3919
כּוֹכָב

כּוֹכָב (*kôk~b*) nom. star (# 3919)

ANE Cognates to *kôk~b* meaning star are common in the Sem. languages: e.g., Ugar. *kbkb* or *kkb*, Akk. *kakkabu*, Aram. *kôkb~'*, Syr. *kauk^{e}b~*, Arab. *kaukab*. Etymologies have been proposed from *kbb*, burn (Akk., Aram. and Arab.) and from *kabba*, roll, revolve (Arab.). Unlike modern Eng. usage but parallel to ancient G, the Sem. word probably includes planets, comets, meteors, or any bright object in the night sky.

Three features of stars were especially important in the ANE and relevant to OT background: (1) the worship of stars as gods; (2) divination by stars, or astrology; and (3) stars as timekeepers.

1. The worship of astronomical objects as gods is quite old and widespread. Babylonian worship of the sun god Šamaš, the moon god Sin, Ištar as the planet Venus, and Marduk as the planet Jupiter was influential throughout the ANE. This system was later borrowed by the Greeks (and from them by the Romans), so that our modern planet names are those of Roman deities.

2. The belief that the heavenly bodies are divine would encourage the thought that stellar phenomena might be messages for earth, particularly in a society already disposed to divination. The Sum. Gudea cylinders (c2100 BC) mention a goddess appearing in a dream with a map of the heavens and telling the king that the time is right to build a temple. Old Babylonian texts (c1800 BC) list omens to be inferred from lunar eclipses and other heavenly phenomena. These were later compiled (by 1000 BC) into the 70-tablet reference work *En©ma Anu Enlil*, influential throughout the ANE to Hellenistic times, connecting specific phenomena of sun, moon, planets, stars and weather with events on earth. Unlike Hellenistic (and modern) horoscopic astrology, such predictions involved public events, kings, and nations rather than private individuals.

3. The worship of stars and the belief they predict earthly events may have arisen from the fact that the stars certainly predict the seasons and sunrise, functioning as calendars and clocks. As the earth makes its yearly orbit around the sun, the stars move westward, rising four minutes earlier each night, thus providing a convenient set of markers for the seasons. Already by 3000 BC, the Egyptians had noticed that each year the star Sothis (Sirius) rose just before sunrise at the time of the annual Nile flooding. By the Middle Kingdom (c2100-1800 BC) the Egyptians had developed a list of 36 "decans" (single stars or constellations) spanning the whole year, with each successively rising with the sun at 10-day intervals. In Mesopotamia a similar system was developed during the Old Babylonian period (c1800-1500 BC). The positions of such stars could also be used to tell time at night (when sundials are useless) as tables had been constructed to calibrate the hours of the night with the current day and month.

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Babylonian stars and constellations have been identified using the astronomical text ^{mul}*APIN* (c700 BC; Van der Waerden, 1949, 13-16). Sufficient detail is given that nearly all the major Babylonian constellations have been identified with reasonable certainty. Many of these are the same as the ancient G constellations we use today: e.g., our Gemini was also for the Babylonians a pair of twins; Leo was a lion (possibly a dog); Corvus, a raven; Libra, a pair of scales; Taurus, a bull; Scorpio, a scorpion; Capricorn, a goat-fish; and Orion, the "true shepherd of the sky." On the other hand, others are different: Ursa Major was a wagon (but cp. Eng. Charles' Wain); Cygnus and part of Cepheus, a panther; Pisces and parts of Pegasus and Andromeda, a large swallow; Canis Major, a bow and arrow; Lyra, a goat; Hercules, a dog; and Aries, a hired laborer. These differences undermine the attractive theory that a "gospel in the stars" comes down to us from patriarchal times, as proposed by F. Rolleston and popularized by J. A. Seiss and E. W. Bullinger.

OT 1. *kôk~b* is used 37x with two areas of meaning: (1) commonly as our word "star" (e.g., Gen 1:16; Exod 32:13) and (2) rarely (1-3x) as an alternative term for "angel" (Job 38:7; Isa 14:12-13?). Both stars and angels are called the "hosts of heaven" (e.g., Deut 4:19 vs. 1 Kgs 22:19). Some see this as an indication that the stars were thought to be angels, though the connection may be no more than that angels, too, are bright objects in the sky. Others, with later rabbinic theology, explain this usage by seeing angels in charge of each star, just as angels are over various nations (Dan 10:20).

