THE QUESTION

Who gave the stars their names, according to the Bible and the early church?

Asked by a THF member on April 22, 2026 · published November 9, 2026, updated November 11, 2026 · 6 numbered quotations · the 11 early Christian passages and 67 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/who-gave-the-stars-their-names-according-to-the-bible-and-the-early-church

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

Early Christians taught that God himself names the stars: Theophilus says God's wisdom called them by their own names, echoing Psalm 147:4. Hippolytus adds that familiar names like the Bear were labels people gave so they could recognize star groups, not signs of hidden powers. Aristides calls the stars God's work, never gods.

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POINT 1 OF 5

God's wisdom calls the stars by name

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

In the 2nd century, Theophilus asks the reader to look at God's works. Among them he lists the stars, including the Pleiades, Orion and Arcturus, and says God's wisdom has called them by their own names. This matches Psalm 147:4, where God gives all the stars their names.

1

> “Consider also the flowing of sweet springs and never-failing rivers, and the timely supply of dew, showers, and rain; the many movements of the heavenly bodies; the morning star rising and announcing the coming of the full light; and the constellations of Pleiades, Orion, and Arcturus, and the path of the other stars that move through the heavens, all of which the many-sided wisdom of God has called by their own names.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Theophilus of Antioch,** *To Autolycus* 6 (c. 169–183 AD) **Source 2, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 5

People named star groups to recognize them

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Hippolytus, writing in the 3rd century, says the stars do not reveal their own names. People gave certain stars names, like the bear, the lion, Cepheus or Andromeda, so they could find them easily. He adds that these figures and their names came long after the first humans.

2

> “For the stars do not give this kind of information. Rather, men themselves gave certain stars these names, so that they could be easily recognized. For what likeness is there between the stars scattered across the sky and a bear, or a lion, or a kid, or a waterman, or Cepheus, or Andromeda, or the ghosts that have been given names in Hades?”

later in the same passage

> “We must remember that these persons, and the names themselves, came into existence long after the beginning of man.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hippolytus,** *Refutation of All Heresies* 50 (c. 200–236 AD) **Source 6, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
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POINT 3 OF 5

An animal name does not give animal powers

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Hippolytus laughs at the claim that a person born under Leo will be brave, or one born under Virgo will look a certain way. He says the ancients gave stars animal names only to recognize them more easily. Seven scattered stars share nothing with a real bear.

3

"For example, they say that someone born under Leo will be brave, and that someone born under Virgo will have long, straight hair, a fair complexion, no children, and a modest character. However, these claims, and others like them, deserve laughter rather than serious attention."

later in the same passage

"But I think instead that the ancients gave the names of known animals to certain stars so that they could recognize them more easily, not because they were similar in nature. For what do the seven stars, far apart from one another, have in common with a bear, or the five stars with the head of a dragon?"

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hippolytus,** *Refutation of All Heresies* 6 (c. 200–236 AD) **Source 8, page 5** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 5

Named stars are God's works, not gods

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Aristides says the sun cannot be a god, because it is God's work, and so are the moon and stars. Origen quotes Deuteronomy 4:19, which warns that seeing the sun, moon and stars must not lead people to worship and serve them.

4

"Therefore it is impossible that the sun should be a god. It is the work of God, and so also are the moon and the stars."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Aristides,** *Apology* 6 (c. 125–140 AD) **Source 1, page 5** Read it in the library ›

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5 “And lest you lift up your eyes unto heaven, and when you see the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, should be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord your God has divided unto all nations unto the whole heaven.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Against Celsus* 10 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 9, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 5

Tertullian objects to idols' names in heaven

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Tertullian, answering an astrologer, says the astrologer has written the names of idols in heaven and given them God's power, as if the stars fixed our lives. He says fallen angels first taught this art. His concern is astrology and false gods, not simply naming stars to find them.

