

Abounding Grace Christian Church

A Look at Creation – Part 5

I. Introduction: In this lesson, we are going to begin to examine the second of the two “**Old Earth Creationist**” views which we have chosen to examine. We’re going to look at what is referred to as the “**Day-Age Theory of Creation**” (Sometimes referred to as “**Progressive Creationism.**”¹)

II. Basic Beliefs of the Day-Age Theory.

- A. Proponents believe the Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God and believe the Genesis creation account to be historical narrative—not myth, allegory, legend or poetic expression.
- B. This is the belief that the “**days**” spoken of in the first chapter of Genesis are consecutive periods and not literal, 24-hour days. Each day, therefore, is thought to represent a much longer, yet undefined, period of time, such as a million or more years. This theory is in an effort to harmonize our understanding of the Bible with what appears to be overwhelming scientific evidence of an old earth. The foremost proponent of this view is astrophysicist, Dr. Hugh Ross. He states:

“For some Christians (young-earth adherents), a ‘day’ of creation means a literal 24-hour day. The creation week described in Genesis is interpreted by them to consist of six days – a total of 144 hours. For other Christians (old-earth proponents), ‘day’ equates to six long periods of time – ages or epochs that encompass thousands or millions of years each.”²

- C. God miraculously created the universe from nothing (ex nihilo), by His decree.
- D. The age of the earth has no bearing on the creation of life. An ancient earth does not equate with Darwinian evolution.
- E. Darwinian evolution is unbiblical and unscientific. Old-earth creationists adamantly reject it.
- F. God miraculously created Adam and Eve, humanity’s historical parents, who were new distinct creatures from whom humanity’s sin originated.

III. The Meaning of the word “Day.”

- A. Biblical Hebrew has a very limited vocabulary (approximately 3,100 words) compared to the English vocabulary (estimated to be 1,000,000 words). Hebrew words often have several literal meanings. Ancient Hebrew scholars acknowledge the Hebrew word **yôm** (translated “**day**” in English) has several literal meanings: a period of daylight, 12-hour day, 24-hour day, a period of time of unspecified length or duration, and an epoch of time. Unlike English, the ancient Hebrew language didn’t have adequate words to use for a long period of time other than the word, **yôm**. An example

of

the word “**day**” being used for a period of time is found in **Genesis 2:4** which reads; “**This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.**” Hebrew linguist Gleason Archer writes,

“Nevertheless, on the basis of internal evidence, it is this writer’s conviction that *yôm* in Gen. 1 could not have been intended by the Hebrew author to mean a literal twenty-four-hour day”³

- B. There are other Scholars who support the idea that the interpretation of “**day**” in **Genesis 1** can be an extended period of time.

1. Dr. Norman Geisler writes:

“There are many indications in the text of Scripture to support the belief that the creation ‘days’ were longer than twenty-four hours...Returning to word meanings, it should be noted how *yom* is used in the Bible. The word sometimes means a *prophetic day*, a significant future time as in ‘the day of the Lord’ (Joel 2:31; cf. 2 Peter 3:10). As noted above, ‘A day is as a thousand years’ in Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8. And in Genesis 2:4 the word summarizes the entire creation. This indicates a broad meaning of the word *yom* in the Bible that parallels the range of meaning for the English *day*.”⁴

¹ Considered a variation of the Day-Age Theory according to Adam Harwood, *Christian Theology*, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022), 211.

² Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), 11.

³ Gleason Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 3rd. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 199.

⁴ Norman L. Geisler, “Genesis, Days Of,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 271.

2. Dr. Wayne Grudem writes:

“In favor of viewing the six days as long periods of time is the fact that the Hebrew word **דַּי** H3427, ‘day,’ is sometimes used to refer not to a twenty-four-hour literal day, but to a longer period of time. We see this when the word is used in Genesis 2:4, for example: ‘In the *day* that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,’ a phrase that refers to the entire creative work of the six days of creation. Other examples of the word *day* to mean a period of time are Job 20:28 (‘the *day* of God’s wrath’); Psalm 20:1 (‘The LORD answer you in the *day* of trouble!’); Proverbs 11:4 (‘Riches do not profit in the *day* of wrath’); 21:31 (‘The horse is made ready for the *day* of battle’); 24:10 (‘If you faint in the *day* of adversity, your strength is small’); 25:13 (‘the *time* [דַּי] of harvest’); Ecclesiastes 7:14 (‘In the *day* of prosperity be joyful, and in the *day* of adversity consider; God has made the one as well as the other’); many passages referring to ‘the *day* of the LORD’ (such as Isa. 2:12; 13:6, 9; Joel 1:15; 2:1; Zeph. 1:14); and many other Old Testament passages predicting times of judgment or blessing. A concordance will show that this is a frequent sense for the word *day* in the Old Testament”⁵