2. The stars are created by God (Gen 1:16; Ps 8:3) and under his providential control (Isa 40:26; Jer 31:35). They were "to separate the day from the night" and "serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years" (Gen 1:14). The sun, of course, marks off the days, the moon indicates the months, and the stars (by their positions relative to the sun) the seasons and the years. They were also created to praise God (Ps 148:3-6), perhaps by their brightness (Dan 12:3; Ps 136:9), purity (Job 25:5), height (Job 22:12) and number (e.g., Gen 15:5). They form a significant element in what the psalmist meant by saying, "The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Ps 19:1). Thus stars are a part of God's self-revelation in nature, his handiwork pointing beyond themselves to God's brightness, purity, greatness and power. The stars being merely created, God's people are not to worship them (Deut 4:19) as the pagans do. They are not gods, nor are they eternal, but rather (with the heavens) they are wearing out like clothing and will one day be discarded (Ps 102:25-26).

The number of stars is uncountably vast (e.g., Gen 15:5), yet apparently finite (Ps 147:4). They are often used (occasionally with the sand of the seashore) to illustrate the promise to Abraham of a multitude of descendants (Gen 15:5; 22:17; 26;4; Exod 32:13; Deut 1:10; 10:22; 28:62). Provisional fulfillment of this promise had already occurred when Israel entered Canaan (Deut 1:10; 10:22) but might be lost again by disobedience if Israel brought itself under the covenant curses (Deut 28:62). In his military census, David feared to count all of Israel (1 Chr 27:23), perhaps thinking such a count would be tempting God who had promised an uncountable multitude.

3. In prophetic contexts, stars are used symbolically to represent prominent individuals C Joseph's brothers in one of his dreams (Gen 37:9-10), the coming ruler in Balaam's vision (Num 24:17), the king of Babylon in Isaiah's taunt (Isa 14:12-13). In the last of these, the symbol seems to represent the king's exaltation, and his subsequent abasement is pictured by being cast down to the earth. In Daniel's eschatological promise to the wise (Dan 12:3), they are to "shine like the brightness of the heavens . . . like the stars for ever and ever."

The darkening of the stars, sun, and moon is a motif in curse contexts, including Job's lament regarding the day of his birth (Job 3:9), his characterization of God's power in judgment (Job 9:7), Qoheleth's picture of old age (Eccl 12:2), Isaiah's oracle against Babylon (Isa 13:10), the locust plague of Joel (2:10), and the eschatological darkness which it foreshadows (Joel 3:15).

4. The meaning of terms apparently used for particular stars, planets, and star-groups are rather uncertain due to the infrequency of their occurrence in the OT, the lack of specifying detail in such contexts, the rarity of identifiable cognate expressions in the Sem. languages, and the diversity of renderings in the ancient versions.

(a) *kîyyûn* (#3962) occurs only 1x (Amos 5:26), in a context of idolatry. The NIV renders the word "pedestal," from the root *kwn*, be firm. More commonly this is assumed to be a proper name *k□w~n* for the planet Saturn viewed as a god. The Akk. cognate is *kaiwânu*, Syr. *k□w~n*, Arab. *kaiw~n*. It is assumed that the peculiar vowels in the Heb. *kîyûn* were substituted from *šiqquṣ*, abomination (#9199), one means by which biblical scribes expressed contempt for paganism.

(b) *kîmâ* (#3966) occurs 3x (Amos 5:8; Job 9:9; 38:31), all in astronomical contexts. The LXX guesses or paraphrases the first, gives Arcturus in the second, and Pleiades in the third. The Vulg. gives Arcturus in the first two, but Pleiades in the last. BDB and KBL^3 favor the bright, closely grouped star cluster Pleiades on the basis of Sem. cognates in Akk., Arab., Eth. and Syr. meaning heap, herd or family. Other interpreters suggest one of the bright stars Arcturus, Sirius, or Aldebaran.

