



## A Critique of the Precreation Chaos Gap Theory

John Zoschke, B.A., M.A., Pastor, Grace Bible Church of Garden City, 2314 B St., Garden City, KS 67846

### Abstract

The four key tenets of the precreation chaos gap theory are that “the heaven and the earth” in Genesis 1:1 refers to the complete organized universe, Genesis 1:1 is a summary statement of the six days of Creation, Genesis 1:2 looks forward to Genesis 1:3, and Genesis 1:2 describes a chaotic state that existed prior to the Creation mentioned in Genesis 1:1. This theory, which first appeared in the 11th–12th centuries A.D., and in a modified version has increasingly become the choice of scholars, was evaluated and found to be incorrect. “The heavens and the earth” does not always refer to the complete organized universe, and specifically, does not have that reference in Genesis 1:1, where it instead refers to the two places where things can exist. The commonly acknowledged summary is at Genesis 2:1, which differs from Genesis 1:1. The circumstantial clause of Genesis 1:2 does not look forward to Genesis 1:3, but rather back to Genesis 1:1. Genesis 1:2 does not describe a chaos contrary to creation, but rather the condition of the earth as it first came from the hand of the Creator.

### Keywords

Creation, Precreation, Chaos, Gap

### Introduction

A “gap theory” is an interpretation of Genesis 1 which puts a time lapse between the empty, dark, watery earth of Genesis 1:2 and the 1st divine fiat (a divine command that follows “God said”), “Let light be” (Genesis 1:3). These fiats continue for the subsequent events of the six days of creation. All gap theorists contend that only these divine fiat events are part of the Creation week.

The views of gap theorists stand in contrast with the view being defended in this paper. That view, called the traditional view by Waltke (1975, p.217), understands Genesis 1:1 as an initial creation of the universe, which was chronologically prior to the divine fiats that begin at 1:3, with 1:2 describing the condition of that universe as it came from the hands of the Creator. This initial creation in Genesis 1:1 is further understood as included within the Creation week, not separated from it by a time lapse.

Currently, there are three versions of the gap theory: ruin-reconstruction; precreation chaos; and soft gap. The precreation chaos view is the one being evaluated in this paper, but a brief description of the other two is given in Appendix A. The precreation chaos view is distinguished from the other two, not only in its approach to Genesis 1:1–2, but also because it (1) had its beginnings before the rise of evolutionary old earth science; (2) has since been formulated by Hebraists; and (3) is the view presented in some of the best and most influential Bible study helps available today. (See Appendix B for a documentation of this).

Essentially, precreation chaos gap theorists do not see Genesis 1:1 as an absolute beginning of creation, but rather as a summary statement of the creative activity detailed in 1:3–31. Moreover, they understand Genesis 1:2 to be describing a chaos that existed prior to the creative activity recounted in 1:3ff. Hence the view is called “precreation chaos.” While all proponents of this theory would agree that Genesis 1:2 describes a chaos, they differ as to its significance: a few view it as a stage of an earlier creative activity not reported in Genesis 1; whereas most maintain that it is a negative state in opposition to God’s creativity activity.

A serious repercussion of this theory is that if Genesis 1 presents our current creation beginning as an empty, dark watery earth, then this text conveys no information on the beginning of the now existing universe. Some precreation chaos adherents teach that, although Genesis 1 is silent on it, later revelation in the Bible assures us that God created everything, that is, creation *ex nihilo*. But Waltke contends that later Old Testament passages do no more than refer back to Genesis 1, and therefore to a relative beginning, not the original one (Waltke, 1975, 132:338; 1976, 133:34–40). In this case, the Old Testament is silent on the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. [Waltke does say, “Other Scriptures clearly state that only God is eternal—he made everything (e.g., Neh. 9:6; Job 41:11; Psa. 102.25; Heb. 11:3; Rev. 1:8),” (2001, p.68). So presumably, he would say the Old Testament *implies* creation *ex nihilo*].

This paper will first briefly trace the development of the precreation chaos theory and then critique its arguments, demonstrating that they lack sufficient validity to justify a departure from the traditional view.

### Development of the Precreation Chaos Theory

Waltke (1975, p.221), who apparently coined the term, “precreation chaos theory,” divides its adherents into two groups, those who regard Genesis 1:1 as a dependent clause, and those who regard that verse as a summary statement explicated in the remainder of the chapter.

Perhaps the first proponents of the former view were the Jewish scholars Rashi (d. 1105) and Ibn Ezra (d. 1167). Rashi understood Genesis 1:1 as the protasis; 1:2 as a parenthesis, and 1:3 as the apodasis, whereas Ibn Ezra understood Genesis 1:1 as the protasis and 1:2 as the apodasis (Waltke, 1975, p.222).

Rashi’s view is the only form of the dependent clause view widely held today. It is reflected in the translations of Genesis 1:1–2 in the New Jewish version (1962), the New American Bible (1970), and the New English Bible (1972), Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant versions of the English Bible, respectively. But Young (1964, pp. 1–3), Waltke (1975, pp.222–225), and Davis (1975, pp.39–40) have all given good refutations of this position. Also, when the New English Bible was revised and renamed The Revised English Bible in 1989, it returned to the more traditional translation of Genesis 1:1 as an independent clause.

The apparent originator of the “Genesis 1:1 as a summary statement” version of the precreation chaos view was a professor of Hebrew at New York University by the name of George Bush. In his 1852 commentary on Genesis, he described Genesis 1:1 as giving “a *summary* of the work of creation, which is more fully detailed in its various particulars in the account of the six days following” (Bush, 1852, p.26). Fifteen years later, Franz Delitzsch’s *System of Biblical Psychology*, which taught the ruin-reconstruction theory, was translated into English. This theory dominated the gap theory landscape until the last half of the twentieth century, when scholars began to notice its grammatical difficulties, with many of them opting for the precreation chaos theory as a better alternative.

In 1958, Merril F. Unger wrote, “Genesis 1:1–2 is introductory to the seven days of creation and presents a summary statement of the divine activity it called forth.” According to him, Genesis 1:3–2:3 “give the details involved in the generalized declaration of verses 1 and 2” (Unger, 1958, p.29). This sounds like a clear statement of the precreation chaos theory, but Waltke (1975, pp. 137, 144) includes him with the ruin-reconstruction gap theorists, noting that (in contrast

to Waltke’s own version of precreation chaos) he takes verse 2 as circumstantial to verse 1, and considers later references to creation to refer to an absolute beginning (Waltke, 1975, p.144).

Three years after Unger’s article, Gerhard Von Rad stated in his commentary on Genesis, “One may understand v.1 as the summary statement of everything that is unfolded step by step in the following verses.” (Von Rad, 1961, p.47). But he adds, “It would be false to say, however, that the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* was not here at all.” (Von Rad, 1961, p.49).

The most comprehensive defense of the precreation chaos theory was given by Dr Bruce K. Waltke in 1974 and 1975–1976, then a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. On October 1–4, 1974, he delivered a series of lectures propounding this theory at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary. These were incorporated into the book *Creation and Chaos*. Waltke revised this book into a five article series, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3” which appeared in *Bibliotheca Sacra* from January 1975–January 1976. In 1996, Allen P. Ross, also of Dallas Seminary, wrote in support of Waltke’s view in an appendix to his book *Creation & Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Ross, 1996).

Waltke’s *Bibliotheca Sacra* articles went largely unchallenged for 17 years—only Weston Fields (1976, pp. 127–128) and John Whitcomb (1986, pp. 154–155) briefly responded to him. Finally in 1992, Mark Rooker, at that time professor at Criswell Bible College, decisively refuted Waltke in a two article series in *Bibliotheca Sacra* entitled, “Creation or Recreation?” But in 2001, Waltke, who meanwhile had moved to Westminster Theological Seminary, published his Genesis commentary. In it, he gives some additional arguments for his precreation theory, but makes no effort to interact with Rooker’s articles.

