

*"Every word of God is pure: He is a Shield unto them that put their trust in Him. Add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." Prov. 30, 5.6.*

# THE EARTH WAS WITHOUT FORM AND VOID . . . .

## *What is God's Teaching in Genesis 1. 2 ?*

*"God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness. hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Cor. 4. 6*

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HOW often has man demonstrated by his very reasoning that his mind is defective. Again and again those who have boasted have been proved unwise. Yet the human heart persists in the exaltation of self. Some seek pleasures, others riches, others reputation, others knowledge, but God is not rightly acknowledged: God is not central. Only as there is the fear of the Lord can there be "the beginning of wis-

dom”: and then the broken heart will be brought to something more than a negative, even a personal knowledge of the Creator, and a knowledge of Him as Father, and in His light shall we humbly see light. It is blessedly true that when we rightly view creation we behold more than creation, even redemption by the precious blood of Christ, and relationship to Him. Indeed, without the new creation in Him we misunderstand the creation of the world, and without the Holy Spirit we are unable to approach nature from the right standpoint.

It is deeply important to realize that the believer, who knows God, has a new attitude toward Scripture. Acquaintance with its Author means that he is no longer an apologist. To him the Scriptures have become authoritative and final. It is true he can show something of their beauties to others, and that he can likewise show up the vanity of human speculations. But bare reasoning leaves a man cold, yea, in the cold of spiritual death. It may silence the sceptic, and negatively prove his failure. But unless he rightly infers his need, and seeks a personal Saviour, the “experience” of Scripture remains unknown. It is the spiritual inworking which is so blessed. How sad it is to find many professing the Name of the Lord Jesus who try to bring the unvarying words of God into line with the crooked ways of men. If Scripture fully agreed with to-day’s “science” it would be wrong to-

morrow, and would prove itself merely human. But, unchanged and unchanging, it abides, the written testimony of the Living God.

The believer need not tremble for the Scriptures. They need no protection. He need not try and accommodate its perfect words to men's thoughts. To do so is a peril, and a sin. Honestly take the Scriptures as they stand, and if you do not understand—believe that One Who has proved their accuracy and power, again and again, knows more than vain man. Wait His time of explaining, and you will not find disappointment in Him.

Some have sought to read evolution into Genesis. The attempt is utterly wrong. Evolution, based on confessed ignorance of the beginning, and unproved assumptions throughout, has no right to be allowed to vaunt its unscientific claims in the sanctuary of God's truth. Evolution, if consistent with itself, attacks the revealed fall of man, and sweeps away the Divinely emphasized standard of right and wrong, and of accountability, and in so doing sets aside redemption by the precious blood of Christ. The theory, filled with credulous suppositions, from men who never saw the changes they assert, and who know nothing of the vain chronology they advance, illustrates the solemnizing words, "The world by wisdom knew not God."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Leaflets on this subject gladly sent.

Some, who earnestly emphasize the full authority of Scripture, have urged that the days of Genesis are periods. We do not question their honesty, but we would earnestly urge that the Holy Spirit gives no hint of this. The reference to the days in Exodus 20. 11 seems definite otherwise, and the use of the numerals "day one," etc., together with the mention of the sun and moon, and the division of day from night (Gen. 1. 14), and the creation of Adam in the sixth day, allowing of no "darkness period" as to the seventh day, would all confirm the plain literal interpretation of this chapter. Nor should this be a difficulty to those who believe that God is the God of miracles, or, in other words, that God is God.

Some, whose reverence for the exact words of the Holy Spirit is unusually refreshing, have maintained that the opening verse is an epitome, and that God BEGAN His work with that which was without form and void, and in literal days accomplished the creation seen in Genesis 1. 1. These beloved friends have written very outspokenly against the interpretation which separates Genesis 1. 1 and 2, and have seemed to suggest that those who adopt it give way before the "oppositions of science falsely so called." As it is so rare for children of God to understand the suggestions of other reverent children

of God as fully as they understand their own, we would ask definite and prayerful pondering of what we feel to be the Scriptural meaning of the verse before us, and, as God gives grace, to avoid all imputation of motives and hurried conclusions, that we may expect His gracious help in the bringing together of His beloved people.

First, we would notice that each day begins with "And God said." This is the commencement of verse 3, and not verse 2. In verse 3 we have the first recorded words of God, and they are beautiful in their simplicity, and power, and meaning. "Let-there-be" is one word, so that there are only two words, and the fulfilment "There-was light" contains the same two words *unvaried*: "He spake and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Psa. 33. 9). How blessed it is to realize the majesty and authority of God: we would bow the head, yea, and the heart, and worship.

