

The stars speak – Chapter 1

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I believe that when God created the universe he wrote a message in the stars for all the people on Earth to see, so that all mankind could understand his purpose. Just as God's message ends with the pictorial book of Revelation, I believe it began with the story in the heavens.

In Genesis, God says,

Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times and days and years (Gen 1:14 NIV)

We know Jesus told us to watch for signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars for heralds of his return. But over time, we have regarded much of this as metaphorical and not literal. It doesn't help that our industrial world has created so much light pollution that we are not easily able to see the glory of God in the night sky, as would have been the case years ago. Perhaps that is a message in itself?

I have been amazed how much information there is (and how many books have been written) relating to the story that God has written in the heavens. I came across Bullinger's Witness of the Stars many years ago, and that book is where my research started.

It is suggested that before they had the Torah, the stars played a part in the lives of the people and provided a visual aid showing God's divine plan. In Antiquities of the Jews, Josephus wrote referring to Seth (the third son of Adam) and his descendants,

They also were the inventors of the peculiar sort of wisdom which is concerned with the heavenly bodies, and their order. (1Antiquities 3:69b)

Jewish writings show that the Jews believed that God gave messages to people through the stars. They also suggest that the twelve tribes of Israel were linked with the twelve signs of the zodiac (*Likutei Moharan 9:2:1*). There is significant evidence that the signs of the zodiac played a

part in the lives of people as far back as we can see. One of the oldest known charts of the zodiac is the Dendera Zodiac, found in Egypt, from about 1,000 years before Christ.

A synagogue in Beit She'an in Israel has been excavated, and the ruins date back to the sixth century C.E. The floor in the main room of the synagogue has a mosaic showing all the signs of the zodiac.

Walter Zanger, the Israeli lecturer and author, states that he has visited seven sites in Israel where zodiac mosaics have been found — every single one on a synagogue floor.

In Christian culture too, we find Chartres Cathedral in France built in 12th Century (and a UNESCO World Heritage sight) has all the signs of the zodiac symbols on the stained glass windows, with their names above them. This indicates that the zodiac symbols represented something to both Jews and Christians in times past.

Scriptural references

Now I want to look at the Bible and see what God tells us about the stars, and then go on and look at the stars themselves and the story that they are telling us.

Psalm 19 states,

The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard. Yet their message has gone throughout the earth, and their words to all the world (Ps 19:1-4, NLT)

Here we are told that the heavens, that is the sun, moon and stars, are speaking to us. But not in words. We know how else stories can be told — if not in words, they can be told in pictures. I believe that this is what David is showing us here. Later in the Psalms we are told that God, *counts the stars and calls them all by name. (Ps 147:4 NLT).*

Turning to the new testament, we see Paul also believed that the stars had proclaimed the word of God. In Romans 10, Paul says,

Faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ. But I ask, have the people of Israel actually heard the message? Yes, they have: “The message has gone throughout the earth, and the words to all the world.” (Rom 10:17-18 NLT)

This is a direct quote from Psalm 19, describing the stars telling the story.

The book of Job is one of the oldest in the Bible and yet it shows that even then, people were familiar with the names of the stars. In Job we read

He [God] made all the stars — the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the southern sky. (Job 9:9 NLT)

Later in Job, God says,

Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion? Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season, or can you guide the Bear with its children? (Job 38:31-32 ESV)

We are familiar with most of the names of the stars that Job is giving us, but we may not be used to the name *Mazzaroth*. Strong's Concordance says it means "the twelve signs of the zodiac and their thirty-six associated constellations." It is the signs of the zodiac and the associated constellations called 'decans' that form the pictures based on the names of the stars, and tell the story in the heavens. From the word *Mazzaroth* comes the Jewish greeting, still used today, "Mazeltov", meaning 'good luck'. Its literal meaning is 'a good constellation'.

