

Difficult Texts From Genesis

Introduction. From earliest times, man has been interested in his origin. The matter of origins is not a "peripheral issue" that can be dealt with after all other issues have been settled. All other issues find their foundation based on our conclusion of our origin. The matter of man's origin, if followed to successful completion, is in essence the matter of God's existence.

To discuss Genesis 1-11 is really to discuss the matter of origins, since Genesis is the "book of beginnings." But a discussion of this subject, for many, is the controversial area of "science versus the Bible." Far too many people have come to believe that Genesis and modern science are somehow opposed to each other. The Bible clearly suggests that the earth was created several thousand years ago, while scientists generally contend that it has been in existence for over four billion years. The solution has been dubbed the "Double Revelation Theory." This false philosophy suggests that there is a revelation of God both in "nature" and in the Bible, and whenever the revelation given in the Bible is in "conflict" with what has been discovered through the scientific method, the Christian must find a way to readjust the Bible so that it is brought into harmony with the scientists' consensus.

The Christian is so intimidated by the scientist with his flowing white laboratory coat, volumes of impressive data, and fancy instruments that he gives up inspired testimony for today's scientific theories. As sincere inquirers of truth, let us examine some passages in Genesis 1-2 in the light of true Bible teaching.

I. ***How Much Time Between "The Beginning" And Day One?***

- A. Genesis 1:1-2 discuss the creative activity of God. The Christian who, for whatever reasons, desires to insert the millions or billions of years of geologic time into the creation account somehow must fit this vast time into Genesis 1. Since the first chapter of Genesis covers the creation of all forms of life (including man), it is obvious that the geological ages could not have occurred after the creation week. Therefore, those who seek to align evolutionary geology with the Genesis record either insert the geological ages before or during the creation week.
- B. For over 100 years Christians who were determined to insert the geologic ages into the space came to the conclusion that it is possible to place the geologic ages between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. This came to be known as the Gap Theory (or the Ruin and Reconstruction Theory or the Pre-Adamic Cataclysm Theory).
- C. During this supposed gap, there lived successive generations of plants, animals, and even pre-Adamic men. According to this view, God destroyed the original creation because of a satanic rebellion and Genesis 1:2 is translated to suggest that "the earth became waste and void."

The Gap Theory has been advocated, in one form or another, by denominationalists and several among churches of Christ.

- D. It is sad indeed that men must pervert the plain teachings of the Bible in order to accommodate evolutionary presuppositions. The Gap Theory (or modifications of it) is false for several reasons.
1. Exodus 20:11 (cf. Exodus 31:17) plainly states that God created everything in six days. If everything was made in six days, then nothing was created prior to those six days! The Bible is its own best interpreter, as always. This one verse demolishes the Gap Theory and all modifications of it.
 2. At the conclusion of the sixth day, God saw everything that He had made and it was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). If God's original creation had become contaminated through Satan's rebellion, it is difficult indeed to see how God could have surveyed the situation and then used the expression "very good" to describe it.
 3. Gap theorists claim that the Hebrew word for "was" should be translated "became" or "had become," indicating a change of state from the original perfect creation to a chaotic condition (vs. 2). Yet none of the scholarly translations of the Bible render the verse in that way. A few years ago, twenty leading Hebrew scholars were polled to see if there was exegetical evidence of a "gap" between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. They unanimously responded, "No!"
 4. Gap theorists assert that the phrase "without form and void" of Genesis 1:2 can refer only to something once in a state of repair but now ruined. "Without form and void" literally means "empty and formless." In other words, the earth was not chaotic, it was simply empty of life and without the features that it later possessed, such as oceans, continents, hills, and valleys -- features that would be essential for man's well-being. In other words, it was not an appropriate home for man.

II. **What About "Create" And "Make"?**

- A. Gap theorists (and Modified Gap theorists) assert that the two Hebrew words *asah* and *bara* in the creation account (meaning to "create" or "make") must be very distinct, and never can be used interchangeably.
1. For example, *bara* supposedly means "to create," whereas *asah* means "to make, re-make, or make over again."
 2. The conclusion we are supposed to draw is that the "original creation" was "created" while the creation of the six days was "made" or "made over," not "created," since the original creation no longer existed.
- B. The fact that *bara* is used only three times in Genesis 1 (vss. 1, 21 and 27) certainly does not imply that the other creative acts, in which

"made" or some similar expression is used, were really only acts of restoration or reconstitution.

