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THE GAP THEORY

Why it fails on all counts

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The Gap (or Ruin-Reconstruction) Theory aims to fit the alleged millions of years of Earth and universe history into a postulated gap between the first and second verses of Genesis Chapter One.

This theory did not arise from contemplation of Scripture, but was an attempt to ‘harmonize’ the Genesis account with belief in long ages, only *after* secular thinkers started to promote the belief that the world was very old.

In its most common form, God originally created a perfect world, but then in this supposed ‘gap’, Satan fell and God judged the world by a catastrophe, which formed most of the fossils. Thus gappists translate Genesis 1:2 as ‘the earth *became* formless and void’. Then the six days of creation become a re-creation of this fallen world.

But this fails on several grounds:^{1,2}

- Although the gap theory was totally motivated to fit in with uniformitarian geology, only the most naïve would think it does. Uniformitarian geologists reject the idea of *any* global Flood, whether the biblical Noah’s Flood, or the gappists’ ‘Lucifer’s Flood’.³
- It postulates the fall of Satan, and the existence of evil, death, suffering and disease in a world God afterwards declared ‘very good’ in Genesis 1:31. Adam and Eve would have been standing on a graveyard of fossils showing death, bloodshed and cancer—hardly ‘very good’.⁴

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Top professors of Hebrew at world-class universities are in agreement that Genesis is teaching straightforward historical narrative about the creation of everything in six earth-rotation days, with no gap, thousands of years ago, and a subsequent global Flood (though they don’t usually believe the history in Genesis, there is no doubt for them about what it says). Which is what the vast majority of believers, for nearly 2,000 years, understood the text to be saying—*until* unbelieving philosophies about long ages become popular.

Like virtually all of the other attempts to ‘harmonize’ long ages with Genesis,⁹ the Gap Theory

- puts death and suffering before the Fall/Curse.
- Has not the slightest basis in the Hebrew of Genesis. In fact, it seriously violates the tenets of historical-grammatical exegesis.
- Was never thought of from the Bible, but arose due to the pressure of outside secular views.
- Fails to satisfy the proponents of those anti-God views, anyway.



REFUTING COMPROMISE

The definitive, classic study on the whole subject of ‘how do we understand early Genesis?’ In his trademark crisp, logical style, scientist and scholar Dr Jonathan Sarfati clinically dismantles those ‘positions’ on Genesis which do not take it straightforwardly, as history. He also shows how these positions, and their justification (the alleged need to respond to pressure from ‘the facts of science’), fail to meet basic standards in the areas of exegesis, logic and the philosophy of science itself.



1 Grigg, R., From the Beginning of Creation: Does Genesis have a Gap? *Creation* 19(2):35–38, March–May 1997;<creation.com/gap>.

2 The definitive critique of the Gap Theory is Fields, W.W., *Unformed and Unfilled*, Burgener Enterprises, Collinsville, Illinois, 1976.

3 By making an imaginary ‘Lucifer’s Flood’, which the Bible nowhere mentions, responsible for the fossils, the global Flood of Noah (which the Bible spends three whole chapters describing in detail) gets relegated to a non-event that did not leave any fossil traces.

4 Sarfati, J., The Fall: a cosmic catastrophe—Hugh Ross’s blunders on plant death in the Bible, *TJ* 19(3):60–64, 2005; <creation.com/plant_death>.

9 E.g. the Day-Age theory, and the Framework Hypothesis.

- It contradicts the Sabbath command of Exodus 20:8–11, which is based on the creation of the ‘heavens, earth, sea and everything in them’ in six ordinary days. In the Old Testament Hebrew, whenever the words ‘heaven(s) and earth’ are conjoined, it is a figure of speech called a *merism*, in which two opposites are combined into an all-encompassing single concept.⁵ Throughout the Bible (e.g. Genesis 14:19, 22; 2 Kings 19:15; Psalm 121:2) this means the totality of creation, not just the earth and its atmosphere, or our solar system alone. It is used because Hebrew has no word for ‘the universe’ and can at best say ‘the all’.⁶
- The Hebrew words *tohu* and *bohu*, translated ‘without form’ and ‘void’ in Genesis 1:2, are claimed by gappists to indicate a judgmental destruction rather than something in the process of being built. But *tohu* occurs several times in the Bible in which it is used in a morally neutral state, describing something unfinished, and confused, but not necessarily evil. Hebrew scholars and the Church have for centuries taken the view that Genesis 1:2 is not a scene of judgment or an evil state created by the fall of angels, but a description of the original undeveloped state of the universe. The plain and simple meaning of what Moses says is that on the first day there was a mass covered by water, with no dry land

involving features (*tohu* = ‘unformed’), and no inhabitants yet (*bohu* = ‘unfilled’).

