

Genesis Stands!

Genesis Gaps,
Contradictions, and Other
Reinterpretations

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Is the Gap Theory a Biblical Option?

by Richard Niessen

The Gap Theory Scenario

Briefly, the scenario in the Gap Theory goes something like this: Genesis 1:1 records the special creation of the original heavens and earth, billions of years ago. Upon that earth lived the various species of prehistoric animals and prehistoric man. During that time Lucifer's rebellion in heaven took place (Isa. 14:12-17; Ezk. 28:1-6; Rev. 12:7-9). Lucifer and his fallen angels (currently called Satan, and demons, respectively) were cast down to earth, corrupted the original inhabitants of the earth, and provoked a worldwide judgement known as "Lucifer's Flood," from which there were no survivors. Thus the earth became without form and void (Gen. 1:2) and remained in this desolate condition for billions of years. Genesis 1:3 and following then records the re-creation of the earth, the biosphere, and man as we know them today. Thus it is also called the Ruin-Reconstruction Theory.

The Gap Theory received its initial impetus in 1814 by Thomas Chalmers of Scotland,¹ whose primary motivation was to allow the Bible to conform to the vast ages of time and the so-called "geologic column," both of which are so central to uniformitarian geology. It was enormously popularized by the notes of the 1917 Scofield Reference Bible, and has been promoted by various scholars up to the present.²

The Gap Theory appeals to Bible-believing Christians for two reasons. First, it is a way of dealing with the major problems associated with the evolutionary scenario - the alleged antiquity of the earth, the geologic column, fossils, dinosaurs, cavemen, etc. The claims and unanswerable problems of "science" are merely shoved into the "gap" between Genesis 1:1-3 or are relegated to the pre-creation earth. Whereas Day-Age people are generally thoroughgoing evolutionists calling themselves "theistic evolutionists" or "progressive creationists."³ Gap Theory people are basically creationists who

¹Thomas Chalmers, **The Works of Thomas Chalmers On Natural Theology** (Glasgow: Wm. Collins & Co., n.d.).

²Bernard Ramm, **The Christian View of Science and Scripture**, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), pp. 195 ff. Arthur Custance, **Without Form and Void**, (Brockville, Canada: Doorway Publishers, 1970).

³See the author's "Significant Discrepancies Between Theistic Evolution and the Bible" in the *Creation Research Society Quarterly*, (March 1980), and "Theistic Evolution and the Day-Age Theory," *ICR Impact No. 81* (March 1980).

have not yet been informed of the modern scientific evidence for a young earth, the rapid formation of the geologic column and the fossils it contains, the invalidity of radiometric dating systems, etc. Most Gap Theory people in practice might be called "irrelevant creationists": since the creation took place so long ago, as "science" claims, there is little point in discussing it.

Second, it gives the appearance of profound and deep Bible study as it is discovered for the first time that billions of years were ingeniously hidden between two verses of Scripture and this remarkable fact is now revealed for all to use in their battle against the raging forces of evolution.

The Alleged Basis for the Gap Theory

There are seven main points generally proposed as the basis for the Gap Theory:

1. Science and the geologic column speak of an old (4.5 billion-year-old) earth and universe.

2. *Hayah* could be translated as "became" in Gen. 1:2 instead of "was." The result is that the earth became waste and void and was re-created after an initial creation and destruction.

3. The Hebrew words translated "without form and void" (*tohu vabohu*) in Gen. 1:2 refer to judgment elsewhere (Isa. 34:11 and Jer. 4:23); therefore, this expression refers to the judgment of Lucifer and the inhabitants of the original earth.

4. The word *tohu* itself is occasionally used in an evil sense elsewhere in the Old Testament (Isaiah 44:9; 59:4).

5. "Darkness" is used elsewhere as representative of evil (John 3:19, Jude 13, etc.); therefore, the darkness in Gen. 1:2 refers to the crushing of Lucifer's rebellion.

6. There is a sharp distinction between the Hebrew words for "create" (*bara*) and "make" (*'asah*). *Bara* refers to the original creation ex nihilo in Gen. 1:1, and *'asah* refers to the subsequent refashioning of items from already-existing materials.

7. Genesis 1:28 speaks of "replenishing" or "refilling" the earth. That means it was originally "filled" and emptied and is now being "re-filled."

A Refutation of the Gap Theory

1. The geologic column (which is the backbone of the evolutionary scenario) shows every evidence of having been deposited quickly, by Noah's Flood, and not over long periods of time.⁴ In fact, both the earth and the universe give every indication of having been created only 6,000-10,000 years ago.⁵ Once it is recognized that the earth is not very old and that many of the evidences appealed to as a part of the evolutionary scenario are actually phenomena produced by the Genesis Flood, the Gap Theory will soon be recognized as superfluous. Once there is no more need to have an old earth, one becomes less vehement about the alleged biblical bases for the theory. It is evident, then, that the above-mentioned points are really biblical "baggage" - the accretions necessary to lend theological respectability to what is essentially an accommodation to science falsely-so-called.

2. In 258 out of 264 occurrences of the word *hayah* in the Pentateuch, it is unquestionably translated as "was." A direct parallel to Gen. 1:2 is Jonah 3:3 - "Nineveh was (*hayah*) a great city." Obviously, it did not become a great city after Jonah set foot in it. Other grammatical parallels include Gen. 31:5; 41:56; Ex. 1:5, and Judges 9:51. The normal way of expressing a change of condition involving *hayah* would have the next word preceded by a prefix *le*, "into," so that it should literally have been constructed, "the earth became *into* formlessness and emptiness..." Such a construction does not appear in Gen. 1:2; therefore, the overwhelming weight of passages (98%)⁶ affirm the traditional translation of "was" (i.e., that the earth was in this condition at the time God created it, mainly because He wasn't finished with the work of creation yet.

