

# 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 *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

## ARTICLE XII.

## CRITICAL NOTES.

## NOVEL BIBLE HISTORY AGAIN. •

ONE of the latest new discoveries in biblical history is that our Saviour promised to "all believers in all times" an inspiration "as truly operative now as it was eighteen centuries ago," apparently identical with that of the apostles, one in fact which should make "believers in Christ know more of Christ than those of the first century," inasmuch as "it has enabled our Lord to say things to his disciples in recent times which the apostles could not bear while he was still with them," which makes them "channels" of "revelations from God" to such a degree that "every believer may hope to find for himself and for others truth not known"; and "God calls the men and women of our time to be his inspired prophets."

This discovery appeared on the 29th of September, 1898—memorable day—in a journal claiming to be "denominational" as well presumably as evangelical, and in the same number young people are urged to support "the denominational paper." We will presently give these singular claims in their full connection, to show that the meaning is unmistakable.

The article referred to is headed "The Word of God for To-day." The opening paragraph reads thus: "Is there a word of God yet to be revealed? In former days 'men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit.' Does the Holy Spirit now move men to speak from God?" Here the reader is requested to observe the entire sentence of which the editor cites the conclusion. After speaking of the voice from heaven which he heard in the holy mount, Peter proceeds, "And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that you take heed as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the daystar arise in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man; but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost" (1 Peter i. 19-21). The bearing of the inquiry is very clear, namely, whether men now have the same kind of inspiration that the prophets had. If the point of the question raised is unambiguous, still less unmistakable is the answer given. To avoid any misunderstanding or charge of misrepresentation, we will cite a continuous part of the article, though

it is not the only statement to the same purport. The way is prepared for the announcement by a series of preliminaries, which, as we will presently show, do not help the statement. After the preliminary half-truth, "The apostles made no exclusive claim to the possession of power to speak the word of God," and some others, the writer proceeds thus (the italics being ours):—

" 'The spirit of truth,' " Christ said, 'shall guide you into all the truth.' *That greatest of Christ's promises Peter declared was made to all believers in all times.* The advancement of the Christian church in the knowledge is the fulfillment of that promise, but it is by no means yet completely fulfilled. After nineteen centuries of Christian experience *if believers of to-day did not know more of Christ than those of the first century the promise would have failed.* The *continuous inspiration of the Holy Spirit* has enabled our Lord to say *things* to his disciples in recent times *which the apostles could not bear* while he was still with them in the flesh. There have been, no doubt, particular periods when that inspiration has been exerted with special power, but *it is as truly operative now as it was eighteen centuries ago.* There are words of God still to be spoken. There are *revelations from God* still to be made to his children. *Every believer* may hope to find for himself and *for others truth not known.* He may be the channel for divine truth which God seeks to impart, which men need to-day. The noblest ambition to which God calls men and women of our time is to be his *inspired prophets.*"

The meaning of the foregoing series of statements cannot be mistaken nor explained away. Notwithstanding the occasional haziness and confusion of things quite distinct, the definite assertions, some of which we have italicized, claim for all believers always an inspiration equivalent to that of the prophets and apostles of old, and not only so, but actually supplementary to it,—a revelation of what Christ could not give to his commissioned apostles, and a revelation not only in the believer's own consciousness but "for others also."

The only direct basis for this stupendous claim is the Scripture quotation in the first sentence, and the assertion in the second sentence. These two sentences contain three several positions which are destitute of foundation.

The first is, if possible, the most objectionable of the three; for it consists in tampering with the passage which it professes to quote, in two ways, as will appear. The clause partly cited reads (R. V.) thus: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all the truth." Our editor carefully omits the personal pronoun *he* (Greek, *ekeinos*), which here, as Alford remarks, is emphatic, and which through the whole section definitely and unmistakably (together with other indications) designates the personal Holy Spirit; and furthermore, in defiance of the usage of the English version, the Revised version, and every English Bible that we have ever encountered, he ventures to print the

word Spirit with a small "s," as we have exactly cited him. These two combined processes thus substitute for the personal Holy Spirit a generalization, abstraction, or merely human mental condition, which constitutes the easy transition, the *facilis descensus* by which "inspiration" is to be made perpetual and universal to believers, and they all stand by the side, and somewhat in advance, of apostles. One would charitably suppose that this irreverent mode of printing was a typographical oversight, but for the combination and relation of the two changes, and also for the reason that in so important and critical a question, *such* a typographical oversight could not be well condoned.

