

WITHOUT FORM AND VOID

TOHU WAVOHU

By Arlen L. Chitwood

“In the beginning God created the heaven 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. 1:2a).

The words *tohu wavohu* are translated “without form and void” in the KJV English text (“formless and void,” NASB; “formless and empty,” NIV; “waste and void,” ASV). *These two Hebrew 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 (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 had previously occurred *relative to the earth* in Gen. 1:2a to that which was about to occur *relative to the land of Israel*.

The land of Israel was about to become *tohu wavohu*. 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 had done to the earth, and that which He was about to do to the land of Israel — was the same. *Sin had entered* (*sin* on the part of Satan in the former, and *sin* on the part of the Jewish people 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, Isaiah 45:18 (where the Hebrew 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 ruin seen in both Gen. 1:2a and Jer. 4:23, for a purpose, is with a view to eventual *restoration*. And *the restoration* seen in the continuing text of Gen. 1:2 (vv. 2b-25) and in the overall passage of Jer. 4:23ff (v. 27b), as well as in related Scripture (e.g., Isa. 35:1ff), is also for a purpose.

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).

As previously stated, man would 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, 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 that 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*.

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* (viewing the opening verse as other than an absolute beginning), apart from a record of the preceding creation and ruin, 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].”

Accordingly, the opening verses of Genesis cannot deal strictly with *Creation*; nor can these verses deal strictly with *Restoration*. Either view would be 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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