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UNDERSTANDING GENESIS 1:1-2 CORRECTLY

When I came into the Church of God over 40 years ago one of the things I learned from Mr. Armstrong was the correct understanding regarding what happened in the first two verses of the Book of Genesis. I clearly proved to my own satisfaction that Mr. Armstrong's explanation is correct. And that is what I still believe today, because I can prove that this explanation is correct.

However, in recent years I have at various times also come across people who refer to that explanation rather disparagingly as "the gap theory", a term coined by Protestant theologians in reference to this explanation, with the obvious intent of discrediting it.

I don't expect anyone who does not have God's Spirit to really understand the truth in this matter; that's the principle of Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 2:11. As far as people in the world are concerned, the best and clearest explanation cannot cross that barrier between God's truth and the natural human mind. And furthermore, in matters like this it is never a case of "the facts speak for themselves".

Anyone who is familiar with 2 Timothy 4:3-4 should realize that it is the facts themselves that are frequently denied and rejected. And it is impossible to convince people who deny the facts. That is one of the major ways in which Satan enslaves people; he persuades people to deny the facts, because an acceptance of the facts would break his power over mankind. Jesus Christ explained that it is acceptance of the truth that sets us free from Satan's hold (John 8:32). A denial of the facts maintains Satan's sway over mankind.

At any rate, we should never feel intimidated by the views of theologians who don't really understand the truth of God. People who make no effort to live by all of God's commandments (including the 4th one!) are cutting themselves off from a good understanding. So always take their views with a hefty pinch of salt.

David stated the following in Psalm 111.

The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom: A GOOD UNDERSTANDING HAVE ALL THEY THAT DO *HIS* COMMANDMENTS: his praise endureth for ever. (Psalm 111:10)

The corollary of this statement is that those people who do NOT obey God's commandments are also NOT going to have a good understanding. A good understanding is one of God's ways of REWARDING the people who obey Him. A good understanding is not a right; it is a reward for faithfulness!

So let's now examine these verses more closely. We'll start with verse 1.

GENESIS 1:1

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

Before we examine this verse, let's consider some grammatical facts. As far as nouns are concerned, here is what we have in four different languages:

1) In ENGLISH we have both, the definite article (i.e. "the") and an indefinite article (i.e. "a" or "an"). Thus in English we can say "a beginning" and we can say "the beginning" to help us differentiate between different events. These two different articles give us the ability to express ourselves more precisely and to differentiate. They enable us to minimize misunderstandings.

2) In HEBREW we have only the definite article (i.e. "ha"). So in Hebrew we can say either "beginning" when we mean "a beginning", or we can say "the beginning".

3) In biblical GREEK we also only have the definite article (i.e. "ho" and "he" and "to"). So in Greek we can say either "beginning" when we mean "a beginning", or we can say "the beginning".

4) But LATIN does not have any articles for nouns. There is no definite article and neither is there an indefinite article. So in Latin we do not readily have the ability to distinguish between "a beginning" and "the beginning". When in Latin we say "beginning", then that can mean "a beginning", but it can equally well mean "the beginning". This obviously creates room for misunderstandings. Where a speaker may want to convey the thought of "A beginning", the hearer may understand this as a reference to "THE beginning". We need to be aware of this grammatical shortcoming in the Latin language.

[COMMENT: There is a way in Latin to get around this absence of a definite article, and that is by using the pronoun and adjective "ille, illa, illud" for emphasis. This can have the general effect of the English definite article "the". But it isn't really the same as the definite article. And in the text of the Latin Vulgate version all the forms of "ille" combined are used far less often than the number of times we find the article "the" in the English language Bible. So in our discussion we can basically ignore this Latin "alternative to the definite article".]

These points are grammatical features for these different languages.

Now let's look at verse 1.

The five English words "In the beginning God created" are a translation of the three Hebrew words "bereshith bara Elohim". There is NO ARTICLE in this Hebrew expression. And it correctly means "In A beginning God created". If it was supposed to say "in THE beginning", then the Hebrew should read "bareshith", which is a combination of "be + hareshith".

In Hebrew the first word of every book became the name for that book. So the Hebrew name for Genesis is "Bereshith", which means "in A beginning". By becoming the name for this first book of the Bible, it ensured that the correct form would always be preserved. So there is no question whatsoever that the correct translation of the Hebrew text here should read "In A beginning God (had) created".

The first translation of the Hebrew Scriptures was the Greek LXX. This Greek text reads as follows: "En arche epoiesen ho theos", which translates as "in A beginning had created (the) God". If this Greek text was supposed to say "in THE beginning", then it should have read "en te arche epoiesen ho theos". But that is not the case. Both, the Hebrew text and the Greek LXX text are anarthrous in this expression.

So the LXX clearly translates the opening of Genesis 1:1 as "in A beginning". This is a correct translation of the Hebrew expression involved.

Now we come to the next translation, the Latin Vulgate version. Remember that Latin does not have any articles for nouns. So the Latin text reads:

"in principio creavit Deus caelum et terram". The first four words at the same time means "in A beginning God created", and also "in THE beginning God created". The last three words at the same time mean

"heaven and earth", and also "the heaven and the earth". Since the reader does not have the opportunity to personally question the writer of this Latin text, therefore IT IS UP TO THE READER TO DECIDE how to translate this expression.

Can you understand this problem of ambiguity here?

Now let's look at the first English translation of this verse. That was the 1395 John Wycliffe Old Testament. Wycliffe and his assistant (i.e. Dr. Nicholas de Hereford of Oxford) unfortunately made this translation from the ambiguous Latin Vulgate text. Here is this translation.

In the bigynnyg God made of nouyt heuene and erthe. (1395 Wycliffe translation, original spelling)

[COMMENT: In old English texts you may at times see the letter "u" used for "v", and vice versa.]

First of all notice that Wycliffe translated the Latin "in principio" as "in THE beginning". This reflects Wycliffe's own understanding of this verse. Wycliffe did not consider either the Hebrew text or the Greek LXX text, both of which clearly state "in A beginning". All Wycliffe used was the ambiguous Latin text.

WYCLIFFE HERE INTRODUCED A MISTAKE INTO THIS VERSE!

Next, notice that while Wycliffe freely provided the article "the" in the translation of "in principio", he did NOT provide any definite articles in the translation of "caelum et terram". These three words Wycliffe translated as "heaven and earth", rather than as "THE heaven and THE earth". This illustrates how subjective the inclusion or omission of definite articles in any translation of a Latin text really is! It is always left up to the translator of a Latin text to decide for himself where to provide definite articles in his translation, and where to leave them out.

Notice also that Wycliffe introduced the words "of nought" or "out of nothing" (i.e. "of nouyt") into this verse. These words are not found in the Hebrew or Greek or Latin text, and were simply supplied by Wycliffe with the intention of clarifying the statement. Later versions would typically have printed such added words in italics.

While Wycliffe's rendering "in the beginning" was grammatically speaking a correct possible way to translate the Latin text, it unquestionably was a mistake when compared to the Hebrew text (and also to the Greek LXX text).

As I have already indicated, in this type of situation the reader of a Latin text can easily get the wrong end of the stick, and read a meaning into a text which was not intended by the original writer. How he translates this verse depends primarily on the frame of mind and the understanding with which the translator approaches this text. And Wycliffe approached Genesis 1:1 with a wrong understanding.

EVERY ENGLISH TRANSLATION SINCE THEN, THAT I HAVE LOOKED AT, HAS COPIED THIS MISTAKE FROM WYCLIFFE! THEY ALL RENDER THIS TEXT AS "IN THE BEGINNING".

