

Chapter 3

What about gap theories?

- What is the ruin-reconstruction theory?
- Lucifer's flood?
- Is the 'soft gap' idea better?

AS shown last chapter, Bible scholars *who relied on the biblical text itself* consistently taught that the earth was about 6,000 years old. However, around the turn of the 19th century, the unbiblical *philosophy* of uniformitarianism¹ found its way into geology,² stretching history to millions of years, and theologians responded in different ways.

Nigel Cameron³ and Douglas Kelly⁴ have each documented the

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1. Uniformitarianism: the belief that the same processes at the same rates observed today applied from the beginning of everything right up till the present time. This philosophy denies miraculous Creation and the catastrophe of the Flood, for example, neither of which are observable today. See 2 Peter 3:3–7.
 2. Mortenson, T., 2004, Philosophical naturalism and the age of the earth: are they related? *The Master's Seminary Journal (TMSJ)* 15(1):71–92, <creation.com/naturalism-church>.
 3. Cameron, N.M.deS., 1983. *Evolution and the Authority of the Bible*, Paternoster, Exeter, Devon, UK.
 4. Kelly, D.F., 1997, *Creation and Change: Genesis 1:1–2:4 in the light of changing scientific paradigms*, Mentor (Christian Focus Publications), Ross-shire, UK.

change in Bible commentaries over this period. Before the rise of uniformitarianism, a straightforward view of Genesis was practically unanimous. Cameron and Kelly showed that many conservative commentators were intimidated by ‘science’ and it was only after the rise of this philosophy that they invented ways to add millions of years to the Bible. Since long ages were not even thought of by conservative Bible scholars before their acceptance by geologists, it is strong evidence that they are not in the biblical text at all.

The conservative theologians were trying to preserve scriptural authority this way, but in adopting this approach, they in effect placed science in authority over the Bible—replacing the biblical and Reformation teaching of *Sola Scriptura* with *Scriptura sub scientia* (Scripture alone with Scripture subservient to science)

In contrast to conservatives, liberal theologians⁵ saw no need to try to preserve biblical authority, so they had no need for the conservative's rationalizations. Rather, it suited their purpose that the ‘facts of science’ undermined the Bible. But they gave not the slightest credence to the compromise views, because they could see that such views didn’t line up with the grammar of Scripture. They could also point out that the compromise views were novelties not thought of before the rise of long-ages ‘science’.

Typical of such liberals was Marcus Dods (1834–1909), a Scottish theologian and author, who became Professor of New Testament Exegesis and then Principal of New College, Edinburgh. He wrote:

‘If, for example, the word “day” in these chapters does not mean a period of twenty-four hours, the interpretation of scripture is hopeless.’⁶

These considerations show that the relatively recent rise of the day-age theory and the framework hypothesis (Chapter 2) are reactions to ‘science’ rather than arising from sound exegesis (Bible interpretation).

Gap theories

Gap theorists accept that the days of the Creation Week had to be six normal-length creation days, but they also accept ‘deep time’ (up to billions of years). So instead of stretching the days (as the day-age theory does) or denying that they are days in history (framework

5. Those who regard the Bible as merely a human invention, not the Word of God.

6. Marcus Dods, 1907. *The Book of Genesis*, Armstrong, NY, p. 4.

hypothesis), they insert a gap between a supposed initial creation and the six days. The classical gap theory inserts the gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, and this gap includes a great flood catastrophe. After this, God supposedly re-created the earth in six normal-length days.

