Isaiah - Commentaries by Stanley Bruce Anstey

The Gap of Genesis 1: Is It A Theory?, Evidences That Indicate a Gap in Genesis 1

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There are a number of internal evidences within the creation account itself that confirm that there is indeed a gap between the original creation and the reconstruction of the earth.

Exegetical Evidence

One of the great principles of proper Biblical exegesis is that we interpret Scripture in the light of all other Scriptures. This is essentially what the Apostle Peter was referring to when he said that no "Scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20). This means that we cannot (rightly) isolate one passage of Scripture from the rest of the Word of God and think that we will have its full meaning contained in that one passage. The J. N. Darby Translation footnote on 2 Peter 1:20 states, "One might almost say 'no prophecy explains itself.'" Similarly, Mr. G. Campbell Morgan said, "It takes the whole Bible to explain any one passage of the Bible." Hence, we must have the light of all the Scriptures shed on any one passage that we may be considering to correctly understand the full meaning of that passage. We must, therefore, turn to other passages of Scripture that speak about the creation to gather a correct understanding of Genesis 1. We reference four such passages:

Isaiah 45:18

ISAIAH 45:18 says: "For thus saith the LORD, that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the earth and made it; He hath established it, He created it not in vain [waste], He formed it to be inhabited." The word translated “in vain [waste]" in this verse ("tohu" in the Hebrew) is the very same word used in Genesis 1:2, translated as "without form" in the KJV. Hence, when Genesis 1:2 Says that the earth was "without form [waste] and void [empty]; and darkness was upon the face of the deep," it could not be referring to God's initial action of creating because Isaiah 45:18 states emphatically that God does not create in that way—i.e. by first creating "waste" matter. Mr. W. Kelly said, “God did not create a mass of undigested materials." Since this is so, it is clear that Genesis 1:2 is a description of the state into which the earth fell subsequent to its creation.

As a rule, when God creates, it is perfect and complete. He does not start with a mass of elements and then build in steps toward a finished product. But when He makes (as in the reconstruction of the earth), He often does; He will build one thing upon another until His work reaches completion. This being the case, Genesis 1:2 Could not be the description of God's creative work because He does not create incompletely. Mr. W. Scott emphasizes this point in his book, "The Two Trees of Paradise" (p. 5): "The scene of utter desolation, so graphically described in the second verse of the Bible, was not the creative work of God, for His [creative] work is perfect." He also points out that the often-used statement, "In six days the LORD created the heavens and the earth," is not found in Scripture. The Bible says, "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth" (Ex. 20:11; 31:17).

A closer look at Genesis 1:2 indicates a threefold condition into which the earth passed—of wasteness, emptiness, and darkness. The word translated "was" ("hay'thah" in the Hebrew) in the KJV, according to many scholars, should be translated "became." For instance, J. N. Darby said, "I hardly think that "hay'thah" (was) here is simple existence, but more 'was become'....a state into which it had passed" ("Notes and Comments on Scripture," vol. 1, p. 111). The passage, therefore, could read, "And the earth became without form and void." "Became" indicates that there was a change of condition in that which God had created, and thus confirms that He did not create the earth in that state of chaos. (There are 17 places in the KJV, in the book of Genesis alone, where this word ("hay'thah") is translated "became." Why the translators of the KJV chose to use “was” in Genesis 1:2 is not known, when they translated the word as “became” in so many other places. The NIV (a favourite translation of many Young Earth Creationists) states in a footnote that the alternate reading for "was" is "became."

It has often been asked that if Genesis 1:2 is descriptive of a fallen state, who, or what caused it? Scripture is silent as to any direct statement about this; however, the answer to this question might be found in the words "waste" ("tohu") and "empty" ("bohu"). It is significant that in each of the five other places in the Bible where these words are used, they are always the result of an act of judgment in connection with sin (Isa. 24:1; 34:11; 45:18; Jer. 4:23; Nahum 2:10). It would be safe, therefore—and consistent with the whole of Scripture—to assume that it was the case in Genesis 1:2.

But what judgment would this be, and on whom or what? From the foregoing references we can deduct that this would be something that resulted from Satan's sinful operations, for as far as Scripture reveals, he and his angels were the only creatures in existence then with such power that would work sinfully. Since it is Satan's way to spoil and corrupt whatever God does, we can deduct that, upon being expelled from the abode of God (Ezek. 28:11-19), he corrupted and wrecked the earth, and God closed it with an act of judgment. We cannot state emphatically that this is the cause of the earth's fallen and chaotic state, but it is consistent with the tenor of Scripture.

