

JOSHUA, WHO MAKES THE SUN STAND STILL

by Lester J. Start

Undated

I. Introduction

1. This story of Joshua is one of the most popular 'difficult' parts of the Bible. It is a favorite for those who like to question the validity of the Bible in every literal detail, and by disparaging certain isolated parts, condemn the authority of the Book as a whole, because they are looking for an excuse to evade the demands it makes upon the conscience.

2. The burning question in many minds then is this: Did Joshua really make the sun stand still? Many question sincerely, honestly disturbed by the discrepancies between Biblical and scientific accounts of the same phenomena, but many question with a smug feeling of superiority thinking they are qualified to judge the religious thinking of the past, and reject it.

A. Illustration of the Scopes trial, and Bryan's defense of this passage. The negro preacher's attitude.

II. What attitude should we take?

1. God speaks to us through our highest faculties: we need not park our brains outside when we go into church or read the bible. He works according to natural law also; this is mystery enough without our need to reject natural knowledge and try to apprehend blindly.

2. We cannot reject our scientific knowledge, but must understand this in the light of that knowledge. When we do so we cannot believe literally that the sun did stand still - the implications of such a belief are untenable.

3. In saying this we do not make a dangerous admission. Those who would conclude from this that the Bible is untrustworthy had better inquire farther; if they feel they know enough to judge, let them consider these factors:

A. It is interesting that those who pride themselves on their scientific knowledge and thus feel qualified to judge are abysmally ignorant of the Bible's literary devices. [They are also devoid of religious sensibilities - thus they are all blind.

Illustration of a physicist who understands music only in terms of wavelengths trying to appreciate Beethoven. Typesetter criticizing Shakespeare.] To judge competently, one must examine this passage from a literary and historical point of view.

(1). Historically, it is embellished to show the providence of God through the prophetic leadership of Joshua; thus it is not a pure record of events, but like the historical novel is designed to point to the lesson beyond.

(2). From a literary point of view, it contains a poetical device not to be taken literally. The verse is a quotation, a four line fragment from the Book of Jeshar, which is merely a poetical expression of the idea that the day was long enough for complete victory

Illustration of Wordsworth's poem, "She was a phantom of delight". This says merely, "it seemed as if the sun would never go down". We cannot be prosaic in reading the Bible for its writers were poets.

B. This is not a scientific or purely historical account of an event. It is religious. This implies a transcendent meaning - the function of the mystical expression of fact.

C. Thus understood the passage provides no problem.

III. The writer of Joshua in making this poetical expression a literal account of a nature miracle, and later interpreters following the same procedure are wrong. We make this judgement, however, not on superficial scientific grounds, but according to the insights of the religious instinct. It is this that we have the real lesson of the story of Joshua.