

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

*THE DRAMA OF CREATION.*

(GENESIS i. 1-ii. 3.)

BETWEEN what the Bible says on any subject and what men think it says, there is sometimes a difference as great as the difference between truth and error. Whoever believes that the earth was created, about six thousand years ago, in six days of twenty-four hours each may hold that this is the plain teaching of the book of Genesis; but men of great ability and undoubted piety refused to accept that view, especially when they were confronted with facts from the crust of the earth, which spoke a different language. Their faith was too strong to allow them to doubt the truth of what they read in Genesis; their reason was too clear to allow them to deny the facts of Geology. They said: "Both records are true, though we do not see how they are to be reconciled." They resolved to wait. At that very time there was a similar conflict between faith and facts in the region of astronomy. Some scientific men, as Professor James Forbes told his class in Edinburgh University one morning, had their faith in the universality of the law of gravitation shaken by inexplicable perturbations in the motions of the planet Uranus. Of the fact of these perturbations there was no doubt; it was possible, they thought, that, at the vast distance of Uranus, the law of gravitation might begin to lose its power. But most men said: "Wait; the explanation will come"; and it came with the discovery of an unknown and farther-off planet, Neptune. Faith in the universality of the law of gravitation was thus brought into harmony with the fact of the perturbations of Uranus.

Both Dr. Chalmers and Hugh Miller, not to mention other names, believed in the facts of Geology; they believed as devoutly in the truth of the story in Genesis. They set

themselves to remove the apparent contradiction between them. Hugh Miller, in a lecture on "The Two Records—Mosaic and Geological," did not think himself called on as a geologist to account for more than the third, fifth, and sixth days' work: and "he showed that the works of these three days correspond with the *leading features* of the geological eras." On reading his lecture, I felt that there was something incomplete about his views. I asked myself, How did Moses, or whoever wrote the first chapter of Genesis, come to know about these geological eras? The analogy of the faith at once supplied an answer, which would be accepted as probable, or at least as a reasonable guess. It was that the revelation came in the form of a dream or vision to the man who wrote the story. Working this idea out, it seemed to me to solve several of the difficulties that had gathered round the chapter. Dr. Hanna, the biographer of Chalmers, was so pleased with the manuscript that he recommended it to be printed. A few days before the book (*The Mosaic Record in Harmony with the Geological*) was published, the publishers presented a copy to Hugh Miller. About three weeks after he adopted the view advocated in the book in an article written for the *Witness* newspaper, and afterwards embodied in his *Testimony of the Rocks*.

In the following paper I shall endeavour to complete an idea which I have long felt was then incompletely developed: and, perhaps, I could not put at the head of it a more fitting preface than these words of Sir Thomas Browne in his *Religio Medici*, xlv.: "Some believe there went not a minute to the world's creation; nor shall there go to its destruction; those six days, so punctually described, make not to them one moment, but rather seem to manifest the method and idea of that great work in the intellect of God than the manner how He proceeded in its operation."

## SCENE FIRST.

*The Triumph of Light over Darkness.*

The introduction to the drama of creation (Gen. i. 1) and the first scene (i. 2-5) are sometimes considered separately, but it is not necessary to do this for a right understanding of the piece.

To some minds it may seem strange, if not unbecoming, to speak of dramas in the Bible, or to call them "the word of the Lord."<sup>1</sup> Its sentiments and literary forms may be deemed worthy of another name than the spectacular representations that have been the delight of men for ages. But there is no other name for a writing which enables a reader to gather the movement of a story from the animated conversation of individuals, whom we call the actors. Long before the ancient Greeks or Hindoos put their earliest dramas on the stage, the pure and noble dramatic conceptions of Hebrew writers were current among their people. Though they have come down to us sometimes in a few words, though they may be but the outlines or plots of longer compositions, they stand comparison as pieces of literature with the best that have survived of Greek writings. Some of them are far older than the oldest of Greek dramas, or are at least as old. Among these are the Book of Job, the Song of Songs, the vision of Micah, the installation of Isaiah, and the trial of Joshua, the high priest. The drama of Creation may be the oldest of them. It was certainly quoted by the prophet Jeremiah,<sup>2</sup> perhaps also by Isaiah. In these circumstances it must have been written nearly three thousand years ago at least, but its antiquity may be greater, and probably is.

