

INVESTIGATING ORIGINS

By Stephen Caesar
Associates for Biblical Research

“Without Form, and Void”

Genesis 1:2 says that the Earth started out “without form, and void.” Interpretations differ as to precisely what this means, but, taking the phrase at face value, it seems to indicate that the Earth began its planetary “life” as an unformed, chaotic mass of material that coalesced into the solid world on which we now live.

If this is the correct interpretation, then the writer of Genesis 1 possessed a remarkable insight into the formation of our planet. Over the past few decades, as their telescopes have gotten more and more powerful, astronomers have been witness to the formation of stars and planets from gargantuan, chaotic clouds of dust and gas floating in the dark reaches of space.

NASA’s Spitzer Space Telescope is one example of these highly powerful telescopes that have allowed scientists to witness the formation of celestial bodies from a “formless and void” state. According to the December 2005 issue of *National Geographic*, the Spitzer uses infrared wavelengths to view “gravity squeez[ing] the denser clumps [of dust and gas] until stars burst into life...” (Douthitt 2005: 111).

The Spitzer “has opened up half the universe to us,” said Robert Kennicutt, an astronomer at the University of Arizona (Ibid. 113). “In the process,” reports *National Geographic*, “it [the Spitzer] has exposed cosmic birthplaces. Stars take shape in clouds of gas and dust, and planets emerge in disks of debris around new stars....Already the telescope has gleaned clues about how and where planets form, and even spotted two of them by picking up their infrared glow” (Ibid.).

If the Biblical term “without form, and void” does indeed mean that the planet Earth began its celestial “life” as an unformed, chaotic mass of dust and gas, then the implications are truly humbling and awe-inspiring. Looking through the Spitzer Space Telescope might very well be like looking at Genesis 1:2 taking place.

Reference:

Douthitt, B. 2005. “Night Vision.” *National Geographic* 208, no. 6.

Stephen Caesar holds his master’s degree in anthropology/archaeology from Harvard. He is a staff member at Associates for Biblical Research.