

# 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)

## NOTES ON GENESIS.

THESE notes on the book of Genesis will be in the strictest sense of the term exegetical. It is impossible, in commenting on such a book, to avoid all discussion of the many questions which have been raised in connexion with it, more particularly in the earlier chapters, such as the relation of the story of creation given here to the cosmogonies of other nations, the order of creation, the origin and antiquity of man, the universality of the flood, the distribution of man over the face of the earth; but I shall touch upon these only so far as is absolutely necessary for the elucidation of the text. In particular I shall abstain from attempting to construct any scheme of "reconciliation" between the statements of the first chapter of Genesis and the well-ascertained results of scientific investigation. Scientific men only have any right to speak on subjects lying within their own domain; and I leave it to them to say how far the statements of Genesis, taken in their plain, literal sense, are, or are not, in accordance with what may be fairly considered as the results, so far as they are certain, of modern scientific research. For myself, I may frankly say that I accept the record in Genesis as a Divine revelation; but I believe that revelation is always adapted to the capacities and modes of thought of the recipient. How should it be conveyed otherwise? How otherwise would it be intelligible to those to whom it was addressed? A revelation given more than 3,000 years ago which should have comprised the science of the nineteenth century would have been utterly confusing and perplexing. Moreover, the pur-

pose of any true revelation must be moral and spiritual, and the Bible nowhere professes to have any other. Why should we assert for it what it nowhere asserts for itself? I know it will be said: "But if the Bible professes to give an account of creation; if it tells me, for instance, that plants producing seed, that the cereals and leguminous plants and fruit trees were in existence before the creation of the sun; if it enters into details as to the order in which plants, fishes, reptiles, birds, mammals appeared—then the Bible does so far lay itself open to a comparison with the discoveries of science; it challenges such a comparison." I fully admit it. And if it is certain that the two records, the record of nature as now interpreted and the record of revelation as it stands, cannot be reconciled, let us honestly say so. But what is there in this to disturb our faith? Why should we argue as if we knew in what precise way God ought to convey to us a revelation? Suppose that it is His will and pleasure to give it us in a form which to our conceptions savours of imperfection, is not that precisely what He has done in His other revelation of Himself in nature? Why not be content to wait? Perhaps all is not told us. There is a reticence in Holy Scripture which is the sure mark of its Divine original. Nothing is really great, really sublime, which is not touched by the shadow of mystery. There must be room for faith. I say this deliberately. If a man cannot feel the simple majesty, the unapproachable grandeur, of this first chapter of Genesis; if he cannot discern God there of a truth, and take his shoes from off his feet, because the place on which he stands is holy ground,—no amount of theories of reconciliation will ever convince him of its divinity. On the other hand, a broad, general correspondence between the record in Genesis and the results of scientific investigation there assuredly is. Nothing can be more striking on this head than the admission of a writer like Haeckel. To him the first

chapter of Genesis is not a revelation, but a Hebrew tradition; and yet what is his testimony as to its scientific worth? After remarking on "the simple and natural chain of ideas which runs through it, and which contrasts favourably with the confused mythology of creation current amongst most of the other ancient nations," he says:

"Two great and fundamental ideas common to the theory of non-miraculous development meet us in the Mosaic hypothesis of creation with surprising clearness and simplicity: the idea of separation or differentiation, and the idea of development or perfecting. Although Moses looks on the results of the great laws of organic development . . . as the immediate acts of a constructing Creator, yet in his theory there lies hidden the ruling idea of a progressive development, and of differentiation of the originally simple matter. We can therefore bestow our just and sincere admiration on the Jewish lawgiver's grand insight into nature, and his simple and natural hypothesis of creation, without discovering in it a so called Divine revelation."<sup>1</sup>

Haeckel denies a creation altogether, for he sees very clearly that this is to admit a miracle; he is a believer in spontaneous generation; he cannot, of course, accept the Mosaic story as a revelation; and yet he goes on to say that from Moses, who died about 1480 B.C., down to Linnæus, who was born 1707 A.D., there has been no history of creation to be compared to it. This admission on the part of an eminent scientific man who is not a believer ought surely to satisfy us. If it were my purpose to criticise Haeckel, I might point out that his own theory is absolutely devoid of proof; that he is obliged to admit that he knows nothing whatever of first causes, of which, indeed, no man can know anything who does not believe in God; and that he speaks again and again of "wonder" and "mystery," though he will not allow the possibility of "miracle." Happily there need be no opposition between faith and science.

