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INTRODUCTION

The origins of the universe, encompassing the beginnings of the earth and life upon it, have long captivated the mind of man, and involve the most fundamental issues of human existence. For centuries, the thinking of Judeo-Christian cultures was dominated by the belief in God's special creation as recorded in the Bible's Book of Genesis. This preeminence was steadily eroded beginning in the late 18th century under the assault of skepticism and humanism, allied with science couched in evolutionary philosophy.

The challenge to the Church from this period onward was how to respond to attacks on the Genesis account of creation which were posed first and principally by geology, then later by biology.¹ By questioning the Bible's creation narrative central truths of Christianity were also, from a human perspective, put at risk – the existence of God, His direct role in creation, the unique place of man in that creation, man's accountability his Creator, his failure (sin) in the Garden of Eden, and the need for a Savior to provide for fallen man's redemption. Of the attempts to reconcile the claims of science to an old earth with the Biblical account of a young creation, the most enduring and well-known in conservative or fundamental circles has been the Ruin-Reconstruction or Gap Theory.² Briefly stated, the Gap Theory

basically advocates that the first two verses of Genesis 1 describe a condition that lasted an indeterminate amount of time and preceded the six days of creation in Gen. 1:3ff. There was creation (1:1), followed by a catastrophe (1:2), in turn followed by a re-creation (1:3ff). All the needed geologic ages in earth's pre-Adamic history may be found either between 1:1 and 1:2 or during 1:2.³

¹ The use of the term "Church" in this context refers to the whole of professing Christendom, as opposed to what might be called believing or biblical Christianity. A brief definition of biblical Christianity is those churches which hold the Bible to be the only rule for faith and practice, and teach the imperative of the new birth of the individual by grace through faith alone in Christ's atonement for sin on the Cross.

² This response was conducted largely in the absence of empirical data, which would have questioned the validity of the scientific claims against Genesis in their own right. Such information has been available now for over 30 years, largely as a result of the Creation Science movement.

³ A.F. Johnson, "Gap Theory," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Ewell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 439.

The objective of this paper is to analyze the Scriptural merits of the Gap Theory against the literal six-day creation presented in the Book of Genesis.⁴ While several variations of the Gap Theory will be mentioned, they will not be reviewed to the same extent as the “traditional version,” which many students of the Bible commonly encounter in the notes to the Scofield Reference / Study Bible, 1917 edition. Since the author is not a student of Hebrew, linguistic and grammatical arguments, where discussed, will be basic. Neither is it the intention here to discuss the scientific debates about the age of the earth, or to conduct an in-depth analysis of the two competing schools of historical geology (the study of the how the earth and its topography were formed in the past) – uniformitarianism and catastrophism. These subjects, though worthy of study, merit a longer forum than is allowed here. Before examining the specifics of the Gap Theory, the events that led to its development and widespread acceptance commend our attention.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE GAP THEORY

The Gap Theory is the theological result of changes in scientific thinking. This differs from theological positions, which are the result of biblical interpretation, or exegesis. While the Gap Theory and literal creationists both use the Bible to support their positions, the starting point with the Gap Theory was prevailing scientific opinion, not the Bible. Therefore, understanding the trends in Geology regarding geologic processes – how the earth’s physical formations were produced – is useful in seeing this cause-and-effect relationship.

⁴ The literal position “regards the six days of creation as literal twenty-four hour days that followed in immediate succession. The earth is generally believed to be only a few thousand years old; the geological ages and the concept of organic evolution are completely rejected.” Scott M. Huse, The Collapse of Evolution (1983; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 32.

The Development of Historical Geology – The Rise of Uniformitarianism⁵

Up until the 18th century, the age of the earth had been relegated largely to the realm of philosophy or theology.⁶ Archbishop Ussher of Ireland (d. 1636) used biblical genealogies to determine a time span of 4,036 years from Adam to Christ, which became a recognized standard.⁷ Scottish geologist James Hutton advanced the first, prominent argument that the earth's age was a matter of scientific, not philosophic inquiry, in 1785.⁸ He contended that

the geologic processes now operating in the earth had been active for extremely long periods in the past, and that such gradual processes could account for the world as we see it today, with its mountains and valleys and fossiliferous strata, without appealing to sudden and stupendous catastrophes. In other words, “the present is the key to the past.”⁹

Another individual who impacted contemporary thinking was William Smith (1769-1839), “the father of stratigraphic geology.” Smith claimed that the sequence of rock layers in the earth followed a uniform pattern, which could be identified by the types of fossils present in them. These “index fossils” allowed strata to be followed over large areas.¹⁰

The views of Hutton and Smith were enhanced by Charles Lyell (1797-1875), who, in his Principles of Geology (1830-1833) completely rejected the idea that global catastrophes had any part in shaping geologic formations.¹¹

Lyell . . . popularized the “uniformitarian” approach to earth history – that geomorphic processes which can be observed in action at present, such as erosion, sedimentation, glaciation, volcanism, diastrophism, etc. (all operating in *essentially* the same fashion as at present) can be invoked to explain the origin and formation of *all* the earth's geological features.¹²

⁵ The last half of this heading is used as a subheading in Henry M. Morris and John C. Whitcomb, The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1961), 92.

⁶ Arthur C. Custance, Without Form and Void (Brockville, Ontario: Doorway Publications, 1970), 25.

⁷ Weston W. Fields, Unformed and Unfilled: A Critique of the Gap Theory (Collinsville, IL: Burgener Enterprises, 1976), 37-38.

⁸ Custance, 25.

⁹ Morris and Whitcomb, 95.

¹⁰ Morris and Whitcomb, 95.

¹¹ A.E. Wilder-Smith, Man's Origin, Man's Destiny (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1968), 48-49. Publication dates obtained from Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia, s.v. “Lyell, Sir Charles.”

Lyell's influence on the scientific community was tremendous. His uniformitarian principles still dominate the field of geology, and Charles Darwin adopted his uniformitarian concepts as a basis for his Theory of Evolution.¹³ Appropriately, he has been called "the high priest of uniformitarianism."¹⁴ Ideas never operate in a vacuum, and the gains of the Uniformitarian School, with its demand for huge lengths of time, came at the expense of its biblically based rival.

The Development of Historical Geology – The Decline of Catastrophism

Up to the time of the uniformitarian writers, the idea of a past universal deluge (Noah's Flood) was the main factor used to explain not only the formation of the earth's surface, but the explanation of the fossil record.¹⁵ The prominence given to Hutton, Smith and Lyell led catastrophists, not all of whom were Christians, to modify their single-deluge, young-earth position.

The departure began with Georges Cuvier (1769-1832), one of the outstanding scientists of Europe, who specialized in comparative anatomy and what is now known as vertebrate paleontology. Cuvier proposed a series of global floods to explain the various rock strata containing fossil remains. He believed animals were created before the first of these, and that some animals survived each flood only to repopulate the earth and be entrapped in the newest fossil layer during the next flood. Man, on the other hand, was a recent creation. Noah's flood, the most recent, only wrought minor change on the earth's topography. Cuvier was influenced in his later writings by William Buckland, a geologist at Oxford University, who also minimized

¹² John C. Whitcomb, *The World That Perished*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 154, note. Italics in original.

¹³ Morris and Whitcomb, 96.

¹⁴ Morris and Whitcomb, 95.