IV. Some Positive Aspects of Old Earth Creationism.

- A. Allows Christians to accept the scientific consensus on the age of the Earth (about 4.5 billion years) and the universe (about 13.8 billion years) and still maintain a high view of Scripture. This avoids the need to reject scientific findings.
- B. It has helped those within the scientific community to see that there is an alternative to interpreting the Genesis creation account, which sometimes makes them open to the Gospel and receiving Jesus Christ as Lord.

V. Some Objections to Old Earth Creationism.

- A. “The primary difficulty with this view is that the predominant meaning of *yôm*, the Hebrew word for ‘day,’ is a 24-hour day (the word has this meaning 2,239 out of 2,304 occurrences, or 97 percent of the time).”⁶
- B. Opponents will argue that this theory undermines the authority of Scripture and places science, which has been often proven as fallible, equal to or above the Word of God. They sometimes quote Hugh Ross who wrote:

“So, God’s revelation is not limited exclusively to the Bible’s words. The facts of nature may be likened to a sixty-seventh book of the Bible.”⁷

- C. The implication that disease, suffering, and death must have existed before the fall of man. Scripture clearly indicates that “**sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin**” (Romans 5:12). Day-Age creationists would agree there was no human death prior to Adam’s sin.
- D. In Exodus 20:11, God says He made the heavens and the earth “**in six days.**” The Hebrew word *yammin* here is also a 24-hour day. If the creation days were long ages, why would God use them as an example for the Sabbath, which is a 24-hour rest?
- E. In Mark 10:6, Jesus says Adam and Eve were made “**from the beginning of creation.**” If the creation week were millions or billions of years long, Adam and Eve would not be “**from the beginning**” but from a later point in that long period.
- F. There are many assumptions without adequate proof.

VI. In Conclusion.

A. Regarding the “**days**” of Genesis, consider the following statement from Wayne Grudem: “**What shall we conclude about the length of days in Genesis 1? It does not seem at all easy to decide with the information we now have. It is not simply a question of ‘believing the Bible’ or ‘not believing the Bible,’ nor is it a question of ‘giving in to modern science’ or ‘rejecting the clear conclusions of modern science.’ Even for those who believe in the complete truthfulness of Scripture (such as the present author), and who retain some doubt about the exceptionally long periods of time scientists propose for the age of the earth (such as the present author), the question does not seem to be easy to decide.**”⁸

Gap Theory Interpretation

⁵ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 293–294.

⁶ *Dictionary of Christianity and Science*, Paul Copan, Tremper Longman III, Christopher L. Reese, and Michael G. Strauss, Gen. Editors (Grand Rapids, MI: Harpers Collins Publishers, 2017).

⁷ Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994), 56.

⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* 297.

Gap Theory is also called the **Ruin-Restitution Theory** or the **Recreation View**. As the name suggests, this view holds that there is a gap of time between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2. How much time transpired? Scripture doesn't say, but most gap theorists agree with the standard ages of the universe and the Planet Earth. During this gap of time, the Earth "became" formless and void. Gap theorists often claim that this was a divine judgment—perhaps caused by the fall of Satan. Genesis 1:3 and following describe God's *recreation* of the world (or perhaps a local region).

The Scottish theologian Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) popularized the Gap Theory in the 1800's. Later, C.I. Scofield further popularized this view in his *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909), and it became the most popular view among evangelicals during this time.

Arthur Custance—a PhD in anthropology and an MA in Middle Eastern languages—is probably the most able defender of the Gap Theory. Others proponents include J. Vernon McGee, A. G. Tilney, Steven E. Dill, G. H. Pember, Arthur Pink, Harry Rimmer, Robert Saucy, and Gorman Gray.