The above survey of the development of the precreation chaos theory prompts two observations. First, the only versions of the theory that had their beginnings before the rise of evolutionary old earth science were the dependent clause versions taught by the Jewish scholars of the 11th–12th centuries A.D., Rashi and Ibn Ezra. There is no evidence that these men intended to debunk the reality of a young earth. In fact, according to Lewis, Rashi actually understood Genesis 2:4 to teach that everything was created on the first day, so that Genesis 1:3–31 is only telling how each created thing came upon its fixed place on the day God appointed it (Lewis, 1989, p.451). If that is the case, Rashi’s view should not really be called a precreation chaos view.

The second observation is that scholars who regard Genesis 1:1 as a summary of 1:3–31 often reveal that a desire to make Genesis 1 harmonize with old earth science influenced their interpretation. Bush defended

his view by claiming that it was “undoubtedly more consistent with ascertained geological facts than any other, and it is certainly desirable to harmonize, as far as possible, the truths of revelation with those of natural science” (Bush, 1852, p.27). Waltke states, “Contemporary scientists almost unanimously discount the possibility of creation in one week, and we cannot summarily discount the evidence of the earth scientists” (Waltke, 2001, p.77). He dismisses the idea that the days of the creation account are literal twenty-four hour periods because “most scientists reject a literal twenty-four hour period” (Waltke, 2001, p. 61).

### Evaluation of the Precreation Chaos Theory

Because Waltke has given the most thorough presentation and cogent defense of the precreation chaos theory, this study primarily will focus on his arguments. The major points he adduces in support of his position are the following:

- (1) אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ, *’et haššāmayim w’et hā’āreš*, “the heavens and the earth” in Genesis 1:1 are a merism referring to the finished organized universe.
- (2) Genesis 1:1 is a summary statement of Genesis 1:3–31.
- (3) Genesis 1:2 is circumstantial to 1:3, not to 1:1.
- (4) בָּרָא, *bārā’* in Genesis 1:1 is not creation *ex nihilo*.
- (5) בָּרָא, *bārā’* in Genesis 1:1 is a telic verb referring to the completed act of creation.
- (6) תְּהוֹ וְיָבוֹהוּ, *tōhū wābōhū* in Genesis 1:2 describes a chaos, a negative state existing prior to the creation summarized in 1:1.
- (7) The Israelite view of creation is distinct from pagan cosmologies in its depiction of God as distinct from creation. But the Genesis 1 account is similar in beginning with preexisting matter, and in later Old Testament references, the Rahab-Leviathan monster of pagan cosmologies is used as a metaphor for God’s creative activity in overcoming the chaos described in Genesis 1:1.

References to the above points in the remainder of this paper will be designated as Waltke Point 1; Waltke, Point 2, etc. Rooker has dealt with all of these points except Waltke Point 5, which was not available to him in 1992, as Waltke first put it in print in 2001. So we will not replot this ground, but will deepen the furrows Rooker made on Waltke Points 1, 2, 3, and 6, and will also respond to Waltke Point 5.

### Is Genesis 1:1 a summary statement of the Creation week? (Waltke Point 2)

*Why has Genesis 1:1 traditionally been understood as an initial creation?* In the centuries since Moses wrote the book of Genesis, what has been the most

common understanding of his first chapter? It is apparent (as shown in Appendix B) that it has been as follows:

1:1 describes God’s initial formation of the universe.

1:2 describes the condition of the earth at this beginning point of creation.

1:3–31 describes the subsequent creative work that God did over a six day period of time to finish the creation of the earth.

Why have the vast majority of the students of Scripture, whether trained or untrained, understood Genesis 1:1 as an initial, still unfinished creation? It is because after Moses describes creation with the two words, “heavens” and “earth” he refers to one of these words, “the earth,” again in Genesis 1:2. According to a discourse pattern that is probably common in all languages, speakers will use anaphora, that is, refer back to a word or phrase they have just mentioned, in order to clarify what they meant by it or give more detail about it (See Lyons, 1977, pp.657–677 for a discussion of anaphora). The traditional view claims that Moses does this in Genesis 1:2. After giving a one-sentence statement of God’s initial creation, Moses alerts the reader that he is not to think of the earth at that point as in the same state that it is in today, but as water that is dark and empty.

*Is “the heavens and the earth” in Genesis 1:1 a merism referring to the finished, organized universe?* (Waltke Point 1). So how could it be that for centuries the vast majority of Bible readers and students have been mistaken about the real meaning of Genesis 1:1? According to Waltke, it is because they have not understood the phrase אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ, *’et haššāmayim w’et hā’āreš*, “the heavens and the earth.” Waltke contends that to interpret the phrase as referring to an original, still unfinished universe “demands that we place a different value on the words ... than are given to them anywhere else in Scripture” (Waltke, 1975, pp.217–218). He insists that “in all its uses in the Old Testament ... this phrase functions as a compound referring to the organized universe” (Waltke, 2001, p. 59), and that as a compound phrase, “it will prove erroneous to study the words ‘heavens’ and ‘earth’ in isolation from one another” (Waltke, 1975, p.218). The phrase must always be understood as a merism in which “‘the heavens and the earth’ are antonyms to designate ‘everything,’ and more specifically ‘the organized universe, the cosmos’” (Waltke, 1975, p.218).

Webster’s dictionary defines a merism as “a synecdoche in which a totality is expressed by two contrasting pairs.” It lists the following as typical merisms: old and young, thick and thin, near and far (Gove, 1986, p. 1414). In a footnote in his Genesis commentary, Waltke explains how the meaning of a

merism is at the phrase level rather than the word level:

The words cannot be understood separately but must be taken as a unity. Just as the English expression “part and parcel” cannot be understood by studying *part* and *parcel* as independent terms, so the merism of the Hebrew words *heavens* (*šāmayim*) and *earth* (*ʿereṣ*) cannot be understood by studying the words separately but only by studying the unit” (Waltke, 2001, p. 59).

So according to Waltke, “the earth” in Genesis 1:2 should not be understood as an anaphoric reference back to the same word in Genesis 1:1, because in Genesis 1:1 “the earth” in fact has no meaning of its own. In essence, Waltke is saying that Moses’ original intended readers were so used to thinking of “heavens and earth” as “the organized universe” that either: (1) it would never occur to them to associate the empty dark watery “earth” of verse 2, with the word “earth” in verse 1; or (2) if it did occur to them, they would know it was an improper association.

In order to determine if in fact “the heavens and the earth” is always a merism that has the meaning “everything,” and more specifically “the organized universe,” an attempt was made to obtain a list of all the occurrences of the phrase in the Hebrew Old Testament. A computer search of five variations of the phrase yielded the following occurrences:

- (1) אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ , *ʾet haššāmayim wʾet hāʾāreṣ*, “the heavens and the earth (with the sign of the direct object), thirteen times. This is how the phrase occurs in Genesis. 1:1.
- (2) הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ , *haššāmayim wʾhāʾāreṣ*, “the heavens and the earth,” two times (Genesis 2:1 and 4).
- (3) שָׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ , *šāmayim wāʾāreṣ*, “heavens and earth,” eleven times.
- (4) אֶרֶץ and שָׁמַיִם , *šāmayim* and *ʿereṣ*, “heavens” and “earth,” (with intervening text between the two words) one time. (The search yielded fourteen occurrences, eleven of them the same as variation 3. One of the remaining three, Isaiah 65:17, seems to fit the merism form.)
- (5) בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ , *baššāmayim ūbāʾāreṣ* “in the heavens and in the earth,” six times.

The total number of occurrences comes to 33. Appendix C gives the references for these, includes their context, and classifies them according to grammatical function and/or the words with which they collocate.

