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In arranging for the publication of these papers on this subject, the Council of the Institute was asked if the scope of the papers and the discussion could be limited to the elucidation of the precise meaning of the Hebrew grammatical construction and words of Genesis i, 2, explicitly excluding all scientific aspects of the problem which could not adequately be discussed on this occasion. The aim of the papers being to obtain a conspectus of linguistic arguments for or against different renderings.

It will however be observed that the rule stated above has been transgressed in some instances, and in fairness to those who have observed the rule, any such transgression should not be considered part of the proceedings.

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“AND THE EARTH WAS WITHOUT FORM AND  
VOID.”

*An enquiry into the exact meaning of Genesis I, 2.*

By P. W. HEWARD.

THE suggestion that this verse unveils a condition when the earth “became” thus, as distinct from God’s creation in verse 1, demands reverent and prayerful care, in translation and comparison.

- (a) What would appear to be the meaning and implication of each word ?
- (b) If two renderings seem possible, do the context and language elsewhere clarify ?

(c) Are there confirmatory allusions in the Divine writings, or the reverse ?

All conclusions need testing by harmony with "all Scripture" (2 Tim. iii, 16), of which the inspiration and unity provide unique evidence.

The opening word "And" of verse 2 is significant. It seems to place verse 1 alone, and introduce in verse 2 a different event.\* In verse 2 the *noun* is before the verb, whereas in all the subsequent verses (till ch. ii, 4) the *verb* comes first in the Hebrew (Lit. "and-said God," etc.). The verb in verse 2 that follows earth (הָיָה, *hayah*) is said, in the Oxford Hebrew Lexicon to signify, "Fall out, come to pass, become, be." It is important to see that the Kal, or simple conjugation of the verb, does have the force "become." In standard Hebrew translations of the New Testament (Delitzsch and Salkinson-Ginsburg) the Kal is employed for the Greek *γίνομαι* (*ginomai*, become) in more than half the occurrences in Ephesians and Colossions,—and no other conjugation. Genesis i, 3–8, the immediate context has the Kal of the same verb as in verse 2 nine times. The ancient Septuagint renders eight by "become." The A.V. elsewhere has both "be" and "become"—the former may include a change (e.g., "should have been," Isa. i, 9). Moreover, our definitional or descriptive "be" is often *unexpressed* in Hebrew (hence the italics in Gen. vi, 5, Ex. 6, 6). This form of speech is not found in Genesis i, 2.

Stronger evidence still is afforded by Exodus vii, 9, where the Kal is explained in verse 15 by "turned" (both with הָיָה, *l*) and verses 17 and 20 "turned to blood" (*cf.* Ps. 78, 44, 105, 29) are elucidated by verse 19 (Kal, *without* הָיָה, *l*).

New Testament quotations corroborate. The "Septuagint is not always employed: there are many variations. God's own approval of *γίνομαι* (*ginomai*, become) for the Kal in Matthew xxi, 42, and Romans ix, 29, is clear.

Let us now come to less technical points :

Verse 2 contains two sentences—concerning (1) the *earth*, (2) the *deep*. The descriptive words are rendered (a) "without form," (b) "void" and (c) "darkness."

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\* 1 Kings xv, 6, 16, 32 illustrate, with the same form. In like manner, the beginning of *each* "day" with "And God said" differentiates verse 2.

The first occurs twenty times in Scripture, eleven in Isaiah. The renderings are italicized.

