

**Nature and Scripture proclaim God's glory!** Doug Hayhoe, March 2024

*Glory is a concept hard to define. But examples from God's two books help us grasp its significance.*

## **Part 1: The glory of God in Nature**



**Figure 1** French River Provincial Park - French River Gorge. Photo by Mhsheikhholeslami. [Wikipedia Commons](#).

When I first taught physics, I liked telling stories about storms and how to avoid being struck by lightning. But these were just stories I had read. Then, one June, I learned the real way!

In preparation for summer camps, some of us took a canoe trip down the French River. On our second day, a huge, dark thundercloud was following us. Unfortunately, the river banks were too steep for us to stop and set up our tents for protection (Figure 1). Some of us were panicking, others praying!

Suddenly, around a bend in the river, a small island appeared, with one tall tree on it. We quickly landed on it, got our tents up and ourselves into the tents, just before the storm arrived. A few minutes later, there was a deafening crash just outside our tents. A strong bolt of lightning had struck the one tree on the island. Fortunately, we had known enough to pitch our tents within a 45-degree cone extending down from the top of the tree, so that the tree would shield us from a direct hit, but not too close to the trunk for the lightning to transfer to us. What a phenomenal, terrifying experience that was! This is just one example of the glory of God.

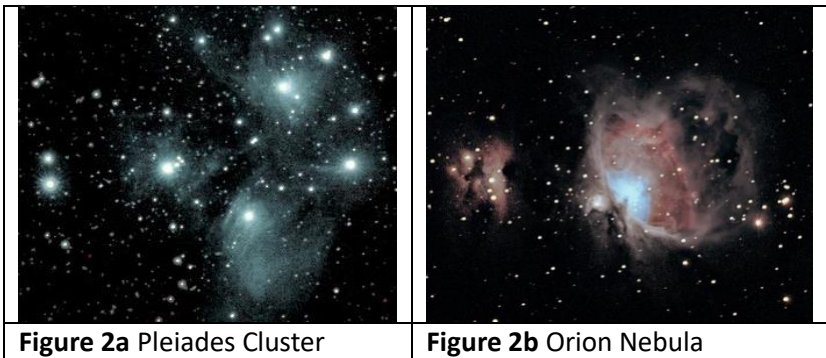
King David had a similar experience. He was up on a mountain top, when a huge storm came in from the Mediterranean Sea. He could hear the thunder rolling across the water. He saw the lightning strike the great cedars of Lebanon. Fascinated, he wrote a poem about it, [Psalm 90](#). For David, the huge crashes of thunder and powerful strikes of lightning were God's voice in creation, declaring his glory. David put it this way "The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders ... in his temple all cry, 'Glory'" (Psalm 29:3, 9 NIV).

## **Stars, galaxies, and nebulae**

The greatest display of God's glory in nature is the night sky. Even before telescopes were invented, a good human eye could make out stars, stellar clusters, nebulae, and a few galaxies, such as Andromeda. How much more, today, when we can look through common telescopes, or see images from the Hubble and James S Webb space telescopes (see my essay *How the Telescope Changed the World*). Another poem in the Bible, [Psalm 19](#), begins by saying "The heavens declare the glory of God." In the New Testament, the apostle Paul says, "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory" (1 Corinthians 15:41 ESV). If you want to see glory, look up on a clear night!

My grandson, Gavin, has taken up astrophotography. Using his mother's single-lens reflex camera, and a mount that he calibrates to rotate with the sky, he takes time exposure photos.

Figure 2a is Gavin's one-hour exposure of the Pleiades star cluster. Figure 2b is his three-hour exposure of the Nebula embedded in the Orion constellation. Both of these constellations or clusters are mentioned in the Bible ([Job 9:9](#); [Amos 5:8](#)). The heavens declare the glory of God!

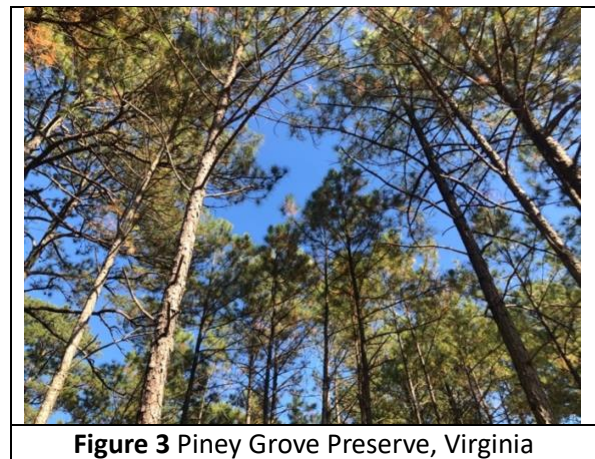


**Figure 2a** Pleiades Cluster

**Figure 2b** Orion Nebula

### Trees and lilies

On a trip to Virginia, Prof. [Lytton Musselman](#), a renowned botanist, took me to visit [Piney Grove Preserve](#). The towering trees are kept free from development to protect a rare bird, the red-cockaded woodpecker. As we stood there, looking up at the bird's cavity nests overhead, we marvelled at the trees reaching up to the blue sky overhead (Figure 3). The glory of it over-awed us. We felt like we were in God's sanctuary.



**Figure 3** Piney Grove Preserve, Virginia

Lytton suggested we stop for a moment and praise God. When I later looked in the Bible to see if trees were said to declare God's glory, this is what I found: "The glory of Lebanon will come to you ... the fir and the cypress together, to adorn my sanctuary" (Isaiah 60:13).



