

# Is the Gap Theory a Biblical Option?

by  
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## The Gap Theory Scenario

Briefly, the scenario in the Gap Theory do something like this: Genesis 1:1 in the records the special creation of the original heavens and Earth, billions of years ago. Upon that Earth live the various species of prehistoric animals and prehistoric man. During that time Lucifer's rebellion in heaven to place (Isa. 14:12-17; Ezk. 28:1-16; Rev. 12:7-9). Lucifer and his fallen angels (currently called Satan, and demons, respectively) were cast down to earth, corrupted the original inhabitants of the Earth, and provoked a worldwide judgment known as "Lucifer's Flood," from which there were no survivors. Thus the Earth became without form and void (Gen. 1:2) and remained in this desolate condition for billions of years. Genesis 1:3 and following then records the REIT creation of the Earth, the biosphere, and man as we know them today. Thus it is also called the ruin-reconstruction theory.

The Gap Theory received its initial impetus in 1814 Thomas Chalmers of Scotland<sup>1</sup>, whose primary motivation was to allow the Bible to conform to the vast changes of time and the so-called "geologic column," both of which are so central to uniform and tearing in geology. It was enormously popularised by the notes of the 1917 Schofield Reference Bible, and has been promoted by various scholars up to the present.<sup>2</sup>

The Gap Theory appeals to Bible-believing Christians for two reasons. First, and it is a way of dealing with the major problems associated with the evolutionary scenario—the allege antiquity of the Earth, the geologic column, fossils, dinosaurs, caveman, etc. The claims and unanswerable problems of "science" are merely shoved into the "Gap" between Genesis 1:1-3 or are relegated to the pre-creation Earth. Whereas Day-Age people are generally thoroughgoing evolutionists, calling themselves "theistic evolutionists" or "progressive creationists,"<sup>3</sup> Gap Theory people are basically creationists who have not yet been informed of the modern scientific evidence for a young Earth, the rapid formation of the geologic column in the fossils it contains, the invalidity of radiometric dating systems, etc. Most the Gap Theory people in practice might be called "irrelevant creationists":since the creation to place so long ago, as "science" claims, there is little point in discussing it.

Second, it gives the appearance of profound and deep Bible study as it is discovered for the first time the billions of years working ingeniously hidden between two verses of Scripture and this remarkable fact is now reveal for all to use in their battle against the ranging forces of evolution.

## The Alleged Basis for the Gap Theory

There are seven main points generally proposed as the basis for the Gap Theory:

1. Science and the geologic column speak of an old (4.5-billion-year-old) Earth and universe.

2. **Hayah** could be translated as “became” in Gen. 1:2 instead of “was.” The result is that the Earth became waste and void and was **re**-created after an initial creation and destruction.
3. The Hebrew words translated “without form and void” (**tohu vabohu**) in Gen. 1:2 refer to judgment elsewhere (Isa. 34:11 and Jer. 4:23); therefore this expression refers to the judgment of Lucifer and inhabitants of the original Earth.
4. The word **tohu** itself is occasionally used in an evil sense elsewhere in the Old Testament (Isaiah 44:9; 59:4).
5. “Darkness” is used elsewhere as representative of evil (John 3:19; Jude 13, etc.); therefore the darkness in Gen. 1:2 refers to the crushing of Lucifer’s rebellion.
6. There is a sharp distinction between the Hebrew words for “create” (**bara**) and “make” (**asah**). **Bara** refers to the original creation **ex nihilo** in Gen. 1:1, and **asah** refers to the subsequent refashioning of items from already-existing materials.
7. Genesis 1:28 speaks of “replenishing” or “refilling” the Earth. That means it was originally “filled” and emptied, and is now being “**re**-filled.”

