

The Gap Theory

(called: "the Ruin-reconstruction theory," "the Cataclysmic Theory and "the Restitution Theory")

Compiled by Dr. Gary M. Gulan, ©1978, (Rev. 86,92,05)

Introduction: This view was taught in many Bible Institutes, Bible Colleges and Seminaries at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE GAP THEORY

A. In Genesis 1:1, the dateless past is recorded when God created the original perfect and complete universe.

B. Between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, there is a significant length of time where Satan rebels and falls, and this perfect universe is marred, resulting in chaos, and sin is brought into the world.

C. In Genesis 1:2, we find desolation and chaos from a catastrophe(s).

D. After Genesis 1:2, God remolded and recreated this sin-marred creation.¹

2. PROPONENTS OF THE GAP THEORY

A. Thomas Chalmers, 1814 (Scotland, Edinburgh University)

B. George H. Pember, 1876 (The Earth's Earliest Ages, in 1907)

C. C. I. Scofield, 1909 (Scofield Reference Bible in 1909, New Scofield Reference Bible in 1967)

D. Eric Sauer, 1962 (London, The King of the Earth)

E. Arthur C. Custance, 1970 (Without Form and Void)²

3. REASONING BEHIND THE GAP THEORY

A. It allows for Satan's fall.

B. It allows for sin to enter the world.

C. It allows for a pre-Adamic race.

D. It allows the Bible to accommodate science and harmonize the Bible with current geological theory.

"The gap theory is not built on sound exegesis, but is rather an attempt to reconcile the Bible with the views of science." It proposes a way to harmonize the Genesis record with the long periods of time seemingly demanded by geology, (which as a science came into being at the first of the nineteenth century)."³

4. ARGUMENTS SURROUNDING THE GAP THEORY

There are five words or phrases in Genesis 1:1-2 that are used to support this view point.

A. "Without form and void"

(1.) For the "gap theory" – is thought to refer to catastrophic "judgment," (Isa. 34:11; 45:18; Jer. 4:23). It describes an evil condition which could not have been a part of the original creation, (Isa. 45:18). It describes the result of God's judgment and not of divine creation.

(2.) Against the "gap theory" - often refers to "lifelessness and empty space," (Job 26:7; Deut. 32:10). "Without form and void' do not necessarily imply judgment and an evil condition. The word 'formless' (Heb. 'tohu') appears in the Old Testament referring to space (Job 26:7) and wilderness (Deut 32:10) without any evil connotations." "Isaiah 45:18 says that it was not God's ultimate intention that the earth be formless and void. In other words, God did originally create the world formless and void, but since this was not His ultimate wish for it, He proceeded to fill it with living things, including man."

B. "Was"

(1.) For the "gap theory" - "Was" really means "became."

(2.) Against the "gap theory" - The Hebrew word "hayetha" (was) is almost always translated "was." It is used 264 times in the Pentateuch. Of these, it is translated "was" 258 times. (Jonah 3:3). "A logical problem also exists with the construction the gap theory places on this verse (1:2). If the verb means 'had become' (a pluperfect sense), then Genesis 1:2 is saying that the earth had become formless and void prior to the Creation of verse 1. But the gap concept requires the becoming to happen after the creating."

C. "Created" (bara) and "made" (asah)

(1.) For the "gap theory" - there is a difference between the two terms, "created" (bara) indicates a different creation from what follows.

(2.) Against the "gap theory" - The words "created" and "made" are used interchangeably. God created (bara) the great sea monsters, (1:21) and God made (asah) the beast of the earth, (1:15). God said, Let us make (asah) man, (1:26) and so God created (bara) man, (1:27).

D. "Darkness"

(1.) For the "gap theory" - the word always indicates "judgment." It cannot be a good thing.

(2.) Against the "gap theory" - Darkness here is simply the absence of light and is sometimes spoken of as being good, (Ps. 104:20,24). Darkness does not always have to be evil. Darkness "was made for Creation's good just as light was (Ps. 104:19-24)."

E. "Replenish"

(1.) For the "gap theory" - it indicates the world was once filled and Adam was commanded to fill an earth that was previously inhabited.

(2.) Against the "gap theory" - the Hebrew word "male" almost always means simply "to fill," (Ex. 40:34; 1 Kings 18:33; Ps. 107:9). The translation "replenish" and "refill" are faulty translations of the Hebrew word. The original command to Adam was to "fill" a earth that was without inhabitants.⁴

Conclusion: Genesis 1:1-2 does not support a "Gap-theory."

Since the 1960's, research in the area of "creation" from a Biblical view point, has helped us understand God's creation better. The "creationists" of today have rejected the Gap Theory and have supported a "young earth" and "one literal original creation view" of Genesis 1:1-2:25.

Besides the reasons already given previously in the paper, the following eleven reasons show why we reject the Gap Theory.

1. Grammar does not allow for a gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2

"Verse 1, is an independent clause. Verse two is composed of three circumstantial clauses, explaining the condition of the earth in the clause of verse one. Verse two's clauses are also connected to verse three."

"Verse 2, begins with what is technically called a disjunctive 'waw' (Hebrew word translated 'now' rather than 'and') and which introduces a circumstantial clause, with the imperfect sense of the verb, translated 'now the earth was....' To translate 'the earth had become formless and void' a 'waw' constructive (which would indicate a sequential clause and be translated 'and') with the pluperfect sense of the verb would be expected. ...The verb normally serves as a linking verb, ('to be' not 'to become').... Also the disjunctive use of the 'waw' seems required because the author apparently is calling the reader's attention to something about the earth, 'now as to the earth its was....'"

