

OUT OF DARKNESS

by Ray C. Stedman

The first verse of Genesis begins with the greatest observable fact known to man: the existence of the universe, "the heavens and the earth," {Gen 1:1b}; and it links to that the greatest fact made known by revelation: the existence of a God who creates. There is thus brought together in this simple verse at the beginning of the Bible the recognition of the two great sources of human knowledge: nature, which is discoverable by the five senses of our physical life; and revelation, which is discoverable only by a mind and heart illuminated and taught by the Spirit of God. These things "are spiritually discerned," says the Apostle Paul {1 Cor 2:14}.

Both of these sources of knowledge are from God, and each of them is a means of knowing something about God. The scientist who studies nature is searching ultimately for God. One great Christian scientist declared, "I am thinking the thoughts of God after him." That is an excellent way to describe what science basically is doing. Also, those who seek to understand the Bible, to grasp its great themes and to understand the depths that are revealed there, are likewise in search of God. Nature is designed to teach us certain facts about God, but revelation is designed to lead us to the God about whom nature speaks. So the two are complementary. They are not contradictory in any sense, but complete one another.

A young nuclear physicist, Dr. John McIntyre, came to know Christ in one of our home Bible classes. He now serves as Professor of Nuclear Physics at Texas A. & M. University. In an article which was printed in *His Magazine*, he told how he came to Christ and what it was that reached him. In the article he recounts the experience he had as a conventional Christian, of assuming certain things that he had been taught, without any basis in the Scripture or from experience. Then he says,

And then, my eyes were opened. I began to attend a home Bible class where the Bible was studied in the same critical manner that I was accustomed to in my daily work in physics. The class assumed the Bible to be consistent and understandable, just as the scientist considers nature to be consistent and understandable.

We wrestled with portions that were difficult to understand or to reconcile with other parts of the Bible and compared them carefully with other pertinent Bible passages. We considered a Scriptural difficulty a challenge to the understanding and an opportunity to modify our present incomplete ideas, rather than consider that the Bible was in error.

This approach to studying the Bible closely parallels the scientist's attitude toward nature. He expects, even welcomes difficulties, and finds persevering study rewarded by deeper understanding. In brief, a person should investigate God's Word, the Bible, with the same methods, even excitement, that he would use in investigating His handiwork, the physical world around us.

These very cogent words from Dr. McIntyre will set the atmosphere for our examination and exploration of this book of Genesis. As he points out, we have two revelations from God, designed to do two different but complementary things. If so, then it is wrong to study the book of Genesis as though it were merely a textbook on science. It is wrong to insist that everything in the first chapter of Genesis provide detailed explanation of how God did things. That is not the purpose of the book; that is not the emphasis it wants to make. It has a quite different purpose in mind, and the chapter and book must be read with that purpose in view. On the other hand, it is equally wrong to view it as merely teaching religious truth. It does speak about nature and physical life, and it is accurate in those areas. What it says is exactly true. The two revelations will ultimately be brought together in clear understanding when man enters the life to come, and then he will see that there is absolutely no contradiction whatsoever.

Perhaps a further observation will help us a bit in resolving the many problems that arise over the supposed conflict between Genesis and science. We must all remember as we come to this book that both scientists and biblicists (Bible students), are continually proposing theories to explain and amplify the facts they observe in the realm they are studying, whether it be nature or revelation. In both cases some of these theories prove to be

true; some are partially true and partially false, needing further understanding; and others prove to be utterly and completely false. For instance, we Christians are quick to point out that scientists have never really proved the theory of evolution. It remains but a theory and there are great gaps in the attempted proof for it. There are many areas which scientists simply cannot explain as to what happens, why it happens, or how it happens. A considerable number of scientists today feel very uneasy about the theory of evolution because it does not explain many of the facts as they are being observed in the exploration of the world around us.

On the other hand, there are also theories in the study of the revelation of God, the Bible. One of these theories concerns the second verse of Genesis 1, to which we come today. Verses 2-5 say,

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

And God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. {Gen 1:2-5 RSV}

In reading these verses certain questions immediately come to mind, and, in attempting to answer these questions, as I have suggested, various theories have been proposed. One theory that has found considerable acceptance among many Christians is that between Verses 1 and 2 there occurs a great gap of time. Therefore, this theory has been called the "gap" theory, because it suggests an unexplained and unrecorded catastrophe which occurred between the original creation, referred to in Verse 1, and a re-creation which begins in Verse 2.

