

THE WITNESS OF THE STARS

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Ancient names tell a story

Many *Biblical Astronomer* readers are familiar with a notion variously called “the gospel in the stars,” or “the witness of the stars.” Over the past dozen decades, several Christian authors and leaders, among whom the most stellar is Dr. D. James Kennedy, have promoted these ideas in print. Invariably, their books are based on the works of Ethelbert Bullinger¹ and Joseph Seiss.² Neither of these two works is original. Both are based on Frances Rolleston’s monumental tome, *Mazzaroth or, the Constellations*.³ Regrettably, Mrs. Rolleston died before finishing her research. At the time of her death she was investigating constellation and star names in some very ancient works and archaeological finds. Still, that leaves us with three complete parts and a partial fourth.

Throughout most if not all of the twentieth century, professional astronomers considered Richard Allen’s *Star-Names and Their Meanings* to be the definitive work on constellation and star names.⁴ Allen’s research goes back to the times of Seneca and Virgil, that is, roughly the time of Christ. He concludes that most of the Arabic names were taken from Greek, namely, that the Arabs, starting in the eighth century, adopted many of the Greek names by translating them into Arabic. Allen was aware of more ancient finds from the Fertile Crescent, leastwise, apparently more ancient than the time of Christ. Insofar as the Chinese literature goes, most if not all of Allen’s names date no earlier than the seventh century B.C.

Allen knew of the gospel in the stars tradition and mentions that it goes back at least to the time of the Reformation. Apparently he was not aware of Rolleston’s work, or if he was, he chose to ignore it. Beginning late in the eighteenth century and maturing in the first quarter of the nine-

¹ Bullinger, E. W., 1893. *The Witness of the Stars*, (Grand Rapids, MI 49501: Kregel Publications).

² Seiss, J. A., 1972. *The Gospel in the Stars*, (Grand Rapids, MI 49501: Kregel Publications). This is an illustrated edition. The original is entitled *The Gospel in the Stars; or, Primeval Astronomy*, 1882, (Philadelphia: E. Claxton & Co.).

³ Rolleston, F., 1862. *Mazzaroth or, the Constellations*. (London: Rivington’s, Waterloo Place).

⁴ Allen, R. H., 1899. *Star-Names and Their Meanings*, (G. E. Strechert) reprinted in 1963 by Dover Publications under the title *Star Names: Their Lore and Meaning*.

teenth century, the goal of science changed from finding out how God created and structured the universe to how the universe could come to exist and function without God. Today, the de-Godification of creation is the paradigm of science and is why evidence for the special creation of the universe and evidence for the universe's geocentric nature are not admissible in the "recognized" literature and practitioners of science.

At the time science was revolting against God, the French astronomers Volney and Depuis felt the need to counter the tradition of the gospel in the stars. Together with Francis Baily of England, they poured contempt on the subject but failed to provide any real proof against it. Instead, while collecting a great deal of traditional astronomical lore, they inadvertently proved not only the great antiquity of the constellations but also showing the correspondence between them and the story of Christ and the gospel of salvation.

In response, Roberts and Faber countered the three atheistic astronomers. In light of their arguments, the scoffers were obliged to admit that the facts of the correspondence were strong, and that the facts did not support their claim that the constellations were purely of pagan origin with no contact with either Judaism or the Scriptures.

The foundational principle undergirding the witness of the stars is found in the word "signs" of Genesis 1:14—"And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years." The most obvious of signs are the constellations, of which formally there are 88. Of those, about forty are ancient. The constellations of the southern hemisphere are mostly modern, that is, created in the last 500 years.

The Decans

The ancients divided the sky into 36 parts called *Decans*. The word, Decans, means pieces, divisions, or faces. Today we still see the root word when we talk about the deck of a ship. The decans were divided into twelve groups of three each, and each group of three was associated with one of the constellations of the zodiac. The word *zodiac* does not relate to our English word, *zoo*, but instead stems from the Arabic word for way, that is, path. The zodiac follows the path traced out by the sun in the course of a year. The moon also moves through the zodiac in the course of a month, and all the planets except Pluto move through the zodiacal constellations in the course of their years. (Pluto's orbit is so highly inclined to the yearly path of the sun about the earth that it passes north of the constellation Scorpius, through Ophiuchus, and south of Aries, through Cetus.)

