

REMARKS ON THE TRANSLATION OF GENESIS 1:2

Our authorized version of the Bible translates the first part of Genesis 1:2 - "And the earth was without form and void." The Revised Version translates it, "And the earth was waste and void." Occasionally we see the statement made that the Hebrew word which is here translated "was" should be translated "became." Obviously, this translation would make a tremendous difference in the sense of the verse. Some claim that this verse is a part of the creative thought as described in the first verse of the book. Others claim that this verse describes something which came after the translation in that the whole earth lost its primal perfect condition as a result of a terrible crisis which occurred. We are interested now, not so much in determining the correct answer to this problem, as in determining exactly what this verse <sup>teaches</sup> ~~speaks~~ about the problem. Does the Hebrew word used here mean "was" or "became"?

At first sight this would seem an easy thing to decide. Someone will say, Why cannot we simply find out which does the Hebrew word mean, "was" or "became", and then translate it accordingly. Can we expect the Hebrew word to have two entirely different meanings?

Right here we must, however, know something very important about languages. It is rare indeed that a word in a language represents an exact point of thought. A good example of this is in the study of Geometry. We consider a point to be something which has neither length, breadth nor thickness yet no one of ever saw such a point. We make points on the ground where one person's land ends and another's begins. These \_\_\_\_\_ points may be marked by stakes which are flat but no such stake is a mere point. Everything which we can represent has length, breadth and thickness. A point is only an imaginary thing. The same is true of our words. Every word which we use represents an area rather than a point of thought. These areas differ in different languages. This is what makes it difficult to translate from one language into another. Words in one language express a certain area of thought. Words in another language express a different area of thought. The two may overlap. They may come almost to coinciding, but rarely do they coincide exactly in their area. One word in one language