### A Refutation of the Gap Theory

1. The geologic column (which is the backbone of the evolutionary scenario) shows every evidence of having been deposited quickly, by Noah’s Flood, and not over long periods of time.<sup>4</sup> In fact both the Earth and the universe give every indication of having been created only 6-10,000 years ago.<sup>5</sup> Once it is recognized that the Earth is not very old, and that many of the evidences appealed to as a part of the evolutionary scenario are actually phenomena produced by the Genesis Flood, the Gap Theory will soon be recognized as superfluous. Once there is no more **need** to have an old Earth, one becomes less vehement about the alleged Biblical bases for the theory. It is evident then that the above-mentioned points are really Biblical “baggage” – the accretions necessary to lend theological respectability to what is essentially an accommodation to science falsely-so-called.
2. In 258 out of 264 occurrences of the word **hayah** in the Pentateuch, it is unquestionably translated as “was.” A direct parallel to Gen. 1:2 is Jonah 3:3 – “Nineveh was (**hayah**) a great city.” Obviously it did not become a great city after Jonah set foot in it. Other grammatical parallels include Gen. 31:5; 41:56; Ex. 1:5, and Judges 9:51. The normal way of expressing a change of condition involving **hayah** would have the next word preceded by a prefix **le**, “into,” so that it should literally have been constructed, “the earth became into formlessness emptiness . . .” Such a construction does not appear in Gen. 1:2, therefore the overwhelming weight of passages (98%)<sup>6</sup> affirm the traditional translation of “was,” i.e. that the earth was in this condition at the time God created it, mainly because He wasn’t finished with the work of creation yet.
3. The expression **tohu vabohu** as a couplet occurs only twice in the Old Testament and is used of divine judgment upon both Gentiles and Israel (Isa. 34:11, Jer. 4:23). Remember, however, that we are not dealing with a data base of hundreds or even

dozens of references. Two passages, that have nothing whatsoever to do with the creation week, can hardly be used as a solid basis for such a radical interpretation.

4. If **Tohu** always referred to something evil wherever it was used in the Old Testament, this might be an impressive argument for applying that idea in Gen. 1:2. However, a careful study of the usage of the word does not support that meaning. For example, in Job 26:7 it states that God “stretches out the north over empty space (**tohu**), and hangs the earth upon nothing.” Here, as in most of the passages in which the word appears in Isaiah, the word is in a position of Hebrew parallelism with “nothing”; there is nothing in the passage to suggest that outer space is evil. Nor is that idea contained in the passages in which the word refers to the emptiness of the wilderness or desert, where the primary idea is the absence of life (Deut. 32:10; Job 6:18; 12:24; Ps. 107:40). It has the primary idea of “nothing,” “emptiness,” or “uselessness,” and is therefore a morally neutral term.

The words *tohu vabohu*, in the context of Gen. 1:2, are best translated as “unformed and unfilled”<sup>7</sup> or “shapeless and empty.” There is no judgement in this context; it is imported only because of outside assumptions.

5. When “darkness” is used as a symbol of evil and “light” is used as a symbol for righteousness, it is clear from the context that these metaphorical interpretations are intended. In Gen. 1:5 it states that the light was called “day” and the darkness was called “night,” the expanse is called “heaven” (v. 8), the dry land is called “earth,” and the waters are called “seas” (v. 10). These are not the mystical terms of allegorical interpretation, but are mundane terms pertaining to physical objects in the created order. Notice the morally neutral use of the idea of physical darkness in Psalm 104:19-24 and Psalm 139:12. It is best, therefore, to understand “light” in Genesis 1:2-5 as being symbolic of light and “darkness” as symbolic of darkness.
6. The absolute distinction between **bara** (to create) and **‘asah** (to form) cannot be maintained, as they are essentially synonymous in Genesis 1. Notice the following:
  - a) In Gen. 1:16 God made (**‘asah**) the sun, moon, and stars. Obviously they were not made from pre-existing matter.
  - b) In Gen. 1:21 it states that God created (**bara**) great sea monsters, while v. 25 states that God made (**‘asah**) the beasts of the earth.
  - c) In Gen. 1:20 the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures while in v. 21 it is explained to mean that “God created (**bara**) every living creature that moved, with which the waters swarmed.”
  - d) Gen. 2:7 tells us that God formed (**yatzar**) man, while 1:26 says he was made (**‘asah**) and 1:27 says he was created (**bara**).

- e) Genesis 1:1 and 2:4 say that God created (**bara**), the heavens and the earth, while Exodus 20:11 says that “in six days the Lord made (**‘asah**), the heavens and the earth.” Furthermore, Genesis 2:4 itself uses the two words in a parallelism: “when they were created (**bara**), in the day of their making (**‘asah**).

Whitcomb rightly observes, “These examples should suffice to show the absurdities to which we are driven by making distinctions which God never intended to make. For the sake of variety and fullness of expression (a basic and extremely helpful characteristic of Hebrew literature), different verbs are used to convey the concept of supernatural creation. It is particularly clear that whatever shade of meaning the rather flexible verb ‘made’ (**‘asah**) may bear in other contexts of the Old Testament, in the context of Genesis 1 it stands as a synonym for ‘created’ (**bara**).”<sup>8</sup>