Francis Schaeffer wrote that this view was a "possibility" and "a hypothesis." Nevertheless, writes Schaeffer, it remains a "theoretical possibility, and that is all I am setting forth." C.S. Lewis' science fiction books *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra* give the idea that Satan ruled Earth before humans. After Satan's revolt, this led to the Earth becoming perverted and a "silent planet." Even those who reject the theory like James M. Boice still write that interpreters "often dismiss it too easily, without adequate attention to the biblical data on which the gap theorists built. This theory may be wrong, but it is not possible to dismiss it cavalierly." And later he writes that the arguments for the gap theory "have not been taken seriously enough by those who oppose the theory."

Others hold to what has been called a "**soft gap theory**." This view doesn't state that the Earth was destroyed—only that an indeterminate gap exists between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. C. John Collins, John Sailhamer, and John Lennox do not affirm the traditional gap theory, but they do see a gap between verses 1 and 2 of Genesis.

How does the Gap Theory support this view?

Gap Theory teaches that there is an unspecified gap of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2

(Gen. 1:1) "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

The Gap Theory agrees with other interpreters that this refers to the creation of the material universe. They would also agree with the modern scientific consensus that this occurred 13.7 billion years ago.

(Gen. 1:2) "The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters."

Gaps are common in the OT (e.g. Zech. 9:9-10; Isa. 9:6; 11:1-5), and the Gap Theory contends that one exists here. However, wherever gaps exist, the interpreter bears the burden of proof to demonstrate this. Proponents of this view give several arguments.

First, virtually all interpreters recognize that verses 1-2 are separate from the rest of Genesis 1. The "days" of Genesis and the *waw*-consecutive do not begin until verse 3, so these two verses are clearly before the creation week. How much time elapsed between verses 1-2 and the rest of the

chapter? The text doesn't say. This is why "soft gap theorists" allow for a gap of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. Traditional gap theorists go further than this, offering evidence that the planet came under judgment during this time.

Second, all interpreters agree that Genesis does not give an exhaustive account of creation. After all, God created hundreds of millions of angels during the creation of the world (Job 38:7), but this entire species of spiritual beings never appear in Genesis 1-2. Yet, they do appear rather suddenly in Genesis 3:24 ("**cherubim**"). Moreover, Satan himself appears abruptly in the text with no mention as to when he was created (Gen. 3:1ff; [Ezek. 28:12ff](#)).

Third, all interpreters agree that a gap exists in the creation of the first humans. On an initial reading, Genesis 1:27 seems to state that God created humans at the same time ("male and female"). Yet later, Genesis 2:7-22 shows that an indeterminate gap of time existed between the creation of the original human couple.

Fourth, grammatically, Genesis 1:2 could be rendered, "But the earth became formless and void." In the Masoretic Text (MT), there is small scribal marker after Genesis 1:1 called a *rebia* (a disjunctive accent, rather than a conjunctive accent). This could render the conjunction as "but," rather than "and." Thus Genesis 1:2 would read, "**But the earth was formless and void...**" Edward J. Young writes, "It is true that the second verse of Genesis does not represent a continuation of the narrative of verse 1, but as it were, a new beginning. Grammatically, it is not to be construed with the preceding, but with what follows." In other words, the conjunction explains the command of verse 3, because the *waw*-consecutive is used to begin verse 3.

The Hebrew word "**was**" (*hāyâ*) could also be rendered "to be, become, exist, happen." Grammatically, it's possible to translate Genesis 1:2 as the earth "*became* formless and void" (see note in the NIV 1984). It's also possible to translate the verb as pluperfect, which would state, "**But the earth had become...**" (Parallel examples occur in Gen. 3:20; 37:20).

Critics of the Gap Theory state that the translation "**became**" is faulty. For instance, Henri Blocher writes, "The translation 'And the earth became' takes inadmissible liberties with the Hebrew grammar... Only in defiance of philology may the pseudo-translation 'the earth became' act as the basis of the theory." Weston Fields calls this "grammatically impossible." However, other Hebraists—even those who disagree with the Gap Theory—believe that this is a *possible* (albeit *unlikely*) rendering of the Hebrew "to be." Most importantly, don't miss the forest for the trees: The Gap Theory does not depend on this translation, because other arguments demonstrate a gap. The Gap Theory does *not* depend on the translation of this one Hebrew word.

