

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

¹ H. Gunkel, *Genesis ubersetzt and erklart*, HKAT 3/1 (Gottingen: 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 *t'hom* in Gen 1:2 had a Babylonian background.⁶ He suggested that *t'hom* 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 *t'hom*.⁷ Many have accepted that the Hebrew *t'hom* 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 *tohu wabohu*, "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 *ruah e'lohim* 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

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 *Schopfung 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 *tohu wabohu*, *t'hom*, and *ruah e'lohim* in the OT and their equivalents in the ANE literature.

The Hebrew Text of Gen 1:2

W'aares hay'eta tohu wabohu wehosek al--p'ne t'hom
w'ruah e'lohim merahepet 'al--p'ne hammayim

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) *W' ha'ares hay'eta tohu wabohu*: "Now the earth was formless and empty"
- (2) *w'ehosek al--p'ne t'hom*: "darkness was over the surface of the deep"
- (3) *w'ruah e'lohim merahepet 'al- p'ne hammayim*: "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

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 1-11*, 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 Jouon 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 Westermann,²⁶ and E. J. Young.²⁷

¹⁵ "Clauses describing concomitant circumstances are introduced by the conjunction ׀ 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 *haya* is in Qal perfect 3 feminine singular *hay'ta*. 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 היתה 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: Genese I- V* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1988), 76-87.

¹⁷ P. Beauchamp, *Creation et Separation* (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: Schocken, 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 Genesis* (Salamanca: Sigueme, 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^eha'ares hay^eta tohu wabohu*: "Now the earth was formless and empty"

B *w^ehosek 'al--p^ene t^ehom*: "darkness was over the surface of the deep"

B' *w^eruah^e lohim m^erahepet 'al--p^ene hammayim*: "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^ene* 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^ene t^ehom // 'al - p^ene hammayim* represents a second example of paired words, *t^ehom // hammayim* that appears in Ezek 26:19 and Ps 104:6; and *mayim // t^ehom* 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^ehomot* and *ruah* in Exod 15:8.²⁹ The antithetic concept is clearly indicated by the opposite or contrasting pair of words *hosek* "darkness" \\\ *ruah^e lohim* "Spirit of God." The noun *hosek* is grammatically a masculine singular (m.s.n.), and *ruah^e lohim* 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^ene tehom* and *'al p^ene hammayim*.³¹ This aspect of the Hebrew syntax is of great importance to the significance and the semantic and etymological origin of *t^ehom*, 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

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

Tohu wabohu *in the Old Testament and
the Literature of the Ancient Near East*

Before specifically considering this point, we must briefly analyze the Hebrew terms *ha'ares* and *hay^eta* 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 *ersetu*) and "country" (*kur*, *kalam*, or *matu*). In Akkadian *ersetu* means "earth," in opposition to "heaven." "Heaven and earth" (*samu u ersetu*) means the universe. In Ugaritic *'rs* 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, *ars // thmt*, chiasmatically related as in Gen 1:2: *tant s'mm 'm ars // thmt 'mn kbkbm*.³⁴

The pair of words *'eres // t^ehom* also reveals an example of inclusive structure in the six days of the creation, where *'al -- p^ene t^ehom* before the first day (Gen 1:2) matches *'al -p^ene ha'ares* after the sixth (Gen 1:29).³⁵

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

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 *ha'ares* "earth" and *t^ehom* "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: *'rs* 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^ehom* "ocean" is a part of the *ha'ares* "earth."

times in the Aramaic sections. The word *eres* 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, '*eres*' designates the earth that together with the "heaven," *samayim*, 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, '*eres*' 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 *haya* (to be) that appears in Gen 1:2 as *hay^eta* 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 *hayeta* 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 *tohu wabohu*. This expression is translated into English as "formless and empty" (NIV). In the Greek versions it is translated as *αορατος και ακατσκευαστος*, "invisible and unformed" (LXX); *κενωμα και ουθεν*, "empty and nothing" (Aquila); *θεν και ουθεν* "nothing and nothing" (Theodotion); and *αργον*

³⁶ E. Jenni and C. Westermann, *Diccionario Teologico Manual del Antiguo Testamento*, trans. J. A. Mugica; 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 Tohu in the OT

Tohu 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, Ode, Leere,... Gen 1:2 es 'bedeutet die ode Wüste, and ist als Grundbegriff zur Schopfung gebraucht";⁴² "caos, lo que no tiene forma ni medida, informe, inmensidad. Lo desmesurado; formulacion clara y directa de la negacion: nada, la nada, vacio, el vacio, nulidad,... caos informe en Gen 1:2."⁴³

The term *tohu* 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, *tohu* 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

³⁸ J. W. Wevers, *Septuaginta: Genesis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 75; cf. A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 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. Baurgartner, and J. J. Stamm, eds., *Hebraisches und Aramaisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1967-1994), 1557.

⁴³ L. A. Schokel, *Diccionario Biblico Hebreo-Espanol* (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, 102-10:3.

or land." In the third group *tohu* 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 'epes, "nothing" (Isa 41:29), *riq*, "empty" (Isa 49:4), and "empty arguments" (Isa 59:4, NIV).⁴⁶ In these passages *tohu* is better understood as "lack or emptiness" rather than "nothing."

Of special interest to this study are the uses of *tohu* 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-tohu*, referring to the "desolate or deserted" state of a city, almost equivalent to the term *samma* 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 -- *tohu* is directly opposed to the creation, though he does not translate it as chaos.⁴⁷ But the expression *al -- tohu* is parallel to the expression 'al - *beli -- ma* "a place where there is nothing." Therefore, in this context a possible translation of *tohu* would be "a desert-like or empty place."⁴⁸

Westermann points out that in Isa 45:18 *lo- tohu* is in direct opposition to the creation.⁴⁹ However, here *tohu* is in parallelism with *lasebet*, Qal infinitive construct (Qal inf. cstr.), "to be inhabited" (NIV), from the verb *yasab* "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, *tohu* 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

⁴⁶ E. J. Young translates *tohu* 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: *noteh sapon al-tohu* // Job 26:7b: *toleh 'eres al-b^eli-ma*.

⁴⁹ Westermann, 103.

⁵⁰ BDB, 442; Holladay, 146.

⁵¹ Isa 45:18f: *to -tohu be ra'ah* // Isa 45:18g: *lasebet y^esarah*. We can verify that it is a structure in parallel panels which is marked by the following microstructure:

A *lo--tohu* [Earth] not to be a desert or uninhabited place

B *b^era'ah* he created it

A' *lasebet* to be inhabited

B' *y^esarah* he formed it

We observe a clear antithetical parallelism between A \\\ A', *lo'- tohu* "[Earth] not to be a desert or uninhabited place" // *lasebet* "[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 synonymous parallelism between B // B', *b^era'ah* "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 *tohu* has been interpreted in two ways: concrete (locative) and abstract. The syntax is always understood in the same way: *tohu* as an adverb that modifies the verbal clause *baqqesuni*, as part of the direct speech.⁵² The Tg. Isa. analyzes *tohu* 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' *tohu* is parallel with B *bimeqom* 'eres *hosek* "in a land of darkness" (NIV). In Tsumura's words: "*Tohu* without a preposition directly corresponds either to 'eres *hosek* or to *hosek*.... In this case, the term *tohu*, corresponding directly to *hosek* 'darkness,' probably means 'desolation.'"⁵⁷ To conclude, we must point out that in the Targums, the Talmudic and the Midrashic literature *tohu* is interpreted as "waste, desolation; vanity, idleness."⁵⁷

**Thw* in Ugaritic Literature

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

y^esarah "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, *tohu* in Isaiah XLV 19," VT 38 (1988): 361-364, esp. 361.

⁵³ J. Ribera Florit, *El Targum de Isaías* (Valencia: Institucion San Jeronimo, 1988), 192.

⁵⁴ Isa 45:19a: *lo'basseter dibbarti* // Isa 45:19c: *lo' amar^eti l^ezera 'ya aqob*. Isa 45:19b: *bim^eqom 'eres hosek* // Isa 45:19d: *tohu baqq^esuni*. We can observe that it is a structure in parallel panels that is marked by the following microstructures:

A *lo'basseter dibbarti* I have not spoken in secret

B *bim^eqom 'eres hosek* from somewhere in a land of darkness

A' *lo' amar^eti l^ezera 'ya'aqob* I have not said to Jacob's descendants

B' *tohu baqq^esuni* ' 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, *lo' dibbarti* negative+Pi'el perfect 1 common singular // *lo' amar^eti* negative+Qal perfect 1 common singular. Meanwhile, there is a semantical parallelism between B // B', 'eres *hosek* // *tohu*, 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 *tohu* was explained in the light of the Arabic *tih*, 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 *u* of the Hebrew *tohu*.⁵⁹

The Ugaritic term equivalent to the Hebrew *tohu* 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, si, el apetito del leon de la estepa, o la gana del tiburon (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 *nps* and *brlt* are a well known idiomatic pair.⁶³ Del Olmo Lete maintains that the Ugaritic term *thw* is a cognate of the Heb *tohu*.⁶⁴

Considering the evidence presented, we can affirm that the Ugaritic term *thw* is a cognate of the Heb *tohu* 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

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 67.1.15: *thw.ham; brlt.anhr*; also M. Dietrich, O. Loretz and J. Sanmartin, *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*, 2d ed., ALASP 8 (Munster: Ugarit, 1995), 22. It is the transliteration of the text 1.5 115: *thw.hm.brlt.anhr*.

⁶¹ Ugaritic text 5 115, 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 Canaan* (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. *tohu*; cf. Gibson, 159)."