7. The idea of “refilling” the earth is based upon a King James mistranslation of the Hebrew word **male’** in Gen. 1:28. It is a broad term which includes either the idea of filling, as in 1:22 and 1:28, or of refilling, as in 9:1. It is therefore inconclusive and cannot be used as a proof one way or the other.
8. The Hebrew letter “**w**,” translated “and,” appears nine times in the first five verses in what is known as a “**waw** conjunctive.” Without getting bogged down in the intricacies of Hebrew grammar, suffice it to say here that this means that each statement is chronologically connected to the statements before and after. Each action follows immediately after the action described in the phrase preceding it. Gen. 1:1-5 therefore refers to one single 24-hour day: the beginning is the first day and the first day is the beginning.
9. In the Gap Theory there is a serious theological problem with sin and death before the fall of Adam in Genesis 3.<sup>9</sup> Fossils contain the idea of death, as a fossil by definition is a dead organism. The idea of a rebellion led by Lucifer automatically contains the idea of sin extending to pre-Adamic man. Yet Romans 5:12 declares that through one man (i.e. Adam) sin entered the world, and death through sin,” while Gen. 3:14 and Romans 8:19-22 state that the effects of Adam’s sin extended to the entire created order. There is nothing ambiguous about the verses and they mean exactly what they say: Adam was the first man, and there was neither sin nor death on the earth prior to the Garden of Eden incident recorded in Genesis 3.
10. Exodus 20:11 was mentioned before as a verse which shows the essential interchangeability between **bara** and **‘asah**, but there is more. The Gap Theory states that in the beginning (i.e., 5 billion years ago) God created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and a whole biosphere. Billions of years later He reconstructed the earth, using already-existent matter. Exodus 20:11, however, states that “in six days (clearly the six days of the creation week of Gen. 1:1-31) the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in

them.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, everything that is in space, on the surface of the earth, indeed the surface of the earth itself, the oceans, and everything they contain were created within the six days of the creation week. Again, the beginning is the first day and the first day is the beginning.

11. Related to the above is Colossians 1:16: “For by Him (i.e., Christ) were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers— all things were created by Him and for Him.” Colossians 1:16-17 is a commentary on Genesis 1 and tells us that every conceivable thing— material or immaterial— was created during the six-day creation week. That includes angels of all kinds and yes, that includes Lucifer also. This is not the place to quibble over whether they were created on the first, the fourth, or the sixth days— and a case could be made for each of the three— the point is that angels did not exist from all eternity: they are created beings like you and me and as such they have their origin within the creation week of Genesis 1.

There is a six-fold repetition of the phrase “God saw that it was good” which appears at the conclusion of each major creative act, climaxed with a summation verse in Gen. 1:31: “And God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good.” The following verse (2:1) notes that that includes heaven, earth, and all the host of them. Notice Psalm 148:2 where “host” is set in Hebrew parallelism with “angels.” That would have to mean, therefore, that the fall of Lucifer and his demons had not yet taken place. This eliminates one of the major elements in the Gap Theory scenario— the pre-creation creation and fall of the fallen angels. Exactly when they did fall is not precisely identified, but it would have been sometime between Genesis chapters two and three, a period of decades rather than billions of years.

12. There is a remarkable silence in other Scriptures regarding this alleged original destruction of the earth, even though there are several places in which it would be appropriate to the argument. Second Peter 2:4-6 refers to the certainty of God’s judgement on three occasions, as does Jude 5-7. Other passages stress the certainty of God’s judgement on pre-Flood people as an illustration of His future judgement upon the world (Matt. 24:37-39), and yet not one ever uses this alleged pre-creation destruction as an example of God’s judgement, even though it was more total in its effects and duration than Noah’s Flood. The reason they do not refer to it, of course, is because it never happened.
13. Because the geologic column is accepted as a record of the geologic ages of the pre-creation earth, or of the so-called “Lucifer’s Flood,” and the fossils are remnants of the pre-Genesis creation, there is a tendency among many gap theorists to diminish the significance, extent, and geological effects of Noah’s Flood in Genesis 6-8. Any flood violent enough to completely inundate the earth and cover its highest mountains in 40-150 days,<sup>11</sup> and

which lasted a total of 371 days,<sup>12</sup> would have had enough destructive force to break up the earth's crust and thus it would have destroyed the geologic column which, after all, is one of the main reasons for holding to the Gap Theory in the first place. This is why some of the most vociferous advocates of the Gap Theory also argue for a local or tranquil flood in Genesis 6-8.<sup>13</sup> Here is a case where error begets additional error.