1. No scientific or exegetical ground exists for a distinction between the two processes. The terms are clearly used interchangeably.
 - a) *Bara* great whales (Genesis 1:21) and *bara* animals, creeping things, and birds (Genesis 6:7). *Asah* the beast (Genesis 1:25) and *asah* them (Genesis 6:7).
 - b) *Asah* man (Genesis 1:26) and *bara* everyone and *asah* them (Isaiah 43:7). *Bara* man (Genesis 1:27) and *bara* and *asah* all His work (Genesis 2:3).
 - c) *Bara* and *asah* man (Genesis 5:1) and *bara* heavens and the earth (Genesis 2:4). *Bara* male and female (Genesis 5:2) and *asah* earth and heaven (Genesis 2:4).
 2. The natural reading of the whole account conveys the understanding of a real creation throughout, not the reconstruction of a devastated world.
 - a) Finally, the summary verse (Genesis 2:3) says that all of God's works, both of "creating" and "making" were completed in six days, after which God "rested."
 - b) If anyone is impressed by the fact that "made" (*asah*) is used in Exodus 20:11 instead of "created" (*bara*), the phrase "all that in them is" should make it plain that the whole earth structure -- not just a reconstituted surface -- is included in what was "made" in the six days.
- C. Furthermore, while the passages in Genesis mention only the making of the firmament, sun, moon, stars, and animals, Nehemiah 9:6 says that the objects of God's making (*asah*) include the heavens, the heaven of heavens, and the earth, and everything contained in and on it, and the seas and everything they contain, as well as the hosts of heaven.
1. While *asah* is applied to the firmament, sun, moon, stars, and beasts, its further application to everything else contained in the universe, and the universe itself (which the language in both Exodus 20:11 and Nehemiah 9:6 conveys) creates a terrible problem of coherent interpretation!
 2. Who is willing to propose a ruin and restoration of the entire Universe and everything in it, including angels? Yet, if *asah* can refer to recreation only, and not to original creation, and if it must refer to working with material previously created (as so many have maintained), then gap theorists have espoused an untenable position.

III. **Was The Earth Populated Before Adam?**

- A. God commanded Adam and Eve to "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:28). The same command was given to Noah and his family upon leaving the ark (Genesis 9:1). Because of the word "replenish," and the fact that in Noah's case he was commanded to refill a once-populated world, some have asserted that the earth also was populated before Adam and Eve.
 1. One well-known defender of the Gap Theory was J. Sidlow Baxter, who spoke of "a cataclysmic change as the result of a divine judgment" and "intimations which connect it with a previous testing and fall of angels." He said it was "easy to believe that, in pre-human eras, Satan (as yet unfallen) may actually have been the rightful and divinely-appointed prince of this earth, presiding over an anterior species of beings."
 2. Baxter saw this "pre-Adamic rebellion and judgment of Lucifer and his associated angel-beings" as proven by "veiled indications" in Isaiah 14:9-17, Jeremiah 4:23-27, and Ezekiel 28:12-18.
- B. Gap Theory advocates would have been spared a lot of needless speculation if they had been more careful to determine the exact meaning of "replenish" in Genesis 1:28.
 1. It is true that *Webster's Dictionary* quotes this verse, under its definition of *replenish*, as "to repeople," and we admit that the etymology of our English word is from the Latin *re* (again) and *plenus* (full), thus meaning "to fill again."
 2. However, the Hebrew word *malah* simply means "to fill," and it is the very same word rendered "fill" in Genesis 1:22. In Genesis 9:1, it is simply equivalent to "bring forth abundantly" (vs. 7). Not even the *New Scofield Reference Bible* (which supports the Gap Theory) made an argument for pre-Adamic men on the basis of Genesis 1:28, and in fact changed its basic KJV text by substituting "fill" for "replenish."
 3. The Bible does not support the idea that Satan and/or his angels inhabited earth at the time of his fall.
 - a) It not only is reading between the lines, but writing between them as well, to use sections of Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 for the origin and fall of Satan. The devil (or Satan) is not referred to in either passage, nor is Lucifer his name. Those passages denounce the kings of Babylon and Tyre.
 - b) Nor does Jeremiah 4:23-27 describe a primeval destruction of the world, but the prophetic overthrow of Judah (2 Kings 24:14). The whole idea of pre-Adamic beings, whether Satan and his angels or a race of men or animals, living on earth prior to the creation week and bringing death and destruction is incorrect.