Those who advocate the "young earth" idea reject this because, in order for death and judgment to exist, there had to be sin. They think that since Romans 5:12 states that sin and death entered the world when Adam disobeyed God, it couldn’t have been involved in the scene which Genesis 1:2 describes, because at that point, Adam did not exist. However, this is a misunderstanding. Romans 5:12 is not referring to sin and death entering the original creation but sin and death entering the Adamic world of which Adam was the head. It is a mistake to think that sin did not exist until Adam. The Bible clearly indicates that Satan was the first sinner. He sinned before Adam sinned, and consequently, was expelled from the abode of God as such. This can be easily proved by the fact that he was in the garden of Eden working in a sinful way, lying and deceiving the woman before she and her husband disobeyed God (Gen. 3:1-7).

In spite of this, Young Earth Creationists reject the idea of sin and death being around before Adam sinned because Genesis 1:31 Says, "And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good." They do not believe that God could say this if the earth's crust were

full of fossils bearing the marks of disease, violence, death, and decay. They ask, "How could God call that very good?" However, a closer reading of the verse shows that God was pronouncing on what He had "made" in the six days of reconstruction, not on what had been spoiled in creation previously. He said that “it” (what He had made in the six days) was “very good.” A simple reading of the passage is all that is needed here.

Mark 10:6 has been brought forward to prove that man was part of the creation mentioned in Genesis 1:1. However, "the beginning of the creation," of which the Lord speaks in Mark 10:6, is not the creation of the heavens and the earth, but the creation of man in Genesis 1:26-27.

Hebrews 11:3

HEBREWS 11:3 states: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God." The word "framed" in the Greek ("katartizo") means "repair" or "mend" (Strongs), or "to put in order again" (Liddell and Scott), or “adjusted” (Nestle). The same word is used in Matthew 4:21 and Mark 1:19 and is translated "mending" in the KJV. In Galatians 6:1, it is translated as "restore." Hence, this verse indicates that God mended or restored that which He had previously created. The fact that it needed mending shows clearly that it had gotten into a chaotic state.

2 Peter 3:5

2 Peter 3:5 states: “For this they are willingly ignorant of, that by the Word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing [having its subsistence] out of the waters and in [through] the water.” In this passage, Peter answers the ignorance of the infidels who mockingly insist that all has remained the same since the beginning of the creation (vs. 4). He shows that there have been two catastrophic, worldwide interventions of God in judgment in the past (vss. 5, 6), and there is a third coming (vs. 7). Verse 5 is a reference to the judgment that left the earth in the chaotic state described in Genesis 1:2; verse 6 refers to the judgment of the flood in Noah’s day, and verse 7 describes a future judgment after the Millennium, at the end of time.

Notwithstanding, Young Earth Creationists insist that verses 5-6 refer to the flood. Verse 6 surely does, but verse 5 couldn’t be. Everyone who knows the story of the flood knows that the waters of the deluge covered the highest mountains (Gen. 7:18-20); there were no pieces of land “standing out of the waters,” as verse 5 states. The 5th verse, therefore, must be referring to something else. Since what is described in verse 5 is mentioned before the description of the flood in verse 6, what else in the first six chapters of Genesis could it be referring to but Genesis 1:2?

The description of the earth in 2 Peter 3:5 may not look like what is stated in Genesis 1:2 when compared, but there is really no difficulty in reconciling the two passages when we remember that the Bible is a progressive revelation of truth. What is given in the Old Testament is often expanded upon in the New, wherein more detail is given. For instance, more is given in 2 Timothy 3:8 about the Egyptian magicians who resisted Moses, which we wouldn’t have known had we only the Old Testament. Similarly, 2 Peter 3:5 amplifies Genesis 1:2. From reading the account in Genesis 1, we might have thought that water covered the earth completely, but 2 Peter 3:5 tells us that there were parts of the earth that were submerged and parts that were not. Taking a closer look at Genesis 1:2, we see that it doesn’t say that the earth was totally covered with water: it is an assumption to say that it was. It may be argued that it wasn’t until the 3rd day that the land appeared. Again, Scripture does not say that; it says that the land became “dry” on the 3rd day. (The word “land” in Genesis 1:9-10 is in italics, indicating that it is not in the Hebrew text.) Putting Genesis 1:2 and 2 Peter 3:5 together, we learn that when the earth was “waste and empty,” it was in a lacustrine (partially submerged) state.

