

When I Consider the Heavens

How often have you gazed upon the night sky on a clear summer night? Contemplating the vastness of the Milky Way, have you ever wondered just how many stars there are up there? Almost every child has attempted to count the stars, either as a school assignment or in the curiosity of sheer determination. According to astronomers, the naked eye can see about 6,000 stars on the clearest possible night. My eyes become tired after trying to count 200!

Every time I scan the night sky, I sense an awesome stillness in the beauty, precision, and majesty that I behold. In that hush, the voice of God is speaking. To Abraham, the stars spoke of the covenant promise of God (Genesis 15:5). To David, they were an inscription of the glory of God (Psalm 19:1). To Paul, they clearly displayed the unfolding of God's invisible attributes, eternal power, and divine nature (Romans 1:20).

The men of the Bible did not have modern telescopes to aid them in their grasp of the vast outreaches of space. Modern science has given us powerful tools with which we can explore the heights of the heavens. Astronomers tell us that within the range of the largest telescope there are 10^{11} (1 followed by 11 zeroes) galaxies with each galaxy containing about 10^{11} stars. Using a little arithmetic, we multiply 10^{11} by 10^{11} and discover that there are 10^{22} stars within telescopic range.

But we are not finished yet. Albert Einstein estimated that the number of stars in total space is 10,000 (10^4) times larger than the number of stars within telescopic range ($10^{22} \times 10^4 = 10^{26}$). How large is 10^{26} ? Counting one number every second, it would take 3 thousand trillion *centuries* to do it! With the recent invention of the radio telescope, stars that give no visible light can be "heard." In our galaxy alone, one of the 10^{11} observable galaxies, there are 10^{11} such stars!

The human mind cannot even begin to fathom the exact magnitude of the number of stars in the heavens. Who knows? The only One who does know is the One who created them.

"He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by their names" (Psalm 147:4).

"Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these stars, the One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power not one of them is missing" (Isaiah 40:26).

God not only knows the exact number of stars, He also has a name for each! In the Hebrew, to name something means to identify its unique character or purpose. God has created each star for a particular purpose, with unique characteristics. Stop and think about that. Think about it deeply. If you do, then you will know why the Psalmist said in his next breath,

"Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite!" (Psalm 147:5)

The literal Hebrew translated as infinite in English means "cannot be numbered." Just as the number of the stars is beyond the scope of our comprehension, so is the intelligence, insight, and wisdom of our God.

The next time you consider the heavens, keep these facts and Scriptures in mind. Do you feel small, paltry, and insignificant as you reflect on the awesome greatness of God?

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“When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou dost take thought of him” (Psalm 8:3-4)

Remember, He who counts the stars knows the number of hairs on your head (Matthew 10:30). Made in His image and redeemed by grace through Christ, you are the crown of His creation.

“Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and dost crown him with glory and majesty! Thou dost make him to rule over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas” (Psalm 8:5-8).

Your smallness is united to His greatness. He who created the vast outreaches of space to declare His glory also created you. He made you to reflect a glory and purpose greater than the stars because He made you the pinnacle of His creation.

And one day, His glory will be manifested and consummated in you to such an extent that your present experience will be faint and dull by comparison. For that day, the stars and all creation “stand on their tiptoes” in anxious expectation (Romans 8:19, J.B. Phillips).