3. The expression *tohu vabohu* as a couplet occurs only twice in the Old Testament and is used of divine judgment upon both Gentiles and Israel (Isa. 34:11, Jer. 4:23). Remember, however, that we are not dealing with a data base of hundreds or even dozens of references. Two passages that have nothing whatsoever to do with the creation week can hardly be used as a solid basis for such a radical interpretation.

4. If *tohu* always referred to something evil wherever it was used in the Old Testament, this might be an impressive argument for applying that idea in

⁴John C. Whitcomb, Jr. and Henry M. Morris, **The Genesis Flood** (San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, 1961).

⁵Harold Slusher, **The Age of the Cosmos** (Creation-Life Publishers, 1980); Henry Morris, **Scientific Creationism** (Creation-Life Publishers, 1974), pp. 131-169.

⁶This 98% ratio apparently holds true for the entire Old Testament. Out of 4,900 occurrences, only 64 could be translated as "became" and the rest are translated as "was." Robert E. Kofahl and Kelly L. Segraves, **The Creation Explanation** (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1975), p. 232.

Gen. 1:2. However, a careful study of the usage of the word does not support that meaning. For example, in Job 26:7 it states that God "stretches out the north over empty space (*tohu*), and hangs the earth upon nothing." Here, as in most of the passages in which the word appears in Isaiah, the word is in a position of Hebrew parallelism with "nothing"; there is nothing in the passage to suggest that outer space is evil. Nor is that idea contained in the passages in which the word refers to the emptiness of the wilderness or desert, where the primary idea is the absence of life (Deut. 32:101; Job 6:18, 12:24, Ps. 107:40). It has the primary idea of "nothing," "emptiness," or "uselessness," and is therefore a morally neutral term.

The words *tohu vabohu*, in the context of Gen. 1:2, are best translated as "unformed and unfilled"⁷ or "shapeless and empty." There is no judgment in this context; it is imported only because of outside assumptions.

5. When "darkness" is used as a symbol of evil and "light" is used as a symbol for righteousness, it is clear from the context that these metaphorical interpretations are intended. In Gen. 1:5 it states that the light was called "day" and the darkness was called "night," the expanse is called "heaven" (v. 8), the dry land is called "earth," and the waters are called "seas" (v. 10). These are not the mystical terms of allegorical interpretation, but are mundane terms pertaining to physical objects in the created order. Notice the morally neutral use of the idea of physical darkness in Psalm 104:19-24 and Psalm 139:12. It is best, therefore, to understand "light" in Genesis 1:2-5 as being symbolic of light and "darkness" as symbolic of darkness.

6. The absolute distinction between *bara* (to create) and *'asah* (to form) cannot be maintained, as they are essentially synonymous in Genesis 1. Notice the following:

- a) In Gen. 1:16 God made (*'asah*) the sun, moon, and stars. Obviously they were not made from preexisting matter.
- b) In Gen. 1:21 it states that God created (*bara*) great sea monsters, while v. 25 states that God made (*'asah*) the beasts of the earth.
- c) In Gen. 1:20 the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures while in v. 21 it is explained to mean that "God created (*bara*) every living creature that moved, with which the waters swarmed."
- d) Gen. 2:7 tells us that God formed (*yatzar*) man, while 1:26 says he was made (*'asah*) and 1:27 says he was created (*bara*).

⁷Weston W. Fields, **Unformed and Unfilled** (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976). This is the most scholarly and refutation of the Gap Theory currently available.

e) Genesis 1:1 and 2:4 say that God created (*bara*), the heavens and the earth, while Exodus 20:11 says that "in six days the Lord made (*'asah*), the heavens and the earth." Furthermore, Genesis 2:4 itself uses the two words in a parallelism: "when they were created (*bara*), in the day of their making (*'asah*)".

Whitcomb rightly observes, "These examples should suffice to show the absurdities to which we are driven by making distinctions which God never intended to make. For the sake of variety and fullness of expression (a basic and extremely helpful characteristic of Hebrew literature), different verbs are used to convey the concept of supernatural creation. It is particularly clear that whatever shade of meaning the rather flexible verb 'made' (*'asah*) may bear in other contexts of the Old Testament, in the context of Genesis 1 it stands as a synonym for 'created' (*bara*)."⁸

7. The idea of "refilling" the earth is based upon a King James mistranslation of the Hebrew word *male'* in Gen. 1:28. It is a broad term which includes either the idea of filling, as in 1:22 and 1:28, or of refilling, as in 9:1. It is, therefore, inconclusive and cannot be used as a proof one way or the other.

8. The Hebrew letter "w," translated "and," appears nine times in the first five verses in what is known as a "waw conjunctive." Without getting bogged down in the intricacies of Hebrew grammar, suffice it to say here that this means that each statement is chronologically connected to the statements before and after. Each action follows immediately after the action described in the phrase preceding it. Gen. 1:1-5, therefore, refers to one single 24-hour day: the beginning is the first day and the first day is the beginning.

9. In the Gap Theory there is a serious theological problem with sin and death before the fall of Adam in Genesis 3.⁹ Fossils contain the idea of death, as a fossil by definition is a dead organism. The idea of a rebellion led by Lucifer automatically contains the idea of sin extending to pre-Adamic man. Yet Romans 5:12 declares that "through one man (i.e., Adam) sin entered into the world, and death through sin," while Gen. 3:14 and Romans 8: 19-22 state that the effects of Adam's sin extended to the entire created order. There is nothing ambiguous about the verses, and they mean exactly what they say: Adam was the first man, and there was neither sin nor death on the earth prior to the Garden of Eden incident recorded in Genesis 3.

