Using Antiquity to Find Your Way

Description

I used to not understand how a book written many years ago would have much bearing on my life. Since October 1998, I have been growing in understanding in how the wisdom of the Bible is applicable today. A vision of a lifeÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s experience recently came to me to help me counter the objection of: Ã¢â‚¬Å“How can a document written 2000 and more years ago have any applicability in todayÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s society?Ã¢â‚¬Â•

I spent a career in the Navy, to include a duty that required me to be a ShipÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s Navigator for 18 months. For 15 years before the moment the story following describes, I had been associated with the principles of celestial navigation, but it had not been my professional assignment to actually conduct the task. I first saw it practiced on the USS ANCHORAGE (LSD-36) by the bearded Lieutenant who was the Navigator. It was many years later when I took the sextant in my hand to look skyward and tell my Captain where I figured we where. My first effort, as a 1st Class Midshipman, was very inaccurate. I recall at least I was plotting us in the western Pacific, which is good, since we were there. By March of 1990, aboard USS CARR (FFG-52), my navigation skills had developed considerably.

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I have experienced the same thing in my newfound Christian life. I am confident that with each passing day and devotion to learning, I will find the messages more precise and concise. I recall the cool, humid air rushing by my face as the ship cruised at about 15 knots across the calm waters of the Persian Gulf. The night is just about to leave twilight and the sky is cloudless. All of the stars of the heavens are not yet visible, just the brightest ones, to the eye, but they are there. The western sky is still dimly lit, providing a clear view of the horizon. I review my planning sheet, completed this afternoon, and make sure my recorder has his stopwatch ready. Standing with my legs apart to stabilize myself on the starboard bridge wing, I lift my sextant and preposition the adjustable arm to the estimated angle for the first star I will Ã¢â‚¬Å“shoot.Ã¢â‚¬Â• Gazing to the southeast, my practiced eye quickly focuses on Sirius as I bring the small telescope to my eye. My left hand pinches the release mechanism to make an adjustment of the mirror. I see a split picture of the sky around Sirius in the mirror and the horizon. I pause and watch the subtle upward movement of the star in my field of view brought on by the rotation of the Earth. I turn the fine adjustment wheel to shift the view where Sirius is slight below the level of the real view of the horizon. I begin to swing the sextant left and right about 20o, Ã¢â‚¬Å“swinging the arcÃ¢â‚¬Â• to ensure I have brought the star to the horizon correctly. My legs flex to compensate for the slow rolling of the ship to provide an accurate reading. A thought crosses my mind as I wait for Sirius to match the horizon. My body is in automatic after so many times I have shot celestial bodies in the course of my assignment. I think just how marvelous the human mind is and how it can accomplish so much with so little thought Ã¢â‚¬â€œ a true gift. With each slow swing of the sextant, pivoting about my eye, Sirius rises slowly ever so slightly. My urge to manipulate the fine adjustment more is overridden by my desire to savoir the moment in this peaceful state. I perceive so much, yet I am so single-minded. In the background, the crackling static of the bridge-to-bridge radio and the footfalls of the Officer of the Deck coming onto the bridge wing are heard, but do not distract me. My recorder, a signalman without professional tasks at the moment, stares at the stopwatch he holds to the clipboard with his left hand, his other holding a pen over the star sighting log sheet, dimly illuminated by a small flashlight clipped to

the board. As Sirius is about to cross the horizon, I say Ã¢â‚¬Å“StandbyÃ¢â‚¬Â• to alert him, then a few short seconds later Ã¢â‚¬Å“MARK!Ã¢â‚¬Â• when the view in the mirror of the brightest star in the sky crosses the horizon, by my best reckoning. He notes the time and I take the sextant from my eye and shine a red flashlight on the angular reading. As I read the numbers to him, I think about how the reading I have just taken represents the light that was made from that star many millions of years ago by the fusion process. I am using it to figure out where my ship is today, but the light has had to travel across space in time to reach me so I could use it as a reference now.

God placed the stars in the heavens many years ago, so I might be able to Ã¢â‚¬Å“fixÃ¢â‚¬Â• my position, then from there I might be able to plot a course to my destination. I can come back later and take reading from the same stars to measure how far I have gone and in which direction and they are still gracing me with this information based on their presence in antiquity. The stars are large and bright and their light has spanned the millennia, being used by the ancient Phoenicians, Chinese and European sailors. The methods used by these ancient sailors have been refined, but the techniques are essentially unchanged today. The Bible is a book the does for you, what the stars did for me on that and many other nights. It may have been written many years ago, but itÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s wisdom and guidance fixes us and our lifeÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s direction today. Also, like the stars, they will report where you are, if you read them correctly. If you have traveled off course, they will reveal that to you, just as they can tell you are where you expect you would and should be to avoid navigation hazards. God made this book so we would have it today to avoid lifeÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s hazards and it can tell you when you are right as well as wrong, once you study it.

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After shooting Sirius, I repeated the process for Betelgeuse, Castor, Pollux, and Aldebaran. My recorder dutifully recorder the time and the Ã¢â‚¬Å“height observed.Ã¢â‚¬Â• I review the data sheet and head back to my state room. I close my door, reach for my nautical almanac, and HO 229 on my book shelf to begin the process of reducing what I have observed. I do the lengthy calculations manually for the intellectual exercise. After stepping through a long series of formula and look up tables, I arrive at values to mark on a nautical chart. The results of this next step will tell me how accurately I can determine the results. When I first began, it was not unusual to be within five nautical miles of where I should have fixed the ship, but as the days went by, my precision became more refined and therefore more correct Ã¢â‚¬Å“interpretations.Ã¢â‚¬Â• This is a similar process with the Bible and understanding. At first, you pick up this ancient text and know there is some wisdom, but you donÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t understand how well it actually speaks to you. With time and regular exposure to the Scriptures, your understanding becomes more clear and concise.

The infinitesimally small arcs on the chart are drawn as straight lines, as the radius of the circle plotted in millions of light years in measurement. After a few minutes, a crossing of the lines indicates where the ship was about an hour ago, as I stood 41 feet above the waterÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s surface, calling marks to my recorder. I could not make an instantaneous judgement on my position, as the stars are so far and small, I could not interpret it until I studied it for some time. The Universe, created to show us GodÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s glory, is vast and too large to grasp, but when studied, some of the meaning will be revealed, if you make the time to observe it and devote time to interpret what you have observed in your Ã¢â‚¬Å“readings.Ã¢â‚¬Â•

As the navigator looks to the ancient sky to find his place on the face of the globe today, so can we look at this example to help understand the purpose of the Bible and how it relates to our lives now. Navigation is the combination of pure mathematics and personal proficiency in interpreting what you study. With dedicated effort, your ability to find the lessons of life become clearer. With understanding,

you gain the ability to pass the information on to others, but they too must devote their energy to gain the ability to know for sure when the stars cross the horizon in the split mirror view. Knowing the Ã¢â‚¬Å“mathÃ¢â‚¬Â• alone will not lead you to the answers, nor can you expect that using someone elseÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s observations to provide as much as you need to know, if you just Ã¢â‚¬Å“plug in the values.Ã¢â‚¬Â•

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