Variation 3 is the merism form that matches the examples given above of merisms in English. The other variations are distinguished by the addition of: the article (2); both the sign of the direct object and the article (1); an adjective (4); or a preposition (5). Since these additions are repeated for the second word of the antonymic pair (“earth”), it raises some

doubt as to whether “heavens and earth” in variations 1, 2, 4, and 5 is in fact in merism form. But in every case, a computer search for the added modifier(s) on only the first word (“heavens”) and not the second (“earth”) yielded zero occurrences. So it was concluded that in Hebrew, the repetition of the modifier on the second word of the antonymic pair is a feature of the language, rather than a departure from the merism form.

Waltke gives five verses (Genesis 2:1, 4; Deuteronomy 3:24; Isaiah 65:17; Jeremiah 23:24) as examples supporting his claim that “in all its uses in the Old Testament ... this phrase functions as a compound referring to the organized universe” (Waltke, 2001, p. 59). Interestingly, these five verses represent variations 1, 2, 4, and 5, the variations with modification added to “heavens and earth.” This indicates that, as in the analysis above, he would not see the addition of identical modification on both words of the antonymic pair as a departure from the merism form, and would regard all 33 of the “heaven and earth” occurrences as “a compound referring to the organized universe” that is, a merism.

It does seem that in most of these 33 passages that exhibit the merism form, “heavens and earth” does in fact function as a merism for “everything.” But the classification of Variation 1 in Appendix C lists three times in Deuteronomy (4:26; 30:19; 31:28) where the phrase “the heavens and the earth” follows the verb עָוָד, *ʿūd*, “give witness.” Heaven and earth are called as witnesses. The phrase should not be considered a merism meaning “everything” in any of these instances. The words instead refer to the stable, enduring, non-living parts of the universe in contrast to the living things like people, animals, and plants that have a shorter existence. There is no essential difference in meaning between the phrase in these three verses and the separate words “heaven” and “earth” in verses like Deuteronomy 32:1 and Isaiah 1:2, where one verb is used with “heaven” and a synonym verb with “earth” (“Hear, O heavens ... Listen, O earth”). And Micah 6:2 specifies what in earth is called on as a witness: “Hear, O mountains, the LORD’s accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth” (NIV).

When the preposition אֶת, *bʾ*, is added to “heavens and earth”, as in Variation 5 noted above, in five of the six occurrences the phrase is better understood as referring to heaven and earth as the two possible places where things can exist rather than to “everything.” Deuteronomy 3:24 and 2 Chronicles 6:14 make the point that God is unlike any other in heaven and in earth. In Psalm 135:6 and Joel 3:3, “in heaven and in earth” is where God does His actions. The meaning of “two possible places where things can exist” is even clearer in 1 Chronicles 29:11,

where David declares that everything in heaven and in earth is God's. If "heaven and earth" is taken as a merism for "everything here," the passage is saying that everything in everything is God's. This is clearly not what this passage is saying. Rather, "In heaven and in earth" here refers to the two places where things can exist. And so, the passage is stating that everything in every place is God's, not everything in everything.

In the second of the Ten Commandments, the words "heaven" and "earth" definitely refer to the two places where things exist. God warns the Israelites, "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth" (Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 5:8 (NASB)). Here the form is different from a merism. "Heaven" has a meaning separate from "earth," with different modifiers used for each, and then "waters" is added with its own modifying phrase. But if these words mean "the places where things exist" here, there is no reason why they could not have the same meaning when they are stated more succinctly in a merism form as "heavens and earth." It seems apparent that the phrase "heavens and earth" may be used in the sense of "the two places where things exist" as well as to express the merism, "the complete organized universe."

As Waltke indicated in his explanation of a merism as cited above, the meaning of a merism "cannot be understood by studying the words separately but only by studying the unit." In light of this, it should be noted that in the two occurrences of Variation 1 in Haggai 2:6, 21 (where it is the object of the verb *רָעַשׁ*, *rā'as̄*, "shake") the writer of Hebrews does single out the two separate members of the phrase when he quotes it in Hebrews 12:26. He states that at Sinai God's voice shook the earth, but the promise in Haggai is saying that some day He will shake "not only the earth, but also the heavens." Clearly, the writer of Hebrews does not view the phrase as a merism in which the words cannot be understood separately. Since at Haggai 2:6, the writer adds "the sea and the dry land" after "the heavens and the earth, it appears that this is another example of "heavens and earth" being used in the sense of "the places where things exist."

Genesis 2:1 is the most telling exception to the phrase "heavens and earth" being used as a merism. That is because, as part of the Genesis 1:1–2:3 creation account, it is in the same context as Genesis 1:1. "The heavens and the earth" in Genesis 2:1 is one of the two Variation 2 occurrences. In his comments on Genesis 2:1, Waltke gives a very insightful and helpful analysis. He analyzes 2:1a, "the heavens and earth were completed," as underscoring "that the creator has perfectly executed his will with regard to the first triad" (the first three days of Creation),

and 2:1b "their vast array" (he uses the NIV text) as referring "to the second triad" (the last three days of creation). Then he explains in a footnote, "in 1:1, the merism 'heaven and earth' functions as a synecdoche for all the vast array as well" (Waltke, 2001, p.67). This seems tantamount to an admission that "heavens and earth" is not a merism meaning "everything" at Genesis 2:1, because there, in contrast to Genesis 1:1, it describes the incomplete heavens and earth at the end of the first three days of creation. As noted above, Waltke, in his comments on Genesis 1:1, specifically lists Genesis 2:1 as one of the places where "heavens and earth" functions as a compound referring to the organized universe. But in his comments on Genesis 2:1, he contradicts this and takes the phrase as a description of an incomplete heavens and earth.

In Rooker's critique of Waltke's view, he makes the following cogent points:

It is a valid question to ask whether the initial reference to the expression in question would have the meaning it did in subsequent verses *after* the universe had been completed. It should be emphasized that this is the first use of the phrase and one could naturally ask how else the initial stage of the universe might be described. (Rooker, 1992, p.319)

These are important observations. Speakers of a language should not be denied the right to be innovative in their use of it, to give words and phrases a new shade of meaning, or apply them in a new way to the referential realm. But our above evaluation of "heaven and earth" leads to the conclusion that Moses' readers would have recognized Moses' use of the phrase as in line with one of its meanings with which they were already familiar.

It should be pointed out that both of the other meanings of the phrase "heavens and earth" that have been described above are found in Moses' writings. The phrase has the meaning, "the stable, enduring parts of the universe" in Deuteronomy 4:26; 30:19; 31:28, and the meaning, "places where things exist" in Genesis 2:1 and Deuteronomy 3:24. Genesis 2:1 is even in the same story as Genesis 1:1. So "heavens and earth" was already being used with these two meanings at the time Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible.

If one of Moses' first readers only read Genesis 1:1, the sentence may have been ambiguous to him. Because three meanings of the phrase, "heavens and earth" were in use in their day, he could not know if Moses was referring to the whole complete universe, or to the two places where things exist. (Since the verse does not refer to calling heaven and earth as witness, he probably would not consider as a possible meaning "the stable enduring parts of the universe"). But when the reader went on to verse 2 to read about the condition of the earth, he knew that Moses was

not referring to the whole complete universe in verse 1, but was talking about the two places where things exist. Of these two places he only gives details on the earth, not the heaven, because that will be his focus in the remainder of the story.

*Is the summary in Genesis 2:1 a restatement of Genesis 1:1?* There are three ways Genesis 1:1 may be regarded as a summary. It may be: (1) a summary of the initial creation, resulting in an earth as described in verse 2 (the view proposed in this paper); (2) a complete summary that answers the question, “who made everything” (Young, 1964, pp.9–10); or (3) a summary of verses 3–31 (Waltke Point 2). It is crucial to the precreation chaos theory that Genesis 1:1 be a summary of verses 3–31, and of those verses only, because otherwise the situation in verse 2 (which Waltke believes is a chaos) exists *after* the initial creative activity, rather than *pre* creation. The other two ways of regarding Genesis 1:1 as a summary understand the Genesis account of creation as beginning with God alone, not with an empty, dark, watery earth already in existence.

