

The language certainly will bear that meaning; indeed, it is almost as strong as language can be to express such a meaning; and does not the passage look like a distinct avowal of this great truth, at the very commencement of the inspired record, in order to refute the opinion, so prevalent in early times, that the world is eternal?

The next inquiry concerning the passage relates to the phrase "the heavens and the earth." Does it comprehend the universe? So it must have been understood by the Jews; for their language could not furnish a more comprehensive phrase to designate the universe. True, these words, like those already considered, are used sometimes in a limited sense. But in this place their broadest signification is in perfect accordance with the scope of the passage and with the whole tenor of the Scripture. We may, therefore, conclude with much certainty, that God intended in this place to declare the great truth, that there was a time in past eternity when the whole material universe came into existence at his irresistible fiat: a truth eminently proper to stand at the head of a divine revelation.

But when did this stupendous event occur? Does the phrase "in the beginning." show us when? Surely not; for no language can be more indefinite as to time. Whenever it is used in the Bible, it merely designates the commencement of the series of events, or the periods of time, that are described. "In the beginning was the Word; that is, at the commencement of things the word was in existence, consequently was from eternity. But in Genesis the act of creation is represented by this phrase simply as the commencement of the material universe, at a certain point of time in past eternity, which is not chronologically fixed. The first verse merely informs us, that the first act of the Deity in relation to the universe was the creation of the heavens and the earth out of nothing.

It is contended, however, that the first verse is so connected with the six days' work of creation, related in the subsequent verse, that we must understand the phrase "in the beginning" as the commencement of the first day. This is the main point to be examined in relation to the passage, and therefore deserves a careful consideration.

If the first verse must be understood as a summary account of the six days' work which follows in detail, then "the beginning" was the commencement of the first day, and of course