THE EARTH OF GENESIS 1:2
ABIOTIC OR CHAOTIC?
PART I

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Introduction

The famous German scholar Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932), well-known advocate of *Formgeschichte*, tried to demonstrate that the battle in which Yahweh defeated the sea monster of the chaos was related to the Hebrew account of creation in Genesis 1. He assumed that the Babylonian creation account, with its *Chaoskampf* or battle between the creator-god and the powers of the chaos, was the basis for the mythical imagery that appears in the Bible.[1]

Since the discovery of the Ugaritic myths, the existence of a conflict between *Yahweh* and the sea dragons (*Leviathan* and *Rahab* in poetical texts of the OT) has been widely accepted.[2] This Canaanite conflict motif has been related to the biblical creation story as "a missing link" which supports the apparent *Chaoskampf* in Gen 1:2. Frequently, the *Chaoskampf* that appears in the Babylonian *Enuma elish* and the Ugaritic Baal myth is considered the main foundation of any cosmogony in the Ancient Near East (ANE).[3] For instance, J. Day assumed that Gen 1:2 is a demythologization of the original *Chaoskampf* myth of ancient Canaan.[4] R. J. Clifford and J. J. Collins have proposed that Genesis 1 begins with a mythical combat between the dragon

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[1]H. Gunkel, *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt*, HKAT 3/1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901); reprinted with introduction by W. F. Albright in *The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History* (New York: Schocken, 1974).

[2]A. Cooper, "Divine Names and Epithets in the Ugaritic Texts," in *Ras Shamra Parallels*, ed. Loren Fisher (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1981), 3:369-383.

[3]See C. Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat with the Sea: A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 70-86; J. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 18-49.

[4]Day, 53.

of chaos and the divine sovereign.[5]

Gunkel stated that the Hebrew term *tᵉhôm* in Gen 1:2 had a Babylonian background.[6] He suggested that *tᵉhôm* derived directly from *Tiamat*, the Babylonian goddess of the primordial ocean in the *Enuma elish*. Since Gunkel's statement, many scholars have assumed some kind of direct or indirect connection between the Babylonian *Tiamat* and the Hebrew *tᵉhôm*.[7] Many have accepted that the Hebrew *tᵉhôm* in Gen 1:2 has a mythological foundation in *Tiamat*, the goddess of the *Enuma elish*, in which *Marduk* the storm god fights and defeats *Tiamat* the sea dragon, thus establishing the cosmos.[8]

The expression *tōhû wābōhû*, "emptiness and waste," in Gen 1:2 is often considered a reference to this primordial "chaos," in strict opposition to "creation." The phrase is taken to refer to the earth in an *abiotic* or lifeless state, with no vegetation, animals, or human beings.[9]

Gunkel also posited the theory, later supported by other scholars, that the *rûaḥ ᵉlōhîm* in Gen 1:2c corresponds to the winds that *Marduk* sends against *Tiamat*, thus assuming that it is an expression that describes the primordial chaos.

The object of this three-part article is to discover whether in Gen 1:2 there is any evidence for the mythological battle between the creator-god and the powers of the chaos, *Chaoskampf*, such as Gunkel and many other scholars maintain.[10] If we found such evidence, we would need to take heed

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[5]R. J. Clifford and J. J. Collins, eds., *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, CBQ Monograph Series 24 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992), 32-33. See also R. J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible*, CBQ Monograph Series 26 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1994).

[6]H. Gunkel, "Influence of Babylonian Mythology upon the Biblical Creation Stories," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. B. W. Anderson, Issues in Religion and Theology 6 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 25-52; first published in *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (1895).

[7]B. S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1960), 36; B. W. Anderson, *Creation versus Chaos: The Reinterpretation of Mythical Symbolism in the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 15-40; K. Wakeman, "The Biblical Earth Monster in the Cosmogonic Combat Myth," *JBL* 88 (1969): 313-320; idem, *God's Battle with the Monster: A Study in Biblical Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 86ff.

[8]For a translation and discussion of this text, see A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); see also the translation by E. A. Speiser in "The Creation Epic," *ANET*, 60-72. The most recent translation can be seen in S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 233-274.

[9]See D. T. Tsumura, "The Earth in Genesis 1," in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood*, ed. R. S. Hess and D. T. Tsumura (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 326-328.

[10]See for example, B. K. Waltke, *Creation and Chaos* (Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974). This author points out that there are three main

to Gunkel's affirmation: "If it is the case, however, that a fragment of a cosmogonic myth is preserved in Genesis 1, then it is also no longer allowable to reject the possibility that the whole chapter might be a myth that has been transformed into narrative."[11] But if, on the contrary, there is no linguistic or biblical foundation for that assumption, the creation account would no longer be a myth or compilation of myths similar to those of ANE literature. The creation story would then be a true, reliable, literal, and objective account of the origin of life on this planet.

To achieve this goal, these articles about the earth described in Gen 1:2 will analyze the Hebrew terms *tōhû wābōhû*, *tᵉhôm*, and *rûah ᵉlōhîm* in the OT and their equivalents in the ANE literature.

The Hebrew Text of Gen 1:2

*Wᵉhā'āreṣ hāyᵉtâ tōhû wābōhû wᵉhōšek 'al~pᵉnê tᵉhôm
wᵉrûah 'lōhîm merahepet 'al~pᵉnê hammāyim*

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (NIV).

Gen 1:2 is formed by three circumstantial clauses:

(1) *Wᵉhā'āreṣ hāyᵉtâ tōhû wābōhû:* "Now the earth was formless and empty"
(2) *wᵉhōšek 'al~pᵉnê tᵉhôm:* "darkness was over the surface of the deep"
(3) *wᵉrûah 'lōhîm mᵉrahepet 'al~pᵉnê hammāyim:* "and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."

In Semitic languages a circumstantial clause describes a particular condition.[12] Verse 2 presents three clauses that describe three circumstances or conditions that existed at a particular time, which is defined by the verb

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interpretations of Gen 1:1-3 within Protestant thinking. These he calls the theory of the postcreation chaos (or theory of the restitution), in which chaos occurred after the original creation; the theory of the initial chaos, according to which chaos occurred in connection with creation; and the theory of the precreation chaos which he himself defends, according to which chaos occurred before the original creation (18, 19); and other authors such as: A. P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 106-107, 723; V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 117. As can be seen, the explanation and interpretation of Gen 1:2 are founded on chaos, whether before, during, or after creation.

