

Hebrews 4:16  
**Jesus, Our Help in Time of Need**

I. Preface

A. I am suspending our study in Hebrews until we can get back together in the classroom. This lesson is not an exegetical or expositional one. That is, I am not out to explain the text and its meaning. Instead, this is more of a topical consideration of Jesus as our help in our time of need.

II. Introduction

A. Gwen and I were sitting on our deck this week with a class member, Joe Bell, and we were visiting and keeping our “social distance”. And he mentioned that the moon and Venus were going to pass by each other. As he left for home, we walked out front and saw Venus high in the sky with the moon rising up towards it.



B. And while we were out I looked for a couple of the constellations I had been reading about in the Scripture – Orion and Pleiades (more on this later). We could find Orion, the Hunter, but it was too cloudy to find Pleiades, also known as the Seven Sisters.

1. The reason I had been reading the Scripture on Orion and Pleiades came as a result of my thinking about Jesus, who in our text is the one we can call upon in our time of need.
2. Hebrews begins by telling us who this Jesus is. Heb 1:1-4 does not name Jesus, but he is clearly the one being described. And one of the descriptions of Jesus in that text says that he is “upholding the universe by his word of power”.
  - a. Now that is a very picturesque way of describing his sovereignty over all things. And it is a wonderful literary method that God uses to communicate his truth and work in the world and in our lives. God does not simply tell us in his Scripture what the truth is – he also paints pictures for us that help us understand that truth.

C. And those pictures are images we can relate to.

1. For example, **Heb 8:9** says that God took Israel “by the hand” to lead them out of Egypt. That is a beautiful picture that we can all understand. Most of us can remember and picture in our minds a time when maybe our parents took us by the hand and led us through a place we did not know.
  2. And there are many more. He sometimes gives us similes – “the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed”. Sometimes through allegory – the prodigal son, the parable of the sower. And there are a number of other ways.
  3. As I looked at the night sky with Venus and the moon and stars I was reminded of another tool God uses to communicate his truth to us.
- III. **Job 38:31** says, “Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion?”(ESV).
- A. This is in the section of Job where God is asking Job a series of questions that humble Job. Job and his “friends” have been going back and forth over how they understand God’s action in Job’s life and the world at large. And through this series of questions that God asks Job, Job comes to realize that he does not even understand the things that take place in this visible, tangible world. And given that inadequacy, he certainly cannot comprehend the mind of God.
  - B. Now as God is getting Job to this realization – God, in 38:31, asks Job about 2 of the constellations, Pleiades (aka the seven sisters) and Orion.
    1. There are plenty of stars and constellations in the sky. What is significant about these two constellations? It may very well be that they were associated with bringing in the seasons. When Pleiades came into the sky he brought with him winter. And when the cluster of the seven sisters entered the sky they brought the spring rains and summer.
    2. The Hebrew dictionary, Brown Driver Briggs, says regarding the word used for Orion that it is “apparently some mythological allusion”.
    3. Calvin as he comments on **Amos 5:8**, where these 2 constellations are also mentioned together says that Amos is speaking of “stars according to the notions of his age”. And the notion of the age is that these constellations moderated ... meaning controlled ... the seasons. They bring with them the heat and the cold.
    4. **2 Kings 23:5** – As a part of Josiah’s reform of worship Josiah deposes the idolatrous priests who burned incense to the sun, the moon and the constellations and all the hosts of heaven. Those priests believed those heavenly bodies had some power or influence over the things on earth.
    5. That same idea is reflected in Milton’s Paradise Lost (X.650) Milton says God gave his “angels” charge. The first of those angels was the Sun to affect the earth with heat and cold. Then the moon and the other 5 planets. And he later names the constellations which each bring their climate (X. 675)
  - C. Here is what I am getting at: God uses the mythology of Job’s day and Amos’ day to make a point. **He uses some human idea that is not true to give Job and the people of Amos’ day some insight as to who he is.**
    1. To Job his point is – you all believe – the fiction or myth is part of your culture - that it is the stars that bring in the seasons. Are you capable of binding or loosing what they do? And the answer is No. God does not trash

the mythology or error. He uses it to get Job to understand how great a gulf of knowledge exists between Job and God.

- a. We are told earlier in **Job 9:9** that God is the one who made these constellations. If the belief of the day – the myth, the error- was that the constellations brought the cold and the heat, God does not dispute that with Job at this point.

D. Look up in **Job 38:22**. He asks Job if he has entered the storehouses of the snow. The idea back then was God stored snow about like we store gold in storehouses.<sup>1</sup> That is not exactly scientific. But it is how the people then conceived of things. And the Lord does not care so much about how advanced our science is. Here, he wanted Job, and us, to understand just how magnificent and exalted God is.

E. I have an Old Testament theology book where the author says the Scripture uses the mythological conceptions of the people in the OT “as an ornament to depict the LORD’s power in the most dazzling possible colors.”<sup>2</sup>

1. The Scripture does 2 things with false beliefs.<sup>3</sup>

- a. There are times, such as in Joshua and Judges, Kings..., where the people are told to go in and destroy the idols. Get rid of the false gods.
- b. But that is not the only way the Scripture deals with false beliefs – myths and false gods. There is another. We see Paul utilizing false beliefs when he comes into Athens and notices all of the various idols. He finds one with the inscription that says “to the unknown god”. He does not condemn their idolatry, though it is certainly condemnable. Rather he utilizes their belief in an unknown god as an opportunity to tell them about the one true and living God.

