

The earth – as first created

Immediately after Genesis 1:1 the Bible narrows down. The rest of the section focuses very definitely on the earth. The Hebrew emphasizes the word ‘earth’ and can be translated ‘Now as for the earth – it was without form and empty’¹. Genesis is not about to tell us much about the other stuff of the universe mentioned in Genesis 1:1. It does not have any special mention of angels at this point. It zooms in on the special area of concern – the earth.

¹ 1:2

In this picturesque description, the world is created in two stages. First the elementary ‘stuff’ is made, but that leaves the earth ‘without form and empty’. Then Genesis 1:3–31 tells us how God arranged and ordered the world.

• **Empty**

The point is that God was getting the world ready for the human race. Verse 2 does not refer to chaos, but to emptiness, which is not quite the same. And it is not possible to translate verse 2 ‘And the earth **became** without form and empty...’. The Hebrew for this would be different. ‘Became’ is an unnatural translation.

• **Undeveloped**

The main point of verse 2 is that the world had to be developed. The direction of the development indicates that it was being designed for the human race.

‘Without form’ means undeveloped, like a blank chalkboard, without anything on it. ‘Empty’ means that it had no people there. ‘Yahweh, who created the heavens and the earth ... did not create it formless ... He formed it to be inhabited...’¹. It was ‘formless’ at first but then God remedied the lack and it became inhabited. The point of Genesis 1:2 is that the earth was not ready for inhabitants.

¹ Isaiah 45:18

• **Dark**

Genesis continues ‘...and darkness was over the surface of the waters’. The picture is of a liquid world. It was totally unsuitable for men and women. It was enveloped in darkness. People need solid ground. People need light.

• **Liquid**

• **Totally unsuitable for mankind to dwell in**

The point of verse 2 is to underline the fact that in Genesis 1:3–31 God is shaping and moulding the world for the human race. Genesis 1:3–31 will be the story of how God makes the planet earth a suitable place for man to dwell in. Hebrews 2:5–6 makes a similar point. ‘God did not subject the world to come – the earth when it is finally glorified – to angels ... But someone has testified somewhere, saying, “What is man, that you remember him.. .”.’ The earth was not for angels; it was for the human race. Light is needful for man. Ground is needed instead of seas. There has to be provision of rain. An ‘expanse’ has to come into being, the sky. Everything is being described from the viewpoint of men and women. In Genesis 1:29 vegetation is specifically for people. The sun and moon are for people to tell the time. The animals are for humankind¹ and are specially close to them². The ‘rest’ of Genesis 2:1–3 prefigures spiritual rest for people.

¹ 1:26

² 1:25–26

Creation shaped for the human race by God's Spirit and God's Word

- By God's breath – the Holy Spirit
- By God's speaking

How did this shaping of creation for the human race take place? It involved the Holy Spirit, the 'breath' of God. Genesis continues: *'and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters'*. God used His Holy Spirit to prepare the world for the human race. This first reference to the Holy Spirit in the Bible gives us an idea of what the Holy Spirit will always do. He is the One who gives life, the One who gives form and shape and direction to our lives. He is the One who gives shape and order to creation, the agent through whom creation was adorned. He was like a bird hovering over a nest, waiting to see the eggs burst forth with life.

The adornment and preparation of creation also takes place by God's speaking. 'And God said, *"Let there be light"*; and there was light'. Creation takes place through God's word. He speaks and things happen. *'By the word of the LORD the heavens were made; by the breath of His mouth all their parts were formed'* ¹.

¹ Psalm 33:6

Salvation follows a similar pattern to creation

- Spirit and Word bring light to our empty and shapeless lives
- A new creation 'in Christ'
- Nothing becomes something

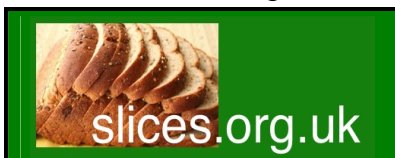
It is interesting that salvation also follows a similar pattern to what we find here. When God first comes to us He finds our lives empty and without shape or purpose. Then He works in our lives. His Spirit moves upon us. His word comes to us. This is not simply a piece of fancy 'spiritualizing' on my part. This is the way Paul considers the matter. *'The God who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness" is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ'* ¹.

¹ 2 Corinthians 4:6

God's ways of working in creation and in salvation are similar. Salvation is His restoration of creation, using a similar pattern. God comes to us in our emptiness. He finds us in darkness, emptiness, hopelessness. His creative word brings life to us. If anyone gets to be *'in Christ'*, there is a new creation¹. Creation from nothing is one of the patterns of God's action. *'He calls into being that which does not exist'*². He works by His Spirit. He speaks. And the very universe comes into being by His word. What He did at first He can do again in a thousand ways. He has but to say a word and nothing becomes something, darkness becomes light, emptiness becomes expectation. God has acted. When He acts He brings newness, light, and solid ground – in more ways than one.

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:17

² Romans 4:17



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