Arthur Custance states that this interpretation of Genesis 1:2 is an ancient view, even citing 2nd century Jewish rabbinical sources. Regarding Genesis 1:2, Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown write that this could be rendered "confusion and emptiness," citing Isaiah 34:11. They write, "This globe, at some undescribed period, having been convulsed and broken up, was a dark and watery waste for ages perhaps, till out of this chaotic state, the present fabric of the world was made to arise."

Gap Theory teaches that Genesis 1:2 describes a previous creation in ruins and under God's judgment

(Gen. 1:2) “The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.”

The prophets use the expression “**formless and void**” (*tohu wabōhū*) to refer to judgment and destruction in the rest of the Bible. Jeremiah writes, “My people are **foolish**, they **know Me not**; they are **stupid children** and have **no understanding**. They are shrewd to do **evil**, but to do good they do not know.²³ I looked on the earth, and behold, it was **formless and void [tohu wabōhū]**; and to the heavens, and they had no light” (Jer. 4:22-23; cf. Isa. 34:10-11). Jeremiah connects the evil of the people with the earth (or land) being “**formless and void**” (i.e. under judgment). According to Gap Theory, this would imply that Genesis 1:2 describes a world under judgment and in need of recreation.

Furthermore, the OT often uses the term “**darkness**” to refer to judgment (Ex. 10:21), death (Ps. 88:13), oppression (Isa. 9:1), and wickedness (1 Sam. 2:9; Isa. 45:7). Even in Genesis 1, God calls the light “good,” but he doesn’t call the darkness good.

Critics of the Gap Theory retort that this is reading too much into the text. God calls the darkness “night,” which doesn’t carry negative connotations (Gen. 1:5, 14, 16, 18).

(Isa. 45:18) “[The Lord] created the heavens (He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create it a waste place [tōhū], but formed it to be inhabited).”

The Gap Theory notices that Genesis 1 teaches that God *did* create the world formless (*tōhū*), contrary to Isaiah’s statement. Thus, they argue that this could be commentary on the original creation not being formless, but rather, becoming this way after some sort of judgment event.

Critics of the Gap Theory again argue that this is reading too much into this text. Isaiah 45 simply states that God did not create the world to be a waste place, and God continued in the process of creating the world.

(2 Cor. 4:6) “Light shall shine out of darkness.”

Paul cites Genesis 1:3, and he states that God brings light (i.e. goodness) out of our darkened hearts (i.e. evil). If Genesis 1:3 is analogous, then Paul is stating that the “**darkness**” of Genesis 1:2 refers to a sinful, evil existence.

(Heb. 11:3) “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.”

The word “**prepared**” (*katartizō*) could be rendered “put in order again” or “restored.” The NT uses the term to refer to “repairing” fishing nets (Mt. 4:21; Mk. 1:19), or how believers are being “perfected” by suffering (1 Pet. 5:10; cf. Gal. 6:1). Thus, according to Gap Theory, the author of Hebrews would be saying that God repaired the world of Genesis 1:2 after a fallen state.

(2 Pet. 3:5-6) “By the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water,⁶ through which the world *at that time* was destroyed, being flooded with water.”

When Peter writes, “**At that time...**” gap theorists note that the context refers to “the beginning of *creation*” (2 Pet. 3:4), not the Flood. Thus, they argue that this is a reference to the destruction or judgment recorded in Genesis 1:2. This would also fit with the world being covered with water in Genesis 1:2 (“the surface of the *waters*”).

Critics of the Gap Theory argue that the only flood Peter mentions in his letters is Noah’s flood (1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5).

Every interpreter must agree that some sort of moral fall occurred before Adam and Eve, because Satan is already in a fallen state by Genesis 3. Thus the question isn’t *whether* a Fall occurred, but rather, *when* it occurred. Since Scripture places Satan’s Fall in the Garden ([Ezek. 28:11ff](#)), this might have occurred long before the first humans were created.

Gap Theory teaches that a fall may have occurred before Genesis 1:2, and the rest of Genesis 1 details the recreation of the Planet Earth

Many gap theorists associate this destruction and judgment with the fall of Satan. Since Satan is so central to the story of the Bible, his fall would potentially wreak havoc on the Planet Earth. Harry Rimmer writes,

The original creation of the heaven and the earth, then, is covered in the first verse of Genesis. Only God knows how many ages rolled by before the ruin wrought by Lucifer fell upon the earth, but it may have been an incalculable span of time. Nor can any students say how long the period of chaos lasted; there is not even a hint given. But let us clearly recognize in these studies that Moses, in the record of the first week of creation, is telling the story of God’s reconstruction; rather than the story of an original creation.

