

Learning from the Night Sky

Gazing up at the sky at night can make us feel quite small. But it can also strengthen our faith, when we contemplate the One who made and sustains it all.

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psa. 19:1).

“The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the peoples see His glory” (Psa. 97:6).

“Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; not one is missing” (Isa. 40:26).



My favorite form of exercise is a long walk early in the morning. Depending on the time of year, these walks often begin in darkness, well before dawn. If the skies are clear and it's a moonless night, I am greeted by a dazzling display of stars overhead. The Big Dipper and the Little Dipper—with its handle suspended from Polaris, the North Star—dominate the northern sky. In the fall and winter months, Orion's Belt rises in the east. The planets Venus and Mars occasionally make an appearance. And the stars! Thousands and thousands of points of light sparkle like tiny diamonds flung across the canopy of heaven. It's an awesome sight.

The night sky is magnificent to behold, but its wonder is magnified by the knowledge we have gained over the last hundred years,

as astronomers have peered deeper into the vastness of space. We have learned that there are countless other galaxies, containing trillions of additional stars, stretching out at distances our minds struggle to comprehend. We do not have the words to describe the scope of what we are seeing.

To the Biblical writers, the wonders of the night sky force our minds to grapple with three unavoidable truths.

First, the heavens reinforce our appreciation for *the role of law in nature*. The cosmos is not a random chaotic jumble, but a “handiwork,” a complex system of physical laws characterized by orderliness and regularity. Structure and order in the physical realm suggest structure and order in the ethical realm as well, as we seek to find some purpose for our existence on this grand stage. There is meaning in this infinite arrangement, and it is worth our trouble to search for that meaning with all our might.

The scope and precision of this design in turn argues for *the existence of a divine Being*. When we stumble across an ancient complex of structures in a remote jungle, we correctly intuit that it was the creation of an intelligent agent. How much stronger is the evidence for a Master Designer and Builder when we study the vastness of space and all the heavenly bodies that inhabit it? It takes far more blind faith to believe that all this “just happened” than to believe in a wise and powerful God who designed and created it.

Finally, the heavens help us understand *the dignity of man*. It was David's awe at the beauty of the night sky that helped him appreciate the dignity of humanity (Psa. 8:3-8). We humans are part of this enormous creation, and the fact that, of all the life forms we know, *we alone* have the capacity to study it, to explore it, and to discover its secrets elevates us to a special place. Yes, we are a tiny blip in the universe; but we are uniquely privileged to ponder the reason why it should be so. That truth puts our lives in a perspective that ought to inspire us to do our best.

When Job complained about God's apparent lack of concern for his miserable life, God gave him a primer on a variety of physical phenomena: geology, oceanography, meteorology, biology—and astronomy. He asked Job, “Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you set their dominion over the earth?” (Job 38:31-33). No, we don't. But we *can* know the One who created them all.

— David King