⁸John C. Whitcomb, **The Early Earth** (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), p.129

⁹This is also a serious objection to the Day-Age Theory.

10. Exodus 20:11 was mentioned before as a verse which shows the essential interchangeability between *bara* and *'asah*, but there is more. The Gap Theory states that in the beginning (i.e., 5 billion years ago) God created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and a whole biosphere. Billions of years later, He reconstructed the earth, using already-existent matter. Ex. 20:11, however, states that "in six days (clearly the six days of the creation week of Gen. 1:1-31) the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them."¹⁰ In other words, everything that is in space, on the surface of the earth, indeed the surface of the earth itself, the oceans, and everything they contain were created within the six days of the creation week. Again, the beginning is the first day and the first day is the beginning.

11. Related to the above is Colossians 1:16: "For by Him (i.e., Christ) were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers - all things were created by Him and for Him."

Colossians 1:16-17 is a commentary on Genesis 1 and tells us that every conceivable thing - material or immaterial - was created during the six-day creation week. That includes angels of all kinds and, yes, that includes Lucifer also. This is not the place to quibble over whether they were created on the first, the fourth, or the sixth days - and a case could be made for each of the three - the point is that angels did not exist from all eternity; they are created beings like you and me, and as such they have their origin within the creation week of Genesis 1.

There is a six-fold repetition of the phrase "God saw that it was good" which appears at the conclusion of each major creative act, climaxed with a summation verse in Gen. 1:31: "And God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good." The following verse (2:1) notes that that includes heaven, earth, and all the host of them. Notice Psalm 148:2 where "host" is set in Hebrew parallelism with "angels." That would have to mean, therefore, that the fall of Lucifer and his demons had not yet taken place. This eliminates one of the major elements in the Gap Theory scenario - the pre-creation creation and fall of the fallen angels. Exactly when they did fall is not precisely identified, but it would have been sometime between Genesis chapters two and three, a period of decades rather than billions of years.

¹⁰ 10. The Bible states that the sun, moon, and stars were not created until the fourth day - three days after the formation of the earth (Gen. 1:14-19). In an attempt to retain the essentially evolutionary cosmology of the sun and stars before the earth, Scofield claims that the sun and moon were created in the beginning. The light of Gen. 1:3-4 came from the sun, but a heavy cloud cover obscured the sky for the first three days (Scofield Reference Bible, p. 3). This interpretation is clearly forced and is against the obvious sense of Gen. 1:14-11) that the heavenly bodies were not in existence until that time. For a discussion of the problem of light before the sun, see the author's article "Biblical Indications of a Rotating Earth," *Bible-Science Newsletter* (December 1980), pp. 1-3.

12. There is a remarkable silence in other Scriptures regarding this alleged original destruction of the earth, even though there are several places in which it would be appropriate to the argument. Second Peter 2:4-6 refers to the certainty of God's judgment on three occasions, as does Jude 5-7. Other passages stress the certainty of God's judgment on pre-Flood people as an illustration of His future judgment upon the world (Matt. 24:37-39), and yet not one ever uses this alleged pre-creation destruction as an example of God's judgment, even though it was more total in its effects and duration than Noah's Flood. The reason they do not refer to it, of course, is because it never happened.

13. Because the geologic column is accepted as a record of the geologic ages of the pre-creation earth, or of the so-called "Lucifer's Flood," and the fossils are remnants of the pre-Genesis creation, there is a tendency among many gap theorists to diminish the significance, extent, and geological effects of Noah's Flood in Genesis 6-8. Any flood violent enough to completely inundate the earth and cover its highest mountains in 40-150 days,¹¹ and which lasted a total of 371 days,¹² would have had enough destructive force to break up the earth's crust and, thus, it would have destroyed the geologic column which, after all, is one of the main reasons for holding to the Gap Theory in the first place. This is why some of the most vociferous advocates of the Gap Theory also argue for a local or tranquil flood in Genesis 6-8.¹³ Here is a case where error begets additional error.

14. If there was really a pre-Genesis world that was cursed and destroyed because of sin, it would not be enough to merely destroy it by water or fire. The curse of sin so penetrates and permeates the very fabric of our universe (Rom. 8:21-22) that when God creates the new heavens and earth, He finds it necessary to cancel the nuclear forces holding together every atom of our universe, allow matter to revert back into pure energy, and then re-create an entire new universe of matter as a repetition of Genesis 1:1 (2 Peter 3:10-13; Rev. 21:1). Sin is to the created order as ink is to a stick of chalk: it cannot be scrubbed from the surface, it must be transformed atomically.

15. If the geologic column contains fossils of a pre-Genesis world, and God recreated all life forms *de novo*, it seems strange that there is a basic

¹¹There is a disagreement over whether the waters peaked at the 40th or at the 150th day.

¹²For a detailed breakdown of the various stages in the Flood scenario, see Whitcomb and Morris, **The Genesis Flood**, p. 3.

¹³Arthur C. Custance, **Without Form and Void** (Brockville, Canada: Doorway Publishers, 1970); **The Flood: Local or Global?** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Bernard Ramm, **The Christian View of Science and Scripture** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954, pp. 229-249).

continuity between the fossil record and the spectrum of plants and animals currently alive on the earth. Many fossils are of animals no longer alive (which proves nothing more than that they are no longer alive today for one reason or another), and while they are in some cases larger than their modern counterparts, they are obviously of the same species. If God performed a brand new creation in Genesis 1:2 and following, why did He not start over again with an entirely different set of prototypes? The best explanation for the essential continuity between the current biosphere and the fossil record is that they both contain descendants of the spectrum of life created in Gen. 1:11-31, and that the fossils are actually preserved specimens of plants and animals killed and encapsulated by Noah's Flood of Genesis 6-8.

