

The Appeal Trial of Satan

The Basis for A Biblical Philosophy of Human History

Presented To
Arlington Community Church
Arlington, Texas

Lesson #2

The “Gap” Theory and the Timing of Satan’s Fall

In the next several lessons in this series, we will examine some of the significant events in the Biblical narrative in light of our introductory lesson. The purpose of these next lessons is to allow you to see how the spiritual war has been waged between Satan’s kingdom (as it is first established and expands) and God’s kingdom. Satan desires to retain his independence from God and that portion of the celestial, angelic creation that opted to become part of his competing kingdom in eternity past.

To do so, Satan must successfully thwart God’s argument – God’s evidentiary matter in Satan’s appeal trial. Humanity and God’s plan for human history is God’s evidentiary matter.¹

Satan follows a two-fold strategy: 1) neutralization and 2) elimination of the evidentiary matter. We shall see how his strategy unfolds in human history in the next few lessons. But first, we shall examine the first two verses in the Bible in light of our understanding of the connection between the pre-historic appeal trial of Satan and the purpose of human history.

The “Traditional” Gap Theory

Many well-known published theologians of the 20th century interpreted Genesis 1:1-2 based upon what is commonly referred to as The “gap” theory (hereinafter referred to as the “traditional” gap theory). Many of the arguments used to support the traditional gap theory have since been questioned by many theologians, if not rejected due to disagreements over certain grammatical and syntactical patterns found in these verses. So, what’s new and surprising about theologians disagreeing on the interpretation of a passage of Scripture? Nothing really.

Regardless of the controversial nature of the traditional gap theory, there is still much validity to A gap theory that allows for a reconciliation of the events of Genesis 1 and the fact of Satan’s *moral* fall to which Isaiah and Ezekiel allude (see Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:12b-19 and the notes from lesson #1 in this series).²

¹ God is omniscient and knew that Adam and Eve would fall in the garden. Today, we see God’s plan for human history from the perspective of a post-fall state of affairs. However, should we consider human history prior to the fall of Adam and Eve, Adam and Eve had the potential to continue to experience perfect fellowship with the Lord in a perfect environment indefinitely (i.e. eternally). Thus, Adam and Eve had the potential to have been the sole evidentiary matter in Satan’s appeal trial had they obeyed God and not succumbed to Satan’s luring tactic – to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

² Actually, these two passages have references to Satan’s *moral* fall as well as prophetic references to his *future ouster* from heaven during the Tribulation. In addition, there are references to the ultimate execution of his sentence when he is cast into the Lake of Fire, which we know to occur at the end of human history.

The traditional gap theory (a.k.a. as the “Restitution” theory) holds that a gap of unknown time exists between Genesis 1:1 & 1:2.³ According to the traditional gap theory, in verse 1, the earth was originally created perfect as a part of God’s creation of the entire universe. However, in verse 2, the earth had become desolate and a wasteland due to God’s judgment as a result of Satan’s rebellion documented in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. Theologians such as Lewis S. Chafer held to the traditional gap theory as did Donald Grey Barnhouse, just to name a couple.⁴

According to the “gap” theory, this necessitated a restorative act on God’s part that is documented in the following verses of Genesis 1. The traditional gap or restitution theory gained wide acceptance largely as a result of the Scofield Bible notes. The proponents of the traditional gap theory generally translate Genesis 1:1-2: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and then the earth became...” (The word “was” can be translated “became.”)

This view is supported by logic, i.e. since the heavens and the earth in verse 1 means the organized universe and verse 2 speaks of the earth in chaos, and verses 3-31 speak of the organization of the universe again, it would be plausible to interpret verses 1-3 as describing three successive stages in the history of the earth. Furthermore, the Hebrew verb *hyh* in verse 2 translated “was” in the NASV can sometimes be translated “became” as in Genesis 3:20, “...for she *became* the mother of all the living.” Also, the only other passages where the phrase “waste and void” or “formless and void” (*tohu wa bohu*) occurs is found in Jeremiah 4:23 and Isaiah 34:11. The Hebrew phrase *tohu wa bohu* describes a state effected by God’s judgment.

However, there are interpretive difficulties with these verses involving the Hebrew *waw* conjunction at the beginning of verses 2 and 3 translated “and” and “then”, respectively – depending upon the translation of the Bible the reader references. After summarizing the traditional gap theory including supporting arguments for it, Bruce Waltke introduces his analysis of the grammatical difficulties associated with Genesis 1:1-3 with the following summarization of the objections to the theory.