¹⁵ Morris and Whitcomb, 90-91.

the impact of Noah's flood. He credited it with creating only a small part of the fossil record, a position he abandoned in 1836.¹⁶

In their attempts to defend catastrophism, Cuvier and Buckland separated the creation account into two parts – an older one for animals and a younger one for man, and essentially erased the importance of Noah's flood as the factor in the formation of fossils. Huge amounts of time were ceded to the uniformitarians. Such compromises to catastrophism ensured its demise as a scientific model by the 1850's.¹⁷ Unfortunately, these changes to the biblical model of creation were welcomed by theologians who sought allies that acknowledged Noah's Flood and its destruction of human civilization in their debates against the deists.¹⁸ It was not long before the theological community altered its interpretation of the Bible to accommodate the shifting scientific landscape.

The Appearance and Development of the Gap Theory

The man credited with first propounding the Gap Theory is a Scottish clergyman, Thomas Chalmers. Avidly interested in science, he was concerned about the negative view Christians had of geology, and as early as 1804 espoused the view that ascribing an older age to the earth than that assigned by Moses in Genesis did not pose a threat to the creation account.¹⁹ Some ten years afterward, Chalmers published his Examination of Cuvier's Theory of the Earth, where he first speculated that between Gen. 1:1 and the first creative act which followed in

¹⁶ Morris and Whitcomb, 92-94, 99.

¹⁷ Morris and Whitcomb, 92.

¹⁸ Morris and Whitcomb, 94.

¹⁹ Custance, 26, cites Hugh Miller, "The Testimony of the Rocks," (Nimmo, Edinburgh 1874), 108-109. He does not say where Miller obtained his quotations from Chalmers.

Gen.1:3, large amounts of time were possible which would allow science and the biblical narrative to work together.²⁰

While Chalmers originated and promoted the Gap Theory, it was left to G.H. Pember to produce the first large-scale treatise on the subject. In 1876 he wrote The Earth's Earliest Ages, which went through several editions, and is still in print. It is a lengthy exposition which, in the opinion of one author, "canonized" the Gap Theory, especially in fundamental circles.²¹ Fields notes, "Not content to offer an alternative to the traditional interpretation of the passage [Gen. 1:1-2], Pember indicts those who hold it with repelling otherwise willing believers in the Scriptures!"²² The Gap Theory gained further acceptance with its inclusion in the notes to the Scofield Reference Bible of 1917, one of the most widely used reference Bibles in English ever published.²³

Despite the appearance and growth of the creation science movement from the 1960's onward – a movement openly critical of the Gap Theory and strongly in favor of a literal six-day creation – the Gap Theory and its variants have displayed an amazing persistence. Notes referring to the Gap Theory are still published in the "old" Scofield Bible, and are included in the New Scofield Reference Bible (1967), but now under in Isaiah 45.²⁴ A major defense of the Gap Theory appeared in Without Form and Void (1970) authored by Arthur C. Custance, a Canadian scientist and oriental scholar. More recently, the notes in Genesis 1 to the Nelson Study Bible

²⁰ Custance 26.

²¹ Bernard Ramm, The Christian View of Science and Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1954), 196.

²² Fields, 43.

²³ Fields, 43.

²⁴ Fields, 43. Notes #4 and 6 in Genesis Chapter 1 of the New Scofield also interpret verses from a gap perspective per John C. Whitcomb, The Early Earth, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 151.

(1997), a product of 43 evangelical contributors, alludes to the creation of Gen. 1:1 being ruined in Gen. 1:2.²⁵

History illustrates that the Gap Theory was a reaction to a growing trend of scientific acceptance of the concept of geologic uniformitarianism in the late 1700's and early 1800's. It was a concept that rejected the catastrophic impact of Noah's flood – a one-year process – on the earth's surface, and required massive amounts of time instead. The Gap Theory granted this chronological blank check to the scientists between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2 while retaining what amounted to a second supernatural creation (a re-creation) starting in Gen. 1:3. This however, is merely a snapshot of what is a much more detailed theory that addresses creation, angels, and the fossil record.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE GAP THEORY

The Gap Theory is explained somewhat differently depending on who is doing the explaining. While certain common factors exist, such as an old earth (or leaving that open as a possibility), and Satan as the cause of the catastrophic judgement which occurs between the first two verses of Genesis, other aspects of the theory are not the same, and the supporting Scriptures vary. For the sake of clarity, we will distinguish two primary "schools" of the Gap Theory, and briefly mention related theories that have been proposed.

The Gap Theory Argument Summarized

The Traditional, or Old-Earth Gap Theory

The standard Gap Theory scenario is similar to the following: God created the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1:1. This earth was a perfect creation and contained all forms of animal

²⁵ Henry M. Morris, "Why the Gap Theory Won't Work." Institute for Creation Research [Back to Genesis No. 107](#) (November 1997), b.

and marine life, vegetation etc. Most traditional gap advocates holds to the existence of pre-Adamic earth dwellers who were either humanoid, angels, or both.²⁶ Many believe Satan was living on earth as God's appointed ruler over this creation (Ezk. 28:13).²⁷ The world remained in this condition for an indefinite period of time, perhaps millions or billions of years, (the geologic ages), during which the rock strata and the fossils were formed.²⁸ Satan's rebellion, clearly described in Is. 14:12-17, is said to have occurred between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. This event was responsible for the description of the creation given in the latter verse, showing that what began as a perfect creation was now shapeless, dark, and covered with water. The earth had experienced a catastrophic global judgement, probably through a universal flood.²⁹ This judgement is mentioned in Is. 24:1; 45:18, and Jer. 4:22-26.³⁰ Immediately following this judgement, God began the recreation of the world told in Gen. 1:3-2:25.

The Gap Theory According to Peter Ruckman

Controversial scholar Peter Ruckman takes a different position on the Gap Theory, and is mentioned here both due to the fact that his writings are well known among many Independent Baptists, and the author's personal experience in dealing with those influenced by his writings. This student considered coining this position the "Young-Earth Gap Theory," but refrained because Ruckman, though a creationist, sees the Bible as not specifying the age of the earth, and

²⁶ G.H. Pember is an example of the first, Earth's Earliest Ages (1876, reprint, Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), 72-74. Merrill F. Unger is an example of the second, Unger's Bible Handbook (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1967), 37. Clarence Larkin is an example of the third, Rightly Dividing the Word (Glenside, PA: Erwin W. Meyer, 1920), 9, 11.

²⁷ Such as M.R. DeHaan, Genesis and Evolution (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962), 26.

²⁸ Henry M. Morris, ed., Scientific Creationism, 2nd ed. (El Cajon, CA: Master Books, 1985), 231.

²⁹ Whitcomb, Early Earth, 141. This flood has been called "Lucifer's Flood" to distinguish it from Noah's flood in Genesis Chapter 7 – Ken Ham, "Closing the Gap," Institute for Creation Research Back to Genesis, n.n. (February 1990), b.

³⁰ Some advocates of the gap theory, like DeHaan, 27, place the geologic ages, i.e., the gap, later during Gen. 1:2.

allows for the possibility of it having a very old age.³¹ It is only fair to say that his chronology is compatible with a young earth.

