
Is there a time gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 ?₂

By C. van Dam

In the preceding article we started to consider the gap theory by which a large time span was said to have existed between the first two verses of Genesis 1. One way this idea was defended involved imposing a rigid separation between the verbs "to create" and "to make." In this way it has been suggested that the earth was created once in the beginning, but subsequently remade due to the fall of creation in sin. The evidence for this argument was found wanting. We also saw that the beginning of the Hebrew text of verse 2 does not al-

low the view that verse 2 follows verse 1 in time. Two other important arguments still need to be considered.

"... without form and void"

It is reasoned that the expression "without form and void" has negative connotations of God's judgment. When verse 2 tells us that "the earth was without form and void," we can draw the conclusion that God has judged the earth because of a preceding fall into sin. However, such a conclusion is unwarranted. The terms in question do not

necessarily speak of God's wrath. The usage of these terms elsewhere makes that clear. The first word "without form" (Hebrew *tōhû*), although sometimes also translated by "vanity" or "vain things" (e.g., 1 Samuel 12:21), literally means "emptiness." It is thus used of "a pathless waste," not formed into hospitable territory (Job 12:24; Psalm 107:40). It pictures the loneliness and desolation of a barren desert. This is clear from the parallelism in Job 26:7. The first part reads: "He stretches out the north over the void [*tōhû*];" the second corresponds to this: "and hangs the earth upon nothing." From the above it can be concluded "that the meaning in Genesis 1:2 is that the earth was still devoid of all the countless living creatures which now occupy it in all of their colourful multiplicity. It was still one expanse of emptiness."¹

The second expression in the pair "without form [*tōhû*] and void [*bōhû*]" only occurs with *tōhû* in the Old Testament (Genesis 1:2; Isaiah 34:11; Jeremiah 4:23) and it is therefore difficult to evaluate it separately. The usage of the term *bōhû* appears to indicate that it is used to strengthen the meaning of *tōhû*. The sense is that the earth was as desolate and empty as could be. Good translations are therefore "without form and void" (RSV) or "formless and empty" (NIV).

At the beginning of the LORD's creation work, the earth could not be inhabited. There is no mention of a fall of creation in the judgment of God or any implication that creation had to be remade. We can think here of Isaiah 45:18. "For this is what the LORD says – He who created the heavens, He is God; He who fashioned and made the earth, He founded it; He did not create it to be empty [*tōhû*], but formed it to be inhabited – He says, I am the LORD, and there is no other" (NIV). The emptiness, the "without form and void," was but a first, initial phase in His creation work. The rest of Genesis 1 will show how God transformed this empty desolation to become an earth fully prepared to receive man.



Darkness over the deep

A fourth (and for our purposes final) argument for a time gap between Genesis 1:1 and verse 2 that can be noted concerns the reference to darkness in verse 2. It is said that this implies the presence of evil and judgment since darkness symbolizes sin and judgment in Scripture. (See, e.g., John 3:19. "And this is the judgment that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.") It is therefore supposed that God originally created the world in light and that the darkness resulted from the fall into sin and God's subsequent judgment.

However, just because darkness can symbolize evil does not make darkness itself a manifestation of evil or inherently bad. God's Word teaches otherwise. Darkness is part of the cycle of day and night as God created it (Genesis 1:5; cf. Psalm 104:20-24). Man needs the darkness to get his rest. It is beneficial to him.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is no scriptural basis for the theory that Genesis 1:2 describes the earth after it fell into God's judgment because of sin. What verse 2 does describe is the first stage in the preparation of the earth for man. "It is the first picture of the created world that the Bible gives The earth was desolation and waste, but all was in God's hand and under His control; nothing was contrary to His design."²

Genesis 1:1 is a broad statement of the creation of heaven and earth. Verses 2 and 3 specifically describe the first day of creation.

Genesis 1:2

In this verse are three circumstantial clauses which describe the condition of the earth in the beginning after being created. The earth was "without form and void," "darkness was upon the face of the deep" and "the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." We have already considered the meaning of the first clause ("without form and void"). Let us now look briefly at the last two.

"Darkness was upon the face of the deep." This shows that no light was present. All was in darkness. The earth was covered with water. Psalm 104:6 refers to this. "Thou didst cover it [i.e. the earth] with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains." All the earth was covered. (Cf. Genesis 1:6f., 9f.) Concerning God's setting the bounds for the water on the third day, we read in Psalm 104:9 ". . . that they [i.e. the waters] might not again cover the earth." The dominant place of water in

the earth as first set forth also reminds us of 2 Peter 3:5, ". . . by the Word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water."

"The Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." The earth was not yet habitable; but it was also not forsaken and left for what it was. No, God's Spirit moved over the face of the waters. Literally it says that the Spirit hovered, as a bird can hover, in care for what lies below. This calls to mind the image of the LORD hovering over Israel, as an eagle taking care of her young (Deut. 32:11). The hovering of the Spirit of God over the deep shows that He is closely involved in the work of creation.

The close involvement of the Spirit in the work of creating can also be seen in other passages of Scripture. Two examples can suffice. "By the Word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of His mouth" (Psalm 33:6). Note that "the breath of His mouth" (which is a literary way of speaking of the Spirit) is parallel with "the Word of the LORD." There is a close connection between the Spirit and the Word. The work of the Spirit in creating is also seen in Isaiah 40:12-13. "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who has directed the Spirit of the

LORD or as His counsellor has instructed Him?"

Genesis 1:2 and Scripture elsewhere show that the Spirit participated in making creation ready for man. It can therefore be said that the Spirit's hovering over the face of the waters was not an empty act, or a mere presence of the Spirit. Aalders put it this way: "an active power goes forth from the Spirit of God to the earth substance that has already been created. This activity has a direct relationship to God's creative work. Perhaps we can say that the Spirit preserves this created material and prepares it for the further creative activity of God by which the then disordered world would become a well-ordered whole, as the further creative acts unfold for our view in the rest of this chapter."³

Before we proceed to continue with the rest of the creation account, it may be good in the next article to pause and address a question that is always there in any discussion of Genesis 1 and 2. What is the relationship of the biblical account to the scientific study of origins? What role (if any) should science play in understanding these chapters?



¹ G.C. Aalders, *Genesis*, I (1981; orig. pub. in Dutch 1933), 54.

² E.J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (1964), 38.

³ Aalders, *Genesis*, I, 56.



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