

Now the Earth was Formless and Empty

1: 2

DIG: What is described in this verse? What is the scene reminiscent of (see Jeremiah 19:1-13)? Who was hovering over the waters? Why? For what purpose did Elohim create the world? What other hovering was there (Second Peter 1:21)?

REFLECT: The Bible teaches that Elohim is not the God of confusion but of peace. If your life is full of darkness and emptiness, ask the Potter to mold you, to send the Spirit of God to hover over you and become involved with your life. But this is a dual undertaking. Our responsibility is to pray and ask (James 4:2), and ADONAI promises to hear your prayer and answer according to His good will and in His good time.

This verse describes the earth before Creation. This is the natural reading of the first two verses of **Genesis**. **God's normal** method is to work from disorder to order (**First Corinthians 14:33**). The human author **Moses** did not write these words to confuse us, but to strengthen our faith. There are three independent narrative phrases in this verse that describe the original state of the earth and introduce the next verse. These phrases are neutral and simply describe the raw material used for creation. We go from looking at Hebrew words in 1:1 to looking at Hebrew phrases in 1:2.

Now the earth was formless (*tohu*) and (*waw*) empty (*bohu*). Elsewhere in the Bible, it is clear that **Elohim** created the earth from nothing (**Psalm 33:6** and **9; 148:5; Hebrews 11:3**)¹³ and here the earth is seen as an empty place of utter destruction. The same expression is used in **Jeremiah 4:23**. There, **Jeremiah** is lamenting the doom of Israel. In **Jeremiah 4:19** he says: **Oh, my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain. Oh, the agony of my heart! My heart pounds within me, I cannot keep silent. Why? Because the trumpet signaling God's judgment against Israel has sounded. Disaster follows disaster; the whole land lies in ruins (Jeremiah 4:20a).** And **Jeremiah** borrowed the very words from **Genesis 1:2**, where **Moses** wrote: **I looked at the earth, and it was formless (*tohu*) and (*waw*) empty (*bohu*); and at the heavens, and their light was gone.** That is how **Jeremiah** described the condition of Judah under the devastating destruction that was brought upon it by the judgment of **God**. What was once fruitful had become a wilderness. It had reverted to a state of barrenness that reminded **Jeremiah** of the state of the earth in the beginning, before **Elohim's** creative work had formed it into something beautiful. It was a place devoid of form or inhabitants - a lifeless, barren place. It suggests that the very shape of the earth was unfinished and empty. The raw material was all there, but it had not yet been given form.¹⁴

This scene is reminiscent of a potter and his clay (**Jeremiah 19:1-13**). The potter wants to make a beautiful container to be filled up and used. He first takes a lump of unformed clay and puts it on the wheel so that he can mold it. This is what **God** did; **He** began with raw materials and carefully shaped it into something perfect. Therefore, **His** work throughout the first six days is like the potter working on the wheel. And the seventh day is like the potter's finished work. It was a process of perfecting that which **Elohim** had already **created in the beginning**.

Darkness was over the surface of the deep (*tehom*). It all began in total **darkness**. The word **deep** in Scripture is an expression used for *the sea*. This suggests that the **earth's** surface was a vast, global ocean. The psalmist said of the original state of the earth: **You covered it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains.** (**Psalm 104:5-6**). The absence of light means **darkness**, just like the absence of form and inhabitants means an **earth** not yet completed. Evil is not implied here, simply incompleteness. This **deep** (**Proverbs 8:24; Isaiah 51:10**) was wrapped in **darkness**. But it was in the process of formation, for the **Spirit of God** moved upon the **waters**.¹⁵

And the Spirit of God was hovering over (*merachephet*) **the waters** (*mayim*). **In rabbinic theology, this refers to the Spirit of King Messiah, giving this Spirit messianic overtones.** **God the Holy Spirit** brooded over it. When we think of **hovering** we think of a hen brooding over her chicks. It conveys the concept of *protecting, caring, fluttering, or flying*. The same Hebrew word appears twice in the TANAKH. **Deuteronomy 32:11** pictures an eagle **hovering over** its nest, and **Jeremiah 23:9** where it is translated **tremble**, describes the prophet's bones shaking over the word of **ADONAI**. In modern terminology you could say it *vibrated* because it implies movement. If the universe is to be energized, there must be an Energizer. **As the Spirit of God** began to *flutter*, particles of earth and water began to come together to form a great sphere moving through space. Therefore, **the Ruach HaKodesh** was actively involved in the act of creation (**Job 6:13; Psalm 104:30**).

This **hovering** or brooding of **the Spirit of God** in the creation account is extremely important. It demonstrates the biblical worldview that **ADONAI** is personally involved in our creation. **Elohim** is not aloof, unwilling or unable to intervene on our behalf. **He** didn't fall asleep at the switch and leave the universe to grow up on its own. Every bit of it, from the smallest particle to the largest galaxy (see Lw - **the Witness of the Stars**), shows **His** handiwork. It is **the work of His fingers** (**Psalm 8:3**).

There is another **hovering** of **the Spirit of God** mentioned in the Bible. **For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Ruach HaKodesh** (**Second Peter 1:21**). Here the Greek word **carried along** in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the TANAKH) is translated as **hovered over** in **Genesis 1:2**. **As the Holy Spirit hovered over** the ancient universe to bring form and life

into ADONAI's original creation, so He later **carried along** God's prophets to bring spiritual life to His new spiritual creation.¹⁶ Therefore, the Bible teaches us that **Elohim did not create the earth to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited** (see my commentary on **Isaiah Ie - Turn to Me and Be Saved, For I AM God and there is No Other**), and that is what we see in the first day of creation.