Quite as singular is the second erroneous statement involved in the sentence immediately following, namely, that this promise of Christ was made to all believers in all times. The historic transaction does not afford a shadow of support for the statement. The promise occurs (John xvi. 13) in the Saviour's discourse to the eleven apostles after the last supper, and was, as matter of fact, made to them alone, either as they still lingered in the room<sup>1</sup> or on their way to the Mount of Olives.<sup>2</sup> In either case, as the reader will see from the whole narrative before and after, there is no intimation that any person beside the eleven was present with the Saviour, but distinctly the contrary. The promise was made to them by themselves. "This section," as Westcott truly remarks, "distinctly marks the position of the apostles with regard to revelation as unique."

Equally unfounded is the statement which enwraps this last error, namely, that Peter declared that this greatest of Christ's promises was made to all believers in all times. We have searched in vain in both epistles of Peter, and in his speeches recorded in Acts, to find any definite allusion to this passage, much less any declaration that the promise was made to all believers in all times. Is it possible that the writer had in mind Peter's quotation from the prophet Joel with reference to the gift of tongues at the day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 16) and in confounding Jesus Christ with Joel, got seven or eight hundred years off the track? Where is that declaration of Peter?

It is somewhat surprising to see such a momentous claim resting on three such baseless positions, addressed by a religious journal to intelligent readers. It seems as though some Mephistopheles had entered the editorial sanctum some day when the editor was out.

The passage thus treated being the only text on which the extraordinary claim is made, with the vindication of the text the claim disappears from sight. The way was prepared for the claim by a number of preliminaries, some not relevant to the proposition, and others confusing things different and distinct, as when the knowledge of religion gained by Christian experience by modern Christians is confounded with direct revelations from God to chosen men with binding authority over other men.

<sup>1</sup> Olshausen, Meyer, Tholuck, Alford, and others.

<sup>2</sup> Lange, Ebrard, Westcott, and others.

There is also the confounding of the imperfect qualifications of the apostles "while Christ was with them in the flesh" with their full equipment after his resurrection when they were endued with the spirit according to his previous promise and specially appointed to be his "witnesses unto the uttermost parts of the earth."

We will barely allude to some of the irrelevant things adduced. We are told that "the Bible as we know does not contain all the words of God which have been already spoken." Very true; but how does that fact of unrecorded utterances of "the mightiest prophets" go to show that we are all mighty prophets? We are also reminded that at the Pentecost believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and spake as the Spirit gave them utterance. Very true; and these persons were specially endowed with miraculous gifts,—a fact which the editor omits to mention. And besides we are not informed that even these persons communicated any new doctrine or duty with authority,—although that is not an important point. We are told again that "often in the early church Christians who had not been set apart to any special work or office spake the word of God." So they did, and so they do now; but how? as new revelations to themselves with binding authority over others, or as revelations made to others, namely, to God's special commissioned messengers, pressed home only on the authority of those others? How does Mr. Moody speak "the word of God"? Once more we read that "writers of the New Testament who do not claim inspiration for themselves ascribe it to others; Luke, for example, says that Elizabeth, Zacharias, and Simeon spoke in the Holy Spirit." Luke also informs us of the fact which the editorial fails to mention, that special revelations were made to these persons. All such references to declared supernatural revelations to certain persons, at a time of miraculous endowments and supernatural revelation, furnish no shadow of proof as to what takes place now. But we read, "The apostles made no exclusive claim to speak the word of God." No; whether we take the ambiguous phrase "word of God" in the wider sense in which all preachers utter it, as a word otherwise revealed, or in the narrower sense which it should have here, as directly and authoritatively revealed to the speaker. For they recognized the authority of the old prophets and especially the supreme authority of their Master, and they also spoke in approval of the utterances of those disciples who in their own time were endowed with miraculous gifts, although we do not read that these latter persons made new and permanent authoritative communications to the church. But all this does not advance one step towards proving that all believers now, showing no such miraculous endowments nor authority, utter original revelations, direct revelations from God. On the other hand, the apostles do expressly claim to speak "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" and by his special authority. As he assured them that they should be his witnesses, so they actually claim to be his witnesses, exhibiting also in con-