To summarize thus far: I have shown that the Hebrew text correctly reads "in A beginning", and that this was correctly translated into Greek in the LXX. I have also shown that the ambiguous Latin text of this verse is the original source for the English mistranslation that reads "in the beginning".

Now while most (or even all?) scholars may acknowledge that there is no definite article in the Hebrew

text, they will insist that there are "other reasons" why this is supposed to be a definite statement. But they are wrong! Scriptures like 1 Cor 2:11 and Psalm 111:10 explain why they are wrong. But the facts are not going to change the views of such people.

We should also note that the Hebrew word for "heaven" is plural, and should really be translated as "heavens". The reason for this mistake is that the Latin "caelum" in the Vulgate is the accusative singular case. (The Greek "ouranon" in the LXX is also singular.) Many translations have acknowledged that it should correctly read "heavens".

Let's now look at a statement in the New Testament, the opening words in the Gospel of John.

JOHN 1:1-2

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

The Greek text rendered as "in the beginning was the Word" is "en arche en ho logos". Here "beginning" is also anarthrous. It does NOT say "en te arche en ho logos". The Greek literally says "in beginning was the Word", meaning "in A beginning was the Word".

This is also the case for verse 2. Where this verse in English reads "in THE beginning with God", the Greek text reads "en arche pros ton theon", which means "in beginning with (the) God", i.e. "in A beginning with God". This expression also does not contain an article for "beginning".

So are most scholars going to admit that therefore John 1:1-2 is also only speaking about "A beginning", rather than about "THE beginning"? Of course not! Are they going to insist that the definite article is implied for "arche"? Certainly!

The point is that people are going to believe what they want to believe. And the facts are not going to change that for the vast majority of people. The best we can often hope for is that scholars will actually admit to the facts which they then do their best to explain away.

Let's now take a different perspective. Let's try to see this from God's point of view.

WHY WOULD GOD POSSIBLY TELL US ABOUT "THE BEGINNING"?

There is no way we can conceive of God having had a beginning, because the question would then be: "by what power did God come into existence?". Both, God the Father and also Jesus Christ are "without beginning". From everything we can understand both have always existed.

At some point those two eternal Beings determined to create a Family of Beings like themselves. And along with the beings they then created (i.e. mankind) They also provided "an instruction manual", the Bible. A key element in that plan to create a Family of Beings is the potential for human beings to either be given immortal life at some point, or to be permanently blotted out, to become as though they had never existed. Both of these extremes are built into that plan.

Now in addition to telling us briefly about how human beings came into existence, God decided to also include in that instruction manual a few very brief references to the time before man's creation. Why did God include some references to time and events before man's existence? And what was God going to include? What does man at this stage really need to know? Was God going to expose the details about GOD'S PAST ETERNAL EXISTENCE to man?

Why would God possibly do that? What purpose would that serve? What business of man is it to know about whatever time God Himself might think of as "THE beginning"?

THAT KNOWLEDGE IS NOT MAN'S BUSINESS AT ALL!

As it is, we are already extremely presumptuous beings. When given a few facts, we infer, impute, imply and insinuate any number of things that were not stated. Sometimes our inferences are justified, and sometimes they are not justified. We commonly "hear" things that were not even said. When told some things, we often assume a host of other things. We seldom stick to the bare facts that have been presented to us. We pride ourselves in being able to extract additional information from some basic facts that may have been given to us.

When people freely provide us with some information they often don't realize that in that process they have sometimes also given us some other information which they did not really want us to have. That's just the way things work.

BUT THAT IS NOT A GAME WE CAN PLAY WITH GOD!

If there is any information that God for His own reasons simply does not want us to have access to, then there is **ABSOLUTELY** no way that we will get access to that information. There is no way we will be able to infer, impute or imply information which God does not want us to have. (COMMENT: Apply this point to prophecies.)

On the other hand, when we can clearly infer some things from certain other things that are said, it means that this is information to which God does want us to have access.

God explained through Moses that "THE SECRET THINGS BELONG UNTO THE LORD OUR GOD, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever" (see Deuteronomy 29:29). God fully controls what is revealed and what information remains hidden. Sometimes we may be able to infer other information, and at other times we may not be able to infer anything beyond what is clearly stated.

So back to what God has revealed in the instruction manual.

Did God in Genesis 1:1 want to tell us about "THE beginning"? NO! God simply wanted to refer to the time when God created the universe. In this passage God had no intention of referring to anything God did before the universe was created. Now there are things that God the Father and Jesus Christ did before They created this physical creation. But those things were not man's business and God had no intention of mentioning them back in Genesis 1. But neither did God want to imply that the creation of the physical universe was "THE beginning", because that is not the case.

Therefore God **VERY DELIBERATELY** inspired Moses to write: "in A beginning God created". This was "THE" beginning for the physical universe, but it was only "A" beginning in the greater context of God's existence and of eternity.

Well then, did God want to tell us about "THE" beginning in John 1:1? NO! In John 1:1 God is simply explaining to us A **RELATIONSHIP** that exists between God the Father and Jesus Christ. That relationship certainly predates the creation of the physical universe. But again, God's intention with this description was not to discuss "THE" beginning of time or of that relationship. How that relationship between these two powerful Beings with free wills came about, or whether that relationship always existed is not the subject of this verse. How or when or why this relationship came about is at present also not man's business to know! That is "privileged information", which is probably reserved for those

who eventually become a part of God's Family.

John 1:1 is God's way of telling us that at a certain point in time, before the creation of the physical universe, a very specific relationship existed between God the Father and Jesus Christ. This verse picks up the story at a certain point in time, without necessarily claiming that point in time to have been "THE" beginning. Very possibly that relationship has always existed? But that is not the point of this verse one way or the other. All we need to know is that this relationship predates the creation of the material universe.

And so God inspired John to write: "in A beginning was the Word".

We don't like that, because it does not allow us to infer and imply the things we want to infer and imply. It doesn't fit in with our preconceived ideas. And since we are usually not prepared to change our preconceived ideas (a necessary step to freeing us from Satan's slavery), THEREFORE the only option open to us is to read this passage differently from the way John wrote it. John may very well have written "in A beginning was the Word", but we think that WE KNOW that John really meant "in THE beginning was the Word". That's how we reason and that is how we reject facts that we don't like.

We need to understand that God was not about to tell us anything about THE beginning from God's point of view. That is simply not our business to know! And so both, Genesis 1:1 and also John 1:1, speak about A BEGINNING. It doesn't matter whether every Hebrew and Greek scholar in the world asserts that these verses must be read as "in THE beginning". God inspired both verses to read "in A beginning", and that is how God really wants us to understand it.

So now let's go back to the account in Genesis, because there really are some things that God has revealed in that account.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GENESIS 1:1

At the very start of the first book of the Bible God tells us that "in a beginning God created the heavens and the earth".

By deliberately not saying "in the beginning" God wanted us to understand that SOME THINGS had occurred BEFORE "this beginning" takes place. If this is only "a beginning" and not "the beginning", then we need to ask: "so what happened before THIS beginning?" We may not get all the answers, but we should ask nonetheless.

The omission of the direct article here is intended to enable us to place into their correct time context certain other events that are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. That's the principle of Isaiah 28:10-11, that God enables us to correctly put together "here a little" with "there a little".

THE OPENING WORD OF THE WHOLE BIBLE ALREADY ANTICIPATES THIS PRINCIPLE!

So are there any other places that speak about "this beginning" in Genesis 1:1? Yes, there are. We have already examined John 1, which shows that God the Father and Jesus Christ already had a very specific relationship before the universe was created. And John 1:3 further reveals that Jesus Christ is the One who did that creating in Genesis 1:1.

