

Blood moons and the Bible.

This article was written in response to queries received concerning the "blood moons" and "super moons" that we have experienced over the last 12 months and, in particular, to address the claims that had been made that these were "signs of the (end) times" and an indication of God's imminent judgement of an evil world.

1. What is a blood moon?

It's when the full moon has a reddish colour to it. This happens when the earth is between the sun and the moon which puts the moon in the earth's shadow. (This is called a lunar eclipse.) But even though the moon is in the earth's shadow, some light from the sun comes through the earth's atmosphere and the dust in the atmosphere makes the light turn red and this light falls on the moon. (This dust in the atmosphere is also what makes some sunsets and sunrises look red, orange and pink.)

It's possible for the full moon to fall in the earth's shadow partially or fully as often as twice a year and these are more visible from some parts of the world than others. Sometimes you can see a blood moon from Australia but not from Brazil, other times from Africa but not from Russia.

These events are the result of the constant movement of the moon around the earth and the earth around the sun. Because these movements are constant, we can work out when next the sun, moon and earth will be in this position again. So it is possible to predict that this will happen again in 18 years time or 6 years or 2 months - you simply look at the positions of the sun, moon and earth, work out their current speed and direction and you know where they will be.

In fact, in the newly discovered Americas in 1504 Christopher Columbus used his astronomy charts to "predict" a lunar eclipse to get the locals to believe that he was a god who could control the shape and colour of the moon and he used their superstition to get them to give him and his men food and supplies. (To him it was science, to them it looked like magic.)

2. If these red moons are a regular event why is everyone getting so excited about the "blood moons" this year?

In 2014-15 these lunar eclipses happened four times in the space of one year (15 April 2014, 8 October 2014, 4 April 2015 and 28 September 2015) Each of these has coincided with Jewish major Jewish feasts (Passover 2014 and 2015 and Tabernacles 2014 and 2015) This is not so unusual as the Jewish feasts are based on the lunar calendar.

The other reason people are noticing the red moons is that we are also having "supermoons" this year. What is a "supermoon"? Well the moon's orbit around the sun isn't perfectly round, but in a sort of oval shape, which means that the moon is sometimes a little closer to the earth than at others. This means that it appears bigger when it is closer. If it is a full moon when it is close to the earth, then it appears bigger than what we are used to and we call it a supermoon.

So this year we have had super-blood-red moons that people have noticed and because there have been four in the space of a year, people have got very excited about that. It's science, but some people see it as magic.

3. Some church people have got very excited about this, saying that this is a sign of the end times or that God is very angry with us. Is this true?

There are some Bible passages that talk about blood red moons and we'll look at these later. The current sensation is that people are talking about four blood moons in the space of a year. This is called a "tetrad series" and authors like John Hagee and Mark Biltz have attracted a great deal of attention and sold a number of books claiming that this tetrad series may mark the start of the "end times."

There are two problems with this.

Firstly, there have been tetrad series of blood moons before and there will be again. So why is this one so special? Secondly, they are making some important mistakes in their understanding of the end times.

Here are some key truths around the "end times":

- **The end times began at the Ascension** when Jesus ascended into heaven and said that He would return but that no one would know the day or the hour (See Acts 1)
- During the end times, there will be wars, earthquakes, famines etc. (See Matt 24)
These are like the **labour pains or contractions** of a mother giving birth. Each contraction is painful but not every contraction brings a child. One of the first contractions the early church experienced was in 70 AD when the temple was destroyed. There have been plenty of contractions since then. In Rom8:22 Paul reminds us that: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."

- There many who believe there will be a “rapture” and “tribulation” (there are many books and movies about this.) It needs to be noted that this line of thinking is a late development in the Church’s theological framework, only appearing in the 17th century AD. In South Africa, this view was popularised by Andrew Murray and his father in the late 1800s. Mainstream Reformed Theologians reject this view, because it implies that Revelation and other “apocalyptic” passages are only relevant for a specific date and time, rather than being relevant at any time that the church in history is experiencing a “labour pain.”
- **We can't tell when the second coming will be.** All the Bible tells us is that there will be contractions and then one day, at the end of one of the contractions (but we don't know which one) the birth of a new heaven and earth will happen.
- All we can say is that **each contraction reminds** us that:
 - we are already in the end times
 - a new world will eventually be born.
 - we should always be ready.

4. What does the Bible say about blood moons?

AC 2:20 (quoting from Joel 2:31) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.)

REV 6:12 I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, 13 and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. 14 The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

I think most people would agree that Rev 6 is talking about what will happen right at the end of time when a new heaven and earth come and so Rev 6 is not a "sign pointing to something that will still happen" but a part of something that is happening.

This leaves us with Joel and Acts. Joel is about a locust plague. During a locust plague people would have made fires to try and drive the locusts away with smoke - the smoke would have hidden the sun during the day and made the moon look red at night. The smoke of war does the same. The dust of an earthquake does the same. So it is not just lunar eclipses that make red moons. When the moon turns red from the smoke and dust from disaster war and trouble, I think it is best to say: "We're seeing another labour pain" - another contraction - we're in the end times and one day this suffering will end when Jesus returns and a new heaven and earth are born.

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