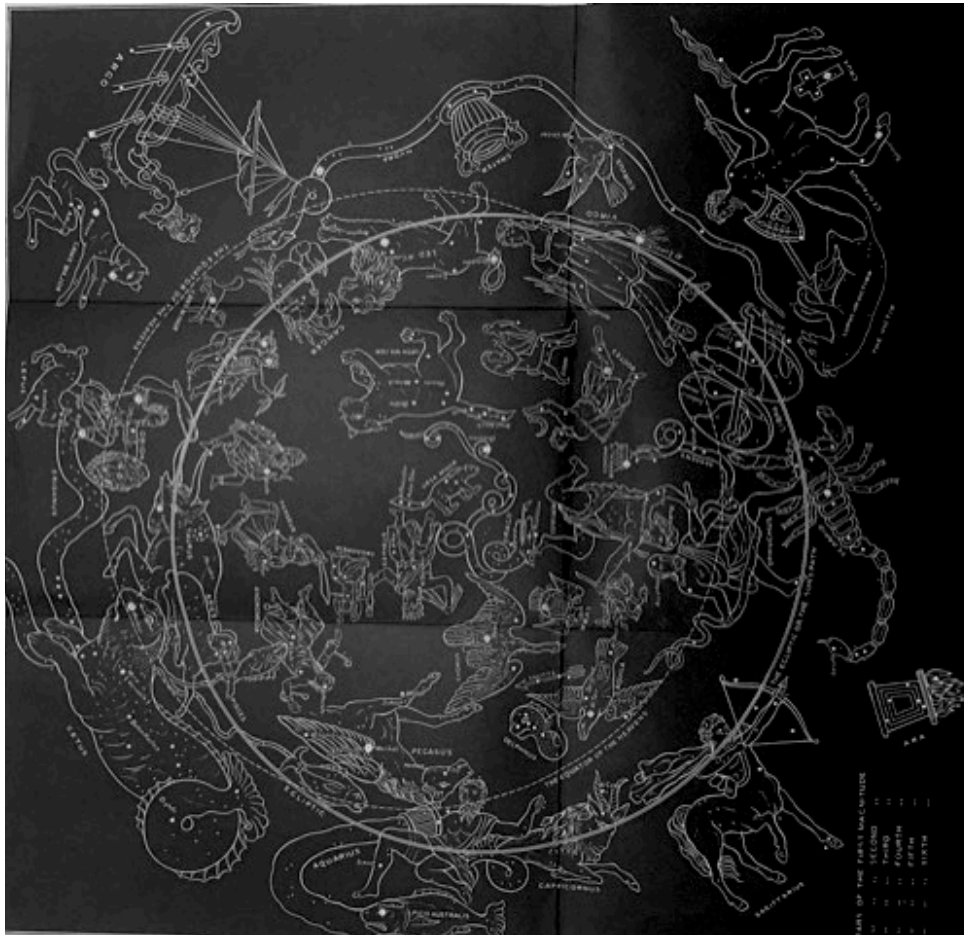
The earth revolves once every twenty four hours as it travels round our largest star, the Sun, with the constellations making a full circle in their positions above the Earth. The stars don't move (although they do shift slightly over long periods of time). The appearance of movement is caused by the Earth moving through the circle of constellations as it travels round the sun, and each planet moves at its own speed.

Mankind has corrupted God's beautiful story told in the stars and has turned it into fortune telling, trying to predict the future. As Christians we may have shunned the zodiac for this reason, but in doing so we are turning away from the beauty and complexity of the most amazing story, which has been presented spectacularly each and every night since creation. And totally free of charge!

The stars and their story

It is important when looking at the various signs of the Zodiac to look at the names of the stars, which are taken from ancient Hebrew and Aramaic, and are translated into English. Some of the shapes and signs have become corrupted over the years, but the essence of them remains the same. The names of the stars dictated the pictures, not the other way round. Also, the Bible

refers only to “stars”, because people then could only look with a naked eye and couldn’t make a distinction between planets and other astronomical objects.



Let us look at the stars and see what the story is that they are telling. I am following an old map of the stars, showing the various signs of the zodiac and their decans, which is taken from Bullinger’s book. I know you will not be able to read the constellations but it shows what it looks like with all the star signs together.