As regards certain recent theories of the composition and structure of the Hexateuch, of which the book of Genesis

<sup>1</sup> *History of Creation*, translated by E. Ray Lankester, vol. i., pp. 37, 38.

forms the first division, my position is briefly this. I believe it to be established that there are three, or rather four, strata of documents running through the work: (A) the Elohist; (B) the Jehovist, into whose narrative there is incorporated that of a second Elohist; (C) the Deuteronomist. One or more editors have put these different documents together, and so brought the whole into its present shape. Without pledging myself to agreement with all the conclusions of the critics, I believe them, broadly speaking, to be so far established. But I believe also that the Pentateuch, especially in its legislative portions, is in substance at least, though not in its present form, Mosaic. Holding this, I have no difficulty in holding that earlier or contemporary or later documents may have been incorporated in the Mosaic work. Such early writings are again and again quoted and referred to in the Pentateuch. At the beginning of Genesis the evidence of different documents is indisputable. The first chapter, together with the first three verses of the second, which ought never to have been separated from it, is, on the face of it, a distinct document. It is complete in itself; it is Elohistic—that is to say, it is marked by the use of the name Elohim for God, and also by certain phrases which are characteristic of the Elohist, such as “After its (their) kind,” “male and female,” “Be fruitful and multiply,” etc.; and it is in style and character quite different from the section which follows, chap. ii. 4 to iii. 24, in which we have the remarkable and frequent combination of the Divine names Jehovah, Elohim, which elsewhere is rare in Holy Writ, and on which I shall have more to say in the notes on the second chapter.

The structure of this first document deserves our closest attention. Creation is not one act, but several. The creative acts are presented to us in a series of tableaux. They occupy six days, which are followed by a seventh

day of rest, the frame or setting thus adopted by the writer being obviously that of the week of seven days. But this is not all. The six days of creation fall into two sections of three days each, and there is a striking correspondence between the two. The first three days are days of preparation, the next three are days of accomplishment. If on the first day light is created, on the fourth we have the creation of the sun, moon, and stars, as the bodies which are henceforth to be receptacles of light, the source of light to the earth. If on the second day God made the firmament, and "divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament," on the fifth He created the fish, which were to multiply in the waters, and the fowl, which were to fly in the open firmament of heaven. If on the third day there are two creative acts, the separation first of all between earth and water, between sea and land, and then the clothing of the earth with vegetation, with the grass and the herb yielding seed and the fruit tree yielding fruit, on the sixth day, in like manner, there are two creative acts: the creation, first, of the wild beasts, the cattle, and all the smaller animals comprised in the general term "creeping things," and then of man, the lord and master of all. But the correspondence between the third and sixth days is to be found not in this circumstance, which is purely external, that each is marked by two creative acts, but in the provision made on the third day of food for the wants of the creatures who come into existence on the sixth. The herb yielding seed and the fruit tree yielding fruit, which are brought forth on the third day, are on the sixth given to man; and every green thing in like manner is given to beast and bird and creeping thing for food.

Strictly speaking however, there is one point in which the correspondence does not hold; for the birds are created on the fifth day, and their food on the third (vers. 11, 12),

although it is not till the sixth day that their food is assigned them, together with the land animals and man.

It will be observed in this enumeration that, while the creative days are six, the creative acts are eight. This has been held to be evidence that the original form of the narrative was different; it at least plainly indicates that the framework of the week has been deliberately adopted by the author in order "to bring under the eyes of his readers all the parts of this immense work, and especially to give prominence to that great and fruitful idea of the gradation which manifests itself therein, as regards the importance, and even the relative perfection, of the different groups of creatures" (Reuss).

The eight great creative words are these :

I. God said, "Let there be light" (ver. 3)—on the first day.

II. God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters" (ver. 6)—on the second day.

III., IV. God said, "Let the waters under heaven be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear" (ver. 9). God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass," etc. (ver. 11)—on the third day.

V. God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to divide the day from the night" (ver. 14)—on the fourth day.

VI. God said, "Let the waters bring forth abundantly, etc.; and, "Let fowl fly above the earth," etc. (ver. 20)—on the fifth day.

VII., VIII. God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature after its kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after its kind" (ver. 24). God said, "Let Us make man in Our own image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion," etc. (ver. 26)—on the sixth day.

