# What Is Glory? And What Does It Have to Do with the End Times?

Once upon a time, *The Late Great Planet Earth* was a highly successful book. It was the bestselling nonfiction book of the entire decade of the 1970s, with 35 million copies sold worldwide. Today, it is no longer relevant. If its author, Hal Lindsey, would have been right, the world would have ended 30 years ago. It is no longer in print, because: “Many books about biblical prophecies are like yoghurt: they are quickly past their ‘best before’ date” (Gaétan Brassard 2015). Did we learn something from this experience?

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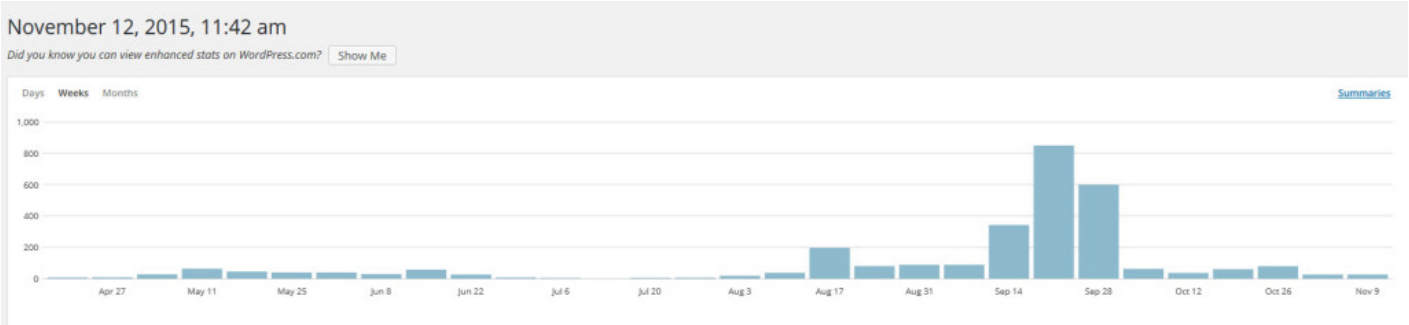
## 1. “End Times” Is Not About Reading Signs, So We Can Come up with a Prognosis

The September issue of Create a Learning Site dealt with end time speculations around the so-called blood moons. This issue was by far the most successful to date. The illustration shows the statistics. The weekend before the last lunar eclipse in a series of four there were hundreds of visitors each day. The accompanying YouTube video was visited more than 300 times. In comparison: the month before, I wrote on Leviticus (seven reasons to read this book). This video was watched 11 times; this includes the times I watched it myself. This although Leviticus has the potential to change our lives; I am not sure what a blood moon can do for our spiritual growth. I guess we would rather eat at McDonalds than make ourselves a healthy bowl of salad…




A well-known Bible verse states: The grass withers, the flower fades, yoghurt goes past its ‘best before’ date, but the word of our God will stand forever. (One of these four is not in the Bible.) Many end time theories like that of the blood moons belong in the category of yoghurt and grass.

It seems we did not learn anything from experience. On the contrary, we may have moved backwards. Hal Lindsey was at least trying to interpret Scripture, even if – in my opinion – he did not do this well. The excitement about blood moons over the past two or three years was not nearly as rooted in the Bible.

As a quick reminder: the blood moon thesis is based on a sequence of four full lunar eclipses in 2014 and 2015. Each of these took place on a Jewish holiday (Passover and Feast of Booths). This was taken as a

sign that great and significant things were about to take place. What is the biblical foundation for these ideas?