	A. V.	R. V.
Deut. xxxii, 10	“Waste howling wilderness”	—
1 Samuel xii, 21	“Vain things,” “vain” (twice)	—
Job. vi, 18	“To nothing”	“Into the waste.”
Job. xii, 24	“A wilderness”	—
Job. xxvi, 7	“The empty place”	“Empty space.”
Psalms cvii, 40	“The wilderness”	“The waste.”
Isaiah xxiv, 10	“The city of confusion”	—
„ xxix, 21	“A thing of nought”	—
„ xxxiv, 11	“The line of confusion”	—
„ xl, 17	“Less than nothing and <i>vanity</i> ” ( <i>confusion</i> , R.V.M.)	—
„ xl, 23	“As <i>vanity</i> ( <i>confusion</i> , R.V.M.).	—
„ xli, 29	“Their molten images are wind and <i>confusion</i> .”	—
„ xliv, 9	“All of them <i>vanity</i> ” ( <i>confusion</i> , R.V.M.)	—
„ xlv, 18	“He created it not <i>in vain</i> ” (“A waste” R.V. text.)	—
„ xlv, 19	“I said not, Seek ye Me <i>in vain</i> (as <i>in a waste</i> R.V.M.)	—
„ xlix, 4	“My strength <i>for nought</i> ”	—
„ lix, 4	“They trust in <i>vanity</i> .”	—
Jeremiah iv, 23	“The earth . . . <i>without form</i> .”	“Waste.”

Not one passage suggests the beginning of an excellent yet unfinished work: many imply the exact opposite. Nor can the element of Divine judgment be eliminated from most. Even one that might seem distinct is not without such thoughts in the context (Job xxvi, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13). Does not God guide us by His consistent testimony, and help us by comparison, in accord with the unity of Scripture? And the omission of the word “heaven”, in this scene of waste, is full of instruction.

The second term בָּרוּךְ (vohu) only comes twice elsewhere, in both cases significantly added to the word just cited (Isa. xxxiv, 11, *emptiness*, Jer. iv, 23, *void*), and thus never alone. Observe that these words are kept in the *same order*, the first example of emphasis by “rhymed-sound.” And the other verses are most definite as to judgment, on Edom and Palestine (or the earth). “Land” is mentioned in each, and there is a reference to darkness (Isa. xxxiv, 4).

If a human writer should employ two rare words thus, and intend to convey entirely different meanings, we should be surprised. There is something far more than a return to a preparatory condition, as some have thought. The Author of Scripture is

perfect in wisdom, and has written to instruct us. An opposite meaning in Genesis i would require strongest contextual evidence.

“Darkness.” This word is *not* associated with the description “good” in Genesis i, 4, nor is it said to be made by God: rather is an antithesis suggested. And frequent use elsewhere would confirm this (e.g., Ps. cv, 28, Isa. v, 30, xiii, 10, Joel ii, 2, Amos v, 18, 20, Zeph. i, 15). But is not “darkness” God’s “secret place”? Yes, in judgment and the awe of Sinai, with bounds about its mount. (Deut. iv, 11). Yet who would identify this with Psalm civ, 2, or 1 Timothy vi, 16? At the end of Scripture we have “the blackness of darkness for ever” (Jude. 13), and the abyss contrasted with “the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof” (Rev. xxi, 23). The final emphasis, too, on “there was no more sea” (Rev. xxi, 1) is significant.

Returning to all the three descriptive words, the writer submits that their use by God would afford accumulative *probability* of a *change from* an earlier condition of harmony with God’s glory.

But *probability* is not certainty. Nor are we accepting any testimony outside Scripture. Assumption, overstatement, and disparagement of others, to gain a point hurriedly, are sin. Do other verses of Holy Writ refer to this passage? Some have been brought forward against what is here set forth. Should we not seek a Divine anointing? Its absence leads to bitterness, and deprives of the moral courage to own oneself wrong, and to seek *truth* alone. *One certainty from God* lays low every probability—however carefully, and even prayerfully, built up. God’s word must stand (Isa. xl, 8).