Ruckman differs from traditional gap theorists by rejecting the existence of man and animals during the first creation, and thus rejects the idea that the fossil record was formed during the gap. He also rejects Jer. 4:23 and Is. 14:17 as proof texts for the Gap Theory, and believes their proper interpretation applies to Israel in the Great Tribulation.³²

His version of the Gap Theory sees a pre-Adamite earth which was populated by angels, with Lucifer as their leader.³³ He rebelled, and a large number of these angels sided with him (one-third according to Rev. 12:4). God judged the creation He had made for them, recreated the earth, and commissioned Adam and Eve to repopulate it. The catastrophe God used to judge the earth in Gen. 1:2 was water (2 Pet. 3:6).³⁴ An involved demonology with angelic-human intermarriage both before and after Noah's flood is part of this scenario.³⁵ Ruckman's explanation shares a similar motive with other "modern advocates [who] propose a gap only for the purpose of explaining Satan's fall."³⁶ However, the two forms of the Gap Theory reviewed above are not the only alternatives offered to the literal six-day interpretation.

Other Variations of the Gap Theory

Of the two principle variants of the Gap Theory, one moves the chronological location of the gap, and the other can be considered as a separate theory of creation altogether. Merrill F. Unger of Dallas Seminary examined the Hebrew of Gen. 1:1-3 and came to the conclusion that

³¹ Peter S. Ruckman, The Book of Genesis (Pensacola, FL: Pensacola Bible Press, 1969), 3, 8.

³² Ruckman, 4.

³³ Ruckman, 5.

³⁴ Ruckman, 6.

³⁵ Ruckman, 173, 175, 178.

³⁶ Ham, b.

the concept of a gap between verses one and two was grammatically indefensible.³⁷ With this place for a gap ruled out, and anxious to address the “alleged conflict with modern science,”³⁸ he speculated that the gap occurred before Gen. 1:1.³⁹ The original earth was the abode of Lucifer and the angels, and was judged by God, precipitating a recreation.⁴⁰ The word “created” in Gen. 1:1 represents “refashioning,”⁴¹ and the verse “is a relative beginning in which the cosmos was reshaped for the latecomer – man.”⁴²

The second variation on the Gap Theory is called the Chaos/Creation Theory.⁴³ This interpretation was developed by theologians “who rejected the traditional Gap Theory for its lack of exegetical sophistication.”⁴⁴ The first two words of verse 1 are seen as a dependent clause, rather than a sentence, and should be retranslated as “in the beginning when God created.” Verse one then serves as a summary statement of the creation which begins in Gen. 1:3.⁴⁵ This position also views Gen. 1:1 as “a relative beginning,” thus allowing a gap. However, some that hold this position go even further, stating that the universe in its original form before creation was chaotic matter.⁴⁶ Both such Chaos/Creation interpretations remove creation *ex-nihilo* (Latin, “out of nothing”) from the first chapter of Genesis. However, the more extreme approach is used by

³⁷ Morris, Scientific Creationism, 242.

³⁸ Unger, 37-38.

³⁹ Morris, Scientific Creationism, 243; Unger, 37-38.

⁴⁰ Allen P. Ross’ description of Unger’s theory in Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 719.

⁴¹ Unger, 37.

⁴² Ross, 719, describes Unger’s position.

⁴³ Whitcomb categorizes the Chaos/Creation theory as a “variety of the Gap Theory,” Early Earth, 154. Field applies a more technical term to this position, calling it “The Dependent Clause Interpretation of Genesis 1:1,” 149.

⁴⁴ Whitcomb, Early Earth, 155. Whitcomb states Unger was one of the founders of the Chaos/Creation school; Fields discusses Unger’s pre-Genesis 1 gap separately and makes no mention of him during his discussion of this topic.

⁴⁵ Ross, 723.

⁴⁶ Whitcomb in Early Earth, 154; Fields, 161. The former, through his citation, seems to indicate Ross holds this position. Ross’ statement on page 723, “The chapter records the bringing of creation out of chaos. For the initial creation, or original creation, one has to look elsewhere in the Bible” appears to indicate that he holds to an original creation out of nothing.

theological liberals to teach pantheistic dualism – all things from which the universe is formed stem from two entities – God and “the deep” (in Gen. 1:2).⁴⁷

The following discussion has served to demonstrate that when the word “Gap Theory” is mentioned, it is best to discern *what* specifically is meant (similar to seeking clarification when someone says, “I’m a Calvinist.”). The Gap Theory comes in a variety of flavors, so to speak, some which embrace the geologic ages, and some which reject them; some with elaborate concepts of the first created world, its inhabitants and their civilizations, and others with very a very simple concept. To compound matters, some versions of the Gap Theory move the gap before Genesis 1:1, and the Chaos/Creation Theory says the original creation isn’t in Genesis 1 at all, and so permits a gap without openly advocating one. Additional understanding can be gained by examining the particular arguments made for the Gap Theory.

The Gap Theory Argument Specified

The Arguments from Genesis 1:2

Genesis 1:2 is the crux of the Gap Theory. While other Scriptures are used as collateral support, the words used in this verse, and its relationship to verse 1, are the main pillars which support the theory. The King James Version translates Gen. 1:2 as follows:

And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.
And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

The multiple arguments for the theory made from verse 2 are aptly condensed by Morris:

It is pointed out that the connective word *waw*, at the beginning of verse 2 can be translated as either “and” or “but,” and that the verb, *hayetha*, can be translated as “became” instead of “was.” Furthermore, the phrase “without form and void” (*tohu va bohu*) is rendered by some as “ruined and empty.” Putting all this together, Genesis

⁴⁷ Fields, 161-162. Fields notes that theological liberals attempt to draw parallels between the Babylonian creation myths and their Chaos/Creation interpretation of Genesis, 161. This is done with the implication that the Jews borrowed their creation idea from the Babylonians, and placed it in a monotheistic framework. Such a view, of course, rejects the Bible’s declaration that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16).

1:1-2 becomes “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; but the earth became ruined and empty and darkness was upon the face of the deep.”⁴⁸

Additionally, from a grammatical perspective, there are two other keys that allow the existence of gap in or before verse 2. This first is classifying Gen. 1:2 as a verbal clause, and the second is attributing the use of the conjunction *waw* (“and” at the beginning of the verse) to a consecutive sense in relation to verse 1 (“this happened and then this happened and next this happened”).⁴⁹ These determinations, coupled with the alternative translation noted above, favor a creation-ruin-recreation chronology. Finally, the word “darkness” in the verse carries the implication of evil and death – a picture consistent with the use of darkness throughout Scripture.⁵⁰

The Argument from “Created” Versus “Made”

Most gap theorists insist on a strict difference between the usage of the words “created” (Hebrew *bara*) and “made” (Hebrew *asa*) in the Old Testament. The former is held to pertain only to God’s creating something out of nothing (as in Gen. 1:1), while the latter is said to reflect only recreation, or forming something out of elements already existing (as they see Gen. 2:2).⁵¹ This view is displayed in the Scofield Reference Bible, which limits God’s creative acts to: 1) the initial creation in verse 1; 2) marine life and birds in verse 21; and 3) man in verses 26-27.⁵² As Fields notes, making this distinction is essential in defending the Gap Theory against Ex. 20:11 (“in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is”), which, at face value, supports a six-day creation with no gap. If *bara* and *asa* truly do not overlap, then Gen.1:1 and Ex. 20:11 refer to two different events – an original creation and a restoration.⁵³

⁴⁸ Morris, Scientific Creationism, 231.

⁴⁹ Fields, 76-82. Parenthetical material quoted from page 81.

⁵⁰ Ross, 106.

⁵¹ Fields, 53, 69.

⁵² C.I. Scofield, ed., The Scofield Study Bible (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1917), 3, note 2.

⁵³ Fields, 53.