It would not be surprising if the Holy Spirit Who so often refers to the Old Testament in the New alluded to these first words of command. It is plain that He refers to Genesis 1 in John 1, and there we behold One Who was Himself the Word, and Who *was* in the beginning, uncreated; and "in Him was Life and the Life was *the Light of men*." At once we read "The Light shineth in the darkness," and evidently the first mention of darkness is to suggest a contrast with Himself, and a darkness associated with sin. This may at

first surprise us in reference to Genesis 1, but we rightly expect clear guidance from God, if there are other allusions.

2 Corinthians 4. 6 reads thus, "FOR GOD, WHO COMMANDED THE LIGHT TO SHINE OUT OF DARKNESS, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Evidently there is a definite reference, and it seems strange that the darkness of our human heart is thus brought before us if the darkness of Genesis 1. 2 was unassociated with sin. We do not doubt God's right to use whatever language He pleases, but He has graciously encouraged us to compare Scripture with Scripture.

Is there a yet more definite reference? I think we may answer, Yes. Hebrews 11. 3 precedes verse 4, and would suggest an allusion to something before the history of Abel. It seems there is only one "spoken word of God" in Genesis 1-3 which fulfils the conditions here brought before us. May our hearts have faith, and realize the importance of simple faith in the full and verbal inspiration of Scripture, as we seek a more literal translation. "By faith we understand the ages<sup>2</sup> to have been fitted together<sup>3</sup> by a spoken WORD of God, with the object that what is beheld should not have BECOME OUT FROM things that appear." Here the Holy Spirit does not use the regular Scriptural term for the world:

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<sup>2</sup> αἰῶνας

<sup>3</sup> κατηγορίσθαι

should we read something into Scripture, from Philo and other writers? Most thoughtful believers are clear that “the end of the world,” where the same word is used, should be rendered “the end of the age.” The two words are together in Ephesians 2. 2: the word “age” is often plural, unlike “world.” Surely Hebrews 1. 2 (the only other passage in question: all other verses are clearly “age”) may be rendered “made the ages” in the light of Ephesians 3 and Colossians 1. The verb for “fitted together” is found first in Matthew 4. 21: Hebrews 10. 5 and 13. 21 are very instructive. How majestic was the Divine command—“Let there be light!” If there is any other word that fits together ages in Genesis 1-3, where is it? The holy emphasis in the added words is helpful. It is a startling witness against evolution. That which is now beheld did not, and does not SPRING OUT of other substances by evolution. “Nature” is not God, but God’s work. There is an utter contrast between God’s commanding “Word” and “self-development,” and faith has no hesitation. It accepts absolutely the former. In the light of 2 Corinthians 4. 6 we realize that faith sees, in the condition that had been brought about when God said “Let there be light,” a picture of men to-day, and thus this verse includes faith’s testimony that no sinner can evolve into something higher. There must be God’s own voice. And thus as the chapter ENDS with His utterance, (comparable with the summons to Lazarus), that

the body may be glorified (40), it BEGINS with a reminder of the inner quickening to-day. Thus our faith in Genesis 1 is also a recognition of the same confidence in the work of Another which the first man of faith, Abel, is said in the next verse (Heb. 11. 4) to have shown. God's first recorded word—there is no doubt as to this in the light of 2 Corinthians 4—was meant to set forth the work of Christ and His glory. The scarlet cord of redemption becomes yet clearer, and we rejoice.

Does the Old Testament likewise indicate that this is the true interpretation? The words “without form and void” are similar in sound,<sup>4</sup> and the second is very rare. Indeed, it only occurs twice otherwise, in Isaiah 34. 11 and Jeremiah 4. 23: in the former it is rendered “emptiness,” in the latter “void.” Yet more remarkably in each passage it is found with the same word as in Genesis 1, and in the same order. In these verses may we not expect the Holy Spirit will give guidance?

Is the context one of formation or of disintegration through judgment? Plainly the latter. In Isaiah we see the Lord's hand on Edom, a land which is marked for judgments uniquely parallel with those on Babylon. The sword of the Lord is emphasized. Jeremiah 4 deals with the earth, and particularly God's witness against Israel. Observe the climax in verse 26, “Broken down at the presence of the Lord, and

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<sup>4</sup> Tohu, bohu.



by His fierce anger.” There is a limitation here, but plainly there is judgment, “FOR thus hath the Lord said, The whole land shall be DESOLATE, yet will I not make a FULL END.” Restoration of the land is Divinely promised. We recognize God’s right to use words as He pleases, but He has given Scripture to direct His people, and we feel the need for very clear instruction if the verses evidently based on Genesis 1. 2 have quite a different meaning. Where is such instruction found in His written words? They alone are authoritative. No suggestions of godly men can stand in the place of His words. This point would be less emphatic if the word “void” were found elsewhere, and in other contexts, but the Holy Spirit has limited it to this.