1) It is like the thing God does with Job.

F. Here is my first point. There are a lot of things in our culture and our culture’s beliefs that are diametrically opposed to the gospel. And we can stand up and fight against every one of those things and use Scripture to do so. The church has long done that.

1. But there is another biblical option open to us. And that is to use the beliefs of our culture to help them understand the greatness of our God and our salvation through Jesus Christ in terms they can relate to. We can help them see the dazzling beauty of Christ and what he has done without condemning some of their false beliefs. Instead we use them.
2. For example, our culture has a popularly adopted slogan “You have to be yourself”. Now, instead of condemning the culture here. We can do as Paul did and use this as an opportunity to share a greater truth. Most of the people who believe what the culture tells them have never really thought much about it.<sup>4</sup> If you have to be yourself, then what if you are Harvey Weinstein? What if you are a racist? Then who do you be? And look, I don’t think you want me to be who I am. There are things inside of me (and everyone else) that need to be changed. Wouldn’t you agree? And there is the door to the gospel.

---

<sup>1</sup> Anderson Job 38:22

<sup>2</sup> Eichrodt *Theology of the OT* v II p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> Reflecting on what Michael Ward says about CS Lewis in *Planet Narnia* p.28

<sup>4</sup> Tim Keller *Preaching* p. 115f

- G. The Lord through the ages has been very patient with our ignorance and misconstrued views of reality. And instead of just outright condemning all of these views, he has graciously worked through them to reveal himself to us in marvelous ways.
1. I kind of wonder when we get to heaven and we see the way things really are how much we will grin at some of our modern day beliefs like we grin at the idea that Orion or Pleiades are the powers that bring us our seasons. I think we are going to find out like Job did that we don't know quite as much as we think we do. We will be humbled before the majesty of our God.
- IV. Now, with that background, let's look at Jesus, our help in time of need. **Hebrews 1:1-4** says, as we stated at the beginning, that Jesus is "upholding the universe by his word of power". We can quickly read over that and maybe miss the picture that the author is painting for us. And if we do then the apostle John gives it to us in a remarkable and dazzling way in the book of **Revelation 1:16** where we read that Jesus holds in his right hand seven stars.
- A. Now you read some commentaries and they identify the 7 stars with the 7 angels of the church. But exactly who or what these stars and angels are is "not at all clear"<sup>5</sup> They could be messengers. They could be delegates sent to John from the 7 churches. They could have been authorities in the local churches. They could have been heavenly angels or guardian angels. All of those are ideas put forth.
  - B. But there may be another. We just saw from Job and Amos (and there are other places in Scripture)<sup>6</sup> where the stars were believed to exert an influence over the earth.
  - C. Those of you who watched *The Big Bang Theory* might remember the episode where Sheldon tried to teach Penny about physics. He explained to her that the word 'planet' comes from the Greek words *astēr planētēs*<sup>7</sup> which means "wandering star".
    1. You see the view of the universe back then was that there were 7 planets (wandering stars) that revolved around the earth. Those 7 stars were the Sun, the moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. We get our 7 days of the week from those 7 wandering stars. Sunday...Moon day... Satur(n)day... and the others from the correspond names of Norse gods.
      - a. All 7 of those "wandering stars" are mentioned in Scripture.<sup>8</sup>
    2. And those stars were thought to be forces that exerted influence and power over the things that happen in this world. They were named after mythological gods.
  - D. So the picture that John is giving his readers who are undergoing various trials and troubles is that of Jesus who holds the 7 wandering stars – planets – the universe and all of its powers in his hand. The 7 stars/planets thought to have influence over the earth, well they are in the hand of Jesus.
    1. The science is not up to date. But the dazzling beauty of its truth is.

<sup>5</sup> Hughes The Book of Revelation p. 30

<sup>6</sup> Judges 5:20; Josh 10:12f; Hab 3:1; 2 Kings 23:5

<sup>7</sup> Aster – we get asteroid and asterisk which looks like a small star. Planetes – you can see we get the word planet.

<sup>8</sup> Ward *Planet Narnia* p. 28f; 260f

- E. My mom is in Rock Hill. I talk to her every day. And this coronavirus thing has her saying some things I don't like to hear. She said that she may never see her children again. We are all going to have to stay away from each other for a year, and all kinds of other things. I want to go up and cut the cable on her TV. But I can't do that.
  - 1. But what I can do is something better. That is what Hebrews is about. I can tell her the better thing. And that is that Jesus has all of this in the palm of his hand – and that, for those who believe in him, is our source of strength and hope.
- F. And for all of us who are living with the coronavirus around us and all of its uncertainties and changes, it is a comforting and powerful image.
- G. There is an old song (1927) later sung in 1958 song by Mahalia Jackson, and then the version I remember from 1968 by Loretta Lynn, and just this week Tyler Perry wants people to sing it. It is trending on Twitter #HesGotTheWholeWorldChallenge<sup>9</sup>. The song is not in the Trinity hymnal - but I love it anyway. "He's got the whole world in His hands... He's got you and me brother in His hands... He's got you and me sister in His hands... He's got the whole world in His hands"
  - 1. Picture that. (Sing it to yourself). Jesus holds the universe and all of its power and influences in the palm of his hand.
- H. And that is the one we go to in our time of need. We have a Savior who upholds the universe by the power of his word and holds the stars in the palm of his hand.

---

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/tv/B-CX1CynGss/?utm\\_source=ig\\_embed](https://www.instagram.com/tv/B-CX1CynGss/?utm_source=ig_embed)