**Figure 4** Crown anemone, Syria

The glory of God is also demonstrated in common flowers in the field. One day Jesus pointed to one and said, "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." (Luke 12:27 ESV). In his book [Solomon Described Plants: A Botanical Guide to Plant Life in the Bible](#), (p. 181), Prof. Musselman says this was probably the anemone, common in the region of Palestine (Figure 4).

### Part 2: The glory of God in Scripture

Shortly after the start of the new millennium, Rebecca Idestrom, Professor of Old Testament at Tyndale University, became fascinated with how often God's glory is mentioned in Scripture. When she read Moses's request to the LORD in Exodus 33:18, "Show me your glory," she decided to make this request her own. This initiated fifteen years of intense study – in addition to teaching her classes – on God's glory. In February 2023, we were rewarded when she finally published her book: [Show me your glory: The glory of God in the Old Testament](#).

In her book (Figure 5), Idestrom explains that the key Hebrew word for glory in the Bible is “kavod.” It occurs 200 times, of which half refer to God’s glory (p. 10). Synonyms often found with it are splendour, majesty, power, and presence, i.e., God’s presence. Idestrom writes, “one could ... argue that every manifestation of God in Scripture is a revelation of his glory” (p. 7). The verb “to glorify God” also occurs numerous times, meaning to honor and respect him as God, the sovereign Lord (p. 11).

The key Greek noun for glory in the New Testament is “doxa,” and the verb, to glorify or honour, is “doxazo.” It has a similar meaning as kavod. Doxa and Doxazo occur 160 times in the New Testament, of which the great majority refer to God the Father or Jesus Christ. We still use the word today. A doxology is a short hymn of praise glorifying God.

“Speaking about God can be daunting,” Stephen J. Nichols states, at the beginning of his essay, “The glory of God Present and Past,” (pp. 23, 25, [The Glory of God](#)). He continues, “the glory of God is the compass that keeps all of our theologizing, pastoring, and Christian living pointed in the right direction – toward God and not toward ourselves.” In other words, our true north is God’s glory not our own!

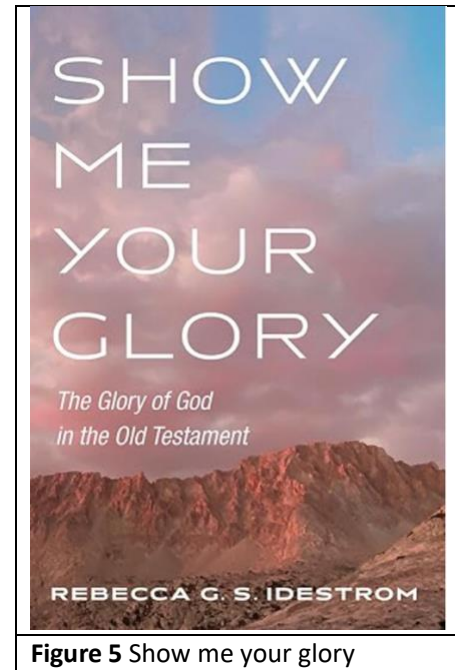


Figure 5 Show me your glory

### God’s glory traced through Biblical history

The “God of glory” first appeared in the Bible when he called Abraham, the “father” of Israel, who was living in the pagan Sumerian city of Ur ([Acts 7:2](#); [Genesis 11:31-12:4](#)). Many centuries later, God appeared in his glory to Moses, the leader who took Israel out of Egypt. When Moses met with God on Mount Sinai, his glory was so bright, Moses had to hide his face in a rock. After, his face was so radiant that people couldn’t look at it ([Exodus chapters 33-34](#)).

God’s glory represented his presence with his people, not only at Mount Sinai, but as they traveled through the desert. It was in the cloud by day and fire by night. It was in the ark they built, and in the tabernacle. Once in the land, God’s glory was present in the beautiful temple. Sadly, however, at the end of Israel’s history the prophet Ezekiel saw the glory of God finally leave the temple, because of all the abominations occurring in it ([Ezekiel chapters 10-11](#)). In her book, Idestrom follows in detail this history of the glory of God.

### God’s glory in Jesus Christ

Every year at Christmas we hear the story of Christ’s birth. That’s when God’s glory returned to Israel, many centuries after leaving it. This time, it returned in the person of Jesus Christ, God’s Son. On the amazing night that he was born, the angels appeared to the shepherds, and “the glory of the Lord shone around them.” And the angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to mankind” (Luke 2:14). The shepherds immediately went and saw the new baby, Jesus. They then returned home, “glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen” (Luke 2:20). Glory is mentioned three times in connection with Christ’s birth.



The Gospel of John takes us deeper into what happened when Jesus came to earth: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling [Greek: tabernacled] among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

John chose that Greek word “tabernacled” very carefully. The same God of glory who lived in Israel’s tabernacle and temple in the past centuries, now tabernacled in the person of his Son, Jesus the Messiah. The author of Hebrews said the same thing when he wrote, “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:2).

**We see the glory of God in the face of Christ**

“God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6)



**Figure 5** Crepuscular rays, [Wikipedia Commons](#). Photo by Kiril Simeonovski.

Where does the Biblical story end? When Jesus returns to earth, as the triumphant Son of Man, his glory will radiate in every direction like the crepuscular rays from the sun (Figure 5). He is coming to reward his faithful followers ([Matthew 16:27](#)). But his coming is also a warning to those who reject him. To them, Jesus said: “all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30).

Jesus had another message – a prayer, in fact – for those who honour him in this life. Before going to the cross, he prayed. “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world” (John 17:24). It will take us all eternity to see this glory!