

The Gap Theory: Genesis 1:1-2

by

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Introduction

The Old Testament unquestionably reveals God as the Creator of everything that exists.¹ However, not all theologians agree on the details, as evident by the Scofield Bible of 1909, which introduced a nontraditional view of creation.² An interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2, known as the gap theory or ruin-restoration creationism.³ Which affirms that Genesis 1:1 tells of the original creation, however, “sometime afterwards” Satan rebelled against God, was cast out of heaven down to the earth, causing the earth to be judged and that Genesis 1:2 describes the consequences of this judgment, a recreation by God.⁴ Supporters of the gap theory, state that the form of *hayah* (הָיָה) and the phrase *tohu wa-bohu* (תְּהוֹ וּבֹהוּ), from Genesis 1:2 affirms their claim.⁵ This exegetical paper will evaluate the interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2 relative to the gap theory through a grammatical-syntactical analysis, relevant word studies, and literary structure, in order to show that Hebrew scriptures does not support ruin-restoration creationism.

The Gap Theory

The gap theory is a “response to the uniformitarian idea” introduced by Christian scientists in the 19th century, even though Payne indicated that the gap theory was a concern of exegesis that predated the scientific encounter, while Custance, attempted to show that its

¹ Mark F. Rooker, “Genesis 1:1-3: Creation or Re-Creation?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (1992): 316.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 317.

⁵ Hercules B. Cemitara and Gerardus D. Bouw, “The Gap Theories of Creation” *Biblical Astronomer* 16, no. 117 (Summer 2006): 87-91.

interpretation was substantiated by early Jewish tradition.⁶ While the gap theory protects the “literal six, twenty-four hour-day,” conversely though, the theory claims eons occurred between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2.⁷

An ideology that allows for numerous eras, as identified for the earth according to the fossils found in it by modern geologists.⁸ For, *created* (*bārā*) as identified in Genesis 1:1 is used in the Old Testament regularly in to indicate a new activity, where the subject is always God.⁹ Which indicates that the gap theory is a theological claim that is subject the appropriate interpretation of the aforementioned verses in Genesis.

Grammatical-Syntactical Analysis

According to the supporters of the gap theory, the verb *was* (הָיָה) in Genesis 1:2, “... earth *was* without form,” correctly should be translated as *became*, which implies that the earth was not created “without form and void”.¹⁰ Furthermore, gap theorists claim that where Isaiah 45:18 pronounces that the Lord did not create the earth “in vain,” he uses the same Hebrew phrase as “without form” in Genesis 1:2.¹¹ The only other places where the Hebrew phrase translates “without form and void,” *tohu wa-bohu* (תְּהוֹ וּבְהוּ), occurs in Isaiah 33:11 and Jeremiah 4:23.¹² Additionally, the language found in Isaiah 14:9–17, Jeremiah 4:23–27, and Ezekiel 28:12–18 are taken as indications of Satan’s sin and judgment, which ruin-restoration creationism claims resulted in a gap period based on language that signify sequential events.¹³

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (Jan.-March 1975): 25-27.

⁸ Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, (Belfast; Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002.), 191.

⁹ Mathews, K. A. *Genesis 1-11:26*. 1A. *The New American Commentary*. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 126–137.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 191.

Nonetheless, Waltke affirms that the sequential nature of the gap theory is unfounded.¹⁴ First, the Hebrew language uses the *waw consecutive* construction to represent the succession of time, however, Genesis 1:1 begins with a prepositional phrase.¹⁵ While Genesis 1:2 uses the *conjunction waw*, which demonstrates that based on grammar and syntactical usage there is no support for chronological activity as recognized by the gap theory.¹⁶ Next, the *waw consecutive* is not present in Genesis 1:2, which most likely in this situation means that it does not introduce an independent consecutive clause.¹⁷

