

Dog Days of Summer

The hottest and muggiest season of the year, known as the dog days of summer, officially comes to an end today. Do I hear a collective “Whew?” Of course, you may not notice an immediate change in the weather, but, slowly, it will begin to happen.

July 3 to August 11 is the period referred to as dog days. The genesis of the term is interesting. In ancient times, when artificial lights and smog did not cloud the atmosphere, people in different parts of the world drew images in the sky by “connecting the dots” of stars. These fanciful drawings were dependent upon the culture. The Chinese saw different objects or animals than the Indians of North America, and they drew pictures different than the Europeans. These star pictures are now called constellations, and the ones that are now mapped out in the sky come from our European ancestors.

For examples, they saw images of bears (Ursa Major and Ursa Minor), twins (Gemini), a bull (Taurus) and others, including dogs (Canis Major and Canis Minor). The brightest of these stars in Canis Major (the big dog) is Sirius, which also happens to be the brightest star in the night sky. It is so bright that the ancient Romans thought the earth received heat from it. Look for it in the southern sky of the northern latitudes during January.

In summer, Sirius (the dog star) rises and sets with the sun. During late July, Sirius is in conjunction with the sun, and the ancients believed that its heat added to the heat of the sun, creating that stretch of hot and sultry weather. They named this period of time, from 20 days before the conjunction to 20 days after, “dog days” after the dog star. Although it is certainly the warmest period of the summer, the heat is not due to the added radiation from a faraway star, but as a direct result of the earth’s tilt.

What does this science lesson have to do with anything? Well, it illuminates, in our minds, the power and the creative genius of God. He shaped our Earth, to be sure, but it is just a tiny part of His handiwork. The heavens themselves are under His control. He orchestrates it all, from the rising of the sun to its going down at night, the planets that move around it in our solar system to interplanetary arrangements that science has not yet discovered.

But the real mystery is that the Lord of the universe has time to deal with the problems that cause us worry and anxiety, and He wants to do so. If we could but learn to surrender them to Him, and let Him lead in their resolution, how much happier our lives would be.

For today? Let’s rejoice in the passing of dog days.

--Beecher Hunter