There are two more words of God in this chapter; they are, however, not creative words, but providential; the first

(ver. 28) assigning to man his office and place here upon the earth, and the second (ver. 29) assigning to him the means of sustenance. Four words of God are uttered on the sixth day, as if to mark its supreme importance. Altogether there are ten words of God in the creation, as there are ten words given on Sinai. The phrase, "And it was so," occurs six times, in vers. 7, 9, 11, 15, 24, 30; or seven times, if we take the words, "And there was light," as equivalent. The LXX. have inserted the phrase in ver. 6 and omitted it in ver. 7, and in order apparently to round off the number seven, have added it at the end of ver. 20.

It may be remarked however, that this phrase, recurrent as it is, does not recur in any very regular order. It is not found at all in the first day; it occurs once in the second, and once in the fourth day; and twice in the third and sixth days, on each of which days, as has been noticed above, two works of creation are recorded.

In vers. 4, 7, 9, 30, the phrase sets the seal to the accomplishment of the Divine work. In vers. 11, 15, 24, it does this, but only by way of a summary statement, which is followed by a more detailed account of the manner of the accomplishment.

Again, the Divine approval rests upon the work at the several stages thereof. Thus we are told of the creation of the light (ver. 4) on the first day, of the separation of the earth and the seas (ver. 10), and of the creation of the grass, the herb, and the tree (ver. 12) on the third day, of the setting of the sun and moon and stars in heaven on the fourth day (ver. 18), of the creation of the fishes and birds (ver. 21) on the fifth day, of the creation of the fauna of the earth (ver. 25) on the sixth day, that "God saw that it was good"; and on the conclusion of the whole work (ver. 31), also on the sixth day, that "God saw *everything* that He had made, and, behold, it was *very* good."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The LXX. add this note of Divine approval also in ver. 8, "God called



Seven times does this grand refrain fall upon the ear, like some strain of heavenly music expressive of the love of the Creator for His creatures, a note of joy and satisfaction in the work of His fingers, such as a later psalmist felt and sought to express when, looking upon the glorious majesty of God in creation he exclaims, "Let Jehovah rejoice in His works."

There is moreover a blessing of God thrice uttered: first, on the fish and the fowl (ver. 22), then on man (ver. 28), lastly, on the seventh day (chap. ii. 3).

So much for the general structure of the great story of creation, as given us in chap. i. and the first three verses of chap. ii. Let us come now to details.

### THE ELOHISTIC STORY OF CREATION.

(CHAP. I. 1 TO II. 3.)

*In the beginning.*—I.e. of the existing universe as conditioned by *time*. The LXX., ἐν ἀρχῇ. The expression is used in precisely the same sense in the prologue of St. John's Gospel i. 1. Ἐν ἀρχῇ does not mean there, as has sometimes been contended, "from all eternity." There is no "beginning" in eternity. The difference between the opening of Genesis and the opening of St. John is in the use of the verbs. "In the beginning"—i.e. of the things which we see and among which our human history unfolds itself—God *created* the universe. In the same beginning the Word *was*, as existing from all eternity. In Hebrews i. 10, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth," the Greek is κατ' ἀρχάς, which is the rendering of the Hebrew לְפָנַיִם in Psalm cii. 25 [26], where our Version has "of old." This is very nearly equivalent to the rendering of Onkelos here, בְּקִרְבֵּי, "of

the firmament heaven, and God saw that it was good," apparently in order that each of the days might be marked by the same benediction.

ancient times." *When* the beginning was we are not told: it may have been thousands or millions of years ago; but there was a beginning. Matter is not eternal.

*God.* Heb. *Elohim*.—The root is one denoting power. The plural form is not merely a plural of majesty, but indicates the manifold powers and attributes residing in the one Being who is the object of awe and worship. When the name is given to false gods, the verb is in the plural; when, as here, to the one true God, the verb is, with rare exceptions, in the singular. The unity of the Persons is thus recognised, together with the diversity of the attributes. So in Ecclesiastes xii. 1, "creator," according to the common text, is plural. (Cf. also Adonim, Baalim.)