⁶⁴ Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartin, 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*

Bohu is similar to *tohu* because it is a m.s.n. which means "'emptiness' of primeval earth";⁶⁶ "emptiness (// formlessness, + earth) ... formlessness and emptiness";⁶⁷ "Heb. *bohu* 'vacuite, vide'; Arab. '*bahw*- 'espace degage, trouee, etc.', *bahiya* 'etre vide, desert', *bahi* 'vide, desert'";⁶⁸ "void, waste";⁶⁹ "emptiness, chaos";⁷⁰ "Leere, Ode";⁷¹ "vacio, caos, caos informe."⁷²

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

**Bhw in the Ancient Near Eastern Literature*

The etymology of *bohu* 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 *bubutu*, "emptiness, hunger," comes from **buhbuhtu* and is possibly a cognate of the Heb *bohu*.⁷⁶ However, the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* does not list "emptiness" as a meaning of *bubutu*A. It translates the term as: "famine, starvation, want, hunger, sustenance"⁷⁷

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 Semitiques* (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, *bohu* comes from the root of ׀׀׀׀ , 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 Philology," *JBL* 43 (1924): 366.

⁷⁷ CAD, B:301-302.

and Von Soden suggests "hunger" as a possible meaning of *bubutu*. Neither of these Akkadian terms is a cognate of Heb *bohu*.⁷⁸

It has been also suggested that the term *bohu* is related to Phoenician divine name $\beta\alpha\alpha\upsilon$, the goddess of "night."⁷⁹ Tsumura. indicates that it is phonologically possible to propose an original "Canaanite" form */bahwu/* for both Heb *bohu* 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 Gorg suggested that *tohu* and *bohu* 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."

In conclusion, taking into account available evidence, although there is no final etymological explanation, the Heb *bohu* 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 *tohu wabohu* means "chaos" and

⁷⁸ W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 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 *bohu*: **/bdhwu/ > /buhwu/ > /buhuu/ > /buhu/ > /bohu/*. But he immediately adds the possible origin of *bohu* in an original form **/bihwu/* 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. Gorg, "Tohu wabohu: 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 *tohu wabohu* in Gen 1:2. E. A. Speiser explains: "The Heb. pair *tohu wa--bohu* 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 *tohu* refers to a watery chaos is shared by many modern scholars, including Cassuto.⁸⁵ According to most modern scholars, the expression *tohu wabohu* 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, Burner-Klein points out that *tohu wabohu* 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 *tohu* and *bohu* appear. In Isa 34:11 *tohu* and *bohu* appear in parallel expressions⁸⁸: *qaw - tohu* "the measuring line of *thw*" (NIV) II '*abne --- bohu* "the plumb line of *bhw*" (NM." This passage clearly refers to an uninhabited place. Basic

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 *tohu wabohu* as the chaotic state before creation. For a recent answer to Waltke's arguments, see M. F. Rooker, "Genesis 1:1-3: Creation or 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. Burner-Klein, "Tohu u and bohu: Zur Auslegungsgeschichte von Gen 1,2a," *Henoch* 15 (1993): 3-41. Burner-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: *wiresuha qaat w^eqippod* // Isa 34:11b: *w^eyansop w^e 'oreb yisk^enu-bah*; Isa 34:11c: *w^enata aleyha qaw-tohu* // Isa 34:11d: *we'abne--bohu*. The structure in parallel panels is marked by the following microstructures:

A *wiresuha qaat w^eqippod* The desert owl and screech owl will possess it
 A' *w^eyansop w^e 'oreb yiskenu --- bah* the great owl and the raven will nest there
 B *w^enatd aleyha qaw-tohu ...* the measuring line of chaos
 B' *w^e 'abne - bohu* and the plumb line of desolation (NIV)

There is a semantic and syntactic synonymous parallelism between A // A', *wiresuha qaat w^eqippod* "The desert owl and screech owl will possess it" // *w^eyansop w^e 'oreb yiskenu - bah* "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', *w^enata*

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 *wire-suha* "will possess it"; and *שָׁכַן* "live in, settle,"⁹¹ Qal imperfect 3 masculine plural *yisk^enu*, "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 uninhabited land." 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 *raiti et -ha'ares* I looked at the earth,
 B *w^ehinneh---tohu wabohu* and it was formless and empty;
 A' *w^e 'el -hassamayim* and at the heavens,
 B' *w^e 'en 'oram* 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 *tohu wabohu* 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 *raiti*,

'aleyha qaw- tohu: "the measuring line of chaos" // *w^e'abne- bohu* "and the plumb line of desolation." In both lines we find the same nouns that appear in Gen 1:2, *tobu* and *bohu*. 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: *middor lador teh^erab l^enesah n^esahim eyn ' ober bah* "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: *middor lador teh^erab*, "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', *raiti 'et- ha'ares* "I looked at the earth" // *w^eel-hassamayim* "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', *w^ehinneh-tohu wabohu* "and it was formless and empty" // *w^e 'en 'oram* "and their light was gone." This parallelism can be observed at a grammatical level between the nouns *tobu* and *bohu* in 4:23b, and or 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 *w^ehinneh*, "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 parallelism⁹⁶ between the vv. 23 and 25-26, "I looked at the earth" (4:23 a) // "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 *tohu wabohu* 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: Diez Macho and G. Anderson.

Y la tierra estaba *tehi' y behi'* deshabitada de hombres y bestias y vacia de todo cultivo de plantas y arboles.⁹⁸

Now the earth was *tehi'* and *behi'* [meaning it was] desolate (*sdv*) with respect to people and animals and empty (*rygn'*) in respect to all manner of agricultural work and trees."

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

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

⁹⁶ See Berlin, 53-57.

⁹⁷ Jer 4:23a: *raiti 'et--ha'ares* // Jer 4:25a-26a: *raiti w^ehinneh 'en ha'adam ... raiti w^ehinneh hakkarmel hammidbar*; Jer 4:23c: *w^e 'el-hassamayim* // Jer 4:25b: *of kol- op hassamayim nadadu*. The following microstructures are evident.

A *raiti et -haares* I looked at the earth

B *w^e 'el-hassamayim* and at the heavens

A'ra itI *w^ehinneh en ha'adam ... raiti w^ehinneh hakkarmel hammidbar* I looked, and there were no people ... I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert

B'w^ekol- op *hassamayim nadadu* every bird in the sky had flown away (NIV).

⁹⁸ A. Diez 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 *tohu wabohu* 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 *tohu wabohu* 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 *bhwh in the Ugaritic Literature*

Several studies have pointed to the similarity between the Heb *tohu wabohu* and the Ugaritic *tu-a-bi[u(?)]*.¹⁰² Tsumura proposes a possible explanation of the morphological correspondence between the Hebrew expression *tohu wabohu* and the Ugaritic *tu-a-bi[u(?)]*.¹⁰³ It is, therefore, possible that the Ugaritic *tu-a-bi [u(?)]* and the Hebrew *tohu wabohu* 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 *tohu wabohu* as an equivalent of the Ugaritic *tu-a pi [ku(?)]*,¹⁰⁵ since the verb form **hpk*, "to upset or overthrow," is identified in the Ugaritic alphabetical texts.¹⁰⁶ In this way, both interpretations *to-a-bi (u?)land to-a pi [ku(?)]* are possible from a phonological and morphological point of view.

Conclusion

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

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

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

"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.

¹⁰² According to Tsumura, the first half of the syllabic orthography, *tu-a*, probably represents */tuha/* since in the Ugaritic syllabic orthography the grapheme < a > can be used as a syllable */ha/*. In the second half of the syllabic orthography, *bi [u]*, if the second sign is correctly restored, it can represent */bihu/* since the grapheme < u > 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-tu*, = Hurrian: *tap-su-hu-um-me* = Ugaritic- *tu-a pi [ku(?)]*.

wabohu 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" *hay'eta tohu wabohu*, 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 *tohu wabohu* 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 *tohu wabohu* 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 *tohu wabohu*.... The course of the debate about the mythical explanation of *tohu wabohu* 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 ... [*tohu*] describes the barrenness of the earth before anything grew on it."

¹⁰⁸ Westermann, 104.

¹⁰⁹ Westermann, 103.

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THE EARTH OF GENESIS 1:2 ABIOTIC OR CHAOTIC?

PART II

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1. *Hosek* and 'al ~ *pene* in Gen 1:2

Etymology of *hsk

Before specifically considering the Hebrew term *t^ehom* in the OT and in the literature of the ANE, we analyze the Hebrew words *hosek* and 'al-*pene* in Gen 1:2. *Hosek* is a masculine singular noun that means "darkness, obscurity,"¹ "darkness,"² "darkness, obscurity,"³ "Finsternis kosmich,"⁴ "oscuridad, tinieblas, lobreguez, sombra."⁵

Words similar to the Heb root *hsk* exist in Phoenician, Punic, biblical and extrabiblical Aramaic, as well as in later Semitic languages. This root does not appear in Ugaritic and Akkadian texts. In the MT the verb only appears in the Qal form "to be/come to be dark" and Hiphil "make dark, darken." The noun *hosek* means "darkness, obscurity." The derived nouns include *h^aseka* "darkness," *mahsak* "dark, secret place," and the adjective *hasok* "dark."

The root appears 112 times in the OT, once in Aramaic (Dan 2:22). The verb appears 17 times (11 x in Qal and 6x in Hiphil). The noun *hosek* appears 79 times, *h^aseka* 8 times, *mahsak* 7 times, and the adjective only once (Prov 22:29).⁶

In Egyptian, the term for darkness is *kkw*, in Sumerian it is *kukku*,

¹ BDB, 365.

² W. L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 119.

³ E. Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 236.

⁴ L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner and J. J. Stamm, eds., *Hebraisches and Aramdisches Lexikon zum Alien Testament* (KBS) (Leiden: Brill, 1967-1994), 1:347.

⁵ L. A. Schokel, *Diccionario Biblico Hebreo-Espanol* (Madrid: Trotta, 1994), 286.