The Argument from Genesis 1:28

Genesis 1:28 contains God's command to Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth." Gap Theory advocates contend God would not have instructed them to replenish, or refill something that was empty to begin with. The word choice indicates that the divine intent was to repopulate the earth, which had lost its original population in the cataclysmic judgement that occurred before Gen. 1:2.⁵⁴

The Argument from Ezekiel 28:13-14

Ezekiel's prophecy against the King of Tyre in 28:11-19 transcends the description of a human monarch, and is generally considered a portrait of Satan.⁵⁵ His beauty and his location "in Eden, the garden of God" (verses 13-14) appears in the narrative before sin is ascribed to him in verse 15. This is a sharp contrast from the Satan presented in Genesis Chapter 3, where, he appeared as (or indwelt) a serpent with malevolent intent and deceived Eve into disobeying God. Gap theorists argue the Eden of Ezekiel Chapter 28 is an earthly Eden of the first creation where Satan dwelt as "Prince of the World . . . before his fall and preparation of the present world."⁵⁶

The Argument from Isaiah 24:1; 45:18; and Jeremiah 4:23-26

These three passages are considered by gap theorists as cross-references to Gen.1:2.⁵⁷ Is. 24:1 and Jer. 4:23-26 are said to picture the pre-Adamite earth following its desolation.⁵⁸ Isaiah 45:18, it is reasoned, reveals God's intention to form an inhabited earth: "God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be

⁵⁴ Larkin, 19.

⁵⁵ Scofield, 871, note 1; Charles Caldwell Ryrie, The Ryrie Study Bible (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1978), 1181, note on Ezk. 28:12.

⁵⁶ Pember, 64-65.

⁵⁷ Scofield, 3, note 3.

inhabited.” The use of the Hebrew *tohu* (“vain”), the same word used in Gen. 1:2 (‘without form’) is said to prove the creation in Gen. 1:2 was not the first, or original creation, since God created the earth not *tohu*.⁵⁹

The Argument from 2 Peter 3:6-7

Gap theory advocates say the reference to a global judgement by water in 2 Pet. 3:6-7 is a direct reference to the cataclysm that ended the original creation. Since Noah and his family survived the flood of Genesis Chapter 7, it cannot be said that the world of Noah’s day perished (2 Pet. 3:6).⁶⁰ Therefore, Peter is referring to an earlier flood, the one described in Gen. 1:2.⁶¹

The case for the Gap Theory centers on Gen. 1:2 with supporting texts drawn from other verses in Genesis Chapter 1 and the prophets. The meanings of specific words and their use in other Old Testament passages must be accepted for the Gap Theory to be plausible. At face value the combined arguments paint a compelling picture that the first chapter of the Bible describes two creations with a gap in between; the six-day creation is merely a starting over, and not a true beginning. Upon close examination however, one readily can see that the Gap Theory is far from an ironclad, settled fact of Scripture.

THE PROBLEMS OF THE GAP THEORY

The Gap Theory can be effectively challenged from two major directions: the weaknesses of texts used to support it, and its conflict with major doctrines of the Bible. The first is an inductive approach which uses proper interpretation to refute the theory use of specific passages.

⁵⁸ Larkin, 12, comments that the latter passage shows the first creation had cities, of which God erased all evidence.

⁵⁹ John C. Whitcomb, “The Ruin Reconstruction Theory of Genesis 1:2” in Scientific Studies in Special Creation, ed. Walter E. Lammerts (El Cajon, CA: Creation Research Society Press, 1990), 35.

⁶⁰ Larkin, 11.

⁶¹ Fields, 143-144, notes a number of Gap Theorists have embraced the local flood explanation of Noah’s flood; this leaves them free to interpret the passage in 2 Peter 3 as referring to the pre-Adamite world.

The second challenge is deductive and highlights its incompatibility with the Bible's theology as a whole, or what is called Systematic Theology. If the Gap Theory is correct, it should be in harmony with what the Bible teaches on the issue of origins, sin, and other doctrines. Finally, the Gap Theory must be reviewed in light of the teachings of Jewish and Church history on creation. While historical practice does not take precedence over the teachings of Scripture, it serves as a useful check when considering new or different doctrines. The Bible, as a timeless book (Ps. 119:152, 160; Is. 40:8) with an eternal Author, should have been consistently interpreted by believers through the centuries. While history is not the normal place to begin the doctrinal analysis, it is appropriate here because of the influence of science on theology.

The Silence of Jewish and Church History

It would no doubt add credence to the Gap Theory if it could be shown that historically, it was at least one of the traditional interpretations of Gen. 1:1-2.⁶² Two factors must be considered when the historical record is examined. First, to avoid any questions of science as the initiating element, only interpretations prior to the advent of geology as an academic field should be considered, i.e., before the late 18th century. Second, as one searches for the Gap Theory in history, it must be kept in mind that the theory is more than just positing a gap; it involves a creation, a ruin or destruction of that creation, and a then recreation.⁶³ Since space will not permit listing all the claims to a historical pedigree for the Gap Theory, examples will suffice and the reader is left to consult major works dealing with the subject.⁶⁴

⁶² As Fields notes, "if such a contention were proven, it would not in itself validate the theory, but it *would* remove from it the stigma of having arisen solely for the purpose of harmonization." 20 (emphasis in original).

⁶³ Fields, 20, 7.

⁶⁴ Custance and Fields list numerous claims and their refutations, respectively.

The Lack of Evidence from Jewish History

Gap Theorists have attempted to claim the authors of the Midrash (“a doctrinal and homiletical exposition of the Old Testament”)⁶⁵ and the Masoretes (Jewish scholars who fixed the form of the Old Testament text and added vowel marks) among others, as their forerunners.⁶⁶ These remain unsubstantiated. For example, claims that the Midrash taught the Gap Theory are secondary and are cited by Custance from an entry concerning the Midrash in an 1866 English Encyclopedia.⁶⁷ A second illustration is the *rabhia*, a “disjunctive accent” left by the Masoretes in their Hebrew text (circa A.D. 500-950) between the first two verses of Genesis.⁶⁸ This served to “notify the reader that he should pause before proceeding to the next verse. In short, this mark indicates a break in the text.”⁶⁹ A break however, does not constitute a ruin and reconstruction. Additionally, the use of the disjunctive, at least with the conjunction *waw* which begins verse 2, is to add details to the story rather than indicate the start of a new phase of it.⁷⁰

The Lack of Evidence from Church History

Reformed scholar Bernard Ramm, no friend of a literal six-day creation, a progressive creationist and a believer in “pictorial-day” approach to Genesis Chapter 1,⁷¹ states in his discussion of the Gap Theory:

⁶⁵ Gleason L. Archer, Jr., A Survey of Old Testament Introduction, rev. ed., (Chicago, IL:Moody Press, 1974), 63.

⁶⁶ Custance, 14-18, Fields, 13-20. Background on the Masoretes from Archer, 64.

⁶⁷ Custance, 14. Fields notes that two famous rabbis, Shammia and Hillel, differed over whether heaven or earth were created first, but little else is known, 13. Archer cites these as two of the contributors to the Midrash, 63.

⁶⁸ Custance, 14.

⁶⁹ Custance, 14.

⁷⁰ Fields, 82. Fields does not address the specific allegation of a Masoretic disjunctive mark between Gen. 1:1-2, but does discuss the classification of the *waw* which begins verse 2, and shows conclusively it is used disjunctively. It appears then, that Custance, rather than strengthening his case by appealing to the Masoretes, weakens it instead.