The same God who is recorded as speaking in Genesis 1 (i.e. Jesus Christ) is also recorded as speaking in the Book of Job. After Job had repeatedly pronounced his own righteousness, God eventually confronted Job directly in chapter 38. In confronting Job God referred to the very action of

creation that is described in Genesis 1:1. Notice:

WHERE WAST THOU WHEN I LAID THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE EARTH? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; WHEN THE MORNING STARS SANG TOGETHER, and ALL THE SONS OF GOD SHOUTED FOR JOY? (Job 38:4-7)

God "laid the foundations of the earth" in Genesis 1:1. So God is here speaking to Job about the time when God "created the heavens and the earth". The references to "morning stars" and to "sons of God" are references to angels.

God here states that the angels were present when God created the heavens and the earth. Therefore God the Father and Jesus Christ had created the angels before Jesus Christ then created the universe.

Consider the following:

In this section God is speaking to Job about a time BEFORE the creation of man. Man, the ultimate pinnacle of the creation account in Genesis chapter 1, is not even mentioned in God's discussion with Job. One of God's main points there is: "Job, all these things happened before I even created human beings; so where were you, Job?"

The events God describes to Job are covered by the statement in Genesis 1:1. But the events also clearly take place BEFORE Genesis 1:26, when God created man. But we also see all the angels SHOUTING FOR JOY. They are extremely excited by what they are witnessing. Can we see that?

So the question arises:

AT WHAT POINT IN THE GENESIS 1 ACCOUNT DID THE ANGELS "SHOUT FOR JOY"? At the end of the first day? At the end of the 2nd or 3rd or 4th or 5th day? It is clear that they shouted for joy at some point before the end of the 6th day, by which time man had been created.

So when in terms of Genesis 1 did the angels shout for joy?

When we examine Genesis 1:2 it will become very apparent that the condition described in that specific verse could NEVER be something about which any angel of God could possibly have shouted for joy! It is absolutely, without any shadow of doubt, impossible to rejoice about any part of the description of the conditions implied by Genesis 1:2. So verse 2 is emphatically eliminated as the time when the angels shouted for joy.

Now it doesn't really make sense to claim that the angels shouted for joy on the 1st or 2nd or 3rd or 4th or 5th day of that Genesis 1 week, does it? How could they possibly shout for joy at any time before the work God was doing had been completed?

I realize that worldly scholars cannot grasp this. But can you, a member of God's Church, understand that the only possible place in the Genesis 1 account where the angels could have shouted for joy is AT THE END OF VERSE 1 AND BEFORE THE START OF VERSE 2?!

That is really the only possible place in Genesis 1 into which we can insert God's statements in Job 38:4-7. The words in Job 38 were spoken by God and are therefore absolutely above question. And they MUST fit in somewhere, because the creation of the earth is the subject matter in both, Genesis 1 and

also in this passage in the Book of Job.

When God had completed creating the heavens and the earth in verse 1, THAT is when the angels sang and shouted for joy. THAT CREATION WAS SOMETHING TO SING ABOUT! And this means that it had to be a completed creation of the universe.

Even before we examine it more closely, we should note that verse 2 has an extremely negative "tenor". The singing and joyful shouting of the angels had most certainly stopped before the start of verse 2.

So note! We have not yet examined verse 2. But God's words in Job 38:4-7 have already made clear that something must have happened between verses 1 and 2 in Genesis 1.

In Genesis 1:1 the English verb "created" is a translation of the Hebrew verb "bara", which is used in the perfect tense. In Hebrew grammar the perfect tense expresses A COMPLETED ACTION IN THE PAST.

In Genesis 1:31 this same tense, when used with the verb "to do" or "to make", is translated PERFECTLY CORRECTLY as "He HAD MADE"! And in Genesis 1:1 the perfect tense of the verb "to create" should be translated EQUALLY CORRECTLY as "HAD CREATED"! (More on the perfect tense later.)

A correct translation of the Hebrew text of Genesis 1:1 should read:

"IN A BEGINNING GOD HAD CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH."

This is a grammatically correct translation of the Hebrew text!

By the end of this verse the whole universe is in existence. And, more specifically, by the end of this verse THE EARTH is in existence. And the state of the heavens and the earth is such that the angels sing about it and shout for joy. [As an aside, just what does it take to get spirit beings to become so excited?]

Before we look at verse 2, let's for a moment consider the cultural circumstances in which the early English translations were made.

EUROPE IN THE 15TH AND 16TH CENTURIES

Ancient Greek astronomers had developed the geocentric belief, according to which the earth was the center of the universe, and the heavenly bodies (supposedly) revolved around the earth. Prior to the voyages of Christopher Columbus there was also the widespread notion that the earth is flat, like a disc.

It was not till the early 1500's that Copernicus (1473 - 1543) put forward the concept of heliocentrism, that the sun is really the body around which the earth and the other planets revolve. And a little later Galileo Galilei (1564 - 1642) built a telescope which enabled him to observe the moons of Jupiter, etc., and thus provide scientific evidence for the heliocentric model of the universe. However, the majority of scientists at that time still rejected the ideas of Copernicus and Galileo. As late as 1633 Galileo (then aged 69) was hauled before the Inquisition in Rome and forced to renounce his support of the Copernican view of the universe.

Now the John Wycliffe Translation was made well before the time of Copernicus. Martin Luther's German Translation, the Matthew Bible, the Coverdale Bible, the Great Bible, the Bishops Bible, the Douay Rheims Bible, and even the King James Version were all made around the time of Copernicus and

Galileo Galilei, and well before Galileo's trial in 1633.

Understanding the time in history when these various translators lived to some degree explains how they translated these first verses of Genesis. How they themselves perceived the universe obviously influenced how they would translate any statements about the creation of the heavens and the earth. We should not assume that the various Bible translators correctly understood the things Copernicus and Galileo Galelei were trying to explain. Many prominent scientists still accepted the geocentric view of creation, and this would also have been the case for many of the Bible translators.

When we look at the first two verses of Genesis, it is not a simple case of saying: the translators of the Old Testament simply translated the Hebrew text into English. As we'll see in a moment, the experts of biblical Hebrew acknowledge that the words in verse 2 are difficult to define. Hebrew went through several centuries during which it was a dead language, before being revived again. The result is that in some cases the meanings of some lesser-used words are not completely clear even to the scholars.

The translations of Genesis 1:2 fall into two broad categories, which overlap to some degree. Firstly, there are those that have looked at the Hebrew text through the view of the universe that was commonly accepted during their time. And then there are those translations that have tried to accurately translate the two key Hebrew words in this verse without being influenced by any particular view of cosmology.

Now let's examine two key Hebrew words in Genesis 1:2.

KEY HEBREW WORDS IN GENESIS 1:2

Where the KJV reads: "and the earth was without form and void, and darkness ...", the Hebrew text reads:

"ve-ha-arets hayeta tohu va-bohu ve-choshek ..."

The prefixes "ve" and "va" mean "and"; "arets" is a form of "erets" which means "earth"; "hayeta" is the qal perfect feminine singular of the verb "hayah" and in this tense it means "became" or "had become"; "choshek" means darkness. So if we leave the two Hebrew words "tohu" and "bohu" untranslated, then this text reads as follows:

"And the earth became tohu and bohu, and darkness ..."

THE WORD "TOHU"

The THEOLOGICAL WORDBOOK OF THE OLD TESTAMENT says the following for "tohu":

"Since the word has no certain cognates in other languages, its meaning must be determined SOLELY from its OT contexts. ... In most (if not all) of these cases, *tohu* has a negative or pejorative sense."