⁶ *TDOT*, 5:245.

which is represented by the double writing of the sign GI₆, which means "black" and "night."⁷ In the Targums and in Talmudic and Midrashic literature *hosek* is interpreted as "darkness."⁸

In Gen 1:2 *hosek* is used to refer to the primeval "darkness" that covered the world. In Gen 1:3ff, God created light and "separated the light from the darkness." The separation is conceived both in spatial and temporal terms. In Gen 1:5 God "called the darkness night."⁹ This name is more than an act of identification; by naming darkness God characterized it and expressed its nature and even indicated his control over it.¹⁰ God, who created light and darkness as separate entities, on the fourth day of creation put them under the "laws" of the heavenly lights which separated "light from darkness" (Gen 1:18).¹¹

The function of darkness in the cosmos is later explained in texts such as Ps 104:20, where the function of the light and the darkness is to indicate the amount of time for the everyday life routine of animals and human beings.¹² In many texts, *hosek* is equivalent or parallel to "night" (Josh 2:5; Job 17:12; 24:16; Ps 104:20). The word appears more times in Job, Psalms, and Isaiah than in all of the other biblical books together.¹³

The OT emphasizes that darkness is under God's control (2 Sam 22:2; Ps 18:2 [28]; Job 1:8; Isa 42:16; Jer 13:16). The ninth plague of Egypt (Exod 10:21-23) illustrates: "So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness [*hosek*- "*pela*"] covered all Egypt for three days." This event was extraordinary since Pharaoh, the son and the representative of the sun-god, was considered the source of light for his country. The darkness directly attacked the great sun-god of Egypt. Another example of God's power over darkness occurs in the desert when the Lord used darkness to protect his people (Exod 14:20; Josh 24:7).¹⁵

⁷ Ibid., 246-247.

⁸ M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalami, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Title, 1943), 511.

⁹ *TWOT*, 1:331.

¹⁰ N. H. Ridderbos, "Genesis i.1 and 2," in *Studies on the Book of Genesis*, ed. Berend Gemser, *Oudtestamentische Studien*, v. 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1958), 239. This author notes that God gave a name to darkness and discusses the importance of giving a name in the OT.

¹¹ *TWOT*, 1:331.

¹² *TDOT*, 5:249.

¹³ *TWOT*, 1:331.

¹⁴ All scriptural texts are taken from the New International Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).

¹⁵ *TDOT*, 5:249-250.

Past studies tended to see in Genesis 1 an antagonism between light and darkness, the scheme of Marduk's fight against the monster of chaos that is described in the Babylonian creation myth.¹⁶ It must be emphasized that nowhere in the OT is mention made of a battle or dualism between light and darkness. Neither is the primeval ocean or darkness considered a chaotic power or mythical enemy of God. God is the creator of both light and darkness (Isa 45:7); his kindness transcends the antithesis of light and darkness (Ps 139:12).¹⁷

E. J. Young indicates that darkness in Gen 1:2 was merely one characteristic of the unformed earth. Man could not live in darkness, and the first step in making the earth habitable was the removal of darkness.¹⁸ Moreover, Young presents the theological meaning of darkness by stating that God named the darkness, just as he did light. Both are therefore good and well-pleasing to him; both are created, and both serve his purpose, making up the day. Thus, darkness is recognized in Genesis 1 as a positive good for man.¹⁹

In a recent study about darkness in Gen 1:2, based on the text rather than on past exegesis, Nicolas Wyatt proposes some interesting points: (1) The literary structure of the verse is important to the interpretation and the meaning of *hosek*; therefore, "darkness" corresponds in some way to *ruah 'elohim* "God's spirit."²⁰ (2) If *ruah 'elohim* denotes some divine quality, *hosek* must denote some similar quality; an example is Ps 18:1, where darkness appears as the place of invisibility and possibly the place of the Deity (see Deut 4:11, 23, where darkness seems to be the appropriate environment for the divine voice); darkness is a figure of invisibility.²¹ (3) The logical structure of the verse implies the initial stages of the Deity's self-revelation: it is an unusual account of a theophany. Gen 1:2 refers to God's invisibility in the context of a primeval cosmogony.²²

In short, the term *hosek* "darkness" refers to an uninhabited Earth, where human beings could not live until God created light. Furthermore, the logical structure of the verse implies the Deity's self-revelation, an unusual account of a theophany.

¹⁶ H. Gunkel, *Schopfung and Chaos in Urzeit and Endzeit* (1895), 3-120; cf. also C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. J. J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 104.

¹⁷ *TDOT*, 1:157.

¹⁸ E. J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 35 n. 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21, 35 n. 33.

²⁰ Nicolas Wyatt, "The Darkness of Genesis 1:2," *VT* 43 (1993): 546.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 547-548. Cf. also I. Blythin, "A note on Genesis 1.2," *VT* 12 (1962): 121.

²² *Ibid.*, 550-552.

'*al* ~ *pene*

'*al*~*pene* is a preposition + masculine plural noun construct which means "face ... surface, upon the face of the deep,"²³ "face = visible side: surface, *p^ene tehom*, *p^ene hammayim*,"²⁴ "face, surface," "superficie del ocean = superficie de las aguas."²⁶

In Hebrew, as in other Semitic languages, the noun appears only in plural. *Panim* is one of the most frequent words in the OT, appearing more than 2100 times. However, in the vast majority of the texts *panim* is joined to a preposition (which may be *l^e*, *min* or '*al*) thus making a new prepositional expression. In many such texts the nominal meaning ("face") has been lost.²⁷

Panim, especially when related to concepts such as country, land, sea, and sky, means "surface," mainly in the construction '*al*~*pene*. The preposition '*al*~*pene* related to concepts such as "*a dama* "land, ground"; '*eres* "land, country"; *mayim* "water" (Gen 1:2); *t^ehom* "primeval abyss" (Gen 1:2) means "on (the surface of)" or "towards (the surface)."²⁸ This construction is important in determining the etymology and the meaning of the Hebrew word *tehom*.

2. Etymology of **thm*

The Hebrew word *t^ehom* in Gen 1:2 is translated into English as "deep." In the Greek LXX it is translated ἀβυσσος "abyss."²⁸

T^ehom is a feminine singular noun that means "primeval ocean, deep,"²⁹ "deep sea, primeval ocean,"³⁰ "'Urmeer, Urflut,' als ein der Schopfung voransgehendes Element,"³¹ "oceano, abismo, sima, manantial. Especialmente el oceano primordial, abisal, en parse subterraneo, que

²³ BDB, 816, 819.

²⁴ Holladay, 293.

²⁵ Klein, 513-514. It is related to the Phoenician פָּנִים (= face), see Z. S. Harris, *A Grammar of the Phoenician Language* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1936), 137; Ugaritic *pnm* (= into); Akkadian *panu* (= face, surface); Syriac פָּנִיתָא (= side).

²⁶ Schockel, 793. Translation: "surface of the ocean - surface of the waters."

²⁷ E. Jenni and C. Westermann, *Diccionario Teologico Manual del Antiguo Testamento*, trans. R. Godoy (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1985), 2:548-549.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:561, 563.

²⁸ A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979).

²⁹ BDB, 1063; Holladay, 386.

³⁰ Klein, 693.

³¹ *KBS*, 1558.

aflora en lagos, pozos, manantiales, y esta presente en mares y rios (de ahí su use en plural), . . . superficie del oceano."³²

T^ehom is the Hebrew form of the Semitic word **tiham-(at)* "sea," which in Akkadian appears as the usual term for "sea" *ti'amtum* (later *tamtu*).³³ In the Targums, as well as the Talmudic and the Midrashic literature, *t^ehom* is interpreted as "deep, depth, interior of the earth."³⁴

The construct relation between '*al~pene* and *t^ehom* (as well as *e'al~p^ene* and *hammayim*) contributes to the determination of the meaning of *t^ehom*.³⁵

Arguing against taking *t^ehom* as a personified being, A. Heidel points out:

If *t^ehom* were here treated as a mythological entity, the expression "face" would have to be taken literally; but this would obviously lead to absurdity. For why should there be darkness only on the face of *t^ehom* and not over the entire body? "On the face of the deep" is here used interchangeably with "On the face of the waters," which we meet at the end of the same verse. The one expression is as free from mythological connotation as is the other."

Thus the expression '*al~pene t^ehom*, "on the surface of the *t^ehom*," indicates that it does not refer to a mythical being but to the mass of waters."

Supposed Babylonian Origin of tehom

B. W. Anderson, among others, assumes that there is some kind of relationship or linguistic dependence between the Babylonian *Tiamat* and the Hebrew *t^ehom*.³⁸ Scholars who followed Gunkel have maintained that the

³² Schockel, 792. Translation: "ocean, abyss, chasm, spring. Especially the primeval, abyssal ocean which is partly underground, and outcroppings in lakes, wells, springs, and is present in seas and rivers (hence its use in plural) ... surface of the ocean."

³³ Jenni and Westermann, 2:1286.

³⁴ Jastrow, 1648.

³⁵ See B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 240-241. See R. Ouro, "The Earth of Genesis 1:2: Abiotic or Chaotic, Part 1," *AUSS* 36 (1998): 259-276. Paul Jouon and T. Muraoka indicate: "A noun can be used in close conjunction with another noun to express a notion of possession, of belonging, etc.... The genitival relationship is expressed by the close phonetic union of the two nouns, the first of which is said to be *constructed* on the second.... The two nouns put in a genitival relationship form a compact unit, and theoretically nothing must separate them" (*A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Subsidia Biblica 14/1, 11 [Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991], 1:275; 2:463). Finally, C. L. Seow points out: "The words in such a construct chain are thought to be so closely related that they are read as if they constituted one long word" (*A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, rev. ed. [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995], 116).

³⁶ A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 99.

³⁷ Jenni and Westermann, 2:2190.