4. The Bible says that Adam was the first man (1 Corinthians 15:45) and that death entered this world as a result of his sin (Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:21). Before the six days there were no heavens or earth (Psalm 33:6, 9; 148:1-5). Therefore, the Gap Theory contradicts New Testament teaching.

IV. ***Twenty-Four Hour Periods Or Geological Periods?***

- A. Since evolutionary time cannot be placed either before or after the creation, some advocates have suggested it occurred during the creation week, and that the days of Genesis 1 are not "days" at all, but rather extensive eons of geologic time.
- B. Suppose the writer of Genesis wished to teach his readers that everything was created and made in six literal days, then what words would he use to best convey this thought? If he wished to convey the idea of long geological ages, he could surely have done it far more clearly and effectively in other words than in those which he selected. It was clearly his intent to teach creation in six literal days.
- C. Therefore, the only proper way to interpret Genesis 1 is not to "interpret" it at all. That is, we accept the fact that it was meant to say exactly what it says. The "days" are literal days and the events described happened in just the way described.
 1. We know the days of Genesis 1 are literal, contiguous 24-hour days because the Hebrew word *yom*, which is translated "day," is used and defined in Genesis 1:5. *Yom* is defined here as the light period in the regular succession of light and darkness.
 - a) This definition precludes any possible interpretation as geologic age. Amazingly, we discover when we begin to study Genesis 1 that we have a built-in scheme for interpreting the length of each of these days.
 - b) Genesis 1:14 states that God created the lights to divide the day from the night, and that they were signs for seasons, days, and years. If the "days" are "ages," then what are the "years?" If a day is an age, then what is a "night?"
 2. The Hebrew phrase translated "evening and morning" is used over 50 times in the Old Testament, and each time it refers to a literal 24-hour day (Exodus 18:13; 1 Samuel 17:16; 1 Kings 17:6; 2 Chronicles 2:4).
 - a) Moses was trying to guard against any of his readers deriving the notion of nonliteral days from his record.
 - b) In fact, it was necessary for him to be completely explicit on this point, since all the pagan nations of antiquity believed in some form of evolutionary origins which entailed vast eons of time be-

fore man and other living creatures developed from the primeval chaos.

3. Whenever *yom* is preceded by a numeral, it always carries the meaning of a 24-hour day. *Yom* occurs over 100 times in this fashion in the Old Testament non-prophetic literature, and always conveys a 24-hour day (cf. Genesis 7:11; Numbers 9:3; Judges 19:8; Ezra 3:6). To my knowledge, there is not a single example of the use of the word "day" in the Bible where it means other than a period of 24 hours when modified by the use of a number.
4. In addition, whenever the Hebrew term *yom* occurs in the plural (*yamin*), it always refers to a literal 24-hour day. When the word "days" appears in the plural (Hebrew *yamin*), as it does over 700 times in the Old Testament, it always refers to literal days (Exodus 24:16; Judges 11:40; 2 Samuel 7:12; 1 Chronicles 22:9). Thus, in Exodus 20:11, when the scripture says that "in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is," there is no doubt that six literal days are meant.
5. Had Moses wanted us to understand that these "days" of Genesis were actually "long geological periods of time," he could have so specified in a very exacting manner. Yet he did not.
 - a) Moses could have used the Hebrew word *olam* or the word *dôr*, both of which would indicate indefinite periods of time, but he did not (Genesis 9:12; Exodus 31:16; Jeremiah 8:5; Micah 5:2).
 - b) He could have modified the Hebrew word *yom* with the adjective *rab* (*yom rab* -- a "long" day), but again, he did not (Exodus 2:23; Joshua 23:1; 1 Kings 3:11; 2 Chronicles 15:3).
 - c) If God said He created everything in six days, but really used six eons, would that not make God a deceptive and deceitful God?
6. If the "days" of Genesis were not days at all, but long geological periods, then a huge problem arises in the field of botany. Plant life came into existence on the third day. Those who allege that the days of Genesis 1 may have been long geological ages, must accept the absurd hypothesis that plants survived in periods of total darkness through half of each geologic age, running into millions of years. Indeed, if there were periods of "evening and morning" -- as the text states -- then how did the plant life live in extended periods of total darkness?
7. The days of Genesis 1 are plainly 24-hour days because of God's explicit command to the Israelites to observe the Sabbath. The Sabbath command in Exodus 20:8-11 can be adequately understood only when the days of the week are considered to be 24-hour days. If the days of Genesis are not 24-hour contiguous days, then the interpretation of scripture is hopeless!