In addition to this diversely understood summary at the *beginning* of the Creation account, there is an undisputed summary in Genesis 2:1 at the *conclusion* of the six days of creation. Because Waltke has already analyzed Genesis 1:1 as a summary of Genesis 1:3–31, when he comes to Genesis 2:1, he is forced to conclude that this summary statement is a restatement of the first one. He gives the following outline of the Genesis 1:1–2:3 creation account:

- (1)Introductory summary statement, 1:1.
- (2)Situation prior to the creation, 1:2.
- (3)Narrative of creation, 1:3–31.
- (4)Concluding summary statement, 2:1.
- (5)Epilogue: the Sabbath rest, 2:2–3 (Waltke, 1975, p.228)

Can Genesis 2:1, merely be a restatement of Genesis 1:1? Although both verses have the phrase “the heavens and the earth,” Genesis 2:1 adds the words “and all their hosts” (NASB). If “the heavens and the earth” means “the complete organized universe” in both verses, then it is a redundancy to add “and all their hosts” at Genesis 2:1. As noted above, Waltke avoided this redundancy by referring “the heavens and the earth” in Genesis 2:1 to only the first three days of creation. So on this analysis, the introductory and concluding summaries are the same, but “the heavens and the earth” has a different meaning in the introductory summary from its meaning in the concluding summary, being a synecdoche (merism) for the complete organized universe at Genesis 1:1, but requiring “and all their hosts” for Genesis 2:1 to have that meaning.

If, instead of understanding “the heavens and the earth” as meaning “the organized universe” in

Genesis 1:1, it is understood as meaning “the two places where things exist” as proposed above, then Moses uses “the heavens and the earth” with the same consistent meaning in both Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 2:1. When he uses “the heavens and the earth” in his concluding summary, he collocates it with the verb כָּלַל, *kālal*, “complete” instead of the verb בָּרָא, *bārāʾ*, “create” used in Genesis 1:1. So in Genesis 1:1, the two places where things can exist were *created*. By the end of the third day, those same two places were *completed*, so that the “all their hosts,” that is, the things that were to exist in those two places, had a place to be put as they were created and completed over the course of the next three days. So the introductory and concluding summaries are complementary rather than synonymous. The concluding summary does not restate Genesis 1:1, but it does make an anaphoric reference to “the heavens and the earth” of that verse without in any way changing the meaning of the phrase.

But Moses not only summarizes the creation story in Genesis 2:1. He also gives God’s own summary of it when He spoke the Ten Commandments. Recorded in Exodus 20:11, God commanded the Israelites to rest on the seventh day “for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day” (NIV). Here, as in Genesis 2:1, if “the heavens and the earth” means “everything,” then “the sea and all that is in them” is a redundancy. It is better to understand that in this summary, as in Genesis 2:1, “the heavens and the earth” refer to the two places for things to exist. The only difference in Exodus 20:11 is that “earth” now has a more specific reference to the land part of the planet rather than to both land and water parts.

*Is bārāʾ in Genesis 1:1 a telic verb?* (Waltke Point 5). In his commentary, Waltke introduced a new support for his view that Genesis 1:1 must refer to the organized universe. His comment on בָּרָא, *bārāʾ*, “he created,” is, “This telic verb refers to the completed act of creation” ((Waltke, 2001, p.58). Then he adds in a footnote,

A telic verb (i.e., die or sell) only finds meaning at the end of a process. The Hebrew term *bārāʾ*... only refers to a completed act of creation (cf. Deuteronomy 4:32; Psalm 89:12; Isaiah 40:26; Amos 4:13), so it cannot mean that, in the beginning, God *began* the process of creating the cosmos.

It appears that Waltke may be basing this statement on a componential analysis system of verb classification, in which verbs like “create” are assigned the meaning components of +dynamic, +durative, +telic. From the standpoint of such a system, it is appropriate to view *bārāʾ* as a telic verb. But the completed created action depends on the object that the verb refers to, which in Genesis 1:1

is “the heavens and the earth.” If this refers to the complete organized universe, as Waltke holds, then he is correct that it cannot mean that in the beginning, God began the process of creating the universe. But if it instead refers to the two places where things exist, as has been shown above, then that is the act of creation that is completed. So this additional support for the precreation chaos view really adds nothing to the debate, since any conclusion based on it depends on one’s understanding of the object of the verb.

### **Is Genesis 1:2 circumstantial to 1:3?**

(Waltke Point 3)

Waltke’s contention that “the heavens and the earth” always refers to the organized universe is crucial to his argument that Genesis 1:1 is a summary statement of Genesis 1:3–31. It has been shown that to contend this, one must conclude that “the earth” in Genesis 1:2 is an exception to the common discourse pattern of a repeated word or phrase serving as a back reference. If the pragmatic force of verse two is not anaphoric (back reference) then it must be kataphoric (forward reference). This is how Waltke understands the verse. He claims that Genesis 1:2 is circumstantial to 1:3, not to 1:1. Can this claim be supported?

*Why is Genesis 1:2 traditionally understood as circumstantial to Genesis 1:1?* In Hebrew narrative, the narrator progresses through the events of the story by using sentences of the common VSO (verb, subject, object) pattern, connecting them together with the conjunction  $\text{ו}$ , *waw*. But if the narrator wants to pause in the story line to introduce a new character or to give background or explanatory information, he will shift to a clause or sentence that still begins with a  $\text{ו}$ , but then has a non-verb (usually a noun, noun phrase, or pronoun). Grammarians distinguish these two grammatical structures by referring to the *waw+verb* construction as having conjunctive word order, and to the *waw+non verb* construction as having disjunctive word order.

The word order is VSO in Genesis 1:1; SVO (*waw+nonverb*) in 1:2; and VSO (*waw+verb*) in 1:3. Today, Hebrew scholars generally agree that Genesis 1:2 functions circumstantially rather than sequentially in the narrative (exx. are Unger, 1958, p.28; Waltke, 1975, p.226; Whitcomb, 1986, p.46; Young, 1964, p.7). In fact, this understanding of Genesis 1:2 has caused most Old Testament scholars to reject the ruin-reconstruction gap theory. But proponents of the precreation chaos gap theory recognize that Genesis 1:2 is circumstantial in nature. The challenge for them is to demonstrate that Genesis 1:2 serves to prepare the reader for verse 3 rather than to clarify verse 1 for him.

When speakers of a language refer back to a word or phrase, they may do so to: (1) emphasize that it

is still the topic; (2) restore it to topic status after intervening text has replaced it as topic; or (3) make it the topic for the first time. In each of these situations, the purpose may be to clarify the meaning of the word or phrase and/or to give more information about it. According to the traditional view, Moses’ back reference to “the earth” at Genesis 1:2 converts it from its object status to topic status so that he can write a sentence about it informing the readers that the earth as created in verse 1 was in a different state than at present. So the sentence in verse 2 is circumstantial to verse 1. The traditional view understands Genesis 1:2 as circumstantial to verse 1 because this conforms to the usual pattern of Hebrew discourse, in which a circumstantial clause provides more information about an already mentioned topic.

*Why do precreation chaos advocates view Genesis 1:2 as circumstantial to Genesis 1:3?* Precreation chaos advocates not only claim that “the heavens and the earth” in Genesis 1:1 can only refer to the organized universe. They also view Genesis 1:2 as describing a chaotic state. So they are forced to conclude that the circumstantial clauses in this verse depart from the usual Hebrew pattern of referring to what precedes. They *cannot* view Genesis 1:2 as an anaphoric reference to 1:1 because, as Waltke points out, “Logic will not allow us to entertain the contradictory notions: God created the organized heavens and earth; the earth was unorganized.” (Waltke, 1975, p.29). Therefore, he concludes, “on lexical and logical grounds verse 2 cannot be construed as circumstantial with verse 1” (Waltke, 1975, p.226). So, Genesis 1:2 is instead viewed as kataphoric, that is, circumstantial to verse 3.

