

WITHOUT FORM AND VOID

TOHU WAVOHU

By Arlen L. Chirwood

“In the beginning God created the heaven [‘the heavens’] and the earth.

And the earth was without form and void [‘But the earth became *tohu wavohu*’]; and darkness was [‘became’] upon the face of the deep...” (Gen. 1:1, 2a).

Scripture opens in Genesis with a complete and continuous section — Gen. 1:1-2:3, thirty-four verses — Divinely designed to foreshadow in a skeletal, succinct manner that contained in the whole of subsequent Scripture about to follow. Possessing a correct understanding and interpretation of this opening section, with the numeric structure seen therein, cannot be overemphasized. But, more often than not, the converse of that is true among Christians.

God’s work during the six days in these opening verses is usually, though erroneously, understood as *creation alone* (i.e., verses describing God’s creation of the heavens and the earth, from v. 1, over a six-day period of time), with little to no significance seen in the six days themselves, along with the following seventh day of rest.

Then another school of thought views Gen. 1:1 as other than an absolute beginning. Those following this school of thought understand the opening chapter of Genesis to begin at the time of *restoration*, with *the creation and a subsequent ruin of the creation* having previously occurred but not seen at this beginning point in Scripture.

However, if Scripture is compared with Scripture, and the whole of subsequent Scripture is viewed in the light of the way Scripture opens in Genesis, *creation alone or restoration alone*, followed by a day of

rest, *cannot possibly* be the correct understanding of this opening section.

The words “without form and void” in the KJV English text of Gen. 1:2a are a translation of the Hebrew words *tohu wavohu* (“formless and void,” NASB; “formless and empty,” NIV; “waste and void,” ASV).

These two words are used together only two other places throughout all of the Old Testament — in Isa. 34:11 and Jer. 4:23. *And both of these passages present a ruin of that previously seen existing in an orderly state.*

In Isa. 34:11, Edom, representing all nations in the future Lord’s Day (v. 6), was destined to become *tohu wavohu* (translated “confusion” and “emptiness” [KJV], “desolation” and “emptiness” [NASB]).

And in Jer. 4:23-28, there is a comparison of that which was about to occur *relative to the land of Israel* to that which had previously occurred *relative to the earth* in Gen. 1:2a.

The land of Israel was about to become *tohu wavohu* (translate the Hebrew word *eret* [vv. 20, 23, 27, 28], meaning “land” or “earth,” as “land” throughout).

That is, as seen in Jer. 4:23-28, God was about to do *the same thing to the land of Israel* (cf. vv. 14-22) *that He had previously done to the earth in Gen. 1:2a*. And the reason for both of these actions — that which God was about to do to the land of Israel, and that which He had previously done to the earth — was the same. *Sin had entered* (*sin* on the part of the Jewish people in the former, and *sin* on the part of Satan in the latter).

And, in complete keeping with this type understanding of the use of *tohu wavohu* in Isa. 34:11 and Jer. 4:23, Isa. 45:18 (where the word *tohu* is used, translated “in vain”) clearly states that God did not create the earth (in Gen. 1:1) in the manner described in Gen. 1:2a. Isaiah 45:18 states that God “created it [the earth] *not* in vain [not ‘tohu,’ not ‘without form,’].”

Thus, if Gen. 1:2a is to be understood in the light of related Scripture bearing on the subject (which it must be [cf. Ps. 12:6; Isa. 8:20; 28:10; I Cor. 2:13]), *there can be only one possible interpretation* — *the ruin of a prior existing creation (from v. 1), because of sin*. The earth from verse one “became” *tohu wavohu*.

(The word “was” in Gen. 1:2a is a translation of *hayah* in the Hebrew text, a verb of being. This word appears twenty-seven times in the first chapter and is used in this chapter far more in the sense of “became” than “was,” though English translations do not normally reflect this fact [ref. the author’s book, THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE, Chapter II, pp. 22-24.]

The ruin seen in both Gen. 1:2a and Jer. 4:23 occurred for a reason (sin had entered); and the ruin in both verses occurred with a view to eventual *restoration*. And the overall teaching from Isa. 34:11 is the same.

Then, *the restoration* seen in both the continuing text of Genesis chapter one (vv. 2b-25) and in the overall passage of Isa. 34:11 and Jer. 4:23ff, as well as in related Scripture (e.g., Isa. 35:1ff), is seen occurring for a purpose, which is *regal*.

Then, the whole of subsequent Scripture is perfectly in line with this type understanding of the opening section of Scripture. The whole of subsequent Scripture is built on a septenary structure, with the foundation established and set in an unchangeable fashion at the beginning, in Gen. 1:1-2:3.

That is to say:

The heavens and the earth were created, there was a ruin of the material creation (because of sin), God took six days to restore the ruined creation, and He rested the seventh day.

Man was created on the sixth day, man fell into a state of ruin (because of sin), God is presently taking six days (6,000 years) to restore man, and God will rest the seventh day (the seventh 1,000-year period [cf. II Peter 1:15-18; 3:3-8]).

