

IS THERE A LARGE GAP OF TIME BETWEEN GENESIS 1:1 AND 1:2?

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The idea that a vast period of time elapsed between the first two verses of Genesis is known as the gap theory. Most variations of this theory interpret Genesis 1:1 as the first creation, which included the creation of the heavens, the earth, plants and animals, and even a race of humans preceding Adam! Perhaps billions of years then elapsed, during which time Satan and his angels fell and corrupted earth's inhabitants. God then judged and destroyed the earth and all its inhabitants. Thus, the earth became "formless and void" (Genesis 1:2) and remained that way for eons. Genesis 1:3, according to the gap theory, describes the beginning of the second creation with the first day of the (re)creation week—the familiar six-day creation. This series of events is also called the "ruin-reconstruction theory" or "the pre-Adamic cataclysm theory."

The modern gap theory was popularized in 1814 by Thomas Chalmers, a leading Scottish theologian. Some geologists of his day argued that the earth was much older than Genesis implied. Chalmers, therefore, proposed the gap theory to harmonize Genesis with those demands. No clear record shows anyone prior to 1814 interpreting Genesis 1:1–2 in this way.¹ This is especially significant, because Hebrew scholars 2,000 years ago certainly understood Hebrew writing better than we do today. The gap theory simply accommodated the growing demand for long periods of time.² Unfortunately, the adherents to the theory are usually unaware of all the scientific evidence supporting a young earth.

What are the problems with the gap theory? Gap theorists generally believe that the fossil record was formed, not in a global flood, but when God destroyed the earth in "the gap" between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. Gappists have not understood how the flood rapidly formed fossils and deposited sedimentary layers with a total average thickness of one mile. For that reason, they believe Noah's flood was less destructive than the judgment they claim preceded the creation week. No clear biblical passage supports the worldwide destruction they imagine, and they ignore references to Noah's flood by many biblical writers and Christ Himself (Mt 24:37–39, Lk 17:26–27). The gap theory resulted, to a large extent, from a failure to

comprehend the flood. [See pages [102–131](#).]

Gap theorists also ignore this clear biblical statement that no great time gap preceded the completed creation:

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them ... (Exodus 20:11)

The gap theory states that the heavens were created long before the six creation days—perhaps billions of years earlier. Exodus 20:11 says the heavens (and everything else) were made in six days. If the gap theory is correct, the Sun must have shone on earth to support the life that existed before the “gap.” But Genesis 1:14–18 says the Sun was made on the fourth day of the creation week.

Gap theorists miss the importance of Christ’s words in Mark 10:6, “But from the beginning of creation, God made them [Adam and Eve] male and female.” Christ knew that Adam and Eve were created at the beginning, not after a vast gap of time.

According to most versions of the gap theory, the death and destruction shown by the fossil record, including the death of supposedly pre-Adamic man, preceded Adam’s creation. But the Bible clearly states that death came because of (therefore, after) Adam.

If Satan fell before the creation week, as most gap theorists maintain, it is strange that at the end of the creation week, God pronounced that all He had made was “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Also, the fossil record gives evidence of death and violent burial on a global scale. How could such destruction be described as “very good” if it preceded God’s pronouncement?

Why then do some believe in the gap theory? As mentioned earlier, they have accepted, perhaps unknowingly, claims that the earth is billions of years old. Therefore, they try to find where a vast period of time might fit into the Bible. They know that long periods of time cannot be inserted after Adam’s creation because the various genealogies are tightly linked.³ Consequently, the only place billions of years can be inserted is before Adam. Because time flowed smoothly and continuously during the creation week, a week that for various reasons is composed of normal 24-hour days, the time gap must be inserted before the first creation day. Rather than start the creation week at Genesis 1:1 as most Bible scholars do, gappists start that week at Genesis 1:3. Therefore, they believe that before Genesis 1:3, a vast length of time existed—as they state, “whatever geologists demand.”

To justify this, they propose nontraditional translations of several verses. They believe that Genesis 1:2a should be translated “the earth became

formless and void,” instead of the more widely accepted translation “the earth was formless and void.” Prior to 1800, no one ever translated this verse as gap theorists do. While it is true that the Hebrew word “hayah” can be translated “became,” it is usually translated “was.” In fact, in the 4,900 times “hayah” occurs in the Old Testament, almost 98% are translated as “was.” Hebrew grammarians and linguists have almost uniformly rejected the translation “became” or “had become.”

Gap theorists rely heavily on Isaiah 45:18, which states:

For thus says the Lord, who 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, but formed it to be inhabited),

They correctly state that God did not create the earth a waste place. Genesis 1:2, using the same Hebrew word as in Isaiah 45:18 for “waste place,” describes the earth as “formless and void.” Gap theorists unfortunately conclude that after the earth’s first creation, it must have become a waste place that was “formless and void.” A more straightforward and internally consistent interpretation is that the earth was temporarily “formless and void” during the first day of its creation. At the end of the sixth creation day, the earth was completed, inhabited, and “very good”—not “formless and void.” In other words, God “did not create it [to be] a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited.”

Another verse used to support the gap theory is Genesis 1:28, which in the King James translation states “... Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it ...” Today, the word “replenish” is a recognized mistranslation of the Hebrew. All modern translations translate this word “fill.”

Most people who accept the gap theory have great confidence in the Bible and oppose evolution. However, they accept many evolutionary interpretations of such things as dinosaurs, ice ages, and coal-producing peat bogs. They avoid controversy by placing dinosaurs, ice ages, and coal formation in the “gap,” and thus fail to see their connection with the flood. So gappists generally take a position of noninvolvement in the origins issue other than saying they accept creation and oppose evolution. This attitude helped the evolutionary viewpoint go largely unopposed in our schools and media for decades.

The gap theory has declined in popularity in recent years.⁴ It was one of many attempts to reinterpret Scripture to conform to a belief that was becoming popular among some scientists in the 1800s—a belief in an old earth. Unfortunately, the gap theory is inconsistent with the Bible in many

ways.