

THE DAY THE SUN STOPPED SHINING!

The darkness that covered the land of Israel for three hours was recorded by three of the Gospel writers. *"Now from the 6th hour there occurred darkness over all the land until the 9th hour"* (Matthew 27:45). *"Now when the 6th hour had come, it became dark over all the land until the 9th hour"* (Mark 15:33). *"It was now about the 6th hour, and darkness came over all the land until the 9th hour, the sun failing"* (Luke 23:44-45).

The three evangelists testify that the darkness lasted three hours, and it *'covered all the land'*. Luke says that *'the sun failed'* ('*tou heliou ekleipontos*'). **Helios** = the Sun. **Ekleipo** = **'to fail, to come to an end.'** In Luke 22:32 Jesus used the same word: *"I have prayed for you that your faith fail not."* Thus the cause of the darkness was an unaccountable failure in the Sun's light. This distinguishes the event from the mere darkness of dense thunderclouds that can cause near night-time conditions. Storms like this are unusual for Palestine, especially at Passover time, and certainly would not have lasted 3 hours. Furthermore, there would have been mention of prodigious rainfall. Luke in fact used a word that gave rise to our present word **ECLIPSE**, an astronomical event, the cause of which lies beyond the confines of the Earth's atmosphere. But we must not think that the strange darkness was caused by an extended eclipse of the Sun, for there was no way for that to occur on the day of the crucifixion. This is because an eclipse of the Sun only occurs when the Moon is directly between the Sun and us, thus blocking out its light. And on this particular day (Passover - the 14th Nisan, Luke 22:13-15), the Moon was full and therefore on the **FAR** side of the Earth away from the Sun (Passover was always on a full moon). There can be no possibility of an eclipse of the Sun that day. Furthermore, no eclipse of the Sun can last more than **7 and a half minutes** in any one place, and this strange darkness lasted for **3 HOURS**. Hence, the cause of the darkness, though beyond the clouds, cannot be attributed to the

Moon, or any source that we are aware of. Something must have intruded its way into a position between the Earth and the Sun and cut off the light. Thus this was a SUPERNATURAL EVENT, darkness fell during Christ's death. Even the universe had to respond to His sacrificial death!

Thus for three hours a strange darkness covered the land. The sky was clear, and the stars appeared. People would be asking themselves whether 'the end of the world' had come. The Jews knew from their Bible that '**the day of the Lord**' would be '**a day of darkness**', and Amos 8:9 says, "**On that day, says the Lord God, I will make the Sun to go down at noon, and darken the Earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasting into mourning, and all your songs into lamentations.**" This darkness speaks of a time of God's judgement upon sin. At the crucifixion God the Father placed all the sins of mankind (including yours and mine) upon His Son Jesus Christ, and God poured out His wrath upon Him. Jesus stood in our place and bore the punishment we deserved. He cried out in a loud voice, "**My God, my God, Why have you forsaken me?**" Jesus was separated from his Father for 3 hours. God signified this by blotting out the sun until Jesus had the paid the price for sin in full

Is there any historical evidence to back up this event?

Yes! - there were other early writers that mentioned this strange darkness. **Tertullian** (at the beginning of the 3rd century) and **Lucian** (the martyr of Nicomedia, who died in A.D. 312) appealed to the testimony of national archives then in existence that a supernatural darkness prevailed at the time of the Cross.

Thallus, a historian writing in AD. 52, writing to deny any supernatural elements accompanying the crucifixion tried to explain away this darkness. Though his writings are lost to us, we have the quotations of other later writers. **Julius Africanus**, a Christian historian, writing about A.D. 221, refers to Christ's crucifixion and the darkness that covered the earth prior to his death saying:

"Thallus, in his third book of histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun - unreasonably as it seems to me. For the Hebrews celebrate the Passover on the 14th day according to the moon, and the passion of our Saviour falls on the day before the passover; but an eclipse of the sun takes place only when the moon comes under the sun. And it cannot happen at any other time but in the interval between the first day of the new moon and the last of the old, that is, at their junction: how then should an eclipse occur when the moon is almost diametrically opposite the sun?"

The phrase 'this darkness' indicates that Thallus was referring to the events of the death of Jesus. Africanus stated his objection to Thallus's statement, arguing that an eclipse of the sun cannot occur during a full moon, as was the case when Jesus died at Passover. The writing of Thallus shows that the facts of Jesus' death were known and discussed in Rome as early as the middle of the first century, to the extent that unbelievers like Thallus thought it necessary to explain the matter of the darkness as something natural. He took the existence of Christ for granted. Neither Jesus, nor the darkness at his death were ever denied. At the time of his writing, anti-Christians had already been explaining the darkness at the time of the crucifixion as a purely natural phenomenon (eclipse). Origen, for example, had written that this idea of it being an eclipse was an invention of the pagans to discredit the Gospels.