8. Perhaps the most damaging statements come from the mouth of Jesus and Paul (Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6; 1 Corinthians 15:45). If they are right, then man and woman have been here "since the beginning of the creation." But the day-age theory, on the other hand, places man at the end of millions or billions of years of geologic time.

V. ***Is Genesis 1-11 Literal Or Mythological?***

- A. Throughout the gospel age there has been a desire to regard portions of the Old Testament, and Genesis 1-11 in particular, as something other than literal history.
 1. For some people, their reason for rejecting the Genesis record as actual history is the extreme remoteness in time with which the accounts deal.
 2. Others point to similarities in mythological literature of the ancient Middle East. Some early Christians resorted to allegorical interpretations in their fight against certain heresies.
 3. Rationalistic refusal to believe in miracles can account for some people's rejection. The destructive work of Higher Criticism has led many to consider much of Genesis as legend and myth.
 4. Finally, evolutionary presuppositions, geological concessions, and an unwillingness to accept the Genesis chronology have caused non-literal reinterpretations.
- B. However, the legendary accounts of creation among other nations bear little resemblance to the Genesis record. The fact that there are myths or legends in existence does not mean that Genesis is myth also. If Genesis 1-11 is historical, as it claims to be, it is understandable that some trace of the creation story should have been preserved in the literature of various nations. Neither are the Genesis accounts said to be "like" anything so as to compare or illustrate some spiritual truth in parabolic fashion, such as the story of "The Good Samaritan." Also, Genesis 1-11 do not differ in literary style from the rest of the book. All of it claims to be history.
- C. The book of Genesis is the cornerstone of all true history and was accepted as such by the inspired writers of the Bible, and our Lord Himself.
 1. Adam is mentioned by name in three Old Testament books (Deuteronomy, Job, 1 Chronicles), and Noah is mentioned in three (1 Chronicles, Isaiah, Ezekiel).
 2. There are over 200 references to Genesis in the New Testament, over 100 of which are from Genesis 1-11.

3. Each of these eleven chapters is quoted or alluded to somewhere in the New Testament, and every New Testament writer refers to this section of Genesis.
4. Even Jesus referred to each of the first seven chapters of Genesis, and neither He nor any New Testament writer viewed those narratives as anything other than history.

Conclusion. If the account of the creation and the fall of man is rejected, the whole Bible is undermined. If the first Adam is mythical, so might be the "second" (1 Corinthians 15:45-47). If man did not fall into sin, why does he need a Savior? If evolution is the cause of life, why should we look for a judgment day? If Genesis cannot be believed, why should we believe Jesus or anyone else who accepted it?

In fact, however, these chapters of Genesis (and other biblical references to them) are the only correct and satisfactory information we have concerning "prehistoric" times. They do not contain mythical suppositions, poetic fancies, parabolic suggestions, or scant records leaving huge gaps in the actual lapse of time. Rather, these chapters contain an accurate and chronological account of the divine origin of everything.

I am deeply indebted to Bert Thompson and Gary Workman for the use of their material.