Appendix I

The Interpretation of Gen. 1:2

*Textual, Contextual Understanding of the Verse*

It would go without saying that there has been a great deal of controversy over the years among theologians and Christians in general concerning exactly how the opening two chapters of Genesis should be understood. And it would also go without saying that, resultingly, confusion has reigned supreme in Christian circles concerning not only these chapters but the general tenor of the remainder of Scripture as well.

Confusion begets confusion; and in this case, confusion at the outset, in the opening two chapters of Genesis, has resulted in confusion in that which follows — Scripture as a whole.

To provide an example, note the doctrine of soteriology (salvation). The opening thirty-four verses of Scripture provide the complete panorama of God’s way of salvation at the outset, along with God’s purpose for salvation. The complete matter is succinctly set forth in these opening verses in a God-designed, pristine form.

(For information on the preceding, refer to Appendixes III, IV in this book, “The Complete Panorama of Salvation” and “The Preaching of the Cross.”)

And, if a Christian begins understanding the subject at the place God first began setting it forth, understanding the God-designed basics, he will have the proper foundation on the subject for all which follows. But if a Christian doesn’t begin here, doesn’t understand the God-designed basics at this foundational point…

*But who does this?*

*Who believes this?*

*Who understands this?*

Numerous Bible students, probably most, know so little about the way Scripture is structured at the outset that they can’t possibly begin at this point, even on the basics of the salvation message.

Then, those who do believe and understand the way Scripture is structured at the outset invariably begin at places in Scripture other than at the beginning when dealing with salvation, among other subjects. And, an individual only has to look around at the resulting confusion pertaining to this one doctrine alone to see what has resulted from man ignoring the God-designed basics, the God-designed foundation, at the outset.

**The Opening Two Chapters of Genesis**

There are actually two major schools of thought surrounding the interpretation of these opening two chapters, though there are a number of variations within that held by those in each school.

Those in one school (probably the position held by the majority today) view the six days in the first chapter as time revealing and describing God’s creative activity introduced in verse one.

And those in the other school view these six days as time revealing God’s restoration of a ruined creation (*creation* seen in v. 1, *a ruin of this creation* seen in v. 2a, and *God’s restoration of the ruined creation* seen in vv. 2b ff).

Then, there is a variation of the second school which is held by quite a few individuals and could be looked upon as a third school of thought. Those holding to this view see Gen. 1:1 as other than an absolute beginning. They see this verse as an opening statement dealing with restoration, not creation.

That is, they see the verse dealing, not with God’s creation of the heavens and the earth in an absolute sense (as most view the verse), but with the beginning of God’s restoration (reforming, remolding, refashioning) of a previously perfect creation which had been reduced to a ruin (with the creation of the heavens and the earth per se not seen in these opening verses).

**“Was” or “Became”**

Much of the controversy surrounding these different views is centered in the linguistics of verse two (though, as will be shown later, this really doesn’t need to be the case). Grammarians go back to the Hebrew text and deal mainly with two areas, and good Hebrew grammarians reach different conclusions in both realms:

1) The relationship of the three circumstantial clauses which form the second verse to that stated in the first verse.

2) The meaning and use of the Hebrew word *hayah* in verse two (translated “was”).

*1) The Three Circumstantial Clauses*

The three circumstantial clauses in Gen. 1:2 are simply the three clauses which form the verse:

1) “And the earth was without form, and void,”

2) “And darkness was upon the face of the deep,”

3) “And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”

In the Hebrew text there is what is called a “waw” beginning verse two (a conjunctive or disjunctive particle [actually, a letter in the Hebrew alphabet, the *waw,* prefixed to a word], usually translated “and” in most English texts). Some grammarians view this particle prefixed to the word beginning verse two in a *conjunctive* sense (showing a connection between v. 1 and v. 2 [“and”]), and other grammarians view it in a *disjunctive* sense (showing a separation between v. 1 and v. 2 [“but”]).

(The other two circumstantial clauses in verse two begin with “waws” prefixed to words as well, which will be discussed later.

The Hebrew text of the Old Testament uses the “waw” more frequently in a conjunctive [“and”] rather than a disjunctive [“but”] sense. Of the approximately 28,000 usages of this particle, some 25,000 appear to be conjunctive and some 3,000 disjunctive. Normally the context determines how the particle is to be understood.)