[11]Gunkel, "Influence of Babylonian Mythology," 26-27.

[12]For a discussion of the function of the circumstantial phrase in Hebrew, see W. Gesenius-E. Kautzch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, trans. A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 451, 489; Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Subsidia Biblica 14 (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991), 2:581.

form of the three clauses.[13] In this verse the three coordinated clauses begin with a *waw* followed by a noun that functions as the subject of the clause.

The theme of the verse 2 is the earth; this is the great central theme, not only in the rest of Genesis 1, but also of the whole Bible.[14] The earth is the center and object of biblical thought.[15]

The exegesis of Gen 1:2 has been considered by scholars such as M. Alexandre,[16] P. Beauchamp,[17] V. P. Hamilton,[18] D. Kidner,[19] S. Niditch,[20] A. P. Ross,[21] N. M. Sarna,[22] L. I. J. Stadelmann,[23] G. von Rad,[24] G. J. Wenham,[25] C. Westermann,[26] and E. J. Young.[27]

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[13]"Clauses describing concomitant circumstances are introduced by the conjunction ו of accompaniment. . . . When the circumstances described are past or future, a finite form of a verb is employed. For the past a perfect aspect is used, e.g. והארץ היתה תהו ובהו 'the earth having been a formless void' (Gen 1:2)" (R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline,* 2d ed. [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976, 1992]), 83. In this case the verb *hāyâ* is in Qal perfect 3 feminine singular *hāytâ*. As C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch point out: "The three statements in our verse are parallel; the substantive and participial construction of the second and third clauses rests upon the והיתה of the first. All three describe the condition of the earth immediately after the creation of the universe" (*Commentary on the Old Testament,* trans. J. Martin [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 1:49).

[14]For further bibliographical references on Gen 1:1-3 from 1885/86 to 1966, see C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary,* trans. J. J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 75-76.

[15]So Keil and Delitzsch, 1:48.

[16]M. Alexandre, *Le Commencement du Livre: Genèse I-V* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1988), 76-87.

[17]P. Beauchamp, *Création et Séparation* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1969), 149-174.

[18]Hamilton, 108-117.

[19]D. Kidner, *Genesis* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1967), 44-45.

[20]S. Niditch, *Chaos to Cosmos* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985), 18.

[21]Ross, 106-107.

[22]N. M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schoken, 1970), 22, 34 n. 23; idem., *Genesis,* The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 6-7.

[23]L. I. J. Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World,* Analecta Biblica 39 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1970), 12-17.

[24]G. von Rad, *El Libro del Génesis* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1988), 58-60.

[25]G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15,* WBC (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 15-17.

[26]Westermann, 102-111.

[27]E. J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 15-42.

The Semichiastic Structure of Gen 1:2

The Hebrew text of Gen 1:2 presents an incomplete antithetical chiastic structure (i.e., a quasi- or semichiastic antithetical structure, because it lacks the section A' which is antithetical to A) marked by the following linguistic and semantic parallelism:

A *W^ehā'āreṣ hāy^etâ tōhû wābōhû:* "Now the earth was formless and empty"
  B *w^eḥōšek 'al ~ p^enê t^ehôm:* "darkness was over the surface of the deep"
  B' *w^erûaḥ 'lōhîm m^eraḥepet 'al ~ p^enê hammāyim:* "and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."

The grammatical, semantic, and syntactic chiastic parallelism is clearly defined by the microstructures B \\ B' (\\ stands for antithetic parallelism) in which the expression "over the surface" *'al ~ p^enê* is repeated. Grammatically speaking, this expression is a preposition + plural masculine noun construct (prep. + p.m.n.cstr.).[28]

The grammatical and semantic parallel *'al ~ p^enê t^ehôm // 'al ~ p^enê hammāyim* represents a second example of paired words, *t^ehôm // hammāyim* that appears in Ezek 26:19 and Ps 104:6; and *mayim // t^ehôm* that appear in Ezek 31:4; Hab 3:10; Jonah 2:6; Ps 33:7; 77:17; Job 38:30. Notice also the parallelism between *mayim // t^ehōmōt* and *rûaḥ* in Exod 15:8.[29] The antithetic concept is clearly indicated by the opposite or contrasting pair of words *ḥōšek* "darkness" \\ *rûaḥ 'lōhîm* "Spirit of God." The noun *ḥōšek* is grammatically a masculine singular (m.s.n.), and *rûaḥ 'lōhîm* is a feminine singular noun construct (f.s.n.cstr.) plus a masculine plural noun (m.p.n.). However, they present an exact syntactic correspondence and parallelism. Both have the same syntactic function, that of a subject.[30]

Another syntactic aspect is important in this antithetic chiasm: the construct relation in *'al ~ p^enê t^ehôm* and *'al ~ p^enê hammāyim*.[31] This aspect of the Hebrew syntax is of great importance to the significance and the semantic and etymological origin of *t^ehôm*, as will be seen in the second part of this article.

A particular type of parallelism used in prose is the gender-matched parallelism. Gen 1:2 is an example of this type of parallelism, since it represent

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[28]Williams, 10-11.

[29]J. S. Kselman, "The Recovery of Poetic Fragments from the Pentateuchal Priestly Source," *JBL* 97 (1978): 163.

[30]For a study of the biblical grammatical, semantic, and syntactic parallelism, see A. Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

[31]See B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 240-241.

the gender-matched pattern: Feminine + masculine // masculine + feminine // feminine + masculine. [32]

Tōhû wābōhû *in the Old Testament and the Literature of the Ancient Near East*

Before specifically considering this point, we must briefly analyze the Hebrew terms *hāʾāreṣ* and *hāy°tâ* in Gen 1:2. The most used Egyptian term for "earth" is *t3*. The antithesis for this term is the formula *pt-t3*, "heaven" and "earth," by which it makes reference to the whole cosmos. The usual hieroglyphic symbol *t3* represents a flood plain with grains of sand all around. In Sumerian and Akkadian there is a distinction between "earth" (*ki* or *erṣetu*) and "country" (*kur, kalam,* or *matu*). In Akkadian *erṣetu* means "earth," in opposition to "heaven." "Heaven and earth" (*šamû u erṣetu*) means the universe. In Ugaritic *iṣ* means "earth, ground, inferior world." The earth is also opposed to "heaven" and the clouds.[33] Ugaritic literature also gives an extraordinary example of a pair of words, *arṣ // thmt,* chiastically related as in Gen 1:2: *tant šmm ʿm arṣ // thmt ʿmn kbkbm.*[34]

The pair of words *ereṣ // t°hôm* also reveals an example of inclusive structure in the six days of the creation, where *ʿal ~ p°nê t°hôm* before the first day (Gen 1:2) matches *ʿal ~ p°nê hāʾāreṣ* after the sixth (Gen 1:29).[35]

The Hebrew *ereṣ* occupies the fourth place among the most frequent nouns in the OT. The term appears 2,504 times in Hebrew and another 22

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[32]See W.G.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, JSOT Supplement Series 26 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1986), 53.