But this understanding [*the traditional gap theory*] has not been accepted by the overwhelming majority of exegetes because it cannot stand the test of close grammatical analysis. For example, the theory assumes that the “and” which introduces verses 2 and 3 are different in the original text. The *waw* introducing verse 3 does in fact denote sequence and is called by grammarians the “*waw consecutive*.” But the *waw* introducing verse 2 is different in both form and function, grammarians refer to this *waw* as the “*waw conjunctive*.” The *waw conjunctive* may introduce various types of clauses (to be discussed below) but it does not introduce an independent sequential clause [*leading some to view it as non-sequential*]. It is inconceivable that Moses would have used a construction which does not indicate sequence in contrast to other constructions open to him, if this had been his intent.⁵

³ Bruce K. Waltke explains three theories of the Genesis 1 account as the restitution theory, the initial chaos theory, and the precreation chaos theory in his book *Creation and Chaos* (Portland, Oregon: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974), 18. Waltke distinguishes these theories as follows – “According to the first mode of thought, chaos occurred after the original creation; according to the second mode of thought, chaos occurred in connection with the original creation; and in the third mode of thought, chaos occurred before the original creation.”

⁴ Lewis S. Chafer, *Satan: His Motives and Methods* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1990), 15 and Donald Grey Barnhouse, *The Invisible War* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), 15-20.

⁵ Bruce Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3: Part II: The Restitution Theory,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (April, 1975): 139-140.

[Notes in brackets and underlining have been inserted for emphasis].

So, essentially, Waltke is indicating that there are grammatical difficulties associated with the conjunctions that connect verses 1-3 and those difficulties impact our understanding of the relationship between the three verses. Waltke challenges the traditional gap theorist's interpretation of the relationship between verses 1-3 to be a sequential relationship, i.e. the activity in verse 1 is followed by that of verse 2 and the activity of verse 2 is followed in sequence by the activity in verse 3. He admits that verses 2 and 3 are sequential in nature, but the real difficulty is in determining the proper interpretation of the *waw* conjunction in verse 2 so that a correct understanding of the relationship between verses 1 and 2 can be ascertained. Does verse 2 sequentially follow verse 1 or is verse 2 related to verse 1 in some other way, e.g. is verse 2 circumstantial to verse 1 – an elaboration of the circumstances described in verse 1?

In Hebrew syntax, a sequential construction is expressed by a *waw* + verb + noun word order. A disjunctive or contrastive construction is expressed by a *waw* + noun + verb word order. In Genesis 1:2, we find the latter syntactical arrangement – a disjunctive or contrastive construction.⁶ This would mean that verse 2 is a contrast to verse 1 and the *waw* conjunction is translated “but.” The traditional gap theorists translate the *waw* conjunction “but.” Furthermore, the fact that the *waw* construction of verse 2 introduces a disjunctive clause means that the clause must be circumstantial to verse 1 or verse 3.⁷ Some of those who reject the traditional gap theory contend that verse 2 is circumstantial to verse 1 (i.e. verse 1 and verse 2 should be viewed as coterminous); whereas, those who accept the traditional gap theory contend that verses 2 and 3 should be seen as coterminous – the earth in a chaotic state is related to the restoration account that begins in verse 3.

Some interpret the *waw* conjunction in verse 2, as non-sequential and thereby connected to verse 1. This would mean that verses 1 and 2 are to be seen as coterminous and the *waw* conjunction is translated “and.” (For example, Joseph Dillow, a proponent of an alternate gap theory explained below, interprets the *waw* conjunction in this manner). Another theologian (Merrill F. Unger) reaches a similar conclusion.⁸

However, the *waw* introducing verse 3 does in fact denote sequence and is called by grammarians the “*waw* consecutive.” Accordingly, it denotes sequence and can be translated by the word “then.”

The fact that there are differences among theologians about the translation of the *waw* conjunction in verses 2 and 3 does not invalidate the theory and is not to say that I believe that theologians like Chafer and Barnhouse who taught the traditional gap theory were necessarily

⁶ Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 650-51.

⁷ Mark F. Rooker, “Genesis 1:1-3: Creation or Re-Creation?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (July, 1992): 317. Note: Rooker represents a theologian who argues for the initial chaos theory (chaos in connection with the original creation) in contrast to Waltke's argument for the precreation chaos theory (chaos prior to the initial creation as described in verse 2).

⁸ Merrill F. Unger, “Rethinking the Genesis Account of Creation,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 115 (January-March, 1958): 115-28. “[This] interpretation...runs into grammatical and etymological problems. In the original language, Genesis 1:2 consists of three circumstantial clauses, all describing conditions or circumstances existing at the time of the principal action indicated in verse 1, or giving a reason for that action.” Thus, Unger's view of the relationship between verses 1-3 is a non-sequential relationship.

wrong or far off base in their position.⁹ Our understanding of the Biblical account of Satan's fall (Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:12b-19) certainly allows for there to have been a period of unspecified duration between the creation of the universe, including the earth, and the moral fall of Lucifer. (See Job 38:7 where we find "all" angels present and rejoicing at the creation of the material universe thereby a likely indication that the universe pre-existed the moral fall of Satan).