*Created.*—It cannot be proved that the word means etymologically to create out of nothing. It is common to all the Semitic languages, and may be connected either with a root meaning "to cut" and "fashion by cutting," the material so cut or fashioned being already in existence; or perhaps with one signifying "to set free," "to let go forth," "to cause to appear." It is in favour of this latter derivation that the word is never followed, like other words denoting "to form," "to fashion," and the like, by the accusative of the material out of which the thing is fashioned. (See the striking use of the word in Num. xvi. 30, "If Jehovah should create a creation.") But the word, whatever be its derivation, is never used except of a Divine act; and it is quite certain that the writer intends to convey the impression of a creation called into existence out of nothing by the voice and will of God. "In the *beginning* God *created*." Before "the beginning" no material thing existed. God called all that is into existence. This is the sense in which the words were understood by the earliest commentators, the Hebrew poets. So in Psalm xxxiii. 9, "For He spake, and it was" (came into being), and Psalm cxlviii. 5, "He commanded, and they were created." So too in the Epistle

to the Hebrews xi. 3: "By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which do appear." The creation, then, was no operation wrought upon pre-existent matter, neither is it an emanation from a Divine substance. The Hebrew cosmogony has no tinge in it either of dualism or of pantheism. God is the eternal, self-subsistent Being; "He is before all things, and by Him all things subsist." Moreover, on its first page the Hebrew Scripture asserts clearly the unity of the Godhead. There are no rival deities here, each exercising an independent power, and claiming several worship: God is one.

*The heaven and the earth.*—I.e. not the chaotic mass, the rough material, so to speak, but, as in ii. 1, the whole kosmos, the universe as it appears in its present order. This is the common mode of expression in Hebrew for what we call the universe. The nearest approach to this idea of "universe" is found in Jeremiah x. 16, where the E.V. has "all things," the Hebrew being literally "the whole." The first verse being complete in itself,<sup>1</sup> we have here the broad, general statement of creation; then follows the early dark, empty, lifeless condition, not of the whole, but of the earth; and then the gradual preparation of the earth to be the abode of man. The history of the visible heavens and earth is bound together throughout Holy Scripture till the final consummation, when "the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up," to make way for "the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

*And the earth was.*—It is the history of "the earth," as

<sup>1</sup> Other renderings which carry on the construction into the next verse, such as, "In the beginning, when God created the heaven and the earth, then the earth was," etc. or, "In the beginning, when . . . and the earth was, . . . God said, Let there be light," are grammatically unnecessary, and quite out of harmony with the simple style of the document.

the scene and theatre of man's activity and man's redemption, that occupies henceforth the writer's thoughts. The earth is to him, if not the centre of the universe, at least the most important part of it. Hence the order of the words in the Hebrew: the copula with the noun standing first before the verb in the preterite, the subject thus having a special prominence given to it. This order is commonly adopted when a new fact or new circumstances are introduced (see iii. 1). The verb "was" is not merely the copula, which in Hebrew need not be expressed, it is almost—"became," ἐγένετο rather than ἦν, though the LXX. employ the latter word as the equivalent here. But this does not justify the rendering, "Now the earth had become," etc., as if the writer intended to speak first of an orderly creation in ver. 1, and then to imply that this orderly creation had fallen into a state of disorder and chaos, the result of the rebellion of Satan and his angels. This is the interpretation commonly resorted to by those who interpolate æons of geological convulsion and catastrophe between vers. 1 and 2, and suppose that what follows describes the final preparation of the earth for man in six literal days of twenty-four hours each. (See Pusey, *Daniel*, pref., pp. xviii-xx.) But all that the writer means is, "Now the earth was (proved to be) in this condition of chaos when God spake what follows, introducing into it harmony and order."<sup>1</sup>

*Without form and void.*—Rather, as R.V., WASTE AND VOID; Heb. *Tohu wa-Bohu*, with a designed assonance to express the confusion of chaos, which the writer of the book of Wisdom calls ἄλλη ἀμορφος (xi. 18). (Similar instances of assonance in the case of other words will be found in Gen. xviii. 27, xxi. 23; Nah. ii. 11; Zeph. i. 15; Jer. xix. 9; Ezra vi. 14, and often elsewhere.) Both words are by their formation evidently ancient (Ewald, *Gram.* 146D). The

<sup>1</sup> I have discussed the grammatical construction in an article on Pusey's *Daniel*, in the first number of the *Contemporary Review*, vol. i., pp. 117-119.

