THE SWEET INFLUENCES AND THE BANDS

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"Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The LORD is his name" (Amos 5:8).

Amos knew something about looking upward. He was a herdsman from Tekoa, accustomed to the open country and the heavens stretched above him. His preaching bears the unmistakable impress of fields, flocks, lions, harvests, drought, rain, and stars. When Israel had become enamored of its religious institutions and intoxicated by its prosperity, Amos directed their attention beyond all of it. **"Seek the LORD, and ye shall live" (Am 5:6)**. Two verses later, he points toward the heavens. Seek the one who made them.

The wording deserves consideration. Amos says "the seven stars and Orion." Job names **"Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades"** among the works of God **(Jb 9:9)**, and later the Lord asks Job, **"Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?" (Jb 38:31)**. The same underlying Hebrew term is represented by **"the seven stars"** in Amos 5:8 and **"Pleiades"** in Job 9:9 and 38:31 is the same word, כִּימָה, Kimah. The AV 1611 gives us **"Pleiades"** in Job and **"the seven stars"** in Amos. We should leave those English words given by inspiration **(2 Tm 3:16)** exactly where God put them. The Hebrew connection helps us recognize the relationship without flattening the English distinctions. Revelation also demonstrates that **"seven stars"** can possess a spiritual identification, for **"the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches" (Rv 1:20)**. Cross references should illuminate the Bible, not obliterate its distinctions.

Job supplies the beautiful expression **"the sweet influences of Pleiades."** Pleiades is connected with the coming of spring, while Orion appears prominently through the colder season. Thus, the Lord asks Job whether he can bind the sweet influences of the one or loose Orion's wintry bands. People may heat a house in January and cool it in July, but they cannot command winter to abdicate or compel spring to remain upon its ascendancy. People can regulate the temperature of a room. They cannot legislate the seasons.

There is excellent medicine here for human arrogance. We speak sumptuously about controlling our lives while inhabiting a world whose morning we cannot produce, whose night we cannot restrain, whose rain we cannot order, and whose constellations we cannot tame. God asks Job, **"Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth?" (Job 38:33)**. Job had enough knowledge to name Pleiades and Orion. What he lacked was power over either one. There is an enormous difference between knowing something about God's creation and possessing God's authority over it.

We often suffer from the same incongruity. We believe the Lord created the heavens, and still become discomposed when some modest province of our own affairs refuses to cooperate. We believe God governs Pleiades and Orion, but wonder whether he can grapple with Tuesday afternoon. We confess his omnipotence over creation and fret over a doctor's appointment, an unexpected expense, an uncertain employment situation, a family difficulty, or some unanswered

question which has been gnawing at our peace. Job's difficulty was not principally that he knew nothing about God. He knew extraordinary things. His perplexity arose when what he knew about the Lord collided with what he was experiencing personally. The stars rebuke such practical unbelief.

Amos also reminds us that the God of pleasant seasons is the Lord of difficult ones. Pleiades has its **"sweet influences,"** while Orion has its **"bands."** Morning comes from him, but Amos also says he "maketh the day dark with night." We are quite willing for God to superintend the springtime. We become less enthusiastic when he permits winter. We praise him for the sunshine and interrogate him about the storm. The Bible gives us no assurance that providence ceases whenever conditions become disagreeable.

Some of the Lord's sweetest operations within us are accomplished beneath the wintry dominion of Orion. Winter has its ministry. Affliction can extirpate spiritual weeds which prosperity fertilizes. Disappointment can loosen our grip upon things we were beginning to idolize. A closed door can preserve us from a room we had no business entering. The Lord can use loneliness to reacquaint us with his fellowship, adversity to expose our pride, and uncertainty to force faith out of the vocabulary and into the conduct. David could say, **"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Ps 119:71)**. Winter sometimes teaches lessons which summer never could.

Amos was preaching to people who desperately needed to understand this. Israel had corrupted judgment, abandoned righteousness, and maintained religious activity while departing from God. The prophet did not tell them to seek improved conditions. He said, "Seek him." Bethel could not save them. Their prosperity could not save them. Their ceremonies could not save them. The Lord who made the seven stars and Orion was the one with whom they had to do.

Our temptation is much the same. We seek relief when we should seek God. We seek explanations when we should seek the Lord. We want him to loose Orion immediately, remove every band, dispel every cloud, and bring the sweet influences of Pleiades according to our preferred calendar. Sometimes he does. Sometimes he allows the winter to finish its work.

Look upward. The stars have not escaped his dominion. The seasons have not mutinied. Morning still reports for duty at his command. The sea answers his summons. Pleiades has its appointed influence, Orion its arranged bands, and every celestial ordinance remains beneath the hand of its Maker.

If God can direct the heavens, he can direct what concerns you today. If the Lord can order Pleiades and Orion, he can order the seasons of your life. Seek him. Trust him. Obey him. Spring and winter are both in his hands, and neither arrives without his knowledge.