⁷¹ Ramm, 218, 226.

“From the earliest of Bible interpretation this passage [Gen. 1:1-3] has been interpreted by Jews, Catholics and Protestants as the original creation of the universe. In seven majestic days the universe and all of life is brought into being.”⁷²

One reason for such unanimity of historical opinion on the foundational subject of creation is the distinct absence in the writings by the Church Fathers of anything to the contrary.⁷³ Attempts by Cuxance to demonstrate that Origen held to a recreated earth have been decisively refuted.⁷⁴

Fields, who has written the most extensive critique on the Gap Theory, has reviewed church history for traces of the Gap Theory. The writings of Hugo St. Victor (1097-1141) and Thomas Aquinas (1227-1274) acknowledge a pause or “interval” in the creation process on day one.⁷⁵ However, these individuals do not go the next step and advocate the ruin-restoration chronology, which is essential to theory. No belief in a gap is mentioned among the reformers, or among the English Bibles which followed the Reformation.⁷⁶ Three theologians who are said to advocate the Gap Theory later Episcopus (1583-1643), Rosenmuller (1736-1815), and Dathe.⁷⁷ Of these, the first has no works, which have been cited to substantiate support for the theory. Dathe finished his commentary on Genesis in 1791, long enough after Hutton’s 1785 controversial publication which endorsed the geologic ages to be suspect of attempting to reconcile the two.⁷⁸ Only Rosenmuller has the potential to be categorized as a gap theorist untainted by the writings of the forerunners of modern geology; this assumes his 1776 publication was uninfluenced by the writings on the “tranquil” flood by Carolus Linnaeus (1707-

⁷² Ramm, 201.

⁷³ Fields, 29, notes a thorough search of all the writings of the Church Fathers produced “the result that not one was found to hold a ruin-restoration view.”

⁷⁴ Fields, 21-25, lists multiple proofs, one of which is a quotation from Origen that, based on Scripture, the age of the earth could be known. Gap Theorists deny this is possible.

⁷⁵ Fields, 32-33. The other two men he cites as seeing a break in creation process between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2 are Pererius (1535-1610) and Dionysius Petavius, a Jesuit theologian, 34-35.

⁷⁶ Fields, 34-36.

⁷⁷ Fields, 36-37.

⁷⁸ Fields, 37.

1778).⁷⁹ The testimony of church history, like Jewish history, provides scant proof of a Gap Theory arising as an alternative to the six-day creation. At best, some interpreters speculated about a gap, but did not overthrow the creation account with a ruin and restoration. The Gap Theory's shortcomings from a historical perspective are matched by faults in exegesis as well.

The Weaknesses of Its Proof Texts

The Initial State of Creation Is in View in Genesis 1:2

A straightforward interpretation of Gen. 1:2 is that it describes the earth's condition immediately following the first creative act. The arguments against this traditional interpretation presented earlier – the meaning of “without form and void,” the issue of darkness, and grammatical structure – now will be addressed, although in a different order.

The Gap Theory depends on separating Gen.1:1 and 1:2, making what is described in verse 2 to follow sometime after verse 1. For this to be the case, several things would have to be true grammatically. First, Gen. 1:2 would have to be a verbal clause, which has a subject and a finite verb predicate.⁸⁰ Gen. 1:2, however, is a noun clause, which has a subject and predicate which are nouns.⁸¹ Noun clauses are used to describe states of being; verbal clauses describe progress.⁸² Gen. 1:2 is further classified as a circumstantial or descriptive noun clause, which “describes some fact secondary to the main course of the narrative.”⁸³

Second, to grammatically allow a gap, the “and” (Heb. *waw*) at the beginning of verse 2 would have to be considered to be used in the consecutive (time) sense (such as at the beginning

⁷⁹ Fields appears to avoid discussing Rosenmuller specifically and focuses most of his discussion on Dathe, 36-37. Whitcomb and Morris, 97, mention Linnaeus as a contributor to uniformitarian thought.

⁸⁰ Fields, 77, gives examples: “‘And God said’ (Gen. 1:3) and ‘And he divided’ (Gen. 1:7).”

⁸¹ Fields, 77, gives an example: “‘And the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners’ (Gen. 13:13).”

⁸² Fields, 77 cites E. Kautzsch and A.E. Cowley, eds., Gesenius Hebrew Grammar (Oxford : At the Clarendon Press, reprint, 1970), p. 450, sect. 140a.

of Gen. 1:3 – “And God said”) instead of the disjunctive or copulative (linking or explanatory) sense.⁸⁴ This would allow a translation of verse two to possibly begin with “but” or “then.” The consecutive *waw* is attached to a verb; the copulative or disjunctive *waw* is attached to a noun. The latter is the case in Gen. 1:2; it is attached to the word “earth,” and “stands at the head of a circumstantial noun clause.”⁸⁵ The consequences of these grammatical findings are significant:

If Genesis 1:2, as both lexicons and grammars testify, is an explanatory circumstantial noun clause, describing a *state contemporaneous* with the main verb, then there is absolutely no possible way of salvaging the Gap Theory, a theory which must assert that 1:2 describes a state *subsequent* to the action of the main verb if it is to survive. The grammar of verse two forces us to say that the earth was created unformed and unfilled, while the Gap Theory alleges that it should say the earth *became* unformed and unfilled *after* (perhaps centuries after) it was created. It is grammatically impossible.⁸⁶

The words “without form and void” (Heb. *tohu wabohu*) in Gen. 1:2 are said to represent God’s judgment upon the rebellious first creation. This argument is primarily based on the use of these Hebrew words in the only other two passages where they are used together – Is. 34:11 (“the line of confusion and stones of emptiness”) and Jer. 4:23 (“without form and void”) – both passages describing judgment from God.⁸⁷ In response, it can be noted that of *tohu*’s 18 occurrences in the Old Testament, it is used 15 times by itself, and “refers to such things as deserts, empty places, undeveloped things, futility, and nothingness.”⁸⁸ Clearly, the varied use of the word does not allow it to be categorized as only representing evil, chaos, or judgment.⁸⁹ The word *bohu* (often transliterated with the conjunction *waw* attached as *wabohu*) is used but three times in the Old Testament, but is given different lexical meanings in each case. In Gen.

⁸³ Fields, 79-80. Fields cites, Gesenius and F.F. Bruce as two authorities who see Gen. 1:2 as a noun clause. Unger, mentioned earlier as one who abandoned the idea of a gap between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2, did so because he saw Gen. 1:2 as three circumstantial noun clauses, Fields, 79.

⁸⁴ Fields, 81-82.

⁸⁵ Fields, 82. He also notes here that Masoretic vowel markings favor classifying this *waw* as disjunctive.

⁸⁶ Fields, 85-86. Italics in original.

⁸⁷ Whitcomb, “Ruin-Reconstruction Theory,” 34.

⁸⁸ Charles Taylor, The First 100 Words (Gosford, New South Wales, Australia: Good Book Company, 1996), 7.

1:2 it is described as “the primaevial earth [sic];” in Is. 34:11 it is called “plummets not as usual for building but for destroying walls;” and in Jer. 4:23 it is “of earth under judgement.”⁹⁰

Based on its usage, “without form and void” may be legitimately understood as meaning merely empty and characterized by the absence of life.