According to Weston Fields, author of the definitive anti-gap book *Unformed and Unfilled*,⁷ the traditional or classical gap theory can be summarized as follows:

‘In the far distant dateless past God created a perfect heaven and perfect earth. Satan was ruler of the earth which was peopled by a race of “men” without any souls. Eventually, Satan, who dwelled in a garden of Eden composed of minerals (Ezekiel 28), rebelled by desiring to become like God (Isaiah 14). Because of Satan’s fall, sin entered the universe and brought on the earth God’s judgment in the form of a flood (indicated by the water of 1:2), and then a global Ice Age when the light and heat from the sun were somehow removed. All the plant, animal, and human fossils upon the earth today date from this ‘Lucifer’s flood’ and do not bear any genetic relationship with the plants, animals and fossils living upon the earth today’

More recently, a new type of gap theory has appeared, sometimes called the ‘soft gap’. Its proponents realize the force of the argument in Chapter 2 that death is the result of Adam’s sin. So this gap theory has no ruin or reconstruction, and merely has long ages for the earth or the universe, or both, and yet the entire fossil record of death postdates the Fall. It is notable that soft gap theorists normally postulate their gap between Genesis 1:2 and 1:3, contrasting with the ruin-reconstruction gappists, who put it between verses 1 and 2. But if there is so clearly a gap, as both parties claim, why is there no agreement about where to put it?

Soft-gap advocate Gorman Gray⁸ claims,

‘Earth lay in total darkness ... for an undefined length of time before the first day until God began to clear the envelope of thick darkness’.⁹

According to Gray, the Creation Week begins with verse 3, with Earth’s first day of forming and filling the pre-existing matter.

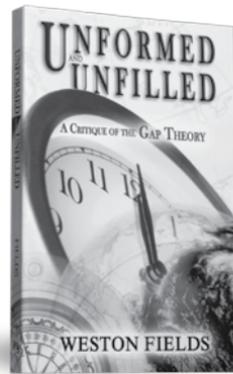
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7. Fields, W.W., 1976. *Unformed and Unfilled*, Burgener Enterprises, Collinsville, Illinois. In Ch. 8, Fields devastates the day-age view as well.
 8. Gray, G., 1997. *The Age of the Universe: What Are the Biblical Limits?* Morningstar Publications, Washougal, Washington.
 9. A biblical solution to starlight and other problems, <www.hal-pc.org/~tom/GGray.html>, 22 January 2004.

The classical gap theory

The idea of a gap of millions of years between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 was virtually unknown until Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847), founder of the Free Church of Scotland and popular evangelical preacher, started promoting it. As a very young pastor in 1804 (seven years before he became an evangelical) he startled his congregation by telling them that millions of years was compatible with Scripture. In response to Cuvier’s catastrophist theory in 1813, Chalmers began to argue against the day-age view and for the gap theory and persuaded many Christians.¹⁰ The idea of a gap was ‘canonized’ for some Christians when C.I. Scofield included it in the footnotes of the *Scofield Reference Bible* in 1909. Arthur Custance defended the gap theory in detail in *Without Form and Void*,¹¹ and Fields wrote *Unformed and Unfilled*⁷ largely to refute this.

But many gap theorists admit that their motivation (as it was for Chalmers) is to find a place in the Bible to fit millions of years. For example, the *Scofield Reference Bible* claims, with incredible wishful thinking:

‘Relegate fossils to the primitive creation, and no conflict of science with the Genesis cosmogony remains.’



Problems with the classical gap theory

The classical gap or ruin-reconstruction theory postulates a catastrophe between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2—the ‘ruin’—followed by the ‘reconstruction’ of the six-day creation. God originally created a perfect world, but then, in this gap, the anointed cherub fell to become Satan (meaning ‘adversary’), and God judged the world by a flood catastrophe, which formed most of the fossils. Thus, gappists translate

10. Compare ‘Chalmers, Thomas, D.D. (1780–1847)’ entry in Stephen, L. and Lee, S., eds., 1917. *Dictionary of National Biography* III:1358 (Oxford University Press) and Francis C. Haber, 1959. *The Age of the World: Moses to Darwin* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press), pp. 201–203.

11. Custance, A.C., 1970. *Without Form and Void*, self-published, Brookville, Canada.

Genesis 1:2 as ‘the earth *became* formless and void’. Then the six Days of Creation are said to be a re-creation of this fallen world.

