

Great Signs In Heaven Above

(D&C 29:14; 45:40)

Parley P. Pratt – Symbols in the Sky

"I had been on a visit to a singular people called, at New Lebanon, about seven miles from my aunt Van Cott's, and was returning that distance, on foot, on a beautiful evening of September. The sky was without a cloud; the stars shone out beautifully, and all nature seemed reposing in quiet, as I pursued my solitary way, wrapt in deep meditations on the predictions of the holy prophets; the signs of the times; the approaching advent of the Messiah, to reign on the earth, and the important revelations of the Book of Mormon; my heart filled with gratitude to God that He had opened the eyes of my understanding to receive the truth, and with sorrow for the blindness of those who lightly rejected the same, when my attention was aroused by a sudden appearance of a brilliant light which shone around me, above the brightness of the sun. I cast my eyes upward to inquire from whence the light came, when I perceived a long chain of light extended in the heavens, very bright, and of a deep fiery red. It at first stood stationary in a horizontal position; at length bending in the center, the two ends approached each other with a rapid movement, so as to form an exact square. In this position it again remained stationary for some time, perhaps a minute, and then again the ends approached each other with the same rapidity, and again ceased to move, remaining stationary, for perhaps a minute, in the form of a compass; it then commenced a third movement in the same manner, and closed like the closing of a compass, the whole forming a straight line like a chain doubled. It again remained stationary for a minute, and then faded away.

I fell upon my knees in the street, and thanked the Lord for so marvelous a sign of the coming of the Son of Man.

Some persons may smile at this, and say that all these exact movements were by chance; but, for my part, I could as soon believe that the letters of the alphabet would be formed by chance, and be placed so as to spell my name, as to believe that these signs (known only to the wise) could be formed and shown forth by chance." (Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, pg. 31)

The Form of a Serpent

"This night, about twelve o'clock, the pilot and officers of the steamer *William Penn*, on the Ohio river, between Aurora and the rising sun, Indiana, observed a great light in the sky, in the form of a serpent. It turned to a livid, bright red, deep and awful, and remained stationary among the stars for two or three minutes, and then in a gradual manner formed a distinct roman G: in about a minute and a half, it turned into a distinct O, and afterwards changed to a plain D, when it turned into an oblong shape, and gradually disappeared." (Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, pg. 309)

Army in the Heavens

"The signs of the coming of the Son of Man were showing themselves in the heavens.

It was the eventful night of September 22, 1827. Says Heber C. Kimball:

'I had retired to bed, when John P. Greene, who was living within a hundred steps of my house, came and waked me up, calling upon me to come out and behold the scenery in the heavens. I woke up and called my wife and Sister Fanny Young (sister to Brigham Young), who was living with us, and we went

out-of-doors.

"It was one of the most beautiful starlight nights, so clear that we could see to pick up a pin. We looked to the eastern horizon, and beheld a white smoke arise toward the heavens; as it ascended it formed itself into a belt, and made a noise like the sound of a mighty wind, and continued southwest, forming a regular bow dipping in the western horizon. After the bow had formed, it began to widen out and grow clear and transparent, of a bluish cast; it grew wide enough to contain twelve men abreast.

In this bow an army moved, commencing from the east and marching to the west; they continued marching until they reached the western horizon. They moved in platoons, and walked so close that the rear ranks trod in the steps of their file leaders, until the whole bow was literally crowded with soldiers. We could distinctly see the muskets, bayonets and knapsacks of the men, who wore caps and feathers like those used by the American soldiers in the last war with Britain; and also saw their officers with their swords and equipage, and the clashing and jingling of their implements of war, and could discover the forms and features of the men. The most profound order existed throughout the entire army; when the foremost man stepped, every man stepped at the same time; I could hear the steps. When the front rank reached the western horizon a battle ensued, as we could distinctly hear the report of arms and the rush.

No man could judge of my feelings when I beheld that army of men, as plainly as ever I saw armies of men in the flesh; it seemed as though every hair of my head was alive. This scenery we gazed upon for hours, until it began to disappear.

After I became acquainted with Mormonism, I learned that this took place the same evening that Joseph Smith received the records of the Book of Mormon from the angel Moroni, who had held those records in his possession.

John Young, Sen., and John P. Greene's wife, Rhoda, were also witnesses.

My wife, being frightened at what she saw, said, 'Father Young, what does all this mean?'

'Why, it's one of the signs of the coming of the Son of Man,' he replied, in a lively, pleased manner.

'The next night similar scenery was beheld in the west by the neighbors, representing armies of men who were engaged in battle.'" (Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, pg. 15)

Great Meteor Shower of 13 November 1833

Philo Dibble said: "On one occasion Joseph [Smith] was preaching in Kirtland sometime in the fall of 1833. Quite a number of persons were present who did not belong to the Church, and one man, more bitter and skeptical than others, made note with pencil and paper of a prophecy uttered on that occasion, wherein Joseph said that 'Forty days shall not pass, and the stars shall fall from heaven.' Such an event would certainly be very unusual and improbable to the natural man, and the skeptic wrote the words as a sure evidence to prove Joseph to be a false Prophet. On the thirty-ninth day after the utterance of that prophecy a man and brother in the Church, by the name of Joseph Hancock...and another brother were out hunting game and got lost. They wandered about until night, when they found themselves at the house of this unbeliever, who exultingly produced this note of Joseph Smith's prophecy, and asked Brother Hancock what he thought of his Prophet now, that thirty-