(c) *kesîl* II (#4068) occurs 4x, 3x in the sing. with *kîmâ*, above, and 1x in the pl. (Isa 13:10). The LXX paraphrases the first, gives Hesperus (evening star) for the second, and Orion for the third and fourth. The Vulg. has Orion for the first and second, Arcturus for the third, and splendor for the fourth. The word *kesîl* I is a common nom., occurring 70x (mostly in Prov) with the meaning fool, shameless one. The Targum Jonathan renders the Job passages *nifîla*, giant, which is consistent with Greek myths about Orion the giant hunter. Driver (1956, 2) connects these ideas with the Pesh. rendering *gabb~râ* and the cognate Arab. *jabbâru*, sees in *kesîl* a nuance thick, stout, clumsy, and so identifies the constellation as Orion. The pl. occurrence is puzzling: "The stars of the heaven and their *constellations* will not show their light." It is not easy in such a context to see a reference to the stars that make up Orion or to some few constellations associated with Orion, given the first possessive "their." But if we think of the word as meaning giants, then all the constellations are giant collections of stars, and many are gigantic pictures of people. So the NIV rendering is perhaps the best guess after all.

(d) *mazz~l* (#4655) occurs only 1x (2 Kgs 23:5) and that as the pl. *mazz~lôt*, unless the word *mazz~rôt* (1x, Job 38:32) is just a variant spelling of the same. The *l/r* variation does occur in Sem. languages, and the LXX transliterates both occurrences as *mazour∩th*. BDB (561) suggest the word may be loaned from Assyr. *manzaltu*, *mazaltu*, station, abode (of the gods). Later Heb. and Aram. have cognate words meaning star of fortune, fate. Syr. has two cognates meaning zodiac and stations of the moon. All in all, either zodiacal constellations or planets (which appear only in the zodiac) would fit the data. Driver (1956, 4-8), in fact, opts for a distinction between the two words, suggesting *mazz~lôt* means planets, and *mazz~rôt*, zodiacal circle.

(e) *ma`adannôt* (#5051) occurs 2x, once in an astronomical context (Job 38:31) and once not (1 Sam 15:32). Both passages are somewhat uncertain. Did Agag come to Samuel haltingly (NRSV, NEB), confidently (NIV), cheerfully (RSV, NASB), delicately (KJV), trembling (TEV), or struggling (NAB)? BDB and KBL^3 suggest a root *`nd* which involves a transposition of letters, but means bind. Thus Agag came to Samuel *bound*, and Job 38:31 asks "Can you bind the *chains* of the Pleiades, Or loose the cords of Orion?" (NASB), in agreement with the parallelism in Job and with its rendering by the LXX and the Targum.

(f) *mišṭ~r* (#5428) occurs just once, in Job 38:33: "Do you know the laws of the heavens? Can you set up [God's] *dominion* (*mišṭ~r*) over the earth?" The verbal root *šṭr* occurs in Assyr. and Arab. meaning to write. Aram. and Syr. have cognate nom. meaning document, and Akkad. another meaning inscription. The nom. *š∩ṭ□r* in Heb. means official, officer. KBL^3 suggests *Himmelschrift = Sternenhimmel* (heavenly writing = starry sky), though the idea of an written *decree*, heaven's or God's, seems better to fit both the lexical background and the parallelism in the context.

(g) *m∩šekôt* (#5436) occurs just once, in Job 38:31. The root *mšk* has the force draw, drag, lead, proceed, prolong, from which the idea arises that the nom. might mean cords, by which such an action is accomplished. BDB (604) see an allusion to an unknown legend in which Orion is dragged by cords. Driver (1956, 3-4) proposes the word should be pointed as singular (as implied by LXX, Vulg., Pesh.) and read as Orion's belt.

(h) *nidg~lôt* (#5609) occurs 2x, in Cant 6:4, 10, the former a geographical context, the latter astronomical. The NIV renders the former "majestic as *troops with banners*," the latter "majestic as *the stars in procession*." The form is apparently a ni. part. used as a subst., from *dgl* II, carry or set up a standard #1839), so "ones bannered" or "bannered hosts." The NIV rendering takes this in the first context as referring to a human army and in the second to the (astronomical) heavenly host. Others derive the part. from *dgl* I, look, behold, to get *things seen*, or "awe-inspiring as *visions*" (Murphy, Hermeneia) or "splendid as the heavenly phenomena" (Snaith, NCB).