According to this theory, God created the heavens and the earth in an unrecorded epoch of time, and filled it with inhabitants. Perhaps it was even placed under the authority of Lucifer (later Satan) who, as an angel of light, was the highest of the angels of God. It may have been inhabited by man-like animals, a pre-Adamic race, the relics of which we find as fossils in the strata of the earth today all this is part of the theory. But then something happened to that original universe, perhaps connected with the fall of Satan. When Satan fell the whole universe including the earth fell into chaos. It is the calling again out of chaos into an orderly arrangement which we have recorded in Genesis 1. God is re-creating the earth, in that sense, and the rest of the chapter is a record of the six twenty-four-hour days in which God called it out of the chaos into which it had fallen and re-created the earth.

That is the theory and it is supported by certain claims. For instance, there is the claim that the word, "was," in Verse 2, should properly be translated "became." "The earth became without form and void." It is true that this is a possible translation of the Hebrew word, though it is not translated that way very frequently in the Old Testament. There is also a verse in Isaiah 45:18 which says that God did not create the earth "void" as it says in Genesis 1:2 that it "became," or "was." This seemingly supports the gap theory so that many have regarded it (the original Scofield Bible takes this position) as the explanation for all the geological ages. This was an attempt to kill two birds with one stone. It endeavored to explain the signs of death and violence and other marks of sin in the primitive world before the fall of man, and, at the same time, to account for the long geologic ages that scientists insist the earth records.

There is something quite attractive about the gap theory. It seems at first glance to provide a means of solving many problems; and its greatest advantage is that it apparently solves these two knotty problems which the Christian faces in his contact with the scientific world. But it really goes a bit too far, and becomes actually a kind of cosmic garbage dump. It is, of course, very advantageous to have such a place, for if you have any problems with science you can simply dump them in the "gap," and it will take care of everything. There is ample room there for all the geologic ages and all fossil discoveries of whatever kind they may be. Of course, as Dr. Bernard Ramm points out, if we take this way out then we really have no way of ever coming to any kind of reconciliation between what science discovers and what the Bible says. It must all be left in the realm of ignorance and inconclusiveness.

For that reason, I personally feel that the theory is insupportable. Others may disagree, but we must remember

clearly one thing: It is at best but a theory. If we Christians insist that science has not proved evolution as a fact, but it must remain an unproved theory, so must we also insist that theories like the gap idea, that deal with the Biblical record, are also unproved theories and not facts. We must not treat them as though they were final and proved facts.

All we actually know from this verse in Genesis 1:2 is that the earth began as a planet covered by an uninterrupted ocean, which was itself wrapped in darkness. With that picture science fully agrees. Revelation says that it was "formless and empty," i.e., without life. There was no land, there were no promontories, nothing to catch the eye, it was simply one great vast deep of water covering the whole world, with no life in it. It was empty. That is exactly what science says. The earth began in that fashion.

But revelation adds a key factor which many scientists stubbornly refuse to acknowledge. Revelation says, in addition, "the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." God was at work in his universe, interacting and interrelating with it. The presence of God at work in that original primeval creation is in line with the great declaration of the entire Bible, that there is purpose and meaning behind the universe. It is not merely a great machine, clanking away in remorseless fashion, catching us up as victims of forces greater than we can control; it is under the control of the wisdom and power of God. God intends an end, and he moves to accomplish it. That basic fact is the explanation for all change that has occurred in past, present, or future history, and for all events in human lives: God is moving in history.

But you cannot detect purpose and ultimate meaning in rocks and fossils and sand and stars. That is why science, studying these things, cannot explain life by observation alone. Its field is too limited, too narrow. It does not involve other great and powerful factors in man's makeup which are as real as anything physical. This is why science, which limits itself completely to observation of events and processes, can never discover God. God moves in invisible ways to accomplish his purposes. To find him by the methods of science would be like looking for love with a steam shovel, or like trying to find intelligence with a telescope. You are using entirely the wrong instrument.

Every now and then some scientist comes up with the statement that there is no God, and he never seems to see the utter ridiculousness of such a position. We laugh at the Russian cosmonaut, Gagarin, who, after circling the earth, came back to announce that he had not found God up there. We think that is childish, and it is childish. But unfortunately, many learned and otherwise highly intelligent men make similar remarks because their thinking, Scripture says, is darkened and clouded, incomplete in many areas {cf, Rom 1:21, 11:10, Eph 4:18}. Someone has well pointed out that if Mr. Gagarin had simply stepped outside his capsule without a space suit he would have found God immediately! That fact rather highlights the ludicrousness of his announcement.