Genesis i, 31 and ii, 1-4 have been adduced. But does not i, 31 refer only to everything God had *made*? It does not assert the absence of results of *judgment*. Ch. ii, 1, does not state when the beginning was, but only the *completion*. Regarding ii, 3, it has been asserted that “created and made” (“created to make”, margin) is parallel, in Hebrew, with “hastened to find,” and should be rendered “creatively made,” and that “create” and “make” are “virtually synonymous.” But is this so? The verb “to find” is the complement of an *incomplete* verb “hasten.” Is this at all parallel? Why should not the infinitive here denote purpose? “Begin to do,” “command to do,”

“ observe to do ” illustrate the wide Hebrew use. See other ten examples of לעשת (l'asoth) in Genesis. Moreover “ make ” is carefully distinguished from “ create ” in ch. i, and its wider meaning throughout Scripture is illustrated by “ the souls that they had gotten ” (Gen. xii, 5), “ he hastened to dress it ” (Gen. xviii, 7), “ one lamb shalt thou offer ” (Num. xxviii, 4), and the references to “ keeping ” the passover ; in each case this verb.

The literal rendering “ created to make ” rather puts creation *first*, (as in Gen. i), and the “ making,” (which includes “ the fruit tree yielding fruit,” Gen. i, 11, the same verb), may well show God’s after-appointment and arrangement.

Genesis ii, 4, should not be read without noticing that it may imply by the word “ generations ” (see v, 1, x, 1) more than one time. It is *not* “ when they were created in the day,” etc. The comma, (preferably a semi-colon), indicates the two parts of the verse, the first associating “ the heavens and the earth ” with the word “ create ” without a time mark (lit : “ in their being, or having been, created ”), and the latter half, with the word “ made,” giving a time mark (“ day ”), inverting the order (“ earth and heavens ”) omitting the *article* (as in Gen. i, 8, 9, rather than verse i), and introducing, in *this* connection, the name LORD for the first time (in the inspired precision of the Divine Names in these sections), concerning Adam and the Lord God’s appointment to him.

These details are more than trivial, their very minuteness is the more significant : there is no parade, but a Divine harmony, only seen when the key is found.

Exodus xx, 11, is a difficulty only if, and when, we wrongly assume that “ make ” = “ create ”. *But* this ignores the perfect distinction of these very words in the Hebrew text. The six days are associated with the making, by the Holy Spirit, which is not synonymous with “ creation,” but may, as we have seen, follow. Hence not only is the difficulty removed, but the Holy Spirit’s deliberate choice of another verb may rather be confirmatory that we are on the right track.

Passages speaking of “ the beginning of the creation ” (Matt. xix, 4, Mark x, 6, see also John viii, 44) have been advanced to suggest there could not have been the creation of heaven and

earth before. But their context deals only with "man" (*cf.* Deut. iv, 32), and would rightly emphasize "the first man, Adam" (1 Cor. xv, 45). It is important to see that, though God is *from everlasting*, He gives us *little* information as to Himself ere the time of creating man, though referring to His covenant-redemption plan before the ages. That was no afterthought. In like manner, do not the prophets and the book of Revelation describe the Lord's kingdom on this earth, but speak little of conditions in "A new heaven and a new earth"? This may meet the objection that if Genesis i, 3-ii, 3, is not primeval creation we have *no* record of this. The *detail* here is appropriately of preparation for man, though, Genesis i, 1 and Job xxxviii *do* state that which God wishes us to know, ere Adam was formed.

Hebrews xi, 3, has been used as an objection, but it seems to the writer to be a Divine witness in support of the interval. What *Scriptural* authority at all have we for rendering *aἰῶνες* (*aiōnes*) by "worlds," or for the *plural* term "worlds" at all? *αἰών* (*aiōn*) is quite distinct from *κόσμος* (*kosmos*). The only seeming support (Heb. i, 2) speaks fittingly, in a context dealing with "times" (1), of making the "ages." Making is not only material with God (Acts ii, 36): times and seasons are in His authority and appointment. An unsupported meaning for a word should not be introduced when the normal one suffices. Hebrews xi alludes to a "word" of God before Abel (verse 4)—no reference to man. In connexion with His work in nature God's first recorded word immediately follows Gen. i, 2, with exact fulfilment. An "age" plainly followed: this verse unveils an "age" before, and their fitting together. The word "framed" is apt, being employed of mending a net (Mark i, 19). In Hebrews the three "fittings" of x, 5, xi, 3, xiii, 21, are impressive, and ch. xi, 3, would corroborate God's language elsewhere. The added witness that things now seen did not "*become out from*" (there is no word "made") things which do appear would deny "e-volution" and ascribe all to HIS fiat, as in Psalm xxxiii, 9, and the terms "see," "appear" are appropriate to the command "Let there be *light*."