But this fails on several grounds:¹²

1. Although the gap theory originated out of a desire to accommodate the millions of years of supposed geological time, only the most naïve would think it succeeds. Uniformitarian geologists reject the idea of *any* global Flood, whether the biblical Noah’s Flood, or the imagined ‘Lucifer’s Flood’ of the gap theory. The fossils supposedly formed over hundreds of millions of years, not rapidly as in a catastrophic flood (ruin). Students from Christian homes went to secular universities and found that the ‘gap theory’ made no sense with secular geology anyway, so they saw it for what it is—an ill-informed attempt to make the Bible fit secular science. And since their Christian leaders had effectively made ‘science’ authoritative over Scripture in this matter, many of these students took the next logical step: since ‘science’ says that dead men don’t rise, virgins don’t conceive, adultery and homosexual behaviour are natural, then ...
2. It postulates the fall of Satan and wholesale death and suffering in a world that God declared ‘very good’ in Genesis 1:31 (see Chapter 2) and thus undermines the doctrine of redemption and the need for Jesus’ death and resurrection.
3. It contradicts the Sabbath command of Exodus 20:8–11, which is

**The gap theory undermines the foundations
of the Gospel.**

based on the creation of the ‘heavens, earth, sea and everything in them’ in six ordinary days. In Old Testament Hebrew, the words ‘heaven(s) and earth’ form a figure of speech called a *merism*, in which two opposites are combined into an all-encompassing single concept.¹³ Throughout the Bible (e.g. Genesis 14:19, 22; 2 Kings 19:15; Psalm 121:2) this means the totality of creation, not just

12. Grigg, R., 1997. From the Beginning of Creation: Does Genesis have a Gap? *Creation* 19(2):35–38, <creation.com/gap>.

13. An English example is ‘open day and night’. This doesn’t simply mean during sunlight and darkness but not dusk; rather, ‘day and night’ means the whole 24-hour day-night cycle. Other examples are ‘high and low’, ‘far and near’ and ‘hill and dale’.

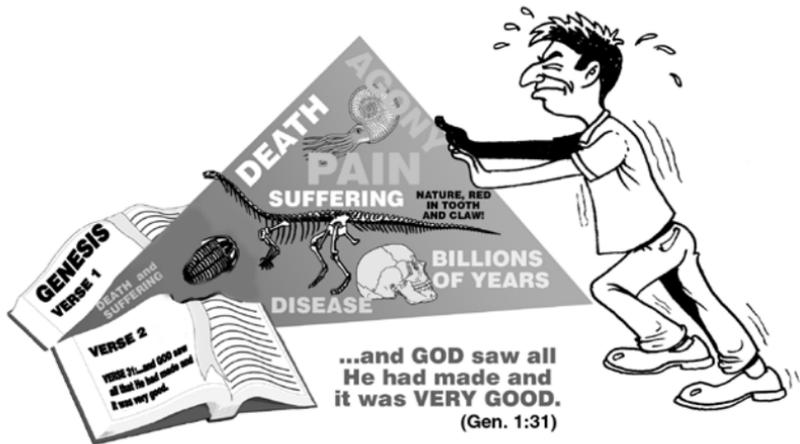


Image by Steve Cardino

Gap theorists, often unwittingly, put death and suffering before Creation week and the Fall.

the earth and its atmosphere, or our solar system alone. It is used because Hebrew has no word for ‘the universe’ and can at best say ‘the all’.¹⁴

4. ‘*Vav*’ (often rendered *waw*) is the name of the Hebrew letter ו which is used as a conjunction. It can mean ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘now’, ‘then’ and several other things depending upon the context. It occurs at the beginning of Genesis 1:2 and is translated in the KJV, ‘And [*vav*] the earth was without form, and void.’ Gappists use this translation to support the gap theory. However, the most straightforward reading of the text sees verse 1 of Genesis 1 as the principal subject-and-verb clause, with verse 2 containing three ‘circumstantial clauses’, meaning that they describe or explain the condition in verse 1. Hebrew grammarian Gesenius called this a ‘*vav explicativum*’, and compares it to the English ‘to wit’. Other grammarians have called it the *vav copulative* or *vav disjunctive* or *explanatory vav*.