If this theory is true, then there is no conflict between science and scripture, because the two are describing two entirely separate eras of history. Antecedent hominins in the fossil record would have existed before the gap, and under this view, the Bible simply doesn’t speak to this. Arthur Pink writes, “The unknown interval between the first two verses of Genesis 1, is wide enough to embrace all the prehistoric ages which may have elapsed; but all that took place from Genesis 1:3 onwards transpired less than six thousand years ago.” G.H. Pember (rightly) remains more agnostic on how much time elapsed between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, when he writes,

*It is thus clear that the second verse of Genesis describes the earth as a ruin; **but there is no hint of the time which elapsed between creation and this ruin...** There is room for any length of time between the first and second verses of the Bible. And again, since we have no inspired account of the geological formations, we are at liberty to believe that they were developed just in the order in which we find them. The whole process took place in preadamite times, in connection, perhaps, with another race of beings, and, **consequently, does not at present concern us.***

The strength of the Gap Theory comes from its lack of articulating specific historical events. As Pember rightly notes, we do not know what happened during this time before Genesis 1:3, and it’s wise to avoid wild speculation about what we are not told.

Critique of the Gap Theory

First, there is very little scriptural support for this view. Critics of the Gap Theory argue that we should have more evidence for this view if it is true. However, advocates of the Gap Theory retort that this era of history has nothing to do with us. The Bible explains information to us on “a need-to-know basis,” and apparently, God didn’t feel it was necessary for us to know about this epoch of history. As Pember noted, this era before Genesis 1:2 “does not at present concern us.”

Second, the Gap Theory implies a complete reconstruction of the Planet Earth (as well as the sun, moon, and stars). This recreation would include the existence of light (Gen. 1:3), the atmosphere (Gen. 1:6-8), dry land (Gen. 1:9-10), plants (Gen. 1:11-12), the sun, moon, and stars (Gen. 1:14-18), aquatic and avian life (Gen. 1:20-22), terrestrial life (Gen. 1:25), and finally, humans (Gen. 1:26-27). If the entire Earth was flooded at such a catastrophic level in the recent past, we would expect to discover this in natural history. Moreover, do gap theorists really believe that God recreated the sun, moon, and stars only several thousand years ago?

Gap theorists argue that God did refill certain aspects of creation. Specifically, the use of the term “**create**” (*bara*) in Genesis 1:21 and Genesis 1:27 implies creating new species: “God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves... God created man in his own image.” It would be very difficult to identify such creative acts in the fossil record.

At the same time, gap theorists also note that most of the created order already existed in Genesis 1:2. After all, the “waters” mentioned on Day Two already existed but were simply separated (Gen. 1:6-8), and the land mentioned on Day Three already existed but merely “appeared” on that day (Gen. 1:9). The same is true of the sun, moon, and stars, which were created at the outset of Genesis 1:1 (cf. Job 38:6), and these only appeared on Day Four. Furthermore, throughout the entirety of the six-days of creation, the Earth already existed (Gen. 1:2). Therefore, according to the text, these features of the natural order *already existed* and most were simply *refashioned* during the creation week.

It’s also possible that the recreation was local—not global. While we haven’t heard this explanation from gap theorists, the “**earth**” (*‘ereṣ*) can be rendered as “land.” Perhaps a local recreation is in view—much like after the Flood (Gen. 6-9). This dovetails with John Sailhamer’s view in his book *Genesis Unbound*.

Third, how could God call his creation “very good,” if it included the existence of Satan? On Day Six, Genesis states, “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). How can this be the case if Satan was already on the loose?

Gap theorists retort that the term “**made**” (*‘āśá*) only refers to what God had created in the six creation days—not to everything he had made for billions of years before that time. In other words, the frame of reference starts in Genesis 1:3. This does not refer to the events before this time (i.e. before the gap). Genesis 1:2 is never called “good” or “very good,” because this was before God began to act.

Fourth, Exodus 20:11 states that God performed his entire creation in six days. This includes the physical universe (“heavens and earth”).

