

The Gap Theory

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I would like to start today by reflecting on the words of Walter Martin, founder of the Christian Research Institute, "Controversy for the sake of controversy is a sin. Controversy for the sake of truth is a divine command." So today, let us look at one of the first controversies that we read in the Bible, starting in the book of Genesis. It is a controversy about the history of creation, the earth, and mankind. It is important. So let us turn to the first chapter of Genesis and read the first two verses.

Genesis 1:1-2 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

It is actually between these two verses, just after 10 words into the Bible, that we have a disagreement about how much time is actually covered by Genesis 1. But there is an idea which provides an answer for the alleged discrepancy between God's Word, which records the history of some 6,000 years of mankind's existence, and geologic and fossil records, which present a world that is millions or billions of years old. The idea is called the gap theory, and it postulates that between the last word of Genesis 1:1 and the first word of Genesis 1:2, there is a gap, an unknowable expanse of time.

The gap theory suggests the following four points.

1. In the beginning, the Eternal God created the entire physical universe out of nothing. That is what we have read in Genesis 1:1.
2. God placed Lucifer, the angel who would later become Satan, on a throne as ruler of the earth, where he ruled over tens of millions of angels for an impossible-to-know length of time.

3. After possibly millions or billions of years, Lucifer rebelled and convinced one-third of the angels to join him in his insurgency. Revelation 5 speaks of 10,000 times 10,000 angels around the throne of God. That is not hyperbole. That is 100 million spirit beings. So there could have been upwards of 30 million rebellious angels who attacked their very Creator. It must have been a horrific battle, and as a result, according to this theory, across our planets that we see in our solar system, God defeated the revolt and cast all of them back to the earth. This chaotic description is what we have read in the first two-thirds of Genesis 1:2.

4. God renewed the earth and created mankind 6,000 years ago, as we read in Psalm 104.

Psalm 104:30 You send forth your Spirit, they are created; and
You renew the face of the earth.

If we read Genesis 1:28 from the King James Version, we see that God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth. Using the same command, He gave eight chapters later to Noah, his sons, and their wives after the Flood had wiped out all of their life on the earth.

According to scientists and geologists, all the planets in our solar system are about four and a half billion years old, and they date the rest of this universe as almost 14 billion years. Christians who believe in the Young Earth theory believe the earth and all of its creation to be no more than 6,000 years old, based mainly on a 1650 calculation by biblical scholar Archbishop James Ussher. Using the chronology presented in the Bible, Ussher calculated the creation of the earth to be 4004 BC, and this is the most widely accepted date for creation among the Young Earth creationists.

However, starting in 1814, Thomas Chalmers offered a different option when he popularized gap creationism, which he attributed to the 17th century Dutch Arminian theologian Simon Episcopius. Thomas Chalmers wrote that, in his opinion, Genesis 1:1 forms no part of the first day, but refers to a period of indefinite antiquity when God created the world out of nothing. He continues, "The commencement of the first day's work I hold to be the

moving of God's Spirit upon the face of the waters." This is the last part of verse 2. And he finishes by stating, "We can allow geology the amplest time without infringing even on the literality of the Mosaic record."

I am convinced that Mr. Chalmers had it right. But some people who believe in Young Earth creation are equally unyielding in their beliefs.

There are several in opposition to an Old Earth, but I am just going to read one example. Writing for the Institute for Creation Research, Dr. John Morris states that, "Suffice it to say that no one could conclude that Scripture specifically places His creation any longer ago than a few thousand years, but to my knowledge," he says, "no one does. Many do hold to an older position, but not for scriptural reasons. They are convinced by radioisotope dating perhaps, or the molecular clock of mutation rates, or some other line of thinking, but not from Scripture." Morris confidently tells us that scripture teaches a Young Earth, "and the time has come for Christians to stop twisting Scripture to fit the evolutionary and uniformitarian speculation of some scientists about the unobserved past." He also declared that "we suggest such Christians stop calling themselves Bible-believing Christians and start using some other such name as world-believing Christians."

Although I do not doubt the sincerity of Dr. Morris or any of those who believe as he does, but let us see what the Bible really does say. Writing in *The Incredible Human Potential*, Herbert Armstrong tells us, "The original Hebrew words imply a perfect creation. God reveals Himself as Creator of perfection, light, and beauty. Every reference in the Bible describes the condition of any completed phase of God's creation. It is very good. Perfect."

Later, he added that "the original creation, probably created millions of years earlier, was a beautiful and perfect, albeit unfinished creation."

He references Job 38:4:7, where God says, when the earth was created, it was so breathtaking that the angels sang together and shouted for joy at its beauty. The idea of a chaotic ruined wasteland at the beginning of creation just does not fit, but this is what the Hebrew can say, and this is apparently the way that the Young Earth Christians say that God created the world.