(i) *`~š* III (#6933) occurs 2x (if *`ayiš* is the same word), both astronomical contexts (Job 9:9, 38:32). There is considerable disagreement on its identification. In 9:9 the Vulg. gives

Arcturus, brightest star in the constellation Bootes; possibly the LXX agrees, if it did not translate the three star groups in the order of the MT. But in 38:32, they give Hesperus/Vesper (Venus as the evening star). Ibn Ezra claimed it was the Bear (Ursa Major), in which case its children (38:32) would probably be the 3 stars in the handle of the Big Dipper. Hölscher and KBL[3] give Leo, taking the Arab. *`ayût*, lion, to be cognate. Schiaparelli and Driver prefer Aldebaran, the brightest star in Taurus, with the surrounding Hyades cluster as its children. The Syr. cognate *`iyûta'* given in the Pesh. is so identified by Barhebraeus. And *`~š* I means clothes-moth, which when it folds its wings, makes a v-shape rather like Aldebaran and the four brightest stars in the Hyades.

P-B Babylonian astronomy and astrology continued to develop, spreading into the G world where the more sophisticated G geometry was applied to these studies. An emphasis on individual astrology develops, based on the heavens at the time of one's birth, reaching its zenith in the Hellenistic city of Alexandria. Numerous astrological papyri survive from this period in Egypt.

In the LXX, *kôk~b* is rendered about equally often by *ast□r* and *astron*, the latter usually in the plur. There appears to be no strong distinction between these terms.

The Pseudepigraphal literature shows interest in astrology and astronomy. 1 Enoch and Jubilees indicate that astrology was taught to humans by the angels who sinned in Gen 6:1-4 (1 Enoch 8:1-4; Jub 8:3). Serug and Nahor practiced astrology, but Abraham was turned away from it by "a word which comes to his heart" one night while watching the stars to make predictions (Jub 12:16-21). Stars are mountains of fire (1 Enoch 18:13-15), driven through the heavens by winds (1 En 18:4). A large section of 1 Enoch (chs 72-82) is devoted to a description of the detailed movements and nature of sun, moon and stars allegedly given to Enoch by the angel Uriel.

NT The most famous star in the NT is the star of Bethlehem, which brought the Magi from the east to worship Jesus (Matt 2:1-12). The star has been variously identified as a (super)nova, a comet, a conjunction of planets, an object like the pillar of fire which guided Israel, an angel, or as purely fictional. The behavior of the star after the Magi had consulted Herod (it "went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was") best fits some *localized* supernatural phenomenon, though some have suggested ways of interpreting this as an object at astronomical distances. Probably the star is to be understood as a fulfillment of Balaam's prophecy (Num 24:17) and as symbolic of Jesus (see below).

The NT follows the OT in connecting the vast number of stars with the promise to Abraham of uncountable descendants (Heb 11:12); in associating stars with angels (Rev 1:20; 9:1; 12:4?); and in seeing eschatological signs in the sun, moon and stars (e.g., Luke 21:25), though here the emphasis is on the stars falling (Matt 24:29; Mark 13:25; Rev 6:13) more than upon their being darkened (Rev 16:10). One of the trumpet plagues of Rev (8:10-11) consists of a star falling on the rivers and poisoning their waters, an effect paralleled in the disastrous meteor fall that ended the Cretaceous period (Cowen).

Symbolically, "wandering stars" are used as a vivid picture of the heretics denounced in Jude 13, probably in the sense of comets moving away from the sun into the darkness beyond, rather than as planets which C though erratic in their movements C always keep coming back. The "morning star" is explicitly a symbol for Jesus in Rev 22:16 and probably also in Rev 2:28 and 2 Pet 1:19. In the first two of these, the reference is apparently to the planet Venus as the morning star, a symbol perhaps of Jesus' first advent as the bright light shining in the darkness before the coming of day. In 2 Pet 1:19, by contrast, the reference seems to be to the sun as "morning star," with Jesus' second advent in view, when darkness will be entirely banished. The sun, moon and stars of Joseph's dream (Gen 37) appear again in the heavenly sign of the pregnant woman in Rev 12:1, variously identified as Mary, Israel, or the people of God. Perhaps she and the dragon in this passage are also to be associated with the constellations Virgo and Draco.

Other astronomical terms: 6 *š~mayim* (heaven, sky, # 9028); 6 *šemeš* (sun, # 9087); 6 *y~r□a* (moon, # 3734); 6 *ab~'* II (hosts, armies [of heaven], # 7372); 6 *eder* (constellations, # 2540).

Bibliography

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