*2) In a Conjunctive Sense*

Those viewing the “waw” prefixed to the word beginning Gen. 1:2 in *a conjunctive* *sense* would usually see the three circumstantial clauses as inseparably connected with verse one; and those viewing this “waw” in *a disjunctive sense* would, instead, see a separation between these two verses.

If there is an inseparable connection of the clauses in verse two with verse one (the *waw* used in a conjunctive sense), and verse one describes an absolute beginning in relation to the heavens and the earth (God’s actual creation of the heavens and the earth in the beginning), then verse two would have to describe *how* God created the earth in the beginning (*i.e.,* “without form, and void”).

Thus, understanding the structure of the Hebrew text after this fashion would necessitate viewing that which is described at the beginning of verse two as *the condition of the earth at the conclusion of the action described in verse one.* That is to say, God would have initially created the earth (v. 1) in the condition described in verse two. Then the six subsequent days would have to be looked upon as time in which God, step by step, performed and completed His creative work introduced in verse one.

The preceding view of the structure of the Hebrew text is the main reason for the position held by some that Gen. 1:1 describes the beginning of God’s restorative work rather than an absolute beginning. Those holding this view see the three circumstantial clauses in verse two as inseparably connected with verse one. But they also see that Scripture teaches a subsequent ruin of the earth following God’s creation of the heavens and the earth in the beginning (*e.g., cf.* Gen. 1:2 and Isa. 45:18 [the Hebrew word *tohu,* translated “without form” in Gen. 1:2 is translated “in vain” in Isa. 45:18; and this verse in Isaiah specifically states that God did not create the earth *tohu, i.e.,* after the fashion in which it is seen in Gen. 1:2]).

Thus, those who see God’s perfect creation undergoing a subsequent ruin but also view the three circumstantial clauses in verse two as inseparably connected with verse one (in a conjunctive sense) are, in a respect, forced into a particular position concerning the interpretation of the opening verses of Genesis. They are forced into the position of seeing the actual creation of the heavens and the earth, and also the ruin of the heavens and the earth, as occurring at a time prior to Gen. 1:1, events which they would see as not being dealt with per se in the opening verses of Scripture at all.

*3) In a Disjunctive Sense*

Then there are those grammarians who see the “waw” prefixed to the word beginning verse two as *disjunctive.* These grammarians would understand this Hebrew “waw” in a similar sense to the way in which the Greek word *de* is used in the New Testament (normally disjunctive), as opposed to the Greek word *kai* (the word usually used to show a conjunctive sense).

In this respect, the translators of the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) used *de* to translate the first “waw” in what was apparently meant to be a disjunctive sense beginning Gen. 1:2 (with the conjunctive *kai* used to translate the remaining two “waws” prefixed to the words beginning the other two circumstantial clauses in the verse).

Using the KJV text to illustrate, the translators of the Septuagint used *de* and *kai* to translate the three Hebrew “waws” in this manner:

“And [*De, lit.,* ‘But’] the earth was without form, and void; and [*kai*] darkness was upon the face of the deep. And [*Kai*] the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”

And, viewing the verse beginning in a disjunctive sense of the preceding nature, there would be no connection between the first two verses of Genesis. Rather, a separation would exist instead. Within this view, one would normally see verse one revealing an absolute beginning, with verse two (along with the verses following) revealing events occurring at later points in time.

(*Most* holding this linguistic view see verse two as a description of God’s perfect creation [from verse one] being brought into a ruined state, separated from verse one by an unrevealed period of time. And they would, accordingly, see God’s activity during the six days as activity surrounding the restoration of this ruined creation.

*Some* holding this linguistic view though still see the six days as time revealing God’s creative activity. They view verse one as describing a “grand summary declaration that God created the universe in the beginning.” Then, apart from seeing a connection between v. 1 and v. 2, they view God’s activity during the six days as a revelation concerning how God accomplished that which He had previously stated in verse one.)

*4) The Hebrew Word “Hayah”*

*Hayah* is the Hebrew word translated “was” in most English versions of Gen. 1:2 (“And the earth *was…*”). The word is found twenty-seven times throughout chapter one and about 3,570 times in the entire Old Testament.