Whoever pieced into one work the general history and the family records, which compose the book of Genesis, did a wise thing in prefacing it with the drama of creation. How wise a thing it was, and how useful to mankind, we

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xxii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Jer. iv. 23-25.

shall discover as we proceed. At what time it was written and by whom, are matters of no consequence. There it is, in its beautiful simplicity of thought and language: let it tell its own story. One thing is clear. It stands apart from the rest of Genesis, a preface to that book, or a preface to the whole Bible; as completely distinct from the story of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden as it is from the story of Joseph in Egypt. It should be printed on a page by itself, instead of being mixed up with the story of Eden, as it unhappily is, and never was intended to be. Mistakes and confusion have resulted, unfortunately, from this mixing up of things wholly different. The drama of creation is one piece; the story of Adam and Eve is another. There is no reason for believing they were written at the same time, or by the same hand, or that the man who put them together in the book now called Genesis was the man by whom they were originally written. With more reason we may inquire if the drama in Genesis i. 1-ii. 3 is an outline or an original whole? Was there more of it when it came fresh from the author's pen, or have we all that he ever wrote on the subject? Judging from the setting of other dramas in the Old Testament, we can scarcely avoid the conclusion that this drama is an outline of a larger piece; and judging from the references to the creation in Job<sup>1</sup> and in Proverbs,<sup>2</sup> it would be a pleasure to think that parts of its sublime poetry have been preserved in these two books.

The first chapter of the Book of Genesis, then, is a drama produced in the ancient world, and causing surprise in modern days by its beauty of finish and its singular picture of the creation of all things. It looks so like a challenge to modern science that its statements have been viewed in that light: the gage of battle, which it is supposed to have thrown down, has been repeatedly taken up, and combats, as unreal as any fabled in ghostly romance, have been

<sup>1</sup> Job. xxxviii. 4-16.

<sup>2</sup> Prov. viii. 22-31.

fought to no purpose. This drama is not a challenge to modern science. With all truth it may be called a challenge to the science accepted by the ancient world, or a protest against the danger and folly of astrology, the worship of the heavenly bodies, the absurdities of the transmigration of souls. In this sense it is a challenge or protest, a lofty challenge on behalf of man, crushed under the superstitions and absurdities of priests and philosophers. And it is a challenge, not in the terms known to the champions who figured in tournaments centuries ago, but in the terms common to prophets and heroes of Bible history three or four millenniums before our day. That ancient form of challenge was by parable, or vision, or drama, or by all three fused into one. Such is the form of the challenge to the science of the ancient world in this preface to the Bible.

On the sublimity of one of its passages at least we have the testimony of a well-known Greek writer, Longinus, who flourished more than sixteen centuries ago. In his book *On the Sublime* he quotes the verse, "God said, Let there be light, and there was light," as a surpassing example of sublimity of thought and diction. Longinus was a heathen; he was not hampered by views of the Bible that carried the world away after his time; he looked on it as a book, a sacred book perhaps, which superstitious people in other lands might regard with awe, but which he was free to handle and speak of as he would the poems of Homer or the plays of Æschylus in Greek literature. His judgment on the sublimity of the passage is the calm judgment of an able and unbiassed critic, and ought to carry conviction to every reader.

The first chapter of Genesis is thus more than a drama; it is a sublime drama of creation. To refuse to call it a drama is to shut one's eyes to facts, for it is full of action throughout, and the speeches, uttered or reported, which accompany the action are clear and distinctly marked off

from the action. There is also a speaker or actor, and there is besides an audience to whom the speaker addresses himself, "Let us make man in our image." The time during which the action proceeds is seven dramatic or scenic days, each day witnessing a change of scene, and an increasing intensity of the action. A march of events more stately and more inspiring never passed across the stage of any theatre on earth. There is no hurry, nor is there any useless delay. The simplicity of the drama and the brevity of it, considering, as we ought, that it is crowded with colour, with motion, with life, with figures, is amazing. You would be justified in saying that the genius, which crowded all these details into a piece containing only four hundred and sixty-seven words, must have been divine. We speak of a true poet as inspired. There is the loftiest poetry and the noblest inspiration in this drama of creation. No one, with an eye for beauty and the orderly march of a plot, can imagine it to have been borrowed from other sources than the marvellous brain of its unknown author. There is nothing like it in literature, and there is nothing so grand. Brief as the drama is, it is divided into seven well-marked scenes or acts, the first of 52 words (i. 1-5), the second of 38 (i. 6-8), the third of 68 (i. 9-13), the fourth of 69 (i. 14-19), the fifth of 57 (i. 20-23), the sixth, the most important of them all, of 148 words (i. 24-31), and the seventh of 35 (ii. 1-3). The stage on which the drama is transacted is, like the plot, grand in its simplicity and vastness: the stage is the world of things in its whole extent, the world of life and of men.

