

Genesis 1:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

Analysis

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. This verse describes the initial state of creation before God's ordering work. The Hebrew phrase *tohu wabohu* (תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ, "without form and void") denotes chaos and emptiness—not evil or disorder resulting from judgment, but the unformed state awaiting divine shaping.

"Darkness was upon the face of the deep" (*tehom*, תהום) describes the primordial waters covering everything. Unlike ancient Near Eastern myths where the deep represents a hostile deity to be conquered, Genesis presents it as part of God's initial creation, completely under His sovereign control.

The "Spirit of God" (*ruach Elohim*, רוח אלֹהִים) hovering or moving upon the waters depicts divine power and presence preparing to bring order from chaos. The verb *merachefet* (מְרַחֵף) suggests protective, nurturing movement—like a bird hovering over its nest. This anticipates the Spirit's ongoing work in creation, preservation, and redemption. The Trinity's involvement in creation becomes evident throughout the chapter, with the Father speaking, the Spirit hovering, and the Word (Christ) executing divine commands (John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:16).

Historical Context

Genesis 1 stands in stark contrast to ancient Near Eastern creation accounts like the Babylonian Enuma Elish, Egyptian creation myths, and Ugaritic texts. While these portrayed creation resulting from conflicts between deities or sexual generation of gods, Genesis presents a sovereign monotheistic God who creates effortlessly by divine decree. This would have been revolutionary to ancient readers accustomed to polytheistic cosmogonies.

The Hebrew text's literary structure (seven days, recurring formulas) suggests careful composition as theological proclamation rather than primitive mythology. Archaeological discoveries of creation tablets from Mesopotamia (2000-1500 BCE) reveal that Genesis addresses similar questions but provides radically different answers about the nature of God, humanity, and the cosmos. The absence of theogony (origin of gods) and theomachy (conflict between gods) distinguishes Genesis from its ancient Near Eastern context.

For Israelites emerging from Egyptian bondage or later facing Babylonian captivity, this truth that Yahweh created everything would have been profoundly liberating and countercultural. The gods of Egypt and Babylon were mere creations, not creators. Genesis 1 establishes that Israel's God alone is supreme, rendering pagan deities powerless and their worship futile.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What theological truths about Creation emerge from this passage?
2. How does this passage challenge modern cultural assumptions about identity, purpose, or morality?

3. How does understanding Christ as the ultimate fulfillment illuminate this passage's meaning?

Interlinear Text

פְּנֵי	עַל	וְחַשְׁךָ	בְּהוּ	תֵּהַ	פִּתְחָה	וְאָרֶץ
And the earth	was	without form	and void	and darkness	upon	the face
H776	H1961	H8414	H922	H2822	H5921	H6440
תְּהַוְּמֵם	פְּנֵי	עַל	מִבְּנֵת	בְּתִימָן	וְרַקְעֵם	פְּנֵי
of the deep	And the Spirit	of God	moved	upon	the face	of the waters
H8415	H7307	H430	H7363	H5921	H6440	H4325

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 4:23 (Parallel theme): I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light.

Psalms 104:30 (Spirit): Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth.

Isaiah 45:18 (References God): For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else.

Psalms 33:6 (Parallel theme): By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.

Job 26:7 (Parallel theme): He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.

Job 26:14 (Parallel theme): Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?