firmation "the signs of an apostle" in their miraculous powers. And they claim to speak with an authority that brooks no resistance; as when Peter denounced "swift destruction" on certain coming false teachers, John warned believers not to receive into their house any teacher who did not bring this [his] doctrine, and Paul could repeatedly pronounce an anathema on any person or being who should preach any gospel "other than that which we preached unto you." Even the Sunday-school scholar should hardly need to be reminded of these things.

One is tempted to inquire what signs of an apostle our friend has shown and whether he claims binding authority over other men in his declarations; and particularly what are some of the revelations that have been made through him. Well, "after nineteen centuries" he has already informed the churches—for it is the same "channel"—that Moses permitted the sale of diseased meats to the Gentiles as a standing law, that "the prophets bitterly contended with one another," and that "all the apostles made mistakes while they were attempting to interpret to men the will of God"—all, we presume, except this latest prophet or apostle. This is some of "the inspiration operative now." When not only the denominational editor, but every believer, may "find for himself and for others truth not yet known"—such truths as these last—what an illumination will there be in this dark world!

A striking illustration of this new light or its equivalent occurred in the same city a few days later, when in Arcade Hall Rev. T. E. Allen announced (so it was reported next day), "I frankly told them [his recent congregation] that I thought I possessed much the same power of prophecy as did Jesus and the Hebrew prophets." But it seems that Unitarianism would not accept the claim, and he resigned his church, and denounced Unitarianism as too slow.

It is a relief not to find in the article referred to any allusion for the hundredth time to the well-worn advice of good John Robinson; for, though Robinson spoke only of "more truth and light yet to break out of God's holy word," it would have taken but one or two vigorous strokes of the pen to make it a promise of more truth to break out of every believer.

When men speak of every believer being inspired and having a revelation, it is only another mode of saying that no one has or has had any distinctive inspiration or revelation. For it reduces prophet and apostle to the common level. A generation or so ago there were certain new lights who earnestly maintained that every day was the Sabbath; which both in theory and practice amounted to this, no Sabbath at all. And when it is maintained that all are inspired prophets and channels of revelation, the claim would abrogate all distinctive inspiration and revelation.

S. C. BARTLETT.

HANOVER, N. H.

TOHU: A HISTORICAL AND EXEGETICAL STUDY OF ITS  
MEANING IN GENESIS I. 2.

THIS word has given translators much trouble, because of their desire to make its meaning harmonize with their philosophy, and their philosophy has so often changed. The only satisfactory course was to determine the sense from the study of other places where *tohu* occurs, and let the philosophy take care of itself. Those who translated the Hebrew into Greek found *tohu* to mean *vanity, naught, a thing of naught, nothing*, and so translated it in the great majority of cases. Even in that much-quoted verse in Jeremiah, "I beheld the earth, and lo, it was *tohu*," they rendered this word by *ὄδὲν, nothing*. But when they came to it in Genesis, they thought they saw an insurmountable difficulty in the way. It was, they imagined, impossible that the earth ever was in such a condition as would be indicated by *naught, a thing of naught, vanity*, and the like, which they had so freely used in other places for *tohu*. So they devised a new meaning to suit their ideas of propriety. They made it read, And the earth was *invisible, áparas*. They could understand this; it in no wise contradicted their philosophy, and, besides, it harmonized well with the next verse, which says, "darkness was upon the face of the deep." But I notice they were not well enough satisfied with that meaning to use it elsewhere. I think they had some doubts about its appropriateness in Genesis.

