

THE GAP THEORY – A Study of Genesis 1:1-2 (part one of five)

I was first introduced, in earnest, to the controversy surrounding the Biblical account of creation while attending Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, Indiana. A very thorough refutation of the false teaching known as the gap theory was provided by Dr. John Whitcomb. However, I had no idea that some thirty-five years later, this issue would still be a topic of hot debate. In light of the current disagreement among sincere Evangelical Christians, my goal in this series will be to clarify some of the confusion which exists in regard to the creative activity of God, described for us in the book of Genesis. So, let's begin in the beginning, where we read the following in Genesis 1:1-2 –

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 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.”

According to advocates of the gap theory, Genesis 1:1 does not refer to the creation account presented to us in the first two chapters of the book of Genesis. Instead, it describes a previous creation that came under the judgment of God, resulting in a condition of ruin, depicted by Moses in Genesis 1:2 as “formless and void.” In order to support this conclusion, gap theorists interpret the Hebrew verb “hayah,” in v2, as **became** rather than **was**; implying a previous condition other than that of being “formless and void.” While the rendering “became” is grammatically possible, it is not common to the translation of “hayah” in Genesis 1:2. I have yet to come across an English translation of this verse which reads “the earth became formless and void,” and would not suppose that I am better qualified to translate Hebrew into English than those who engage in such an endeavor.

The above example is just one of many glaring errors made by the promoters of a theory which requires semantical gymnastics, as well as the use of eisegesis in place of exegesis. The bizarre extrapolations which have resulted from the twisting and torturing of the Genesis 1:1-2 text, only serve to confirm the unbiblical nature of this teaching known as the gap theory.

When confronted with false doctrine, I do my best to avoid a perpetual back and forth of interpretive opinions. Instead, at the very outset, I seek for a foundational proof text which can effectively bring the debate to a common-sense conclusion. I believe that there are two such texts and will share one of them with you in the next segment. My sincere desire throughout, will be to provide the most accurate interpretation possible of Genesis 1:1-2, in light of its Biblical context.