[33]*TDOT*, 1:388-392.

[34]R. E. Whitaker, *A Concordance of the Ugaritic Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 613.

[35]Kselman, 164. For this type of inclusion or construction see D. N. Freedman's "Prolegomenon" to G. B. Gray, *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry* (New York: KTAV, 1972), xxxvi-xxxvii. However, according to D.T. Tsumura the nature of the relationship between *hāʾāreṣ* "earth" and *t°hôm* "abyss, ocean" in Gen 1:2 is a *hyponym*. According to Tsumura, in modern linguistics, the relationship of meaning is called hyponym which sometimes is explained as inclusion. (i.e., what is referred to in the term A includes what is referred to in the term B). The former is preferred over the latter because a relationship of sense exists among lexical items rather than a relationship of reference. Thus the hyponym can be used also in a relationship between terms that have no reference. In Tsumura's own words: "Our term 'hyponym' therefore means that the sense [A] of the more general term 'A' (e.g. 'fruit') completely includes the 'sense' [B] of more specific term 'B' (e.g. 'apple'), and hence what 'A' refers to includes what 'B' refers to. In other words, when the referent [B] of the term 'B' is a part of/belongs to the referent [A] of the term 'A', we can say that 'B' is *hyponymous* to 'A,' ("A 'Hyponymous' Word Pair: *ʾrṣ* and *thm (t)* in Hebrew and Ugaritic" [*Bib* 69 (1988): 258-269, esp. 259-260]). Therefore, in Gen 1:2 there is a hyponym in which *t°hôm* "ocean" is a part of the *hāʾāreṣ* "earth."

times in the Aramaic sections. The word *ereṣ* designates: (1) cosmologically, the earth (in opposition to heaven) and solid ground (in opposition to water); (2) physically, the soil on which humans live; (3) geographically, certain regions and territories; (4) politically, certain sovereign regions and countries. In the most general sense, *ereṣ* designates the earth that together with the "heaven," *šāmayim,* comprises the totality of the universe. "Heaven and Earth" is an expression designating the whole world (Gen 1:1; 2:1, 4; 14:19, 22; etc.).

In addition to a bipolar view of the world, there is also a tripolar view: for instance, heaven-earth-sea (Exod 20:11; Gen 1:10, 20 and others); heaven-earth-water beneath the earth (Exod 20:4; Deut 5:8). But what is important to the OT is not the earth as part of the cosmos but what lives on it (Deut 33:16; Isa 34:1; Jer 8:16; etc.): its inhabitants (Isa 24:1, 5-6, 17; Jer 25:29-30; Ps 33:14; etc.), nations (Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; Deut 28:10; etc.), and kingdoms (Deut 28:25; 2 Kgs 19:15; etc.). Thus the term "earth" may designate at the same time—as it does in other languages—the earth and its inhabitants (Gen 6:11; etc.). In its physical use, *ereṣ* designates the ground on which human beings, things, dust (Exod 8:12), and reptiles (Gen 1:26; 7:14; 8:19; etc.) are.[36]

The verb *hāyâ* (to be) that appears in Gen 1:2 as *hāyᵉtâ* in Qal perfect 3 f.s. is translated by the majority of the versions as "was" but may also be translated "became," as it appears in some versions. However, the syntactic order and the structure of the clause do not allow this translation here. The syntactic order in Gen 1:2 (first the subject and then the verb) is used to indicate the addition of circumstantial information and the absence of chronological or sequential occurrence. For that reason the translators of the LXX translated *hāyᵉtâ* as "was" and not as "became."[37] Besides, the Hebrew letter *waw* that appears at the beginning of Gen 1:2 is a "circumstantial *waw*" because it is joined to the subject "the earth" and not to the verb. Therefore it is better translated as "now." The translators of the LXX, who were very careful in the translation of the Pentateuch, translated it in that way.

The initial state of the earth in Gen 1:2 is described as *tōhû wābōhû.* This expression is translated into English as "formless and empty" (NIV). In the Greek versions it is translated as αορατος και ακατασκευαστος, "invisible and unformed" (LXX); κενωμα και ουθεν, "empty and nothing" (Aquila); θεν και ουθεν "nothing and nothing" (Theodotion); and αργον

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[36]E. Jenni and C. Westermann, *Diccionario Teológico Manual del Antiguo Testamento,* trans. J. A. Múgica; Madrid: Cristiandad, 1978), 1:344-54. See also *TWOT,* 1:167-68; D.J.A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 1:384-397, esp. 392, which gives specific references to Qumran literature and related extrabiblical texts.

[37]F. Delitzsch comments that the perfect preceded by the subject is the most usual way of describing the circumstances in which the subsequent account takes place (*A New Commentary on Genesis* [Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978], 1:77).