Conclusion

The biblical verses used to support the Gap Theory, as impressive as they may initially appear, are forced, taken out of their contexts, and are actually merely the biblical baggage attached to a theory that was invented primarily to accommodate (i.e., compromise) the Bible to several facets of the evolutionary scenario: the alleged antiquity of the earth and the universe, the geologic column, fossils, etc. The Gap Theory does less violence to the Scriptures as a whole than the Day-Age Theory, and the sincerity of its adherents must be commended in that their motivation is to attempt to confirm the scientific accuracy of the Bible. But sincerity is not a determinant of truth, as one can be sincerely wrong. The bottom line of this article is that "the beginning" is a part of the first day and the first day is the beginning (Gen. 1:1). Since there is no gap permissible between Gen. 1:1, 2, or 3, either grammatically or contextually, the Gap Theory is unscriptural and is, therefore, false.

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Creation Contradictions?

by Dr. Bernard E. Northrup

Man Before Plants?

Many have been troubled about the apparent contradiction concerning the order of creation in the accounts of Genesis 1 and 2. There are two texts in chapter two which, in translation, appear to teach contrary to that revealed in chapter one. In both cases, the problem lies in the manner in which the Hebrew text was translated. In Genesis 2:5 a negative particle is twice translated as if it were a preposition. The verse reads in the common translation: "And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew; for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground." The negative in question is underlined. The Hebrew particle *terem* found here means "not yet." One readily can see that "before" conveys that sense of time with only a slight shade of change of thought.

When is the time which is referred to in this way? When had not the shrubs of the field come to be? When had not the field herbs come to sprout forth? The reference clearly is to that time just before the creation of man, "...For the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground." It can only refer to the time between the fourth and the sixth days, according to the context of the first chapter.

Regrettably, some have used verses 5 and 6 to prove that it never rained between the creation and the Noahic flood. While that may be, it should not be proven by these verses. Their time frame specifically is delineated as preceding the divine activity which is found in verse 7.

Why then does the verse discuss the fact that plant life had not yet sprouted forth (the meaning of the verb translated "grew")? A *possible* solution follows: In the creation of the plant life which is described as happening on the third day, the creative act of planting vegetation did not take place all over the world but specifically in the garden. The landmass had just risen out of the sea in that same day (Gen. 1:9-10).

The process of draining and drying continued over many days. The moist state of "the field" and of the rest of "the earth" clearly is implied in Genesis 2:5-6. It was still so wet outside of the garden over "the whole face of the ground" that "a mist went up from the earth." Psalm 104 describes this process of the uplift and drainage of the landmass after describing the Lord's initial covering of it "with the deep as with a garment" when "the waters stood above the mountains" (Ps. 104:6) of the newly created earth (Ps. 104:5).

The Psalmist says: "At thy rebuke they (the waters) fled; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away. The mountains went up; the valleys went down unto the place which thou hadst founded for them" (Ps. 104:7-8, literal). Now the water-soaked hills drained. Springs began to flow. "He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills" (Ps. 104:10), providing for the needs of the animals as they are created (Ps. 104:11-18). Thus, the suggestion is that the creative activity of the third day resulted in the placing of plant life in the Garden of Eden in preparation for the habitation of the air with birds, the sea with its swarming creatures, and the land with the animals and man. Genesis 2:5-6 would then be describing the condition of the earth *outside* of the garden in those days before the creation of man.

But does not the text of Genesis 2:8-9 specifically say that the garden was planted after man is formed out of the dust of the earth? The problem of interpretation which allows one to conceive the idea that man was created before plant life (which contradicts Genesis 1:9-31) arises out of the real time relationship of verses 8-9 to verses 6-7. The entire text reads in the King James Version:

"And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil."

To the English reader it appears obvious that there is no way of harmonizing this statement that vegetation was created after man with these statements in Genesis one. "And God said, Let the earth bring forth vegetation, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit, after its kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth vegetation, and herb yielding seed after its kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after its kind: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day" (Gen. 1:11-13). Man's creation is described as taking place later in the sixth day. "And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over

every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them...And the evening and the morning were the sixth day" (Gen. 1:24-27, 31).

Man Before Animals?

This passage in Genesis 1 is also important in considering the second apparent contradiction which some have thought to find in chapter two: that Adam was created before the animals. The text causing the confusion is Genesis 2:19. After the Lord's comment on Adam's unsatisfactory state in having no mate (v. 18), the Lord God now provided him a mate. "And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an helpmeet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man" (Gen. 2:19-22). Thus, it sounds as if the animals are created after Adam and before Eve. What is the solution? Is this proof that the Bible is untrustworthy? Or does the answer lie somewhere in the transition made when the Hebrew original was rendered into the English language?

The Linguistic Problem

The solution is one which will not satisfy some who will think that any suggestion concerning the original language is an attack upon the integrity of the Word of God. But the writer is one who has diligently studied in and then taught the three original languages of the Bible, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, for nearly 40 years with one goal. That goal is to better understand the intended meaning behind the numerous difficult statements found in our King James translation. These apparent contradictions which appear to be inescapable in our translation simply are examples of a translation problem caused by an inadequate grasp on the part of the translators of certain very important facts about the Hebrew language.