exact collocation occurs again only in Jeremiah iv. 23, with obvious allusion to this passage: "I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was waste and void"—a return, as it were, to the primeval chaos, as indeed the whole prophetic picture that follows implies. The two words are used together in the same passage also in Isaiah xxxiv. 11, where the R.V. has "the line of *confusion*" (perhaps "desolation" would have been better, as approaching more nearly to "waste" here), "and the plummet of *emptiness*." Except in these two passages, *Bohu* occurs nowhere else; it is doubtless connected with the name *Báav*, which is found in the Phœnician story of creation. *Tohu* occurs frequently. In Job xxvi. 7 it is rendered "empty space": "He stretcheth out the north over empty space"—to which in the next clause "nothing" is the parallel: "and hangeth the earth upon nothing." It occurs frequently in the later chapters of Isaiah. In one passage, xlv. 18, there seems to be almost a contradiction to the statement made here: "For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; He is God; that formed the earth and made it; He established it, He created it not a waste, He formed it to be inhabited." This is the rendering of the R.V.; but it labours under the manifest disadvantage that in the very next verse, the same word *Tohu* is rendered "in vain." The A.V. is more consistent in having the same rendering, "in vain," in both verses. If we follow the R.V. in the first clause, we may explain, "He created it not to be a waste"—*i.e.*, as Dr. Cheyne says, "not to continue a chaos"; though he seems to me to push literalism too far when he renders in the next verse, "I have not said unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me as chaos."

*The deep* (Heb. *T'hôm.*; Assyr. *Tihantu*).—Also a very ancient word, from a root signifying *to surge, to roar*, and always found without the article except in two later passages, Isaiah lxiii. 13, Psalm cvi. 9, where it occurs in the

plural. It is the great primeval surging mass of waters enveloping the globe. This is not the same thing as the chaos; the writer did not regard this watery mass as constituting the original material of the world, but rather as enveloping the whole crust of the earth, as the later poets understood it: "Thou coveredst it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains" (Ps. civ. 6; cf. Job xxxviii. 8-11, 2 Pet. ii. 5). So Milton:

"The earth was formed, but, in the womb as yet  
Of waters, embryo immature, involved,  
Appeared not; over all the face of earth  
Main ocean flowed."

This great, circumambient sea was shrouded in darkness; but it was not left in hopeless gloom and death, *the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters*. The Targum of Onkelos renders: "And a wind from before the Lord blew upon the face of the waters," which has been followed by Eph., Saad., Ibn Ezra, and others (and recently by Dr. Cheyne, "a wind of Elohim"), the wind being sent to dry up the waters from the face of the earth. But, besides the poverty of conception involved in this rendering, and the impossibility of saying that a wind hovered over or brooded upon the face of the waters, it is contrary to the statement in ver. 7, according to which the separation of the waters is a distinct creative act. The Spirit of God moreover is elsewhere in the O.T. the source and giver of life (τὸ ζῶοποιόν, as in the Nicene Creed). Cf. Psalm civ. 30: "Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created." See also Psalm xxxiii. 6, and compare with these Job xxxiii. 4: "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life," and xxvii. Without attributing to the writer of the O.T. a knowledge of the mystery of the eternal Trinity, which would be to run counter to the whole history of revelation, as a gradual unfolding of Divine truth, nevertheless we must acknow-

ledge that the references to the action of the Spirit of God as the source of life, courage, illumination, wisdom, physical and intellectual gifts, spiritual power, holiness, are neither few nor unimportant. See for instance chap. vi. 3, an Elohist passage like this, in which it would be impossible to render otherwise than "My Spirit"; and compare Exodus xxxv. 31-35; Numbers xi. 10-30, xxiv. 2; Deuteronomy xxxiv. 9; Judges iii. 10, vi. 34, xi. 29, xiii. 25, xiv. 6, xv. 14; 1 Samuel x. 10, xi. 6, xvi. 13; 2 Samuel xxiii. 2; Psalm li. 11, 12 [12, 13], cxliii. 10; Proverbs i. 23; Isaiah xi. 2, xlii. 1, xlv. 3, xlvi. 16, lxi. 1, lxiii. 10, 11, 14; Nehemiah ix. 20; Ezekiel xi. 24, xxxvi. 27, xxxvii. 14, xxxix. 29; Joel ii. 28, 29. No doubt the personal reference in all these instances is not equally definite, though in some it is plain enough. But in none of them could "wind" be substituted for "spirit," and the passages already quoted from Job and Psalm civ. show clearly the sense in which the Hebrew poets understood our verse.