³⁸ B. W. Anderson, *Creation versus Chaos: The Reinterpretation of Mythical Symbolism*

author of Genesis borrowed the Babylonian name *Tiamat* and demythologized it. But, as Tsumura points out, if the Hebrew *t^hom* were an Akkadian loan-word, it should have a phonetic similarity to *ti'amat*.³⁸ In fact, there is no example of Northwestern Semitic borrowing Akkadian /' / as /h/.³⁹ Moreover, it is phonologically impossible for the Hebrew *t^hom* to be borrowed from the Akkadian *Tiamat* with an intervocalic /h/, which tends to disappear in Hebrew (e.g., /h/ of the definite article /ha-/ in the intervocalic position).⁴⁰

Therefore, *t^hom* cannot linguistically derive from *Tiamat* since the second consonant of *Ti'amat*, which is the laryngeal alef, disappears in Akkadian in the intervocalic position and would not be manufactured as a borrowed word. This occurs, for instance, in the Akkadian Ba'al which becomes Bel.⁴¹

All this suggests that *Tiamat* and *t^hom* must come from a common Semitic root **thm*.⁴² The same root is the base for the Babylonian *tamtu* and also appears as the Arabic *tihamatu* or *tihama*, a name applied to the coastline of Western Arabia,⁴³ and the Ugaritic *t-h-m* which means "ocean" or "abyss." The root simply refers to deep waters and this meaning was

in the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 15-40; see H. Gunkel, "Influence of Babylonian Mythology upon the Biblical Creation Story," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. B. W. Anderson, Issues in Religion and Theology 6 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 42, 45.

³⁸ D. T. Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2*, JSOT Supplement Series 83 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 46. Tsumura maintains that the Hebrew form that we should expect would be similar to **ti'amat < ti'omat > t^homat* which would later change into **te'oma(h)* with a loss of the final /t/, but never *t^hom* with a loss of the whole feminine morpheme /-at/.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Heidel affirms: "But to derive *t^hom* from *Tiamat* is grammatically impossible, because the former has a masculine, the latter a feminine, ending. As a loan-word from *Ti'amat*, *t^hom* would need a feminine ending, in accordance with the laws of derivation from Babylonian in Hebrew. Moreover, it would have no *h*.... Had *Ti'amat* been taken over into Hebrew, it would either have been left as it was or it would have been changed to *ti'ama* or *te'ama*, with the feminine ending *a*, but it would not have become *t^hom*. As far as the system of Semitic grammar is concerned, *t^hom* represents an older and more original formation than does *Ti'amat*, since the feminine is formed from the masculine, by the addition of the feminine ending, which in Babylonian and Assyrian appears, in its full form, as *-at*" (*Babylonian Genesis*, 100, n. 58). Cf. also Westermann, 105. This author, agreeing with Heidel, adds that there is general consensus on the opinion that *t^hom* and *Ti'amat* come from a common Semitic root, and that the appearance of *t^hom* in Gen 1:2 is not an argument to demonstrate the direct dependence of the Genesis story on the Enuma elish.

⁴¹ *TWOT*, 2:966.

⁴² Heidel, 100.

⁴³ U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989), 23-24.

⁴⁴ Heidel, 101; see also Westermann, 105.

maintained in Hebrew as a name for water in the deep ocean.⁴⁵ Thus, the popular position that the Hebrew *t̄hom* was borrowed from the Babylonian divine name *Tiamat*, to which it is mythologically related, lacks any basis.⁴⁶

Well-known Assyriologists such as W. G. Lambert, T. Jacobsen, and A. W. Sjöberg have discussed the supposed connection between Genesis 1 and the *Enuma elish*. These scholars doubt the influence of Mesopotamia on the mythological and religious concepts of peoples living along the Mediterranean coast; instead, they see a strong influence of that region on Mesopotamia.⁴⁷ W. G. Lambert pointed out that the watery beginning of Genesis is not an evidence of some Mesopotamian influence.⁴⁸ Moreover, he saw no clear evidence of conflict or battle as a prelude to God's division of the cosmic waters.⁴⁹ T. Jacobsen also maintains that the story of the battle between the thunderstorm god and the sea originated on the Mediterranean coast, and from there moved eastward toward Babylon.⁵⁰

Furthermore, in some ancient Mesopotamian creation accounts, the sea is not personified and has nothing to do with conflict. In those traditions, the creation of the cosmos is not connected to the death of a dragon as it is in the *Enuma elish*.⁵¹ Tsumura concludes that since some accounts never associated the creation of the cosmos to the theme of the conflict, there is no reason to accept that the earlier stage, without the conflict-creation connection, evolved into a later stage with this connection.⁵² Frankly, the evolutionary process should be reversed: from an earlier stage with the mythological conflict-creation connection to a

⁴⁵ *TWOT*, 2:966.

⁴⁶ See also Tsumura, 47.

⁴⁷ A. W. Sjöberg, "Eve and the Chameleon," in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G. W. Ahlstrom* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 218.

⁴⁸ W. G. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood.- Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, ed. R. S. Hess and D. T. Tsumura, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 4 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 96-113, especially 103.

⁴⁹ Lambert, 96-109.

⁵⁰ T. Jacobsen, "The Battle between Marduk and Tiamat," *JAOS* 88 (1968):107.

⁵¹ Tsumura quotes as an example a bilingual version of the "Creation of the World by Marduk," which belongs to the Neo-Babylonian period and describes the creation of the cosmos without mentioning any theme of conflict or battle. In this myth, the initial circumstances of the world are described simply as "all the earth was sea" (49).

⁵² *Ibid.*

more recent stage *without* the mythological conflict-creation connection.

In conclusion, the Hebrew term *t^ehom* is simply a variant of the common Semitic root **thm* "ocean," and there is no relation between the account of Genesis and the mythology of *Chaoskampf*.

Supposed Canaanite Origin of tehom

Since the discovery of the Ugaritic myths, a Canaanite origin for the conflict between Yahweh and the sea dragons has been widely propounded. This motif is thought to be related to creation and is proposed as a basis of a supposed *Chaoskampf* in Gen 1:2.

Recently, J. Day stated that Gen 1:2 was a demythologization of an original myth of *Chaoskampf* coming from the ancient Canaan.⁵³ He suggested that the term *t^ehom* can be traced back to the early Canaanite dragon myth.⁵⁴ Therefore, he understands the Hebrew term *t^ehom* as a depersonification of the Canaanite mythological divine name.⁵⁵

However, scholars have pointed out that the myth of the Baal-Yam conflict in the existing Ugaritic texts is not related to the creation of the cosmos;⁵⁶ the storm god Baal is not a creator-god as is Marduk in the *Enuma elish*.⁵⁷ In the Baal cycle there is no evidence that he creates the cosmos from the bodies of defeated monsters as does Marduk.⁵⁸ In Ugaritic mythology, El is the creator-god; as the creator of humanity he is called "Father of humanity."⁵⁹ No other god fulfills any role in the creation of the cosmos.⁶⁰

Finally, if the account of the creation in Genesis were a demythologization of a Canaanite dragon myth, the term *yam* "sea" should appear at the beginning of the account, but this term does not

⁵³ 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), 53.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ M. S. Smith, "Interpreting the Baal Cycle," *UF* 18 (1986): 319f; J. H. Gronbaek, "Baal's Battle with Yam-A Caananite Creation Fight," *JSOT* 33 (1985): 27-44; Tsumura, 64-65.

⁵⁷ Tsumura, 64.

⁵⁸ J. C. L. Gibson, "The Theology of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle," *Or* 53 (1984): 212, n. 16.

⁵⁹ C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), 19.483; 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), 171-187; Tsumura, 144-148.

⁶⁰ See also P. D. Miller, Jr., "El, the Creator of Earth," *BASOR* 239 (1980): 43-46.

appear until Gen 1:10, in the plural form *yammim*.⁶¹ As Tsumura points out, if the Hebrew term *t^ehom* came from a Canaanite divine name and was later depersonified, the term would be something like **t^ehom*. There is no evidence that the term *t^ehom* in Gen 1:2 is a depersonification of a Canaanite mythological deity.

3. **Thm in the Old Testament*

The term *t^ehom* appears 36 times in the OT, 22 in singular and 14 in plural.⁶² This Hebrew term appears without an article in all texts but Isa 63:13 (singular) and Ps 106:9 (plural).⁶³ *T^ehom* always means a flood of water or ocean (abyss); there is no type of personification. The word appears in a context of creation" with no mythical reference.⁶⁵ The word is used to designate a phenomenon of nature.⁶⁶ Many times *t^ehom* is parallel to *mayim* "water"⁶⁷ or *yam* "sea."⁶⁸

T^ehom also means "deep waters, depth" as in Ps 107:26: "They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths." Translated as "depth" it acquires in some contexts the meaning of "abyss or depth" that threatens human existence.⁶⁹

The depth of the ocean is also presented as bottomless. Thus, *t^ehom* is conceived in some texts as a source of blessing.⁷⁰ The texts that consider *t^ehom* a source of blessing make it impossible to believe that the basic

⁶¹Tsumura, 62, 65.

⁶² See A. Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Old Testament* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1990), 1219-1220. The 22 texts in singular are: Gen 1:2; 7:11; 8:2; 49:25; Deut 33:13; Job 28:14; 38:16, 30; 41:24; Pss 36:7; 42:8 (2x); 104:6; Prov 8:27, 28; Isa 51:10; Ezek 26:19; 31:4, 15; Amos 7:4; Jonah 2:6; Hab 3:10.

⁶³ Ibid, 1220. The 14 texts in plural are: Exod 15:5, 8; Deut 8:7; Pss 33:7; 71:20; 77:17; 78:15; 106:9; 107:26; 135:6; 148:7; Prov 3:20; 8:24; Isa 63:13.

⁶⁴ Job 38:16; Pss 33:7; 104:6; Prov 3:30; 8:24, 27-28.

⁶⁵ Westermann, 105.

⁶⁶ Job 38:30: "when the waters become hard as stone, when the surface of the deep is frozen?"; *t^ehom* is, in this instance, the mass of water that freezes due to intense cold.