The purpose of God is revealed in Gen 1:2-5 in the direction events take. Notice that, in these verses, there is a moving toward order out of disorder, and form out of formlessness, something comes out of nothing. The Spirit of God is moving to what end? To bring light out of darkness, to bring shape out of shapelessness, form out of formlessness, moving to accomplish. The first step God took, according to the records, is to create light. "Let there be light," he said, and there was light. Light, as we know now, is absolutely essential to life of any sort. Without light there can be no life.

In the creation of light it is important to note that there is no mention of where this light comes from. It is not that the sun and the moon were not yet created (we will come to an explanation of that when we come to the fourth day) but because this is not the point which Scripture is attempting to make. Again, it is not trying to give a scientific explanation of where light comes from. It ignores that entirely at first and later seems even to put it out of order. Scripture is after something else; it desires to underline for our understanding the fact that light is from God. Light is a symbol of God. That is the point Scripture seeks to make.

This is why the moment God makes light, he pronounces it "good." Why is anything "good," as opposed to "bad"? What is it that constitutes "goodness," as contrasted to "evil"? Goodness is that only which relates in some way to God himself. God is good, and only that which is of him, or from him, can be called good. That is why God said light is good, because it is from him and is characteristic of his nature. We read in First John, "God is light and in him is no darkness at all," {1 Jn 1:5b}. John does not say, "Light is God. "That would be

pantheism. We do not worship light. But the Scripture says God is light, because the characteristics which we observe in light are also true of God.

This suggests something very important. We must learn to understand that truth is found at various levels, but is always equally true at any level of meaning. Basically, there are three levels at which man can understand truth. If you like to think of it this way, truth, or life, is like a chocolate layer cake. You cut it through and find there are three layers. There is a bottom layer, the physical; there is a middle layer, the soulish or psychic, dealing with our mental and emotional reactions; then there is a top layer, the spiritual.

Light can be viewed from these three levels. There is first physical light, which is now filling this room and by which we can see one another. There is a beam of light originating, the scientists tell us, in the atom. When electrons, performing their incredible dance up and down between various energy levels, drop from a higher level to a lower level, they emit a beam of light. We call it a beam though no one knows what it is, but it is light. That is the physical level of light.

There is also a psychic level of meaning for the term. For instance, we speak of light as knowledge, or truth. Someone says, "Could you give me a little light on this problem?" He does not mean by that, turn on a lamp. He means, explain the nature of it to me. We say, when someone has explained something to us, "Oh, yes, I see." We use the same term a blind man would use if suddenly his eyes were opened -- "I see." So light occurs on the level of mental or emotional reaction. Moral knowledge is light, and God intended the term to be used in this way.

There is still a third level of meaning, the spiritual level, which deals with the nature and character of God himself. As I quoted to you, John says, "God is light and in him is no darkness at all," {1 Jn 1:5b}. That light is equated also with the very life of God. When you open John's account of the years he spent with the Lord Jesus, and read the simple eyewitness account of what he saw and heard (you will find in the preface) which reflects the opinions, attitudes, and conclusions to which he came about this One, these amazing words, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men," {John 1:4}. Jesus said of himself, "I am the light of the world. If any man follows me he shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life," {cf, John 8:12}. Whatever way you take the word light, it is equally true at any of these levels.

This phenomenon will greatly help us as we come to this book of Genesis. We must understand that truth is not to be viewed only on the physical level. That is the problem of many in approaching this book. We have sought to understand these great and luminous revelations at the level of their physical meanings alone. But all of them have a trilogy of meaning, a three-fold level of understanding. To limit them to the physical is to miss the major point of revelation. Paul uses the psychic meaning of light in Second Corinthians 4, when he says, "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ," {2 Cor 4:6 RSV}. There is both the first and second level of meaning of light, clearly brought together with reference to the first day of creation.

There is a second step which God took on this first day. He created light, and then he separated the light from the darkness.

God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. {Gen 1:5 RSV}

What does this mean? Let us apply the key we have just discovered. Take this declaration at a three-fold level. At the physical level, the material level, this clearly indicates that God began the process of rotation, for it is the rotating of the earth upon its axis that makes night and day, darkness and light. When an astronaut goes up and zooms around the earth in orbit, he passes through alternating periods of night and day because both he and the earth are rotating. What is this strange function? It is an intriguing problem in science as to why everything in the universe revolves or rotates. Science has long been seeking the explanation for this motion, which they call "angular momentum." One of the difficult problems of science is not only to explain why everything rotates but also to explain why occasionally they find an object that, in an apparently perverse way, rotates the wrong way, as some of the moons of certain planets do, and as even some of the planets themselves. Retrograde motion is what the scientists call it. Within matter there is a force, somewhat akin to gravitation, which

compels two bodies that approach one another to revolve around a common center. On the physical level that is what produces light and darkness. It is true of everything in the universe, without exception, whether it be the great blazing suns of space or the electrons in the atom.