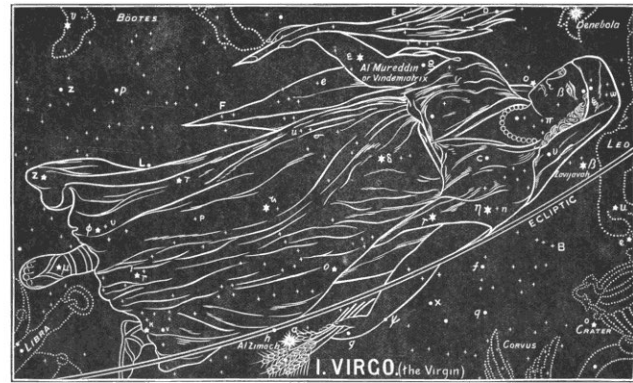
I will be taking each constellation and enlarging it and looking at each cameo in turn. The names of the stars tell the story in three chapters, and each chapter comprises four constellations. We will be starting with Virgo (on the chart, Virgo is just right of twelve o’clock on the circle). Then we will be moving clockwise through Libra, Scorpio and Sagittarius.

The story has images of evil serpents and conquering heroes fighting for the crown of righteousness, and the struggle over sin and death. In later chapters we see the Gentiles being included in God’s plan, going forward to resurrection and Christ’s return in glory and power.

I cannot mention all the stars in each constellation — there are 110 in the image of the virgin alone. I will select only one or two from each constellation, to show how the story builds and we will see that the names of the stars start to shape the pictures.

Virgo

The first chapter starts with Virgo showing us the promised birth of Christ through the generations, his sacrifice, then obtaining the crown, and the final harvest. Virgo is always shown holding a branch in her right hand and some stalks of corn in her left. The first two stars to note are *Spica*, translated ‘the ear of corn’, and *Subilon*, ‘a spike of corn’. The ears of corn in Virgo’s left hand remind us of the promise of the coming seed back in Genesis, as God speaks to Eve of *her* offspring. There is no mention of *their* offspring — that is belonging to both Adam and Eve. But how could Eve produce offspring without a man? Isaiah tells us,



Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. (Is 7:14 NIV)

The star here is called *Subilah*, which translates as ‘who carries’, referring to the virgin carrying Christ during her pregnancy. God promised that he would make Abraham a great nation,

He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars — if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring [seed] be.” (Gen 15:5 NIV)

— referring to the establishment of the Children of Israel through Abraham, but also to the seed in the singular, that is Christ. In Galatians, it is explained further that

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ. (Gal 3:16 NIV)

Our next star *Al Zimach* means ‘the branch’, and we see the branch in Virgo’s right hand. In Isaiah we read,

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
(Is 11:1)*

Other stars named in the Virgo constellation are *Al Araf*, meaning ‘those who are sent forth’, another is *Zavijahveh* translated as ‘beautiful Lord’, and *El Muridin* meaning ‘the sent one’. So we have the prediction of the birth of our beautiful Lord, sent forth to preach and do his Father’s work.

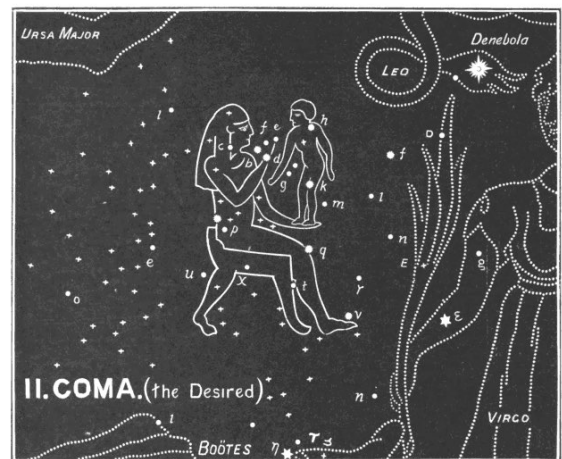
The first decan of Virgo is *Coma*, to the left of Virgo, and shows a woman with a child on her lap. The name *Coma* translates as ‘desired of all the nations’. In Haggai we read,

“I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord Almighty” (Hag 2:7 NIV)

A further star in *Coma* translates as, ‘to rule all nations’.