- Some have misused Jeremiah 4:23 to teach the gap theory, because it uses the phrase *tohu va bohu* to describe the results of a judgment. Leading gap theorists like Arthur Custance used this fact to assert that ‘without form and void’ must mean ‘laid waste by a judgment’. But this is fallacious—there is nothing in the Hebrew words *tohu va bohu* themselves to suggest that. The only reason they refer to being ‘laid waste’ is due to the context in which the words are found. They simply mean ‘unformed and unfilled’. This state can be due either to nothing else having been created, or some created things being removed. The context of Jer. 4 is a prophecy of the Babylonian sacking of Jerusalem, not creation. In fact, Jer. 4:23 is known as a *literary allusion* to Genesis 1:2—the judgment would be so severe that it would leave the final state as empty as the world before God created anything.

An analogy: when I open my word processor, my document screen is blank. But if I delete an entire document the screen would likewise be blank.

So ‘blank’ means ‘free from any text’. In some contexts, the lack of text is because I haven’t written anything, in others it is due to a deletion of text. You would need to know the context to tell which—you couldn’t tell from the word ‘blank’ itself. However, a gappist-type analysis of the word might conclude: ‘since “blank” can refer to a screen with all the text deleted, the word “blank” itself signifies a text deletion event, even when none is stated.’

This is in line with the common biblical principle where a judgment is a *reversal of creation*. Jer. 4:23 is taking the land back to its unformed state, unfit for Man to live in. Similarly, the Flood took the world back to its condition on Day 2, before the land and water had separated.

Furthermore, the gappist argument violates the principle of God’s progressive revelation in Scripture. Later texts presuppose the prior revelation of earlier texts, not vice versa. Therefore Jer. 4:23 cannot be used to interpret Gen. 1:2 as a judgment—that would be completely back-to-front, because an allusion works only one way.

- Jesus said that people were there ‘from the beginning of creation’, not after a billions-of-years gap from the beginning (Mark 10:4–6).⁷
- The English word ‘replenish’ in the KJV translation of Genesis 1:28 (‘... and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth’), does not support the gap theory as gappists claim. As linguist Dr Charles Taylor explains,⁸ when it was translated in 1611, “replenish” was merely a parallel to “fill”, and the prefix “re-” didn’t mean “again”, but “completely”. The same Hebrew word *male* is used in Genesis 1:22, and is there translated “fill (the seas)”, so there was no need to translate it differently in verse 28.



TECHNICAL BOX

Why the Hebrew grammar forbids the idea of a ‘gap’

‘Waw’ is the name of the Hebrew letter which is used as a conjunction. It can mean ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘now’, ‘then’, and several other things depending upon the context and type of *waw* involved. It occurs at the beginning of Genesis 1 verse 2 and is translated in the KJV, ‘And [*waw*] the earth was without form, and void.’ Gappists use this translation to support the gap theory. However, the most straightforward reading of the text sees verse 1 of Genesis 1 as the principal subject-and-verb clause, with verse 2 containing three ‘circumstantial clauses’. Hebrew grammarian Gesenius calls this a ‘*waw explicativum*’, and compares it to the English ‘to wit’. Other terms

for it are ‘*waw copulative*’, ‘*waw disjunctive*’ or ‘*explanatory waw*’.

Such a *waw* disjunctive is easy to tell from the Hebrew, because it is formed by *waw* followed by a non-verb. It introduces a parenthetic statement, that is, it’s alerting the reader to put the following passage in brackets, as it were—a descriptive phrase about the previous noun. It does not indicate something following in a time sequence—this would have been indicated by a different Hebrew construction called the *waw consecutive*, where *waw* is followed by a verb (the *waw consecutive* is in fact used before the different days of creation— see my book,

Refuting Compromise, p. 100).

It is simply grammatically impossible to translate the verb *hayah* as ‘became’ when it is combined with a *waw* disjunctive—in the rest of the Old Testament, *waw* + a noun + *haya* (*qal* perfect, 3rd person) is always translated, ‘was’ or ‘came’, but *never* ‘became’. Also, the correct Hebrew idiom for the word ‘become’ is to attach the verb ‘to be’, e.g. ‘was’ to the preposition ‘to’ (Hebrew *le*). The verb ‘to be’ does NOT mean ‘become’ without this preposition. Since Genesis 1:2 lacks the preposition, it **cannot** mean that the earth ‘became’ without form and void.

5 An English example is ‘open day and night’. This doesn’t simply mean during sunlight and darkness but not dusk; rather, ‘day and night’ means the whole 24-hour day-night cycle. Other examples are ‘far and near’, ‘hill and vale’, ‘high and low’.

6 See Leupold, H.C., *Exposition of Genesis*, 1:41, Baker Book House, Michigan, 1942, who cites similar usage in Jeremiah 10:16; Isaiah 44:24; Psalm 103:19, 119:91; and Ecclesiastes 11:5.

7 See also Mortenson, T., *But from the beginning of ... the institution of marriage?* <creation.com/beginning>, 1 November 2004.

8 Taylor, C., *What does ‘replenish the earth’ mean?* *Creation* 18(2):44–45, March–May 1996; <creation.com/replenish>.