

Without Form and Void (תְּהוֹ וְבִהוּ)

The insistence among some Christian teachers that the universe was created in six days raises a few issues when examining Scripture. It is Scripturally accurate that the earth we currently know was made in six days; however, made and created are two different concepts.

In a beginning God created the heavens and the earth, Genesis 1:1. Although in verse one many English translations add a definite article (the) before “Beginning”, implying that it is the first act or start of creation, in the original Hebrew, “Beginning” is not definite. Therefore, Genesis 1:1 is not referring to the beginning of God’s acts of creation. God’s first step in creation was creating the spirit beings, who witnessed the creation of the universe, Job 38:7. In verse Two of Genesis chapter One, the Hebrew verse starts with a conjunction vav (ו). Vav is used to indicate the progression of the story; however, it is not connected to time, only to order. Many events could have happened between the two episodes, but the first event occurs before the second one. Therefore, God created the heavens and the earth, and then something happened that caused the earth to be in a state of ruin. What occurred between the creation of the universe and the earth being found as a wasteland, void of life, in Genesis 1:2 is not discussed in Genesis, for the focus is on the renovation of the earth and the creation of humans, not the creation of the universe. Before we look at what happened between the creation of the universe and the condition of the earth in Genesis chapter One verse Two, let us examine the words “without form” and “void” to ensure we are not imposing an English meaning onto them that does not convey what the Hebrew language is stating.

To-hu (תְּהוֹ) means a wasteland - a place void of life. It does not carry the meaning of “without a clear or definite shape or structure”, in the same way the English concept of formless is used. Instead, “wasteland” or “void of life” properly express the Hebrew concept. To-hu (תְּהוֹ) is used to describe the path of the chiefs and princes of the people who reject God. He makes the chiefs of the people on the earth wander in wastefulness, Job 12:24. He pours contempt on the princes and causes them to wander in squander, Psalm 107:40. In these two verses, to-hu (תְּהוֹ) is incorrectly translated as wilderness, which is mid-bar (מִדְבָּר) in Hebrew. Those who are wicked and lay a snare for man, turning aside the just by wasteful (to-hu) words will be cut off, Isaiah 29:21. To-hu conveys the meaning of a wasteland, not a place that has no form such as a primordial ooze, which was pushed upon Scripture by the theory of evolution.

Bo-hu (בִּהוּ) expresses emptiness. Bo-hu is used to describe Edom after the wrath of God comes upon it. It will be a place of emptiness, void of life. The pelican and porcupine will possess it, with the owl and the raven; however, a line of confusion will be stretched out over it, and its nobles and princes will be nothing, Isaiah 34:11-12. This describes a place that has no intelligent life. In Genesis chapter one verse two, bo-hu carries the same meaning. The earth is found in a state of having no intelligent life upon it.

The Hebrew phrase, to-hu vav bo-hu (תְּהוֹ וְבִהוּ) is also used in Jeremiah 4:23, describing the desolation of the earth at the anger of God. This shows us that in Genesis, without form and void (to-hu vav bo-hu) does not describe an earth that is in a state of being formless before its formation; instead, it is a wasteland that is empty. The land being a wasteland and empty because of God’s judgment is the same condition of the earth in Genesis chapter One verse Two, which was a direct result of Lucifer’s sin. Just as in Jeremiah chapter four, the earth has been caused to become in this state by judgment; it was not originally in this condition. God did not create the earth in a chaotic state; instead, it was formed to be inhabited, Isaiah 45:18. However, it was not initially inhabited by humans or biological life. Earth, or Eden, was Lucifer’s throne before his fall, Ezekiel 28:13. The earth is found a wasteland and empty in Genesis chapter one verse two because Lucifer attempted to set his throne in the third heaven with God, causing the earth to be flooded and no light to shine upon the deep.

When it comes to understanding Scripture, the original words are essential to comprehend what is conveyed by the Holy Spirit through the writings of the authors of Scripture, for they express the truth revealed, not the derived meaning of words by translations. We should be very cautious not to impose the meaning of an English word onto Scripture. “Without form and void” originally carried the meaning of a wasteland that was empty; however, through the generations, these English words have changed their meaning, and teachers have used this difference to force an interpretation upon Scripture to justify an incorrect belief that Genesis Chapter One is the creation of the universe. This requires redefining the meaning of words and ignoring other passages of Scripture that clearly show the earth was inhabited before humans were created. Genesis chapter one is the story of the renovation of the earth for the creation of biological life and humans. It is not the story of the creation of the universe.