

Does Ezekiel 28:11–19 affirm the fall of Satan in Genesis 1:1–2 as claimed in the gap theory?

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The gap theory claims that Ezekiel 28:11–19 and Isaiah 14:12–15 refer to the fall of Satan in the mineral Garden of Eden before Creation Week. This event is said to have occurred in between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. Gap proponents are intimidated by secular geologists who claim that the earth is billions of years old. By inserting billions of years between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, gap proponents assume that this allows them to reconcile Scripture with the idea of long ages. This paper demonstrates that the passage in Ezekiel 28 cannot relate to this supposed time gap even if the passage refers to the fall of Satan. If the text is understood as a reference to the fall of Satan, we would still be required to interpret the timing of Satan's fall as an event that occurred after the sixth day of creation, and the final judgment of Satan is reserved for fire rather than water. We show that the gap theory is an extrabiblical and artificial construct that has been imposed upon the text of Genesis 1:1–2, and that Ezekiel 28 is actually problematic for the gap theory.

Gap theory claims that there was a previous earth that was created and then destroyed billions of years ago because of the rebellion of Lucifer. This supposedly took place prior to the Creation Week mentioned in Genesis 1. It is postulated that when Lucifer fell into sin, God destroyed this earth with a worldwide (Lucifer's) flood and then recreated the world. This is also called the ruin–reconstruction or creation–recreation theory. This event is said to have occurred in a time gap between Genesis 1:1–2. The gap theory was proposed to reconcile Scripture with the emerging notion that the earth is billions of years old in the developing uniformitarian geology of the 18th and 19th centuries.

German Protestant theologians Johann Georg Rosenmüller (1736–1815) and Johann August Dathe (1731–1791) were the first to propose the early ideas for the gap theory. Later, Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847), who founded the Free Church of Scotland, actively promoted it.¹ From 1909, Cyrus Ingerson Scofield popularized the gap theory through his widely distributed *Scofield Reference Bible*.²

The teaching of the gap theory is built on the following ideas:

1. a long time ago, God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1)
2. Lucifer and the angels ruled the earth filled with soulless humans
3. Lucifer resided in the mineral Garden of Eden (Ezekiel 28:11–19), desired to be like God, and eventually rebelled against God (Isaiah 14:12–15)
4. as a result of Satan's rebellion, sin entered into the world

5. God destroyed the earth and everything in it with a worldwide Flood that produced the fossils and rock layers we see today
6. after the destruction of the earth, God recreated the earth (Genesis 1:2)
7. the recreation of the earth and life took six 24-hour days (Genesis 1:3–31).

The gap theory presupposes the fall of Lucifer, the *Day Star*, who is also known as Satan after his fall, to have occurred between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. In this article, we endeavour to examine the interpretation of Ezekiel 28:11–19 and its application to Genesis 1:1–2, focusing on the timing of Satan's fall and his judgment.

Interpretation of Ezekiel 28:11–19

Ezekiel 28:11–19 is notorious for being a difficult passage to interpret, resulting in differing views among evangelicals.

In the first interpretation, some commentators suggest that this passage is simply a reference to the human king of Tyre.³ In this view, this whole passage should be interpreted as mocking the foolish thinking of the king. One of the objections that can be raised against this interpretation is the reference to a guardian cherub who walked about in Eden, the Garden of God. Even if the passage speaks about the human king of Tyre, human beings are never called 'cherubim', which are angelic beings with wings (Ezekiel 10:1–5). Calling a human a 'cherub' requires an allegorical interpretation of the passage. Some authors go as far as to allegorize that the Garden of Eden is simply a reference to a

garden in the king’s palace or temple in Ezekiel’s day. They surmise that the reference to perfection is just a poetic way of saying that the king was full of splendour.

The second interpretation comes from other ancient commentaries such as the Jewish *Talmud* and *Targumim*. In these commentaries, this passage alludes to the fall of the king, linking it metaphorically to the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden. The King of Tyre was not regarded as literally being in the Garden of Eden but he was provided with the luxuries that equal those of paradise in Eden. But is this passage analogous to the fall of Adam? Just as it is with the first interpretation, this explanation fails to account for the difference between cherub and man. In contrast to the cherub of Ezekiel 28, Adam was not adorned with precious stones and gold from his head to his feet on the day he was created. Adam was made naked and he was not ashamed of this until he fell into sin. And while Adam was instructed to cultivate the Garden of Eden, it would be difficult to see how he could be called an anointed guardian cherub, much less walk in the midst of stones of fire. Cherubim are angels tasked with guarding the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24); standing by the wheels of the throne of God (Ezekiel 10); and overshadowing the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant (Hebrews 9:5). In Ezekiel 28:11–19, the cherub is judged by a fire with no chance of reconciliation. In contrast, when Adam sinned in Genesis 3:6–7, God reconciled him and clothed him with animal skin (Genesis 3:15, 21)—a picture of the final reconciliation and redemption through the Cross.