The second decan is *Centaurus*, at the bottom of the picture, showing a being with two natures. The rider has a spear in his hand and is killing the victim. The image shows the *Centaurus* and the victim as Christ. That is Christ killing himself. The victim is actually a decan of *Libra*, but I’ll deal with it here because it shows Jesus himself laying down his life, and so completes the picture. A star in the victim constellation is *Thusia*, which translates as ‘the sacrifice’, the Lord allowing himself to be killed. The gospel of John records our Lord Jesus saying,

*The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life — only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.
(John 10:17-18 NIV)*



The brightest star in *Centaurus* is called *Toliman*, which translated means ‘the heretofore and hereafter’ or the one which Revelation says, *who is, and who was, and who is to come* (*Rev 1:8*). We also see the star *Al Mureddin* meaning ‘he shall have dominion’.

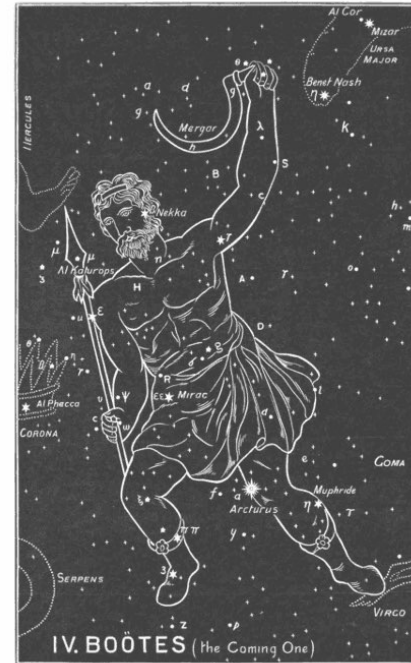
The third decan is *Bootes* which means ‘to come’. *Bootes*’ hand is holding a sickle in motion. He’s swinging towards the neck of the constellation *Serpens* to strike it because the serpent is trying to steal the crown. We are reminded of Genesis when speaking to the serpent, God says, *He will strike your head* (*Gen 3:15*).

The star *Arcturus* translates as ‘he comes’. Revelation tells us,

I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, “Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. (Rev 14-14-16 NIV)

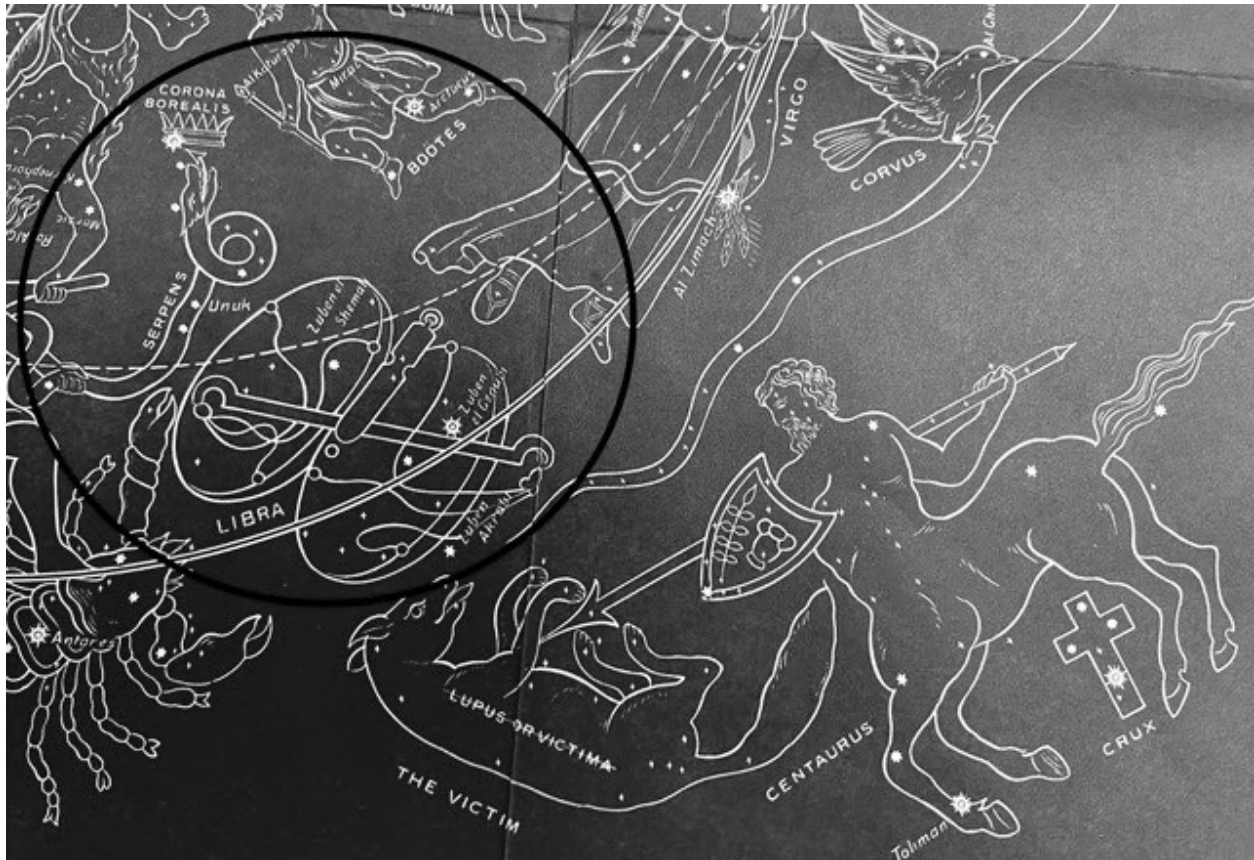
Other stars in the constellation of *Virgo* include *Nekkar*, ‘the pierced’, and *Al Katuraps*, which means ‘the branch treading under foot’.

