

## Lesson 16

**THE GAP THEORIES ARE POSSIBLE**

## I. INTRODUCTION

- A. There are many evangelical scholars who are not evolutionists who want to see long periods of time in Genesis 1. Their cosmogony is affected by what appear to be scientific facts.
- B. The question is how does Genesis 1 fit in relation to geological (rocks), paleontological (fossils), and anthropological (man) studies? These viewpoints all try to harmonize the apparent facts of science with the creation account in the Bible.

## II. THE STANDARD GAP THEORY

- A. 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 of science 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 theories 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.
- B. Assumptions of the Gap Theory
  - 1. God is the creator of the world and brought it into existence by a creative act. It assumes the supernatural.
  - 2. Genesis chapter 1 is literal language and is to be interpreted as such.
  - 3. 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.
  - 4. 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.
  - 5. 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.
- C. Support of the Gap Theory
  - 1. 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 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 (cf. Job 38:4-7)?
  - 2. 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.

3. Translation of *Hayah*: While it is admitted that *hayah* generally has the meaning of “was” in the Old Testament, it can also be translated “became” (cf. Psa. 118:22; Gen. 19:26). Genesis 1:2 could be translated “The earth became without form and void.”
4. 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 (Ezek. 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 animals on the earth during this time (pre-historic animals). Some would even say there was a pre-Adamic race of men without souls such as Adam had.
5. Use of the Verbs “Create” and “Make” in Genesis One: Apart from verse 1, 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. Other gaps in Scripture: Such a gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 is illustrated by the long gap between Christ’s first and second advent, which is often referred to in the Old Testament and which is likened to the valley between two mountain peaks.
9. 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.
10. Popular View: The gap theory is very popular with many evangelicals today. A modern advocate of this view is J. Sidlow Baxter (cf. *Explore the Book*, Vol. I).

#### I. D. Objections to the Gap Theory

1. 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 vv. 1 and 2:” Their reply was “no.” (Darwin Surburg, *Evolution and Creation*, pp. 53-54).

2. 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.
3. 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.
4. The words *tohu-wa-bohu* (“without form and void”) could best be translated “desolate and waste,” speaking of the fact that 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.
5. 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 that is only conjecture.
6. 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; Ex. 20:11; Gen. 1:16; 3:1; 1:26; 6:6). NOTE: In Gen. 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.
7. In Isa. 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.
8. 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 14 merely means “made to appear,” (reappear), reduces the creation act of the fourth day almost to insignificance.
9. To say that Satan inhabited the original created earth is purely assumption for scholars are not all agreed that Isa. 14 and Ezek. 28 refer in context to Satan.
10. The illustration of a gap between the two advents of Christ cannot rightly be likened to Gen. 1:2. For while many passages undeniably teach two advents of Christ, no passage plainly teaches a gap in Gen. 1:2. Thus there is no real parallel.
11. 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.

### III. THE MODIFIED GAP THEORY

- A. Definition: This theory places a judgment and a long period of time before Genesis 1:1. Thus Gen. 1:1—2:3 simply states a refashioning of the earth after this judgment. Merrill F. Unger says,

Thus Genesis 1:1-2 evidently described not the primeval creation *ex nihilo*, celebrated by the angels (Job 38:71); Isa. 45:18), but the much later refashioning of a judgment-ridden earth in preparation for a new order of creation—man. The Genesis account, accordingly, deals only with God's creative activity as it concerns the human race in its origin, fall and redemption. There is no valid reason why the context of the phrase "in the beginning" (Gen. 1:1) should refer to any other time. There is nothing in the original language to suggest otherwise. The spirit of God in the Genesis narrative is simply giving the facts of creation as they immediately affect man, who is a comparative late-comer in God's creative program ("Rethinking the Genesis Account of Creation," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, p. 28).

B. Support

1. The Genesis account evidently opens in a much later context and, like the Mesopotamian creation stories, begins with chaos.
2. If Genesis 1:1 refers to the original creation of the universe out of nothing, Genesis 1:2 must be construed to be the original chaotic state in which the earth was created. But why would God create an original imperfect and chaotic earth? Thus "in the beginning" must refer to a new beginning after a previous judgment. NOTE: Unger is a Hebrew scholar who knows the original language. He does not allow for a gap between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2.
3. The Hebrew word *bara* does not always mean to create out of nothing. It often bears the meaning of "shaping, forming or fashioning" (Gen. 1:27; 5:1-2; Isa. 65:17). Thus Genesis 1:1 could be translated, "In the beginning God fashioned the heaven and the earth."
4. The days of creation are 24-hour days, describing how God refashioned the earth to make it livable for mankind.

C. Objections

1. It is strange that Genesis, the book of beginnings, would have nothing to say about the beginning of God's original creation.
2. It is pure conjecture to place a gap before Genesis 1:1.
3. The Bible nowhere refers to a judgment or time period before Genesis 1:1. It is strange that this judgment is passed over in silence.
4. This view seems to be willing to turn the whole creation account over to the findings of uniformitarian geology.
5. This is a relatively new view and held only by one prominent scholar.