The third interpretation, held by Tertullian and Origen, is that Ezekiel 28:11–19 speaks about the fall of the King of Tyre and then likens his fall to the fall of Satan and Satan’s power at work in the human king.⁴ Later, Scofield endorsed this interpretation.⁵ In this view, Satan, in his unfallen state, was placed in Eden, the Garden of God. He is called the anointed guardian cherub who is perfect, beautiful, completely adorned with precious stones and gold, and who walked in the midst of the stones of fire. This cherub fell because of pride and will face judgment by fire. This third interpretation is also the view of most gap proponents.

While we have reviewed these views but have not taken a particular view, we shall now assume the third interpretation of gap proponents and examine whether or not it can indeed be applied to support the gap theory.

Timing of the fall of Satan

If Ezekiel 28:11–19 speaks about the fall of Satan, it should give us important clues when Satan fell.

Ezekiel 28:13–17:

“You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering... On the day that you were created they were prepared ... You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on

the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you ... so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground”

In the initial verses 13–15, Satan was still in his perfect state in the Garden of Eden. In fact, Job 38:4–7 reveals that the angelic beings were rejoicing when God was laying the foundation of the earth before the creation of the Garden of Eden. In his former state, Satan was celebrating with God’s initial act of creating the earth, as recorded in Genesis 1:2. Genesis 2:7–9 indicates that God planted the Garden of Eden only after Adam was created on the sixth day of Creation Week and both creation and the Garden of Eden were still very good at the end of the sixth day (Genesis 1:31). So a plain reading of Ezekiel 28:13–19 requires Satan’s fall to occur, at the earliest after the sixth day of creation. Yet if Satan had not yet fallen into sin on the sixth day of creation, how then could there have been a judgment on Satan between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2? The timing of the fall of Satan in Ezekiel 28 could not have occurred between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 as the gap theory proposes.

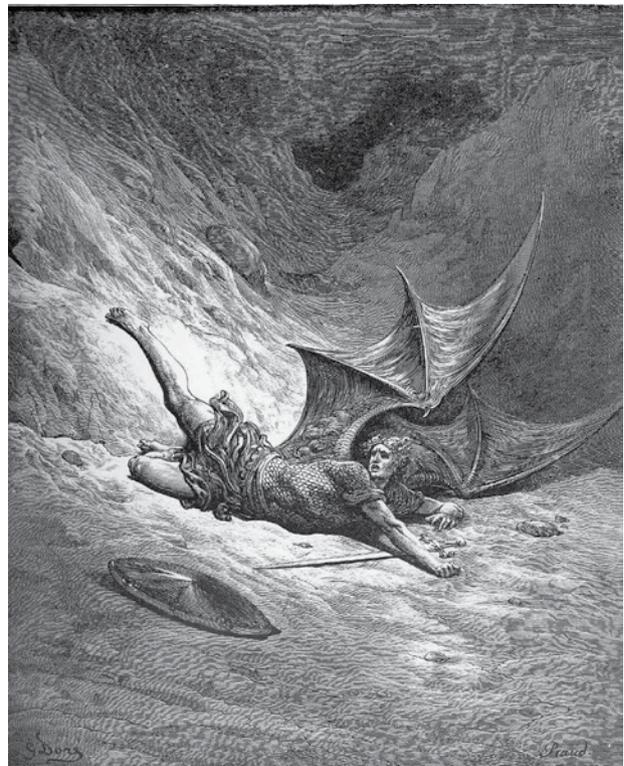


Figure 1. Did Satan fall before Creation Week?

In order to fit Satan's fall in between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, gap proponents introduced another Garden of Eden, a mineral garden that was made for Lucifer.⁶ After the rebellion, this garden was destroyed with the rest of the earth and then recreated with a second Garden of Eden.⁷ However, this proposal of a mineral garden requires reading between the lines of Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 and is based on an argument from silence with no exegetical basis.

Watery judgment on Satan

To support the gap theory, gap proponents also presuppose a water judgment called 'Lucifer's flood' before Genesis 1:2 to conform to the fossils and geologic record of billions of years. But such a reading into the text does not hold water (pardon the pun). Although Genesis 1:2 mentions water, elevating it to Lucifer's flood is counterintuitive because the judgment was ineffective against Satan while other creatures were destroyed. Satan escaped, appeared in the purported second Garden of Eden billions of years later, tempted Adam and Eve, and then was cursed. After failing to destroy Satan with water, God could only curse him as he continued to cause mischief to mankind (Genesis 3:14). This view contradicts the all-powerful God and the sure judgment on Satan in Ezekiel 28:18–19. Moreover, the judgment mentioned in verse 18 is one of fire rather than water.

Gap proponents sometimes claim that 2 Peter 3:4–7 speaks about the flood that occurred when Satan fell into sin before the six days of creation. The passage reads:

“They will say, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.’ For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.”

But “all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation” in verse 4 refers to history from the Creation Week. It follows that verse 5–6 would point to Noah's Flood after the Creation Week. Furthermore, Noah's Flood is explicit in Genesis 6–8. It makes no sense for Peter to write about a muted Lucifer's flood and thus leave out the global flood judgment in Noah's day. In fact, Peter sets the context that the flood came during the days of Noah in the earlier chapter, in 2 Peter 2:4–5, which reads:

“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah,

a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly . . .”