The etymology of the word is somewhat questionable (most look at the probable, primary meaning of *hayah* as “falling” or “to fall”). Hebrew scholars though see the word used over and over in the Old Testament in the sense of “to be,” “to become,” or “to come to pass.”

And through attempts to trace the etymology of the word, comparing Hebrew with Arabic (a related Semitic language), and seeing how the word is used in the Old Testament, many scholars have come to look upon the word in the sense of *a verb of “being”* (“to be”). But scholars also recognize that it is not completely accurate to equate the word with the English verb of being after this fashion.

The word is translated different ways in English versions — *e.g.,* “was” or “were” (Gen. 1:2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 13, etc.), “be” (Gen. 1:3, 6, 14, 29, etc.), “became [or, ‘to become’]” (Gen. 2:7, 10; 3:22, etc.). But that’s in English versions. In the Latin Vulgate there are thirteen instances where *hayah* has been translated in the sense of “became” in Genesis chapter one alone; and in the Septuagint there are twenty-two such instances in this one chapter (out of the twenty-seven times *hayah* appears in chapter one).

The first use of *hayah* in Scripture is in Gen. 1:2 — the verse being discussed. But going beyond this verse for a moment, note how the word is used elsewhere in chapter one.

*Hayah* appears twice in verse three, translated “be” and “was.” And translating, “Let light *be* [or *‘become’*]: and light *became,*” would actually best convey the thought of that which occurred.

Then note verses 5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31. The word *hayah* appears two times in the latter part of each verse (both translated in a combined sense in the English text by one word — “were”). Translating literally from the Hebrew, using “was” in the translation, the text would read, “…And there *was* evening, and there *was* morning, [comprising] the first day…the second day…the third day,” etc.

Actually though, “became” would really better convey the thought surrounding that which occurred, for evening and morning came to pass, “became,” comprising each of the six different days.

(Leupold, a Hebrew grammarian from past years, in his commentary on Genesis, appears to capture the overall thought of *hayah* to mark beginning and/or ending points in each day quite well by translating, “…Then came evening, then came morning — the first day…the second day…the third day,” etc.)

Then note the words, “…and it *was* so,” at the end of verses 7, 9, 11, 15, 24, 30. “Was” in each reference is a translation of the word *hayah,* and it is easy to see that “became” rather than “was” would really provide a better description of that which occurred in each instance, translating, “…and it became so” (*cf.* “Let there *be* [a translation of *hayah*]…” [vv. 3, 6, 14]).

Though *hayah* has been translated “was,” “were,” or “be” throughout the first chapter of Genesis, the word is actually used mainly throughout this chapter in the sense of “be,” “became,” or “had become.”

Attention is called to this fact because numerous individuals look at translating *hayah* “became [or ‘had become’]” as so rare in the Old Testament that serious consideration should not be given to the thought of translating Gen. 1:2, “And [or ‘But’] the earth became [or ‘had become’]…” But the rarity is in the English translations, not in a literal Hebrew rendering or in certain other translations (*e.g.,* in the KJV there are only 17 instances in all of Genesis where *hayah* has been translated “became [or, ‘become’]” [2:7, 10; 3:22; 9:15; 18:18; 19:26; 20:12; 21:20; 24:67; 32:10; 34:16; 37:20; 47:20, 26; 48:19]; but in the Septuagint there are at least 146 instances [and some 1,500 instances in the entire O.T.]).

**The Hebrew Text Alone**

Can linguistic questions surrounding the first two verses of Genesis be resolved from the Hebrew text alone? Can one determine from the Hebrew text alone whether the “waw” beginning verse two should be understood as conjunctive or disjunctive? Or, can one determine from the Hebrew text alone how the word *hayah* should be translated in verse two? Or, can one determine from the Hebrew structure of verse two alone how the remainder of the first chapter should be understood in an overall sense?

Some Hebrew scholars would answer in the affirmative. But, because of the different ways in which a number of Hebrew scholars view the matter at hand, using the Hebrew text alone, the issue could only be resolved within their minds and possibly within the minds of others who would follow their same line of reasoning.

And note that the issue would be resolved by different scholars after entirely different fashions, all based on their understanding of the grammatical structure of the Hebrew text.