If the blood moon thesis finds support anywhere in the Bible, I would expect this to be in Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 (and in its original in the book of Joel):

> And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
> that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
> and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
> and your young men shall see visions,
> and your old men shall dream dreams;
> even on my male servants and female servants
> in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.
> And I will show wonders in the heavens above
> and signs on the earth below,
> blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;
> the sun shall be turned to darkness
> and the moon to blood,
> before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.
> And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Acts 2:17-21, ESV)

Taking a thorough look at this passage makes us realize there are problems with the blood moon thesis:

- Peter believes this is happening now, in his own time, almost 2000 years ago.
- A lunar eclipse is not a “wonder” or miracle.
- There is no mention of four or of Jewish holidays. It does not say: there will be four lunar eclipses on Jewish holidays, and then… something important will happen in the world.
- The signs listed in Acts 2 accompany something of great significance for salvation history, a real turning point. But this turning point was hardly visible: some people in Jerusalem acting strangely and speaking foreign languages.
- The last line describes something that was also already true back then and continued to be true until today. It is not about something that will one day, still in the future, begin to come true.

The blood moon thesis goes far beyond the text. Something was constructed that doesn’t have much to do with the Bible.

Notice that this passage does not only speak of wonders in the heavens, but also of signs on the earth: blood, fire, smoke. Many interpreters believe that this kind of language in the prophets is not intended to be taken literally. It is a formula that points to significant turning points or events in salvation history; these may not look spectacular to the natural eye. For those who disagree and believe there has to be a more literal and visible fulfilment, it should be considered that this passage must then describe something considerably bigger and far more dramatic than what happened on 28 September last year. Surely Acts 2 does not describe a lunar eclipse (or four)!

Franziska and I really wanted to see the eclipse, so we got up at four am that day. We were in the south of Spain, known for its many cloudless days (and nights). However, when we went outside, we saw nothing but clouds. So what kind of a sign is this? We could not even see it.

There is hardly a more harmless natural phenomenon than a lunar eclipse.

When it comes to the end times, our aim should not be to read signs in order to come up with a prognosis or a scenario (what will happen next? how much time is left?). Experience teaches: this does not work. This is why older end time books are no longer in print. They failed. If we concentrate on this, we will miss more important implications of this subject.

## 2. It Is About Living Differently and About God’s Glory

So if it is not about reading signs, what is it about? Among other things, it is about living differently and about God’s glory. When dealing with the end times, we often speak about living differently, but not nearly as much about glory. It is not commonly understood as an end times topic, although it is. Perhaps we are too preoccupied with ourselves to recognize it is really about God?

Both in English and in Greek, the word *end* can also signify the aim or purpose of something, rather than merely its end in a temporal sense. This makes sense: it is a sad end if the goal is not reached. So what is the goal?

We find it in Ephesians 1. In the first half of this chapter, Paul presents us with an immensely dense summary of God's plan of salvation from beginning to end. In this, he repeats the phrase, "to the praise of his glory." So in the end, it is all about God's glory.

The obvious question then is: what does 'glory' mean? The English word sounds beautiful, but it is a bit vague. We tend to associate it with concepts like:

- Light and radiance
- Beauty and splendour
- Greatness and power
- Honour

All these concepts to some extent overlap in meaning with glory. Especially interesting is the Hebrew word: Kabôd. Its primary meaning is weight or heaviness.

So how heavy is God? The question does not make sense. We cannot put God on a scales. Weight is a subject in physics, but God is not physical. When dealing with God, the term is used as an image, a metaphor. The previous question, how heavy is God, can then be answered: he is infinitely heavy. Maybe you know what it is like to experience God's presence: it is a profound sense of lightness and heaviness at the same time.

One of the first events in which God's glory revealed itself – in a dramatic fashion! – was on Mount Sinai. Thunder and earthquake and trumpets and fire and smoke accompanied this manifestation of God. This may be the reason that later manifestations of God are described in similar terms, even though they may not have been visible.

Shortly after this, the glory of God moved into the tabernacle in the form of a cloud. Several centuries later, during Solomon's reign, it moved into the newly built temple. This line runs straight through the whole Bible: God's glory insists on coming to us; he wants to share it with us. At the end of the Bible, therefore, we find a city beaming with God's glory and presence.