Phlegon Confirms Jesus' story and Darkness at Noon.

Julius Africanus then mentions another source, that of **Phlegon of Tralles**, a first century Greek historian born not long after the crucifixion. His greatest task was in the writing of history, called **OLYMPIADES**, where he used the Olympiads as a useful means of establishing a time-line. We only have fragments left to us of this monumental work and quotations of it from other writers.

The words Africanus quoted were: "**During the time of Tiberius**

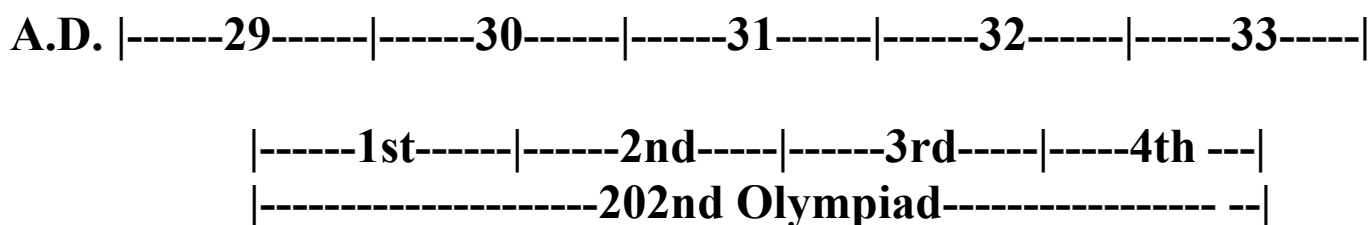
Cæsar an eclipse of the sun occurred during the Full Moon."

The timing agrees with the Gospels, and as we have shown, this must refer to a supernatural event. Thankfully we have a more detailed fragment from Phlegon's Olympiades:

"In the 4th year of the 202nd Olympiad, there was a great eclipse of the Sun, greater than had ever been known before, for at the 6th hour the day was changed into night and the stars were seen in the heavens. An earthquake occurred in Bythinia and overthrew a great part of the city of Nicæa."

This reference reveals several key things. The sun was darkened during Christ's death along with a great earthquake. The time of the darkness agrees with Matthew 27:45. This statement of Phlegon also gives us the year of the crucifixion. In ancient Greece the Olympic Games were held in the July of the first year of each **Olympiad**, (a 4-year period running from July to June of each succeeding year). The 202nd Olympiad has been calculated to run from July AD 29 to June AD 33. The diagram below will clarify the matter.

THE 202nd OLYMPIAD CALENDAR



Each year of an Olympiad began on 1st July. We know that Jesus died in the Spring, and thus it had to be in A.D. 33 according to Phlegon. As several of the early Fathers quoted him, there seems no reason to doubt his word. Therefore the **year of the crucifixion is A.D 33.**

Another historian, **Philipon** (with **Origen**), confirms the historicity of Phlegon's statement by writing, "**And about this darkness - Phlegon recalls it in the Olympiads...Phlegon mentioned**

the eclipse which took place during the crucifixion of the Lord Christ, and no other (eclipse), it is clear that he did not know from his sources about any (similar) eclipse in previous times ...and this is shown by the historical account of Tiberius Caesar."

So it was recorded in a historical account of Tiberius by Roman historians that Rome was in darkness during the reign of Tiberius - the Caesar in AD.33. Writers that refer to this statement of Phlegon include Julius Africanus, Joannes Philoponus, Malelas, Origen, Eusebius and Maximus. As many as 7 ancient writers directly quote Phlegon! This makes the fragment among the best-attested in ancient writing. One of these wrote:

"Phlegon records that in the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the 6th hour to the 9th, manifestly that one of which we speak."

Origen wrote to answer Celsus, a strong critic of the supernatural element in the Gospels, saying: "Now Phlegon, in his 13th or 14th book, I think, of his Chronicles, not only ascribed to Jesus a knowledge of future events . . but also testified that the result corresponded to His predictions" (Origen Against Celsus).

And in the same work, Origen refers to Phlegon again, as follows: **"And with regard to the eclipse in the time of Tiberius Caesar, in whose reign Jesus appears to have been crucified, and the great earthquakes which then took place, Phlegon too I think has written in the 13th or 14th book of his Chronicles"** and

"He [that is, Celsus] imagines also that both the earthquake and the darkness were an invention, but regarding these, we have in the preceding pages made our defence, according to our ability, adducing the testimony of Phlegon, who relates that these events took place at the time when our Saviour suffered."