**Another Way**

However, there is *another way* to approach the matter; and that other way is to see how the whole of Scripture deals with the issue at hand. If the whole of Scripture can be shown to support one view alone — *which it can* — then the correct linguistic understanding of Gen. 1:2 and the corresponding correct interpretation of chapter one *can easily and unquestionably be demonstrated.*

This is not to say that Gen. 1:2 or the first chapter of Genesis as a whole cannot be understood correctly apart from first going to the remainder of Scripture, for that cannot be the case. God would not have begun His revelation to man after a fashion which man could not have understood apart from subsequent revelation (requiring approx. 1,500 years to complete).

But this is to say that the correct linguistic position for Gen. 1:2 and the correct corresponding interpretation of the entire chapter — which can be shown by going to the remainder of Scripture — is a position which God would have expected man to see *as evident when he began reading at this point in Genesis,* though man many times has not done so (past) and does not do so (present).

Thus, in this respect, a knowledge of the way in which the Hebrew text is structured is really not going to resolve the issue at hand. And time has been spent on the Hebrew construction of Gen. 1:2 and other related passages, not in an attempt to resolve the issue, but to demonstrate two basic things:

1) There are good, reputable Hebrew scholars who hold varying views on the opening verses of Genesis, which are many times based strictly on their understanding of the structure of the Hebrew text, apart from contextual considerations.

2) Though the linguistics of the Hebrew text (within the different ways scholars understand the linguistics of the text) will support any one of these views, all but *one* are out of line with the remainder of Scripture and are, consequently, *wrong.*

That is to say, though it may be possible to support different views from the structure of the Hebrew text alone (the way different scholars understand the syntax of the Hebrew text), different views *cannot* be supported when the remainder of Scripture is taken into consideration — with or without the Hebrew text. Scripture will support *only one view,* and that one view is the position alluded to in the opening portion of this chapter.

Scripture will support:

1) “Creation” (an absolute creation [v. 1]).

2) “Ruin” of the creation (which means that the “waw” prefixed to the word beginning v. 2 must be understood in a disjunctive sense [“But”], and the Hebrew word *hayah* must be understood in the sense of “became [or ‘had become’]” [v. 2a]).

3) “Restoration” of the ruined creation (vv. 2b-25).

4) “Rest,” following six days of restorative work (1:2b-2:3).

And to illustrate this is not difficult at all. In fact, *the opposite is true. It is a very simple matter to illustrate, from other Scripture, exactly how the opening verses of Genesis must be understood.*

**Tohu Wavohu**

In this respect, first note the words *tohu wavohu* from the Hebrew text of Gen. 1:2.

The words *tohu wavohu* are translated “without form and void” in the KJV English text (“formless and void,” NASB; “formless and empty,” NIV; “waste and void,” ASV).  *These two Hebrew words are used together only two other places throughout all of the Old Testament* — in Isa. 34:11 and Jer. 4:23. *And both of these passages present* *a ruin of that previously seen existing in an orderly state.*

In Isa. 34:11, “Edom” (vv. 5, 6), representing *all nations in the future Lord’s Day* (vv. 2, 8), was destined to become *tohu wavohu* (translated “confusion” and “emptiness” [KJV], “desolation” and “emptiness” [NASB]).

And in Jer. 4:23-28, there is a comparison of that which had previously occurred *relative to the earth* in Gen. 1:2a to that which was about to occur *relative to the land of Israel.*

The land of Israel was about to become *tohu wavohu.* That is, as seen in Jer. 4:23-28, God was about to do *the same thing to the land of Israel* (*cf*. vv. 14-22) *that He had previously done to the earth in Gen. 1:2a.*

And the reason for both of these actions — that which God had done to the earth, and that which He was about to do to the land of Israel — was the same. *Sin had entered* (*sin* on the part of Satan in the former, and *sin* on the part of the Jewish people in the latter).

And, in complete keeping with this type understanding of the use of *tohu wavohu* in Isa. 34:11 and Jer. 4:23, Isaiah 45:18 (where the Hebrew word *tohu* is used, translated “in vain”) clearly states that God did not create the earth (in Gen. 1:1) in the manner described in Gen. 1:2a. Isaiah 45:18 states that God “created it [the earth] *not* in vain [*not ‘tohu,’ not* ‘without form,’].”

