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Genesis

Lesson 3
The Gap Theory
Genesis 1:1-31

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. We now begin our study of cosmogony, which deals with the theories of the creation or origin of the world. Cosmogony does not deal with the origin of life, but the origin of the world.
- B. There are essentially three basic views on cosmogony: (1) Atheistic evolution states that the world came into existence by accident denying the supernatural; (2) Theistic evolution states that God started the evolutionary process; and (3) Creationism states that the world came into existence by a creative act of God.
- C. The Gap Theory is a theory held by creationists on how God created the earth. This view was popularized by G. H. Pember in his book *Earth's Earliest Ages*, and is held by many Christian fundamentalists today.

II. DEFINITION OF THE GAP THEORY: This position holds that a gap of thousands or even millions of years took place between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. The geological ages can be fitted in to agree with earth's antiquity. The gap was due to a pre-Edenic judgment of some nature and most gap theorists take it to be the judgment of Satan. The days of Genesis 1 are literal 24-hour days of "recreation" or "restitution" from the terrible judgment on the original creation.

III. ASSUMPTIONS OF THE GAP THEORY

- A. God is the creator of the world and brought it into existence by a creative act. It assumes the supernatural.
- B. Genesis chapter 1 is literal language and is to be interpreted as such.
- C. There is no date given in Genesis 1 for the age of the earth. Had God wanted us to know the age He would have told us.
- D. The geologic time tables for the antiquity of the earth are fairly accurate; therefore, the world could be as much as 4.9 billion years old.
- E. The world is very old but the creation of man is quite recent. They deny the evolutionary theory in the creation of the world and life.

IV. SUPPORT FOR THE GAP THEORY

- A. Original Creation. Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" refers to God's original creation, which was perfect and non-chaotic. A perfect God must make a perfect creation. A God who does not think chaotically will surely not create anything chaotic. Hence a chaos cannot have existed before the cosmos by Divine direction. NOTE: How could the angels have rejoiced over God's creative glory if this creation had at the first been formless and empty, desolate and chaotic (Job 38:4-7)?
- B. Divine Judgment in 1:2. The words "waste and void" occur several other places in the Old Testament and refer to a divine Judgment(Isa. 34:11; Jer. 4:23-26) This divine judgment is of great consequence and may go back to a judgment of Satan.
- C. Translation of "Was" (*Hayah*). While it is admitted that *hayah* generally has the meaning of "was" in the Old Testament, it can also be translated "became" (Psa. 116:22; Gen. 19:26). Genesis 1:2 could be translated "The earth became without form and void,"
- D. Earth Created for Habitation. Isaiah 45:18 states that God did not create the earth a waste or desolation. God formed the world "to be inhabited." POINT: Who inhabited the earth after its original creation? It must have been Lucifer before his original fall (Ezk. 28:11-20). When he fell, his place of habitation was judged (Isa. 14:12-15). NOTE: There are some (not many) who have capitulated to science to such a degree that they are willing to say that there may have been pre-historic animals on the earth during this time. Some would even say there was a pre-Adamic race of men without souls such as Adam had.
- E. Use of the Verbs "Create" and "Make" in Genesis One. Apart from verse one, the Hebrew verb *bara* (create) is found only twice, in creation of animal (1:21) and human (1:26-27) life, Otherwise the account

always uses the word *asah* (make), which means to “form or shape out of already existing materials” Thus Genesis 1 is not primarily concerned with the first, original creation, but with the new shaping of the earth after its destruction. It is a recreation after judgment of the earth.

F. Significance of Darkness and Water. Total darkness and water in Genesis 1:2 would produce ice and this may explain the ice ages of geology. NOTE: It might also explain pre-historic animals found in this ice, assuming there were animals in the original creation.

G. Significance of the Days. Literal hermeneutics (laws of interpretation of Scripture) demand literal 24-hour days. The days of Genesis 1 are solar days of “restitution.” Some of the days are creative days in the case of animals and man.

H. Other Gaps in Scripture. Such a gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 is illustrated by the long gap between Christ’s first advent and second advent, which is often referred to in the Old Testament and is likened to the valley between the two mountain peaks.

I. Hebrew Language. The Hebrew language is very flexible and not too much emphasis can be put upon strict grammar. Thus there may be a gap between 1:1 and 1:2. The *waw* consecutive (“and”) beginning verse 2 seems to permit a gap.

J. Popular View. The gap theory is very popular with many fundamentalists today. A modern advocate of this view is J. Sidlow Baxter (cf. *Explore The Book*, Vol. I).

V. OBJECTIONS TO THE GAP THEORY

A. The “and” before verse 2 begins a circumstantial clause, giving a reason for the action of 1:1. It does not necessarily allow for a gap. NOTE: The gap theory does not have the support of modern Hebrew scholars:

In 1948, at the Winona Lake School of Theology, M. Henkel polled 20 leading scholars of the Hebrew language in the United States. They were asked, “Is there any exegetical evidence for *the view* that there was a gap between vs. 1 and 2? Their reply was no (Surburg, *Darwin, Evolution and Creation*, pp. 53-54).

B. It is strange that the original creation should be given in one short sentence and then dismissed when over thirty verses should be given to reconstruction, a less significant act. To say that the original creation is given only in 1:1 and then dismissed, and that 1:3ff denotes a restoration after judgment is guesswork.

C. It is difficult to see how the Bible could be silent about such a primeval catastrophe and such a long interval of time between verses 1 and 2 of the Genesis account.

D. The words *tohu-wa-bohu* (“without form and void”) could be translated “desolation and waste,” speaking of the fact the earth in its original state was uninhabitable. In the judgments of Isaiah 34:11 and Jeremiah 4:23-26 it is quite obvious that they refer to the land of Palestine, and because of these judgments the land would be temporarily uninhabitable. These two verses do not look back to creation but are prophetic.

E. The very *hayah* (“was”) almost always means “was” and to give it a very unusual meaning in Genesis 1:2 is to support a position which is only conjecture.

F. While there is a distinction between the words *bara* and *asah*, they are also very closely related. *Asah* does at times speak of God’s creative activity (Gen. 2:2; Exod. 20:11; Gen. 1:16; 3:1 1:26; 6:6). NOTE: In Genesis 5:1 the words *bara* and *asah* are used side by side in relationship to God’s creation of man.

Therefore it may be concluded that there is not enough distinction in these words to support a gap theory.

G. In Isaiah 45:18 the translation should be, He did not create it to be a waste.” This means that God made his original creation for the purpose that it should be inhabited by man. This verse says nothing of a pre-Edenic habitation of the earth.

H. If the original creation of “the heaven and the earth” included the sun, moon and stars, then the word “darkness” (verse 2) must be interpreted to mean either that the light of these bodies was extinguished by the catastrophe, or that it was concealed from the earth by mists and vapors which were the result of it. To hold that the heavenly bodies were not affected by the catastrophe described in verse 2 and that the “made” of verse 4 merely means “made to appear, (reappear), reduces the creative act of the fourth day almost to insignificance.

I. To say that Satan inhabited the original created earth is purely assumption since many scholars do not agree that Isa. 14 and Ezk. 23 refer to Satan in context.

J. The illustration of a gap between the two advents of Christ cannot rightly be likened to Genesis 1:2. While many passages undeniably teach two advents of Christ, no passage plainly teaches a gap in Genesis 1:2. Thus there is no real parallel.

K. It has further been objected that even if the geological strata could be inserted between verses 1 and 2 of the Mosaic record--for which however there is no valid scientific or Biblical ground--there is still no passage in the whole of the Bible which connects the fall of Satan and this conjectural intervening period between the first two verses of Scripture.