And the latter restoration, patterned after the former restoration, is what the whole of Scripture is about. *The whole of Scripture is about the same thing initially introduced and established in an unchangeable fashion in the opening thirty-four verses of Genesis (1:1-2:3).*

The whole of Scripture is about the creation of man, his ruin, his restoration over a six-day period (over a 6,000-year period), followed by a seventh day of rest (a seventh 1,000-year period — the Sabbath

rest awaiting the people of God [Heb. 4:9; cf. vv. 3, 4], the Messianic Era).

Man would evidently have been expected to understand this opening section of Scripture after the preceding fashion at the time it was written. And subsequent Scripture simply verifies the correctness of the way man would have been expected to understand this opening section at that time, even apart from other revelation.

(Note one thing about the restoration in Gen. 1:2b-25 which should be understood. This restoration could only have been a *complete restoration*. No trace of "the world that then was" [the world preceding the ruin seen in Gen. 1:2a], or the subsequent ruined earth [in Gen. 1:2a], can be seen "in the heavens and the earth, which are now."

A complete restoration would have removed *all traces* of anything having to do with "the world that then was" or with that world during the time when it lay in a ruined state. That is to say, geology today cannot show evidence of any type pre-existing creation or a ruin of that pre-existing creation, for a *complete restoration*—the only type restoration possible through the Divine work seen in Genesis chapter one—would have removed *all traces of a pre-existing creation and ruin*.

Had the preceding not been the case, God would have created man, untainted by sin, through using that tainted by sin [the earth]—*an impossibility*.

In this respect, all that exists in the present secular world of history and science—*e.g.*, the complete fossil record, the dinosaurs, topographical formations such as the Grand Canyon, etc.—would all have to be placed this side of the restoration seen in Gen. 1:2b-25, within time covered by "the heavens and the earth, which are now."

That which occurred during and resulted from the Noachian Flood, 1,656 years following the restoration of the earth [Gen. 6-8], along with later topographical changes on the earth during the days of Peleg [born 100 years after the Flood (Gen. 10:25)], *must be looked to* for an explanation of numerous things of the preceding nature, not to a world lying in ruins in Gen. 1:2a, or to a world existing prior to that time.)

Viewing the whole of Scripture, the correct interpretation of the opening verses of Genesis can be clearly and unquestionably presented and understood through:

1) The manner in which the Hebrew words from Gen. 1:2a, *tohu wavohu*, are used elsewhere in Scripture (interpreting Scripture in the light of Scripture [Isa. 34:11; 45:18; Jer. 4:23]).

2) And the typical nature of Old Testament history (I Cor. 10:6, 11), which has been set forth in a very evident, Divinely established septenary arrangement.

And these opening verses, providing the Divinely established basis for that which follows, *must* be understood accordingly.

The Bible is a *book of redemption*; and only a correct view of the opening verses of Genesis can reflect positively, *at the very outset*, on God's redemptive message as a whole—*the restoration of a ruined creation, performed in its entirety through Divine intervention, for a revealed purpose*.

An incorrect view can, on the other hand, only have negative ramifications. *Creation alone*, apart from a ruin and restoration of the creation, fails to convey the complete message at the outset of the Word; and *Restoration alone* likewise fails to convey the complete message at this opening point in Scripture.

It is as F. W. Grant stated years ago relative to the existing parallel between the creation and ruin of the earth and the subsequent creation and ruin of man:

"The thought of a ruined condition of the earth succeeding its original creation...is...required by the typical view [that is, the earth's creation, ruin, and subsequent restoration forms a type of (foreshadows) man's creation, ruin, and subsequent restoration]."

(In line with the preceding, refer to the author's pamphlet titled, "Genesis and John." The same septenary structure seen beginning Genesis is also seen beginning John; and John's gospel, for this and other reasons, should begin the N.T., paralleling Genesis beginning the O.T.

This septenary structure in Genesis deals with *the restoration of a ruined material creation*; and this same septenary structure in John deals with the restoration of that foreshadowed in the Genesis account—*the restoration of ruined man*.

And, beyond the septenary structure beginning both books, in the opening two chapters of each book, the subject matter in both books is the same throughout. In Genesis, the subject matter is set forth in *innumerable types*; in John, it is set forth in *eight signs*.)

Accordingly, the opening verses of Genesis cannot deal with *creation alone*. Nor can these opening verses deal with *restoration alone*.

Along with the grammatical problem of dealing with *tohu wavohu* in this respect, *creation alone* would be out of line with the whole of Scripture, beginning with the central theme of Scripture, *the message of redemption*.

And *restoration alone*, though not out of line with the grammatical problem seen in *tohu wavohu*, is, as creation alone, out of line with the whole of Scripture, beginning with the central theme of Scripture, *the message of redemption*.

The *only* interpretative view which will fit—*at all points*—within the Divinely established septenary arrangement of Scripture (which has its basis in these opening verses) is:

Creation (an absolute beginning, and a perfect creation [v. 1]).

A Ruin of the Creation (v. 2a).

A Restoration of the Ruined Creation (vv. 2b-25).

Rest (in the type—six twenty-four-hour days of restorative work, followed by a twenty-four-hour day of rest; in the antitype—six 1,000-year days of restorative work, followed by a 1,000-year day of rest [1:2b-2:3]).

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