και αδιακριτον, "unproductive and indistinguishable" (Symmachus).[38]

Etymology and Usage of Tōhû *in the OT*

Tōhû is a masculine singular noun (m.s.n.) that means "formlessness, confusion, unreality, emptiness, . . . formlessness of primaeval earth in Gen 1:2";[39] "wasteland, solitude or emptiness";[40] "emptiness, waste, desert, chaos, confusion";[41] "Wüste, Öde, Leere, . . . Gen 1:2 es 'bedeutet die öde Wüste, und ist als Grundbegriff zur Schöpfung gebraucht";[42] "caos, lo que no tiene forma ni medida, informe, inmensidad. Lo desmesurado; formulación clara y directa de la negación: nada, la nada, vacío, el vacío, nulidad, . . . caos informe en Gen 1:2."[43]

The term *tōhû* appears 20 times in the OT, 11 of them in Isaiah.[44] The different uses of the term can be classified, according to Westermann, in three groups that go from the concrete meaning of "desert" to the abstract "emptiness": (1) "Desert," the terrible and barren desert that leads to destruction: Deut 32:10; Job 6:18; 12:24 = Ps 107:40; (2) "Desert or devastation that threatens": Isa 24:10; 34:11; 40:23; Jer 4:23; "the state that is opposed to the creation and precedes it": Gen 1:2; Isa 45:18; Job 26:7. 3; (3) "Nothing": 1 Sam 12:21 (2x); Isa 29:21; 40:17; 41:29; 44:29; 45:19; 49:4; 59:4.[45]

The first and third groups are simple enough to define and describe. In the first, *tōhû* is "earth, desert ground" (Deut 32:10), the "untilled land" where caravans die (Job 6:18), a "barren ground without roads" where people wander (Job 12:24; Ps 107:40). Therefore, the term refers to the desert as a "barren ground

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[38]J. W. Wevers, *Septuaginta: Genesis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 75; cf. A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgessellschaft, 1979).

[39]F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (BDB) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 1062.

[40]W. L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 386.

[41]E. Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English* (Jerusalem: University of Haifa, 1987), 692.

[42]L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, eds., *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1967-1994), 1557.

[43]L. A. Schökel, *Diccionario Bíblico Hebreo-Español* (Madrid: Trotta, 1994), 792. Translation: "Chaos; what has no shape or measure: shapeless, immensity, the excessive; a clear and direct formulation of the negation: nothing, the nothingness, empty, the emptiness, nullity, . . . shapeless chaos in Gen 1:2."

[44]See A. Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Old Testament* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1990), 1219. The 20 texts are: Gen 1:2; Deut 32:10; 1 Sam 12:21 (2x); Job 6:18; 12:24; 26:7; Ps 107:40; Isa 24:10; 29:21; 34:11; 40:17, 23; 41:29; 44:9; 45:18-19; 49:4; 59:4; Jer 4:23.

[45]Westermann, 102-103.

or land." In the third group *tōhû* refers to a situation in which something that ought to be there is lacking. It is used in an abstract sense in which it appears in parallel with other nouns such as *ĕpes*, "nothing"(Isa 41:29), *rîq*, "empty" (Isa 49:4), and "empty arguments" (Isa 59:4, NIV).[46] In these passages *tōhû* is better understood as "lack or emptiness" rather than "nothing."

Of special interest to this study are the uses of *tōhû* in Westermann's second group, where the word describes the situation or condition of places such as the planet earth, land (region), or city. In Isa 24:10 we have *qiryat-tōhû*, referring to the "desolate or deserted" state of a city, almost equivalent to the term *šammâ* in v. 12, which refers to the desolation of a city: "The ruined city lies desolate; the entrance to every house is barred" (NIV).

In Job 26:7, Westermann thinks *'al ~ tōhû* is directly opposed to the creation, though he does not translate it as chaos.[47] But the expression *'al ~ tōhû* is parallel to the expression *'al ~ belî ~ mâ* "a place where there is nothing." Therefore, in this context a possible translation of *tōhû* would be "a desert-like or empty place."[48]

Westermann points out that in Isa 45:18 *lō ' ~ tōhû* is in direct opposition to the creation.[49] However, here *tōhû* is in parallelism with *lāšebet*, Qal infinitive construct (Qal inf. cstr.), "to be inhabited" (NIV), from the verb *yāšab* "to dwell."[50] The text does not indicate anything about a chaotic state in the earth: "he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited" (NIV). Instead, *tōhû* in this text also means "a desert, an uninhabited place." Thus this verse may be better translated as "[earth] not to be a desert or uninhabited place he created it, to be inhabited he formed it."[51] In other words, this verse explains that God

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[46]E. J. Young translates *tohû* in Isa 44:9 as "unreality" and explains that the word "suggests an absence of all life and power" (*The Book of Isaiah*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972], 3:172).

[47]Westermann, 103.

[48]Job 26:7a: *nōṭeh ṣāpôn 'al ~ tōhû* // Job 26:7b: *tōleh ʾereṣ 'al ~ b'lî ~ mâ*.

[49]Westermann, 103.

[50]BDB, 442; Holladay, 146.

[51]Isa 45:18f: *lō ' ~ tōhû b'rā'āh* // Isa 45:18g: *lāšebet y'ṣārāh*. We can verify that it is a structure in parallel panels which is marked by the following microstructure:

A *lō ' ~ tōhû* [Earth] not to be a desert or uninhabited place
   B *b'rā'āh* he created it
A' *lāšebet* to be inhabited
   B' *y'ṣārāh* he formed it

We observe a clear antithetical parallelism between A \\ A', *lō ' ~ tōhû* "[Earth] not to be a desert or uninhabited place" // *lāšebet* "[Earth] to be inhabited." As Watson points out when referring to the parallel types of words: "*antonymic word-pairs* are made up of words opposite in meaning and are normally used in antithetic parallelism" (131). At the same time, there is a synonymic parallelism between B // B', *b'rā'āh* "he created it" //

did not create the earth to be uninhabited or desert but to be inhabited. Gen 1:2 can be understood in the same sense, that God created the earth to be inhabited, but "it was still desert or uninhabited" during the initial stage of the creation though it was in no sense in a chaotic state.

In Isa 45:19 the term *tōhû* has been interpreted in two ways: concrete (locative) and abstract. The syntax is always understood in the same way: *tōhû* as an adverb that modifies the verbal clause *baqqešûnî*, as part of the direct speech.[52] The *Tg. Isa.* analyzes *tōhû* in the same way: "¡Buscad en vano (*lryqnw*) mi temor!"[53] However, its meaning and grammatical function must be analyzed by considering the parallel structure of the complete verse.[54] Therefore, from the literary structure in parallel panels, B' *tōhû* is parallel with B *bimeqôm 'ereṣ ḥōšek* "in a land of darkness" (NIV). In Tsumura's words: "*Tōhû* without a preposition directly corresponds either to *'ereṣ ḥōšek* or to *ḥōšek.* . . . In this case, the term *tōhû*, corresponding directly to *ḥōšek* 'darkness,' probably means 'desolation.'"[57] To conclude, we must point out that in the Targums, the Talmudic and the Midrashic literature *tōhû* is interpreted as "waste, desolation; vanity, idleness."[57]

*Thw in Ugaritic Literature

Once we have analyzed the etymology and the usage of *tōhû* in the OT, we consider its etymology and usage in the Ugaritic literature. Until recently,

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yṣārāh "he formed it." In Watson's words: *"synonymous word-pairs* comprise a large class with a broad spectrum. . . . Its components are synonyms or near-synonyms and therefore almost interchangeable in character" (ibid.).