This Hebrew drama is a record of battle between hostile powers animated with a deadly hatred to each other. On the one hand are the allied powers of darkness and death; on the other the allied powers of light and life. Concealed beneath the banners of each pair of allies is a third power, whose presence is more distinctly revealed as the story of

life proceeds. In league with darkness and death is seen, at first in the background, the malignant spirit of hatred; while in league with light and life is seen irradiating the whole field of action, and making its gracious presence felt in every nook and cranny, the spirit of love. What has been felt throughout the whole course of life, what is felt to this day, is brought out as distinctly in this short drama of creation as in all the books that have been written, and all the speeches that have been made in the onward march of time. This drama of creation is worthy, and is alone worthy, to stand as a fitting preface to the history of life and literature on earth. While it makes no claim to this place of honour, there can be no doubt in a reader's mind that it is worthy of the place that it fills, and that it ought to fill it. There is no competitor with it for the place, there is no rival. Compared with it Babylonian legends and Greek world-makings are child's play, the dimmest shadows at the best of the majestic march of this drama of four hundred and sixty-seven Hebrew words. It begins with a brief but distinct picture of the stage on which the first act is to be played. The heavens and earth are made; an ocean is rolling before the spectator, but he sees nothing, for "darkness was upon the face of the deep." Darkness held the whole field. Chaos and death were in undisturbed possession. But there is a movement heard on the dreary, darkened stage. "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." What was it?

A voice is heard sounding its summons over the dark waste, for so the drama represents the scene to suit the feebleness of man's mental powers. The voice is that of the Prince of Life, summoning the armies of light to the battle with darkness. The battle began with the order, "God said, Let there be light, and there was light." Long triumphant darkness was beaten back from the waters of chaos; light was streaming on the scene, and revealing to

the audience the reality of the battle and the change in the aspect of affairs. Let us think of it what we please, but no one can conceal from himself that this first triumph of light was a most fitting introduction or preface to the many triumphs light was destined to achieve. If the Bible is anything uncommon, the most uncommon thing about it as a piece of literature is that, what the preface to it says, is found true in every book it contains through the many centuries during which these books were written. "Let there be light" is the keynote to this sublime drama of creation. Light, more light, and yet more light is the cry raised by its many writers and heroes all down the ages, till the whole concludes in that gorgeous picture of the lighted city, where they have no need of sun or moon, because the Lord God is the light thereof, and where darkness is unknown; "there shall be no night there." The bond that unites all these books, from the opening of this sacred drama in Genesis to the close of the history in the end of the Book of the Revelation, is the triumph of light. The light is called day; the darkness is called night; but it is everywhere recognised that day and night have a narrower or a far wider meaning than the twenty-four hour changes to which they are confined in common speech. It is enough to note that, at the very beginning, light enters on its long struggle with darkness, and that the keynote which is thus struck is sounded by poets, by prophets, by apostles, by heroes all down the ages—a sweet refrain that binds together their writings with a common purpose, and in a common faith. Could this be an accident in the literary history of a nation, or is it a purpose of Him who said, Let there be light, and there was light?

No reader of the Bible requires to have it proved for him that the triumph of light is the note that breathes most fully and most sweetly in all its varied music. "In thy light shall we see light," "Send out Thy light and Thy

truth," "Unto the upright ariseth light in the darkness," were the song and the prayer of Hebrew poets. "I will give Thee for a light to the Gentiles," "The Lord shall be thine everlasting light," "When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me," were the bursts of gladness that cheered the prophets amid the growing darkness of the age. Even the half-sneering, half-sorrowful writer of the book of Ecclesiastes finds the theme pleasant, "I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness"—words which one cannot compare with those of the drama in Genesis, "God saw that the light was good," without coming to the conclusion that the former are an amplified echo of the latter. Evangelists and Apostles revel, so to speak, in the growing brightness and ultimate triumphs of light. "Ye are the light of the world," "The true light that coming into the world lighteth every man," "Walk as children of light," "Every good and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights," are sublime echoes of the first divine summons to battle, "Let there be light, and there was light."

It has been often remarked that light is summoned into being in the first scene of the drama, while the sun is not called on to appear till the fourth. A defiance to the common belief of mankind so singular, rung out at the very beginning of the drama, stamps it as either singularly foolish in the writer, or singularly knowing. Modern science proves that this placing of light previous to the appearance of the sun, this antedating of light, so to speak, is not singularly foolish, but is entirely in accordance with facts. What the real meaning of this antedating may be, we do not know, and need not attempt to guess; that it is agreeable to nature we are well assured, for light is not an existence dependent on the sun, but probably flashed its sweetness athwart space ages, millions of ages, before the sun shone in our heavens. Light is not the servant and

successor of the sun ; the sun is the successor and the servant of light.