*How do precreation chaos advocates support their claim that Genesis 1:2 is circumstantial to Genesis 1:3?* Even after demonstrating, as has been done above, that “heavens and earth” in Genesis 1:1 does not refer to the whole of finished creation, those who hold the traditional view must still concede that this is its most common meaning. But on viewing a circumstantial clause as explaining what will follow rather than what has preceded, the shoe is on the other foot. The precreation chaos proponent has to admit that it is highly unusual for a circumstantial clause to function kataphorically.

In spite of this, Waltke asserts that there is positive evidence for understanding Genesis 1:2 as circumstantial to 1:3. In proof of this he claims that: (1) Genesis 2:4–7 and 3:1 exhibit a parallel pattern to 1:1–3, and the *waw+noun* clauses in these two passages also look forward rather than backward; (2) there are many other examples where the circumstantial clause precedes the main verb (Waltke, 1975, pp.226–227).

*Do the circumstantial clauses in Genesis 2:5–6 and 3:1 support a forward reference in Genesis 1:2?*

How strong is the parallel between Genesis 1:1–3 and Genesis 2:4–7, and the parallel between Genesis 1:1–3 and Genesis 3:1? Waltke shows the parallelism by assigning a common label to each circumstantial clause and to the sentences before and after it as follows:

Genesis 1:1–3

(1) *Introductory summary statement:*

“In the beginning God created the cosmos” (Genesis 1:1).

(2) *Circumstantial clause* of the pattern *waw*+noun+verb (היה) describing the negative state before creation:

“Now the earth was devoid of form ...” (Genesis 1:2).

(3) *Main clause* of the pattern *waw* consecutive+prefixed conjugation form describing the creation:

“And God said ...” (1:3) (Waltke, 1975, p.226).

Genesis 2:4–7

(1) *Introductory summary statement:*

“This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created ...” (Genesis 2:4).

(2) *Circumstantial clause* of the pattern *waw*+noun+verb (היה) describing a negative state before creation:

“Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth...” (Genesis 2:5–6).

(3) *Main clause* of the pattern *waw* consecutive+prefixed conjugation form describing the creation:

“Then the LORD God formed man ...” (Genesis 2:7) (Waltke, 1975, p.226).

Genesis 3:1

[(1) *Introductory summary statement:* (Genesis 2:4)]

(2) *Circumstantial clause* of the form *waw*+noun+verb (היה):

“Now the serpent was more crafty ...” (Genesis 3:1a).

(3) *Main clause* of the form *waw* consecutive+prefixed conjugation form describing the creation of sin:

“And he said ...” (3:1b) (Waltke, 1975, p.227).

Note that for this passage, Waltke has borrowed the summary statement from Genesis 2:4, explaining that the passage “lacks a separate introductory statement because it is a sub-story of the creation record about man introduced by 2:4” (Waltke, 1975, p.227).

This display of these three passages is very helpful in showing their *grammatical* parallelism. It shows that the circumstantial clause in each passage has a common grammatical pattern—*waw*+noun+verb (היה). Also, it shows that each main clause after the circumstantial clause exhibits the grammatical pattern for sequencing the narrative, namely *waw* consecutive+prefixed conjugation form (that is, a *wayyiqtol* verb).

But the rest of the parallelism is accomplished through *semantic* labels. Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 2:4 are labeled *Introductory summary statement*, even though they differ in grammatical form, Genesis 1:1 being a sentence with a *qal qatal* finite verb form, whereas Genesis 2:4 is a verbless sentence. Sentences with markedly different grammatical form are assigned the same semantic label.

The sentences in Genesis 1:2 and Genesis 2:5–6 are labeled grammatically as *waw* + noun + verb (היה), but then the semantic description “describing the/a negative state before creation” is added. This obscures the fact that the state in Genesis 1:2 is prior to the divine fiats of Genesis 1, whereas the state in Genesis 2:5–6 is after some of them have been spoken.

Mention was made earlier of Waltke’s helpful analysis of 2:1a, “the heavens and earth were completed,” as underscoring “that the creator has perfectly executed his will with regard to the first triad” (Waltke, 2001, p.67). It was concluded that “the heavens and the earth” here is consistent in meaning with “the heavens and the earth” in Genesis 1:1, with Genesis 1:1 summarizing God’s initial creation of the two places where things can exist and Genesis 2:1 the completing of those two places by God’s fiats during the first three days of creation. Now it becomes apparent that Moses begins his “generations of the heaven and the earth” account (Genesis 2:4–4:26) by looking back at הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ, *haššamayim w’hā’āreš*, “the heavens and the earth,” in Genesis 2:1. He does this by a double anaphoric reference in Genesis 2:4: הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ, *haššamayim w’hā’āreš*, “the heavens and the earth”; and אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם, *’ereš w’samayim*, “earth and heavens.” The phrases in Genesis 2:1 and the first Genesis 2:4 reference are identical, and are the two Variation 2 occurrences of “heavens and earth” noted above. A time phrase ties each of these two anaphoric references in Genesis 2:4 back to the creation account: בְּהִבְרֹאתָם, *b’hibbār’ām*, “in their creating” for the first reference; and בְּיוֹם עֲשׂוֹתָ, *b’yôm ’ešōt*, “in the day of making” for the second. For these time phrases, Moses repeats *bārā’*, “create” and *’asah*, “make” from the previous verse, putting them in an infinitive construct form.

It is through this double back reference at Genesis 2:4 that Moses ties his creation account and his “generations of the heavens and the earth” account together. Having explained in his creation account how God by divine fiat filled a world that He had created empty, he is going to explain in his next account how God מִן־הָאָרֶץ, *min-hā’dāmāh*, “from the ground” formed a man (Genesis 2:7), made all kinds of trees grow (Genesis 2:9), and formed the beasts of the field and the birds of the air (Genesis 2:19); in a world that He had created devoid of all these things. So a suggested semantic label that properly accounts

for God's work in both Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 2:4 is *Introductory summary statement of God's preparatory creative work*.

Coming now to the circumstantial clauses in Genesis 2:5–6, a comparison of these clauses to the account of creation in Genesis 1 would lead one to conclude that the setting for the Genesis 2:4–24 account is not “a negative state before creation.” Instead of beginning at a point prior to the divine fiat of the six days of creation as he did in his creation account, Moses now begins at a point after God made the dry ground appear on the third day of creation, but before He filled it with animals and people. Yes, that state can be called negative if one means that the earth at that point lacks some things that are not yet created. But it can not be called negative if one means that it is contrary to creation, because by that point, God has already observed three times that what He has made is good. So the semantic description of Genesis 2:5–6 should not be “describing a negative state before creation,” but rather “describing an empty state of the earth at that point in the creation.”

If “the heavens and the earth” in Genesis 2:4 refer to the organized universe, Waltke is correct that the circumstantial clauses in Genesis 2:5–6 can not look back at this, but must look forward to verse 7. But if “the heavens and the earth” in Genesis 2:4 has the same meaning Waltke understood “the heavens and the earth” to have in Genesis 2:1 (as we have suggested above), then Genesis 2:5–6 looks back to Genesis 2:4 to explain that this account begins at the point in that creation when the earth was devoid of three things: (1) plants and shrubs of the field, (2) rain, and (3) man.

