

The Earth Was Without Form and Void

1 Genesis 1:2

Genesis 1:2: *“The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”* Here we see that God brought the earth through a process in its formation, and the Spirit of God was controlling the process. Let’s read the verse again, *“The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”*

Background Notes

Let’s consider a few background notes for this second verse of the Bible. The first verse of the Bible states emphatically that *“in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* This opening verse is either a summary statement of all that is to follow in the creation account, or it is part of the first day of creation week. I think either of these views is possible, while maintaining a high view of Scripture. There are two other ways to view the harmonization of the first three verses of Genesis 1, both of which I believe have some shortcomings, and I will cover these two other views under doctrinal point number one. Let’s take one more background note.

In Romans chapter 1:20 *“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead...”* -- or divine nature. This verse says that creation is not only evidence of God’s power, but it is also evidence of God’s very nature, his divine nature. Now where do we see that? Well, I think one way God’s nature is reflected in creation is the fact that God created a “tri-universe” -- a space, matter, and time universe. God is a trinity, or tri-unity, that is, God is one in essence and yet three persons. The universe is a tri-unity of space, matter, and time. So you see that the universe is not just an illustration of the trinity, the universe reflects the very nature of its Creator..

Doctrinal Point

1. There was a time when the earth was formless and empty.

Verse 2 again, *“The earth was without form, and void; or empty.* We said in our background notes that Genesis 1:1 was either a summary statement of the whole creation account, or it was part of the first day of creation week. We said that there were two other views that conservative Christians have taken concerning the interpretation of the first three verses of Genesis chapter 1. One is that Genesis 1:1 refers to the creation of the basic matter that God used to form this material universe, but it is not part of Day One, and Genesis 1:1 is billions of years in the past. In this view, verse 2

represents the millions or even billions of years of time when God was slowly forming the earth. Then verse 3 begins God's creation week, in the not too distant past. We could call this the "matter old, life young" theory.

It sounds good at first, but I don't think it fits the rest of Scripture. Let me give you just two Scriptures in this connection. Exodus 20:11 says, "*For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them...*" The phrase "the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them" covers everything, all the basic stuff that God used to form this earth and universe including atoms, subatomic particles, like neutrinos and quartz. Everything in six days! When you read Exodus 20:11, it doesn't sound like anything existed before the six days. Now let me ask you, "What was Moses, the inspired writer, trying to communicate here?" It's pretty obvious what was Moses, the inspired writer, was intending to teach -- everything was brought into existence in six literal days!

One more point here: how did Moses' audience, the Hebrew people, understand what Moses was communicating here? Do you think that the Hebrew people at that time said, "Oh, we understand what you're saying Moses -- yes, billions of years ago God created the basic stuff with which he would later make the universe, and then in six geologic ages, or six stages of billions of years, he brought this universe into existence"? Of *course* they wouldn't have understood it that way! In the context, they were thinking of a creation week of literal days, where everything came to be, and before the six days there was nothing. There were plenty of ways that Moses could have communicated "long periods of time" in the Hebrew language, if that was the truth and if that was what God wanted to communicate.

The other Scripture is Mark 10:6. Here we read that our Lord said, in reference to Adam and Eve, "*But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female.*" Adam and Eve were created, as we know, on the sixth day of creation week. Now do you think that the Lord Jesus was thinking of the "6th geologic age," or so many "billions of years from the start of creation" when He said, "*But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female*"? I think it is *obvious* that our Lord believed in a creation week of six literal days of earth time.

Now for the other view of the first three verses of Genesis 1, which has been held by many conservative Christians. It is the so-called "gap theory" or "ruin and reconstruction theory." In this view, verse 1 of Genesis represents an original perfect creation of the heavens and earth, including life. Then verse 2 represents a ruined condition of the earth involving much geologic time. In fact, those who hold to this view translate verse 2 as, "and the earth became without form and void." This ruined condition, in this view, was because of Satan's rebellion and the divine judgment that followed -- including the death of all life at that time. The evidence this death, they say, is in the fossil record. Then, in this view, verse 3 begins God's creation week --that is, the "re-creation week" or "reconstruction week." At one time I thought this might be a valid theory, because it allows you to put as many years of geologic time as you want into the "gap." However, I have come to see that this view has serious shortcomings. Briefly let me mention three.

- First, the best translation of the Hebrew in Genesis 1:2 is not the earth *became* without form and void, but really it is *“The earth **was** without form, and void [emphasis added].*
- Secondly, Romans 5:12 indicates that death is the penalty of man’s sin; *“Therefore just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus, death spread to all men because all sinned.”* Furthermore, in Romans 8:18-22, the indication there is that even death in the animal kingdom was the result of the bad fallout of man’s sin. You see, to believe in the “gap theory” you must accept the idea that there were millions and millions of years of tooth and claw and violent death in the animal kingdom, as seen in fossil record. I believe the fossil record is the result of death in the Great Flood, not millions of years of time gap between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:3. I don’t believe that the fossil record is evidence of evolution either. No, it is evidence of death in the Flood!
- Point number three is in reference to Isaiah 45:18. Isaiah 45:18 does not say that there was a “time gap of ruin.” Let me read Isaiah 45:18. *“For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited....”* Isaiah 45:18 is one of the favorite proof texts for those people who hold to the “gap theory.” They say that there was a time gap in earth’s history of waste and desolation. However, the actual point of this verse is that God’s intentions were not to leave the earth formless, and empty, or uninhabited, even though God did take the earth through a formless and empty process on the first day of creation week. So, although it wasn’t long, there was a time when the earth was formless and empty. Let’s move now to Doctrinal Point number two.

2. There was never a time when the earth was not under God’s control.

“And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” This certainly refutes the old Deist idea that God wound up the universe and let it go on its own. That is certainly not Scriptural! Even on the first day when *“**The earth was without form, and void,**”* it was never out of God’s control. *“And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”* The thought here is of a mother hen or bird hovering over her young. Listen to Deuteronomy 32:1, about God’s care for His people, where the same word for “hovering” is used: *“As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings.....”* So, even though the earth was without form and void and in total darkness, God was at work and in control of everything. There was never a time when the earth was not under God’s control.

Practical Application

Remember that your life is never out of God's care and control.

Just as God was in total control of the earth's formation, so God is in total control of your life. I am speaking especially to believers now. It may sometimes seem like your life is without form and empty and disordered, and that God does not care and is not in control, and it may be dark, very dark. At times like this, God may be allowing you to pass through some very deep waters. But listen, God is still in control. God knows and He cares. I Peter 5:7, "*casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*" **Remember that your life is never out of God's care and control.**