A *vav* disjunctive is easy to tell from the Hebrew, because it is formed by *vav* followed by a non-verb. It introduces a parenthetic statement; that is, it alerts the reader to put the passage following in brackets, as it were—a descriptive phrase about the previous noun.

14. See Leupold, H.C., 1942. *Exposition of Genesis* 1:41, Baker Book House, Michigan, who cites similar usage in Jeremiah 10:16; Isaiah 44:24; Psalm 103:19, 119:91; and Ecclesiastes 11:5.

It does *not* indicate something following in a time sequence—this would have been indicated by a different Hebrew construction called the *vav consecutive*, where the *vav* is followed by a verb. (The *vav consecutive* is in fact used at the beginning of every day of creation—indeed, the beginning of every sentence. In some cases it is used in the middle of a sentence—from Genesis 1:3 through 2:3—which is strong evidence that this is all straightforward historical narrative).

5. It is grammatically impossible to translate the verb היה (*hayah*) as ‘became’ when it is combined with a *vav* disjunctive—in the rest of the Old Testament, *vav* + a noun + היה (*qal* perfect, 3rd person) is always translated, ‘was’ or ‘came’, but never ‘became’. Moreover the *qal* form of היה does not normally mean ‘became’, especially in the beginning of a text, where it usually gives the setting.¹⁵
6. Also, the correct Hebrew idiom for ‘become’ is to attach the verb ‘to be’ היה (*hayah*), e.g. ‘was’, to the preposition ‘to’ (Hebrew ל *le*). The verb ‘to be’ does NOT mean ‘become’ without this preposition. Since Genesis 1:2 lacks the preposition, it *cannot* mean ‘became’.

The gap theory imposes an interpretation upon Genesis 1:1-2 which is unnatural, and grammatically unsound.

7. The Hebrew phrase *tohu va bohu* (תהו ובהו), translated ‘without form and void’ in Genesis 1:2, is claimed by gap theorists to indicate a judgmental destruction rather than something in the process of being built. But *tohu* occurs several times in the Bible in which it is used in a morally neutral state, describing something unfinished, and not yet organized, but not necessarily evil. Hebrew scholars and the church have for centuries taken the view that Genesis 1:2 is not a scene of judgment or an evil state created by the fall of angels, but a description of the earth in its undeveloped state. The plain and simple meaning of what Moses says is that on the first day there was a mass covered by water, with no dry land involving features such as hills (*tohu* = ‘unformed’), and no inhabitants yet (*bohu* = ‘unfilled’). The following verses simply describe the forming and filling.

15. den Exter Blokland, A.F., 1995. *In Search of Text Syntax: Towards a Syntactic Text Segmentation Model for Biblical Hebrew*, Applicatio, 14, VU University Press: Amsterdam, p. 52.

8. *Bara* (ברא) and *asah* (עשה) (create and make). Gap theorists overstate the distinction between these words, claiming that *bara* refers only to God’s creating out of nothing and *asah* refers to shaping something out of pre-existent material. This is an exegetical fallacy that evangelical New Testament scholar Dr Don Carson called ‘Unwarranted semantic disjunction or restriction.’¹⁶

As in English, there is considerable semantic overlap between ‘create’ and ‘make’. Sometimes *asah* is used to mean ‘create *ex nihilo*’, e.g. Nehemiah 9:6

You alone are the LORD. You made (asah) the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.



God created **everything** in six days. (Exodus 20:8-11)

Indeed, the two words are often used interchangeably in the O.T., sometimes even in synonymous parallelism, e.g. Isaiah 43:7, *Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created (bara) for my glory, whom I formed (yatsar יצר) and made (asah).*

See also Genesis 1:26–27.