In an article entitled "Gap Creationism," Wikipedia gives a listing of reasons why those who believe in a gap theory believe as they do, and I would like to refer to some of them. The article tells us, "Because there is no specific information given in Genesis concerning the proposed gap of time, other scriptures are used to support and explain what may have occurred during this period and explain the specific linguistic reasoning behind this interpretation of the Hebrew text."

To make a bit of a digression here, I would like to introduce us to a group of Jewish scribes called the Masoretes. An online article on Britannica.com gives the following information about their work, the Masoretic text, which they tell us is the traditional Hebrew text of the Jewish Bible, meticulously assembled and codified and supplied with diacritical marks to ensure correct pronunciation. It was a huge work that covered 400 years of intensive study by Talmudic scholars to transmit to future generations the authentic Word of God. To this end, they gathered manuscripts and whatever oral traditions were available to them. Remember Romans 3 tells us that God entrusted His Old Testament scriptures to the care of the Jews. Over centuries of time, the Masoretes checked and rechecked every Hebrew or Aramaic letter and called attention to any strange spellings or unusual grammars.

They introduced symbols to represent vowels to ensure correct pronunciation. In addition, signs for stress and pause were added to the text to facilitate public reading of the Scriptures in the synagogue. Britannica's article relates that at the completion of each section, "the Masoretes not only counted and noted the total number of verses, words, and letters in the text, but further indicated which verse, which word, and which letter marked the center of the text. In that way, any future emendation, that is correction or revision could be detected." Because of their fidelity to preserving the Word of God, the Masoretic text is universally accepted as the authentic Hebrew Bible.

Returning to Wikipedia, the first example that they highlight is a small mark found in the Masoretic text just after Genesis 1:1, referred to as a *rebia*. A *rebia* is a mark in the Hebrew text that indicates that we should pause, kind of like a comma, semicolon, or colon, and which indicates that the reader is to pause before proceeding to the next verse. They tell us it is one indication

among others that the [??] which introduces verse 2 should be translated but rather than and. The second proof that Wikipedia offers is that the word "was" in Genesis 1:2, is translated in other areas of the Bible as "became." Such a word choice, the article states, makes the gap interpretation easier to see in modern English.

Setting the example that Herbert Armstrong used, if we look at Genesis 19:26 and recall the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot's wife turned back and *became* a pillar of salt. The word became in this verse is the same word that is translated "was" in Genesis 1:2. In other words, gap theory proponents say that the first two sentences of the Bible should be read, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. But the earth became without form and void."

For a third reason in support the gap theory, the article tells us that God is perfect and everything that He does is perfect, so a newly created earth from the hand of God should not have been without form and void and shrouded in darkness. They refer to Deuteronomy 32, verse 4 which tells us,

Deuteronomy 32:4 [Our] God is the Rock, His work is perfect.

I John 1:5 God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

We will be finishing today by returning to Genesis 1:2 and looking at the words translated "without form and void." They are the Hebrew *tohu* and *bohu*. BlueLetterBible.org says that *tohu* is from an unused root meaning to lie waste, a desolation and confusion. The website also tells us that, among other options, *tohu* can be used in the following ways, formlessness, wasteland, and most interestingly, a place of chaos. Similarly, *bohu* is from an unused root meaning superficially, an undistinguishable ruin, emptiness, void, and waste. Biblehub.com tells us that the word means a vacuity, an undistinguishable ruin.

The second part of verse 2 tells us that darkness was on the face of the deep. The word darkness is *Strong's* #2822, *choshek*, which means darkness, dark, obscurity, and night. Figuratively, it can represent misery, destruction, death,

ignorance, sorrow, and even wickedness. But Isaiah 45:18 literally tells us the Lord, who formed the earth and made it, did not create it in vain. The word vain is the same word *tohu* that we read in Genesis 1:2 as void.

Also, Jeremiah 4, verse 23 tells us, if you could turn there, please.

Jeremiah 4:23 I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form, and void; and the heavens, they had no light.

It is the same construction that we see in Genesis 1:2, and here, it is referring to a prophecy of God's judgment on sinning Judah. The earth was not created this way, it became *tohu* and *bohu*. *The Pulpit Commentary* writes about this verse: "Without form and void means rather waste and wild or more literally, formless and lifeless."

God is not the author of confusion, and there should not be a controversy.

Think about the perfection that makes Him God. If you are the divine Creator, writing a book detailing the beginning of your magnificent creation's history and the commencement of your most ambitious plan ever, is this the way that you would start the story, in chaos, waste, and misery?

I think that Mr. Chalmers and Episcopius had it right. I am not a scientist, but I am sure that there are others who could provide us with a much more thorough explanation and support. It is not spelled out directly, but while it may be called the gap theory, there really is no controversy in the Scriptures. It is the only explanation that makes perfect sense.