An interpretive translation of Genesis 1:1-3 based upon the traditional gap theory could read as follows:

(V. 1) **In the beginning** [*when God first created the universe at a point in eternity past – see Job 38:7*] **God created the heavens and the earth.** (V. 2) **But** [*"waw" conjunctive interpreted to indicate contrast*] **the earth became** [*same Hebrew word "hyh" (was) is translated "became" in Gen. 3:20*] **formless and void** [*"tohu wa bohu" in association with Satan's moral fall at a point in eternity past*], **and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.** (V. 3) **Then** [*"waw" consecutive indicating sequence in action and introducing the restorative acts of the remainder of Genesis 1*] **God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.**

[*Note: phrases in brackets are inserted for interpretive purposes*]

An Alternate Gap Theory

Some theologians have adopted an interpretation that may be called an "alternate" gap theory. These theologians have concluded that the "gap" that exists is a gap between the initial creation of the material universe and the restoration process that begins in Genesis 1:1. In other words, an alternate gap theory holds that the gap is between a point in eternity past and Genesis 1:1 versus a gap between the original creation (v. 1) and judgment of the earth (v. 2) as espoused by the traditional gap theory.

For instance, Joseph Dillow sees the "gap" to exist between the initial creation of the earth at some point in eternity past and the restoration process that begins in Genesis 1:1.¹⁰ In particular, he states the following:

The writer is assuming a widely held view that Gen. 1:1 refers not to the absolute but to a relative beginning. The entire known universe, including the sun and stars and atmosphere, etc., came into existence out of nothing in Gen. 1:1ff. The earth itself, however, apparently already existed at this time. The angels were

⁹ In fact, I believe that Waltke's conclusions regarding the interpretation of this passage which he summarizes at the end of the last of three articles on the subject allows for a gap theory to be a plausible explanation of the relationship between the verses. Waltke reaches a conclusion that verse 1 is a summary statement and verse 2 describes the situation prior to the creation. Verses 3 and following are the narrative of creation. While Waltke doesn't accept the traditional gap theory, it seems to me that the interpretation he proffers has many parallels to the two gap theories discussed in these notes. He even states that it is not possible to conclusively disprove the interpretation of verse 2 – "But the earth had become." See Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3: Part III: The Initial Chaos Theory and the Precreation Chaos Theory," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (July-Sept, 1975): 227-28.

¹⁰ Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, North Carolina: Schoettle Publishing Company, 1992), 1-2. Merrill Unger espoused this view. See Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2 Vols (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 1:5. Also, see Allen P. Ross, "Genesis" in John Walvoord & Roy Zuck, editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Press, 1985), 28.

created and some of them fell in the pre-Gen. 1:1 universe. When God begins His creative work, the earth is already in a judged condition. This is not to be confused with the [*traditional*] “gap theory” which teaches a gap between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2. Rather, the gap is between the original creation in eternity past (Jn 1:1-2) and the re-creation [*restoration*] of Gen 1:1 which occurred about six thousand to twelve thousand years ago. In the pre-Gen 1:1 universe an entirely different set of natural laws prevailed.¹¹

[*Note: Bracketed phrases are added for clarification and are not a part of the original quotation*]

I believe that the view presented by Jody Dillow in the Prologue to his book *The Reign of the Servant Kings* provides an acceptable alternative to the traditional gap theory. At a minimum, it negates some of the arguments of the critics of the traditional gap theory.

So an interpretive translation of Genesis 1:1-3 according to the alternate gap theory might read:

(V.1) In the beginning [*beginning of man related history, not a pre-historic event in eternity past*] **God created the heavens and the earth.** (V.2) **And** [*“waw” conjunctive indicates a concurrent event, not sequential activity*] **the earth was** [*Hebrew word “hyh” is translated “was”*] **formless and void** [*“tohu wa bohu” alludes to the process associated with creation*], **and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.** (V. 3) **Then** [*“waw” consecutive indicating sequence in action*] **God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.**

At this time, I believe either the “gap” theory that Chafer presents or the alternative theory that Dillow presents pose the best potential for understanding the sequence of events leading up to the creation of man.

- Both recognize a “gap” between the original creation of the earth and the restoration process that began in Genesis 1. The traditional “gap” theory recognizes this judgment to have occurred between Gen. 1:1 & 2; whereas the alternate gap theory recognizes this judgment to have occurred between some point in eternity past and Gen. 1:1.
- Both allow for some catastrophic event resulting from God’s judgment to have occurred between the original creation and the restoration that is described in Genesis 1.
- We have seen that the catastrophic event that occurred is Satan’s sin and the resulting judgment upon the universe brought about by God’s justice.

As we progress in this study, it is important to keep in mind the effect of and analogy between Satan’s fall and man’s fall. When Adam fell, he acquired a sin nature that originated from an attitude of independence from God. The increasing confusion and darkness that has continued since Adam’s fall will reach its maximum level in the Tribulation and will stand in stark contrast to the Kingdom of Christ on earth during the Millennium during which the “light of men” (John 1:4), the resurrected Christ will rule in all His glory and splendor.

¹¹ Ibid. (See footnote 1 at the bottom of page 1 of Dillow’s book). See also Bruce Waltke, *Creation and Chaos* (Portland: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary Press, 1974), 31-36.