*Moved.*—Rather, *was hovering* or "brooding." The participle denotes the continuance of the action. So the Greek translators have rightly represented it, so far as the tense is concerned, either by the imperf. *ἐπιφέερον* or by a participle *ἐπιφερόμενον*. But the Hebrew word does not mean "to move," but rather "to hover over," as a bird over its nestlings, with tender, fostering care. (Cf. Deut. xxxii. 11, "as an eagle . . . fluttereth over her young.") The R.V. has "brooding" here (cf. Milton's

"Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss"),

but in the passage in Deuteronomy leaves "fluttereth," although it is the same word. There may be a distant allusion, as Dillmann says, to the Babylonian myth of the "world-egg," out of which the universe was hatched; but instead of the coarse, material conception contained in that myth, we have here the tender and beautiful and suggestive

figure of the Spirit of God hovering over the abyss of waters with quickening, fostering energy, as a bird over its nest. The Palestine and Jerusalem Targums have: "And the Spirit of mercies [or tender love, רַחֲמִין] from before the Lord breathed upon the face of the waters." (So Etheridge and Delitzsch.) But in chap. viii., where the same expression occurs in both Targums in reference to the deluge, Etheridge renders: "And the Lord caused the *wind* of mercies to pass over the earth, and the waters were dried."

It is not a little remarkable that Augustine, though he sees here, as might be expected, the action of the Spirit of God, nevertheless suggests that this may perhaps be understood in a lower sense. "Potest autem et aliter intelligi, ut spiritum Dei, vitalem creaturam, qua universus iste visibilis mundus atque omnia corporea continentur et moventur, intelligamus; cui Deus omnipotens tribuit vim quandam sibi serviendi ad operandum in iis quo gignuntur. Qui spiritus cum sit omni corpore æthereo melior, quia omnem visibilem creaturam omnis invisibilis creatura antecedit, non absurde spiritus Dei dicitur."

The inspired writer does not trouble himself with the question *how* this primeval state of confusion and darkness came to exist; he merely acknowledges the fact as the substratum, so to speak, of the creative process. This is evidence, as Dillmann truly remarks, of the antiquity of the record; this links it with the most ancient traditions of other nations; whereas the later references in the Bible to the story of creation drop all allusion to a chaos. But here, as everywhere else, the superiority of the biblical cosmogony appears. This lies however, not in the assertion of a supernatural principle as necessary to the formation of the world; for that is to be found in the heathen cosmogonies, whether as a universal spirit as in India, or as *Ἔπος* among the Greeks (cf. Hes., *Theog.* 120; Parmenides in Plato's *Symp.*, p. 178; Arist., *Metaphys.* i. 4;



Lucian, *Amor.* 32), or as *πόθος* and *πνεῦμα* among the Phœnicians, but in the assertion that this spirit is the spirit of *God*, not confused or mingled with, but before and above and altogether distinct from the matter on which He operates with sovereign freedom.

J. J. STEWART PEROWNE.

(*To be continued.*)

### *THE GOSPEL OF PAUL AT THESSALONICA.*

IN this paper we shall endeavour briefly to answer the question, *What was the gospel brought to Thessalonica?* Can we give to ourselves any precise account of the "good news" which "Paul and Silas and Timotheus" announced in this city, and which produced so powerful and enduring an effect? Further, was there anything special to the place and the occasion in the form which the Apostle's message assumed, and which will serve to explain the peculiar tone of Christian feeling, the style of thought and cast of doctrine, that distinguished the faith of this great Macedonian Church in its first beginnings? To these inquiries the indications of the two Epistles to the Thessalonians, compared with the story of the Acts, enable us to give a tolerable answer.

1. The foundation of St Paul's teaching was laid in *the proof of the Messiahship of Jesus*, drawn from the prophecies of Scripture, compared with the facts of the life, death, and resurrection of the Saviour. The method of this proof, briefly indicated in Acts xvii. 3, is set forth at length in the report of his discourse at the Pisidian Antioch, given by St Luke in the thirteenth chapter of the Acts.

2. *The purpose of Christ's death and its bearing on human salvation* must have been amply explained by the Apostles. So we infer, not only from the central position

of this subject in the Apostle's later Epistles, and from the prominence given to it in Acts xiii. 38, 39 (where the announcement of *forgiveness of sins* and *justification by faith* forms the climax of St Paul's whole sermon), but the words of 1 Thessalonians v. 8-10 leave us in no doubt that the same "word of the cross" was proclaimed at Thessalonica which St Paul preached everywhere. Here "salvation" comes "through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us"—a salvation from "the anger of God," a salvation in part received already, in part matter of "hope," and which belongs to those who "have put on the breast-plate of *faith* and love." This salvation was the great need of the Gentile world, which "knew not God," and was enslaved to idolatry and shameful lusts (1 Thess. i. 9, iv. 5; 2 Thess. i. 8).