[52]D. T. Tsumura, "*Tōhû* in Isaiah XLV 19," *VT* 38 (1988): 361-364, esp. 361.

[53]J. Ribera Florit, *El Targum de Isaías* (Valencia: Institución San Jerónimo, 1988), 192.

[54]Isa 45:19a: *lō'bassēter dibbartî* // Isa 45:19c: *lō' 'āmar'tî l'zera 'ya 'āqōb.* Isa 45:19b: *bim'qôm 'ereṣ ḥōšek* // Isa 45:19d: *tōhû baqq'šûnî.* We can observe that it is a structure in parallel panels that is marked by the following microstructures:
   A *lō'bassēter dibbartî* I have not spoken in secret
      B *bim'qôm 'ereṣ ḥōšek* from somewhere in a land of darkness
   A' *lō' 'āmar'tî l'zera 'ya 'āqōb* I have not said to Jacob's descendants
      B' *tōhû baqq'šûnî* Seek me in vain' (NIV)
The syntactical and morphological parallelism is evident between A \\ A' in the negative sentence, and the tense and the person of the verb, *lō'dibbartî* negative + Pi'el perfect 1 common singular // *lō' 'āmar'tî* negative + Qal perfect 1 common singular. Meanwhile, there is a semantical parallelism between B // B', *'ereṣ ḥōšek* // *tōhû*, with the same nouns as in Gen 1:2 (for a linguistic study of the different types of biblical parallelisms, see Berlin, 32-58).

[57]Tsumura, 362-363.

[57]M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Title, 1943), 1651.

recently, the etymology of *tōhû* was explained in the light of the Arabic *tîh*, waterless desert, trackless wilderness.[58] However, as Tsumura points out, the Arabic term, with a second weak consonant *h*, does not explain the final long *û* of the Hebrew *tōhû*.[59]

The Ugaritic term equivalent to the Hebrew *tōhû* is the *thw* nominal form that appears only once in the Ugaritic literature,[60] in the cycle of *Baal and Mot* as follows:

pnp.s.nps.lbim [15] *thw*
"'But my appetite is an appetite of lions (in) the waste,

hm.brlt.anhr [16] *bym*
"'just as the longing of dolphin(s) is in the sea.[61]

Del Olmo Lete presents the following translation of the same text: "Tengo, sí, el apetito del león de la estepa, o la gana del tiburón (que mora) en el mar."[62] In the context of the two lines of Ugaritic text, *lbim.thw* "of a lion in the steppe [desert]" corresponds to *anhr.bym*, "of a shark in the sea," since *npš* and *brlt* are a well known idiomatic pair.[63] Del Olmo Lete maintains that the Ugaritic term *thw* is a cognate of the Heb *tōhû*.[64]

Considering the evidence presented, we can affirm that the Ugaritic term *thw* is a cognate of the Heb *tōhû* and both have a common meaning: "desert." They are probably nouns with a common Semitic root, **thw*. In relation to this, Huehnergard points out that the text or alphabetical form *thw* is probably **/tuhwu/* "wasteland."[65]

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[58]Klein, 692.

[59]D. T. Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation*, JSOT Supplement Series 83 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 17.

[60]See C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, Analecta Orientalia 38 (Roma: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1965), 178. It is the transliteration of the text 67.I.15: *thw.ham.brlt.anhr*; also M. Dietrich, O. Loretz and J. Sanmartín, *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*, 2d ed., ALASP 8 (Münster: Ugarit, 1995), 22. It is the transliteration of the text 1.5 I 15: *thw.hm.brlt.anhr*.

[61]Ugaritic text 5 I 15, in J.C.L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2d ed., 1978), 68.

[62]G. Del Olmo Lete, *Mitos y Leyendas de Canaán* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1981), 214. Translation: "I have, yes I do, the appetite of a lion on the steppe, the longing of a shark (who lives) in the sea."

[63]On p. 635 Del Olmo Lete says: "*thw*: n.m., 'estepa, desierto' (cf. heb. *tōhû*; cf. Gibson, 159)."

[64]Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartín, 1.18 IV 25, 36-37, 55, 58. Del Olmo Lete notes that *thw* "steppe, desert" is antonymous to *ym*, "sea."

[65]J. Huehnergard, *Ugaritic Vocabulary in Syllabic Transcription*, Harvard Semitic Series 32 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 84, 287.

Etymology of *bhw

Bōhû is similar to *tōhû* because it is a m.s.n. which means "'emptiness' of primeval earth";[66] "emptiness (// formlessness, + earth) . . . formlessness and emptiness";[67] "Heb. *bōhû* 'vacuité, vide'; Arab. '*bahw-* 'espace dégagé, trouée, etc.', *bahiya* 'être vide, désert', *bahi* 'vide, désert'";[68] "void, waste";[69] "emptiness, chaos";[70] "Leere, Öde";[71] "vacío, caos, caos informe."[72]

The term *bōhû* appears only 3 times in the OT, always with *tōhû:* Gen 1:2; Isa 34:11; Jer 4:23. Its meaning will be considered in the section on the usage of phrase *tōhû wābōhû.* In the Targums, as well as the Talmudic and the Midrashic literature, Jastrow finds that *bōhû* is interpreted as "chaotic condition; always with תהו."[73]

*Bhw *in the Ancient Near Eastern Literature*

The etymology of *bōhû* has been explained through the Arabic *bahiya,* "to be hollow, empty."[74] This Arabic term is used to describe the "empty" state of a store or house that has little or nothing in it.[75] Therefore, its meaning is more concrete than abstract, "nothing, empty."

Albright suggested that the Akkadian term *bûbûtu,* "emptiness, hunger," comes from *buhbuhtu and is possibly a cognate of the Heb *bōhû.*[76] However, the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* does not list "emptiness" as a meaning of *bûbûtu A.* It translates the term as: "famine, starvation, want, hunger, sustenance"[77]

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[66]BDB, 96.