This is an admission that the exact meaning of "tohu" has been lost, and that THE ONLY WAY the correct meaning can possibly be established is by looking at the context of every place where this word is used in the OT. In plain language: there isn't a single scholar of Hebrew anywhere in the world who can establish the correct meaning of "tohu" in any way except by looking at how this word is used in other contexts. But that is something we ourselves can also do.

In his COMMENTARY on this verse ADAM CLARKE wrote: "The original terms *tohu* and *bohu*, which we

translate *without form and void*, are OF UNCERTAIN ETYMOLOGY; but in this place, and wherever else they are used, they convey the idea of *confusion* and *disorder*." Adam Clarke agrees with the statement in TWOT.

The word "tohu" is used 20 times in the OT. in 19 different verses. In the following 18 Scriptures the translation of "tohu" is given in capital letters for easier recognition.

Deuteronomy 32:10 He found him in a desert land, and IN THE WASTE howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.

1Samuel 12:21 And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after VAIN THINGS, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they *are* VAIN. ("tohu" is used twice in this verse)

Job 6:18 The paths of their way are turned aside; they go TO NOTHING, and perish.

Job 12:24 He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander IN A WILDERNESS *where there is no way*.

Job 26:7 He stretcheth out the north over THE EMPTY PLACE, *and* hangeth the earth upon nothing.

Psalms 107:40 He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander IN THE WILDERNESS, *where there is no way*.

Isaiah 24:10 The city OF CONFUSION is broken down: every house is shut up, that no man may come in.

Isaiah 29:21 That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing OF NOUGHT.

Isaiah 34:11 But the cormorant and the bittern shall possess it; the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it: and he shall stretch out upon it the line OF CONFUSION, and the stones OF EMPTINESS (Hebrew "bohu").

COMMENT: The last part of this verse reads: "the line of tohu and the stones of bohu".

Isaiah 40:17 All nations before him *are* as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and VANITY.

Isaiah 40:23 That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as VANITY.

Isaiah 41:29 Behold, they *are* all vanity; their works *are* nothing: their molten images *are* wind and CONFUSION.

Isaiah 44:9 They that make a graven image *are* all of them VANITY; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they *are* their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed.

Isaiah 45:18 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 formed it to be inhabited: I *am* the LORD; and *there is none else*.

Isaiah 45:19 I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me IN VAIN: I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.

Isaiah 49:4 Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength FOR NOUGHT, and in vain: yet surely my judgment *is* with the LORD, and my work with my God.

Isaiah 59:4 None calleth for justice, nor *any* pleadeth for truth: they trust IN VANITY, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.

Jeremiah 4:23 I beheld the earth, and, lo, *it was* WITHOUT FORM, and VOID (Hebrew "bohu"); and the heavens, and they *had* no light.

By examining the contexts in the above 18 Scriptures, we can know as much about the meaning of "tohu" as any scholar of Hebrew might come to understand.

To summarize all the above Scriptures: The word "tohu" is NEVER used in a positive sense! It is ALWAYS something bad! It refers to things like a desert wasteland, a destroyed city, confusion, emptiness and things of no value! It is used in the context of being a penalty or A CONSEQUENCE OF SINS.

Now the claim that God ORIGINALLY created the earth in a state of "tohu" is a huge criticism of Almighty God and of His creative power! It implies that God originally created A THING OF NO VALUE!

CAN WE UNDERSTAND WHY SATAN WOULD WANT MAN TO BELIEVE THAT GOD ORIGINALLY CREATED THE WORLD IN A STATE OF TOHU AND BOHU? THIS IDEA IS A WAY TO DISPARAGE GOD ALMIGHTY!

And can we recognize that Satan wants humanity to believe that GOD was really responsible for THE MESS THAT SATAN'S REBELLION HAD PRODUCED?

Isaiah 45:18 specifically says that God did NOT create the earth in a state of "tohu"! "Tohu" is not the way this earth started out.

In Jeremiah 4 the prophet is speaking about a time of war and of penalties being poured out on Israel. In that context Jeremiah 4:23 draws THE IDENTICAL PICTURE to Genesis 1:2. Jeremiah says (KJV): "I beheld the earth, and lo *it was* WITHOUT FORM AND VOID; and the heavens they had no light". That's identical to the first part of Genesis 1:2. And here in Jeremiah this is a description of A PENALTY that God is deliberately pouring out on Israel.

[COMMENT: The verb "was" in this verse is not in the text. The translators should really have provided the verb "became" for this verse; i.e. "And lo it became tohu and bohu".]

A description of a penalty in one place cannot possibly be a description of God's original creation which the angels sang about in another place.

The Theological Wordbook, quoted above, is perfectly correct when it states that the word "tohu" is invariably used in a pejorative sense, meaning that in every case it refers to things that have been made worse. And there are no exceptions to this assessment. This is also true for Genesis 1:2. There it also describes "things that have been made worse".

THE WORD "BOHU"

The word "bohu" is only used 3 times in the Bible. Some people claim that it is derived from an unused root that means "void, waste, emptiness", which may well be correct, though Adam Clarke states that its

etymology is uncertain. One helpful clue is that in all 3 occurrences it is used together with "tohu". The 3 Scriptures, all quoted above, are: Genesis 1:2 and Isaiah 34:11 and Jeremiah 4:23.

The THEOLOGICAL WORDBOOK OF THE OLD TESTAMENT says the following:

Always occurring with *tohu* waste, *bohu* describes the primordial condition of the earth, void at the beginning of creation, (*Genesis 1:2*) or MADE EMPTY BY GOD'S JUDGMENT. (*Isaiah 34:11*; *Jeremiah 4:23*).

By "primordial" they mean "existing from the beginning".

This "primordial" statement by TWOT is clearly a biased interpretation, rather than an objective factual statement. They have INTERPRETED Genesis 1:2 to be a description of the "primordial condition of the earth". This is in spite of openly stating that in both other instances where these two words are used together (i.e. Isaiah 34:11 and Jeremiah 4:23) this refers to HAVING BEEN MADE EMPTY BY GOD'S JUDGMENT.

So note carefully:

TWOT recognizes that in two places the expression "tohu and bohu" refers to the condition of having been made empty by God's judgment. These two places are very clear and unambiguous. Yet TWOT still claims that in the only other place where this expression is used (Genesis 1:2) it supposedly refers to "the primordial condition".

Their opinion regarding Genesis 1:2 is an obvious bias. And it is unjustified.

THE TRUTH is that in Genesis 1:2 the expression "tohu and bohu" refers to EXACTLY THE SAME TYPE OF THING that it refers to in the only other two places where this expression is used! It refers to A PENALTY FOR TRANSGRESSIONS. It refers to CONSEQUENCES OF SINS. It is only in magnitude, and not in type, that Genesis 1:2 differs from the other two references.

Now let's examine some translations of Genesis 1:2. Most translations are agreed in translating the Hebrew "bohu" as "void" or as "empty space". Where they differ is in their translations of "tohu". Those that render this word as "without form" (or formless, etc.) were influenced by the general view of cosmology that was accepted at that time. And those translations that render this as "waste" (or desolate, etc.) were trying to convey the meaning of the Hebrew word "tohu".

THE WYCLIFFE TRANSLATION AND THE VULGATE TRANSLATION

Here is the 1395 John Wycliffe Translation, made from the Latin Vulgate text.

Forsothe the erthe was idel and voide, and derknessis weren on the face of depthe; and the Spiryte of the Lord was borun on the wattris. (Genesis 1:2, original spelling)

In this text "forsothe" means "in truth", "idel" means "to become useless, waste, idle", "voide" means "void, an empty space", "borun" means "to bear, be borne", and "wattris" means "waters".