Most English readers do not recognize the nature of the task of translating from one language into another with a very different grammatical structure. It could be likened to the difficulty which our American astronauts would have met on attempting to dock with the Russian cosmonauts had there not been some very careful cooperative planning and engineering on the locking ports of both vehicles beforehand.

English is a language that conveys a rather precise announcement of the time values which are involved in every statement of its sentences. Hebrew, to the uninitiated English student, is remarkable in that it does not use phonemes in its verb system which signal to the reader such concepts as present, past, future, previous present, previous past and previous future, subsequent past and subsequent future. These elements are not at all conveyed by the verb system. Rather, the writer (and speaker) depended upon context and occasionally an adverb to convey such ideas. It was impossible unequivocally to say with English precision: "I had fallen from the tree before I hit the ground." A Hebrew student would have said: "I fell from the tree before I hit the ground." He would marvel that the English language student would find it beneficial for the speaker to explain any further that the one action preceded the other! Nonetheless, to the English mind, such an explanation is expected since the reader is used to finding these precise time relationships defined in his language. Thus, he instinctively places one action before another in his mind when he reads: "Now the Lord *had* said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country..." (Gen. 12:1). The Hebrew reader sees no such grammatical structure, yet, if alert, immediately recognizes the same time relationship.

The Apparent Contradictions Resolved

It is this disparity in time structure between the two languages which causes the translation problem and the apparent contradiction to appear on the surface of our English translation of Genesis 2. Oddly enough, the translators of the King James recognized the grammatical principle above by supplying "had" in Genesis 12:1. It is regrettable that "had" was not placed in italics to indicate that there actually is no comparable form in the original text, the normal mode of these translators in supplying an element for the reader's understanding. These men knew from the context that the revelation from God which required Abram's departure from Ur of the Chaldees was given before his departure in obedience to that command. Thus, they translated it: "Now the Lord *had* said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country... So Abram departed, as the LORD *had* spoken unto him..." (Gen. 12:1,4). In the same way, these translators recognized in Genesis 3:1 that the creation of the beasts of the field had taken place before the demonstration of the subtlety of the serpent. Thus, they have translated: "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God *had* made."

This practice of supplying helping verb forms in the English language was carried on by the King James translators with fair regularity as context demanded it. Genesis 2:8-9 contains an example of it in the phrase "...there he put the man whom he *had* formed." But herein lies the crux of the problem. *There are two other verb forms in these two verses where context should have required the supplying of the previous past helper, "had".*

The context of chapter one should have required the verses to be translated: "Now the LORD God *had* planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God *had* made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil." Recognition of the fact that chapter one places these creative activities in the third day of creation would have totally eliminated the difficulty which some doubters have when they come to read this "apparent contradiction" in the Word of God.

The second apparent contradiction found in Genesis 2 seems to require the placing of the creation of man before the creation of the animals (Gen. 2:18-20). By now, the reader should suspect the problem which causes the English reader the difficulty. Yes, again it is the failure of the translators to acknowledge the government of prior revelation upon the way that they translated these verses. The following is a suggested partially expanded translation of these verses which completely resolves the apparent contradiction by following the very principles followed elsewhere by the King James translators:

"And the LORD God said, 'Man's being alone is not good. I will make for him an helper as his counterpart. Now the LORD God *had* formed from the ground every living creature of the field and every fowl of the heavens and he *had* brought (them) unto the man to see what he would call each one. And whatsoever the man *had* called each living creature, that (became) its name. And the man *had* given names to every cattle and to the fowl of the heavens and to every living creature of the field, but for man there *had* not been found a helper as his counterpart. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man and he proceeded to sleep. And he took one from his ribs and he closed up the flesh in its place. And the LORD God built the rib which he *had* taken from the man into a woman, and he brought her unto the man."

Now it can be readily seen that the specific purpose of Adam's newly appointed task of naming the animals and birds was to prepare him psychologically to recognize his need of a wife! By the time the young bachelor had reviewed all of creation's pairs, there had fallen a heaviness over his spirit. He had recognized that he alone of all God's created beings did not have a counterpart! He now was prepared for the crowning act of creation and for the presentation of his wife to him as he awoke from the first surgical operation. He knew that he needed a wife and gladly received her as such from the hand of the Creator.

Now it also can be seen that the imagined contradictions found in Genesis 2 simply are the result of inconsistent application of perfectly normal translation principles and that there really is not any contradiction here at all. As revealed, God's Word is fully and completely inspired and accurate even to the

very words chosen. It is trustworthy and authoritative for our lives as we seek to serve the One who gave it through holy men of old (2 Pet. 1:21).

At the time this article was written, Dr. Bernard E. Northrup was the associate pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Redding, California, and a member of the Bible-Science Association Board of Advisors.

Dare We Reinterpret Genesis?

by David Watson

Editor's note: The October 1982 Christianity Today published an editorial pooh-poohing the literal interpretation of Genesis I -II. David Watson wrote a reply, which the magazine refused to print. This article is that response.

"Tracing the future of the Universe from the present onward is not nearly so hard (as tracing the past): we do not need any new way of looking at the world. All that we really need to plot out our future are a few good measurements." James S. Trefil, *Smithsonian Magazine*, June, 1983.

So runs a recent challenge from the humanist camp. Do you see what has happened? Completely self-assured about the (Big Bang) theory of the world's beginning, they now assert with equal intrepidity their predictions about the world's end. God is not invited or involved - even as spectator! But at least they are logical and consistent: the godless overture is matched with a godless finale. A much stranger phenomenon today is Christians who profess to believe what God says about the end of the world (Last judgment, Heaven, etc.), but at the same time refuse to accept what He has said about its beginning.

