

# **THE CREATION STORY**

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The Creation Story by William Ewart Gladstone

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**WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE**

**THE CREATION  
STORY**





WILLIAM E. GLADSTONE, M. P.



Gift  
H. Russell  
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## THE CREATION STORY.

“The rising birth  
Of Nature from the unapparent deep.”  
*Par. Lat. B. vii.*

IN recent controversies on the trustworthiness of the Scripture record, much has been thought to turn on the Creation Story; and the special and separate importance thus attached to it has given it a separate and prominent position in the public view. This constitutes in itself a reason for addressing ourselves at once to the consideration of it, apart from any more general investigation touching either the older Scriptures at large, or any of the books which collectively compose them.

But there are broader and deeper reasons for this separate consideration. It is suggested, first, by the form which has been given to the relation itself. The narrative, given with wonderful succinctness in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, and in the first three verses of the second chapter, stands distinct, in essential points,

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from all that follows in the Scriptures. It is a solitary and striking example of the detailed exposition of physical facts. For such an example we must suppose a purpose; and we have to inquire what that purpose was. Next, it seems as it were to trespass on the ground of science, and, independently of investigation and of evidence, to assert a rival authority. And further, forming no part, unless towards its close, of the history of man, and nowhere touching directly on human action, it severs itself from the rest of the Sacred Volume, and appears more as a preface to the history, than as a part of it.

And yet there are signs, in subsequent portions of the Volume, that this tale of the Creation was regarded by the Hebrews as both authoritative and important. For it gave form and shape to portions of their literature, in the central department of its devotions. Nay, traces of it may, perhaps, be found in the Book of Job (xxxviii.), where the Almighty challenges the patriarch on the primordial works of creation. More clearly in Psalm civ., where we have light, the firmament, the waters and their severance and confinement within bounds; a succession the same as in Genesis. Then follow mixedly the animal and vegetable creations, and man as the climax crowns the

series in ver. 23. So in Psalm cxlviii. we have first (1-6) the heavens, the heavenly bodies, and the atmosphere; then, again mixedly, the earth and the agents affecting it, with the animate population (7-10), and lastly man. If there be some variation in the order of the details, still the idea of consecutive development, or evolution, which struck so forcibly the intelligence of Haeckel, is clearly impressed upon the whole. At a later date, and only (so far as is known) in the Greek tongue, we find a more nearly exact resemblance in the Song of the Three Children. The heavenly bodies and phenomena occupy the first division of the Song; then the earth is invoked to bless the Lord, with its mountains, vegetation, and waters; then the animate population of water, air, and land, in the order pursued in the first chapter of Genesis, and with the same remarkable omission of the great kingdom of the Reptiles at their proper place. Then follow the children of Men; and these fill the closing portion of the Song. The most noteworthy differences (which, however, are quite secondary, seem to be that there is no mention of the first beginnings of vegetation, and no supplemental notice, as in Gen. i. 24-30, of the reptiles.

But also the sun, moon, and stars, which



are categorically placed later in Genesis than vegetation, precede in the Song any notice of the earth. Let not this difference be hastily called a discrepancy. Each mode is to be explained by considering the character and purpose of the composition. In Genesis, it is a narrative of the action; in the Song, it is a panorama of the spectacle. Genesis, as a rule, refers each of the great factors of the visible world to its due order of origin in time; the Song enumerates the particulars as they are presented to the eye in a picture, where the transcendent eminence of the heavenly bodies as they are, and especially of the sun, gives to this group a proper priority.

But this Creation Story may have an importance for us even greater than it had for the Hebrews, or than it could have in any of those ages when all men believed, perhaps even too freely, in special modes of communication from the Deity to man, and had not a stock of courage or of audacity sufficient to question the possibility of a divine revelation. For we have now to bear in mind that the Book of Genesis generally contains a portion of human history, and that all human history is a record of human experience. It is not so with the introductory recital; for the contents of it lie outside of, and anterior to, the very

earliest human experience. How came, then, this recital into the possession of a portion of mankind?

It is conceivable that a theory of Creation and of the ordering of the world might be bodied forth in poetry, or might under given circumstances be, as now, based on the researches of natural science.

But, in the first place, this recital cannot be due to the mere imagination of a poet. It is in a high degree, as we shall see, methodical and elaborate. And there is nothing either equalling or within many degrees approaching it, which can be set down to the account of poetry in other spheres of primitive antiquity, whatever their poetical opulence may have been. Further, the early Hebrews do not appear to have cultivated or developed any poetical faculty at all, except that which was exhibited in strictly religious work, such as the devotions of the Psalms, and (principally) the discourses and addresses of the Prophets.

As they were not, in a general sense, poetical, so neither were they in any sense scientific. By tradition, and by positive records, we know pretty well what kinds of knowledge were pursued in very early ages. They were most strictly practical. Take, for example, astronomy among the

Chaldees, or medicine among the Egyptians. The necessities of life then, as now, pressed upon man. We may say with much confidence that in remote antiquity there existed no science like geology, aiming to give a history of the earth. So, again, there was no cosmogony, professing to convey a history of the *kosmos* as then understood; which would have included, together with the earth, the sun, moon, planets, and atmosphere.

When, at a later date, speculation on physical origins began, it was rather on the primary idea than on any systematic arrangement or succession. With the Ionic, which was the earliest school of philosophy, the human intelligence was mainly busied in contending for one or other of the known material elements, as entitled to the honors of the primordial cause. Nor had even the Greeks or Romans formulated any scheme in any degree approaching that of Genesis for order and method, so late as the time when they became acquainted with the Hebrew Scriptures through their translation into Greek. The opening statement of Ovid in the "Metamorphoses" is remarkable; but at the time when he wrote, the Book of Genesis had been accessible to educated persons in what was then the chief literary language of the Romans. There is