In modern English this Wycliffe Translation would read:

In truth THE EARTH HAD BECOME USELESS (or WASTE) AND AN EMPTY SPACE, and darkness was upon the face of the deep ...

This translation was not influenced by the then current view of cosmology. Rather, it was an attempt to accurately translate this verse into English.

Since this was based on the Latin Vulgate text, let's now see how the 425 Vulgate rendered this verse into Latin.

terra autem erat inanis et vacua et tenebrae super faciem abyssi et spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas (Genesis 1:2, Vulgate)

Translating this Latin text word for word, we get:

(the) earth however was (or had become) empty (or "empty space") and empty and darkness (or "darknesses") upon (or "above") (the) face of the deep and (the) spirit of God was borne (or carried) upon (or "above") (the) waters.

The Latin words "inanis" and "vacua" both mean "empty". Where "inanis" means empty in the sense of nothing in it, "vacua" means empty in the sense of unoccupied.

So a translation of this Latin text, which was used by Wycliffe, would read:

"however the earth was (or had become) empty and empty and darkness (was) upon the face of the deep and the spirit of God was borne above the waters."

The Latin text had translated the Hebrew word "tohu" with "inanis" and the Hebrew word "bohu" with "vacua". Now the Latin words "inanis" and "vacua" are basically synonyms, both meaning "empty". However, while the Hebrew words "tohu" and "bohu" clearly rhyme, they are not necessarily synonyms. "Tohu" and "bohu" should be viewed as complementary, but without being synonymous.

Note!

Jerome, in preparing the Vulgate translation, wasn't really all that clear on the correct meaning of the Hebrew word "tohu". That is why he translated "tohu" as a synonym of "bohu". But it is also a fact that today, in order to establish the meaning of some difficult Hebrew words with uncertain meanings and uncertain pronunciations, modern scholars of Hebrew actually look to the Vulgate and to the Catholic "church fathers" of that time for some guidance. This is to help them bridge the gap when Hebrew was a dead language.

What the Latin Vulgate text of Genesis 1:2 tells us is that the PRECISE meaning of "tohu" has REALLY BEEN LOST! And it had already been lost by Jerome's time (around 400 A.D.). Otherwise Jerome would not have treated "tohu" as a synonym of "bohu". Like modern scholars, Jerome also only established a general meaning for "tohu" by examining all the other OT places where this word is used. And that examination Jerome didn't even do particularly well.

But the main point to keep in mind here is that this rendering was certainly influenced by Jerome's own views regarding the creation and the nature of the universe. Without CORRECTLY understanding what had really happened when God created this universe and thereafter, it was virtually impossible for

Jerome to present a correct picture in his translation. We should keep this in mind. So for the expression "tohu and bohu" he simply presented two synonyms, both meaning "empty". He was guessing!

In this regard Wycliffe came closer to the intended meaning of the Hebrew expression. Instead of rendering this as "empty and empty", Wycliffe rendered this as "useless and empty", or as "waste and empty". Wycliffe's translation made "tohu" A VALUE STATEMENT (i.e. useless or waste or idle), and it made "bohu" A CONTENT STATEMENT (i.e. void or empty). Wycliffe was on the correct track.

Before we look at various different translations of this verse, let's note some meanings and synonyms.

IDLE (used by Wycliffe) meant: useless, waste, worthless, etc.

VOID means: empty

WITHOUT FORM: synonyms are unformed and formless

THE LXX TRANSLATION OF GENESIS 1:2

At this point we might also briefly consider the Greek LXX translation of "tohu and bohu" in Genesis 1:2. For "tohu and bohu" the LXX here reads "aoratos kai akataskeuastos". Greek "aoratos" means "invisible", "kai" means "and", and "akataskeuastos" means "without preparation". So the Greek LXX literally translates this expression as "INVISIBLE AND WITHOUT PREPARATION". This meaning is deliberately disguised in the official English translation of the LXX, which reads: "But the earth was UNSIGHTLY AND UNFURNISHED". Here "unsightly" is deliberately vague, an obvious appeal to readers to apply the modern meaning of "unsightly" to this text.

The point is that Scriptures like Colossians 1:15-16 and Romans 1:20 and 1 Timothy 1:17 make quite clear that "aoratos" really does mean INVISIBLE! And thus the LXX translation of Genesis 1:2 is not only poor, it is totally unacceptable! There is no way that the Hebrew text of Genesis 1:2 means "and the earth was invisible"! The author of this LXX text (i.e. Origen) was obviously clueless as to what "tohu" really means!

However, this LXX rendering of "invisible" had a major influence on how later translators viewed the word "tohu". It was this concept of "invisible" that became the stepping-stone to the expression "without form". We should be aware of this line of thinking.

Now let's see which translations fall into which group regarding the translation of "tohu and bohu".

GROUPING THE DIFFERENT TRANSLATIONS TOGETHER

- 1) THE GREEK LXX translates this as "INVISIBLE AND UNPREPARED".
- 2) THE LATIN VULGATE basically translated this as "EMPTY AND EMPTY".
- 3) THE WYCLIFFE TRANSLATION translated this as "idle and void", meaning "WASTE AND EMPTY".

Translations that have followed this Wycliffe translation and used the expression "waste and empty", including the use of synonyms, are:

- 1522 Martin Luther's GERMAN TRANSLATION

- 1884 DARBY TRANSLATION
- 1885 ERV
- 1901 ASV
- 1898 YOUNG'S LITERAL TRANSLATION ("waste and void")
- some Dutch and Afrikaans translations based on Luther's translation

4) Translations that stuck with the Vulgate rendering of "empty and empty", but using the synonyms "void and empty" are:

- 1535 COVERDALE TRANSLATION
- 1537 MATTHEW BIBLE
- 1584 DOUAY RHEIMS TRANSLATION
- 1922 MOFFATT TRANSLATION ("void and vacant")

5) Translations that were influenced by the LXX and the cosmic world view of the 1500's, and thus introduced the wording "without form and void" (including synonyms for "without form") are:

- 1560 GENEVA BIBLE
- 1568 BISHOPS BIBLE
- 1611 KING JAMES VERSION
- 1833 WEBSTER BIBLE
- 1853 LEESER OLD TESTAMENT
- 1947 RSV
- 1985 GREEN'S LITERAL VERSION ("without form and empty")
- 1917 JPS ("unformed and void")
- 1977 NAS ("formless and void")
- 1984 NIV ("formless and empty")
- 1989 NRSV ("a formless void" = a formless emptiness??)
- 2008 WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE ("formless and empty")
- NEW CENTURY VERSION ("empty and had no form")

Apart from the four translations that copy the Vulgate's "empty and empty" translation, all these translations fall into the two major groups of "WASTE AND EMPTY" and "FORMLESS AND EMPTY".

The rendering "waste and empty" is based on evaluating the meaning of "tohu" as it is used in the other 18 Scriptures in the OT. The rendering "without form and empty", on the other hand, is BASED SQUARELY ON JOHN CALVIN! So the above list from the Geneva Bible to the New Century Version expresses John Calvin's interpretation of the creation account.

Let's look at John Calvin's comments.

JOHN CALVIN'S COMMENTARY ON GENESIS 1:2

The following text is a quotation from John Calvin's Commentary on Genesis 1:2.