When Genesis 2:4–6 is understood in this way, its parallelism to Genesis 1:1–2 can be displayed as: (1) Genesis 1:1 and 2:4—*Introductory summary statement of God's preparatory creative work*. (2) Genesis 1:2 and 2:5–6—*Circumstantial clauses* of the pattern *waw*+noun+verb (וה) describing an empty state of the earth at that point in the creation. In Genesis 1:2 as in Genesis 2:5–6, the circumstantial clauses look back at the creation described in the previous verse to explain that at that point in creation, the earth was still in an empty condition. In Genesis 1:2, it is dark empty water. In Genesis 2:5 it is ground devoid of plants and shrubs of the field, rain and man. And neither Genesis 1:2 nor Genesis 2:5–6 is negative in the sense of being contrary to creation, but only in the sense of lacking the rest of creation.

But Waltke also claims that the circumstantial clause of Genesis 3:1 looks forward rather than backward. He, of course, is correct in viewing Genesis 3 as “a sub-story of the creation record about man introduced by 2:4” (Waltke, 1975, p. 227). But instead of going back to Genesis 2:4 for an introductory

sentence for this sub-story, it may be appropriate to view the verse before Genesis 3:1, Genesis 2:25, as an introductory sentence. After saying in Genesis 2:25 that the man and his wife were both עֶרְוִים, *‘arūmmim*, “naked,” Moses states in the circumstantial clause of 3:1, that the serpent was עָרוּם, *‘arūm*, “crafty.” Because *‘arūm* has a different sense in Genesis 3:1 and, being a paronomasia, requires a different English word in translation, it is easy to miss Moses' use of the word in Genesis 3:1 as a back reference to Genesis 2:25. But it is, and the circumstantial clause of Genesis 3:1, like the clauses in Genesis 1:2 and Genesis 2:5–6, looks backwards rather than (or perhaps “as well as”) forwards.

*Are there many other examples where the circumstantial clause precedes the main verb?* Besides claiming that the clauses in Genesis 2:5–6 and Genesis 3:1 give positive evidence for seeing Genesis 1:2 as circumstantial to what follows, Waltke also claims that there are many other examples of this in the Old Testament. His only support of this is to appeal to the examples given by Young (1964, p. 9). Young cites 11 instances of this (and calls them “several” examples, not “many”). The passages are Genesis 38:25; Numbers 12:14; Joshua 2:18; 1 Samuel 9:11; 1 Kings 14:17; 2 Kings 2:23; 6:5, 26; 9:25; Job 1:16; and Isaiah 37:38.

Rooker replies, “This evidence is problematic, however, as none of the examples cited has the same structure as Genesis 2:2–3, (*sic*, he means Genesis 1:2–3) that is, a *waw* disjunctive clause followed by *waw* consecutive prefixed form (Rooker, 1992, p. 416). Only two of the examples (2 Kings 2:23; 6:5) are *waw* disjunctive clauses; the others are not introduced by *waw*. The circumstantial clauses in all of them are marked as nominal clauses by a participle (except Numbers 12:14, which has an infinitive). As such, they are dependent, becoming part of a complex sentence by joining with the clause following. They translate into English as dependent time clauses that begin with “when,” “while,” or “as.” So they must be taken with what follows because their grammatical structure *requires* it. And Rooker's point is that if there is a *waw* connecting it to the clause following, it will not be *waw* consecutive (that is, conjunctive) as it is in Genesis 1:3, but rather *waw*+noun or pronoun.

On the other hand, Genesis 1:2 is not a nominal clause, but an independent verbal sentence that contains the finite verb הָיְתָה, *hāy'tāh*, “was (fem.)” [Davidson (1901) says that a circumstantial clause “may be nominal or verbal, though it is chiefly nominal, and even when verbal the order of words is that of the nominal sentence. . . . *vav*, *subj.*, *pred.*” (p. 186). It is this order in Genesis 1:2 that marks the sentence as circumstantial.] The very fact that Genesis 1:2 contrasts with the examples above in these

two ways—being independent and verbal rather than dependent and nominal—actually becomes another reason to interpret it as referring to what precedes rather than to what follows.

Instead of appealing to differently structured circumstantial clauses, a better approach is to look for other clauses of the same structure as Genesis 1:2. Rooker cites Judges 8:11 and Jonah 3:3 as two more passages “where a finite verb is followed by a *waw* disjunctive clause containing the verb  $\text{וַיִּשְׁׁר}$ ” and points out that in both instances “this clause qualifies a term in the immediately preceding independent clause. The independent clause makes a statement and the following circumstantial clause describes parenthetically an element in the main clause” (Rooker, 1992, p. 416). So just as “the earth” in Genesis 1:2 looks back at “the earth” in Genesis 1:1, “the camp” is looked back at in Judges 8:11, and “Nineveh” in Jonah 3:3. Another example of a finite verb followed by a *waw* disjunctive clause containing the verb  $\text{וַיִּשְׁׁר}$  occurs in Zechariah 3:3. Here, though, “Joshua...standing before the angel” refers back to the same phrase two sentences before, not the immediately preceding one.

### Does Genesis 1:2 describe a chaos?

(Waltke Point 6)

Ruin-reconstruction gap theorists believed that Genesis 1:2 specifically informed the reader about a chaos that happened subsequent to God’s initial creation of the heavens and earth, which is reported in Genesis 1:1. This initial creation included the creation of angels, but when some of them rebelled against God, the earth was plunged into ruin (hence “ruin” in the designation “ruin-reconstruction”) resulting in the chaotic state of verse 2. Precreation chaos advocates recognize that Genesis 1:2 is circumstantial rather than sequential, but they join with ruin-reconstructionists in believing that Genesis 1:2 describes a chaos, and that this chaos contrasted with, rather than being a stage of, God’s creative activity.

Because the understanding of Genesis 1:2 as a chaos is a tenet of the formerly popular ruin-reconstruction view, defenders of the traditional interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2 have already written at length to support the view that Genesis 1:2 is the beginning phase of creation rather than a subsequent condition opposed to creation. It is beyond the scope of this paper to review all of their argumentation, but the sources include the following: Davis (1975, pp. 45–46); Fields (1978, pp. 113–134); Rooker (1992, pp. 320–323; 420–423) Whitcomb (1986, pp. 141–158) and Young (1964, pp. 11–14; 30–38).

Young’s view bears some similarity to precreation chaos. He takes Genesis 1:1 as a summary statement

and Genesis 1:2 as circumstantial to Genesis 1:3. But he views Genesis 1:1 as summarizing, not Genesis 1:3–31, but creation as a whole, as the answer to the child’s question, “Who made the world?” (Young, 1964, p. 9). Understood in this way, Genesis 1:1 refers to the original creation. Then he says that verse 2 “states the condition of the earth as it was when created, and until God began to form from it the present world.” (Young, 1964, p.11). So he defends both original creation at Genesis 1:1, and the earth in Genesis 1:2 as being the first stage of God’s creative activity.

Perhaps one of the reasons people have been so inclined to view Genesis 1:2 as a chaos is the translation of  $\text{וַיְהִי}$ , *tōhû*, in the phrase  $\text{וַיְהִי כִּי הָיָה הָאָרֶץ וַאֲבִרְוֹן וַאֲבִרְוֹן וַאֲבִרְוֹן}$ , *tōhû wābōhû*, as “without form (KJV, NKJV) or “formless” (NASB, NIV). Rooker quotes Tsumara as assigning the meaning “desert” to it after considering the word in relation both to cognate Semitic languages and its use in the Old Testament (Rooker, 1992, p. 320). Regarding the complete phrase, *tōhû wābōhû*, Tsumara concludes, “both the biblical context and extra-biblical parallels suggest that the phrase *tōhû wābōhû* in Genesis 1:2 has nothing to do with “chaos” and simply means “emptiness” and refers to the earth which is an empty place, that is, “an unproductive and uninhabited place” (quoted in Rooker, 1992, p. 322). A better translation than “formless,” therefore, would be a word more closely synonymous to “void” or “empty,” such as “desolate.” “Desolate” does not suggest chaos in the way that “formless” does.