2. The Hebrew poetic form makes the six days a story of the original creation.

With the Gap Theory, "The six days of Creation then, describe a re-creation, restoration, or restitution, not the original Creation." This would disrupt the poetic structure of the first chapter.

3. This would make the earth millions of years old.

The Gap Theory would comply to the evolutionist's scheme of dating. "The ancient fossil found on the earth, many of which are said to be millions of years old, stem from the first creation (4,500,000,000 years ago), which is mentioned only in Genesis 1:1."

4. Satan's fall was in heaven prior to the creation of the earth.

"There exists no biblical proof that Satan's fall resulted in judgment on the earth. Adam's fall did, (3:17-19)."

5. There is no Scriptural support for the Gap Theory.

"There is no verse in Scripture that explicitly talks about an earlier creation. So this theory is lacking even one verse of Scripture to give it explicit support."

6. God's statement does not support the Gap Theory.

"In Genesis 1:31, when God finished his work of creation, we read, 'And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.' But according to the gap theory, God would be looking at an earth full of the results of rebellion, conflict, and terrible divine judgment. He would also be looking at all the demonic beings, the hosts of Satan who had rebelled against Him, and yet be calling everything 'very good.' It is difficult to believe that there was so much evil and so many evidences of rebellion and judgment on the earth, and that God could still say that creation was very good."

7. There is too much time between the creation of the earth and then the heavens in the Gap Theory.

"Moreover, Genesis 2:1, says, in an apparent summary of all that has happened in Genesis 1, 'Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the hosts of them.' Here it is not just God's work on earth, but all that He made in the heavens, that is said to have been completed in the narrative in Genesis 1. This would not allow for large parts of heaven and earth to have been finished long before the six creation days."

8. Moses does not support the Gap Theory.

"In a later description of God's work of creation found in the Ten Commandments, we read, 'for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it,' (Ex. 20:11). Here the creation of both the heaven and the earth, and the making of 'all that is in them,' is attributed to God's work in the six days of creation."

9. The Gap Theory is a theological position of accommodation and compromise.

"The gap concept does not rest on solid exegetical grounds. The fact that it became popular about the same time as geology came on the scene makes one suspect that it gained acceptance because it easily accommodates the findings of uniformitarian geology."

10. Modern geology knows nothing of the Gap Theory.

"While the motive of the gap theory, the harmonization of the Bible with current geological theory, is commendable, the validity of their argument is extremely doubtful. Modern geology knows nothing of the theory's two global catastrophes with two distinct geological periods." "The gap theory is thus self-defeating scientifically."

11. The Gap Theory allows for other false theological views.

From this theory, the "spirits of a pre-Adamic race" has been adopted, stating that the human race was originally created between 1:1 and 1:2, and now the spirits of demons are those who fell with Satan. Romans 5:12, states the conditions of sin and death came through Adam and not a pre-Adamic race. "The gap theory is not only impossible scientifically, but also destructive theologically."⁵

Notes:

¹The material under this point was summarized from the following sources:
Willmington's Guide To The Bible, H.L. Willmington, Wheaton: Tyndale, 1981, p. 5;
The Bible Knowledge Commentary, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, Wheaton: Victor, 1985, p. 28; Unger's Guide To The Bible, Merrill Unger, Wheaton: Tyndale, 1974, p. 119; The Moody Handbook of Theology, Paul Enns, Chicago: Moody, 1989, Pp. 295, 302, 635; Systematic Theology, Wayne Grudem, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, p. 287. Practical Christian Theology, Floyd Barackman, Old Tappan: Fleming Revell, 1984, p. 60; Lecture In Systematic Theology, Henry Thiessen, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949, p. 113; Genesis, S. Lewis Johnson, Dallas: Believers Chapel, 1978, Lesson 1, p. 3; Paradise To Prison, Studies in Genesis, John J. Davis, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978, Pp. 39-47; Exploring Genesis, John Phillips, Chicago: Moody, 1980, Pp. 36,39-45; The Genesis Record, Henry Morris, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980, Pp. 46-52.

²The material under this point was summarized from the following sources:
Willmington's Guide To The Bible, H.L. Willmington, Wheaton: Tyndale, 1981, p. 5; Basic Theology, Charles C. Ryrie, Wheaton: Victyor, 1986, Pp. 182-183; Systematic Theology, Wayne Grudem, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, p. 287; Practical Christian Theology, Floyd Barackman, Old Tappan: Fleming Revell, 1984, p. 60; Genesis, S. Lewis Johnson, Dallas: Believers Chapel, 1978, Lesson 1, p. 3; Paradise To Prison, Studies in Genesis, John J. Davis, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978, Pp. 39-47; The Genesis Record, Henry Morris, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980, Pp. 46-52.

³The material under this point was summarized from the following sources:
The Moody Handbook of Theology, Paul Enns, Chicago: Moody, 1989, p. 302; Basic Theology, Charles C. Ryrie, Wheaton: Victyor, 1986, Pp. 182-183; Systematic Theology, Wayne Grudem, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, p. 287; Paradise To Prison, Studies in Genesis, John J. Davis, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978, Pp. 39-47; Exploring Genesis, John Phillips, Chicago: Moody, 1980, Pp. 36,39-45; The Genesis Record, Henry Morris, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980, Pp. 46-52.

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Systematic Theology, Wayne Grudem, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, p. 287;
Practical Christian Theology, Floyd Barackman, Old Tappan: Fleming Revell, 1984, p.
60; Paradise To Prison, Studies in Genesis, John J. Davis, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978,
Pp. 39-47; Exploring Genesis, John Phillips, Chicago: Moody, 1980, Pp. 36,39-45;
The Genesis Record, Henry Morris, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980, Pp. 46-52.