Furthermore, the gappist argument violates the principle of God’s progressive revelation in Scripture. Later texts presuppose the prior revelation of earlier texts, not vice versa. Therefore Jer. 4:23 cannot be used to interpret Gen. 1:2 as a judgment—that would be completely back-to-front, because an allusion works only one way.

- Jesus said that people were there ‘from the beginning of creation’, not after a billions-of-years gap from the beginning (Mark 10:4–6).7

- The English word ‘replenish’ in the KJV translation of Genesis 1:28 (‘… and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth’), does not support the gap theory as gappists claim. As linguist Dr Charles Taylor explains,8 when it was translated in 1611, “replenish” was merely a parallel to “fill”, and the prefix “re-” didn’t mean “again”, but “completely”. The same Hebrew word male is used in Genesis 1:22, and is there translated “fill (the seas)”, so there was no need to translate it differently in verse 28.

Summary and conclusion

Top professors of Hebrew at world-class universities are in agreement that Genesis is teaching straightforward historical narrative about the creation of everything in six earth-rotation days, with no gap, thousands of years ago, and a subsequent global Flood (though they don’t usually believe the history in Genesis, there is no doubt for them about what it says). Which is what the vast majority of believers, for nearly 2,000 years, understood the text to be saying—until unbelieving philosophies about long ages become popular.

Like virtually all of the other attempts to ‘harmonize’ long ages with Genesis,9 the Gap Theory

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REFUTING COMPROMISE

The definitive, classic study on the whole subject of ‘how do we understand early Genesis?’ In his trademark crisp, logical style, scientist and scholar Dr Jonathan Sarfati clinically dismantles those ‘positions’ on Genesis which do not take it straightforwardly, as history. He also shows how these positions, and their justification (the alleged need to respond to pressure from ‘the facts of science’), fail to meet basic standards in the areas of exegesis, logic and the philosophy of science itself.

3 By making an imaginary ‘Lucifer’s Flood’, which the Bible nowhere mentions, responsible for the fossils, the global Flood of Noah (which the Bible spends three whole chapters describing in detail) gets relegated to a non-event that did not leave any fossil traces.
It postulates the fall of Satan, and the existence of evil, death, suffering and disease in a world God afterwards declared ‘very good’ in Genesis 1:31. Adam and Eve would have been standing on a graveyard of fossils showing death, bloodshed and cancer—hardly ‘very good’.4

It contradicts the Sabbath command of Exodus 20:8–11, which is based on the creation of the ‘heavens, earth, sea and everything in them’ in six ordinary days. In the Old Testament Hebrew, whenever the words ‘heaven(s) and earth’ are conjoined, it is a figure of speech called a merism, in which two opposites are combined into an all-encompassing single concept.5 Throughout the Bible (e.g. Genesis 14:19, 22; 2 Kings 19:15; Psalm 121:2) this means the totality of creation, not just the earth and its atmosphere, or our solar system alone. It is used because Hebrew has no word for ‘the universe’ and can at best say ‘the all’.6

The Hebrew words tohu and bohu, translated ‘without form’ and ‘void’ in Genesis 1:2, are claimed by gappists to indicate a judgmental destruction rather than something in the process of being built. But tohu occurs several times in the Bible in which it is used in a morally neutral state, describing something unfinished, and confused, but not necessarily evil. Hebrew scholars and the Church have for centuries taken the view that Genesis 1:2 is not a scene of judgment or an evil state created by the fall of angels, but a description of the original undeveloped state of the universe. The plain and simple meaning of what Moses says is that on the first day there was a mass covered by water, with no dry land involving features (tohu = ‘unformed’), and no inhabitants yet (bohu = ‘unfilled’).

Some have misused Jeremiah 4:23 to teach the gap theory, because it uses the phrase tohu va bohu to describe the results of a judgment. Leading gap theorists like Arthur Cunstace used this fact to assert that ‘without form and void’ must mean ‘laid waste by a judgment’. But this is fallacious—there is nothing in the Hebrew words tohu va bohu themselves to suggest that. The only reason they refer to being ‘laid waste’ is due to the context in which the words are found. They simply mean ‘unformed and unfilled’. This state can be due either to nothing else having been created, or some created things being removed. The context of Jer. 4 is a prophecy of the Babylonian sacking of Jerusalem, not creation. In fact, Jer. 4:23 is known as a literary allusion to Genesis 1:2—the judgment would be so severe that it would leave the final state as empty as the world before God created anything.

An analogy: when I open my word processor, my document screen is blank. But if I delete an entire document the screen would likewise be blank. So ‘blank’ means ‘free from any text’. In some contexts, the lack of text is because I haven’t written anything, in others it is due to a deletion of text. You would need to know the context to tell which—you couldn’t tell from the word ‘blank’ itself. However, a gappist-type analysis of the word might conclude: ‘since “blank” can refer to a screen with all the text deleted, the word “blank” itself signifies a text deletion event, even when none is stated.’

This is in line with the common biblical principle where a judgment is a reversal of creation. Jer. 4:23 is taking the land back to its unfomed state, unfit for Man to live in. Similarly, the Flood took the world back to its condition on Day 2, before the land and water had separated.

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Technical box: Why the Hebrew grammar forbids the idea of a ‘gap’.

’Waw’ is the name of the Hebrew letter which is used as a conjunction. It can mean ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘now’, ‘then’, and several other things depending upon the context and type of waw involved. It occurs at the beginning of Genesis 1 verse 2 and is translated in the KJV, ‘And [waw] the earth was without form, and void.’ Gappists use this translation to support the gap theory. However, the most straightforward reading of the text sees verse 1 of Genesis 1 as the principal subject-and-verb clause, with verse 2 containing three ‘circumstantial clauses’. Hebrew grammarian Gesenius calls this a ‘waw explicativum’, and compares it to the English ‘to wit’.

Other terms for it are ‘waw copulative’, ‘waw disjunctive’ or ‘explanatory waw’.

Such a waw disjunctive is easy to tell from the Hebrew, because it is formed by waw followed by a non-verb. It introduces a parenthetic statement, that is, it’s alerting the reader to put the following passage in brackets, as it were—a descriptive phrase about the previous noun. It does not indicate something following in a time sequence—this would have been indicated by a different Hebrew construction called the waw consecutive, where waw is followed by a verb (the waw consecutive is in fact used before the different days of creation—see my book, Refuting Compromise, p. 100).

It is simply grammatically impossible to translate the verb hayah as ‘became’ when it is combined with a waw disjunctive—in the rest of the Old Testament, waw + a noun + haya (qal perfect, 3rd person) is always translated, ‘was’ or ‘came’, but never ‘became’. Also, the correct Hebrew idiom for the word ‘become’ is to attach the verb ‘to be’, e.g. ‘was’ to the preposition ‘to’ (Hebrew le). The verb ‘to be’ does NOT mean ‘become’ without this preposition. Since Genesis 1:2 lacks the preposition, it cannot mean that the earth ‘became’ without form and void.

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5 An English example is ‘open day and night’. This doesn’t simply mean during sunlight and darkness but not dusk; rather, ‘day and night’ means the whole 24-hour day-night cycle. Other examples are ‘far and near’, ‘hill and vale’, ‘high and low’.