"And the earth was without form and void. I shall not be very solicitous about the exposition of these two epithets, tohu and bohu. The Hebrews use them when THEY DESIGNATE ANYTHING EMPTY AND CONFUSED, or vain, and nothing worth. UNDOUBTEDLY MOSES PLACED THEM BOTH IN OPPOSITION TO ALL THOSE CREATED OBJECTS WHICH PERTAIN TO THE FORM, the ornament and the perfection of the world. Were we now to take away, I say, from the earth all that God added after the time here alluded to, then WE SHOULD HAVE THIS RUDE AND UNPOLISHED, OR RATHER SHAPELESS CHAOS. ... For the same reason he calls it the abyss and waters, since IN THAT MASS OF MATTER NOTHING WAS SOLID OR STABLE, NOTHING DISTINCT." (John Calvin's Commentary)

THIS IS THE ORIGIN OF THE "WITHOUT FORM" TRANSLATION FOR "TOHU"! John Calvin was the man who viewed the creation of the earth as starting out with "shapeless chaos" in which "nothing was solid" and "nothing was stable". Calvin was also clearly influenced by the LXX translation of this verse.

My comment here is: Who needs the theory of evolution and Charles Darwin when you can have John Calvin saying basically the same thing? These comments by Calvin planted the seeds for the idea of "theistic evolution" in modern religious thought. It all (supposedly) started with shapeless chaos in which nothing was solid or stable.

Anyway, the Geneva Translation was the first English translation to ever use the words "without form" because that is how John Calvin explained the creation. The wording "without form" was also intended to be more acceptable than the LXX "invisible". And every translation since then that has used the expression "without form and void" (including synonymous expressions like "without form and empty", "formless and empty", etc.) is doing nothing more than presenting John Calvin's very distorted perception of the creation account in Genesis.

To be quite clear:

When John Calvin had William Whittingham write into the English language Geneva Bible in Genesis 1:2 "and the earth was without form and void", what Calvin really meant was "AND THE EARTH WAS A SHAPELESS CHAOS AND EMPTY". Whether they have realized it or not, every translator who has copied the words "without form" (or its synonyms) into this verse is really saying with John Calvin "and the earth was A SHAPELESS CHAOS" in which nothing was solid or stable, and it was invisible! Is that what they really want to say? Because that is precisely what they are saying with their translation "without form".

The words "without form" are deliberately vague; just ask someone what "without form" is supposed to

mean. They can't really tell you. Most people would not know that this is just a euphemism for the LXX term "invisible", and for Calvin's idea that the earth was "A SHAPELESS CHAOS in which nothing was solid". The euphemistic "without form" expression was much more likely to find acceptance.

Alternatively, the translation "a shapeless chaos and empty" would also have made it much easier to recognize that something big must have happened between the end of verse 1 and before the start of verse 2. So even from this perspective it was desirable (for Satan!) to ensure that these words did not end up in the text of the final translation. It was okay to have them in a commentary, but not in the actual text. Let's not forget, there is a "god" who controls this present age to a considerable degree (2 Cor 4:4).

Anyway:

1) Translations that say "WITHOUT FORM and void (or empty)" are an expression of the views of John Calvin, without in any way attempting to establish the correct meaning of "tohu". These translations of the Hebrew expression "tohu and bohu" are to be rejected.

2) Translations that say "WASTE and empty (or void)" represent attempts at trying to establish the meaning of "tohu" by considering the other Scriptures where "tohu" is also used. These translations are likely to be basically correct for the rendering of "tohu and bohu".

Now let's examine something else. And that concerns the verbs in this passage.

HEBREW VERBS WITH THE QAL STEM AND THE PERFECT TENSE

Hebrew verbs have different forms. The most common form used in the OT is called "qal", being used about twice as often as all other verb forms combined. It expresses a simple action in the active voice form.

Each verb also has the ability to express a tense. I mentioned earlier that the verb "created" in verse 1 and the verb "was" in verse 2 are in the Hebrew text both in the perfect tense. This tense has a range of uses. The first and most common use is that the perfect tense expresses a completed action in the past. It is also used in situations where in English the present tense is used in many cases. However, the primary meaning of the perfect tense remains "a completed action in the past".

Thus the perfect tense means: in a beginning God "CREATED" the heavens ...; and it also means: in a beginning God "HAD CREATED" the heavens.

Similarly, the perfect tense means: and the earth "WAS" waste and empty ...; and it also means: and the earth "BECAME" (or "HAD BECOME") waste and empty.

As with the absence of any articles in the Latin text, so also with verbs in the perfect tense in the Hebrew text, to a considerable degree it really depends on THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE TRANSLATOR as to how the perfect tense is best translated into English in any specific context.

To get some idea of the scope of this matter, in the OT Hebrew there are 12,562 instances, in 8,659 different verses, where a verb is used with the qal stem and in the perfect tense. In other words, verbs with this stem and this tense are EXTREMELY COMMON in the Hebrew text of the OT.

Below is a list of random examples where a verb with the qal stem and the perfect tense has been correctly translated in the KJV with the help of an auxiliary verb. (Common auxiliary verbs are: have, be, may, can, must, do, shall and will.) I have included three examples from other books to show that this is not limited to the Book of Genesis. Each case presents only the relevant expression in these verses, and

I have rendered the translation of the verb in question (all of which are in the qal stem and the perfect tense) IN CAPITAL LETTERS for easier recognition.

GENESIS 1:29 = behold, I HAVE GIVEN you every herb bearing seed

GENESIS 1:31 = And God saw everything that HE HAD MADE

GENESIS 2:2 = God ended His work which HE HAD MADE

GENESIS 2:3 = ... because that in it HE HAD RESTED

GENESIS 2:8 = ... there He put the man whom HE HAD FORMED

GENESIS 2:22 = And the rib which the LORD God HAD TAKEN from man

GENESIS 3:1 = ... which the LORD God HAD MADE

GENESIS 3:14 = Because you HAVE DONE this, you are cursed

GENESIS 3:17 = Because you HAVE HEARKENED unto the voice of

GENESIS 4:1 = ... Eve ... said, I HAVE GOTTEN a man from the LORD

GENESIS 4:5 = But unto Cain ... HE HAD not RESPECT

GENESIS 4:11 = ... the earth which HAS OPENED her mouth to receive

GENESIS 4:23 = And Lamech said ... I HAVE SLAIN a man

GENESIS 4:25 = For God, she said, HAS APPOINTED me another seed

GENESIS 6:6 = It repented the LORD that HE HAD MADE man

GENESIS 6:7 = I will destroy man whom I HAVE CREATED

GENESIS 7:4 = every living substance that I HAVE MADE

GENESIS 8:6 = opened the window of the ark which HE HAD MADE

GENESIS 16:4 = when she saw that SHE HAD CONCEIVED

GENESIS 24:16 = ... neither HAD any man KNOWN HER

GENESIS 33:5 = The children which GOD HATH graciously GIVEN thy servant

GENESIS 36:6 = all his substance, which HE HAD GOT in the land of Canaan

GENESIS 37:6 = this dream which I HAVE DREAMED

GENESIS 39:9 = neither HATH HE KEPT BACK any thing from me

GENESIS 40:1 = and *his* baker HAD OFFENDED their lord the king of Egypt

GENESIS 43:10 = surely now WE HAD RETURNED this second time

JONAH 4:10 = THOU HAST HAD PITY on the gourd

ESTHER 9:11 = the number ... WAS BROUGHT before the king

ESTHER 9:26 = and *of that* which THEY HAD SEEN concerning this matter

This is a very small sampling of the many, many hundreds of places where the qal perfect must be correctly translated with the help of an auxiliary verb. This should suffice to demonstrate that it is PERFECTLY CORRECT to translate the qal perfect in Genesis 1:1 as "In a beginning God HAD CREATED", and in Genesis 1:2 as "And the earth BECAME (or HAD BECOME) waste and empty". That is, after all, precisely what the translators themselves have done with other verbs (but with the same tense!) in the above list of examples, as well as in many hundreds of other cases.