⁶⁷ Exod 15:8; Ps 77:17; Ezek 26:19; 31:4; Jonah 2:6; Hab 3:10.

⁶⁸ Job 28:14; 38:16; Pss 106:9; 135:6; Isa 51:10.

⁶⁹ Exod 15:5; Neh 9:11; Job 41:23; Pss 68:23; 69:3, 16; 88:7; 107:24; Jonah 2:4; Mic 7:19; Zech

1:8; 10:11; "marine depth" Isa 44:27; "depths" Pss 69:3, 15; 130:1; Isa 51:10; Ezek 27:34. *T^ehom* has this meaning in the song of the Sea in Exod 15:5, where the destruction of the Egyptians is described: "the deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone."

⁷⁰ Gen 49:25: "blessings of the deep that lies below"; Deut 8:7; 33:13; Ps 78:15; Ezek 31:4.

meaning of the Hebrew term is a "hostile mythical power.,⁷¹

In some texts, *t'hom* refers to "subterranean water," as in Deut 8:7: "a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills." This is a description of the land of Canaan being watered by fountains and springs fed by subterranean waters. We find a similar picture of *t'hom* in Ezek 31:4: "The waters nourished it, deep springs made it grow tall; their streams flowed all around its base and sent their channels to all the trees of the field."

The texts generally used to explain the term *t'hom* are Gen 1:2 and the verses related to the flood (Gen 7:11; 8:2). Before considering the word in the flood story, it must be noted that H. Gunkel had a powerful influence on the exegesis of these verses through his *Schopfung and Chaos in Urzeit and Endzeit* (1895). In that work he derived the term directly from the Babylonian Tiamat, the mythical being and the feminine principle of chaos, thus maintaining a basically mythical meaning. Hasel has rightly pointed out that this direct derivation is unsustainable, for in the OT *t'hom* never refers to a mythical figure.⁷²

Gen 7:11 notes that *nibq^e'u kkol~ma'y^enot t'hom rabbah wa^a rubbot hassamayim niptahu*, "all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened." The verb *baqa'* appears here in the Niphal perfect 3 plural common; it means "burst open,"⁷³ "be split, break out,"⁷⁴ "to split, to break forth,"⁷⁵ "was cleft, was split, was broken into,"⁷⁶ "sich spalten, hervorbrechen."⁷⁷ This verb frequently appears in the biblical literature in connection with the outflowing or expulsion of water.⁷⁸ In Gen 7:11 the phrase refers to the breaking open of the crust of the earth to let subterranean waters flow in unusual quantity.⁷⁹ The parallelism in Gen 7:11b is marked by a precise

⁷¹ Jenni and Westermann, 2:1290.

⁷² G. F. Hasel, "The Fountains of the Great Deep," *Origins* 1 (1974): 69; Jenni and Westermann, 2:1290.

⁷³ BDB, 132.

⁷⁴ D.J.A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 2:249.

⁷⁵ Holladay, 46.

⁷⁶ Klein, 81. Ugar. *bq'* (= to cleave, to split), Arab. *facqa'a* (= he knocked out, it burst, exploded), *ba'aja* (= it cleft, split).

⁷⁷ *KBS*, 143.

⁷⁸ Exod 14:16, 21; Judg 15:19; Neh 9:11; Job 28:10; Pss 74:15; 78:13, 15; Prov 3:20; Isa 35:6; 43:12; 48:21.

⁷⁹ Hasel, 70.

chiastic structure.⁸⁰ In short, when considering the Hebrew terminology and the literary structure of Gen 7:11b, it is evident that the bursting forth of the waters from the springs of the "great deep" refers to the splitting open of springs of subterranean waters.⁸¹

The Hebrew of Gen 8:2 is similar to that of Gen 7:11b in terminology, structure, and meaning.⁸² The two Niphal verbs in 8:2 (*wayyissak^eru* "had been closed" and *wayyikkale'* "had been kept back") indicate the end of the impact of the waters on the earth; in the chiasm they correspond to each other both grammatically, with the two Niphal verbs of Gen 7:11b (*nibq^e'u* "burst forth" and *niptahu* "were opened"), and semantically, with the inversion of the phenomenon that begins with the flood in Gen 7:11b (*nib^e'u*, a "burst forth" and *niptahu* "were opened") and ends in Gen 8:2 (*wayyissak^eru* "had been closed" and *wayyikkale'* "had been kept back").⁸³ The quadruple use of the verb in passive voice

⁸⁰ A *nibq^e'u* burst forth

B *kkol~ma* 'y^enot *tehom rabbah* all the springs of the great deep

B' *wa^arubbot hassamayim* and the floodgates of the heavens

A' *niptahu* were opened

The chiastic structure A:B:B':A' indicates that the waters below the surface of the earth flowed (were expelled) in the same way that the waters on the earth fell (were thrown). In B: B' there is a pair of words which are common parallels in biblical literature, *t^ehom // hassamayim* (Gen 49:25; Deut 33:13; Ps 107:26; Prov 8:27). But above all there is phonological, grammatical, and semantic equivalence between *nibq^e'u // niptahu* (Job 32:19; Num 16:31b-32a; Isa 41:18), *rabbah // rubbot* (see J. S. Kselman, "A Note on Gen 7:11," CBQ 35 (1973): 491-493); and between, *nibq^e' ukkol ~ma'y^enat t^ehom rabbah // wa^arubbot hassamayim niptahu*, verb +subject \\subject +verb(\\ antithetical parallelism). See also A. Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 107].

⁸¹ Hasel, 71.

⁸² "Now the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky."

A *wayyissak^eru* now had been closed

B *ma' y^enot tehom* the springs of the deep

B' *wa^arubbot hassamayim* and the floodgates of the heavens

A' *wayyikkale'* had been kept back

The verb "had been closed" corresponds to "had been kept back" (A:A'); "the springs of the deep" correspond to "the floodgates of the heavens" (B:B'). The chiastic parallelism indicates that the waters below the surface of the earth stopped flowing (being expelled) just as the waters on the earth stopped falling (being thrown). The same pair of parallel words appears as in Gen 7:11b *t^ehom // hassamayim*. Above all there is a phonological, grammatical, and semantic equivalence between *wayyissak^eru // wayyikkale'* and between *ma' y^enot t^ehom // wa^arubbot hassamayim wayyikkal^e'*, verb+subject \\ subject+verb(\\ antithetical parallelism).

⁸³ Hamilton, 300.

indicates clearly that the flood was not a caprice of nature, but that both its beginning and end were divinely ordered and controlled.⁸⁴ The Hebrew terminology and literary structure of Gen 8:2 give it a meaning similar to that of Gen 7:11b: the splitting, open of springs of subterranean waters is envisaged.⁸⁵

Thus, not even here is *t^ehom* used in a mythical sense. The word designates subterranean water that breaks the surface of the earth, thus producing the catastrophe.⁸⁶ In a similar way, modern scholarship understands the use of the term in Gen 1:2 is widely understood as "ocean, abyss, deep waters," therefore, as purely physical. *T^ehom* is matter; it has no personality or autonomy; it is not an opposing or turbulent power. There is no evidence of demythologization of a mythical concept of *tehom*.⁸⁷ Jenni and Westermann conclude their discussion of *t^ehom* by pointing out that "if one wishes to establish the theological meaning of *t^ehom*, one must conclude that *t^ehom* in the OT does not refer to a power hostile to God as was formerly believed, is not personified, and has no mythical function."⁸⁸

4. *Thm in Ancient Near Eastern Literature

The Ugaritic term equivalent to the Hebrew term *t^ehom* is *thm* which appears in Ugaritic literature in parallel with *ym*. It also appears in the dual form *thmtm*, "the two abysses," and in the plural form *thmt*.⁸⁹ The basic meaning is the same as in Hebrew, "ocean, abyss."⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ Hasel, 71.

⁸⁶ See also Jenni and Westermann, 2:129 1.

⁸⁷ See M. Alexandre, *Le Commencement du Livre Genese I-V* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1988), 81; P. Beauchamp, *Creation et Separation* (Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1969), 164,- Cassuto, 24; Hamilton, 110-11, n. 25; D. Kidner, *Genesis* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1967), 45; K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26* (Broadman and Holman, 1996), 133-134; S. Niditch, *Chaos to Cosmos* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985), 18-, A. P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 107; N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 6; idem, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1970), 22; Stadelmann, 14; G. von Rad, *El Libro del Genesis* (Salamanca: Sigueme, 1988), 58-59; G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 16; Westermann, 105-106; Young, 34-35.

⁸⁸ Jenni and Westermann, 2:129 1.

⁸⁹ See Gordon, where the word appears in Ugaritic texts: singular, 174; dual, 245, 248-249; plural, 3. See M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartin, *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*, ALASP 8 (Munster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2d ed., 1995): singular, 68; plural, 11; dual, 113.

⁹⁰ Gordon, 497. See also S. Segert, *A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 203. Segert points out that the meaning of the dual *thmtm* is "(primeval) Ocean, Deep."

Thm appears in the cycle of "*Shachar* and *Shalim* and the Gracious Gods" (Ugaritic text 23:30). The parallel use of *ym* and *thm* is evident.