Gap theorists retort that Exodus 20:11 refers to the six days of creation, which do not begin until Genesis 1:3 (after the gap). Moreover, Exodus 20 uses the term “**made**” (‘āśâ), rather than the term “**create**” (*bara*). The term “**made**” (‘āśâ) is “much broader in scope, connoting primarily the fashioning of the object with little concern for special nuances.” In other words, this language stops short of stating that God’s creation in Genesis 1 refers to a brand new creation. It could refer to a refashioning or recreation of the existing world. James Boice—himself not a gap theorist—states that this subtle shift of language “allows for a recreation or reforming.”

Fifth, God’s command to *fill* the Earth would need to be translated *refill* the Earth (Gen. 1:28). Of course, it’s true that God commanded the first humans to fill the Earth (Gen. 1:28). But he gave the same exact command to Noah after the Flood (Gen. 9:1). If the command to Noah actually meant to *refill* the Earth, then this would be consistent with his initial command to Adam and Eve.

Conclusion

The Gap Theory often seems strange to interpreters, and speculation abounds about what exactly happened during this gap of time. Scripture simply doesn’t say, so this has led to outrageous conjecture among gap theorists. (For example, that Satan possessed a race of humans during the gap!) This is not only foolish but also unbiblical; these interpreters should be careful “not to exceed what is written” (1 Cor. 4:6).

The greatest strength of the Gap Theory is in its agnosticism—namely, we simply don’t know what happened during this time. Gap theorists are at their best when they simply say, “We don’t know,” and leave it at that. Moreover, if the Gap Theory is true, it would resolve some of the most controversial subjects between creation and modern science—though a worldwide flood in the last ~10,000 years would still remain a difficulty. Finally, it should be noted that a theory with the most explanatory power and explanatory scope is usually the theory that is correct, and Gap Theory offers a possible model that has both.

Further Reading

Arthur Custance—a PhD in anthropology and an MA in Middle Eastern languages—is probably the most able defender of this view in his book *Without Form and Void* (Brockville, Canada: 1970). It is free online [here](#).

Steven E. Dill, *In the Beginnings* (Xulon Press, 2010).

Jack Langford, *The Gap is Not a Theory!* (Xlibris, Corp, 2011).

Weston W. Fields has written the most detailed critique of the Gap Theory in his book *Unformed and Unfilled: A Critique of the Gap Theory of Genesis 1:1, 2* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1973). Fields critiques this from a YEC perspective.

1. [^](#)

Arthur C. Custance, *Without Form and Void* (Brockville, Canada: 1970).

2. [^](#)

J. Vernon McGee, *Genesis: Volume I* (Pasadena, CA: Through the Bible Books, 1980).

3. [^](#)

A. G. Tilney, *Without Form and Void* (Hayling Isl., Hants., U.K.: Evolution Protest Movement, 1970).

4. [^](#)

Steven E. Dill, *In The Beginnings* (Xulon Press, 2010).

5. [^](#)

G. H. Pember, *Earth's Earliest Ages and Their Connection with Modern Spiritualism and Theosophy* (London and Glasgow: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.).

6. [^](#)

Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1950), 11.

7. [^](#)

Harry Rimmer, *Modern Science and the Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941).

8. [^](#)

We are not aware of Saucy having any sort of extended writing on this subject. However, a debate was sponsored on the Trinity Broadcasting Network called *Round Table on Genesis One*, 120-minute video cassette (Pasadena, CA: Reasons To Believe, 1992). James Buswell, Hugh Ross, Robert Saucy, and Dallas Willard participated, and Robert Saucy represented the gap theory.

9. [^](#)

It's questionable to include Gray as a gap theorist. He calls his view the "biosphere model," rather than the gap theory. He places the gap between Genesis 1:2 and Genesis 1:3. He argues for the creation of a young "biosphere" over six literal days, while the universe and earth can be billions of years old. Gorman Gray, *The Age of the Universe: What Are the Biblical Limits?* (Morningstar Publications, US), 1997.

10. [^](#)

Francis A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time: The Flow of Biblical History* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1972), p. 62.

11. [^](#)

James M. Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), p.58.

12. [^](#)

James M. Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), p.60.

13. [^]

John Collins writes, “There is a gap between verses 1 and 2, but it is not the gap of the gap reading.” C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2006), p.128.

John Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996), p.105.

John C. Lennox, *Seven Days that Divide the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p.53.

14. [^]

James M. Boice, *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), p.58.

15. [^]

Edward J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed. 1964), p.30.

16. [^]

Hamilton, V. P. (1999). 491 הָיָה. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr., & B. K. Waltke (Eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed., p. 213). Chicago: Moody Press.

17. [^]

James M. Boice, *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), p.59.

18. [^]

Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), p.43.

19. [^]

Weston W. Fields, *Unformed and Unfilled: A Critique of the Gap Theory of Genesis 1:1, 2* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1973), p.86.

20. [^]

Gleason Archer—though himself not a gap theorist—agrees that this is a possible grammatical rendering. He writes, “It should be noted in this connection that the verb ‘was’ (*hāyētâ* in Gen. 1:2) may quite possibly be rendered ‘became’ and be thus construed to mean: ‘And the earth *became* formless and void.’” Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Third Edition. Chicago, IL: Moody, 1998), p.198.

21. [^]

The Targum of Onkelos (2nd c. AD) translates Genesis 1:2 as “The earth was *laid waste*.” **Akiba ben Joseph** (AD 135) in his work *The Book of Light or Sefer Hazzohar* comments on Genesis 2:5-7. He writes, “These are the generations of the destruction which is signified in verse 2 of chapter 1. The

earth was *Tohu* and *Bohu*. These indeed are the worlds of which it is said that the blessed God created them and destroyed them, and, on that account, the earth was desolate and empty.” Arthur C. Custance, *Without Form and Void* (Brockville, Canada: 1970). See Chapter One: “A Long Held View.”

22. [^](#)

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 1, Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997). p.17.

23. [^](#)

Custance writes, “I believe it makes excellent sense to assume here that Paul had in mind an interpretation of these first three verses of Genesis 1 which sees the situation as a ruin about to be restored by God’s creative power, commencing with the giving of light where all was formerly darkness.” Arthur Custance, *Without Form and Void* (Brockville, Canada: 1970), p.16.

24. [^](#)

Harry Rimmer, *Modern Science and the Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 28.

25. [^](#)

Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1950), 11.

26. [^](#)

G. H. Pember, *Earth’s Earliest Ages and Their Connection with Modern Spiritualism and Theosophy* (London and Glasgow: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.), p.28.

27. [^](#)

G. H. Pember, *Earth’s Earliest Ages and Their Connection with Modern Spiritualism and Theosophy* (London and Glasgow: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.), p.28.

28. [^](#)

Hamilton, V. P. (1999). 167 אָרְרָ. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr., & B. K. Waltke (Eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed., p. 74). Chicago: Moody Press.

29. [^](#)

John Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996).

30. [^](#)

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31. [^](#)

James M. Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), p.61.

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The So-Called Gap Theory by Dr. Robert Saucy

I. The Theory: The Gap-Theory or the Restoration theory as it is sometimes called is the belief that the creation record of six days of [Gen. 1](#) is not the original creation, but rather a re-creation. God had originally created the earth and then presumably due to judgment, the earth became chaos as seen in [Gen. 1:2](#). The six days of the creation account then record God's recreation. This theory has taken the first two verses of Gen. in two different ways. Both however agree on the basic outline of Original creation, Chaos, Recreation.

a. A gap between v. 1 and v. 2. In this interpretation, verse one is seen as a statement of the original creation. Between verse one and verse two a time elapses during which something happens which changes the earth from a perfect orderly creation (cosmos) to chaos which is described in verse two. It is from this gap that the popular name "Gap theory" takes its name.

b. A gap before v. 1. [Genesis 1:1](#) begins the record of the recreation. Prior to this time there had been a creation which was reduced to chaos. The gap of time is therefore prior to [Gen. 1:1](#). Records of the original creation would have to be found in other places in the Bible. At least partly because of the popular use of the gap-theory in the attempt to harmonize the geological age of the earth with the Biblical record and the apparent failure in this purpose, the theory has fallen into disrepute. The opposition to the gap-theory has come from both those who accept a certain harmony of the Bible with evolutionary views (e.g. Ramm) and those who hold a strict literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and a recent creation (Whitcomb). It is sometimes argued that the gap-theory arose only in the late 18th and early 19th centuries to combat the rise of modern geology. But history reveals that there were advocates of this interpretation much earlier. It is our opinion that the Gap-Theory is not a reconciliation of the Bible and science, but that it is indicated by the exegesis of the Scripture and theological consideration as well as extra-biblical creation traditions. Whether the gap-theory does or does not have a bearing on the scientific age of the earth elements, the evidence for such an interpretation is strong.

