



BIGGER THAN THE SUN

Anyone remember the eclipse a few weeks back? OK, so the experience wasn't quite as dramatic as a lot of us had hoped, but it did get a little darker (a little).

But why have eclipses fascinated – or terrified – people over the millennia? The answer, I think, is that both sun and moon were regarded as among the most powerful forces in nature. Anything affecting them, affects us.

And today's story from Joshua is all about forces, and in particular, the most ultimate force there is. And a heads-up: this sermon has got more points than any other sermon I've preached, so ...

You have been warned!

Joshua 10:1-28

After the events of Jericho this is probably the part of the Book of Joshua that people know best. It's also in the New Atheist list of '10-least-likely-to-have-ever-happened' biblical events. And the reasoning goes like this:

For the sun and the moon to stand still in the sky, it would have to mean the earth had stopped spinning for a whole 24 hours, and the moon too. And that would mean devastation on a global scale: continental plates crashing into each other, earthquakes, mega-tsunamis, perhaps even the destruction of all life on the planet. Joshua would have been asking for the world to end by praying for this to happen.

Now let me make something clear: I believe that God can do this. If He created time and space, then He can certainly bend them to His will. But that might not be what Joshua is actually praying for.

An alternative translation reads like this:

And he said, "Sun, be quiet over Gib'on! And moon in the valley of Ayalon!" And the sun was quiet and the moon stopped ... The sun stopped in the midst of the sky, and did not rush to rise for a full day.

The Hebrew word for 'stopped', *amad*, is also used in Habakkuk 3:11: "Sun and moon stopped in their dwelling ..." So what does that mean? Well, it might mean that the sun and moon seemed to stand still in the sky. But there's another possibility: that they stopped *shining*. Apart from the fact it makes OK sense of the Hebrew, it makes better sense of the historical and geographical details. We're told that the Israelites had marched all night, which means this is a night-time attack. And where are the sun and the moon? The sun is positioned over Gibeon in the east and the moon over Ajalon in the west.

I.e. this isn't the *middle* of the day, this is the *beginning* of it. It's sunrise. Joshua isn't praying for a longer day –

He's praying for a longer *night*.

Now understand this from the point of view of the Canaanites: these guys worship *shamash*, the sun god, and *yarikh*, the moon god – the 2 most powerful deities in the Canaanite pantheon. So, if you'd been one of those Canaanite warriors, fighting off a surprise attack from the Israelites (and a hailstorm on top of that), and suddenly the sun and the moon seem to just disappear on the horizon, what would that say to you? That the God of Israel is bigger than everything – even the scariest forces in our lives (yes, even the boss. Or the mother-in-law).

Which leads me on to my 24 points. Are you ready for this? Stand up and read them with me ...

- 1) He's bigger than our friends.
- 2) He's bigger than our enemies.
- 3) He's bigger than our past.
- 4) He's bigger than our future.
- 5) He's bigger than our dreams.
- 6) He's bigger than our nightmares.
- 7) He's bigger than our joys.
- 8) He's bigger than our sorrows.
- 9) He's bigger than our words.
- 10) He's bigger than our actions.
- 11) He's bigger than our successes.

- 12) He's bigger than our failures.
- 13) He's bigger than our wisdom.
- 14) He's bigger than our folly.
- 15) He's bigger than the easy things.
- 16) He's bigger than the hard.
- 17) He's bigger than us.
- 18) He's bigger than others.
- 19) He's bigger than life.
- 20) He's bigger than death.
- 21) He's bigger than all we can see.
- 22) He's bigger than all we can't.
- 23) He's bigger than the universe entire.
- 24) He's bigger than anything else!

A. W. Tozer puts it like this: "God possesses what no creature can: an incomprehensible plenitude of power; a potency that is absolute ..." And that God who is bigger than everything holds everything in His hand, so that in some way everything works according to His plan and purpose. As it says in Jeremiah, "Lord GOD, you have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for You!"

Remember Who Is God

Now this is more of a creedal sermon than a 'how to' one, but if we grasp this, what effect do you think it might have? Do you think it might affect the way we think and pray and act? The way we see God, the world, ourselves? Or even, perhaps, the things God does through us? Is our God a God for whom things are difficult, for whom miracles are a tough ask? Or is our God a God for whom anything is possible? A God who is powerful enough to heal relationships? To break addictions? To change people's thinking? To change people's lives?

Are you, am I, a 'little Godder', or a 'big Godder'?

It can be easy to forget. I know I do, and I'm sure you do, too. Because let's face it, sometimes the challenges we face can seem bigger than everything else. But we live in a world of miracles – in fact, you are one! Say it! Tell the person next to you! Get ready to tell someone else!

So, when you look at the world and think the odds are stacked against you, or the opposition is just too powerful, remember.

Remember who is biggest. Remember who is God.