Now we can understand all this in the light of Romans i. 16-25, iii. 23-26, v. 1-11, and as touching Him "whom God set forth in His blood a propitiation through faith"; but without such knowledge the Apostle's language would have been equally unintelligible to the Thessalonians and to ourselves. Still it must be admitted, and it is remarkable, that very little is said in these two letters on the subject of the atonement and salvation by faith. Evidently on these fundamental doctrines there was no dispute at Thessalonica. They were so fully accepted and understood in this Church, that it was unnecessary to dilate upon them; and the Apostle has other matters just now to deal with.

3. The Church at Thessalonica being chiefly of heathen origin, St Paul and St Silas had said much of *the falsity and wickedness of idolatry*; they had completed the lessons which many of their disciples had already received in the synagogue. Their faith was emphatically a "*faith toward God*—the living and true God," to whom they had "turned from their idols" (this seems to imply that many Thessalonian Christians had been converted directly from

paganism), and whom they knew in "His Son" (1 Thess. i. 9, 10). And this living and true God, the Father of the Lord Jesus, they had come to know and to approach as "our Father" (1 Thess. i. 3, iii. 11, 13; 2 Thess. ii. 16), who was to them "the God of peace" (1 Thess. i. 1, v. 23; 2 Thess. i. 2), who had "loved them and given them eternal comfort and good hope in grace," had "chosen" them and "called them to enter His kingdom and glory," who "would count them worthy of their calling and accomplish in them all the desire of goodness and the work of faith," who had "given them His Holy Spirit," whose "will" was their "sanctification," whose "word" was ever "working in" them, who would "comfort and strengthen their hearts" in every needful way and reward them with "rest" from their afflictions in due time, whose care for His beloved was not limited by death, for He was pledged at Christ's coming to restore those whom death had snatched away (1 Thess. 1. 4, ii. 12, 13, iv. 3, 7, 8, 14, v. 18; 2 Thess. i. 5, 7, 11, ii. 13, 16, 17). Such a God it must be their one aim to love and to please; St Paul's one desire for them is, that they may "walk worthily" of Him (1 Thess. ii. 12, iv. 1; 2 Thess. iii. 5). The good news the Apostle brought he speaks of repeatedly as "the gospel of *God*,"—while it is "the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. i. 8), since He is its great subject and centre. Compare Romans i. 1, 3, "the gospel of God concerning His Son."

It is important to note the prominence of *God* in these Epistles, and the manifold ways in which the Divine character and relationship to believing men had been set forth to the Thessalonian Church. For such teaching would be necessary, and helpful in the highest degree, to men who had just emerged from heathen darkness and superstition; and these letters afford the best example left to us of St Paul's *earliest* instructions to Gentile converts. The next report we have of his preaching to the heathen comes

from Athens (Acts xvii. 22-31), where his discourse bore principally on two subjects—*the nature of the true God*, and *the coming of Jesus Christ to judge the world*.

4. So we come to that which was the most conspicuous and impressive topic of the Thessalonian gospel, so far as we can gather it from the echoes audible in the Epistles; viz. *the coming of the Lord Jesus in His heavenly kingdom*. These letters compel us to remember, what we are apt to forget, that the second advent of Christ is an important part of the Christian gospel, the good tidings that God has sent to the world concerning His Son. In 1 Thessalonians i. 9, 10, the religion of Thessalonian believers is summed up in these two things—"serving a God living and true, and waiting for His Son from the heavens." It was in the light of Christ's second coming that they had learned to look for that "kingdom and glory of God" to which they were "called," and "for which" they were now "suffering" (1 Thess. ii. 12; 2 Thess. i. 5, 10-12). "The coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints" was an object of intense desire and fervent anticipation to the Apostle himself; and he had impressed the same feelings on his disciples at Thessalonica to an uncommon degree. His appeals and warnings throughout these Epistles rest on the "hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" as their strongest support. It was, moreover, upon this subject that the misunderstandings arose which the Apostle is at so much pains to correct—the first appearing in 1 Thessalonians iv. 13, touching the share of departed Christians in the return of the Lord Jesus; and the second in 2 Thessalonians ii. 1, 2, concerning the immediacy of the event itself.