[30] [*il . ys*] *i . gp ym* [El went out] to the shore of the sea
wysgd. gp. thm and advanced to the shore of the ocean.⁹¹

Del Olmo Lete points out that the Ugaritic *thm* is a cognate of the Hebrew *t'hom* and translates the word as "oceano."⁹²

The plural *thmt* appears twice. Line 3 c 22 of "The Palace of Baal" reads:

[22] *thmt. 'mn. kbkbm* of the oceans to the stars.⁹³

The other example appears in the cycle of *Aqhat* (17 VI 12)-

[12] [] *mh g't. thmt. brq* [] the ocean(s) the lightning.⁹⁴

The dual *thmtm* is found in the cycle of "The Palace of Baal" (4 IV 22)

[22] *qrb. apq. thmtm* amid the springs of the two oceans.⁹⁵

It also appears in the cycle of *Aqhat* (Ugaritic text 19 45):

[45] *bl. sr'. thmtm* without watering by the two deeps.⁹⁶

Other ANE languages use forms of the *thm* root to describe a large body of water. The Akkadian *ti'amtum* or *tamtum* also means "sea" or "ocean" in the earliest texts, dated before the *Enuma elish*.⁹⁷ In the Babylonian account of the flood, the *Atra-Hasis* epic, the expression "the barrier of the sea" (*nahbala tiamtim*) appears 6 times. In turn, *tiamta* "sea" is used in parallel to *naram* "river," with a common meaning for both.⁹⁸

⁹¹ J.C.L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), 124.

⁹² G. Del Olmo Lete, *Mitos y Leyendas de Canaan* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1981), 443. In this he agrees with Gibson, 159; cf. Del Olmo Lete, 635. In his study, this author notes also the occurrences of the plural *thmt* and the dual *thmtm*.

⁹³ Gibson, 49.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 108.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 59.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 115.

⁹⁷ D. T. Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2*, JSOT Supplement Series 83 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 55. Tsumura quotes the example from an ancient Akkadian text in which the term *tiamtim* is used in its common meaning "sea, ocean":

<i>Lagas^{ki} atima tiamtim in'ar</i> (SAG.GIS.RA)	he vanquished Lagas as far as the sea
<i>kakki</i> (^{gis} TUKUL-gi)-su in <i>tiamtim imassi</i>	He washed his weapons in the sea.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

In Eblaite *ti-'a-ma-tum* commonly means "sea" or "ocean."⁹⁹

The evidence indicates that the Ugaritic term *thm* is a cognate of Hebrew term *t^ehom* and both mean "ocean." In addition, cognate words from other ANE languages have the same meaning and come from a common root, **thm*.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

In conclusion, both the OT and the Ancient Near Eastern Literature indicate that the term *t^ehom* in Gen 1:2 must be interpreted as a lifeless part of the cosmos, a part of the created world, a purely physical concept. *T^ehom* is matter; it has no personality or autonomy and it is not an antagonistic and turbulent power. The "ocean/ abyss" opposes no resistance to God's creating activity.¹⁰¹ Certainly there is no evidence that the term *t^ehom*, as used in Gen 1:2, refers at all to a conflict between a monster of the chaos and a creator-god.¹⁰²

There is no evidence of a mythical concept in *t^ehom*. Therefore, it is impossible to speak about a demythification of a mythical being in Gen 1:2. The author of Genesis 1 applies this term in a nonmythical and depersonified way.

The Hebrew term *t^ehom* in Gen 1:2 has an antimythical function, to oppose the mythical cosmologies of the peoples of the ANE. This antimythical function is confirmed by the clause in Gen 1:2c, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." Here there is no fighting, battle, or conflict. The presence of the Deity moves quietly and controls the "waters," the "ocean, abyss" to show his power over the recently created elements of nature. This interpretation is further confirmed in the following verses, particularly in Gen 1:6-10 where God "separates water from water" (v. 6); then says, "let the water under the sky be gathered" (v. 9); and calls the "gathered waters" by the name "seas"(v. 10). The whole process concludes in v.10: "and God saw that it was good." All that God does on the surface of the waters and the ocean is good. These two elements are lifeless; they do not offer resistance or conflict to his creative

⁹⁹ Ibid., 56.

¹⁰⁰ Huehnergard points out that the form or root *thm* would be */tahamatu/* "the deep." J. Huehnergard, *Ugaritic Vocabulary in Syllabic Transcription*, HSS 32 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987). Huehnergard shows the relation of *thm* and the Sumerian: [AN-tu₄] = Hurrian: [a]s-[t]e-a-ni-wi = Ugaritic: *ta-a-ma-tu*, (184-185).

¹⁰¹ See G. F. Hasel, "The Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels," *AUSS* 10 (1972): 6, n. 10.

¹⁰² For a detailed discussion of the relation between *t^ehom* and the Sumerian, Babylonian, and Egyptian cosmogonies, see G. F. Hasel, "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmogony," *EQ* 46 (1974): 81-102.

fiat; they respond to his words, orders, acts, and organization with absolute submission. All this is contrary to what happens in the mythologies of the ANE, where creation is characterized by conflict or battle between powers (or gods) of nature.

In short, the description of *t'hom* in Gen 1:2 does not derive from the influence of any Ancient Near Eastern mythology but it is based on the Hebrew conception of the world which explicitly rejects the mythological notions of surrounding nations.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Stadelmann agrees: "The subsequent acts of creating the heavenly bodies manifest the same antimythical view as we have noted in the cosmological presuppositions of the Priestly writer" (17). On the distinction between the Hebrew conception of the world and that of other peoples of the ANE, see *ibid.*, 178ff.

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

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Introduction

As the third and final part of the study of Gen 1:2,¹ this article seeks to analyze the impact of the phrase *ruah ʿlohim merahepet al pʿne hammayim* on the question of the state of the earth as depicted in this verse. Gunkel, along with other scholars after him, assumed that *ruah ʿlohim* refers to winds that Marduk sends against Tiamat.² Others have postulated that this phrase refers to divine creative activity. To reach my conclusion, I will analyze the phrase and its use in the Hebrew Bible and in languages cognate to Hebrew.

Etymology of ruah ʿlohim

The Hebrew expression *ruah ʿlohim* is commonly translated in English Bibles as "Spirit of God" (KJV, NASB, RSV, NIV). In the Greek LXX the phrase is translated as πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐπεφέρετο. Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion use the same translation. The Vulgate coincides, translating *spiritus Dei ferebatur*.

The term *ruah* appears in the OT 378 times in Hebrew, generally in feminine, and eleven times in Aramaic (only in Daniel).³ The basic meaning of *ruah* is "wind [something that is in motion and has the power to set other things in motion] and breath."⁴

According to BDB, *ruah ʿlohim* means "spirit of God, energy of life." Holladay translates "spirit of God," whereas Klein allows for "breath, wind,

¹ See Roberto Ouro, "The Earth of Genesis 1:2: Abiotic or Chaotic?" *AUSS* 36 (Autumn 1998): 259-276; and *AUSS* 37 (Spring 1999): 39-53.

² H. Gunkel, *Schopfung and Chaos in Urzeit and Endzeit* (1895); see notes in first article of the series.

³ E. Jenni and C. Westermann, *Diccionario Teologico Manual del Antiguo Testamento*, tras. R. Godoy (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1985), 2:915.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:917; see also *TWOT*, 2:836-837.

spirit."⁵ KBS has "'Der Geist Gottes'; als Wiedergaben sind möglich: a) der Geist Gottes schwebte, b) der/ein mächtiger Wind (= Sturm) wehte, c) der/ein Gotteswind (= Gottessturm) wehte; b) und c) sind dabei nicht streng zu scheiden." Schokel translates: "aliento, halito, aliento vital, respiracion, resuello, soplo, resoplido, . . . aliento de Dios."⁶ It is evident that the word *ruah* can mean both spirit and wind.

Western Semitic languages contain words cognate to the Heb *ruah*: the Ugaritic *rh*, "wind, aroma"; the Aramaic *rwh*, "wind, spirit"; and the Arabic *ruh*, "vital breath"; and *rih*, "wind." The word is absent in the Eastern Semitic; for instance, in Akkadian *saru* is used for "wind, breath."⁸ Jastrow observes that in the Targumim, Talmudic, and Midrashic literature *ruah* is interpreted as "spirit, soul; the holy spirit, prophetic inspiration, intuition."⁹

Ruah ^e*lohim* in the OT

The phrase *ruah* ^e*lohim* appears sixteen times in Hebrew and five times in Aramaic.¹⁰ Its natural meaning would be spirit or wind of *Elohim*.

The term ^e*lohim* is the usual Hebrew word for "God"; however, J.M.P. Smith has suggested that it may also function as a superlative meaning "strong," "powerful," "terrible," or "stormy."¹¹ However, as D. W. Thomas remarks, it is difficult or even impossible to find OT examples of the use of the divine name only as an epithet of intensity.¹²

⁵ E. Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English* (Jerusalem: The University of Haifa, 1987), 610.

⁶ L. A. Schokel, *Diccionario Biblico Hebreo-Espanol* (Madrid: Trotta, 1994), 692.

⁷ See C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (U7), *Analecta Orientalia* 38 (Roma: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1965), n. 2308.

⁸ Jenni and Westermann, 2:914-915.

⁹ M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Title, 1943), 2:1458.

¹⁰ See A. Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Old Testament* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1990), 1064-1066. The Hebrew texts are Gen 1:2; 41:38; Exod 31:3; 35:31; Num 24:2; 1 Sam 10:10; 11:6; 16:15, 16, 23; 18:10; 19:20, 23; 2 Chron 15:1; 24:20; Ezek 11:24. The Aramaic texts are Dan 4:5, 6, 15; 5:11, 14.

¹¹ J.M.P. Smith, "The Use of Divine Names as Superlatives," *American Journal of Semitic Languages* 45 (1928-29): 212-220; see also Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. J. J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 107. In a similar vein, G. von Rad points out that *ruah* ^e*lohim* should be translated as "God's storm = a terrible storm," noting that the phrase is related to the description of the chaos and does not yet refer to creation (*El Libro del Genesis* [Salamanca: Sigueme, 1988], 58-59).

¹² D. W. Thomas, "A Consideration of Some Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative in Hebrew," *VT* 30 (1953): 209-224.

G. J. Wenham clearly affirms that reducing *‘lohim* to merely a superlative seems improbable since in other biblical texts the word always means "God." Moreover, there is no other example in the OT in which the expression *ruah ‘elohim* means "strong or powerful wind"; in fact, it always refers to God's Spirit or Wind."