9. Some have attempted to use Jeremiah 4:23 to teach the gap theory, because it uses the same phrase, *tohu va bohu*, to describe the results of a judgment. Gap theorists like Arthur Custance used this to assert that ‘without form and void’ must mean ‘laid waste by a judgment’—so that use of these words in Genesis 1:2 must mean that the earth suffered a judgment. But this is fallacious—there is nothing in the Hebrew words *tohu va bohu* themselves to suggest that. The only reason they refer to being ‘laid waste’ is due to the context in which the phrase is found in Jeremiah 4. The

16. Carson, D.A., 1996. *Exegetical Fallacies*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 2nd Ed., p. 55.

words simply mean ‘unformed and unfilled’. This state can be due either to nothing else having been created, or some created things having been removed. The context of Jeremiah 4 is a prophecy of the Babylonians attacking Jerusalem, not creation. In fact, Jeremiah 4:23 is known as a literary allusion to Genesis 1:2—the judgment would be so severe that it would leave the final state as empty as the earth before God formed and filled it.

An analogy might help here. When you open your word processor program, your document screen is blank. But if you delete an entire document, the screen would likewise be blank. So ‘blank’ means ‘free from any text’. In some situations, the lack of text is because you haven’t written anything, in others it is due to a deletion of text. One would need to know the context to tell which—one couldn’t tell from the word ‘blank’ itself. However, a gappist-type analysis of the word might conclude, “‘blank’ can refer to a screen with all the text deleted, so the word ‘blank’ itself signifies a text deletion event, even when none is stated.’

This is in line with the common biblical principle where a judgment is a *reversal of creation*. Jeremiah 4:23 is taking the land back to its unformed state, unfit for man to live in. Similarly, the Flood took the world back to its condition on Day 2, before the land and water had separated.

This argument for the gap theory also violates the principle of God’s progressive revelation in Scripture. Later texts presuppose the prior revelation of earlier texts, not vice versa. Therefore, Jeremiah 4:23



If ‘Lucifer’s flood’ created this, then what did Noah’s Flood do?

cannot be used to interpret Genesis 1:2 as a judgment—that would be completely back-to-front, because an allusion works only one way.

10. Gap theorists often rely on the English word ‘replenish’ in the KJV translation of Genesis 1:28 (‘... *and God said unto them, be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth*’), since this word today often means ‘refill’. But the original Hebrew means ‘fill’ *not* ‘refill’. Linguist Dr Charles Taylor writes, ‘As translated in 1611, it (“replenish”) was merely a parallel to “fill”, and the prefix “re-” didn’t mean “again”, but “completely”.¹⁷ The same Hebrew word *mālē* is used in Genesis 1:22, and is there translated “fill (the seas)”, so there was no need to translate it differently in verse 28.’

Soft gap problems

While the soft gap tries to avoid the problems involving death and suffering before sin, many problems remain. By far the most important one is *authority*, as previously pointed out. The web promotion for Gorman Gray’s book claims, ‘Light from distant galaxies, isotope dating and other riddles are solved.’ Distant starlight and isotope dating supposedly ‘prove’ billions of years of ‘deep time’, and Gray claims that he has the solution.

The web promo also says, ‘Unique interpretive devices force the issue to a showdown in this controversial but insightful treatise.’ If we are to accept the author’s claims, for thousands of years readers of Genesis have apparently been in the dark as to its true meaning. Even great Bible scholars such as Basil, Luther, Calvin, John Gill, Matthew Henry and others, missed seeing it. But now, finally, Mr Gray has enlightened us with his unique (‘only one of its kind’) understanding of what Genesis really means. This is a hugely presumptuous claim, and really an admission that ‘science’ has been made the authority over the text, just like all the other failed attempts at harmonizing.

1. Did the heavenly bodies merely appear on Day 4?

One problem with all these reinterpretations is that Genesis 1 says that God *made* the sun, moon and stars on Day 4 of the Creation Week (1:14–19). Some, including Gray, try to get around this clear teaching by proposing that the sun, moon and stars merely *appeared*, on Day 4

17. Taylor, C., 1996. What does ‘replenish the earth’ mean? *Creation* 18(2):44–45, <creation.com/replenish>.

(but who was there, on the earth, to see it?). Gray says:

‘On Day Four, God cleared the translucent blanket of obscuring cloud to transparency. ... Day Four has nothing to do with the creation of sun, moon and stars but only initiating their function as seasonal markers by clearing the atmosphere to transparency’.