What may have been the train of thought and feeling in the Apostle's mind that led him to dwell upon this theme with such especial emphasis at this particular period, we cannot tell. But there were two conditions belonging to his early ministry in Europe which naturally might suggest this

line of preaching. In the *first* place, the Christian doctrine of final judgment was one well calculated to rouse the Greek people from its levity and moral indifference; and it had impressive analogies in their own primitive religion. It was for this practical purpose that St Paul advanced the doctrine at Athens. "Having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands men that all everywhere should repent; *because He has appointed a day* in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He ordained." To the busy traders of Corinth and Thessalonica, just as amongst the philosophers and dilettanti of Athens, the Apostle made the same severe and alarming proclamation. The message of judgment was an essential part of St Paul's good tidings. "God shall judge the secrets of men *according to my gospel*, through Jesus Christ" (Rom. ii. 16). But the declaration of Christ's coming in judgment involves the whole doctrine of the second advent. On this matter St Paul intimates that he had abundantly enlarged in the Thessalonian Church (1 Thess. v. 2; 2 Thess. ii. 6).

In the *second* place, it should be observed that the Apostle in entering Europe by the Via Egnatia was brought more directly under the shadow of the Roman empire than at any time before. Philippi, a Roman colony, and a memorial of the victory by which the empire was established; Thessalonica, a great provincial capital of European aspect and character; the splendid military road by which the missionaries travelled, and along which troops of soldiers, officers of State with their brilliant retinues, foreign envoys and tributaries were going and coming—all this gave a powerful impression of the "kingdom and glory" of the great world-ruling city, to which a mind like St Paul's could not but be sensitive. He was himself, it must be remembered, a citizen of Rome, and by no means indifferent to his rights in this capacity; and he held a high estimate

of the prerogatives and functions of the civil power (Rom. xiii. 1-7).

But what he saw of the great kingdom of this world prompted in his mind larger thoughts of that mightier and diviner kingdom whose herald and ambassador he was. He could not fail to discern under the majestic sway of Rome signs of moral degeneracy and seeds of ruin. He remembered well that it was by the sentence of Pontius Pilate (1 Tim. vi. 13) that his Master was crucified; and in his own outrageous treatment by the Roman officials at Philippi and the sufferings of the Christian flock at Thessalonica he may well have seen tokens of the inevitable conflict between the tyranny of secular rule and the authority of Christ. If such thoughts as these coloured the speech of Paul and Silas at Thessalonica, we can understand the charge made against them in this city: "These all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, even Jesus." It was in principle the charge alleged against Jesus Himself before Pilate, compelling the Roman governor to pronounce his fatal sentence. "If thou let this man go, thou art *not Cæsar's friend*: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh *against Cæsar*." So "the Jews cried out"; and at the bottom, the accusation was true; their sharp-sighted enmity rightly discerned that the rule of Jesus was fatal to Cæsarism. If the Apostle preached, as he could do without any denunciation of the powers that be, a universal, righteous, and equal judgment of mankind approaching, in which Jesus (crucified by the Roman State) would be judge and king; if he taught that "the fashion of this world passeth away" (1 Cor. vii. 31), and that an atheistic, world-wide despotism would one day culminate in some huge disaster, to be itself "consumed by the breath of the Lord and the brightness of His coming" (2 Thess. ii. 3-11), there were grounds plausible enough for accusing him of treasonable doctrine,

even though no express political offence had been committed. That such a judgment was impending was "good news" indeed; but it was of deadly import to the imperial tyranny of Caligulas and Neros, and to the social and political fabric of the pagan world. In this consequence lies the most significant and distinctive, though not perhaps the most obvious, feature of the "gospel" of Thessalonica.

It may be further added, that the hope of Christ's return in glory was the consolation best suited to sustain the Church, as it sustained the Apostle himself, in the great fight of affliction through which they were passing.

5. *The moral issues* of the gospel inculcated by St Paul at Thessalonica, the new duties and affections belonging to the new life of believers in Christ, are touched upon at many different points, but not developed with the fullness and systematic method of subsequent Epistles. Most prominent here are the obligation to *chastity*, as belonging to the sanctity of the body and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess. iv. 1-8); and the claims of *brotherly love*, with the good order, the peace, and mutual helpfulness that flow from it (1 Thess. iv. 9, 10, v. 12-15; 2 Thess. iii. 14, 15). What is singular in these Epistles is the repeated and strong injunctions they contain on the subject of *diligence* in labour and attention to the ordinary duties of life (1 Thess. iv. 10-12; 2 Thess. iii. 6-15).

A striking moral feature of the gospel proclaimed at Thessalonica is manifest in the conduct of the missionaries of Christ themselves,—their incessant labour, their unbounded self-denial, the purity and devoutness of their spirit, and their fearless courage (1 Thess. i. 6, 7, ii. 1-12; 2 Thess. iii. 8, 9).

GEORGE G. FINDLAY.