In view of such verses how are we to understand Isaiah 45. 18? Here we have the word “tohu” rendered “in vain.” It seems to us to go fittingly with the verb “created,” “He created it not without form” (as translated in Genesis 1. 2). but if any should wish to read with the preceding verb, “He established it not in vain, He created it to be inhabited, He formed it,” (though this possible rendering appears less natural<sup>5</sup>), will it alter the fact that God implies the word “tohu” is out of harmony with Him? And so it is repeated in the next verse, “I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye

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<sup>5</sup> The order of words in Heb. of verse 19 may help.

Me IN VAIN.” Here is the Divine application. That which is “without form” is contrasted with God’s work. Can we regard it as the original condition in Genesis 1?

The evidence seems remarkable, and our hearts would acknowledge God’s perfect use of language. In this connection we observe also that in a passage already compared there is a contrast between the words “be” and “become.” “The Word WAS God”: “the Word BECAME flesh.” In the Epistle already studied the same contrast is emphasized, “Who BEING the Brightness of His glory” followed by “HAVING BECOME” in verse 4. And in chapter 11, “He that cometh to God must believe that He IS and that He BECOMES a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” The well-known illustration of usage in John 8. 58, exalting the Lord Jesus, must never be forgotten, “Before Abraham BECAME, I AM.” Now it is well known that the Hebrew does not employ the ordinary definitional verb. “I am the Lord” is “I the Lord,” and in like manner we observe the italics in 1 Kings 18. 39, “The Lord, He (is) the God.” But in Genesis 1. 2 the word “was” is the verb which occurs again in verse 3 “Let the light become.” Likewise it is found in Genesis 7. 10 when the waters “became” on the earth, and in 9. 16 when the bow is said to “BE,” i.e. “come to be” in the cloud. So in Exodus 10. 21 darkness “became.” In Genesis 19. 26 Lot’s wife “became” a pillar of salt.

When the word of the Lord “came” to a prophet, the same verb is often used. The Hebrew definitional idiom is NOT before us. May not this confirm the meaning of Genesis 1. 2?—“The earth came to be (or, became) without form and void.” In view of the full, and therefore verbal, inspiration of Scripture we must not overlook this point.

But we would readily acknowledge again the sincerity and earnest concern for God’s glory among those who feel that Genesis 1. 2 is the first step ‘in God’s creating. To us it seems that they ignore other verses, and somewhat veil the glory of God’s work. The formation of man from the dust may, at first, appear to them a parallel. But the dust is not described in terms of judgment, or as “without form and void.” Proverbs 8. 26 must not be forgotten. Doubtless, God’s plan was meant to be a humbling witness to man afterwards, but this is quite different from the interpretation which implies the use of that which is “void” in the *beginning* of God’s perfect work.

Great emphasis has been laid on Exodus 20. 11, and rightly so, but every attempt to IDENTIFY the words “create” and “make” can only lead to a misconception of verbal inspiration, however earnest the intention may be. The verb “made” is also used for appointment, and for the getting ready of food, So when the young man prepared the calf in Genesis 18. 7 we read “he hastened to make it.” The Holy Spirit uses the words

with perfect precision. Genesis 2. 4 is most remarkable. When “the heavens and the earth” are before us, as in Genesis 1. 1 we have no time mark, and the verb “created”: where the order is changed (earth cf. 1. 2, and the heavens) a time mark occurs, and the verb “made” is used. A colon should be in the midst of the verse. The Divine expression of 2. 3 is literally given in the margin, and we need care before we merge the two words: “creation” leads to appointment, and God’s continued arrangement is at once helpfully seen.

One objection expressed by many of those who, we feel, mistake the witness of Genesis 1. 2 is the repeated declaration, “It was good.” They ask “Could this be said if the results of sin were in the earth?” But God does not use the word “good” indiscriminately: it occurs seven times in the chapter. “God saw the light that it was good,” but the same is not said of the darkness. In verses 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31 we find continual stress on His work. “Everything that He had made” WAS indeed good, His appointments are ever good, even in judgment. Will not the Lord rejoice in His works in the millennium (Psa. 104. 31), although the reminders of His anger are around, and the prophecies of His further wrath await fulfilment?