In preparing the Vulgate, the same difficulty was met,—what to do with *tohu*. The mistranslation of the LXX. was too glaring to be followed, and so, from the study of the various Hebrew texts in which the word occurs, another meaning, more in harmony with them, was evolved, *inanis*.

This passed muster for a long time. But the idea that chaos was the real condition of the primal world—an idea which later on was embalmed in Milton's immortal verse—became more and more prevalent; and so, when King James's divines met to form a new version, they adopted for *tohu*, *without form*, as representing a chaotic condition. Of all renderings this has the least excuse.

That of the Septuagint, *invisible*, had this in its favor: If it was true, as the account said, that darkness did really cover the deep, the earth certainly was invisible. And as to *inanis*, that was in pretty good accord with other uses of *tohu*. But *without form* was merely forcing into the account what those divines thought was true, viz., that at first there was neither law nor order, form nor shape. This did very well as long as no one questioned it. After a time, however, scientists pointed out that the earth had never been without law and order; that nature knew nothing of a chaos in the Miltonian sense, and, moreover, every portion of matter, however irregular, had form.

A century or more later, when geology began to make trouble with the

traditional Genesis, a new exegesis was proposed, which would avoid the difficulty with geology, and yet admit what Milton and others had taught as to the "days." If I remember right, Dr. Pye-Smith devised it. Many, perhaps most who believe in revelation, have adopted it, and still hold it.

In the beginning, millions and millions of years ago, according to this explanation, God created the heavens and the earth. In that vast stretch of time lived the plants and animals of geology whose remains are now found in the rocks; then, too, occurred the great geological movements of which we read. After all this, God saw fit to cause the water to overflow the land and extinguish all life, plant as well as animal. At the same time he covered the earth with a thick envelope of cloud, which shut out the light, and all was dead and dark. How long this continued we do not know; but at last it came to an end, and God began to refit the world for man, and in six days it was done, finished as we now see it.

Without stopping to point out the difficulties in the way of this theory, in which it surpasses all others, I shall speak only of its influence on the rendering of *tohu*. *Without form* had become intolerable to many as describing a state that could not possibly exist. Knowing nothing of our world's having been an unsegregated part of a great gaslike mass, it never occurred to them that the earth then had no more form than has the water, now in the cloud, which will soon fill my cistern, or the pen in my hand, when it was a part of the steel ingot from which it came. They dropped the old rendering, *without form*, and reasoned out a new one. They said, In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; and then, in due time, he laid the earth waste. That must have been its condition when he set out to re-create it for man, and therefore *tohu*, which describes it, must mean *waste*. When the Revised Version was made, its authors thought this would obviate all objections, and so they made it read, "And the earth was waste and void."

If that could be shown to be the real meaning of the word, no one should change it; even though it indicated a condition which never existed; for our first business is to know what the account says, and then wait, if need be, till we have more light.

What then does *tohu* mean? I find the following in my Hebrew Concordance:—

1. Isa. xxix. 21. And turn aside the just for *tohu*, a thing of naught.
2. xlix. 4. I have spent my strength for naught, *tohu*.
3. Job vi. 18. They go to nothing, *tohu*.
4. xxvi. 7. He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, *tohu*.
5. Isa. lix. 4. They trust in vanity, *tohu*. Vulgate, in *nihilo*.
6. 1 Sam. xii. 21. For they should yet go after vain things, *tohu*.
7. For they are vain, *tohu*.
8. Isa. xl. 17. All the nations are accounted . . . vanity, *tohu*.
9. xl. 23. He maketh the judges of the earth, *tohu*, as vanity.

10. xliv. 9. They that make graven images are all of them *tohu, vanity*. Vulgate, *Nihil*.
11. xli. 29. Molten images are . . . *confusion, tohu*.
12. xlv. 18. He created it not *tohu, in vain*. Vulgate, *in vanum*.
13. xlv. 19. I said not . . . seek ye me *tohu, in vain*.