[67]D.J.A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 2:97; in the Qumran materials we find the variant 1QM 17₄.

[68]D. Cohen, *Dictionnaire des Racines Sémitiques* (Louvain: Peeters, 1994), 2:47.

[69]Holladay, 34.

[70]Klein, 65.

[71]Koehler and Baumgartner,107.

[72]Schockel, 102. Translation: "empty, chaos, shapeless chaos."

[73]Jastrow, 142.

[74]According to Klein, *bōhû* comes from the root of בהה, Arabic *bahw,* "hollow, empty" (65).

[75]E. W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1863; reprinted 1968), 269f.

[76]W.F. Albright, "Contributions to Biblical Archaeology and Philogy," *JBL* 43 (1924): 366.

[77]*CAD,* B:301-302.

and Von Soden suggests "hunger" as a possible meaning of *bûbûtu*. Neither of these Akkadian terms is a cognate of Heb *bōhû*.[78]

It has been also suggested that the term *bōhû* is related to Phoenician divine name βααυ, the goddess of "night."[79] Tsumura indicates that it is phonologically possible to propose an original "Canaanite" form */báhwu/ for both Heb *bōhû* and Phoenician */bah(a)wu/*, which was apparently re-presented in Greek script as *ba-a-u*.[80] But he adds that there is no evidence that the Hebrew term had any connection with the Phoenician divine name, except for its possible origin in a common root, **bhw*.[81] Likewise, Cassuto, after indicating that the word is found in the earlier Canaanite poems, adds: "but there is no connection apparently with the Mesopotamian goddess *Ba-u*."[82]

Recently Görg suggested that *tōhû* and *bōhû* must be explained by the Egyptian terms *th3* and *bh3*.[83] This proposal is highly speculative since no hendiadys of these terms in is known.[84]

In conclusion, taking into account available evidence, although there is no final etymological explanation, the Heb *bōhû* seems to be a Semitic term based on the root **bhw* and is probably a cognate of Arabic *bahiya*, "to be empty."

**Thw and **bhw in the OT*

Albright's affirmation that the clause *tōhû wābōhû* means "chaos" and

[78]W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbach* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrossowitz, 1965-1981), 135.

[79]Albright, 366, n. 7.

[80]Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters*, 22. This author proposes the following evolution of the original form for the Heb *bōhû*: */báhwu/ > /búhwu/ > /buhuu/ > /búhu/ > /bóhu/*. But he immediately adds the possible origin of *bōhû* in an original form */bíhwu/* from a Ugaritic example written syllabically (ibid., n. 26).

[81]Ibid.

[82]U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961; reprinted 1989), 22.

[83]M. Görg, "*Tōhû wābōhû*: ein Deutungsvorschlag," *ZAW* 92 (1980): 431-434; see also "Zur Struktur von Gen 1.2" *Biblische Notizen* 62 (1992): 11-15.

[84]*Hendiadys* is defined as: "The use of two substantives, joined by a conjunction, to express a single but complex idea. The two words may be collocated, be joined by a copula or be in apposition. Hendiadys is used very often in Hebrew. . . . The important aspect of hendiadys is that its components are no longer considered separately but as a single unit in combination" (Watson, 324-325). Such is the case of *tōhû wābōhû* in Gen 1:2. E. A. Speiser explains: "The Heb. pair *tō hû wā-bō hû* is an excellent example of hendiadys, that is, two terms connected by 'and' and forming a unit in which one member is used to qualify the other" (*Genesis*, AB [New York: Doubleday, 1962], 5, n. 2a).

that *tōhû* refers to a watery chaos is shared by many modern scholars, including Cassuto.[85] According to most modern scholars, the expression *tōhû wābōhû* in Gen 1:2 is understood as the primeval "chaos, confusion, disorganization" and is, therefore, in direct opposition to creation.[86] On the other hand, Börner-Klein points out that *tōhû wābōhû* describes the state of the earth immediately after God had created the world. From the LXX and the ancient Greek versions, as well as the Qumran materials, he concludes that the phrase refers to a created, yet shapeless earth.[87]

To complete the study we must consider Isa 34:11 and Jer 4:23, where *tōhû* and *bōhû* appear. In Isa 34:11 *tōhû* and *bōhû* appear in parallel expressions[88]: *qaw ~ tōhû* "the measuring line of *thw*" (NIV) // *'abnê ~ bōhû* "the plumb line of *bhw*" (NIV).[89] This passage clearly refers to an uninhabited place. Basic

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[85]Cassuto, 23. See also B. K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3, Part 3, The Initial Chaos Theory and the Precreation Chaos Theory," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (1975): 225-228. Waltke interprets *tōhû wābōhû* as the chaotic state before creation. For a recent answer to Waltke's arguments, see M. F. Rooker, "Genesis 1:1-3: Creation o Re-Creation? Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (1992): 316-323; and "Genesis 1:1-3: Creation or Re-Creation? Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (1992): 411-427. Wenham speaks of "total chaos" (15-16).

[86]See Alexandre, 77; Beauchamp, 162-163; Hamilton, 108; Kidner, 44; Niditch, 18; Ross, 106; Sarna, 6; Stadelmann, 12; Wenham, 15; Westermann, 103; Young, 33-34.

[87]D. Börner-Klein, "*Tohu* und *bohu*: Zur Auslegungsgeschichte von Gen 1,2a," *Henoch* 15 (1993): 3-41. Börner-Klein analyzes the LXX, Origen, Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, which use a variety of images to translate the clause: "the earth was invisible," "uncultivated," "a desert," "an empty space," "nothing." His study of Qumran materials renders the following interpretations: "a desolate country," "vanity" and "empty." Rabbinic literature interprets the clause as a negative principle, primeval matter that God already found at creation, i.e., a substratum of the *creatio ex nihilo*, created matter but shapeless yet. In a Karaite commentary on Genesis he found the idea of an empty earth, without buildings. His study included   Christian Bible commentaries that develop similar concepts   in opposition to Aristotle's doctrine of the eternity of the world.

[88]See W. G. E. Watson, *Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse*, JSOT Supplement Series 170 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 148, 153, 161, 165.