Historical Precedents

Before we take a closer look at the *Guideposts* article (*Christianity Today* (CT), October, 1982), it may be well to remind ourselves that reinterpretation of Scripture is an old game. "Full well you reject the commandment of God that you may keep your own tradition... you hold the tradition of men ... making the Word of God of none effect through your tradition which you have handed down..." (Mark 7). We find this attitude of Christ to the Old Testament uniformly consistent throughout His ministry - in His answers to the devil, to enquirers about divorce, about the sabbath, about eternal life, and on a dozen other occasions. He never reinterpreted Scripture. He simply quoted the words as being in themselves perspicuous, intelligible, and meaningful, in the plain sense of common speech. Why did this offend the Pharisees? They were certainly fundamentalists. They believed in an inerrant Book. But they had reinterpreted the words to suit their own life-style.

As we move on through the New Testament we find again and again a similar resistance to new truth, or, rather, to old truths rediscovered. "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" Notice that the Lord did not blame them for failing to understand dark and difficult passages. He did blame them for failing to believe prophecies like (presumably) Isaiah 53, where the sufferings of Christ are clearly foretold. Once again, Bible-believers

were blind to Bible truth because of the current philosophy - in this case, expectation of a conquering Messiah.

We can follow the same theme through Church history. As has often been pointed out, the Pope believed 95 percent of what Martin Luther believed, including the plenary inspiration and authority of the Bible, and "the just shall live by faith." But the schoolmen had *reinterpreted* Paul's words to fit in with the current medieval philosophy and ecclesiastical system. It was "all a matter of interpretation." So it was in the days of John Wesley. Anglican prelates disapproved of his open-air preaching, in spite of obvious precedents in the Acts of the Apostles. Baptist elders tried to discourage Carey: "God can take care of the heathen without your help, Master William!" - in spite of Mark 16:15. They *reinterpreted* Christ's command to suit the *laissez-faire* philosophy of 18th century England. When George Muller and Hudson Taylor affirmed that it was possible for Christian work to be supported "by prayer alone to God alone," Christian businessmen laughed them to scorn: "Thinks he can live on thin air!" The promises had always been right there in Matthew 6, but "little faith" had *reinterpreted* them as being contrary to experience.

So we see that pioneers of spiritual truth are often ridiculed in their own generation. Uncomfortable doctrines are jettisoned to prevent their rocking the boat. Outward profession of conformity to Scripture is retained even when practice and teaching differ widely from Scripture's pattern. And not infrequently there is heavy reliance on tradition: "Old So-and-So was a great man of God and he believed this (or acted thus), so it must be OK for us too!" We are reminded of Kipling's brilliant satire, "The Disciple";

He that hath a gospel
For all earth to own -
Though he etch it on the steel,
Or carve it on the stone -
Not to be misdoubted
Through the after-days -
It is his Disciple
Shall read it many ways.

Yes, the Fourth Commandment was indeed carved on stone; but 20th century disciples have read it many ways.

Origins of the Non-Literal Interpretation of Genesis 1-11

Lord Macaulay writes of John Milton: "His attacks were directed against those deeply-seated errors on which almost all abuses are founded: the servile worship of eminent men and the irrational dread of innovation." The author of *Guideposts* leans heavily on eminent men: Augustine of Hippo, J.I.

in the Gospels to Christ's resurrection includes the phrase "after three days" or "on the third day," or carefully specifies that only one day, the sabbath, intervened between His death and rising again. Why? Because God knows that we require every possible assurance and reassurance to faith. And details of time and place are what make a story interesting and memorable. Not otherwise is it with the creation history and genealogies. Theologically it may be a matter of no significance whether Adam was created 6000 years ago or six million, whether the universe was made in six days or sixty billion years, but the veracity of God cannot be so easily dismissed - and by all the laws of language it is certain that Genesis tells of a six-day creation some 6000 years ago. There is as little reason to doubt the six days of Genesis as to doubt the three days of the Gospels. We shall now call witnesses to show that this has been the view of the greatest scholars, ancient and modern, for 1900 years.

Supporters of the Literal Interpretation

Flavius Josephus, a Jew of the 1st century A.D., was reckoned by Scaliger, the great Reformation scholar, to be a better historian than all the Greek and Roman writers put together. He certainly had unequalled opportunities of investigating and understanding the culture and traditions of his own people. How does he handle the early chapters of Genesis?

1) "Moses says that in just six days the world and all that is therein was made... Moreover Moses, *after* the seventh day was over, begins to talk philosophically..." In other words, Josephus is saying that Chapter Two may be a bit mysterious, but in Chapter One there is no hint of any mystery at all. He obviously takes the days as literal.

2) "The sacred books contain the history of 5000 years..." This is conclusive evidence that the Jews of Josephus' day *added up the* figures in Genesis 5 and 11 to make a chronology. To make assurance doubly sure, he later states: "...this flood began 2656 years from the first man, Adam." (Both computations are based on the LXX text.)

What C.S. Lewis has so trenchantly written about critics of the New Testament surely applies no less to reinterpreters of the Old:

"The idea that any man or writer should be opaque to those who lived in the same culture, spoke the same language, shared the same habitual imagery and unconscious assumptions, and yet be transparent to those who have none of these advantages is, in my opinion, preposterous. There is an *a priori* improbability in it which almost no argument and no evidence could counterbalance.

"In other words, it seems unlikely that English-speaking Americans in the 20th century will understand Moses better than a Hebrew-and-Greek-speaking Jew of the 1st century A.D."

St. Ambrose (d. 397 A.D.) was no more infallible than any of the Church Fathers, but his treatment of Genesis One is grammatical and objective:

"In notable fashion has Scripture spoken of 'one day,' not 'the first day'...Scripture established a law that 24 hours, including both day and night, should be given the name of 'day' only, as if one were to say that the length of one day is 24 hours in extent."