In all these, *tohu* is translated by *naught*, or *nothing*, or *vanity*, or some such word, except in the eleventh, and there it evidently ought to be. The sense would be improved by substituting *vanity* or *nothing* for *confusion*. The other renderings which have been proposed for *tohu* refuse to be used in any of them.

In the following passages, all that remain, there is the same idea of *naught, nothing, vanity*, or the like.

14. Job xii. 24. To wander in a *wilderness, tohu* (i.e. a place where there is nothing).
15. Ps. cvii. 40. He causeth them to wander in a *wilderness, tohu* (where *nothing* is).
16. Dent. xxxii. 10. In the *waste, tohu*, howling wilderness. (A howling wilderness where nothing is.)
17. Isa. xxiv. 10. The city of *confusion, tohu*, i.e. the city of utter worthlessness, whose value is naught; *vanitatis*, as the Vulgate has it.
18. xxxiv. 11. Stretch upon it the line of *confusion, tohu*. The Septuagint has it, "*the line of surveying of a desert*." Where the city has been, the land surveyor with his line shall measure only a desert. In plain prose the city shall become a desert.
19. Jer. iv. 23. I beheld the earth, and lo, it was *tohu*. The Old Version says, *without form*, and the Revised, *waste*. I do not know that any one defends the former; the only question is in regard to the latter.

The context does not forbid it, nor does it forbid any other adjective which one may fancy appropriate. But to say, I beheld the earth, and lo, it was *waste*, is in no better harmony with the context than, I beheld the earth, and lo, it was a thing of *naught, nihil*, i.e. utterly destroyed. The expression *a thing of naught* is in easy harmony with all the texts where *tohu* occurs, while *waste* is incongruous with nearly all of them.

Only one thing could justify the use of *waste* in the second verse of this account, viz., that such a creating and subsequent destruction did actually take place. It requires a very moderate knowledge of geology, though greater than was attainable when this theory was launched, to say that nothing of the kind occurred. On the other hand, it is beyond all reasonable question that our earth at first was in a gaslike condition, many hundred times rarer than the air we breathe, as near nothing as one can form any idea of, and well described by such terms as *vanity, a thing of naught, nothing*.

Independently of all theories, the study of the places quoted shows

that, to the Hebrews, *tohu* was a word of depreciation answering closely to our colloquial use of the word *nothing*,—not an absolute vacuum, but close to it.

Looking at it as a question in hermeneutics, and apart from any geological or other theory, the usage demands that these first two sentences should be translated,

In the beginning God created the heaven and earth.  
And the earth was vanity (or a thing of naught) and void.

It should be no objection to such rendering that it chances (?) to describe the earth's earliest condition.

Admitting this to be the proper meaning of *tohu*, the way is clear to collate the physical statements in this account with the facts made known by astronomy and geology and relating to the same matters. To be satisfactory the work must be thorough, skipping nothing, shirking nothing, omitting no detail, bending no word from its legitimate meaning, and making no change in the order. On the other hand, the "facts" to be collated must be facts, *res adjudicatae* by the consensus of 1899.

It is greatly to be desired that such a collating of the two accounts should be made,—but only by those whose knowledge of Hebrew and of present science qualify them for the task,—and that they should give the world the results. Will they do so? It is worth trying.

C. B. WARRING.

POUGHKEEPSIE, N. Y.

#### REJOINDER TO DR. BEHREND'S CRITICISMS.

DR. BEHREND'S strictures in the last issue upon my article "The Early Religion of the Hebrews," published in the same number, appears to me to evidence a far too careless reading of my thesis to warrant him passing judgment thereon.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Behrends commenced by complaining that I had neglected to indicate the exact date when, according to my contention, the religion of the Hebrews was little, if any, removed from that of those people by whom they were surrounded. But Dr. Behrends himself neglected to note that in this connection I had purposely employed the term *so-called* Hebrews, which, with a little careful study of my opening contention, should have shown him that I had reference to a period commencing with the advent of Abraham in Canaan, and covering the entrance of the Israelites into the promised land.