Although we cannot know for certain what day of the year the creation week started, the best evidence appears to suggest the first day of fall. At the time, the sun would be crossing the equator southwards in the constellation of Virgo. For that reason, the Decans of Virgo, that is to say the decans assigned to Virgo, is listed first in the ancient lists. The twelve groups are, as listed using their common names:

Decans of **Virgo** (the virgin):

Coma Berenices or Berenice's hair,
Centaurus the Centaur,
Boötes the herdsman.

Decans of **Aquarius** the water bearer:

Pisces Austrinus the southern fish,
Pegasus the flying horse,
Cygnus the swan.

Decans of **Libra** the scales:

Crux the Southern Cross,
Lupus the wolf,
Corona Borealis, the Southern Crown.

Decans of **Pisces** the fishes:

The Band joining the fish,
Cephus the king,
Andromeda the chained lady.

Decans of **Scorpio** or scorpion

Serpens the serpent,
Ophiuchus the physician
serpent holder,
Hercules.

Decans of **Aries** the ram:

Cassiopeia the queen,
Cetus the whale,
Perseus the slayer of Medusa.

Decans of **Sagittarius** the archer:

Lyra the lyre,
Ara the altar,
Draco the dragon.

Decans of **Taurus** the bull:

Orion the giant,
Eridanus the river,
Auriga the charioteer.

Decans of **Capricornus** the (sea) goat:

Sagitta the arrow,
Aquila the eagle,
Delphinus the dolphin.

Decans of **Gemini** the twins:

Lepus the hare,
Canis Major the big dog,
Canis Minor the little dog.

Decans of **Cancer** the crab:
 Ursa Major the big bear,
 Ursa Minor the little bear,
 Argo Navis the Argonauts'
 ship.

Decans of **Leo** the lion:
 Hydra the water snake,
 Crater the cup,
 Corvus the crow.

Using the constellation names of the decans, and the Semitic roots of the star names, an apparently ancient account of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ can be traced. Starting with Aries, said to be a ram (Gen. 22:13) but looking like a lamb (Gen. 22:8), the lamb is sent forth, cut off, the exalted head who is lifted up. Associated with the constellation is the first decan, a queen, freed on a throne of liberty. Under the lamb is the whale—symbol of death (Jonah 1:17, Mat. 12:40)—which is overthrown. The third decan is the breaker, holding the enemy's head and who carries away like a celestial David carrying Goliath's head, one of whose eyes the Arabs call Algol, "the ghoul"

After Aries comes Taurus, the bull. The constellation has rather a double meaning. Some aspects and names seemingly relate to Christ, yet the face of a bull is associated with the face of a cherub (compare Eze. 1:10 with 10:14) and Satan is a cherub. Israel had Aaron make a golden calf at Mt. Sinai, and the northern kingdom, from Jeroboam's day forward worshipped the golden calves at Bethel and Dan. The Pleiades, also known as the seven stars in the Bible, are a type of the Church, the influence of the Gospel. Though now reckoned as part of Taurus, originally it was a separate constellation.⁵ Most of the associations with Christ which Rolleston, Seiss, and Bullinger read into Taurus really stem from the Pleiades. The first decan of Taurus is Orion, the giant. In Hebrew he is called *Kesil*, the fool. It is said that once the constellation may have referred to the Messiah, but that Nimrod took it to himself. Most of the names refer to strength, a prince, and a stock or branch. Next is Eridanus the river of judgment in Hebrew. It appears to relate to the Jordan (descender) River, a type of death. The third decan is Auriga, a shepherd (now charioteer) holding Capella (she-goat) and her kids.

Then comes Gemini, the twins or united. The first decan is the enemy (Lepus), fool, deceiver, plucked up. The second is the big dog with reference to mighty, prince who shall come, leader, and shining one. The little dog refers to redeemer, prince, chief ruler, and burdened.

That is followed by cancer the crab. The Hebrew name means "who holds or binds." Its stars relate to the multitude offspring, sheltering, lambs. The little bear is the first decan meaning awaiting the coming,

⁵ Bouw, G.D., 1999. "The Bible and the Pleiades," *Biblical Astronomer* 9(87):4.

assembled. The great bear is next, the sons of Ash, the assembly, the sheepfold, purchased (i.e., peculiar), and cut-off. The third decan is Argo, the ship that releases, the desired, of him who comes. The Egyptians saw Cancer as a scarab beetle.

