

Which Way The Shadow?

Weylan Deaver • April 2007

Hezekiah, king of Judah 700 years before the birth of Christ, received one day a most distressing message from Isaiah the prophet (2 Kings 20:1-11). The king had become deathly ill and the Lord sent his prophet to inform Hezekiah that he needed to make ready because death was imminent. Hearing that, the king wept bitterly and prayed to the Lord for mercy, speaking to God of the faithful life he had lived. God heard the prayer and saw the tears and sent Isaiah back to Hezekiah with news that the king would be healed, another fifteen years being added to his life.

The king then asked Isaiah what sign God would give to prove he would, indeed, be healed. God, through Isaiah, gave Hezekiah a choice, letting him pick his own sign from Heaven. Hezekiah could choose either that the shadow went forward ten steps, or that the shadow went backward ten steps on the sundial of Ahaz. In an age before clocks, this was a means of keeping time. The normal event was for the shadow to move forward as the day progressed. An obvious miracle would be required to move the shadow backward ten steps, and Hezekiah chose this for his sign (noting that this would be the more difficult of the two choices). In other words, God's causing the shadow to move backward would give the appearance of time moving in reverse. Isaiah then prayed to God and the requested sign was given.

In reading this account, we usually focus on the miraculous nature of the second option—the sign that Hezekiah chose. But, have you ever considered that the first option would have been just as much an act of God as the second? As a day wears thin and shadows lengthen, it is, after all, God who controls the process. True, time moving in reverse would be a miracle. But, when time moves methodically forward, day in and day out, how many of us chalk it up to “Mother Nature”? In fact, there is no such thing as “Mother Nature.” Nor is nature itself either controlling events or propelling itself forward. Those ideas rob the true force—God—of glory he is due. Rather, the biblical concept is that God is running things, and very much so. Specifically, every element in the universe is currently being held together by none other than Christ himself (Colossians 1:17).

We may fail to recognize the Lord's power in a raindrop on the cheek, blooming flowers in spring, the hoot of an owl, the tick of a clock, the cool of a breeze, or an evening shadow. But that is only because we are not looking at things through biblical lenses. Which way the shadow? In point of fact, either way a shadow moves is proof enough that God moves it. The shadow moving backward was a clear sign to Hezekiah's eyes. But let us not forget that the shadow moving forward should be no less the working of God in our eyes today. What we perceive as “nature” is really the continuous product of divine supernatural activity, sustaining the world till the time God has chosen to bring all things to an end. In the meantime, perhaps we should sing with greater reflection the lyrics of Maltbie Babcock—

*This is my Father's world, the birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white, declare their Maker's praise.
This is my Father's world: He shines in all that's fair;
In the rustling grass I hear Him pass;
He speaks to me everywhere.*