W. Kelly remarked, “The passage before us [2 Peter 3:5-6] is by some applied only to the earth’s primeval constitution, by others to the deluge. It is plain enough that the apostle looks successively at each.” (The Second Epistle of Peter, p. 165)

Genesis 2:4

GENESIS 2:4 is a divinely inspired summary of the creation account. It says, "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens." God's work is stated twice here. First, in connection with what He "created" in the dateless past. (Note: the heavens are mentioned before the earth, which is the order in Genesis 1:1.) Then, secondly, God’s work is stated in connection with the things which He "made." (Note: the earth is mentioned before the heavens, which is the order of God's work in the six days of reconstruction in Genesis 1:3-31.) Referring to these things in this marked way, the Spirit of God was clearly indicating that the creation account contained two distinct works of God.

W. Kelly concludes his remarks on this subject by saying, "The common idea of putting the creation of the world some six thousand years ago is a mere blunder. The Bible is in no way responsible for it. Where does Scripture say so? or anything approaching it?" ("The Creation," p. 11)

Structural Evidence

The Scriptures were written carefully and precisely (being divinely inspired), and they are to be studied in that way—"precept upon precept; line upon line" (Isa. 28:10). This means that we are to pay attention to the smallest details of God's Word. The student of Scripture is also called to "rightly divide the Word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). This means that the Word of God has divisions in it and that we are to observe those divisions in seeking to gain an understanding of the truth. Topics are sectioned off by certain reoccurring terms and phrases that mark unified paragraphs of thought. These are to be noted by the Bible student. An example of this can be seen in the five books of the Psalms; each book is carefully marked off by ending with the phrases, "Amen and Amen" or, "Praise the LORD" (Psa. 41:13; 72:19; 89:52; 106:48; 150:6).

The very first division in the Word of God, which students of Scripture should take note of, is between Genesis 1:2 and Genesis 1:3. The structure of the Biblical account itself indicates this. This can be seen by noting that the six days in the passage are each sectioned off by two reoccurring phrases that indicate the beginning and the ending of each day. The first day begins with, "And God said," and it ends with, "And the evening and the morning were the first day." These two repeating phrases act as bookends for each day. This pattern continues throughout the account. It shows clearly that the first day begins at verse 3, and not at verse 1, as Young Earth Creationists say. To teach otherwise is to disregard this pattern that God has set in His Word

This shows that the first two verses are a separate paragraph from what follows in the rest of the chapter. The things mentioned in these two verses, therefore, are actions that clearly did not occur at the same time as the things stated in the rest of the chapter. This break in the text indicates a gap between God's two works of creating and reconstructing, with no mention of how long the gap was.

Grammatical Evidence

G. V. Wigram notes in his article, "Examination of the Hebrew Bible as to the Structure and Idiom of the Language," that there is a significant change in the tenses in Genesis 1, and that this change indicates a new work of God from verse 3 onward ("Memorials of the Ministry of G. V. Wigram," vol. 2, pp. 161-169).

He points out that verses 1-2 are stated as past action, whereas verses 3-31 are present action. This change of tenses in the text indicates that verses 1-2 stand alone as a paragraph by itself. Mr. Wigram states that "created" and "was [became]" are verbs in "the perfectly past time." Then, he shows that verses 3-31 indicate a fresh action of God, emphasized by a change to the present tense. This present tense follows through the whole latter part of the chapter. He says that verses 3, 6, 9, 14, etc., could be translated more accurately as, "God saith, Let there be light..." And, "God sees the light, that it is good..." Also, verses 5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31 should be, "And evening is, and morning is, a first day..." This shows that in writing the creation account the Spirit of God was clearly indicating a change. Mr. Wigram concluded, "Anyone who weighs the matter will see that it is the commencement of an entirely new paragraph." This evidence again points to a break in God's dealings between His creation of the original earth (vs. 1) and His reconstruction of the present earth (vss. 3-31).

Those who reject that there was an original creation which fell into chaos are quick to point out that verse 3 begins with "And" ("waw"). In their minds, it shows that verses 3-31 are connected with verses 1-2, and thus, the first two verses are part of the first day. However, the word "And" ("waw") is not in the Hebrew text in verse 3 as a separate conjunctive. It is attached to and is part of the word translated "said," and thus, could be translated as a disjunctive, "Then God said..." (NKJV; NASB; NLT; NRSV; J. Green Interlinear Bible, Wycliffe Bible Committee, etc.). This supports the thought of a new departure of God without necessarily connecting it to the foregoing verses. Choosing to place "And" at the beginning of verse 3 has misled some to think that the chapter is all one continuous process of creation, which it is not.

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