Contemporary scholars are divided between two basic interpretations of *ruah ‘lohim*. One understanding is that *ruah ‘lohim* refers to the Creator of the Universe, to the Deity's presence and activity." The second holds that *ruah ‘lohim* refers to an element sent by God, as part of the description of the chaos.¹⁵ In a similar vein, E. A. Speiser translates:

¹³ G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 1:17. Cf. also A. P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 107; V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 111; and E. J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 37, n. 37. See, for instance, Gen 41:38; Exod 31:3; 35:31; Num 24:2; Sam 10:10; 16:14, 16; 18:10; 19:20, 23; 1 Chron 24:20; Ezek 11:24.

¹⁴ Scholars who favor this interpretation include: I. Blythin ("A Note on Genesis 1:2" *VT* 12 [1962]: 120-121); U. Cassuto (*A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Adam to Noah* trans. I. Abrahams [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978], 1:24); B. S. Childs (*Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, SBT 27 [London: SCM, 1960], 33-36); R. Davidson (*Genesis 1-11*, CBC [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973], 16); A. Dillman (*Genesis*, trans. W. B. Stevenson [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897], 1:59); S. R. Driver (*The Book of Genesis* [London: Methuen, 1905], 4); M. Gorg ("Religionsgeschichtliche Beobachtungen zur Rede vom `Geist Gottes," *Word and World* 43 [1980]: 129-148); V. P. Hamilton, 111-112; D. Kidner (*Genesis* [Leicester: InterVarsity, 1967], 45); D. Lys (*'Ruach' Le Souffle dans l'Ancien Testament* [Paris: Universitaires de France, 1962]: 176-182); R. Luyster ("Wind and Water: Cosmogonic Symbolism in the Old Testament," *ZAW* 93 [1981]: 1-10); K. A. Mathews (*Genesis 1-11:26*, New American Commentary [Broadman & Holman, 1996], 131, 135); W. H. McClellan ("The Meaning of Ruah Elohim in Genesis 1, 2," *Bib* 15 [1934]: 517-527); S. Moscati ("The Wind in Biblical and Phoenician Cosmogony," *JBL* 66 [1947]: 305-310); J. P. Peters ("The Wind of God," *JBL* 30 [1911]: 44-54 and *JBL* 33 [1914]: 81-86); O. Procksch (*Die Genesis, Kommentar zum Alten Testament* [Leipzig: Deichertsche, 1913], 426); N. H. Ridderbos ("Genesis i. 1 and 2," *Studies on the Book of Genesis, Old Testament Studies* 12 [Leiden: Brill, 1958]: 241-246); A. P. Ross, 107; N. M. Sarna (*Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989], 6-7)- J. L. Ska ("Separation des eaux et de la terre ferme dans le recit sacerdotal," *NRT* 103 [1981]: 528-530); J. Skinner (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930], 18); O. H. Steck (*Der Schöpfungsbericht der Priesterschrift: Studien zur literarkritischen and überlieferungsgeschichtlichen Problematik von Genesis 1,1-2,4a* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981]; L. Waterman ("Cosmogonic Affinities in Genesis 1:2," *American Journal of Semitic Languages* 43 [1927]: 177-184); Wenham, 17.

¹⁵ Scholars who support this position include E. Arbez and J. Weisengoff ("Exegetical Notes on Genesis 1:1-2," *CBQ* 10 [1948]: 147-150); W. Eichrodt (*Theology of the Old Testament*, Old Testament Library, trans. J. A. Baker [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967], 2:105); O. Eissfeldt ("Das Chaos in der biblischen and in der phönizischen Kosmogonie," *Kleine Schriften* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1963] 2:258-262); K. Galling ("Der Charakter der Chaosschilderung in Gen 1,2," *ZTK* 47 [1950]: 151-155); R. Kilian ("Gen 12 and die Urgötter von Hermopolis," *VT* 16 [1966]: 420-438); W. H. Schmidt (*Die Schöpfungsgeschichte der Priesterschrift: Zur*

"an awesome wind sweeping over the water."¹⁶

The suggestion that *ruah* should be interpreted in Gen 1:2 as "wind" appears already in the *Tg. Onq.*: "And the wind from the Lord was blowing over the surface of the waters." However, this translation is not found in the *Tg. Ps.-J.* and *Tg. Yer.* McClellan finds the translation "wind" supported by Rabbinic literature originally attributed to Rabbis Ibn Ezra and Saadiah.¹⁷ However, Cassuto rejects this interpretation as inappropriate to the text.¹⁸

H. M. Orlinsky defends the translation "wind" in Gen 1:2c by affirming that the biblical version of the creation derives to a great extent from the Mesopotamian creation stories in which wind has an important role.¹⁹ In the *Enuma elish*, Anu begets the four winds, which are associated with Tiamat and created earlier than the universe (I:105, 106). When Marduk resolves to destroy Tiamat, the four winds help him: "The south wind, the north wind, the east wind, (and) the west wind" (IV: 3). Then *Imhullu* is created: "the evil wind, the whirlwind, the hurricane" (lines IV: 45, 46).²⁰ Later Marduk sets the evil wind free and leads it to the mouth of Tiamat (IV: 96-99). The north wind, then, helps to carry the remains of Tiamat to "out-of-the-way places" (IV: 132). This account deals with a theme totally different from the one found in Gen 1:2; therefore, the mention of the winds in the *Enuma elish* does not truly support the translation "God's winds" in Gen 1:2.²¹

In the same article Orlinsky also appeals to Rabbi Judah (third century A.D.), who affirms that on the first day of Creation ten elements were created. Among these were *rwh wnym*, translated as "wind and water." As Young points out, if this translation is correct, it simply shows ancient Hebrew exegetical use.²²

Überlieferungsgeschichte von Genesis 1, 1-2,4a und 2,4b-3,24 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1973], 81-84); J.M.P. Smith ("The Syntax and Meaning of Genesis 1:1-3," *American Journal of Semitic Languages* 44 [1927/28]:108-115); P. J. Smith ("A Semotactical Approach to the Meaning of the Term *ruah 'elohim* in Genesis 1:2," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 8 [1980]: 99-104); L.I.J. Stadelmann (*The Hebrew Conception of the World: A Philological and Literary Study* [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970], 14-15); B. Vawter (*On Genesis: A New Reading* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1977], 40-41); von Rad, 58-59; Westermann, 106-108.

¹⁶ E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 3, 5.

¹⁷ McClellan, 518.

¹⁸ Cassuto, 24.

¹⁹ H. M. Orlinsky, "The Plain Meaning of RU^AH in Gen 1:2," *JQR* 48 (1957/58):174-182.

²⁰ A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 22, 37, 38. ZI Young, 41.

²² *Ibid.*; for an analysis of the inconsistency in Orlinsky's arguments, see Hamilton, 112-114.

Contrary to Orlinsky's proposal, 34 of the 35 times that *‘lohim* appears in the Gen 1 Creation account, it refers undoubtedly to the Deity.²³ Moreover, in Gen 1:1 and 1:3, which are the immediate context of 1:2, *‘lohim* clearly refer to the Creator.²⁴ It would be difficult to accept that Gen 1:2c does not refer to divinity, especially when the Hebrew has numerous other clear ways to describe a powerful wind or a heavy storm.²⁵ In addition, when *ruah* appears in the Hebrew genitive construction with *‘lohim* (or YHWH) it always refers to some activity or aspect of the deity.²⁶ As Moscati indicates, *‘lohim* in Gen 1:2c has a personal meaning, and the attempt to exclude God from this important stage of the Creation fails completely.²⁷

Recently DeRoche suggested that the use of *ruah*, "wind," in Gen 8:1 and Exod 14:21 "leads to the division within the bodies of water, and consequently, the appearance of dry land"; therefore, "the *ruah ‘lohim*, "wind or spirit of God" of Gen 1:2, "must also be a reference to the creative activity of the deity."²⁸ DeRoche concludes:

The *ruah ‘lohim* of Gen 1:2c refers to the impending *creative activity of the deity*. It is neither part of the description of chaos, nor does it refer to a wind sent by Elohim, if by wind is meant the meteorological phenomenon of moving air. *It expresses Elohim's control over the cosmos and his ability to impose his will upon it.* As part of v. 2 it is part of the description of the way things were before Elohim executes any specific act of creation.²⁹

Nicolas Wyatt, in a recent article about the darkness in Gen 1:2, concluded his exegetical study by pointing out that the logical structure of the verse implies the initial stages in the manifestation of the deity; it is an unusual account of a theophany. In this way, according to Wyatt, Gen 1:2 refers to God's invisibility in the context of a primeval cosmogony.³⁰

²³ M. DeRoche, "The *ruah ‘lohim* in Gen 1:2c: Creation or Chaos?" in *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie*, ed. L. Eslinger and G. Taylor, JSOTSS 67 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 307.

²⁴ Moscati, 307.

²⁵ *Ibid.*; cf. also Davidson, 16; Hamilton, 112. Whenever the biblical Hebrew refers to a "strong, powerful or stormy wind" it uses expressions with no ambiguity at all such as *ruah g'dola* (1 Kgs 19:11; Job 1:19; Jonah 1:4; etc.); *ruah s' 'ara* or *s' 'arot* (Pss 107:25; 148:8; etc.); *ruah qadim* is the stormy wind that destroys the ships (Ps 47:7; Jer 18:17; etc.)

²⁶ See D. Lys, 176-185, 337-348; cf. T. C. Vriezen, "*Ruach Yahweh (Elohim)* in the Old Testament," in *Biblical Essays*, Proceedings of the Ninth Meeting of the Old Testament Society of South Africa, 1966.

²⁷ Moscati, 308.

²⁸ DeRoche, 314-315.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 318; emphasis added.

³⁰ N. Wyatt, "The Darkness of Genesis 1:2," *VT* 43 (1993): 546-552.

