

WITHOUT FORM AND VOID

TOHU WAVOHU IN GENESIS, ISAIAH, AND JEREMIAH

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

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

Scripture opens in Genesis with a complete section, covering thirty-four verses — Gen. 1:1-2:3 — Divinely designed to foreshadow in a succinct, skeletal 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 (septenary) 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 understood *as creation alone* (i.e., verses describing God’s creation of the heavens and the earth, from verse one, 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, a smaller segment of Christendom 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 or dealt with* at this beginning point in Scripture.

And those ascribing to this way of understanding the first chapter, as those seeing creation only, also see little to no significance in the six days themselves, along with the following seventh day of rest.

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, *NEITHER creation ALONE NOR restoration ALONE, followed by a day of rest, can possibly be the correct understandings of this opening section.*

Ascertaining the Correct Interpretation

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

The words tohu wavohu are used together ONLY two other places throughout all of the Old Testament — in Isa. 34:11 and Jer. 4:23.

BOTH of these passages present a ruin of that previously existing in an orderly state. And, as seen in corresponding Scripture, as will be shown, the ruin of each occurred with a view to a subsequent restoration.

In Isa. 34:11, Edom [‘Idumea’], representing *ALL nations in the future Lord’s Day* (vv. 5, 6), was destined to become *tohu wavohu* (translated “confusion” and “emptiness” [KJV], “desolation” and “emptiness” [NASB]).

And in Jer. 4:23-28, The land of Israel was about to become tohu wavohu (translate the Hebrew word eretz [vv. 20, 23, 27, 28], meaning “land” or “earth,” as “land” throughout).

And, as seen in other parts of the chapter, the people of Israel, inseparably connected with their land, would suffer the SAME fate as their land.

THEN, there is an allusion in Jer 4:23-28 back to Gen. 1:2a. *The land of Israel (cf. vv. 14-22) was about to suffer the SAME fate that the earth had suffered in Gen. 1:2a. Or, to turn that around, the earth had previously suffered the same fate that the land of Israel was about to suffer. One can draw from the other — the latter from the former, the former from the latter.*

And the REASON for BOTH of these actions — that which God had previously 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 EXACTLY the same thing was previously seen relative to the Gentile nations in Isa. 34.

THEN, in complete keeping with this type use of *tohu* and *wavohu* together in Gen. 1:2a, Isa. 34:11, and Jer. 4:23, note Isa. 45:18 (where the word *tohu* is used, translated “in vain”).

“For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain [‘He created it *not tohu*’; i.e., ‘He didn’t create it without form’], he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else.”

This verse in Isaiah clearly states that *God did NOT* create the earth (in Gen. 1:1) in the manner described in Gen. 1:2a. Isaiah 45:18 clearly states that God “created it [the earth] *NOT* in vain [*NOT ‘tohu,’ NOT ‘without form,’*].”

NOR did God create Israel and her land after the manner seen in Jer. 4.

NOR did God create the Gentile nations after the manner seen in Isa. 34.

NOR did God bring about the destruction of Israel or the nations apart from a view to eventual restoration.

Israel’s restoration is seen numerous places throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Lev.. 26:14-46; Isa. 2:1-5; Ezek. 37-48).

The Old Testament is filled with God's promises to one day restore Israel, BUT ONLY following the nation's repentance.

And there are numerous Scriptures dealing with God's restoration of the nations, which will inhabit the millennial earth and be reached during this time by Israel (e.g., Isa. 2:1-5; Zeph. 3:6, 20; Zech. 8 20-23; Rev. 2:26, 27; cf. Rev. 21:24).

Note an early reference to the restoration of both Israel and the nations, during the Noachian Flood, in Gen. 8:1ff:

(At the end of 150 days, when God closed the floodgates of heaven and stopped the underground waters from coming up, Noah and his family RESTED in the ark on a shoreless ocean of water ABOVE the mountains of Ararat (v. 4).

The typical picture has to do with the place and position which Israel will occupy at the end of the Tribulation — safely seen through the Tribulation, now occupying a position of REST [the seventh day] ABOVE ALL the nations [the mountains below the ark].

As the waters which had wrought destruction receded, the mountains began to come into view [vv. 5ff (the destroyed nations coming out of the Tribulation, with a view to restoration)].

Then, Israel, occupying a position ABOVE these nations, is also seen as the nation through which ALL of the Gentile nations will be blessed on this seventh day [Gen. 12:1-3].)

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. And this ruin (as well as the ruins in both Isaiah and Jeremiah) occurred with a view to eventual restoration (seen in a Divine work throughout the subsequent six days).

And ALL of this was with a view to a SEVENTH day of REST.

(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, *End of the Days*, Appx. 1, “The Interpretation of Gen. 1:2.”]

To recap, the ruin seen in both Gen. 1:2a and Jer. 4:23 occurred for a reason (sin had entered). And, with the ruin in Jer. 4:23 occurring with a view to eventual restoration and reflecting back on the ruin in Gen. 1:2a, the interpretation of this verse in the opening chapter of Genesis can, SOLELY from a Biblical standpoint, be understood ONLY one way.

And the overall teaching from Isa. 34:11 is perfectly in line with that seen through Gen. 1:2a and Jer. 4:23 drawing from one another.

THEN, the restoration seen in BOTH the continuing text of Genesis chapter one (vv. 2b-25) and in corresponding Scripture having to do with Isa. 34:11 and Jer. 4:23ff occurs for EXACTLY the same ultimate GOAL, which is REGAL.

THEN, the whole of Scripture is perfectly in line with this type understanding of the opening section of Scripture. The whole of 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, for a PURPOSE. Man fell into a state of ruin, with the ground subsequently cursed (because of sin, having to do with the PURPOSE for BOTH the restoration of the earth and his creation).

And God is presently taking six days, 6,000 years, to restore BOTH man and the material creation. And God will THEN rest the seventh day, the seventh 1,000-year period.

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 [cf. II Peter 1:15-18; 3:3-8]).

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 this time.

Subsequent Scripture, Other Thoughts

Apart from Gen. 1:1-2:3 occupying its God-ordained and God-provided place at the outset (with the same thing seen in John 1:1-2:11 in the N.T.), *the septenary structure of ALL subsequent Scripture would have NO correct and proper foundation upon which to rest.*

And the point need not be belabored, for it is self-explanatory.

(Then, note something about the restoration itself 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” [the heavens and earth in existence since Gen. 1:2b ff (II Peter 3:6, 7)].*

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 left NO trace whatsoever of a pre-existing creation and ruin.*

Had the preceding *NOT* been the case, *man, created from the restored earth [from the ground], could ONLY have been tainted by sin at the time of his creation.*

[Man tainted by sin at the time of his creation, no matter how minute, *would have rendered him unfit to fulfill the reason for his creation.*

And, in turn, this would have made Satan's actions in Gen. 3, bringing about man's fall, completely unnecessary].

Thus, a perfect restoration HAD to occur in Gen. 2b-25].

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 Noahian 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, as previously seen, and to summarize, 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, perfect as well (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]).

Begin right in Genesis, and you can remain right as you move on into other parts of Scripture. BUT, begin wrong in Genesis, or ignore Genesis, and...