

Science itself, moreover, tells us that the heavenly bodies would be visible on the earth's surface only at a period long subsequent to its formation, when its atmosphere had had time to clear of thick vapours, with the gradual fall of temperature of the heated globe. Only that it would prove too much, there might be some ground for claiming this as an anticipation of science, rather than as out of harmony with its teaching. Certainly, no one who is not determined to find fault, need have any difficulty in reconciling them with each other.

2. A more famous, and, on the face of it, a much more serious astronomical difficulty is the statement as to the sun and moon standing still at the bidding of Joshua (Josh. 10:12-14), in order that the Israelites might have full opportunity to annihilate their enemies after the battle. In addition to the astronomical difficulty pure and simple, we apparently have the introduction of a most stupendous miracle, which, according to all ordinary laws, must have deranged the whole universe, and that for a paltry purpose altogether inconceivable on God's part. It is not to be wondered at, perhaps, that such an accumulation of difficulties should have caused much perplexity, and that this perplexity has not yet altogether disappeared from the ordinary mind. Endless suggestions have been made for its solution. But as usual, the true explanation is a very simple one, and lies near at hand. The whole statement is nothing more than a poetical version of the fact, that the day almost unexpectedly proved long enough for the Israelites to complete the destruction of their foes. The very context explains that it is a quotation from the book of Jashar, of which almost the only thing we know is that it was a collection of national songs. No one has ever pretended to have difficulty about the statement made in the song of Deborah (Judges 5: 20) that "they fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera." It is an obvious allusion to some natural occurrence, such as a storm, on the day of the battle, which was adverse to the vanquished. If the whole of the song relating to Joshua's victory had been preserved, the meaning of the figurative language here, in its original setting, would