So, *Virgo* shows us the promise of the virgin birth from *Eve*, through *Abraham*, and on to our Lord *Jesus Christ*. We see the desired of all the nations, as a man, giving himself willingly on the cross for our sins, winning the crown, and then finally reaping the harvest.



Libra

The next sign we come to is *Libra*, the scales. Usually shown like the scales of justice. They are in the lower half of the black circle in the image below, and seen from above. The story of *Libra* is *The Cross to the Crown*. It shows the Lord *Jesus*’ atoning power, the cross endured, the victim slain and the crown bestowed. *Libra* means weighing.



We see our own lives in the balance, with our sins far outweighing our righteousness as when Daniel is speaking to King Belshazzar, *you have been weighed on the balances and have not measured up. (Dan 5:27 NLT)*

We have the star *Mozanaim*, which in Hebrew means ‘the weighing scales’, and the star *Al Zubena* meaning ‘purchase or redemption’. The Jews celebrate Yom Kippur under this sign. The day they believe their lives are in the balance as God decides whether or not their names are written in the book of life.

Libra contains two particularly bright stars. The first is *Zuben-al-Genubi*, which means ‘the purchase or price, which is deficient’, showing the state of man when left to himself.

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. (Rom 3:23 NLT)

Only Christ’s atoning sacrifice can put things right with God. As it says in Corinthians, *Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. (1Cor 1:30 NLT)*

The other bright star is *Zuben al Chemali*, which means ‘the price which covers.’ We are reminded of Psalm 85,

You forgave the guilt of your people — yes, you covered all their sins. (Ps 85:2 NLT)

The first decan is the *Southern Cross* in the bottom right corner, shaped like a cross. The brightest star you can see is called *Acrux* and means ‘cross’. You can see that *Centaurus* is leaping over the *Southern Cross* representing Christ overcoming the cross. The Hebrew name for it is *Adom*, meaning ‘cutting off’. The *Southern Cross* comprises five stars which appear in the shape of the letter *Tau*, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which is written as a cross as we might write the letter ‘t’ in our alphabet. It is used to mark the ending or finish of something. We cannot help but think of Christ saying, “It is finished.” In the Talmud, the letter *Tau* represents truth.

The second decan is *Lupus* or *Victim*, the victim slain, which we discussed above.

The third decan is *Corona Borealis*, the crown of righteousness, with the brightest star in this constellation called *Al Phecce* meaning ‘the shining’. Here we have the crown bestowed. Hebrews tells us,

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (Heb 2:9 NIV)

Also in Timothy,

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2Tim 4:8 NIV)

This is Libra: us in the balance and found wanting, Christ dying for us and gaining the crown, opening up the way to salvation.