Finally, the second part of Gen. 1:2; “and darkness was upon the face of the deep,” is said by Gap Theory advocates to represent the aftermath of the judgement of evil found in the pre-Adamite earth. This conclusion is based on the general association in Scripture of darkness with evil (Jn. 3:19), the specific contrast of the darkness at creation with the personal light of knowing Christ (2 Cor. 4:6), and the lack of God’s commendation of darkness (Gen. 1:2) compared to his approval of light (Gen. 1:4).⁹¹

In response, Scripture distinguishes between physical darkness and spiritual darkness. One cannot say that *all* darkness in Scripture is evil, for God is said to have been the origin of physical darkness: “I form the light and create darkness” (Is. 45:7).⁹² In Psalm 104:19-24 God is said to have made His works in wisdom, which are characterized as riches. These include darkness (v. 20).⁹³ Charles Taylor observes:

Nothing that God creates is evil. However, people can use a good thing for evil purposes, and sin prefers to work in the dark. But when God was creating, there was no evil yet present. We know this because He said after all the creation work was finished that everything was very good [Gen. 1:31].⁹⁴

Finally, in certain places in the Bible God uses darkness as a picture of His inscrutability. In Gen. 15:12, Abraham experiences a terrifying darkness before he hears the voice of God.

⁸⁹ Whitcomb, “Ruin-Reconstruction Theory,” 34. On page 35 he notes Job 26:7 is one such example.

⁹⁰ Fields, 114; definitions from Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon, 96.

⁹¹ Whitcomb, Early Earth, 150; Morris, Scientific Creationism, 241.

⁹² Taylor, 9. God went so far as to name it “Night” (Gen. 1:5).

⁹³ Whitcomb, Early Earth, 150. God also questions Job concerning his understanding of darkness as a part of His creation (Job 38:19).

⁹⁴ Taylor, 9.

Five verses later, God initiates His covenant with Abraham after it becomes dark.⁹⁵ “Dark sayings” are associated with godly wisdom (Ps. 78:2, Prov. 1:6). On Mount Sinai, where Moses received the 10 commandments, “Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was” (Ex. 20:21, see also Deut. 4:11; 5:22-23). The picture in Gen. 1:2 of darkness covering the face of the deep and the Spirit of God moving upon the face of the waters is a picture of the majesty of God, whose thoughts and ways are higher than ours (Is. 55:18-19).

The Author’s Use of Synonymous Terms Is in View in Genesis Chapter 1

An objective examination of the use of the Hebrew words *bara* (“create”) and *asah* (“make”) regarding creation will show that any alleged distinction is purely artificial. God, as the Author of Scripture, is free to choose different words to express the same concept. Maintaining such a distinction is difficult and leads to developing alternate explanations of when, or where, other forms of life or things were created. For example, Gap Theory advocates have gone as far to say that: 1) Plant life was created in the first earth and was only “brought forth” (Gen. 1:11-12) in the recreated world;⁹⁶ 2) The sun was created in Gen. 1:1 to sustain plant life on the pre-Adamite earth and was only made more visible on the fourth day of the recreation;⁹⁷ 3) Land animals were made on the fifth day of creation and were only “appointed” or “made to appear,” on sixth day (Gen. 1:25);⁹⁸ and 4) God “created His image in man but only appointed his likeness” (Gen. 1:26).⁹⁹

These problems disappear if “make” or “made” and “create” are interchangeable. In fact, 12 different Hebrew words are used referring to creation activity in the first two chapters of

⁹⁵ Taylor, 9.

⁹⁶ Whitcomb, Early Earth, 152, cites Scofield Reference Bible, 1917 edition, page 4, note 3. Plant life survived the world cataclysm in seed form and was available to “bring forth” later on the third day of recreation.

⁹⁷ Fields, 57-58. This is necessary because the theory portrays only the earth as judged in Gen. 1:2.

⁹⁸ Whitcomb, Early Earth, 152, cites New Scofield Reference Bible, page 2, note 2.

Genesis; they are translated nearly that many ways into English, and can be grouped into 13 sets of different terms referring to particular events in the creation narrative (Gen. 1:26, 27 is one example).¹⁰⁰ Four passages where “made” (*asa*) is used to summarize all creative activity are Gen. 2:2-4, Ex. 20:11, Ex. 31:14-17, and Neh. 9:6.¹⁰¹ Each of these verses uses *asa* in reference to the creation of heaven, demonstrating that Gen. 1:1 is included in the six days of creation. Thus, the effort by Gap Theorists to show a difference between the terms “created” and “made” and by doing so to separate Gen. 1:1 from the six days of creation by placing it before the gap, is not Scriptural. God says creation began in Gen. 1:1, and continued for six days.¹⁰²

The Command of God to Initially Fill the Earth Is in View in Genesis 1:28

The Hebrew word for “replenish” in this verse is *mil’u*, which means, “fill.”¹⁰³ Although used 306 times in the Old Testament, it is never employed with the idea of refilling.¹⁰⁴ That “replenish” means simply to “fill” is acknowledged by Custance, a scholar who avidly supports the Gap Theory.¹⁰⁵ It is here that the study of the English word “replenish” proves useful. The meanings of Latin prefixes to English words were not in used as part of their definitions for a period of five centuries beginning in the 13th Century.¹⁰⁶ Only after this did scholars again begin to attach the meaning of Latin prefixes to words. The clear command by God to Adam and Eve was simply to “fill” or populate the earth, not to replace an earlier race wiped out in the gap.

⁹⁹ Fields, 68.

¹⁰⁰ Fields, 73 (table).

¹⁰¹ Henry M. Morris, *Scientific Creationism*, 237; “Old Earth Creationism.” Institute for Creation Research *Back to Genesis No. 100*, April 1997, b; Fields, 61-62.

¹⁰² Morris, *Scientific Creationism*, 237.

¹⁰³ Whitcomb, *Early Earth*, 153.

¹⁰⁴ Ham, “Closing the Gap,” c.

¹⁰⁵ Whitcomb, *Early Earth*, 153, cites Custance, 8.

¹⁰⁶ Ham, “Closing the Gap,” c. Taylor, 74, notes “of 64 examples quoted up to the nineteenth century, only two meant ‘refill,’ and these were later than the King James Version.”

The Place of Lucifer in the Heavenly Hierarchy Is in View in Ezekiel Chapter 28

As mentioned earlier, Ezk. 28:13-14 is used in connection with the Gap Theory as a proof text that Lucifer dwelt in an original Eden in the original earth.¹⁰⁷ John Whitcomb provides three reasons that here Eden represents the dwelling place of God in the third heaven.¹⁰⁸

First, “the holy mountain of God” is the place where God set Lucifer, a place where he performed a covering function (Ezk. 28:14) presumably over God’s throne. He was cast out of the mountain (Ezk. 28:16) to the ground (Ezk. 28:17; Is. 14:13). These accounts are reinforced with the imagery of “the stone . . . cut out of the mountain without hands” (Dan. 2:45) which crushes the last and most powerful world kingdom (Dan. 2:34, 44). Christ’s account of Satan’s fall from heaven (Lk. 10:18) is additional verification that the Eden in Ezekiel 28 is the mountain of God, His dwelling place, from which Satan was expelled. Second, the composition of the Eden of Ezk. 28 with its precious stones, contrasts sharply with the Eden of Genesis, with its vegetation and animals, but parallels that of the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21:10-21.