It may be asked, “Does the Holy Spirit give us any thought as to the sin which brought about the condition of Genesis 1. 2?” I think we must answer, Yes. Plainly it

was not the sin of A MAN, for Adam was the first man (1 Cor. 15. 45). But Scripture reveals two companies of beings who have sinned—angels and men. The two are before us in 2 Pet. 2. 4, 5, and in Jude 6, 7, and it seems in Revelation 20. 13 also, for the sea gives up the dead who are distinguished from men, who have bodies AND souls and are in both “death and Hades.” These spirit-beings appear to be punished in water, and this may give light on Matthew 8. 32 and 12. 43. There is no salvation for fallen angels (Heb. 2. 16 omit italics): the fall of their prince is associated with pride (1 Tim. 3. 6, cf. Isa. 14. 13). When the serpent comes before us in Genesis 3 we have no mere animal, but the devil himself (John 8. 44), a spirit-being appearing in body form. God did not create an evil being: he fell. Job 1. 6 shows us Satan among “the sons of God” (cf. 2. 1), but at the creation of the earth “all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38. 7). There was no rebellion then. It is rather remarkable that the same chapter immediately mentions the sea and a cloud of thick darkness, followed by a reference to the morning. This is remarkable in view of Genesis 1. 2-5, and the thoughtful reader will observe that the passage does not regard the swaddling band as a beginning, for the “corner stone” was surely fastened before the joy of verse 7 (6, see the parallel completeness in Zech. 4. 7). The ONE reference to confusion BEFORE man’s sin is Genesis 1. 2.

Have we not here a reference to God's judgment on the arch enemy? The Son of God, the Lord Jesus, is to be earth's King, angels and men are to acknowledge Him. Is it surprising if earth was associated with angels and their failure, and then with men and their failure? The earth is now given to the children of men (Psa. 115. 16); yet it is worthy of prayerful notice that in the verbal accuracy of the Holy Spirit, we do not read "By one man sin entered into the earth," but "into the world" (Rom. 5. 12). We dare not substitute one term for another. It is this substitution as to the words "create" and "make," "world" and "age," "vine" and "fruit of the vine," "doctrines" and "doctrine," "stone" and "rock," etc., which has caused so much confusion, and bitterness. "The first earth" still remains (Rev. 21. 1), but it is not called "the first world"; (see 2 Pet. 2. 5). "Every word of God is pure."

In this light we realize the attempt of the enemy to win the sovereignty of earth by man's betrayal, and his hatred to the Holy One Who came that He might buy the field, and become the rightful Owner of the kingdoms of the world. Genesis 3 and Matthew 4 alike become far more impressive, and the great conflict, and its never uncertain issue in Revelation, shine out to the glory of Him Who as "King of kings and Lord of lords" must have dominion from SEA to SEA, and from the river (the new central river of Ezek. 47. 1, con-

trusted with Eden's) unto the ends of the earth, when the dragon shall be bound in the prison of Revelation 20. 3. Thus our hearts say "Even so, come, Lord Jesus," for is not "this Second Man" our Lord Jesus, Who was from heaven (1 Cor. 15. 47) and Whom we now await from heaven (1 Thess. 1. 10) ?

Does not the panorama of Psalm 104 yet further illustrate ? There we behold, after the beginning of PERSONAL praise, the glory of God in His majesty alone, and finally the casting of death and Hades out of the earth, away from God's presence<sup>6</sup> (35). In the intervening verses we have creation (5), and the present history of man (10-29) with the millennial earth (30, cf. Matt. 19. 28) followed by the fiery judgment at its close (32, cf. 2 Pet. 3. 10, Rev. 20. 9). This perfect order leads us to look more closely to the earlier verses, and we discover that verse 6 speaks of a definite act, "Thou coveredst it with the deep as with a garment." But is this the flood of Genesis 7 ? In Psalm 104. 7 the waters flee at God's voice but in verse 8 they AGAIN ascend mountains, only to go back to the place founded for them and after this SECOND flood a bound is set, exactly as we read in Genesis 8, that there may be a universal flood no more. This repeated flood is impressive, and makes the earlier one a definite action,

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<sup>6</sup> Gen. 5. 24 shows how utterly superficial is the thought that the Hebrew idiom means "annihilate."

as we have seen, and not an event in the process of creating. This agrees helpfully with the true explanation of Genesis 1. 2 and reminds us yet again that Scripture is its own commentary, and the Holy Spirit is His own Interpreter.

May we have anointed eyes to see God's gracious teaching, for not only does this help as to the whole of Scripture, but it becomes a call and a beacon, that we may not be ignorant of Satan's devices. Moreover, as we have noticed in 2 Corinthians 4. 6, God Himself uses this as a type of His gracious dealings with lost sinners. And thus anew we cry for His saving hand to be seen, that He may say "Let there be light," with a view to fruit, and that there may be growing up to that perfect Man contrasted with Adam, in the precious climax of the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (Eph. 4 .13). Then will be the rest which will not be broken, and the "keeping of a Sabbath" (Heb. 4. 9 marg.) that remains for the people of God, when the Lord Jesus shall be exalted in the midst of His people. Thus our whole meditation leads to His glory Who is mentioned "in the unrolling of the book" (Psa. 40. 7), and Who is its Centre throughout, until in the last verse His grace is the joy of those who know Him as their soon coming Lord (Rev. 22. 21).

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