Leo the lion comes next. The Lord judge, who rends, puts down the enemy, and comes quickly. Hydra the abhorred is the first decan, a water snake over whom the cup of wrath (second decan) is about to be poured. The third decan, the crow, is about to eat the serpent.

Next is the virgin and its three decans, we find a child (Coma), who is the desired one, the branch, and the avenger. The next decan is the centaur, the despised one, the sin offering, and the smitten king. The final decan in Virgo is Boötes, the coming one, the keeper of the flock, who bruises by treading under foot.

Next comes Libra, the scales. The scales speak of a judgment, a weighing or meting-out in payment, gain, and battle. The first decan is a cross whose stars speak of boundary, mark, and cutting off. Second is the "victim," the one who is destroyed, the beast, the animal. Third comes the crown, speaking of the shining and encompassing kingdom.

After Libra comes Scorpio, speaking of conflict. There is war, oppression, conflict and battle in its star names. Looming over the scorpion is Ophiuchus, holding a serpent in his hands. His foot star is called bruise. The brightest star in the serpent is the accursed, the reptile. The third decan is Hercules, the strong one who was wounded and now chastens, the kneeling branch about to bruise the serpent, Draco.

Next comes Sagittarius, the bowman, who swiftly comes down from heaven to fire a dart, and who graciously labored. The first decan is the lyre, which is sent forth to rejoice for triumph in battle. Next is the altar, which is perfect for sacrifice. The last decan is Draco, the dragon, the punished enemy, the tread-upon.

After Sagittarius come Capricornus, the goat cut off, that is, the scapegoat (Leviticus 16) that has the record of the cutting-off, that is, of sin. The first decan is the arrow, destroying and making desolate. Next is the eagle, the bright scarlet wounded falling one. Thirdly is the dolphin, which the ancients viewed as a vessel pouring out water and the star names speak of swift as water, coming or flowing quickly.

Aquarius is next. He is the one who pours out the water and has the record of pouring forth. The water flows to the (southern) fish's mouth. The second decan is Pegasus, the horse coming from heaven with the righteous branch coming quickly and joyfully. Cygnus is the third decan, a swan (also the northern cross) who gads about, flees, going about in a circuit.

Last is Pisces, the fishes. The fish have lengthened (eternal) life, sons, the fish of him that cometh, the united ones and upheld. The first decan is the band that connects them. It speaks of a bond or bridle. The second decan is Cephus, a king holding a branch. The stars say he is the redeemer branch, who goes about breaking underfoot. The third decan is Andromeda, the chained lady. Though in chains and poor, faint and smitten, yet she shall be set free from death.

This finishes our brief overview of the tale of salvation and damnation as seen in the stars and constellations. The picture is not perfect, but then God nowhere promised that the constellation gospel would be perfect and preserved. He did make that promise for his words, however, in Psalm 12:7.

Using stars and constellations to correct the Bible

There is no doubt that at least some, if not all, of the stellar pagentry is very ancient. The witness of the stars approach takes the Greek, Roman, and Arabic names and searches for Hebrew or Semitic equivalents. Sometimes it works, sometimes the matches are far-fetched.

Take the brightest star in the constellation Leo, for example. Today we know it by the name of Regulus, which is Latin for little king. The word has a sense of directing in a straight line, to lead, to rule. The Hebrew is *regel* which means foot or big toe. Thus Rolleston says, “The treading under foot” as the meaning of the star’s name. True, the sense of walking is in the Latin, we even have a foot-ruler of twelve inches in length that ties the two concepts together. Linguists, however, ignore Hebrew roots, insisting that word roots have to come from somewhere else, like India or Persia. However, the view that European languages stem from India is really quite recent. Hebrew roots of European languages, especially English were universally recognized before the Jesuit conquest of the European educational institutions in the eighteenth century. Our Regulus example is typical of the relationship found by Rolleston and her predecessors.

During the eighteenth century, corresponding with the rise of the higher and lower Bible criticisms, scholars searched for ways to remove what they thought were superstitious or mythical elements from the Holy Bible. To do so, they looked away from the sacred writings of the ancients and looked into the pagan writings, holding them even more authoritative than the Christian and Jewish writers. Some, like Westcott and Hort, openly claimed that when it came to the Bible, Christians were infinitely more likely to lie than atheists. But the higher critics did not stop with the secular writings, they read the gospel in the stars, too.