Third, Job 38:7 describes the angelic presence at the beginning of the earth’s creation, and specifies that “all the sons of God” [angels] rejoiced. Gap Theory advocates must explain this passage as 1) referring to the first creation – the creation of a pre-Adamite world of which Job knew nothing about, or 2) Referring to the recreation beginning in Gen. 1:3. In this case “all” has to refer to all of the remaining, loyal angels who elected not to follow Satan in his earlier rebellion. Either interpretation is strained when compared to the traditional six-day creation which usually places Satan’s fall between Gen. 1:31 and 2:1.

¹⁰⁷ DeHaan, 26. On the next page he comments “God placed him in Eden, the prehistoric Eden which geology has now uncovered.” This is a typical example of traditional gap theorists attributing all of the geologic and fossil records to the pre-Gen. 1:2 earth. It also implies the first Eden covered the entire earth.

¹⁰⁸ Material for the first two reasons from Whitcomb, Early Earth, 154. The last reason uses the Scripture ref. of Job 38:7 supplied by Whitcomb with this student’s rationale.

The Tribulation and Kingdom Are in View in Isaiah 24:1; 45:18 and Jeremiah 4:23-26

These verses have been cited as depicting the state of the earth in Gen. 1:2. When viewed in context, these verses refer to future judgements which will occur in Daniel's 70th week, a time also known as the Tribulation period. For example, when Isaiah 24 is examined as a whole, the worldwide judgements described are that of the Tribulation.¹⁰⁹ A remnant is also described in verse 13 as "the shaking of an olive tree, and as the gleaning of grapes when the vintage is done." This picture of the Jewish remnant (Rev. 12:17) conflicts with the Gap Theory's catastrophe, which leaves no survivors.¹¹⁰ The fire mentioned in this passage as the instrument of judgement (vs. 6, 15) contrasts "Lucifer's flood" which leaves the earth covered by water following a prehistoric deluge in Gen. 1:2.

Is. 45:18 is found in the midst of the Lord's discourse on Israel. The setting is Israel's place in the millennial kingdom.¹¹¹ The passage teaches that as the Lord created the earth "not in vain" (Heb., *tohu*), and "formed it to be inhabited" so Israel also will be delivered with an everlasting salvation (Is. 45:17). The Lord's intent to create an inhabited earth was fulfilled by the end of the creation week. Gen. 1:2 is therefore not in conflict with the Lord's purpose, and shows

the initial creation was of basic elements, rather than of a completed system. The initial creation was not perfect in the sense that it was complete, but it was perfect for that first stage of God's six-day plan of creation.¹¹²

Finally, Jer. 4:23-26 is a prophecy of future judgement on Israel and the Gentile powers in the Tribulation. That Israel is included in this prophecy is clear from the context of the

¹⁰⁹ J. Dwight Pentecost, Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology (1958; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1964), 233. The author cites Is. 24:1, 3, 6, 19-21 as verses describing the Tribulation.

¹¹⁰ Scofield, 733, has a column heading over verse 13 which reads, "The Jewish Remnant." Nevertheless, he cross-references Is. 24:1 with Gen. 1:2 and references Is. 24:5 with Gen. 3:17, making the laws, the ordinance, and the everlasting covenant all pertain to God's command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹¹¹ Pentecost, 507.

¹¹² Henry M. Morris, The Genesis Record (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), 49-50.

passage. Verse 22 begins with “For my people,” and verse 27 looks toward God’s mercy, and a remnant – “The whole land shall be desolate: yet will I not make a full end.” Verse 29 mentions “the whole city shall flee.” That the land is Israel, and Jerusalem specifically, is clear from the setting. To say this passage is a reference a great worldwide judgement in Genesis that annihilated all life leaves unanswered the difficult issues of the city, “my people” and the fact God determined not to utterly destroy them. Morris concludes: “the divine judgement described in Jeremiah 4:23 has nothing to do with Genesis except similar rhetoric.”¹¹³

The Flood of Noah Is in View in 2 Peter 3:6-7

Gap Theorists claim 2 Pet. 3:6-7 refers to Lucifer’s flood of Gen. 1:2 and not Noah’s flood. However, Christ only spoke of Noah’s flood (Mt. 24:38-39; Lk. 17:27) and the Greek noun *katallusmos* appears elsewhere only in reference to Noah’s flood.¹¹⁴ Also, both 2 Pet. 3:6 and 2 Pet. 2:5 refer to “the world that then was,” and “the old world,” respectively. If Noah’s flood was truly the second time the world was destroyed by water, these verses should correctly read “worlds.” Gap Theorists who allege that the survival of Noah’s family meant the world of his day did not “perish,” are inconsistent when they teach that the angels in charge of the “original earth” survived to intermarry with human females in Genesis Chapter 6.¹¹⁵

The inductive arguments of the Gap Theory are convincing at face value. Under close scrutiny they are found to be interpretive “stretches” of the text or worse. If accepted, however, the premises of the Gap Theory are found to conflict with several Biblical themes.

¹¹³ Morris, Scientific Creationism, 240.

¹¹⁴ It appears in the two references cited by Christ, in 2 Pet. 2:5, and 2 Pet. 3:6; Whitcomb, Early Earth, 143; Morris, Scientific Creationism, 242.

¹¹⁵ Larkin, quote from page 9. Concerning the survival of angels, compare page 11 with pages 21-22.

The Contradictions with Bible Doctrines and Theology

One of the major consequences of the Gap Theory is that God's original creation is limited to but one verse in the entire Bible. According to theory proponents this creation was magnificent, beautiful, spawned life and civilizations (say some) which lasted thousands or millions of years or even longer, and is confined to one verse.¹¹⁶ As Whitcomb rhetorically asks, "Are Christians to assume that before Genesis 1:2 we must look to uniformitarian and evolutionary geologists to fill in the blank?"¹¹⁷ Similarly, the judgement of truly global proportions meted out to the first world is directly addressed only in Gen. 1:2. While gap supporters would contend other verses address this catastrophic occurrence, these passages merely address the effects of the judgement, and provide few details, especially when compared to the lengthy account of Noah's flood found only a few chapters later. Finally, God's verdict on his creation in Gen. 1:31 is either incorrect, or must be narrowly defined to Gen. 1:3-30 if the Gap Theory is valid.¹¹⁸ With the elements of the second creation built on top of the ruins of the first, sin-judged creation, describing "every thing" as "very good" hardly seems a proper assessment. Gen. 1:31 is simpler and consistent when regarded as a summary evaluation of the only creation, with Satan's fall yet to occur.

A second conflict which results from the Gap Theory is that Noah's flood is reduced in importance. As mentioned earlier, old-earth gap theorists ascribe the fossil record and geologic formations to Lucifer's flood of Gen. 1:2. Noah's flood is treated as having little impact on geology; some even consider it a local flood. Part of this reluctance to embrace Noah's flood is

¹¹⁶ Archer, 190. He calls Gen. 1:1 a "bare statement" if it is truly summarizing a previous world.

¹¹⁷ Whitcomb, Early Earth, 143.

¹¹⁸ Henry M. Morris, Biblical Cosmology and Modern Science. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), 24.

the reliance on scientific claims for huge amounts of times to accomplish certain natural processes:

We find fossils these of prehistoric animals which lived millions of years ago. In our coal deposits we find the evidence of luxuriant tropical vegetation. Oil is known to be the result of decomposed animal and vegetable matter dating back millions of years.¹¹⁹

Ten years after this was written oil was made artificially in 20 minutes by placing garbage and manure under pressure and heat.¹²⁰ And in 1980, Mount St. Helens exploded, producing strata nearly 600 feet thick, demonstrating to scientists the amazing speed at which rock formations and fossils can be formed from a natural catastrophe.¹²¹ These events illustrate that the Bible record is sufficient for things spiritual and scientific, and remains so even when man cannot understand it. Man's invention of an earlier global disaster to accommodate science has only served to create confusion.