[89]Isa 34:11a: *wîrēšûhā qāat wĕqippôd* // Isa 34:11b: *wĕyanšôp wĕ 'ōrēb yiškˁnû ~ bāh*; Isa 34:11c: *wĕnāṭâ 'āleyhā qaw ~ tōhû* // Isa 34:11d: *wĕ 'abnê ~ bōhû*. The structure in parallel panels is marked by the following microstructures:

A *wîrēšûhā qāat wĕqippôd* The desert owl and screech owl will possess it
A' *wĕyanšôp wĕ 'ōrēb yiškˁnû ~ bāh* the great owl and the raven will nest there
  B *wĕnāṭâ 'āleyhā qaw ~ tōhû* . . . the measuring line of chaos
  B' *wĕ 'abnê ~ bōhû* and the plumb line of desolation (NIV)

There is a semantic and syntactic synonymous parallelism between A // A', *wîrēšûhā qāat wĕqippôd* "The desert owl and screech owl will possess it" // *wĕyanšôp wĕ 'ōrēb yiškˁnû ~ bāh* "the great owl and the raven will nest there." In both cases, at a semantic level, the lines refer to birds. On the syntactic level, there is also a subject + verb (+suffix) // subject + verb (+suffix) parallelism, but with the components of the clauses inverted. Likewise, there is semantic and syntactic synonymous parallelism between B // B', *wĕnāṭâ*

to the understanding of Isa 34:11 as a land uninhabited by human beings is the grammatical and semantic parallelism of the verbs יָרַשׁ, "take possession of,"[90] Qal perfect 3 common plural *wîrēšûhā*, "will possess it"; and שָׁכַן "live in, settle,"[91] Qal imperfect 3 masculine plural *yiškᵉnû*, "will dwell," in Isa 34:11a and Isa 34:11b. Besides, an exegesis of the immediately preceding verse, Isa 34:10cd, clearly shows the meaning of Isa 34:11: an un-inhabited land.[92] In Young's words: "the land will become a desolation and waste so that it can no more receive inhabitants."[93] Therefore, in Isa 34:11 we do not find linguistic or exegetic evidence for any chaotic situation.

Jer 4:23 contains the following parallel structure:[94]

> A *rāʾîtî ʾet ~ hāʾāreṣ* I looked at the earth,
> B *wᵉhinnēh ~ tōhû wābōhû* and it was formless and empty;
> A' *wᵉ ʾel ~ haššāmayim* and at the heavens,
> B' *wᵉ ʾ ēn ʾ ŏrām* and their light was gone (NIV).

It has often been stated that Jer 4:23-26 describes a return to the primitive chaos.[95] But this point of view is highly influenced by the traditional exegesis of the expression *tōhû wābōhû* as "chaos" in Gen 1:2 and not on the analysis of the context of Jer 4:23. In vv. 23-26, each of the verses begins with *rāʾîtî*,

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ā leyhā qaw ~ tōhû: "the measuring line of chaos" // *wᵉ ʾabnê ~ bōhû* "and the plumb line of desolation." In both lines we find the same nouns that appear in Gen 1:2, *tōhû* and *bōhû*. Finally, both nouns are in a construct relation (on grammatical, semantic, and syntactic parallelism, see Berlin, 31-102).

[90]BDB, 439; Holladay, 145.

[91]BDB, 1014-1015; Holladay, 371.

[92]Isa 34:10cd: *middôr lādôr teḥᵉrāb lᵉnēṣaḥ nᵉṣāḥîm ʿeyn ʿōbēr bāh* "From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass through it again" (NIV). Thus Isa 34:10d interprets Isa 34:10c and 34:11 in a definite semantic parallelism to: *middôr lādôr teḥᵉrāb*, "From generation to generation it will lie desolate."

[93]Young indicates that the prophet Isaiah uses the language of Gen 1:2 (*Book of Isaiah*, 2:438).

[94] There is an antithetical semantic parallelism between A // A', *rāʾîtî ʾet ~ hāʾāreṣ* "I looked at the earth" // *wᵉ ʾel ~ haššāmayim* "and at the heavens." These are the basic components of the Hebrew conception of the bipartite structure of the universe, *earth and heavens*. There is also a grammatical and semantic parallelism between B // B', *wᵉhinnēh ~ tōhû wābōhû* "and it was formless and empty" // *wᵉ ʾ ēn ʾ ŏrām* "and their light was gone." This parallelism can be observed at a grammatical level between the nouns *tōhû* and *bōhû* in 4:23b, and *ʾ ōr* in 4:23d, both are m.s.n.; at a semantic level, both concepts imply the lack of something, both on the earth ("formless and empty") and the heavens ("light").

[95] For example, Holladay affirms that Jeremiah "envisages a 'de-creation' of the cosmos, the world again become the chaos before creation began" (W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], 1:164; see also W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986], 1:106-107).

"I saw," and the word *wᵉhinnēh*, "and behold," is repeated in each verse. The exegesis of verse 23 is completed and confirmed by the interpretation of verses 25-26, which are translated: "I looked, and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away. I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the Lord" (NIV).

There is a precise positive-negative syntactic parallelism[96] between the vv. 23 and 25-26, "I looked at the earth" (4:23a) // "I looked and there were no people (4:25a); "I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert" (4:26a) and "and at the heavens" (4:23c) // "every bird in the sky had flown away" (4:25b). Therefore, v. 23a, "I looked at the earth," is interpreted in vv. 25a-26a, "I looked, and there were no people"; "I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert." Likewise, v. 23c, "and at the heavens" is also interpreted by v. 25b, "every bird in the sky had flown away." Therefore, the earth or land of Jer 4:23 was uninhabited, with no human beings on it; "there were no people." It was also arid and unproductive: "the fruitful land was a desert." On the other hand, the heavens of Jer 4:23 are empty, without light ("their light was gone") and without birds ("every bird in the sky had flown away").[97]

The interpretation of *tōhû wābōhû* in the *Targums* also helps solve the difficulties inherent in the interpretation of Gen 1:2. On Gen 1:2 the *Tg. Neof.* reads as follows, according to two translators: Díez Macho and G. Anderson.

> Y la tierra estaba *tehî'* y *behî'* deshabitada de hombres y bestias y vacía de todo cultivo de plantas y árboles.[98]

> Now the earth was *tehî'* and *behî'* [meaning it was] desolate (*sdy*) with respect to people and animals and empty (*ryqn'*) in respect to all manner of agricultural work and trees.[99]

On his translation of *Tg. Neof.* Anderson says:

> This text first reproduces the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew pair *tōhû wābōhû* and then interprets them. The first term, *tōhû*, is interpreted to mean an absence of faunal life; the second term, *bōhû*, the absence of

[96]See Berlin, 53-57.

[97]Jer 4:23a: *rāîtî 'et – hā'āreṣ* // Jer 4:25a-26a: *rāîtî wᵉhinnēh 'ên hā'ādām . . . rāîtî wᵉhinnēh hakkarmel hammidbār*; Jer 4:23c: *wᵉ 'el – haššāmayim* // Jer 4:25b: *wᵉ kol – ôp haššāmayim nādādû.* The following microstructures are evident.

   A *rāîtî 'et – hā'āreṣ* I looked at the earth

   B *wᵉ 'el – haššāmayim* and at the heavens

   A'*rāîtî wᵉhinnēh 'ên hā'ādām . . . rāîtî wᵉhinnēh hakkarmel hammidbār* I looked, and there were no people . . . I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert

   B' *wᵉ kol – ôp haššāmayim nādādû* every bird in the sky had flown away (NIV).

[98]A. Díez Macho, *Neophyti: Targum Palestiniense* (Madrid: CSIC, 1968), 1:2.

[99]G. Anderson, "The Interpretation of Genesis 1:1 in the Targums," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 23.

floral life. No longer do *tōhû wābōhû* connote a primeval substrate "chaos." Rather they simply describe the earth in an unfinished state. The earth was not created as a state of chaos; rather it is simply devoid of the living matter which will be created in days 3, 5 and 6. Exegesis has brought order to the unordered. All other targums follow this general exegetical direction.[100]

In brief, the expression *tōhû wābōhû* refers to a "desert-uninhabited" (Isa 34:11; Jer 4:23) and "arid or unproductive" (Jer 4:23) state.[101] Neither text gives any linguistic or exegetical evidence to support the existence of a situation of mythic chaos in the earth.

*Thw *and* *bhw *in the Ugaritic Literature*

Several studies have pointed to the similarity between the Heb *tōhû wābōhû* and the Ugaritic *tu-a-bi-[ú(?)]*.[102] Tsumura proposes a possible explanation of the morphological correspondence between the Hebrew expression *tōhû wābōhû* and the Ugaritic *tu-a-bi-[ú(?)]*.[103] It is, therefore, possible that the Ugaritic *tu-a-bi-[ú(?)]* and the Hebrew *tōhû wābōhû* are two versions of the same idiomatic expression in the Northwestern Semitic.[104]

However, scholars such as J. Huehnergard have proposed a different morphological relation, considering the Hebrew expression *tōhû wābōhû* as an equivalent of the Ugaritic *tu-a-pí-[ku(?)]*,[105] since the verb form **hpk*, "to upset or overthrow," is identified in the Ugaritic alphabetical texts.[106] In this way, both interpretations *tu-a-bi-[ú(?)]* and *tu-a-pí-[ku(?)]* are possible from a phonological and morphological point of view.

Conclusion

To conclude, considering OT and ANE literature, the expression *tōhû*

[100]Ibid.

[101]See also Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters*, 41.

[102]See, for example, J. C. de Moor, "El, the Creator," in *The Bible World: Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon*, ed. G. Rendsburg et al. (New York: KTAV, 1980), 183, and n. 58; Tsumura, *Earth and the Waters*, 24.

[103]According to Tsumura, the first half of the syllabic orthography, *tu-a*, probably represents /*tuha*/ since in the Ugaritic syllabic ortography the grapheme <*a*> can be used as a syllable /*ha*/. In the second half of the syllabic orthography, *bi-[ú]*, if the second sign is correctly restored, it can represent /*bihu*/ since the grapheme <*ú*> of the syllabic orthography is used in syllables /*hu*/ (ibid.)

[104]Ibid.

[105]*UVST*, 84, 121, 315, 322.

[106]Ibid.; Gordon, 392a n° 788; Dietrich et al.,1.103:52. Sumerian: *BAL* = Akkadian: *na-bal-ku-tu₄* = Hurrian: *tap-su-hu-um-me* = Ugaritic: *tu-a-pí-[ku(?)]*.

To conclude, considering OT and ANE literature, the expression *tōhû wābōhû* in Gen 1:2 must be interpreted as the description of a "desert, uninhabited, arid and unproductive" place.[107] The earth of Gen 1:2, which "was" *hāyeˀtâ tōhû wābōhû*, refers to the earth in an "empty" state with no vegetation, animals, or people. Hence the title of this series of articles: "The Earth of Genesis 1:2: Abiotic or Chaotic." The concept that appears in Gen 1:2 is an abiotic concept of the earth; i.e., Gen 1:2 describes an earth in which there is no life; it presents the absence of life—vegetable, animal, and human. That life appears in the following verses of Genesis 1 by the *fiat* of God. The Hebrew idiomatic expression *tōhû wābōhû* refers to an earth that is "uninhabited and unproductive," owing to the absence of life, of fauna, and of flora at this stage of the creation. At a later stage the earth will be "inhabited and productive." In no case does the phrase describe a chaotic state of the earth as the result of mythical combats between the gods of the myths and legends of Israel's neighbors.

The main reason why the author describes the earth as *tōhû wābōhû* is to inform the audience that the earth "is not yet" the earth such as they know it. Westermann puts it this way: "Creation and the world are to be understood always from the viewpoint of or in the context of human existence."[108] In other words, it is necessary to use literary language and figures common to the audience to communicate to human beings the theme of creation. Therefore, the author uses in this verse language originating in his life experience (desert, empty, uninhabited, unproductive places) to explain the initial situation or condition of the earth.

The words of Westermann summarize well the findings on Gen 1:2:

There is no sign of either personification or mythological allusion in the biblical use of תהו. . . . The course of the debate about the mythical explanation of תהו ובהו indicates clearly that the arguments for a mythical background are becoming weaker and weaker. The discussion can now be considered closed.[109]

[107]See also N. H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job: A New Commentary* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1967), 381: "in Gen 1:2 . . . [*tōhû*] describes the barrenness of the earth before anything grew on it."

[108]Westermann, 104.

[109]Westermann, 103.