When 2 Peter 3:4–7 is read in light of 2 Peter 2:2–4, it becomes clear that the ‘world that was deluged by water and perished’ is not Lucifer's flood at pre-Creation Week but Noah's Flood at post-Creation Week.

While the earth was judged, there is no explanation in the gap theory for why the heavens would also have been judged along with the earth. Yet if the heavens were not judged, then the recreation of the heavens, including the sun, moon, and stars in Genesis 1:14–19, was unnecessary. The judgment of only the earth does not fit the gap theory.

Implications of the gap theory

The proponents of the gap theory try to harmonize Scripture with geology by inserting a long time gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. For this theory to work, gap proponents must not only invent an imaginary fall of Satan before the Creation Week; they must also invent an imaginary mineral Garden of Eden and an imaginary Lucifer's flood, and then place this entire edifice before Genesis 1:2. But such an approach would be contrary to sound exegesis. Gap proponents cite Ezekiel 28:13–19 for scriptural support. But as we have shown, Ezekiel 28 tells us that Satan could not have rebelled against God before the sixth day of creation. This undermines the very purpose of the gap theory, which is to attempt to stay faithful to Scripture while accounting for the billions of years of uniformitarian geology.

Furthermore, since gap proponents claim that the fossils and rock layers are billions of years old, they must commit to the idea that Lucifer's flood produced the fossils and rock layers we see today. In other words, they must reject the Flood of Noah since such a global flood would certainly have destroyed traces of a prior Lucifer's flood and it would have laid down its very own set of rocks and fossils. But if Noah's Flood was responsible for the fossils and rock layers, there is no longer any basis for the supposed ‘billions of years’, and no purpose for a gap theory. At best, gap proponents can only accept a local flood in Mesopotamia.⁸

The attempt to satisfy the secular worldview of billions of years of the earth ends in a compromised account of biblical creation. The plain narrative of Genesis 1:1–2 simply tells us that the earth was unformed and unfilled at the initial stage of its creation and was only otherwise at the end of the sixth day of creation.⁹ The application of this interpretation of Ezekiel 28:11–19 to the fall of Satan before Genesis 1:2 is problematic for the gap theory. When God laid the foundations of the earth, the angels were busy singing together and shouting for joy (Job 38:4–7) rather than being judged for rebelling against God. The end result is a view that is neither biblical nor compatible with secular geology.

Other reasons why the gap theory is not compatible with Scripture¹⁰

1. A plain reading of the Genesis text tells us that God created in six days of 24 hours each. The chronogenealogy listed in the Bible from Adam to Jesus, to this present day, requires a history of the earth and universe in some 6,000 years. This interpretation is supported by Exodus 20:11, “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth”
2. Inserting billions of years of death and disease in a ruined earth in between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 contradicts Genesis 1:31, “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good”
3. Placing death, disease, and suffering in the first two verses of Genesis 1 before the Fall of Adam also undermines the foundation of the Gospel. Jesus, the last Adam, died a physical death to redeem man from the physical death that came in through the first man, Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45).
4. Jesus taught that Adam and Eve were created from the beginning of creation (Mark 10:6). Inserting billions of years before Adam and Eve puts the first couple at the end of the billions of years instead of the beginning of creation. Suggesting Jesus was wrong commits the kenotic heresy.¹¹
5. The belief that billions of years before Adam generated its own fossils and geology requires rejecting the global Flood of Noah and twisting Scripture (1 Peter 3:20, 2 Peter 2:4–5, and 2 Peter 3:4–7) to fit Lucifer’s flood.
6. The gap theory contradicts the Hebrew syntax in Genesis 1:1–3. Genesis 1:2 begins with a *waw* followed by a non-verb. This requires the verse to be translated as a *waw* disjunctive (‘now’) rather than a *waw* consecutive (‘and’). In other words, it is not possible to interpret Genesis 1:2 as an event that occurs after verse 1. Rather, the syntax requires us to understand Genesis 1:2 as an in-depth description of what Genesis 1:1 means when it says, ‘In the beginning’. The *waw* disjunctive in 1:2 functions like a bracket—a series of three circumstantial clauses that explains Genesis 1:1. Since Genesis 1:2 begins with a *waw* disjunctive, it is not possible to insert a time gap between verses 1 and 2. The gap theory is incompatible with the Hebrew syntax.
7. Last, but not least, Genesis 1:2 is a description of the initial stage of the earth at creation. Reading into Genesis 1:2 a watery judgment using other later scriptures on judgment (Isaiah 34:11 and Jeremiah 4:23) contradicts the principle of God’s progressive revelation in biblical interpretation. “Later texts presuppose the prior revelation of earlier texts, not vice-versa.”¹² In fact, Isaiah 34:11 and Jeremiah 4:23 were predicting a future and not past judgment.

References

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