The first scene of the drama closes with two reports : *first*, " God saw the light that it was good " ; and, *second*, " God called the light day and the darkness He called night. " Whether the audience heard God's voice thus speak, or received the reports from a messenger sent to publish them abroad, we are not told, nor need we inquire. The scene began in darkness, and ends in light. The scenes that follow proceed on a lighted stage. The audience can now see all that happens as the drama of life unfolds itself before them. The curtain that concealed the action has risen.

#### SCENE SECOND.

##### *The Beginnings of Order.*

In the first scene of the drama light is summoned to reveal to a seeing eye the chaos that forms the stage. All is confusion. A waste of waters is covered with a veil of cloud or mist, stooping so low, and rising so high, that no intervening space separates the chaos below from the chaos above. What this may mean in the nature of things it is useless to inquire. One may hold one view ; another may hold another view ; explanations are of no use for the march of the drama. Out of confusion order must come. He who sheds light on the confusion, as God did in the first scene, will bring order out of disorder on the now lighted stage of earth. The audience see the confusion that prevails ; they next hear the voice that summons Order to fill its rightful place in the world. Waters above, waters below, so confuse the spectator that he has but one name for the vast disorder—it is chaos. There is no beauty, there is no magnificence in the outlook. A feeling of terror at the appalling confusion is indicated by the very presentation of the scene on the lighted stage ; waters above and waters

below; nothing to relieve the eye, and nothing to soothe an apprehensive spirit. There is confusion, as "without form" means; there is emptiness—no life, no man: it is a yawning gulf of emptiness, a chaos.

Again is the commanding voice heard speaking, the voice that never speaks but it is obeyed, "Let there be an open stretch in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." On the lighted stage the action proceeds before the beholders, whoever they were. The parting of the waters takes place: clouds float in the open heaven above, the tumbling waves roll in the seas below, and a breadth of outstretched air severs the former from the latter. There is no reference to a crystal firmament, with stars studded in it here and there, as the ancients imagined and wrote. An outstretched space is the meaning of the word used by the writer of this drama, a word that prevents all misconception, and might be used to-day by the most scientific. We speak of the firmament, using the word common among the Greeks and Latins, but without attributing to it their meaning. We do not use the word of the writer of this drama, but we accept his meaning of an outstretched space. It is a marvellous thing, this avoidance of error by the writer of the drama, whoever he was. More than two thousand five hundred years have passed away, perhaps twice that number of years, since he put pen to paper, but there is not the slightest reason for saying that his science here is at fault. He states a scientific fact, and he states it as we would state it to-day. He saw the thing taking place, and in common-sense language he describes what he saw. As the drama proceeds, it becomes even more wonderful in truthfulness of presentation and in simplicity of language.

The audience hear the name given to the space outstretched between the parted waters: it is Heaven, and the giver of the name is God. In the same way He named the

light, Day; and the darkness, Night. The names were bestowed before men appeared on the stage, and before man's language was known on earth. It is certainly not meant by this naming of things that the words were known and in use before man's birth, but the meaning clearly is that, what God enables and encourages man to do—for speech and naming are the gift of God—by a well understood rule God is said to do Himself.

JAMES SIME.

(To be concluded.)

### NOTE ON ACTS XVI. 12.

As Dr. Hort's alteration of the text is regarded not without favour by Dr. Zahn in his recent *Einleitung in das Neue Test.* p. 375, a work whose value and well-deserved influence imparts great weight to any opinion expressed in it, the reasons against tampering with the text should be strengthened. Hort objected to the text *πρώτη τῆς μερίδος* on the ground that *μερίς* "never denotes a region or any geographical division." It is pointed out in my *Church in Rom. Emp.*, p. 158, that this is incorrect. To the Egyptian example there given of *μερίς* as subdivision of a large district or province, it may be added that *μερίς* is used to indicate a geographical subdivision in Syria (*Strabo*, p. 749), in Asia Minor (*id.*, p. 560), and in Gaul (*id.*, p. 191); that sense is therefore peculiarly appropriate to *μερίς*, and its use in *Acts* is unimpeachable. The meaning in the verse quoted must be taken, on the analogy of the other cases, as "first of a subdivision of Macedonia"; and the correctness of that description, and its real character, are sufficiently shown elsewhere (*St. Paul the Trav.*, p. 207). On the other hand, the Bezan text, which substitutes *κεφαλὴ τῆς Μακεδονίας*, is in every respect bad, both being incorrect in fact, and losing the appropriateness of the terms *πρώτη* and *μερίς*. Zahn cannot be justified in practically following the Bezan sense when he interprets "a first city of the province Macedonia."

W. M. RAMSAY.