II. Evidence from the creation account

a. Creation of the earth itself as seen in v. 2 is not included in any of the six days. According to the pattern of [Gen. 1](#) the creative day begins with the command of God "And God said..." concluding with "the evening and the morning was...." According to the creation account the first day involved the bringing of light into the darkness upon the earth and the separation of the light and darkness into

Day and Night. The creation of the elements of the earth therefore must have occurred at some other point.

b. Verse 2 reveals a situation of chaos—something other than a perfect creation.

i. The verb “was.” The gap-theory cannot either be conclusively proved or disproved by the grammatical considerations of this word. Suffice it to say that each side argues for their interpretation of this word on the basis of the context and other grammatical issues. However, the question cannot be settled on the consideration of the meaning of this verb. Driver simply states that the gap theory is “exegetically admissible” (S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 22).

ii. “without form and void” – Hebrew *tohu waw bohu*. *Tohu* – While *tohu* used alone can signify simply emptiness, or nothingness, as in [Job 26:7](#) where God “stretcheth out the north over empty space (*tohu*)”, nevertheless it almost always has an unfavorable meaning. *Tohu* repeatedly means ‘desert’ ([Deut 23:10](#); [Job 6:18](#); [Ps 107:40](#); and others), ‘wasteness’ ([Is. 24:10](#)); it occurs also in the sense of ‘vanity,’ ‘emptiness,’ but even then it almost always has an unfavorable meaning. *Bohu* – this word is used only three times in the Bible and always in connection with *tohu*. It is there in connection with this word that *bohu* must be considered. The other two occurrences of *bohu* are [Is. 34:11](#) and [Jer. 4:23](#). In both of these uses it is clear that *tohu wabohu* describes a situation resulting from God’s judgment. The meaning of these words especially as used together in the Scriptures is unanimously for a situation of chaos. For this reason many versions of the Bible simply translate the two words as a hendiadys i.e. – “the earth was chaotic” (cf. Speiser, Anchor Bible). This is hardly the way God who is described in the Bible as the God of order and not confusion would begin His creation.

iii. “darkness” – the Bible relates that “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” ([1 John 1:5](#)). Christ is also described as the light of the world ([Jn 8:12](#); [9:5](#); [12:46](#)). The knowledge of God is described as humankind’s light. Darkness is the antithesis of all this. Two special instances of darkness in the Bible are the 9th plague upon Egypt just before the angel of death and the darkness at the crucifixion. Both were used in the sense of judgment. In relation to this issue it is interesting to note that the apostle Paul likens a person’s rebirth to the command of God which brought light into the darkness of creation ([2 Cor 4:6](#)). A further indication that the darkness is not equally good with the light is that God only sees the light as “good” ([Gen 1:4](#)). To have the earth which has just been created by God surrounded by darkness seems incongruous with the nature of God as light.

iv. “the deep” – Hebrew *Tehom*. While water can be used in a good sense in Scripture, in many instances there is something sinister and anti-god related to the deep. The sea is often represented in Scripture as that which God must control or the place where the sea monsters, Leviathan and Rahab, and the serpents, which represent anti-god forces, dwell. It is also perhaps relevant that it is from the “deep” that the waters of the flood come to destroy the world ([Gen. 8:2](#)). As in the case of the darkness, there is likewise no sea in the eternal state ([Rev. 21:1](#)). It might be noted further that many interpreters connect the Hebrew word *tehom* with *Timiat*, the name of the Babylonian primordial chaos.

About the Author:

In 1961, Saucy joined the faculty of [Talbot School of Theology](#), where he was appointed [distinguished professor](#) of systematic theology in 1989. He was a long-time member of the [Evangelical Theological Society](#), and served as its president in 1972.^[3] Saucy was one of only three scholars who worked on both the original 1971 translation of the [New American Standard Bible](#) as well as the 1995 update.^[4] He was also a faculty member at [Rosemead Graduate School of Psychology](#) from 1970 to 1977.

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