At the psychic level, the level of the soul, the mental and emotional level, this declaration about God separating the light from the darkness implies the beginning of the cycles of the ages. Time seems to have a rotary motion as well, and ages come and go, both within the reckoning of man and even before man appeared upon the earth. There is suggested a possible rotation of the ages, each one having a period of moral light and darkness. It is not physical light we are speaking of, but moral, dealing with knowledge in some way. In Paul's letter to the Romans, in Chapter 13, he says to Christians, "... you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep" {Rom 13:11b RSV}, "... the night is far gone, the day is at hand," {Rom 13:12a RSV}. He is referring to the approaching nearness of a new age, the morning of God's eternal day when there will be night no more.

Then, on the spiritual level, there is the recognition of the existence of both good and evil. God says the light is good, i.e., there is something in the universe, he says, which comes from me. Whatever it is, it is good, because it is of him; it partakes of his character and nature. But there is also in the universe that which is not of him, that which is the opposite of what he has given. That is "not good," that is darkness. These terms, light and darkness, are constantly played against one another all the way through the record of Scripture, and all the way through the record of man. This does not refer, of course, to a duality of gods, though it appears so from man's point of view. But there are not two gods. The devil is subject to God, though, from our point of view, there is an apparent stand-off between these two forces.

This play between two forces gives us our key to the last thing to note in this passage, the phrase, "there was evening and there was morning, one day." One of the questions everyone asks about Genesis is, "How long are these days of Genesis 1? Are they 24-hour days during which God created the earth, i.e., actually one literal week? Or do they represent long and indefinite ages of time, as science would suggest today, at its present level of knowledge?" It is interesting that, if we apply the key that we have just discovered, we will see that all three levels could be involved. We are all familiar with a 24-hour day which includes an evening and a morning. There are also ages of time which, even in the reckoning of man, would include what could be regarded as darkness and light -- times of ignorance and relative knowledge. Even in our own day we speak of the "Dark Ages." And there is an ultimate spiritual meaning which involves the realities of heaven and hell -- that which is of God and that which is opposed to God, that which is light with no darkness at all, and that which is nothing but darkness with no light at all. Since the material or physical level is usually the symbol of the others, I would think that, just as in the case of the Sabbath, the 24-hour day is intended to be a reminder to us of the great ages during which God created the heavens and the earth. The present recurring 24-hour day is a symbolic microcosm of past ages, just as the Sabbath day was given to man as a symbol to remind him of a spiritual and emotional rest that could be his. If that be the case, then we do not have 24-hour day periods in Genesis 1, but rather an indefinite length of time much more descriptively termed an age, or an epoch, of time.

But each is to be characterized by an evening and a morning. Note the order of that. The evening comes first. We Westerners, with our penchant for compromise, have divided the day so that it is a sandwich, beginning with a period of darkness, then a period of light in between, and finally another period of darkness. We begin our day at midnight. But in the Eastern world the day begins at sunset so that each day starts with an evening and ends with a period of light. That is in line with this revelation of the way God works. No matter whether it be man's day upon earth, an age of time, or a 24-hour period, each begins with a period of darkness, and then a period of light. As the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, "first that which is natural, then that which is spiritual," {cf, 1 Cor 15:46}. That is the invariable order.

What meaning does that have for us, as Christians? Can we not trace the fulfillment of this in our own experience? Did we not all begin our lives in darkness, in the grip and bondage of death and darkness? Through the glorious redemption of the cross of Jesus Christ we have passed into a period of light which is, as the Old Testament says, "increasing more and more unto the perfect day" {cf, Prov 4:18} we have entered a period of growing and ever-expanding light. You can see this order in the work of the Lord Jesus himself. There was the darkness of the crucifixion, passing very shortly into the glorious morning of the resurrection when he stepped forth into the glory of a new day and a new life. An evening and a morning, one day.

Scripture also makes clear that if we have never gone through the darkness with him there is no morning to come. We must live constantly in the darkness. The testimony of Scripture is that those who cling to the darkness, who refuse to be brought into the light, become at last, as Jude describes them, "wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved forever," {Jude 1:13b RSV}.

This even links with the celebration of the Lord's table. What is this simple supper we celebrate? Is it not a symbol to remind us of the one eternal event which is able to separate us from darkness and bring us into light? When God separated the light from the darkness he anticipated the great separation of the cross of Jesus Christ, when light would be eternally separated from darkness. Any of us, passing through that event with him, will also be separated from the darkness and brought into the light. Thus this simple table links directly with the words of our text. We too have passed from darkness into light

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