To justify this, Gray claims that the Hebrew word used for God making (Heb. עָשָׂה *asah*) things can mean almost anything, including uncovering something.

However, the land animals were ‘made’ (*asah*, v. 25), as was the sky (v. 6–8) and no-one interprets these passages to mean that they were merely revealed, having been created at some earlier time. Furthermore, Hebrew has a word for ‘appear’, רָאָה *ra’ah*, used in Genesis 1:9 where God said, ‘Let the dry land appear (*ra’ah*)’ (from under the water). God could have inspired the writer of His Holy Word to use this word regarding the sun, moon and stars, if they were only caused to appear (from behind the cloud). But He did not.

2. Does Exodus 20:11 really refer to the whole universe?

Gray proposes a novel translation:

‘For six days God worked on the atmosphere and the land, the seas and all their hosts ...’

To justify this, Gray argues that the merism of ‘the heavens and the earth’ (meaning the universe) is ‘broken’, by the addition of ‘and the seas’. Thus he justifies restricting heavens to merely the atmosphere, so he can have billions of years for other parts of the universe (stars, galaxies, etc.).

However, the merism is hardly ‘broken’; rather, it is *emphasized*. Even in English, we can say, ‘he worked day and night, even during coffee breaks’, or ‘she looked high and low, even in the kitchen sink’.¹⁸

3. The soft gap creates new problems of its own

The soft gap, like the older gap idea, does not solve anything anyway. Using igneous inclusions, geologists date rocks that contain fossils using the very same dating techniques used for meteorites, the moon, or rocks without fossils. So if one believes the dating for the age of the

18. See also DeRemer, F., 2005. Young biosphere, old universe? A review of Gray, Ref. 8, *Journal of Creation* 19(2):51–57.

rocks of the earth, as the soft gap proposes, then logically one should also accept it for the age of the fossils buried in those rocks. That then makes fossils millions of years old, older than Adam and Eve, and we now have death and corruption before the Fall—just what the soft gap was trying to avoid!

Also, if we accept such ‘dating’, then the sedimentary rocks laid down by water all around the world actually formed over hundreds of millions of years, not during the year of Noah’s Flood. Thus, the abundant evidence for the global Flood of Noah evaporates—this leads logically to a tranquil flood, an absurdity, or no flood at all. Everything unravels—it’s another slippery slide to unbelief.¹⁹

Conclusion

Compromise on the first chapter of Genesis, as explained in this Chapter and Chapter 2, has caused enormous damage to the church. After all, if we can’t trust the first chapter of Genesis to mean what it so plainly says, why should we trust the rest of the Bible? And if the first Adam didn’t really bring physical death to a previously deathless world, then why did the Last Adam have to die physically? (See 1 Corinthians 15:21–22.) Or if we should ‘reinterpret’ Genesis to fit secular science, why not do the same with the other miracles, and the passages that offend secular morality?

Gap theories have arisen in response to the obvious clash between the long-age interpretations prevalent in the culture of the day and the straightforward implications of the biblical text. But ‘gap’ solutions have massive textual and scientific problems, much greater than the ones that they purport to solve.

Even though their inventors may have had good motivations, such notions still seriously compromise the authority of the Bible, even if unintentionally.



19. See Batten, D., 2004. ‘Soft’ gap sophistry, *Creation* 26(3):44–47, <creation.com/softgap>.

The classical gap theory caused much of Christendom to 'fall asleep on its watch', comforted by the mistaken belief that the scientific problems of uniformitarian geology had been solved for the believer. This left a generation of students to face evolutionary teaching unprepared and defenceless, in effect. Today, as more of the public is educated in such areas, one finds the gap theory (apart from the occasional flirting with new versions like the soft gap) generally 'dying out' as an interpretive framework.

**The gap theory anesthetized the church for over
one hundred years.**