When Genesis 1:2 is viewed as a negative state opposed to creation, it affects both the distinction in classical theology between creation and providence, and between creation and redemption. The statement in the Sabbath account, Genesis 2:2–3, that by the seventh day, God had completed His work and rested from all of it is commonly taken as the point where creation concluded and providence began. But if God had actually just finished remaking a world that had fallen into chaos since its original creation, the creating was more like a heightened providence as compared to the original creation, and the resting was a return to a lower providence not unlike what He must have been doing when He let the world fall into chaos.

Similarly the distinction between creation and redemption is blurred. Instead of redemptive history beginning after the fall of man, it was really happening during the six days of creation, if God was restoring a world that had fallen into chaos. On this point Merrill says:

Many scholars’ attempts to see salvation as a central theme even in the creation account are not convincing because such attempts draw most of their support from pagan mythology in which creation occurs as a result of the subjugation of primeval chaotic waters

by the gods. There is no hint of such a thing in the Old Testament except in passages where such mythic themes may be used as poetic illustration of Yahweh's victory over His enemies, who are at times likened to chaotic and destructive floods (Merrill, 1991, p. 22).

### Other considerations

If Genesis 1:1–2 refers to an initial creation as claimed in this paper, must it be included in the first creative day? Although Genesis 1 may be considered ambiguous on this, Exodus 20:11 resolves that ambiguity when it says “in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them” (NASB). This clearly requires that Genesis 1:1–2 be a part of the first day of creation. It should be noted that precreation chaos advocates must view “made” more in the sense of “remodeling” or “remaking” and “the sea and all that is in them” as a redundancy.

How can Genesis 1:1 say that God created the heavens as an initial creative event when during the six days He created the expanse and called it heaven (second day), and also created the sun, moon and stars (fourth day)? Humphreys, noting that the “deep” of Genesis 1:2 has a surface, suggests that the heavens of Genesis 1:1 was the space above that surface (Humphreys, 1994, p. 64). Whitcomb, noting Paul's reference to a third heaven in 2 Corinthians 2:12, stated that the creation of the heavens in Genesis 1:1 resulted in a third heaven populated with millions of angels (Whitcomb, 1986, p. 53). Perhaps it would be better to say that the space above the surface was populated with angels, with that space becoming the second heaven after the expanse was made on day two. It should be noted that a place of existence is what it is because of the spiritual beings who live in it, whether that be God in the third heaven, angels in the second, or human beings on earth with the stellar first heaven as part of their scenery. The New Jerusalem is not “the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Revelation 21:9) because of its jasper wall and golden streets, but because the Lamb's redeemed people live there.

### Conclusion

This paper has explained what the precreation chaos gap theory is, traced how it developed, and shown how its key argument—that “the heavens and the earth” in Genesis 1:1 must refer to the finished, organized universe—overlooks the fact that the phrase sometimes refers to the two places where things exist. The opposing arguments of the traditional theory have been shown to have the best support: “the earth” in Genesis 1:2 refers back to Genesis 1:1; Genesis 1:1 is a summary only in the sense of being a summary of the initial creation, whereas Genesis 2:1 is the summary for the whole creation account; the circumstantial

clause of Genesis 1:2 refers back to Genesis 1:1, and describes emptiness, but not chaos. In short, Exodus 20:11 can be taken at face value, “In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them.”

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## Appendix A

### The Three Gap Theories of Genesis 1:1–2

This paper has defended the traditional view of Genesis 1:1–2. The challenges to this view have taken a variety of forms. Faced with the long ages insisted on by evolutionary scientists, many have tried to read long periods of time into the six days of creation. Recognizing the exegetical problems with this approach, more conservative biblical scholars have instead argued for disconnecting Genesis 1:1–2, from the six days of creation.

In the Genesis 1 account, the first divine fiat, “Let there be light,” is at verse 3. Then this same divine fiat creation continues for all the subsequent creative events of the chapter. But neither verse 1 or 2 states that “God said, Let there be ...” It is this distinction between the first two verses and the remainder of the chapter that seems to allow the possibility that the light created on day one was all that was created that day. Rather than recognizing that Exodus 20:11 disallows this possibility, gap theorists accept it. This leads them to conclude that the empty dark watery earth of verse 2 was already in existence before day one, so that there is a gap between an earlier form of the universe, and the first day of creation.

Although, as this paper has shown, there was a version of the precreation chaos theory before modern times, the various gap theories have for the most part developed since the rise of uniformitarian evolutionary science with its contention that the earth is billions of years old. The first gap theory to gain prominence since that time, and possibly still the most familiar one today, was the ruin-reconstruction view, also known as the restitution theory. This theory regards Genesis 1:2 as describing a chaos that was due to some catastrophe, generally assumed to be the result of Satan’s fall. This chaos was successive to an initial creation at Genesis 1:1, so the gap occurs between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2.

According to Davis, the ruin-reconstruction view was first proposed by Thomas Chalmers in 1814

“to accommodate Georges Cuvier’s theory that the earth’s fossiliferous strata are the product of a series of catastrophes” (Davis, 1975, pp.42–43). It became more widely popular when Franz Delitzsch taught it in his *System of Biblical Psychology*, which was translated into English in 1867. Its popularity carried over into the first half of the twentieth century, partly due to its advocacy by George Pember, whose *Earth’s Earliest Ages* appeared in 1907, and by the 1909 *Scofield Reference Bible*.

Although the ruin-reconstruction view was a popular way for Bible believing Christians to respond to evolutionary arguments in the first half of the twentieth century, it was eventually shown to be exegetically untenable, and has largely been abandoned today, at least in most scholarly circles. Today the most thorough defense of this gap theory may be found in Arthur C. Custance’s book *Without Form and Void*, published in 1970. The most exhaustive refutation of it is by Fields (1976).

The second gap theory to gain prominence since the rise of old earth science was the precreation chaos theory that has been presented and evaluated in this paper. Although George Bush (1852) appears to have been the first to present this view in modern times, the 1958 article by Merrill F. Unger appears to have played an important role in its rise to prominence in the twentieth century. Unger continued to hold to the cosmogony of the ruin-reconstruction theory, and as noted, is classified with them by Waltke. But by referring to Genesis 1:1 as a summary statement, he in essence placed the gap before that verse. It was by building on this idea of Genesis 1:1 as a summary statement that Waltke developed the precreation chaos theory that has been critiqued in this paper.

Although there is a decided difference in the interpretive method used by ruin-reconstructionists and precreation chaos defenders, there appears to be little difference in their cosmogonies. Both groups regard Genesis 1:2 as a chaos that must have resulted from some kind of action opposed to God’s first creative activity. But precreation chaos adherents, because they correctly recognize that Genesis 1:2 comprises three circumstantial clauses rather than a main movement of the narrative (which would be indicated by a verbal clause with *wayyiqtol*), have no definite statement of Scripture to that effect. They can only argue this point from a presupposition that God would never create anything like the chaos they allege to be in view in Genesis 1:2, even as a stage in His overall creation activity. Rather than posit a pre-Adamic fall to explain Genesis 1:2, Waltke refers to it as “surd evil” (Waltke, 2001, p.68). He explains his position as follows:

But what about the uncreated or unformed state, the darkness and the deep of Genesis 1:2? Here a great

mystery is encountered, for the Bible never says that God brought these into existence by His word. What, then, can be said about them?

First, it can be said that the Book of Genesis does not inform us concerning the origin of that which is contrary to the nature of God, neither in the cosmos nor in the world of the spirit. Where did the opposite of Him that is good and bright originate? Suddenly, without explanation, in Genesis 3 an utterly evil, brilliant, intelligent personality appears in the Garden of Eden masquerading as a serpent. The principle of origins, so strong in our minds, demands an explanation. But the truth is that the Book mocks us. The Bible provides no information regarding that which is dark and devoid of form. Here are some of the secret things that belong to God. (Waltke, 1975, p. 338)

Precreation chaos theorists must also be less definite about creation *ex nihilo*. As noted in the introduction of this paper, since they do not believe Genesis 1:1 teaches this, they must either search for it elsewhere, or deduce it as an implication from the Scriptures that say only God is eternal.