Let us now examine references which may enhance the probability of the rendering "become" and of the interval. God will not confuse but guide His children, redeemed by the blood of His beloved Son.

Isaiah xlv, 18-19 contain the expressions “ create,” “ without form,” and “ darkness.” There is no doubt as to the allusion. Some have taken the words to mean God did not complete the work with “ tohu,” viewing that as a stepping stone. But the passage does not say this: the context does not seem to me to imply it. “ Tohu ” is ruled out from seeking Him (19) because he did not speak in darkness, but spoke righteousness. Should not “ tohu ” (“ in vain,” “ without form,”) be equally ruled out from His creative work? It seems in both verses to be associated with that which is judged. Whether we render (a) “ To be inhabited He formed it,” or (b) “ For the sabbath,” His work is contrasted with the desolation which “ tohu ” suggests—the more impressively when we remember Isaiah contains more than half its occurrences usually indicating reverse of initial blessing. If this verse were not in Scripture, and a commentary contained such allusions to the wording of Genesis i, would the writer’s standpoint be viewed as quite doubtful?

What is the testimony of 2 Corinthians iv, 6? Plainly it is based on Genesis i, 3, “ God, Who commanded the light to shine, out of the darkness, hath shined in our hearts.” Rightly we emphasize “ God,” *but* this does not alter the fact that the darkness typifies the heart of one removed from God’s glory. Such parallelism is not forced. To ignore would seem to make the full illustration void, or dim. We realize that God made man upright, even as in the beginning He “ created the heavens and the earth.” Then man was shut out from the garden, even as, we submit, the earth became desolate. Thus the references to “ the *Spirit* of the Lord ” (2 Cor. iii, 17-18) and to “ the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ ” are appropriate.

The order in Genesis reminds that when God’s Spirit quickens a sinner, the weight of judgment is lifted. Then we enjoy light, and bring forth “ fruit,” the climax in both first and second *half* of the week (Gen. i, 11, 28). May His glory be central even in an exposition of this character, for knowledge is vain, unless the Holy Spirit’s ministry of Christ leads to fruit, united with “ abiding ” in Him (John xv, 7), and with the obedience of love.

Does not Job xxxviii, 4-11 imply :—

- (a) There was *light* (“ the morning stars ”) when God laid earth’s foundations ?

(b) The sea broke forth *afterwards*, and *darkness* then covered it (9) ?

To maintain that darkness subsisted before light appears out of harmony with all Scripture revelation. "I form the light, and create darkness" (Isa. xlv, 7), occurs in a totally different context : but even there light is first.

Is any passage of Scripture exactly parallel with Psalm 104 ? It is a complete panorama. Beginning with God's personal glory (1, 2), before mentioning creation, it goes on, beyond the renewing of the face of this earth (30), to the closing judgments of 2 Peter, iii, 10, 11 (32), and, yet beyond, to the new heaven and new earth (35) "wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. iii, 13). We have the heavens before the earth (2), light first (4), the subsequent covering of earth with the deep (6) next God's voice (7), and a *second* ascending of the deep (8, Gen. vii), followed *then* (and not till then) by a fixed bound (9) of which the rainbow is a covenant remembrance to this day.

If our enquiry unfolds the perfect harmony of "All Scripture," the glory belongs to its Divine Author.