

Without Form And Void

by Jim Schicatano

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty... (Gen. 1:1-2 NIV)

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; (Gen: 1:1-2 KJV)

Scientists estimate that the age of the Earth (and the solar system) is about 4.5 billion years old. During its turbulent beginning, the Earth was a strange and alien world of boiling molten rock with eruptions virtually everywhere. Those eruptions spewed molten lava and gasses that were trapped beneath the Earth's violent surface. Planetesimals, comets, and meteors continued to bombard our planet, depositing more gasses, water, dust, and raw materials to our world. The violent impact of those extraterrestrial rocks released vast amounts of heat and energy, further fueling our world's red hot, fiery beginning.

The young Earth's early atmosphere was remarkably different from today. The outgassing of sulfur and carbon dioxide from the interior of the Earth fueled the development of a heavy, toxic atmosphere. There was no free oxygen to breathe at that time, and water molecules remained in a superheated gaseous state.

It seems impossible that life could have ever developed on our young world. Nevertheless, out of the primordial chaos, God brought forth order. Out of desolation, God brought forth a sustainable life. The Bible does not give us a detailed description of a young Earth, but it does refer to our planet as "without form and void." The Hebrew words used in this verse are "tohu" and "vavohu."¹ These Hebrew terms are meant to convey images of confusion, formlessness, and disorder.²

"Chaos" seems to be the integral concept here. In the Creation Story, the Bible reveals that chaos reigned supreme throughout our universe. It is only by the will of God that order prevails.

The Biblical account can be considered an accurate depiction of a young Earth. Certainly, the emptiness and lifelessness of the planet are correct. The Bible's description of a desolate, chaotic world is an adroit, if not scientific, portrayal of the violent processes that

formed the Earth.

Scientists have learned that four and a half billion years ago the planet Earth was a turbulent, desolate world. The Bible's description of our young planet is certainly in agreement with science.

NOTES:

Torah Portions, World Ort Union, "Navigating the Bible", 1996, April 16, 1997

P.R. Ackroyd, A.R.C.Leaney, and J.W.Packer, eds., The Cambridge Bible Commentary: Genesis 1-11 (Cambridge: At The University Press, 1973), p.15