Cairns, also dispute the gap theory on several grammatical and syntactical issues. First, the verb *was* in Genesis 1:2 is correctly translated, for it cannot mean *became*, since if *became* was the meaning, the Hebrew verb *hayah* would have a prefixed *lamed*, which is not the case¹⁸. The phrase in verse 2a is a noun clause and, therefore, characterizes a state of *being*, not of *becoming*.¹⁹ It is also, a *contingent* clause, which in Hebrew syntax “must describe what precedes it,” thus, “the earth was without form” is a narrative expansion of the prior statement, “God created...”²⁰

Hence, Cairns agrees with Waltke that *and* at the beginning of verse 2 is the Hebrew *waw* and is connected with the noun *earth*, thus “according to some of the best grammarians,” it must therefore introduce an explanation of the preceding statement.²¹ Therefore it is grammatically illogical for the *waw* to convey that Genesis 1:2 communicates a chronological gap between it and the previous verse and therefore, verse 2 must be understood as describing a state of being

¹⁴ Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,” 25-27.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,” 25-27.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 191-192.

that is parallel with the main verb *created* (*bārā'*).²²

Applicable Word Study

Since God is Creator of all that exists, he is originator to it, distinct from it, while yet personally involved with it.²³ Three parallel phrases in Genesis 1:2 describe the conditions of the earth at its beginning: 1) ... formless and empty (*tohu wa-bohu*), 2) ... the surface of the deep (*těhôm*), and 3) ... hovering over the waters (*mayim*).²⁴

For, Exodus 20:11, equates this creation of the complete universe to the six-day period found in Genesis 1:1, even though, the gap theorists claim that the verb *make* (עָשָׂה) in Exodus 20:11 is not identical with the verb *create* in Genesis 1:1.²⁵ Nevertheless, Nehemiah 9:6 uses the same word as Exodus 20:11 in a context that is certainly describing the original creation. This is where a comprehensive lemma search helps to explain the unique use of *created* (*bārā'*) as identified in Genesis 1:1 in context with the subject is always God and the act of creation.²⁶

The verb *created* (*bārā'*) is found most frequently in Isaiah, twenty times in chapters 40–66. Furthermore, the appeal in Isaiah 45:18 is barren because the context shows that Isaiah's meaning is simply that God's purpose in creating the world was not that it should be "without form" *tohu wa-bohu* (תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ), but that it should be populated.²⁷ Therefore, Isaiah does not tell the *nature* of the earth when God created it, for his statement, refers to the *purpose* for which God created the universe.²⁸

Literary Structure

²² Ibid.

²³ Mathews,. *Genesis 1-11:26*, 126–137.

²⁴ Mathews,. *Genesis 1-11:26*, 130-135.

²⁵ Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 193.

²⁶ Mathews,. *Genesis 1-11:26*, 129–137.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

It is important to interpret Genesis 1:1-2, in terms of its literary context. According to Blocher, this creation description was given to the Israelites in the wilderness, after their migration from Egypt, but before they occupied Canaan.²⁹ Sometimes called a "hymn," Genesis, appears to be a unique blend of prose and poetry.³⁰ "Genesis is a book of beginnings: the origin of the universe, birth of the human race and founding of the Hebrew family, as well as the foundation to many themes prominent throughout the Old and New Testaments."³¹

Conclusion

The meaning of the original message, in Genesis 1:1-2, to the original hearers must dictate the understanding of what the verses mean now, to us, today in this present time.³² Modern day scientist and theologians must not be allowed to command an interpretation of Scripture that does not convey the original intent. Regardless of how "scientifically correct" they are attempting to be, based on scientific discoveries. Therefore, the gap theory must be rejected, because based this exegetical research, considering the grammatical-syntactical analysis, pertinent word studies, and literary structure review; it fails to reflect the envisioned meaning of the Hebrew scripture.

²⁹ Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 29-33.

³⁰ Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 29-33.

³¹ Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 29-33.

³² *Ibid.*

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Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (Jan.-March 1975): 25-36.