

# Abounding Grace Christian Church

## A Look at Creation – Part 4

**I. Introduction:** In this lesson, we are going to begin to examine two “Old Earth Creationist” views. We’re going to begin by looking at a view of creation which was very popular during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries but is not accepted by most scholars today. This view is called “The Gap Theory” or “The Ruin-Restoration Theory.”

### II. History of the Gap Theory.

A. The gap theory shows up in the work of a Scottish theologian by the name of Thomas Chalmers, who proposed it in 1814. It became popularized by G. H. Pember, who was a part of the Plymouth Brethren movement, in his book *Earth’s Earliest Ages* in 1876. After Pember, the gap theory made its way into the *Scofield Reference Bible* (first published in 1909) which made it even more popular and became quite orthodox in many circles. In 1949, *God’s Plan for Man*, by Finis Dake was published which continued to popularize the theory, especially amongst Pentecostals. Then Finis Dake continued teaching it in *Dake’s Annotated Reference Bible*, first published in 1963. Amongst the Presbyterians, Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse included the teaching in his book, *The Invisible War*, published in 1981. The book touted as being the most scholarly is entitled *Without Form and Void* by Arthur Custance, first published in 1970.

**III. What is the Gap Theory (Ruin-Restoration Theory)?** This theory proposes that there was a time gap between the first two verses of Genesis 1 before God restored creation in six 24 hour days. This gap in time could have been millions or billions of years. If this is true, then it helps to reconcile the scientific evidence of an ancient Earth and a literal reading of the literal six, 24 hour day creation, albeit a re-creation.

### IV. The most common teaching of The Gap Theory is as follows:

- A. The first verse of **Genesis 1**, states that God created the heavens and the earth. **Verse 2** states, “**The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep...**” The words “**without form**” (Hebrew: *tohu*) mean; “**formlessness, emptiness, vacuum.**”<sup>1</sup> The word “**void**” (Hebrew: *bohu*) means; **waste, emptiness. Always occurring with tōhû “waste”, bōhû describes the primordial condition of the earth, “void” at the beginning of creation**<sup>2</sup>
- B. In **Isaiah 45:18**, the Scripture states; “**For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: ‘I am the LORD, and there is no other.’**” In this passage, it says that God did not create the earth “...in vain...”. The word “**vain**” here is the same Hebrew word *tohu* (“**formlessness, emptiness, vacuum.**”)<sup>3</sup> So, the argument is, if the Lord didn’t create the earth formless and empty (**Genesis 1:1**), yet it’s said to be formless and empty in **Genesis 1:2**, there must have been an interval of time where the earth went from not being, to being. In addition, something must have happened to bring about this condition. Concerning this passage, Kevin J. Conner writes:

**“The language certainly links up with Genesis. The Lord is the One who created the heavens and the earth. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Then Isaiah says that the Lord God formed the earth and made it and established it. He did not create it ‘in vain’. It is the same Hebrew thought as in Genesis. The earth was ‘without form and void’, but God did not create it that way. It became that way. Something must have taken place. Something must have happened to bring about this condition.”<sup>4</sup>**

- C. In **Jeremiah 4:23-26** there is a phrase connecting it to **Genesis 1:2**. From this passage, this theory proposes that there must have been wildlife (“...all the birds of the heavens had fled” v. 25), and there must have been some kind of civilizations (“...all its cities were broken down...” v. 26),

<sup>1</sup> Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 1062.

<sup>2</sup> Elmer A. Martens, “205 ברה” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 92.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1062.

<sup>4</sup> Kevin J. Conner, *Restoration Theology*, (Victoria, Australia: KJC Publications, 1998), 21.

which existed between **Genesis 1:1-2**. In referring to this passage, Finis Dake writes:

**“The passage is all in the past tense and therefore should be understood to mean a past judgment unless stated otherwise in this passage, or in some other Scripture on the same subject. Since it cannot refer to the flood of Noah, it must refer to a judgment before the days of Adam, and since it is in perfect harmony with Gen. 1:2, we naturally understand it as referring to that time. If it does refer to that time, then it proves there were inhabitants and animals on Earth before the six days and the time of Adam.”**<sup>5</sup>

D. To reinforce the idea of a time gap, adherents consider the word **“was”** in **Genesis 1:2**. They point out that it should have, or could have been, translated as **“became.”** So, putting it together, it is translated, **“The earth became without form and void...”**. The word translated **“was”** means; **“to be, become, exist, happen.”**<sup>6</sup>

E. Another verse often used to substantiate this view is found in **Genesis 1:28** where the King James Version records that God told Adam and Eve to **“replenish”** the earth.

F. Gap Theory adherents believe that there was a cataclysmic event due to the judgment of God which happened between verses 1 and 2 which resulted in the earth being **“ruined”** and in need of **“restoration”**, thus, the naming of it as the **“Ruin-Restoration Theory.”** It is believed that God gave His archangel, Lucifer, rule over planet earth. It is further believed that when Lucifer rebelled against God, he influenced those subject to him and, therefore, God judged the entire earth and its inhabitants. **(See Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:11-19; Luke 10:18).** G.H. Pember wrote:

**“If so, we can easily discover the outline of Satan’s pre-adamite world...So, probably, in remote ages, before the first whisper of rebellion against God, Satan, as the great governing head and the viceroy of the Almighty, assisted by glorious beings of his own nature, ruled over the sinless dwellers upon earth. At the same time he directed the worship of his subjects, and expounded to them the oracles of the all-wise Creator. But his weight of glory was more than he could bear: pride lifted up his heart and he fell from his obedience. Then, doubtless, corruption, appeared among his angels, and so descended to those who were in the flesh.”**<sup>7</sup>

G. Often you may hear someone refer to **“Lucifer’s Flood.”** In **Genesis 1:2** the phrase, **“...and darkness was on the face of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”**, gives us the idea that the earth is flooded.

## **V. This Theory has some Positive Aspects.**

A. It gives a possible explanation for the scientific age of the earth including the existence of dinosaurs prior to the judgment of Genesis 2 and the existence of fossils.

B. It retains the doctrine of six literal 24 hour days of **Genesis 1:3-31**.

C. It gives an explanation as to why Satan is still called the **“god (or ruler) of this world”** **(II Corinthians 4:4)** and why he is still allowed to remain on planet earth.

D. It possibly explains where demonic spirits came from if indeed they are disembodied spirits from a pre-adamic race, or they are the spirit beings who were under Lucifer’s rule on earth.

## **VI. Criticisms of this Creation Theory.**

A. There are no clear Scriptures that explicitly state that there was a gap between **Genesis 1:1-2**.

B. Though the word **“was”** in **verse 2** can be translated as **“became”**, the Hebrew in that context does not seem to allow for it. Dr. Robert Utley writes:

**“The earth was’ This VERB can only very rarely be translated ‘became.’ Grammatically and contextually ‘was’ is preferable.”**<sup>8</sup>

C. The gap theory claims animal death, suffering, and fossilization prior to Adam’s sin, seemingly contradicting **Romans 5:12**, which attributes death’s entrance to the fall of man.

D. There are too many assumptions and not enough Scripture to back up many of the claims.

<sup>5</sup> Finis Jennings Dake, *God’s Plan for Man*, n.d., 123–124.

<sup>6</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, “491 הָיָה,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 213.

<sup>7</sup> G.H. Pember, *Earth’s Earliest Ages*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publishing, Reprint 1982), 55.

<sup>8</sup> Robert James Utley, *How It All Began: Genesis 1–11*, vol. Vol. 1A, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International, 2001), 21.