6 “I do not argue that he honors idols, because he has written their names in heaven and has assigned all God's power to them. For men assume that we are disposed of by the unchangeable decision of the stars, and because of that they think that God is not to be sought.”

later in the same passage

“I lay down one point: those angels who deserted God, the lovers of women, were also the discoverers of this curious art, and for that reason too they were condemned by God.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Idolatry* 9 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 5, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not say that our familiar star names are the names God gave.
- They do not explain how or when any star names first reached people, or give a full list of biblical star names.
- Psalm 147:4 appears here only as an echo in Theophilus, not as a separate Bible passage explained by these writers.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

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WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 11 early Christian passages and 67 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–11, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 12–67, in Bible order), then 11 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *11 passages from 8 writers*

Aristides, *c. 125–140 AD · source 1*

1 *Apology* 6 (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** "in like manner also the moon and the stars… [continues online] **read ›**

Theophilus of Antioch, *c. 169–183 AD · source 2*

2 *To Autolycus* 6 (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** "the constellation of Pleiades, and Orion, and Arcturus, and the orbit of the other stars that circle through the heavens, all of which the manifold wisdom of God has called… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 3–4*

3 *Against Heresies: Book II* (on point 4) "stars have they called into existence? Or what lights of heaven have they caused to shine… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Against Heresies: Book V* have this name. Among many people, this name is considered divine, so that even the sun is called "Titan" by those who currently rule. This word also conveys a sense… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · source 5*

5 *On Idolatry* 9 **Quote 6, page 4** "I do not argue that he honors idols, because he has written their names in heaven and has assigned all God's power to them. For men assume that we are disposed of by the unchangeable decision of the stars, and because of that they think that God is not to be sought." **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · sources 6–8*

6 *Refutation of All Heresies* 50 (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** "men of their own accord, for the designation of certain stars, thus called them by names, in order that they might become to them easily distinguishable… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Refutation of All Heresies* 27 (1885 English; on point 2) "we know that those originally conversant with such investigations have called the stars by names given in reference to propriety of signification and facility for future recognition… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *Refutation of All Heresies* 6 **Quote 3, page 3** "For example, they say that someone born under Leo will be brave, and that someone born under Virgo will have long, straight hair, a fair complexion, no children, and a modest character. However, these claims, and others like them, deserve laughter rather than serious attention." **read ›**

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Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 9*

9 *Against Celsus* 10 **Quote 5, page 4** offer a defense of our refusal to recognize as gods, equally with angels, and sun, and moon, and stars, those who are called by the Greeks manifest and visible divinities… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · source 10*

10 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 4) “they say, "Lest, when you see the sun, and the moon, and the stars, you should… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · source 11*

11 *Divine Institutes* 4 (on point 4) think they are gods because their courses are fixed and orderly, they are mistaken. For this clearly shows that they are not gods, because they are not allowed to depart… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *56 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

12 **Genesis 1:14** Then God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to give light on the earth, to divide between the day and the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons, for days and for years. **read ›**

13 **Genesis 1:15** Let them be for light in the firmament of heaven, to shine on the earth.” And it was so. **read ›**

14 **Genesis 1:16** God made the two great lights: the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night; and he made the stars. **read ›**

15 **Genesis 2:19** God also formed out of the earth all the wild beasts of the field and all the birds of heaven. He brought them to Adam to see what Adam would call them, and whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. **read ›**

16 **Genesis 44:6** So he overtook them and spoke these words to them. **read ›**

17 **Numbers 1:17** Moses and Aaron took these men who had been called by name, **read ›**

18 **Deuteronomy 4:19** and lest, looking up to heaven and seeing the sun, the moon, and the stars, and all the array of heaven, you go astray and worship them and serve them, the things that the Lord your God has allotted to all the nations under heaven. **read ›**

19 **Judges 5:20** From heaven the stars drew up for battle; from their courses they drew up against Sisera. **read ›**

20 **2 Kings 4:15** And he called her, and she stood at the door. **read ›**

21 **Nehemiah 5:10** I and my brothers and my acquaintances have lent them money and grain. Let us give up this demand for repayment. (Septuagint 2 Esdras 15:10 (Nehemiah 5:10 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

22 **Psalms 5:9** For there is no truth in their mouth; their heart is vain; their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have dealt deceitfully. (Septuagint Psalm 5:10 (Psalm 5:9 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

23 **Psalms 147:4** He counts the multitudes of the stars and calls them all by name. (Septuagint Psalm 146:4 (Psalm 147:4 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

24 **Psalms 148:3** Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you stars and light. **read ›**

25 **Isaiah 17:5** And it will be as when someone gathers the standing grain and reaps the seed of the ears; and it will be as when someone gathers ears of grain in a solid ravine. **read ›**

26 **Ezekiel 38:7** Be prepared, prepare yourself, you and all your congregation gathered with you, and you shall be my advance guard. **read ›**

