**Eclipse Hysteria**

On Monday, August 21, 2017, Americans along a 70-mile-wide path stretching from Oregon to South Carolina will be able to witness a total solar eclipse. The moon will align with the sun, turning daylight into twilight and causing temperatures to drop rapidly. Cities in our region are at points that will experience the longest eclipse duration in the nation, so folks from all over the world will be flocking to this area for the big show.

All this excitement is in anticipation of an event that will last a little over two minutes, and with good reason. But all this attention presents a great opportunity to consider an occasion nearly 2,000 years ago when the sun was darkened for three hours! Of course, I am referring to the period from noon till three o’clock while Jesus of Nazareth was hanging on a Roman cross. Matthew 27, Mark 15 and Luke 23 offer accounts of this amazing event.

You would think that something this significant would have been documented by historians other than disciples of Christ, and you would be right.

Thallus wrote a history of the eastern Mediterranean world following the Trojan War in about AD 52 and his writings were quoted by renowned third century historian, Julius Africanus. He wrote, “Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away the darkness as an eclipse of the sun – unreasonably as it seems to me.”

Phlegon was a Greek historian writing in AD 137. He stated, “In the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad (i.e., AD 33) there was the greatest eclipse of the sun and that it became night in the sixth hour of the day (noon) so that stars even appeared in the heavens. There was a great earthquake in Bithynia, and many things were overturned in Nicaea.”

What is interesting about these accounts is the acknowledgement of secular historians that a great darkness had, in fact, occurred when the New Testament writers said it did. I agree with Africanus that any attempt to explain the occurrence as a solar eclipse are “unreasonable”. The timing of the Jewish Passover is simply not consistent with the possibility of a solar eclipse. Besides, the duration of the darkness at the crucifixion was simple too long to be explained by any natural phenomenon. The simple fact is that the Father of the one hanging on that cross wanted the world to know that something special was happening.

Romans 3:24-25 tells us that we are justified “through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.” Paul goes on to explain that the death of the sinless Son of God made it possible for the Father to justify us while maintaining His sense of justice, and in order to do that, Christ’s sacrifice had to be carried out publicly, for all the world to see!

Jesus’ death was no typical Roman execution. The blood He shed paid the price for our sins. God darkened the sky as He hung there so we would know that, because of that sacrifice, He can offer us undeserved justification while still remaining a just God. As I stand and watch the sun disappear on August 21, I will be touched with a sense of profound gratitude for the grace and mercy made possible by events on a lonely hill outside the city of Jerusalem when stars were visible at noon.

**John McKee**

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