However, the glory of God is not only a phenomenon that manifests itself from time to time. It is also something that in a sense is always there. "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (present tense, Is. 6:3, ESV). At the same time, it is a promise, a desire, and a prayer: "May the whole earth be filled with his glory!" (Ps. 72:19, ESV).

As God's glory becomes visible reality, it fills the entire earth: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14, ESV). In other words, God is continuously on the move to bring his glory into this world. This is the end: his ultimate, final goal.

His glory is present, it manifests itself, and it will be fully realized in the end (on earth, as it is in heaven). Already and not yet – this is an idea that will look familiar to many of us.
God has clearly announced that this is what he intends:

> A voice cries:
> "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;
> make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
> Every valley shall be lifted up,
> and every mountain and hill be made low;
> the uneven ground shall become level,
> and the rough places a plain.
> And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
> and all flesh shall see it together,
> for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." (Is. 40:3-5, ESV)

At the beginning of the gospels, these verses are quoted. There can be no question about it: the voice in the desert is John the Baptist. We know, therefore, what is to come next: the revelation of the glory of God. And what came after John? A man named Jesus, the son of a construction worker.

Shortly after his appearance in public, he was cruelly executed as a criminal and a rebel. Is this the glory of God, a man who dies on a cross? Yes, this is indeed the glory of God. This, too, is what glory looks like. No one is stronger than the one who has power but does not use it. No one is mightier and more glorious than the one who does what serves others. Sacrificial love is the greatest glory that God reveals. It surpasses and greatly outweighs the glory of Sinai. This is the glory that will one day fill the earth and the universe, so that, in the words of 1 Corinthians 15:28, "God will be all in all."

## 3. What Does It Mean to Live Differently?

Now that we have understood the concept of God's glory better, let's revisit the other point: living differently. We are still dealing with the subject of the end times. This photo shows start and finish. Finish does not mean: this is where it stops. Every end is also a new beginning. In this picture, start and finish coincide. But what if the new beginning precedes the finish? What if the old is not yet finished, but the new already gets started? In this case, we end up with overlap.

The starting shot has already been fired. The start is behind us, even if the finish of the old world is still ahead. It makes us new people, called to carry the new (God's light and presence) into the world. In the OT, there was only one place where God's glory dwelled. In the NT, there is such a place in every location where there is a church, where Christians live as Christians, where someone loves God.

End times means: the new has already begun. We reveal God's glory and carry it into the world. We do so as broken vessels. None of us is perfect yet. Sometimes the disabilities are obvious, sometimes less so. The less obvious ones are usually the more problematic. But God builds his new creation with the broken pieces of the old one.

We are carriers of his presence. This reminds me of the legend of Christophorus (Gr. Christ-bearer). Christophorus was a strong man who became a believer. He wanted to do something, so he was told to carry travellers across a certain river. One day, a child appeared that he also carried across. The child revealed it was Christ, and gave Christophorus his name.

We don't carry Christ outwardly across a river. But what would it mean to carry him and his glory into the world? We have seen that glory stands for:

- Light. Light is a metaphor for truth, but also for purity, perfection, and the morally good. Theologically correct is also important, but it does not in and of itself give life. We are called to be light in this world.
- Beauty. There is plenty of ugliness in the world and it does not lead to God, except perhaps as a contrast pointing to its opposite. We are called to make God known through the creation of beauty.
- Power. Not in the sense of pure strength that can destroy or enforce its will. This is a liberating, restoring, healing kind of power, the power of love and forgiveness. Restoring is far more difficult than destruction. Anyone can destroy, even the devil, but to make someone or something whole again… This is a skill that only God fully understands.
- Honour. We are called to give God glory. In words, but also through our lives: by living differently.

So this is our calling: light of the world, beauty in the world, power that heals. And all of this to the praise of his glory.

*What could you do to make more room in your life for God's glory?* Leave a comment!

## References

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