Scorpio

Next we have Scorpio, showing the Redeemer’s conflict. Scorpio gives us an action picture of *Ophiuchus*, a conqueror wrestling *Serpens*, whilst stepping on a scorpion. Meanwhile *Hercules* is stepping on another serpent named *Draco*.



The first decan is *Serpens* and contains the star *Unukalhai* translated as ‘the serpents neck’. It shows the serpent (representing the sin of the world) struggling to reach the crown to wear it himself and trying to wriggle free from *Ophiuchus*.

The second decan is *Ophiuchus*. The name *Ophiuchus* means ‘the serpent held’, and here we see the conqueror grasping the serpent. This symbolises Christ’s struggle with the enemy, and his holding back the serpent preventing it from reaching the crown.

We have another star *Akrab* which means ‘the conflict or war’.

The largest star shown on scorpio’s back is *Antares*, which means ‘the wounding’. Other stars are *Unuk*, meaning ‘encompassing’, *Al Hay*, ‘the reptile’, and *Al Chelbalrai*, ‘the serpent unfolding’.

Surely god will crush the heads of his enemies. (Ps 68:21 NIV)

The enemy may try and try, but he will not win. *Scorpio* is positioned under *Ophiuchus*, who has his foot moving towards the head of *Scorpio* to crush his head. We remember Christ told the disciples that they could walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them (Luke 10:19).

The third decan is *Hercules*, the mighty man. He is to the upper left of *Ophiuchus*. A man kneeling on one knee, humbled in the conflict, but holding aloft the tokens of victory with his foot on the head of the dragon. The mighty vanquisher, seeming to sink in the conflict. Stars here are *Was al Gethi*, meaning the ‘head of him who bruises’, and *Guiam* translated as ‘treading under foot’. We return to Genesis with God speaking to the serpent,

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel. (Gen 3:15 NIV)

and we think of Psalm 91 referring to Christ,

You will trample upon lions and cobras; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet! (Ps 91:13 NLT)

and Job 26,

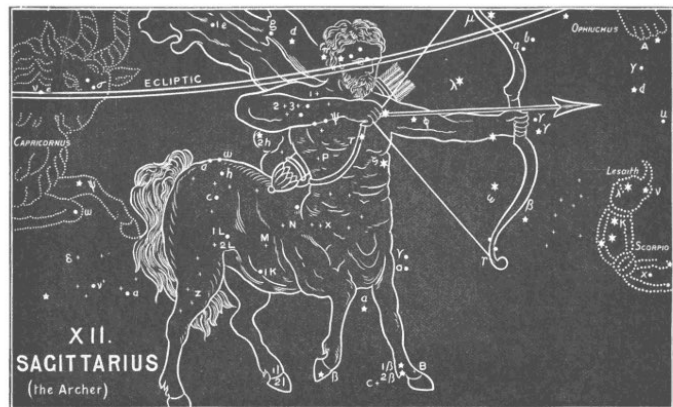
By his skill he crushed the great sea monster. His Spirit made the heavens beautiful, and his power pierced the gliding serpent. (Job 26:12-13 NLT)

The story of *Scorpio* is that of the coming Messiah being wounded while crushing a snake and wrestling a scorpion, with the snake trying to take the *Corona Borealis*. It reminds us that Messiah had to struggle against the power of sin, enduring the cross, but overcame and gained the crown.

Sagittarius

The last sign in Chapter One is *Sagittarius*, who shows us the Redeemer’s triumph over death and sin, so appeasing God’s wrath. It is shown through stars such as *Kesheth*, ‘the archer’, *Shannon*, ‘the gracious one’, and *Knem*, ‘he conquers’. *Sagittarius* is at the bottom of the chart, just right of centre. Revelation 6 says,

I looked up and saw a white horse standing there. Its rider carried a bow, and a crown was placed on his head. He rode out to win many battles and gain the victory. (Rev 6:2 NLT)



Here we see a figure similar to *Centuarus*. John tells us in his first epistle that, *the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil.* (1John 3:8 NLT). Here we see the archer firing an arrow into *Scorpio*. Christ aiming to kill the scorpion, representing sin.

