

Why the Eclipse Matters After Today

Fred Espenak is known as “Mr. Eclipse.” The retired NASA astrophysicist has traveled all over the world to see 27 total solar eclipses.

Today, for the first time in 38 years, he can stay in America.

The last total eclipse in the United States was in 1979. The last time a total eclipse was visible from coast to coast was June 8, 1918.

Today, as *Newsweek* explains, the moon will block the sun, casting us into “a short-lived night in the middle of the day.” The “path of totality,” where the full eclipse will be visible, crosses 14 states from Madras, Oregon, to Columbia, South Carolina. People not on this path will see a partial eclipse if they live in North America and even parts of Africa, Europe, and South America.

Do *not* view the eclipse directly—you could damage your retinas permanently. You could view it through special glasses (avoid fakes), photograph it with your phone, or see it through a pinhole viewer. Or you could live stream it on NASA’s website.

You could also attend one of many “eclipse parties” across the country. Some have been in full swing for days. For instance, Nashville has been hosting the “Howl at the Moon Music Festival” since Saturday.

People didn’t always treat today’s event so lightly.

In ancient China, people would bang drums and pots and shout to scare away the dragon that was eating the sun. When royal astronomers failed to predict the eclipse of 2134 B.C.,

Emperor Chung K'ang had them beheaded.

Greek poet Archilochus wrote of the 647 B.C. eclipse, "There is nothing beyond hope, nothing that can be sworn impossible" since "Zeus, father of the Olympians, made night from mid-day, hiding the light of the shining Sun, and sore fear came upon men."

Archilochus was more right than he knew.

Our secular culture is convinced that science has rendered faith irrelevant, that we don't need God to give our lives meaning and purpose. But today's eclipse teaches us that we are not the masters of our world. All the accumulated power of our planet's most powerful nation cannot prevent this blackening of our sky. For a few minutes, we will be shown that we are creatures, not Creator, that this world is not of our making or within our control.

And when night becomes day once more, we will be reminded that every moment of light and life is a gift from the One who "makes His sun rise" (Matt. 5:45) and "gives all men life and breath" (Acts 17:25c).

Let's respond to God's grandeur and our finitude by making Alfred, Lord Tennyson's prayer our own:

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:/Thou madest man, he knows not why,/He thinks he was not made to die;/And thou hast made him: thou art just.