Nobody, I think, disputes that the Reformers accepted Genesis as literal truth, but two brief quotations may be useful. Calvin: "God Himself took the space of six days, for the purpose of accommodating His works to the capacity of men." Luther: "We know from Moses that the world was not in existence before 6000 years ago."

Modern Scholars

James Barr, Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture in Oxford University, ridicules the non-literal interpretation espoused by the Inter-Varsity Press: "...the biblical material is twisted to fit the various theories that can bring it into accord with science. In fact *the only natural exegesis* (of Genesis One) *is a literal one, in the sense that this is what the author meant...he was deeply interested in chronology and calendar*" (our emphasis).

Samuel R. Driver, Professor of Hebrew at Oxford University, published his commentary on Genesis in 1904, and it is still a standard work of reference. "There is little doubt that the writer meant 'days' in the literal sense, and that Pearson was right when he inferred from the chapter that the world was represented as created '6000 or, at farthest, 7000 years' from the 17th century A.D." The same interpretation is maintained by Keil and Delitzsch, Gerhard von Rad, and (so far as I am aware) by every major commentary on Genesis. In fact, we have never heard of any Professor of Hebrew in any of the world's great universities who believes that the original writer did not intend his words to be taken literally. Let the Interpreter's Commentary speak for them all:

"There can be no question but that by *day* the author meant just what we mean - the time required for one revolution of the earth on its axis. Had he meant aeon he would certainly, in view of his fondness for great numbers, have stated the number of millenniums each period embraced."

Finally, Dr. John C. Whitcomb has pointed out that a close parallel to Genesis 1 can be found in Numbers 7. No expositor would dare to affirm that the extended and metaphorical use of "day" in 7:84 negates the literal 24-hour days of vv. 12, 18, 24, etc. No more should any expositor to maintain that the extended and metaphorical use of "day" in Gen. 2:4 negates the literal days of chapter one.

Francis Schaeffer

The last of CT's "eminent men" is Dr. Francis Schaeffer. We, too, admire his versatility and outstanding achievements, but as a Hebrew scholar he cannot be compared with Barr and Driver, let alone with Calvin and Luther. Let us glance briefly at his objection to the literal interpretation: "...the Bible never uses the early genealogies as a chronology. It never adds up the numbers for dating."

This seems to us a perfect example of begging the question because the figures *are* a chronology. Otherwise, no conceivable purpose can be adduced for noting the age of each father at the birth of his son (especially in Chapter 11, where the "begetting ages" are quite normal by modern standards, mostly in the 30s). Why should Moses do for us what we can do for ourselves? Similarly Moses does not in Chapter 11 add up the total lifespan of each patriarch, as he did in Chapter 5. Does this mean that, *e.g.*, Shelah did not live to be 433? Obviously he did, but Moses does not waste words telling us the obvious because the principle of addition had already been established in Chapter 5. Also, Moses does not tell us the age of Jacob at the birth of Joseph, but he very neatly works it into the story (41:46, 45:6, 47:9) so that by simple addition and subtraction we find it to be 91. We are expected to do the sum for ourselves. There is no reason to doubt that Moses was working on exactly the same principle when he left the totals un-added in Chapters 5 and 11. So we conclude that Dr. Schaeffer's objection is invalid. In the Bible, long dates (Exodus 12, 1 Kings 6) are given only when there is no other way of computing the total.

Adam 100,000 B.C.?

There are, by the way, a number of other problems attached to the 100,000-year theory:

- 1) God condemned Adam to eat bread, and archaeology tells us that wheat appeared only 6000-7000 years ago.
- 2) Cain built a city, and archaeology knows nothing of city building before 7000 B.C.

3) What was God doing for 100,000 years while the human race murdered and plundered and raped and tortured and wallowed in every kind of abominable bestiality? It is hard enough to "justify the ways of God to man" on the assumption that He waited 4000 years before sending a Savior. To explain a delay of 100,000 years is, we opine, absolutely impossible.

The Length of the Sixth Day

Isn't it interesting that no Bible expositor before Darwin had any problems with the sixth day? But now we are told: "Clearly the author is indicating that the sixth day extended over quite a period of time." We beg to differ. How long does it take God to plant a garden? Not longer, I think, than the time it has taken you to read the question. How long did God need to create Adam? Five seconds, perhaps? And how many pairs of animals did Adam have to see before he felt his own need of a mate? Ten - twenty - fifty? Surely not more than fifty and one can see fifty pairs of animals in a couple of hours at any fair-sized zoo. Naming them would be no problem for a man with a perfect mind and a God-given language. But what about Eve? Surely that operation took a long time? One pictures - subconsciously - angel nurses scrubbing Adam's chest, white-robed cherubim administering anesthetic, and the long wait that often precedes surgery in a modern hospital. All pure fantasy! Almighty God, we suggest, did not need ten minutes to remove Adam's rib and build it into a woman. As for Adam's "Now - at last!, the expression of joy and surprise is perfectly natural and reasonable when we ponder the fact that he had never seen another human, let alone a beautiful woman. (Luther was so sure of the Sixth Day being completed by the first "Friday" that he confidently assigns the Fall to the first Sabbath). No - the "long-sixth-day" objection is another "deeply-seated error," a desperately weak argument cobbled together to escape the inescapable confrontation of Exodus 20 and 31. "Ye de err, not knowing ... the power of God."