14. If there was really a pre-Genesis world that was cursed and destroyed because of sin, it would not be enough to merely destroy it by water or fire. The curse of sin so penetrates and permeates the very fabric of our universe (Rom. 8:21-22) that when God creates the new heavens and earth, He finds it necessary to cancel the nuclear forces holding together every atom of our universe, allow matter to revert back into pure energy, and then re-create an entire new universe of matter as a repetition of Genesis 1:1 (2 Peter 3:10-13; Rev. 21:1). Sin is to the created order as ink is to a stick of chalk: it cannot be scrubbed from the surface, it must be transformed atomically.
15. If the geologic column contains fossils of a pre-Genesis world, and God recreated all life forms *de novo*, it seems strange that there is a basic continuity between the fossil record and the spectrum of plants and animals currently alive on the earth. Many fossils are of animals no longer alive (which proves nothing more than that they are no longer alive today for one reason or another), and while they are in some cases larger than their modern counterparts, they are obviously of the same species. If God performed a brand new creation in Genesis 1:2 and following, why did He not start over again with an entirely different set of prototypes? The best explanation for the essential continuity between the current biosphere and the fossil record is that they both contain descendants of the spectrum of life created in Gen. 1:11-31, and that the fossils are actually preserved specimens of plants and animals killed and encapsulated by Noah's Flood of Genesis 6-8.

## Conclusion

The Biblical verses used to support the Gap Theory, as impressive as they may initially appear, are forced, taken out of their contexts, and are actually merely the biblical baggage attached to a theory that was invented primarily to accommodate (i.e. compromise) the Bible to several facets of the evolutionary scenario: the alleged antiquity of the earth and the universe, the geologic column, fossils, etc. The Gap Theory does less violence to the Scriptures as a whole than the Day-Age Theory, and the sincerity of its adherents must be commended in that their motivation is to attempt to confirm the scientific accuracy of the Bible. But sincerity is not a determinant of truth, as one can be sincerely wrong. The bottom line of this article is that "the beginning" is a part of the first day and the first day is the beginning (Gen. 1:1). Since there is no gap permissible between Gen. 1:1,2, or 3 either grammatically or contextually, the Gap Theory is unscriptural and is therefore false.

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### Endnotes

1. Thomas Chalmers, **The Works of Thomas Chalmers On Natural Theology** (Glasgow: Wm. Collins & Co., n.d.).
2. Bernard Ramm, **The Christian View of Science and Scripture**, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), pp. 195 ff. Arthur Custance, **Without Form and Void**, (Brockville, Canada: Doorway Publishers, 1970).
3. See the author's "Significant Discrepancies Between Theistic Evolution and The Bible" in the **Creation Research Society Quarterly**, (March 1980), and "Theistic Evolution and the Day-Age Theory," **ICR Impact No. 81 (March 1980)**.
4. John C. Whitcomb, Jr. and Henry M. Morris, **The Genesis Flood** (San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, 1961).
5. Harold Slusher, **The Age of the Cosmos** (Creation-Life Publishers, 1980); Henry Morris, **Scientific Creationism** (Creation-Life Publishers, 1974), pp. 131-169.
6. This 98% ratio apparently holds true for the entire Old Testament. Out of 4,900 occurrences only 64 could be translated as "became" and the rest are translated as "was." Robert E. Kofal and Kelly L. Segraves, **The Creation Explanation** (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1975), p. 232.
7. Weston W. Fields, **Unformed and Unfilled** (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976). This is the most scholarly and complete refutation of the Gap Theory currently available.
8. John C. Whitcomb, **The Early Earth** (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), p. 129.
9. This is also a serious objection to the Day-Age Theory.

10. The Bible states that the sun, moon, and stars were not created until the fourth day—three days after the formation of the earth (Gen. 1:14-19). In an attempt to retain the essentially evolutionary cosmology of the sun and stars before the earth, Scofield claims that the sun and moon were created in the beginning. The light of Gen. 1:3-4 came from the sun, but a heavy cloud cover obscured the sky for the first three days (Scofield Reference Bible, p. 3). This interpretation is clearly forced and is against the obvious sense of Gen. 1:14-19 that the heavenly bodies were not in existence until that time. For a discussion of the problem of light before the sun, see the author's article "Biblical Indications of a Rotating Earth," Bible-Science Newsletter (December 1980), p. 1-3.
11. There is disagreement over whether the waters peaked at the 40<sup>th</sup> or at the 150<sup>th</sup> day.
12. For a detailed breakdown of the various stages in the Flood scenario see Whitcomb and Morris, **The Genesis Flood**, p. 3.
13. Arthur C. Custance, **Without Form and Void** (Brockville, Canada: Doorway Publishers, 1970); **The Flood: Local or Global?** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Bernard Ramm, **The Christian View of Science and Scripture** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954, pp. 229-249).