The first decan is *Lyra*, the harp with wings. This represents praise prepared for the Conqueror, as in Revelation 5,

Blessing and honour and glory and power belong to the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever. (Rev 5:13-14 NLT)

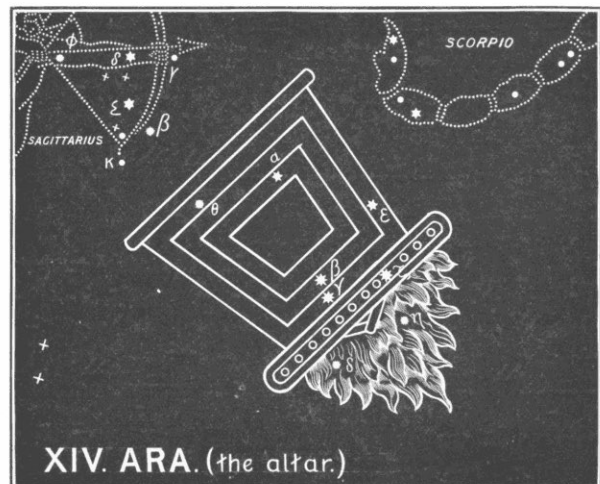
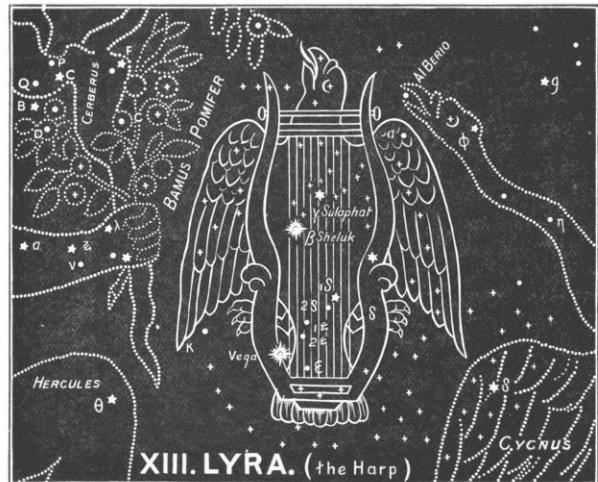
One of the stars in *Lyra* means ‘eagle’ and we can see *Lyra* is over the serpent *Draco* showing the triumph of the eagle over the serpent. Again from Revelation,

Then I looked, and I heard a single eagle crying loudly as it flew through the air, “Terror, terror, terror to all who belong to this world because of what will happen when the last three angels blow their trumpets.” (Rev 8:13 NLT)

Other stars are *Vega*, meaning ‘he shall be exalted’, and *Fent-kar*, ‘the serpent ruled’.

The second decan is *Ara*, the ‘altar’, the consuming fire prepared for the enemies. This constellation is seen from the southern hemisphere, and so appears to be pouring fire on the earth. As in Malachi,

Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire, (Mal 4:1 NIV)

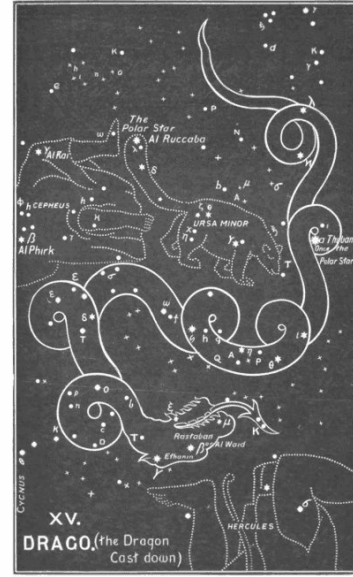


The third decan is *Draco*, which is the serpent. The dragon, the old serpent, the devil, cast down from heaven.

The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. (Rev 12:9 NIV)

The whole world, starting with *Eve who was deceived by the serpent's cunning (2Cor 11:3 NIV)*. And then we see the star *Al Mugamra*, which means 'the completing or finishing'.

Summarising *Sagittarius*, we are reminded of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, and how it alone could pay the price for our sins, destroying the work of the evil one, and so appease God's wrath.



Summary

So we conclude the first Chapter, having seen Christ in the seed story and *Virgo*, our lives in the balance in *Libra*, Christ, being sacrificed for our sins in *Scorpio*, and returning in vengeance in *Sagittarius*.