Thus, if Gen. 1:2a is to be understood in the light of related Scripture bearing on the subject (which it must be [*cf.* Ps. 12:6; Isa. 8:20; 28:10; I Cor. 2:13]), *there can be only one possible interpretation* — *the ruin of a prior existing creation (from v. 1), because of sin.* The earth from verse one “became” *tohu wavohu.*

*The ruin* seen in both Gen. 1:2a and Jer. 4:23, for a purpose, is with a view to eventual *restoration.* And *the restoration* seen in the continuing text of Gen. 1:2 (vv. 2b-25) and in the overall passage of Jer. 4:23ff (v. 27b), as well as in related Scripture (*e.g.,* Isa. 35:1ff), is also for a purpose.

**Subsequent Scripture**

Then, the whole of subsequent Scripture is perfectly in line with this type understanding of the opening section of Scripture. The whole of subsequent Scripture is built on a septenary structure, with the foundation established and set in an unchangeable fashion at the beginning, in Gen. 1:1-2:3.

That is to say:

*The heavens and the earth* were created, there was a ruin of the material creation (because of sin), God took six days to restore the ruined creation, and He rested the seventh day.

*Man* was created on the sixth day, man fell into a state of ruin (because of sin), God is presently taking six days (6,000 years) to restore man, and God will rest the seventh day (the seventh 1,000-year period [*cf.* II Peter 1:15-18; 3:3-8]).

(For information on the preceding, refer to Chapters I, II in this book, “On the Third Day, Seventh Day” and “After Six Days, on the Seventh Day.”)

And the latter restoration, patterned after the former restoration, is what the whole of Scripture is about.

*The whole of Scripture is about the same thing initially introduced and established in an unchangeable fashion in the opening thirty-four verses of Genesis* (1:1-2:3).

The whole of Scripture is about the creation of man, his ruin, his restoration over a six-day period (over a 6,000-year period), followed by a seventh day of rest (a seventh 1,000-year period — the Sabbath rest awaiting the people of God [Heb. 4:9; *cf.* vv. 3, 4], the Messianic Era).

As previously stated, man would have been expected to understand this opening section of Scripture after the preceding fashion at the time it was written. And subsequent Scripture simply verifies the correctness of the way man would have been expected to understand it at that time, apart from other revelation.

(Note one thing about the restoration in Gen. 1:2b-25 which should be understood. This restoration could only have been *a complete restoration.* No trace of “the world that then was” [the world preceding the ruin seen in Gen. 1:2a], or the subsequent ruined earth [in Gen. 1:2a], can be seen “in the heavens and the earth, which are now” [II Peter 3:5-8].

A complete restoration would have removed *all traces* of anything having to do with “the world that then was” or with that world during that time when it lay in a ruined state.

That is to say, man today, through science, *cannot* show evidence of any type pre-existing creation or a ruin of that pre-existing creation, for *a complete restoration* — the only type restoration possible through the Divine work seen in Genesis chapter one — would have removed *all traces of a pre-existing creation and ruin.*

And, accordingly, man’s different recognized dating methods, often showing the earth to be much, much older than 6,000 years, *can reveal nothing to change the preceding.*

The Noachian Flood, 1,656 years beyond the restoration, left things quite skewed in this respect anyway. All dating methods are based on *conditions remaining uniform throughout all time.* *And conditions* *changed considerably at the time of the Flood. They are not at all the same today as they were before the Flood, destroying the foundation upon which dating methods rest.*

Then, did God restore the earth with apparent age? After all, God created man with apparent age. What is a restored tree or a restored rock like, etc? Would they show age if subjected to man’s dating methods?

In this respect, all that exists in the present secular world of history and science — *e.g.,* the complete fossil record, the dinosaurs, topographical formations such as the Grand Canyon, etc. — would all have to be placed this side of the restoration seen in Gen. 1:2b-25, within time covered by “the heavens and the earth, which are now.”

In short, one *MUST* look to the Scriptures for answers to the numerous questions which could be raised in the preceding respect, not to man’s wisdom or to a realm where man cannot go [to a world lying in ruins in Gen. 1:2a, or to a world existing prior to that time].)