My reference to Dr. Davidson's suggestion as to the true cause of Abraham's departure from Ur, casts no reflection upon the record of this event as we have it in Genesis. Dr. Davidson suggested that he left Ur after being defeated as the leader of a horde in some local encounter.

<sup>1</sup> See *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. lv. (Oct. 1898) pp. 629-655, 742-743.

Professor Margoliouth, in the October *Contemporary Review*, suggests that he left Ur to enjoy greater freedom to worship Sin, the moon-god, for which purpose he settled for some time in Haran. My suggestion was that he left his home for Canaan as one representative of the people who had recently become possessed of Babylonia, and who were gradually taking possession of the surrounding districts.

Now Genesis represents Abraham as leaving Ur for Haran, and Haran for Canaan, on account of special calls of God to that end. None of the three causes given above for Abraham's removal conflict with this representation. Modern criticism does not deny the direct hand of God in the various episodes narrated in Genesis. It seeks only to arrive at truer and more likely details in these episodes which have been unintentionally lost in the well-recognized Oriental method of fancy picture painting.

Dr. Behrends seems to think that "it is purely arbitrary criticism which preserves an Abraham, and then resolves Jacob and his twelve sons into personifications." But why so, if criticism accepts Lycurgus as a real person, but denies that he had two sons named Eunomos and Eukosmos (i. e., "Law" and "Order" respectively)?

And here I may mention that the great champion of traditionalism, Professor Hommel, plays fast and loose with the sons of Jacob. The tribes of Asher, Simeon and Levi, he informs us, left Egypt and settled in South Palestine long before the time of Moses.<sup>1</sup> Asher he infers must no longer be looked upon as the son of Jacob, but as the son of Dedan, son of Jokshan, son of Abraham by Keturah his second wife,<sup>2</sup> at least this is the logical inference from his finding touching the origin of Asher.

Dr. Behrends is certainly not warranted in stating that the Decalogue is intensely and emphatically a law-code of spiritual and ethical monotheism, in opposition to my contention that Moses was a pronounced henotheist. Conceding that Moses penned the Decalogue as it stands at present, there is, after all, no more than a pronounced henotheism to be discovered here. The first and second commandments of the Ten Words alone allude to the worship of, or obedience to, Israel's God, and here we are simply told that Israel is to have no other gods but Jehovah, since he is a jealous God. Thus, all that can be gathered from the Decalogue is a pronounced henotheism with at the most an implied monotheism. As the Decalogue stands, there is not one word against the assumption of the existence of other gods, but merely that no other gods—whose existence Moses abundantly admits—must be worshiped by the Israelites but Jehovah only.

From the above it will be seen that there is not the slightest necessity to dissect and mutilate the Decalogue, as Dr. Behrends contends, to discover that Moses was, after all, merely a pronounced henotheist and not

<sup>1</sup> Ancient Hebrew Tradition, p. 268.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 238-240, 271, 272.

a monotheist, a fact plainly seen in his frequent admission of the existence of other gods besides Jehovah (Ex. xii. 12; xv. 11; xviii. 11; Num. xxxiii. 4).

In concluding, Dr. Behrends appears altogether incapable of grasping the philosophy in the study of comparative religion. To suggest that, because monotheism was the outcome of the religious movement inaugurated by Abraham and Moses, the henotheism of these leaders might as well be called monotheism, is scarcely the utterance of a student of comparative religion. The development of the henotheism of Abraham and Moses respectively into monotheism was due to the hand of God. Indeed, the henotheism of these two leaders was similarly due, not, however, according to modern criticism, in the manner of objective calls, as recorded in the Old Testament and accepted by the traditional school; but owing to the faithful acceptance and working out of those subjective impressions which are quite as much calls of God as any outward manifestation could possibly be. This method of interpreting the Oriental picture painting of Old Testament incidents is fully accepted by no less a scholar than Professor W. Sanday in his "Oracles of God."<sup>1</sup>

ARTHUR E. WHATHAM.

THE PARSONAGE, WAY'S MILLS, QUEBEC.

<sup>1</sup> Fourth edition, p. 49.