The Gap Theory clashes with the Bible in a third area - its doctrine of angels clashes with the Bible's doctrine of man. Under the Gap Theory, the earth was created and Lucifer and the angels were granted dominion over it, including any human life present in the first creation.¹²² This overlordship continued into the recreation.¹²³ The context of Genesis Chapter 1 is that man is God's highest creation, and was given responsibility over creation and was accountable to God. This is stated in Psalm 8.¹²⁴ Yet, according to the Gap Theory, Satan's authority over the earth, which can be seen in his temptation of Christ (Lk. 4:5-7), was given to him *before* Adam sinned, and retained through the second creation.

¹¹⁹ DeHaan, 26.

¹²⁰ Whitcomb, The World That Perished, 123.

¹²¹ Steven A. Austin, "Mount S. Helens and Catastrophism." Institute for Creation Research Impact No.157 (July 1986): i-iii.

¹²² Pember, 65, 72.

¹²³ Pember implies that Adam was a threat to the reign of spiritual evil on earth, 124, 135.

¹²⁴ Whitcomb, Early Earth, 142.

Perhaps the most serious contradiction the Gap Theory has with Scripture is on the doctrine of sin. All theory proponents teach that sin entered the first world through an angelic rebellion, and caused a catastrophic judgement to destroy the earth (traditional gap theorists usually include men without souls as subjects of the disaster¹²⁵). Ken Ham tells how this fails to correspond with the Bible's teaching on the origin of sin:

On the basis of a number of passages of Scripture (e.g., Romans 5:12, 1 Corinthians 15:21), it is understood that there could not have been sin or death before Adam. 1 Corinthians 15 makes it plain that this is physical death, not just spiritual death. This is consistent with the fact that Genesis 1:29 and 30 teach us that the animals and man were originally created vegetarian.

In Hebrews 9:22 we are told that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission" of sin. In other words, God introduced death and bloodshed because of sin as the means by which man could be redeemed. If death and bloodshed of animals (or man) existed before Adam sinned, the whole basis of atonement – the basis of redemption – is destroyed.¹²⁶

Also, the fossil record ascribed by traditional gap theorists to the geologic ages before the rebellion occurred is one of "disease, decay, and death."¹²⁷ Morris observes:

But if "death reigned" not "from Adam to Moses," as the Bible says (Romans 5:14), but had already reigned for billions of years before Adam, then death is not the wages of sin but instead was part of God's creative purpose. How then could the death of Christ put away sin? The gap theory thus undermines the very gospel of our salvation, as well as the holy character of God.¹²⁸

The Gap Theory clearly cannot be reconciled with what the Bible says about sin.

On a final note, the prominence of sin and death before Adam in the Gap Theory make the Edenic curse (Gen. 3:17) seem either misplaced or anticlimactic. Gap Theorists tell us the world into which God brought Adam was rebuilt on the ruins of one that had, in effect, been cursed already, and was already occupied by Satan, acting as "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4).

¹²⁵ Fields, 7.

¹²⁶ Ham, "Closing the Gap," b.

¹²⁷ Morris, Scientific Creationism, 233.

For God to add a curse to a world in this condition seems redundant. The literal six-day creation, however, places man in a perfect world over which he is given dominion and which he then willingly forfeits. The penalty of his sin introduces a new element – death. Creation is then left groaning and travailing in pain until now (Rom. 8:22).¹²⁹

The Gap Theory would have us believe two of the most significant events in the history of the world – its initial creation and its sudden, violent, demise – comprise a mere two verses of the primary narrative in God’s word. The importance of the Noahic flood is trivialized or eliminated as a causative factor in the geologic and fossil records, overshadowed by events which presumably occurred in aeons past. The creation account is changed dramatically, since sin and death are said to have made their prior entry into the world through angelic agents. The curse God placed on creation as Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden was levied on a world already under Satan’s headship. These doctrinal or thematic problems of the Gap Theory are the fruit of improper interpretations of various texts in Genesis Chapter 1 and other Old and New Testament texts. Recognizing why this occurred in the first place is not merely an issue of history, but a lesson for the believer’s application.

CONCLUSION: THE LESSON OF THE GAP THEORY

The origins of the Gap Theory lay in the challenges posed to the Church beginning nearly two centuries ago. Changes in contemporary science (initially geology) demanded a response from Christians on the issue of origins. Three basic options were available. The first was to capitulate to the “facts” which allegedly “prove” evolution, thus relegating the first ten or eleven

¹²⁸ Morris, “Why the Gap Theory Won’t Work,” c. Since Adam is brought sin and death into the world (Rom. 5:12; 14), the Gap Theory position that Satan had already fallen and was ruling the world in Gen. 1:3 can be dismissed.

¹²⁹ Morris, Biblical Cosmology, 23.

chapters of Genesis to mythology, including the accounts of creation proper, the fall of man and his expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the Noahic Flood, and the dispersion of man and creation of languages at the Tower of Babel. The second was to maintain a literal creationist position, regardless of the apparent scientific evidence being leveled at the Scripture. The third was to adopt a hybrid or compromise view of origins which reconciled evolutionary science and the Bible. The consequence of choosing the first option was theistic evolution and theological modernism which came to dominate nearly all Protestant and some Baptist denominations beginning in the mid-to-late 19th century. The consequence of selecting the second was the reaffirmation of the literal interpretation of the Bible and the separation of believers and churches from those who chose to adapt the Bible to evolution and modern thinking. The consequence of following the third option was the development of the Day-Age/Progressive Revelation Theories and the Gap Theory with the goal of adhering to foundational Biblical truth and accommodating scientists arguing for a very old earth. In fairness to those who followed this path, we must note they too held to the fundamentals of the faith, and separated themselves ecclesiastically from those who wholeheartedly embraced evolution. It is also a fair criticism to note that some of these same people were not always charitable to their brethren who chose “the Bible alone” position. History has shown that those who sought to reconcile the Bible with the old-earth claimed by science failed to achieve their goals. The Gap Theory, on one hand, blurred the literal creation account and important associated doctrines. On the other hand, it failed to win the respect for, or tolerance of, the supernatural creation of life by the general scientific community. The attempt to meld the Bible and science proved a one-way affair.

What lesson is there for today’s believers, who face challenges to the Bible’s authority from all directions? It is that the Bible, as the supreme truth of God to man, cannot be lowered to

the level of an academic discipline and blended with contemporary science to achieve a middle ground and still honor God. The Gap Theory, a blend of Christian theology with uniformitarian, evolutionary geology, is a classic example.

Science sometimes produces faulty results and is more often than not is conducted by fallen men with an anti-supernatural philosophy. We are no better than our forefathers and will face temptations to compromise biblical truth in areas in addition to that of origins. For example, alcoholism, homosexuality, and other sinful activity are now asserted to be the product of genetics. The Bible is true whether scientific inquiry validates it or not, and remains fully sufficient for the issues of life when opposed by today's science. True science will ultimately agree with the Bible, but such empirical verification may not occur in our lifetime, and may even await the return of Christ. Saints today, as they have in the past, can rest confidently in God's word.

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