The Flood Ignored

It is puzzling to find in *Guideposts* no reference to Noah's flood - puzzling because this is the real point at issue. If the fossils were caused by one colossal deluge, then there never was a need for the Gap Theory or any of the other intellectual contortions devised by evangelical concordists over the last 120 years. (We suggest the time has come for *CT* to review Dillow's impressive book **The Waters Above**, (Moody, 1981), which reinforces with massive new evidence Whitcomb and Morris's **Genesis Flood**). There may be problems connected with this Bible history (e.g., how did the marsupials reach Australia?), but these are as nothing compared with the problem of explaining away the physical evidence for a universal flood.

It is also fair to say that if Genesis 6-9 had been written in any book other than the Bible, no one would have doubted that the writer meant to convey the idea of a worldwide deluge. For example, compare the Latin poet Ovid's account of the same event: "Wherever old Ocean roars around the earth, I must destroy the race of men..." says Jupiter. "He preferred to destroy the human race beneath the waves... and now the sea and land have no distinction. All is sea, and a sea without a shore... Here (on Mount Parnassus, 8000 feet) Deucalion and his wife had come to land - for the sea had covered all things else." (Deucalion addresses his wife) "O only woman left on earth... we two are the only survivors, the sea holds all the rest." Any scholar who dared to suggest that Ovid did not intend to depict a universal flood would be laughed out of court. Now - the language of Genesis 6-9 is at least as unambiguous and comprehensive as Ovid's, but evangelical concordists have succeeded in throwing an aura of mystery around the Bible story so that "no one can be quite sure what it means." Alas for Christendom!

"It is his Disciple
Who shall tell us how
Much the Master would have scrapped
Had he lived till now...
Amplify distinctions,
Rationalize the claim;
Preaching that the Master
Would have done the same."

On the contrary, we believe that God is the greatest communicator of all time. When He planned His revelation to mankind, He had at His disposal all the words of all the languages of every tribe and nation. How could He have failed to communicate what He really meant - when a pagan poet succeeded?

Too Complicated

Our final objection to the Non-Literal Theory (NLT) is that it is far too complicated. Every teacher knows that you begin with the simple and move on to the complex. This principle can be clearly seen in the Bible, too. Prose in Samuel and Kings leads on to poetry in the Psalms, philosophy in Ecclesiastes, prophecy in Isaiah, and finally the difficult passages in Ezekiel and Daniel. But the non-literal school would have us believe that right at the beginning of His revelation, God has placed a conundrum as hard to solve as any in the whole Bible. Anyone who has tried to teach the elements of Christianity to primitive or illiterate people will recognize the utter impossibility of explaining to them why God's first words should be "a subtle, highly sophisticated modification of an ancient Mesopotamian literary device" (R. Youngblood), rather than plain statements of fact, easily intelligible in every language to all people - as the pioneer missionaries believed.

The Literary Framework Hypothesis is a house of cards carefully constructed by academics in the airless atmosphere and artificial light of a theological library. We need to open the windows and allow a good strong blast of common sense to blow it down.

"When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. And the men of Israel pursued..." As Norman Macbeth recently said, "It is a time for funerals - of evolutionary hypotheses." The top Philistines know well that their champion (Darwin) is dead. Isn't it time for all true-hearted soldiers to join in the pursuit?

And what about children? Of all the books in the Bible, Genesis is preeminently the children's book. Who can doubt but that these fascinating stories were designed by God to allure the sweet innocence of childhood and lead us gently to faith in Christ? ("From a babe thou hast known the Holy Scriptures," writes Paul to Timothy.) But now, inevitably, questions will be asked:

"Dad, did God *really* make everything in six days?"

"Mom, did the ark *really* hold every kind of animal?"

-- and parents who follow the NLT with one accord begin to make excuse:

"Well, no, not really, darling. You see, the scientists say..."

In view of Christ's solemn words about causing little ones to stumble, I would not like to stand in the shoes of anyone who teaches a child that in the A-B-C book of religion, God does not mean what He says.

An Appeal

Finally, a personal appeal to "progressive creationists." "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em" is good advice. The past twenty years have seen a mighty movement "Back to the Bible," following the exposure of mega-evolution as a mega-lie and the discovery of many new facts supporting creationism. Would it not be wise to admit, now, that the pioneers (Whitcomb and Morris) were right after all? Non-literalist commentaries on Genesis are the laughingstock of the world, and no amount of special pleading or reinterpretation is ever going to persuade ordinary people that Moses did not teach a literal six-day creation, a young earth, and a universal flood.

"Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold," as did the medieval church, as did William Carey's obstructors and Hudson Taylor's. Martin Luther's challenge of 500 years ago is right up to date: "If I profess with the loudest voice every Bible doctrine except that one truth which Satan is attacking today, I am no soldier of Jesus Christ." You don't have to be a reader of the *Smithsonian* to know which Bible truths are under special attack today. Noah's flood is a "fairy tale"; Archbishop Ussher is a figure of fun; and six-day creation is a "pre-scientific myth." That is why God is calling for *real* disciples who will not "amplify distinctions" or "rationalize the claim," but will stand up and tell the world that He means just what He says in Genesis 1-11. The scientific establishment will never take seriously the Christian doctrine of Last Things until they see that Christians take seriously the Bible doctrine of First Things. Unbelievers will recognize their dreams of the future as wholly delusive only when they are shown that their picture of the past is completely chimerical.

David C. C. Watson (M.A., Cambridge, England) was a missionary to India 1947-60, 1966-70, and was co-founder of the Union of Evangelical Students of India in 1953. He is the author of: *The Great Brain Robbery (Studies in Evolution)*, *Myths and Miracles* (a study-guide to Genesis 1-11), and *Fact or Fantasy?* (supporting the authenticity of the Gospels).