So if anyone tells you that the translations "had created" and "became waste and empty" (or "had become waste and empty") are not correct, then you should know that there are HUNDREDS of examples regarding Hebrew verbs in the Old Testament which translate the perfect tense just this way.

THE ROTHERHAM TRANSLATION OF THIS VERSE

I have held back until now from looking at the 1902 Rotherham Translation, because this translation illustrates a very interesting point. Let's now look at it.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now THE EARTH HAD BECOME WASTE AND WILD, and darkness was on the face of the roaring deep, but the Spirit of God was brooding on the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2, Rotherham)

Note!

This translation illustrates that the way to translate the Hebrew verbs in these two verses depends more on the understanding and the perspective with which the translator approaches this text, than on some inherent quality of the Hebrew text. Rotherham knew that, grammatically speaking, the translation "had become" was just as correct as the translation "was". It was Rotherham's own understanding that prompted him to choose "had become" rather than using "was". Both translations would technically be correct, but only one of these would convey the INTENDED meaning. In this case Rotherham's own understanding led him to select the correct option.

But by the same token the verb in verse 1 could be translated as "created" or as "had created"; and for verse 1 Rotherham chose the wrong option "created". This illustrates that scholars may well be linguistically qualified to make a correct translation, but WHEN THERE ARE SEVERAL THEORETICALLY CORRECT CHOICES, then their skills in Hebrew and in Greek are not enough; that is when 1 Corinthians 2:11 comes into play. It takes an understanding imparted by God's Spirit to select the correct choice from amongst a group of potentially right answers.

So note! As long as there is only one possible way to correctly translate a verse, there is always a good chance that qualified translators can come up with the correct translation, even if they don't have God's Spirit guiding them. It is when, from a grammatical point of view, there are TWO OR MORE theoretically correct options for translating a verse, that translators who don't have God's Spirit are likely to make a

wrong choice. With two or more potentially correct translation options they are playing roulette; they may get it right, but the odds are usually stacked in favor of getting it wrong.

Rotherham illustrates this point very well. While he got it right in verse 2, he got it wrong in verse 1. Almost all other translators got the verb wrong for both verses. Yet the other translators probably had the same level of competency in Hebrew that Rotherham had.

We might consider another example of this same point, and that is John Wycliffe's translation of Genesis 1:1. Faced with the options of "in a beginning" and "in the beginning" from the Latin text, Wycliffe chose "in the beginning". He had a 50-50 chance of getting it right, but he still got it wrong. On top of that, in his desire to make the text clearer, Wycliffe added the words "of nought" or "out of nothing" to this verse. He also got it wrong in this regard. God did NOT create the heavens and the earth "out of nothing"!

In Hebrews 11:3 Paul explained that through faith we understand that the "things which are seen (the material universe) were not made of things which do appear". Paul did not mean that physical matter was made "out of nothing". What Paul meant is that God created physical matter out of invisible building blocks. Through faith we understand that God used the Holy Spirit to create matter. In plain language: faith helps us to understand that all physical matter is simply a manifestation of, for lack of a better term, "spirit essence". Matter can be converted into energy, and energy is power; and that's precisely what the Holy Spirit is: power! So a comment that John Wycliffe intended as helpful in fact detracted from the truth revealed in Genesis 1:1.

A third example that also illustrates this point concerns the comments TWOT makes regarding the Hebrew word "bohu". TWOT can readily see that "bohu" refers to "having been made empty by God's judgment" in the only places where this word is used outside of Genesis 1:2. Yet they are unable to reach a sound judgment regarding the use of "bohu" in Genesis 1:2. For Genesis 1:2 they claim this word refers to "the primordial condition of the earth", a claim that is utterly absurd, one that mocks God's creative powers and abilities. The correct meaning seems so obvious, and yet they are incapable of understanding the truth (1 Cor 2:11).

Another example of this point is the Greek LXX text of Genesis 1:1-2. The LXX gets it right in verse 1 with "in A beginning", and then it gets it wrong in verse 2 with "but the earth was INVISIBLE".

This is something we encounter in all of the translations (and also in reference works and commentaries) that have been made: otherwise linguistically competent scholars, when faced with a choice of more than one potentially correct way to translate or to evaluate a text, frequently choose the wrong option.

We in God's Church need to understand this point. Proficiency in Hebrew and in Greek is helpful to understand certain difficult passages; but in many cases such proficiency is not enough! There must ALSO be some guidance from God's Spirit, especially when there are two or more potentially correct answers.

This issue is like the question about tithing and the weightier matters of the law. It is not a question of "either / or". It is really a matter of "this we ought to do and not leave the other undone"; i.e. we need to correctly understand the meaning of the original Hebrew or Greek text, but we ALSO need to be guided by God's Spirit in selecting correct options in ambiguous situations.

Coming back to Rotherham, he translated "tohu" as "waste" and "bohu" as "wild". That's probably close enough to the original intent of this expression. For these two verses in Genesis the Rotherham Translation is one of the better ones.

IN SUMMARY

- 1) Many years ago Mr. Armstrong already explained this verse correctly. But people have since then questioned his explanation.
- 2) While Hebrew and Greek have a definite article and no indefinite article, Latin has neither an indefinite article nor a definite article. This can make a Latin text somewhat ambiguous in certain situations.
- 3) The Hebrew text of Genesis 1:1 does not have the definite article, and this verse should correctly read: "In A beginning".
- 4) The Greek LXX text of this verse also does not have a definite article in this expression. So it also translates the Hebrew correctly as: "In A beginning".
- 5) The ambiguous Latin Vulgate text could unfortunately be read as "In A beginning" and also as "In THE beginning". This creates confusion.
- 6) Translating from the Latin text, John Wycliffe translated this phrase as "In THE beginning". This was a mistake! And this mistake has been repeated in virtually every translation since then. For Wycliffe, who knew neither Hebrew nor Greek, this was an innocent mistake. But subsequent translators have really known better.
- 7) The Greek text of John 1:1-2 also correctly reads "In A beginning". There is no definite article in the Greek text of this expression.
- 8) We should sometimes pause and ask ourselves: WHY would God possibly want to tell us about the time that God Himself might perhaps view as "THE beginning", if there even was such a time? There is neither any indication nor any reason why God would possibly give us such information.
- 9) In a number of places in the Bible there are very brief references to events before the creation of man. By providing such brief glimpses God has given us the opportunity to try to place these glimpses into their correct context in the greater picture of God's plan and God's actions.
- 10) By inspiring Genesis 1:1 to read "In A beginning", God was already alluding to the fact that some things had preceded THIS particular beginning that is referenced in verse 1.
- 11) In Job 38:4-7 God is speaking, and the obvious question here is: exactly where in the Genesis 1 account do God's comments in Job 38:4-7 fit in? They must fit SOMEWHERE into the flow in that chapter. The only question is: where?
- 12) An examination of these statements makes clear that BETWEEN verses 1 and 2 is really the only place for God's statements in Job 38.
- 13) The prevailing view of cosmology in Europe until about 1600 was that the earth is the center of the universe, and many believed that the earth is flat. Copernicus and Galileo presented their views in the 1500's and the 1600's. But many Bible translators and commentators very likely still had some rather unsound views regarding creation, the universe and the earth. These views would have influenced how they (e.g. John Calvin) would view these two verses in Genesis.
- 14) The precise meaning of the Hebrew word "tohu" was lost, and a meaning can now only be established by looking at every passage where this word is used. Its most likely meaning, based on all the other occurrences in the OT, is something like "waste" or "desolate". It most certainly does not mean "without form", which is nothing more than a disguised version of the LXX's "invisible".