27 **Daniel 12:3** And those who understand shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and some of the many righteous like the stars forever and beyond. **read ›**

28 **1 Esdras 3:16** And he said, “Call the young men, and they themselves shall explain their sayings.” So they were called, and they came in. **read ›**

29 **Tobit 5:9** And he called him, and he came in, and they greeted one another. **read ›**

30 **Wisdom of Solomon 7:19** the cycles of years and the positions of the stars; **read ›**

31 **Wisdom of Sirach 43:9** the beauty of heaven, the glory of the stars, an ornament giving light in the highest places of the Lord. **read ›**

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32 **Baruch 3:34** and the stars shone in their watches and were glad; he called them, and they said, “Here we are”; they shone with gladness for him who made them. **read ›**

33 **Letter of Jeremiah 1:60** For sun and moon and stars, being bright and sent out for service, are obedient. **read ›**

34 **4 Maccabees 17:5** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

35 **Matthew 2:2** saying, “Where is he who is born King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.” **read ›**

36 **Matthew 2:10** When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. **read ›**

37 **Matthew 14:18** He said, “Bring them here to me.” **read ›**

38 **Matthew 24:29** “Immediately after the distress of those days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon will not give her light; the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. **read ›**

39 **Matthew 27:47** Some of them who stood there, when they heard it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.” **read ›**

40 **Mark 3:13** He went up into the mountain and called to himself those whom he wanted, and they went to him. **read ›**

41 **Mark 3:16** Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); **read ›**

42 **Mark 6:40** They sat down in ranks, by hundreds and by fifties. **read ›**

43 **Mark 10:49** Jesus stopped and ordered that he be called. They called the blind man, saying, “Take courage! Rise; he is calling you.” **read ›**

44 **Mark 13:25** and the stars of heaven shall be falling, and the powers that are in the heavens shall be shaken. **read ›**

45 **Mark 15:35** Some of those who stood by, when they heard it, said, “Behold, he is calling Elijah.” **read ›**

46 **Luke 6:13** When it was day, he called his disciples, and from them he chose twelve, whom he also named apostles: **read ›**

47 **Luke 8:54** But he put them all outside, and taking her by the hand, he called, saying, “Child, arise!” **read ›**

48 **Luke 9:15** They did so, and made them all sit down. **read ›**

49 **Luke 21:25** There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and on the earth distress among nations in perplexity, with the sea and the waves roaring; **read ›**

50 **Luke 24:8** They remembered his words, **read ›**

51 **Luke 24:14** They talked with each other about all of these things which had happened. **read ›**

52 **John 10:3** The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. **read ›**

53 **Acts 1:15** In those days Peter stood up among the disciples—the gathering numbered about a hundred and twenty—and said, **read ›**

54 **Acts 4:18** They called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. **read ›**

55 **Acts 9:21** All who heard him were amazed and said, “Is this not the man who devastated those in Jerusalem who called on this name, and has he not come here to bring them bound before the chief priests?” **read ›**

56 **Acts 13:10** and said, “You son of the devil, full of all deceit and all cunning, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? **read ›**

57 **Acts 14:12** They called Barnabas Zeus, and Paul Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. **read ›**

58 **1 Corinthians 15:40** There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; but the glory of the heavenly is one kind, and that of the earthly another. **read ›**

59 **1 Corinthians 15:41** There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. **read ›**

60 **Ephesians 3:15** from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, **read ›**

61 **Jude 1:13** wild waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the blackness of darkness has been reserved forever. **read ›**

62 **Revelation 1:16** He had seven stars in his right hand. Out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining at its brightest. **read ›**

63 **Revelation 1:20** The mystery of the seven stars you saw on my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are seven churches.” **read ›**

64 **Revelation 2:28** and I will give him the morning star. **read ›**

65 **Revelation 6:13** The stars of the sky fell to the earth, like a fig tree dropping its unripe figs when it is shaken by a great wind. **read ›**

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66 **Revelation 8:11** The name of the star is “Wormwood.” One third of the waters became wormwood. Many people died from the waters, because they were made bitter. **read ›**

67 **Revelation 12:1** A great sign was seen in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *11 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Matthew 5:14 · 5:16 · 5:34 · 23:16

John 2:23

Acts 10:1 · 10:15

Romans 1:25 · 1:28

1 Peter 2:9

Revelation 22:17

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Who gave the stars their names, according to the Bible and the early church?” on April 22, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY