

## In the Beginnings

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Genesis 1:1–2 (NKJV) In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup>The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

**Was – In Hebrew “became”**

**Without Form –**

**2494 תֹהַה (*t hh*). Assumed root of the following.**

**2494a תּוֹהָה (*tōhû*) confusion.**

**2494b תּוֹהָלָה (*tohōlâ*) error (Job 4:18).**

**תֹהַה (*tōhû*).** *Confusion, the empty place* (Job 26:7; ASV “empty space”; RSV “the void”), nothing, nought, vain, vanity, waste, wilderness, without form. (ASV similar; RSV renders “chaos” in Isa 24:10; 45:18f.). Since the word has no certain cognates in other languages, its meaning must be determined solely from its OT contexts. It refers to a desert wasteland in Deut 32:10; Job 6:18 (see ASV, RSV); 12:24b = Ps 107:40b; to a destroyed city in Isa 24:10 (see also 34:11); to moral and spiritual emptiness or confusion in I Sam 12:21 (twice) and several times in Isa (29:21; 41:29; 44:9; 45:19; 59:4); and to nothingness or unreality in Isa 40:17, 23; 49:4 (see also the Heb. text of Sir 41:10). In most (if not all) of these cases, *tōhû* has a negative or pejorative sense.

Two passages in particular call for more extended comment. The first is Job 26:7: “(God) stretches out the north over *tōhû*; he hangs the earth upon nothing.” The context of chap. 26 stresses not only the omnipotence and sovereignty of God in creation and providence but also the ease with which he does whatever he pleases. While it would be improper for us to rigidly impose our own contingent, twentieth-century cosmology on this chapter and insist on interpreting it literally throughout (see, e.g., the obvious metaphor in verse 11), it is nonetheless striking that 26:7 pictures the then-known world as suspended in space. In so doing, it anticipates (at the very least!) future scientific discovery.

The other passage requiring discussion is, of course, Gen 1:2a: “The earth was *tōhû wābōhû*.” The meaning of *bōhû* itself is uncertain (it appears elsewhere only in Isa 34:11 and Jer 4:23, both times in context with *tōhû*), although it apparently signifies “emptiness” (cf. the possible Arabic cognate *bahiya* “was empty”). Therefore, the phrase *tōhû wābōhû* in Gen 1:2a has been variously understood as a hendiadys meaning “a formless waste” (E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 5), “absolutely nothing whatever” (H. Renckens, *Israel’s Concept of the Beginning*, p. 84), “void and vacancy” (H. E. Ryle, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 4—though without complete conviction). But the traditional rendering, “without form and void” (or “unformed and unfilled,” to preserve something of the euphony of the Hebrew phrase), is ably defended by W. H. Griffith Thomas in *Genesis—A Devotional Commentary*, p. 29, where he writes that “the adjectives ‘formless’ and ‘empty’ seem to be the key to the literary structure of the chapter. The record of the first three days refers to the heaven and earth receiving their ‘form,’ and the record of the last three days to the filling-up

of their ‘emptiness.’” See further R. Youngblood in JETS 16:219–21. The “gap” or “interval” theory, which posits a millennia-long period of time implied by or in Gen 1:2 and which usually translates 1:2a by the less likely “but the earth became without form and void,” has come into increasing disfavor in recent years. Its main exegetical support, Isa 45:18, reads “(God) did not create (the earth) *tōhû*,” and has been interpreted to mean that therefore an original creation (described briefly in Gen 1:1) was destroyed; that the geologic ages ensued (during the “gap”); and that the new creation portrayed in Gen 1:3ff. was built on the wreckage of the old. But Isa 45:18, after the phrase quoted, goes on to say that God “formed (the earth) to be inhabited,” thereby assuring the reader that *tōhû* was not his ultimate purpose in creation. (For extended critiques of the “gap” theory, see especially O. T. Allis, *God Spake by Moses*, pp. 153–159; B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*, pp. 195–210). The word *tōhû* in Gen 1:2, likewise, refers not to the result of a supposed catastrophe (for which there is no clear biblical evidence) but to the formlessness of the earth before God’s creative hand began the majestic acts described in the following verses. As Jer 4:23 indicates, the earth always has the potential of returning to *tōhû wābōhû* if God decides to judge it.

But as difficult as *tōhû* is to define, it is even more difficult for us to conceptualize it. Augustine, in his Confessions (Book XII, 6), admitted his failure to grasp it visually; Haydn, in the “Representation of Chaos” overture to his oratorio, *The Creation*, was much more successful in expressing it musically. [On the other hand, since “create” in Gen 1:1 is a summary statement expounded in the remainder of the chapter (cf. concluding summary in Gen 2:1–3), it may be that Isaiah designates by “create” all of God’s works during the six days. He did not “create” chaos but a cosmos (cf. Bruce K. Waltke, *Creation and Chaos* (Portland, Oregon: Western Baptist Theological Seminary, 1974). B.K.W.)<sup>1</sup>

## Void

205a                      בָּהֵן (*bōhû*) **void, waste, emptiness.**

Always occurring with *tōhû* “waste” (q.v.), *bōhû* describes the primordial condition of the earth, “void” at the beginning of creation (Gen 1:2), or “made empty” by God’s judgment (Isa 34:11; Jer 4:23). It is probable that the descriptions in Isaiah of the desolations of Edom and those in Jeremiah of Israel borrow this phrase from the Genesis picture of a primordial chaos.

**Bibliography:** Young, Edward J., “The Interpretation of Genesis 1:2,” WTJ 23:151–78.

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## Darkness

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<sup>1</sup> Youngblood, R. F. (1999). [2494 תהָנָה](#). R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr., & B. K. Waltke (Eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed., pp. 964–965). Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>2</sup> Martens, E. A. (1999). [205 תהָנָה](#). R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr., & B. K. Waltke (Eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed., p. 92). Chicago: Moody Press.

769 **הַשְׁךָ** (*hāšak*) ***be dark, darkened, black, dim, hidden.*** Denominative verb.

**Parent Noun**

769a **הַשְׁךָ** (*hōšek*) ***darkness.***

769b **הַשְׁךָן** (*hāšōk*) ***obscure, low,*** only in Prov 22:20.

769c **הַשְׁךָקָה** (*hāšēkâ*) ***darkness.***

769d **מַהֲשָׁךְ** (*mahšāk*) ***darkness.***

Little doubt surrounds the meaning of this denominative verb coming from the noun *hōšek* (darkness). It occurs eighteen times, seventeen times in poetical books. Exodus 10:15 is the only occurrence of *hāšak* in a prose passage. There it refers to the plague of darkness over Egypt. Elsewhere the word is used to indicate judgment or curse. (See Job 3:9; 18:6; Ps 105:28; Isa 5:30; 13:10; Jer 13:16; Ezk 30:18; Amos 5:8; 8:9; Mic 3:6.)

The author of Eccl used *hāšak* to describe the dim vision that comes with old age: “Those who look out the windows shall be darkened” (12:3b). Lamentations 5:17 uses the word similarly. The Psalmist may be praying down the curse of blindness on his enemy when in Ps 69:23 he asks that their eyes “be darkened.”

In Lam 4:8 *hāšak* refers to the sun-blackened skin of the exiles.

A cognate accusative appears in Ps 139:12: “For you darkness itself is not dark” (NAB). Only Job 38:2 clearly conveys the idea of hiding in it. There God asked the patient hero the immortal question, “Who is this who darkens counsel without knowledge?”

**הַשְׁךָ** (*hōšek*). ***Dark, darkness, obscurity, night, dusk.*** The noun *hōšek* is the common word for “darkness,” and in about half of its eighty occurrences it means literally the opposite of light.

Genesis 1:2 uses *hōšek* referring to the primeval “darkness” which covered the world. In verse 4 the celestial luminaries divided the “darkness” from the light (cf. v. 18). And in verse 5 the “darkness” was called “night.” Elsewhere *hōšek* is equal or parallel to “night,” as in Josh 2:5; Job 17:12; 24:16; and Ps 104:20.

This word is used for the plague of “darkness” on the Egyptians (Ex 10:21–22; Ps 105:28). It also accompanied God’s appearance on Mt. Sinai (Ex 14:20; Deut 4:11; 5:23).

In several places it refers to the “darkness” of the grave (I Sam 2:9; Job 10:21; 18:18; 34:22; Ps 88:12 [H 13]; Eccl 6:4).

The word occurs far more frequently in Job, Psalms, and Isaiah than in all the other books together. Often it has a figurative meaning as noted in the paragraph above. Among those meanings are “ignorance” (Ps 18:28 [H 29]; 107:10; Isa 9:2 [H 1]); “evil” (Isa 5:20); “hiddenness” (Ps 18:11 [H 12]; 139:11–12); “blindness” (Job 12:25; 22:11; Isa 29:18); and “judgment” (Job 3:4; Ps 35:6; Isa 47:5; 59:9). The few times the other prophets use *hōšek* it is mostly in this last sense (cf. Ezk 32:8; Joel 2:2, 31 [H 3:4]; Amos 5:18, 20; Nah 1:8; Zeph 1:15).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Alden, R. (1999). [769 הַשְׁךָ](#). R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr., & B. K. Waltke (Eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed., p. 331). Chicago: Moody Press.

## **Biblical Support of a Previous Age**

Jeremiah 4:23ff

Isaiah 45:18 – creation was not in vain (chaos) See **Without Form and Void** by Arthur Custance

Isaiah 45:18-Lord did not create earth a waste place

Exodus 20:11 – Yasah. Bara is used in Genesis 1:1

Haggai 2:6 once more shake the heavens and the earth

Hebrews 12:25-27 Once more shake the heavens and the earth

Hebrews 11:3 – framed can be translated repair