15) By deceiving mankind about the truth regarding the events surrounding these two verses, Satan is in effect blaming God for THE MESS the universe was in before God proceeded to sort out the "tohu and bohu" presented in verse 2. That is a very effective way of hiding the fact that all the "tohu and bohu" was entirely the result of Satan's perverse rebellion against God. Satan deceived mankind into believing that "tohu and bohu" is the best that God's INITIAL creation could come up with! This deception IMPLIES that God really NEEDED to work in "evolution-like" steps, which is not only dead-wrong, but also an insult to God's creative powers!

The bottom line for Genesis 1:2 is: Satan WANTS people to attribute "tohu and bohu" to Almighty God's actions.

16) Isaiah 45:18 states quite clearly that God DID form the earth, but also that He DID NOT create it in "tohu". God inspired this comment in Isaiah as an antidote to the anticipated future twisting of Genesis 1:2. Isaiah 45:18 is a plain and clear statement.

17) The meaning of the Hebrew word "bohu" is "empty" or "void". But it does NOT refer to any "primordial condition", as is asserted by TWOT. Both other uses make clear that it refers to consequences of sins and to penalties from God.

18) The best way for us to translate the Hebrew expression "tohu and bohu" is probably something like "waste and empty" or "desolate and empty", combining a value statement with a content statement.

19) It was John Calvin's view of a shapeless chaos that produced the translation "without form and void". This translation had nothing to do with the meaning of the Hebrew word, and it had everything to do with the views of John Calvin (which in turn were influenced by the LXX). John Calvin's views of creation have by a long shot had the most powerful influence on subsequent translators, to the point where hardly anybody even questions this nonsensical "without form" translation.

20) The translations of Genesis 1:2 can be divided into three groups.

A) There is the group that follows the Latin Vulgate's translation of "empty and empty". The translations in this group include Coverdale Bible, Matthew Bible, the Douay Rheims Translation, and the Moffatt Translation.

B) The second group is the deceived group that expresses the views of John Calvin with the vague "without form and void" translation. While they don't say it directly, John Calvin's own commentary makes clear that this wording was intended to convey "a shapeless chaos". This group includes the majority of the major translations, including: the Geneva Bible, the Bishops Bible, all of the King James Versions, Leeser's Old Testament, JPS, NAS, RSV, NRSV, NIV, Webster Translation, World English Bible, Green's Literal Translation, etc.

C) Then there are those translations that have it basically correct, when they say "waste and empty". Translations in this group include the Wycliffe Bible, Luther's German Translation, the Darby Translation, the ERV, the ASV and Young's Literal Translation.

To summarize these groups: for this verse the translations in group "A" are clueless, the translations in group "B" have been led astray by John Calvin, and those in group "C" have basically got it correct (i.e. for this specific expression).

If you are familiar with other translations which are not included in the above three groups, you should now be able to figure out for yourself to which group they are aligned.

21) In Hebrew verbs the "qal perfect" is extremely common in the OT. A large number of examples can be cited, with a range of different verbs, to illustrate that this tense does indeed commonly refer to a completed action in the past. It is perfectly correct to translate the verb in verse 1 as "had created", and the verb in verse 2 as "became" or as "had become". Understanding that verse 1 only speaks about "A beginning" also makes this a very logical translation.

22) So the best way to translate Genesis 1:1-2 is as follows:

"In a beginning God had created the heavens and the earth. And the earth became (or had become) waste and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

23) The sequence of the events that are referred to and alluded to in different places in the Bible was more or less as follows:

A) It is revealed that "in a beginning" a certain relationship existed between God the Father and Jesus Christ. In that relationship Jesus Christ willingly and unconditionally submitted to the authority and the leadership of God the Father. He would be the Executive to always carry out the Father's will. John 1:1-2

B) With that relationship as a foundation, They determined to reproduce Themselves and to create a Family of God.

C) The first step towards Their goal was the creation of all the angels. This preceded the physical creation. A period of training for these angelic beings followed. During this period the one who became Satan was trained as a covering cherub in the very presence of God the Father. Ezekiel 28:14-15

D) Then God created the universe as the greater environment in which to carry out this plan for creating a Family. All the angels witnessed the creation of the universe. This creation was a staggering feat of perfection, to the point that all the angels were spontaneously moved to sing and to shout for sheer joy and excitement. Genesis 1:1 and Job 38:4-7

E) Then, still as a part of the continuing training program for the angels, the one who became Satan was sent to this earth, a perfect jewel in space at that point in time, together with one third of all the angels. Committing one third of all the angels to this one location in the universe was an expression of the high level of importance that God attached to the responsibility God entrusted to these angels under the leadership of the one who became Satan. They were to prepare this planet for the next phase of God's plan, which was the creation of physical human beings.

F) While here on earth as the leader over one third of all the angels, Satan spawned a totally new way of thinking, one that had never before existed anywhere in the universe. It was the way of "me first", the way of selfishness, the way of get rather than the way of give. It was in total opposition to the way God and all the angels had always functioned up to that point in time. Satan became extremely vain and determined in his mind to take over from God the Father as supreme ruler of the universe. Isaiah 14:13-14

G) So Satan, by lying, deception and flattery, coerced every single one of the angels under his leadership to join him in rebellion against God. In this way Satan formed the first ever "army". There is no indication as to how long this process continued. But at some point Satan and his army rose up from this earth to confront God in an attempt to wrest control of the universe from God and to take over God's position.

H) In the battle that ensued Satan and his followers were emphatically defeated, and they were thrown back down to this earth like bolts of lightning. Revelation 12:4 and Luke 10:18

I) But in the process of this rebellion against God a great deal of damage had also been inflicted upon the physical creation. Everything that had been achieved in the physical creation up to that point in time was destroyed and laid waste. This planet earth had been turned into a state of "tohu and bohu" (Genesis 1:2). And the rest of the universe, including our solar system, had also suffered some physical damage.

J) God, in the person of Jesus Christ, then proceeded to repair the damage to this earth during a period of 6 days, followed by the first Sabbath. Genesis 1:3 - 2:3

K) God started off by thinning out the fumes and vapors that had enveloped this planet, to the point that some light from the sun was able to penetrate to the surface of the earth on the first day, even though a heavy cloud cover remained.

L) It was not till the fourth day that the sun and the moon actually became visible from a vantage point on this earth. By then the atmosphere was totally clear, and the daily cycles of the sun and the moon could be readily observed. Then followed the remaining activities.

That is the basic sequence of events leading up to the creation of man.

24) The Rotherham Translation of Genesis 1:2 is probably the closest to the original message of this verse.

25) As far as criticizing this understanding which recognizes "a gap" between the first two verses of Genesis is concerned, there are many other places in the Bible where there is "a gap" in time between two consecutive verses. God never said or implied that the Bible would be written in clear, easy-to-follow terms, where everything is always in a chronologically perfect sequence. Isaiah 28:13 says:

But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, *and* there a little; THAT THEY MIGHT GO, AND FALL BACKWARD, AND BE BROKEN, AND SNARED, AND TAKEN.

And Isaiah 29:11 says:

And the vision of all is become unto you AS THE WORDS OF A BOOK THAT IS SEALED, which *men* deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it *is* sealed:

As I said at the start, I don't expect people without God's Spirit to really understand this. But how about you who are a member of God's Church? Can you understand that the explanation Mr. Armstrong provided for these verses decades ago has been correct all along?

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