Finally, the concept "wind of God" becomes unsustainable when the rest of Gen 1 is considered. Sarna points out that "wind" has no function in the rest of the story." The uninhabited and empty earth is covered by vegetation, animals, and human life. Darkness is separated from light under the regulation of the luminaries. Throughout Gen 1 there is a clear development of the elements that appear in Gen 1:2.

M^erahepet in Gen 1:2

Biblical Use of m^erahepet

M^erahepet is a Pi'el feminine singular participle of the verb *rahap*, "hover" (BDB); "hover, fly, flutter"³²; "Zitternd schweben" (KBS). In addition, the Targumic, Talmudic, and Midrashic literature interpret *mrhpt* as "to move, hover, flutter."³³ This meaning is supported by the Ugaritic in which eagles are pictured as hovering over their prey, ready to dart down upon it.³⁴

Deut 32:11 uses this verb, also in the Pi'el. Here the Lord is pictured as leading Israel, "like an eagle [Heb נֹשֶׁר / Ugaritic *nsr*] that stirs up its nest, that flutters [*rahap*] over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions" (RSV) The verb describes the actions of the mother eagle after the young are out of the nest or, when they are compelled to leave the nest. In this text *m^erahepet* can only be construed as hovering or fluttering and cannot describe the action of a "mighty wind."³⁵ Following this analogy, *ruah* "lohim in Gen 1:2 is described as a living being who hovers like a bird over the created earth.³⁶

³¹ Sarna, *Genesis*, 6.

³² Klein, 614.

³³ Jastrow, 1468.

³⁴ Young, 36, n. 36.

³⁵ *Ibid.* Other scholars who agree with this interpretation are Hamilton, 115; McClellan, 526-527; Ross, 107; Wenham, 1:17; and Westermann, 107. T. Friedman points out that the interpretation of *ruah* "lohim in Gen 1:2 as "strong wind" is inappropriate for this text because both in the biblical and Ugaritic texts the root **rhp* describes the actions of birds (living beings) and not the actions of the winds (inanimate phenomena); see his "*W^eruah* "lohim *m^erahepet a1-pene hammayim* [Gen 1:2]," *Beth Mikra* 25 [1980]: 309-312.

³⁶ Young, 37.

Rhp in Ugaritic Literature

The Ugaritic term equivalent to the Heb *rahap* is the verb *rhp*.³⁷ In Ugaritic texts this verb is always associated with eagles.³⁸ While C. H. Gordon suggests the meaning "to soar" for the Ugaritic *rhp*,³⁹ Gibson prefers the verb "hover" in his translation of two sections of the *Epic of Aqhat*.

[Above him] eagles shall hover, [a flock] of hawks look down.

Among the eagles I myself will hover.⁴⁰

Del Olmo Lete points out, just as Gibson does, that the Ugaritic *rhp* is a cognate of Heb *rahap*.⁴¹

In conclusion, the use of *rhp* in the Ugaritic literature agrees with the idea that this is an activity carried out by a living being. Thus the appropriate translation of Gen 1:2c is "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." To complete the analysis of the verse, its place within its context must be studied.

Gen 1:2 in the Context of Gen 1

The interpretation of Gen 1:2 perfectly fits the literary structure of the chapter. In v. 2 the author does not turn his attention to the "heavens," but to the earth, where his audience is, and presents "the earth"--the familiar earth with vegetation, animals, and human beings--as not yet existing. Therefore, both the third (vegetation) and the sixth (animal and human life) days of Creation are the climax of the literary structure of the Creation account, while its zenith is reached with the creation of human beings on the sixth day.⁴²

³⁷ It appears in the transliteration of the text 1 Aqht.I.32: 'l bt . abh. nsrn. tr [hpn] (UT, 245); and 3 Aqht:20, 21, 3132:(20) nsrn. trhpn. ybsr. [hbl d] (21) iym. bn. nsrn. arhp. an [k 'l] (31) trhpn. ybsr. hbl. diy[m bn] (32) nsrn trhp. 'nt. 'l [aqht] (UT, 249). See also M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartin, *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit (KTU), ALASP 8* (Munster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995). It is the transliteration of the text 1.18 IV 20, 21, 31, 32: (20) nsrn. trhpn ybsr. [hbl. d] (21) iym. bn. nsrn. arhp. an [k.] 'l(31) trhpn. ybsr. hbl. diy[m. bn] (32) nsrn trhp. 'nt. 'l [.aqht] (KTU, 55); and 1.19132: 'l. bt. abh. nsrn. trbpn (KTU, 56).

³⁸ See Hamilton, 115.

³⁹ UT 484. See also S. Segert, *A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 201.

⁴⁰ Ugaritic text 18 IV 20, 21, 31, 32; 19132. J.C.L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978), 112,113. Del Olmo Lete uses the Spanish "revolotear," to fly over, to flutter; *Mitos y leyendas de Canaan* (MLC) (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1981), 384-385.

⁴¹ Del Olmo Lete literally says: *rhp*: v.D., "revolotear" // *bsr* (hb. *rahep*) (MLC, 624); cf. Gibson, "hovered, soared" (CML, 158).

⁴² Wenham, 1:6; B. W. Anderson, *Creation versus Chaos: The Reinterpretation of Mythical Symbolism in the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 187-191.

Gen 1:2 shows the earth as unproductive and uninhabited (*tohu wabohu*) within the literary structure of Gen 1.⁴³

[DAY 1]	light and darkness	[DAY 4]	"sun" and "moon"
[DAY 2]	two waters	[DAY 5]	fish and birds
[DAY 3]	earth and seas vegetation	[DAY 6]	animals and man on the earth

The earth became productive when God said, *tadse' ha'ares dese'* ("let the land produce vegetation," v. 11) on the third day. The "empty" earth, i.e., "yet uninhabited" became inhabited when God said *watose' ha'ares nepes hayya* ("let the land produce living creatures," v. 24) and *na'aseh 'adam besalmenu kidmutenu* ("let us make man in our image, in our likeness," v. 26). Therefore, the "unproductive and empty/uninhabited" earth became productive, with vegetation, animals, and man created by God's fiat. The Gen 1 creation account affirms that God created human beings "in his image" and provided an inhabitable and productive earth for them.⁴⁴

Conclusion

This analysis of the Heb of Gen 1:2 has sought to find answers to difficult questions. Does Gen 1:2 describe a watery chaos that existed before the Creation? Is there a direct relationship between Gen 1:2 and the mythology called *Chaoskampf*? Do *tobu wabohu*, *tehom* and *ruah 'elohim* in Gen 1:2 suggest a chaotic state or an abiotic state of the earth?

Our study of the OT and ANE literature has found that Gen 1:2 must be interpreted as the description of the earth as it was without vegetation and uninhabited by animals and humans. The concept that appears in Gen 1:2 is an abiotic concept of the earth, with vegetable, animal, and human life appearing in the following verses.

Additional support for the abiotic state of the earth is found in the parallel between Gen 1:2 and 2:5, which is generally admitted.⁴⁵

Gen 1:2: "The earth was formless and empty" //

Gen 2:5: "No shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for ... there was no man to work the ground."

Gen 1:2 provides the background for the development of the narration,

⁴³ See I. M. Kikawada and A. Quinn, *Before Abraham Was: The Unity of Genesis 1-11* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 78; D. T. Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2-- A Linguistic Investigation*, JSOT Supplement Series 83 (Sheffield, ENG: JSOT Press, 1989), 42.

⁴⁴ Tsumura, 42-43.

⁴⁵ See, for example, W. H. Shea, "Literary Structural Parallels between Genesis 1 and 2," *Origins* 16 (1989): 49-68.

which shows the earth full of life and inhabitants (Gen 1:11-12, 20, 24, 26).⁴⁶ The earth is not described as being in a chaotic state after a previous destruction, but as being barren and not yet developed. In addition to showing the initial state of creation, the verse presents God as author of life, without whom there can be no life. Life is present only in God's Spirit; the elements of the earth are lifeless and awaiting the Spirit's command. Here God's Spirit is about to create life, to change an abiotic state to a biotic state of vegetable, animal, and human life through the divine *fiat*.

The objective of this research was to discover if Gen 1:2 contains evidence of the existence of a mythological battle (*Chaoskampf*) between the creator-god and the powers of the chaos, such as Gunkel and others have suggested. This is an important question, for if Gunkel's presuppositions are true, "it is also no longer allowable in principle to reject the possibility that the whole chapter might be a myth that has been transformed into narrative."⁴⁷ On the contrary, if there is no linguistic and biblical foundation for the assumption, it is more difficult to insist that the Genesis account is a myth such as those of ANE literature.

In conclusion, it is of utmost importance to reiterate the differences between the Hebrew cosmology and the Mesopotamian cosmogony. Sarna explains: "The Hebrew cosmology represents a revolutionary break with the contemporary world, a parting of the spiritual ways that involved the undermining of the entire prevailing mythological world-view. These new ideas of Israel transcended, by far, the range of the religious concepts of the ancient world."⁴⁸ Sarna found that "the supreme characteristic of the Mesopotamian cosmogony" was "that it is embedded in a mythological matrix. On the other hand, the outstanding peculiarity of the biblical account is the complete absence of mythology in the classical pagan sense of the term. ... Nowhere is this non-mythological outlook better illustrated than in the Genesis narrative. The Hebrew account is matchless in its solemn and majestic simplicity.... The clear line of demarcation between God and His creation was never violated. Nowhere is this brought out more forcefully than in the Hebrew Genesis account."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ See D. L. Roth, "Genesis and the Real World," *Kerux* 9 (1994): 30-54.

⁴⁷ H. Gunkel, "Influence of Babylonian Mythology upon the Biblical Creation Story," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. B. W. Anderson, Issues in Religion and Theology, vol. 6 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 26-27, emphasis added, first published in *Schopfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (1895), 3-120.

⁴⁸ N. M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1970), xxviii.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 9-11, emphasis added.

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