nine days had passed and the prophecy was not fulfilled. Brother Hancock was unmoved and quietly remarked, 'There is one night left of the time, and if Joseph said so, the stars will certainly fall tonight. This prophecy will all be fulfilled.' The matter weighed upon the mind of Brother Hancock, who watched that night, and it proved to be the historical one, known in all the world as 'the night of the falling of the stars.' He stayed that night at the house of the skeptical unbeliever, as it was too far from home to return by night, and in the midst of the falling of the stars he went to the door of his host and called him out to witness what he had thought impossible and the most improbable thing that could happen, especially as that was the last night in which Joseph Smith could be saved from the condemnation of 'a false prophet'. The whole heavens were lit up with the falling meteors, and the countenance of the new spectator was plainly seen and closely watched by Brother Hancock, who said that he turned pale as death, and spoke not a word. After that event the unbeliever sought the company of any Latter-day Saint. He even enticed Mormon children to keep him company at his house. Not long afterwards, too, he sent for Joseph and Hyrum to come to his house, which they did, but with no noticeable results, for I believe he never received the gospel." (*Juvenile Instructor*, 27:23, May 1892)

Joseph Smith wrote in his own hand in his diary on Nov 13, 1833: The entry indicates that Joseph saw the meteor shower as "a literal fulfillment of the word of God as recorded in the holy scriptures and a sure sign that the coming of Christ is close at hand." The entry is completed with a prayer, "Oh how marvellous are thy works Oh Lord and I thank thee for thy me[r]cy u[n]to me thy servent Oh Lord save me in thy kingdom for Christ sake Amen." This "great sign in the heavens" was mentioned by the Prophet six days later, but not discussed. In editing the documentary history, Roberts changed the Prophet's writings that the spelling and the grammar would be correct. Moreover, he added a substantial discursive section describing the event and speculating on its meaning. This addition, some of which was taken directly from the Autobiography of Parley Pratt, was not set apart in any way, leaving the misleading impression that it had been written by the Prophet. Jessee's work provides a means of separating such additions from the true history of the Prophet written "by himself." Thus, besides being valuable, in and of itself,"

Parley P. Pratt wrote: "About 2:00 the next morning [in November 1833] we were called up by the cry of signs in the heavens. We arose, and to our great astonishment all the firmament seemed enveloped in splendid fireworks, as if every star in the broad expanse had been hurled from its course, and sent lawless through the wilds of ether. Thousands of bright meteors were shooting through space in every direction, with long trains of light following in their course. This lasted for several hours, and was only closed by the dawn of the rising sun. Every heart was filled with joy at this majestic display of signs and wonders, showing the near approach of the coming of the Son of God." (*Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 103)

The edited form of Joseph Smith's entry read: "About 4:00 a.m. I was awakened by Brother Davis knocking at my door, and calling on me to arise and behold the signs in the heavens. I arose, and to my great joy, beheld the stars fall from heaven like a shower of hailstones; a literal fulfillment of the word of God, as recorded in the holy Scriptures, and a sure sign that the

coming of Christ is close at hand. In the midst of this shower of fire, I was led to exclaim, 'How marvelous are Thy works, O Lord! I thank Thee for Thy mercy unto Thy servant; save me in Thy kingdom for Christ's sake. Amen.'" (*Documentary History of the Church*, 1:439)

John Brush wrote: "A strange thing happened, which was a marvel and a wonder throughout the land. The Saints assembled for prayer, as usual, and on rising to their feet witnessed a peculiar sight. Numbers of stars had begun to fall and continued to increase until the whole heavens were streaked with their shining trains. For hours this phenomenon continued, presenting a joyful sight to the Saints; for to them it was a glorious witness from God in heaven that He was remembering His people and would cause their persecutors to know that He was displeased with what they had done. And that they were right in taking this view of it was verified by those who visited their camp, for from them they heard that the scene had been one of terror to those who had helped to drive out the Saints. Pricked in their hearts they could not sleep, but ran from house to house, talking over the strangeness of the sight and crying, 'Send for the Mormons quick, and bring them back, that a terrible calamity may not come upon us.' But as morning dawned and the great display ceased, they were ashamed to openly confess that they had done wrong, by restoring the Saints to their possessions, and so it was never done." (*Autumn Leaves*, 4:21-25 and 65-66; EJCM, 26)

The Times and Seasons published on May 15, 1845: "The appearance of these signs varied in different sections of the country: in Zion, all heaven seemed enwrapped in splendid fireworks, as if every star in the broad expanse, had been suddenly hurled from its course, and sent lawless through the wilds of ether: some at times, appeared like bright shooting meteors with long trains of light following in their course, and in numbers resembled large drops of rain in sunshine. Some of the long trains of light following the meteoric stars, were visible for some seconds; those streaks would cut and twist up like serpents writhing. The appearance was beautiful, grand and sublime beyond description; as though all the artillery and fire works of eternity were set in motion to enchant and entertain the Saints, and terrify and awe the sinners on the earth. Beautiful and terrific as was the scenery, which might be compared to the falling figs or fruit when the tree is shaken by a mighty wind." (*Times and Seasons*, 6[9]:898)

Stephens wrote: "During the fall of 1833 occurred a natural phenomenon of a most wonderful character. This was on the night of the 13th of November. It was what was known as the 'meteoric shower' or the 'falling of the stars'. It was witnessed with amazement and astonishment throughout the entire limits of the United States." (*History of the United States*, 455; HC, 1:440)

Agnes Clerke wrote: "On the night of November 12-13, 1833, a tempest of falling stars broke over the Earth. The sky was scored in every direction with shining tracks and illuminated with majestic fireballs. At Boston, the frequency of meteors was estimated to be about half that of flakes of snow in an average snowstorm. Their numbers ...were quite beyond counting; but as it waned, a reckoning was attempted, from which it was computed, on the basis of that much-diminished rate, that 240,000 must have been visible during the nine hours they continued to fall." (*Victorian Astronomy Writer*)