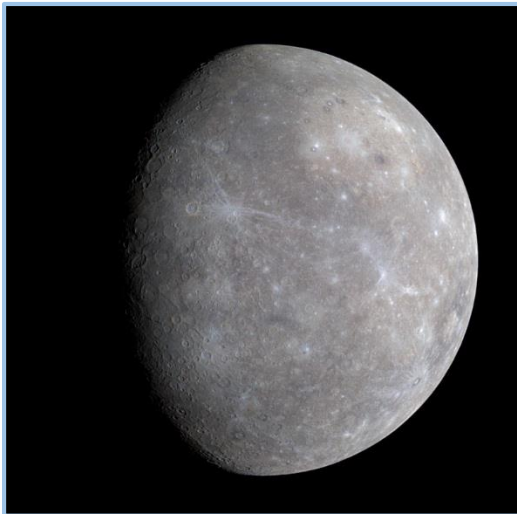


THE WEIRD ORBIT OF MERCURY

Physicists had scratched their heads for some 50 years over the unexplainable orbit of the planet Mercury.

Mercury, of course, is the smallest and closest to the sun of the eight planets in the solar system. It has an orbital period of about 88 earth days. Named after the Roman deity Mercury, the planet – seen from earth – appears to move around its orbit in about 116 days, which is faster than any other planet.



Sir Isaac Newton's theories of gravity had served well for centuries to understand the orbits of all the other planets, but in Mercury's elliptical orbit, the point nearest the sun drifted by a small amount. Astronomers conjectured that another small, hidden planet, which they named Vulcan, might be orbiting the sun and exerting gravitational force on Mercury. But Vulcan was never discovered.

Then Albert Einstein formulated his general theory of relativity. Where people went wrong looking for objects, Einstein eventually revealed that they should have been looking at space itself.

He showed that mass warps space. This warping didn't noticeably affect planets far from the sun, but Mercury was so close that its strange precession was visible as soon as people started paying close attention. When he applied this gravitational formula to the eccentric orbit of Mercury, the numbers fit. Mercury was a mystery no more.

On occasions, our lives may seem to have an orbit which, like Mercury, defies our best efforts to explain it.

Nevertheless, as surely as there is order in the universe, there is a heavenly reason for our circumstances that is utterly consistent with God's Word and character.

We just cannot understand it yet. One day, however, we will.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths (Proverbs 3:5 NKJV).

– Beecher Hunter