the sons of Israel killed with the sword” (v. 11).

With these clouds, God’s presence is also seen, because “the clouds are the dust of his feet” (Nahum 1:3). He protected his people by providing shade from the sun, and he also used these clouds in judgment against his enemies (v. 11), just like the Psalmist said, “the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire” (18:13). Although he was not there physically, there is not any doubt that God’s glory and power was present during this day of battle.

Yet, it seems this idea is not completely solid when it comes to the order of events. In verse 11, it says that God provided the hailstorm and then Joshua made the command in the following verse. It would seem that the text is implying that the clouds and the hailstorm came first then the command of the sun to “stand still.” This is not necessarily the case.

It seems that the hailstorm came from clouds because Joshua had commanded the sun to stop shining: “at that time Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel” (v. 12). “At that time” is derived from the Hebrew word *az* which can also be translated as “at which time,” “for,” or “since.” This form of translation does not seem to dictate chronological order. It is almost more of a poetic form like that of the Hebraic Psalms: “*at that time* [for] Joshua spoke to the LORD *in the day when the LORD gave the Amorites* over to the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel.”

It does not seem so much to be about order of events as it is answering how things came to be. The hailstorm came from the clouds which were the result of Joshua’s command for the sun to stop shining. YHWH made it stop by covering Joshua and his army with clouds.

## NO DAY LIKE IT OR SINCE

Another item that could throw a wrench into the machine is verse 14: “there has been no day like it before or since.” It seems that this phrase could make the account seem like the day was longer than usual; thus there has not been a day like it before or since. If Joshua only commanded for there to be shade, it would seem that nothing out of the ordinary occurred for there to be a statement like “there has been no day like it or since.”

The answer to this query is simple, for the rest of the text answers it: “there has been no day like it before or since, *when the LORD heeded the voice of a man*, for the LORD fought for Israel.” Joshua did not ask. He did not pray. He commanded that the sun stop shining. This is exactly why there has never been a “day like it before or since.” YHWH heard Joshua and heeded (or obeyed) Joshua. This was why that day was so significant, and there has never been a day like it.

## WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

Just like those of Galileo’s time, man could take passages from the Scriptures as proof-texts for their scientific beliefs. Joshua 10 could have been used in the same manner to teach that heliocentrism was false, because it does seem like the account (plus other passages) indicate that the sun revolved around the earth. Does this mean that geocentrism is correct because it is perceived that way in the Bible? Does it mean that the Bible is not inspired since it is understood as fact that the solar system is not geocentric?

Even though this is a heliocentric solar system, this does not mean that the Scriptures are incorrect. It has been made clear by the previous analysis of Joshua 10 that the account does not teach geocentrism. It

has nothing to do with the planetary orbits but everything to do with relief from the sun for Joshua and his army (God using men and naturally occurring events to execute his will).

If the traditional understanding of Joshua 10 for an extended day was the correct interpretation, it would only mean that the account was recorded in a fashion of which it was perceived and understood, much like other texts. Although this principle is not necessarily applicable to this account (as it is believed by some), this hermeneutic definitely is in other passages in the Scriptures and should be kept in mind and applied when studying Scripture.

Thus, science and Scripture do not contradict. The ancient people of this time only understood so much in the way of science as far as simple observation had allowed. When events or whole accounts were recorded, they were recorded in a way that anyone during that time would be able to comprehend it.

This may seem like a contradiction to what was said in the introduction to this work regarding the difficulty and complexity of the Scriptures, but it is not. Both statements are true. These writings that compose the Scriptures were written to specific recipients for *their* understanding. For man of a different culture two millennia removed from that time, it is definitely going to be difficult for modern man because of his lack of understanding the cultures, times, and ancient intelligence. Even though the Scriptures were written for specific recipients, some of that information was even hard for them to understand, depending on God's purpose for that particular information (Daniel 8:27; 1 Peter 1:10-11).

When the writers of the Scriptures penned what is considered the Bible, they did not receive God-like knowledge of the planetary orbits, physics, divine-perceived time, etc. God fed them information that they would have been able to comprehend. Otherwise, what would have been the point of Scripture if no one of that time could have understood it? The Word received from God to man was in a form that man would have understood to that point in regards to their intelligence and understanding of the ways of the earth and universe. Again, just as Dungan had stated, God had indeed spoken to man in man's language.<sup>7</sup>

Joshua desired shade for relief from the sun. God used a natural occurrence of nature to grant Joshua's command—clouds to block the rays. Man of Joshua's day may not have understood what clouds consisted of, but they understood the functions of it. God did not and does not educate man in the workings of his creation. That was never of concern for him or his Scriptures. He has left that up to man to discover on his own time.

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<sup>7</sup> Dungan, Prof. D. R. (n.d.). *Hermeneutics*. Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company. 82.