In addition to the proponents of the precreation chaos theory noted in the paper, Rooker lists the following:

John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), 14; S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Methuen, 1904), 3; Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning*, trans. David G. Preston (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 63. Brongers, Cassuto, Eichrodt, Gunkel, Procksch, Schmidt, Strack, von Rad, Westermann, and Zimmerli also hold to the summary view according to Hasel (Gerhard F. Hasel, "Recent Translations of Genesis 1:1: A Critical Look," *The Bible Translator* 22 [1971]: 164). (Rooker, 1992, p. 412)

Recently, still a third gap theory has been proposed. In 1997, Gorman Gray wrote the book, *The age of the universe: What are the biblical limits?* He contended that Genesis 1:1 does describe the original creation, and that 1:2 describes its condition when created, a creation that existed for an indefinite period of time, but was not a chaos. This view has been named the "soft gap" view, presumably because the state of the earth in 1:2 is only a stage of creation, not the result of some anti-creation development such as a catastrophe. This gap theory places the gap between 1:2 and 1:3. It has been refuted by Batten (2004) and Deremer (2005). Due to its various alterations of traditionally understood Hebrew vocabulary and grammar, it is unlikely that it will gain a large following among scholars of biblical Hebrew.

Added to the first two, this third gap theory appears to have exhausted the ways an extended time period can be placed into Genesis 1:1–2. The

precreation chaos theory puts it before verse 1, the ruin-reconstruction theory puts it between verses 1 and 2, and the soft gap theory puts it after verse 2.

## Appendix B

### The Popularity of the Precreation Chaos Gap Theory

In 1971, Gerhard Hasel said of the traditional view, "it has the support of the majority of Jewish and Christian interpreters" (quoted in Waltke, 1975, p. 217). Calvin, for example, gave this explanation of the first two verses of Genesis, "For Moses simply intends to assert that the world was not perfected at its very commencement, in the manner in which it is now seen, but that it was created an empty chaos of heaven and earth" (Calvin, 1965, p. 69).

In more recent times, however, this traditional view has been repeatedly challenged. Just four years after Hasel's statement, although not denying it, Waltke noted that "Although this view is still supported in modern times, its number of adherents is diminishing." (Waltke, 1975, p. 217)

Of course, for those of us living in the 21st century, the question is whether or not that diminishing trend did in fact continue during the years since Waltke made this claim. On the one hand, it seems that for some Christians, this diminishing trend has been arrested by the growth of some outstanding creationist movements. But on the other hand, many in the world of biblical scholarship are more persuaded by outstanding exegetes like Bruce Waltke and Allen Ross than they are by creationist scientists. It is not difficult to find their influence in a variety of Bible study helps intended to assist the reader in his understanding of the Scriptures.

For example, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* has been a popular resource for Bible study since it first appeared in 1985. It was written by Dallas Seminary faculty and was originally published by Victor Books, the book division of Scripture Press, which produced Sunday School curriculum. It still is listed as a resource in the Scripture Press curriculum (now owned by Cook Communications) and in other Sunday School curriculums. In the book, the commentary on Genesis by Allen Ross (1985) defends the common precreation chaos arguments: Genesis 1:1 is not an original creation; Genesis 1:2 describes a chaos and is circumstantial to Genesis 1:3. (p. 28)

In 1996, Allen Ross's work *Creation & Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* was published. It has also been a popular and helpful Bible study resource for students of the Scriptures. In Appendix 1 of the book, he gives an overview of



**Jeremiah 32:17**

“Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.”

**2. call \_\_\_\_\_ and the earth****Deuteronomy 4:26**

I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you this day that you will quickly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. You will not live there long but will certainly be destroyed.

**Deuteronomy 30:19**

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.

**Deuteronomy 31:28**

Assemble before me all the elders of your tribes and all your officials, so that I can speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to testify against them.

**3. fill/shake \_\_\_\_\_ and the earth****Jeremiah 23:24**

“Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?” declares the Lord. “Do not I fill heaven and earth?” declares the Lord.

**Haggai 2:6**

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.’”

**Haggai 2:21**

“Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I will shake the heavens and the earth.”

**4. the heavens [with “the earth” added after intervening text]****Nehemiah 9:6**

You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.

**Hosea 2:21**

“In that day I will respond,” declares the Lord—“I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth.”

**5. the heavens [without adding “the earth”]****Deuteronomy 11:17**

Then the Lord’s anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the Lord is giving you.

**Deuteronomy 28:12**

The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none.

**NIV Verse List for the 2nd variation:** הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ,

*haššamayim w<sup>h</sup>ā’āreš*, “the heavens and the earth,”

**Genesis 2:1**

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

**Genesis 2:4**

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens—

**NIV Verse List for the 3rd variation** הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ, *šamayim wā’āreš*, “heavens and earth,”

**1. used as subject****Psalm 69:34**

Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and all that move in them.

**Jeremiah 51:48**

“Then heaven and earth and all that is in them will shout for joy over Babylon, for out of the north destroyers will attack her,” declares the Lord.

**Joel 3:16**

The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.

**2. used as object of participle *qōnēh* “creator” in construct state****Genesis 14:19**

... and he blessed Abram, saying, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.”

**Genesis 14:22**

But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth ...”

**3. used as object of participle *ōśēh* “maker” in construct state****Psalm 115:15**

May you be blessed by the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

**Psalm 121:2**

My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

**Psalm 124:8**

Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

**Psalm 134:3**

May the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion.

**Psalm 146:6** (*ōseh* is in absolute state)

... the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—the Lord, who remains faithful forever.

**4. used as complement of noun *hūqqōt*, “fixed laws” in construct state****Jeremiah 33:25**

This is what the Lord says: ‘If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed laws of heaven and earth ...’

**NIV Verse List for the 4th variation:** שָׁמַיִם וְאָרֶץ and אֶרֶץ , *šāmayim* and *ʿereṣ*, “heavens” and “earth,” **Isaiah 65:17**

“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”

**NIV Verse List for the 5th variation:** בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ *baššāmayim ûbāʾāreṣ*, “in the heavens and in the earth”

**Deuteronomy 3:24**

“O Sovereign LORD, you have begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and mighty works you do?”

**1 Chronicles 29:11**

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours.

Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.

**2 Chronicles 6:14**

He said: “O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven or on earth—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.”

**Psalms 113:6**

who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?

**Psalms 135:6**

The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.

**Joel 3:3**

I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth,

blood and fire and billows of smoke.

**Verse list for** שָׁמַיִם וְאָרֶץ or אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם , *šāmayyā wʾarqāʾ* or *šʾmayyāʾ wʾarʾāʾ*

(Because these verses are in Aramaic, they were not listed as a variation in the paper. However, the Jeremiah 10:11 verse is another example of the phrase used in the sense, “the two places where things can exist.” In the last half of the verse, Jeremiah reverses the order and selects a different preposition for each member of the phrase, which would not be done for a merism meaning “everything.” And it should be noted that the phrase here is the object of the verb “make.” So it is in a creation context. Since Jeremiah was a native speaker of Hebrew, it is doubtful that this one verse that he put into Aramaic for the benefit of the nations which he was addressing, loses its significance as another example of a non-merism usage of “the heavens and the earth.”)

**Ezra 5:11**

This is the answer they gave us: “We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, one that a great king of Israel built and finished.”

**Jeremiah 10:11**

“Tell them this: ‘These gods, who did not make the heavens and the earth, will perish from the earth and from under the heavens.’”

**Other results**

Searches for variations of “heavens and earth” in which any modification before “heavens” (the article, הַ; the sign of the direct object, הָ; both of these; the preposition בְּ; or the adjective הַרְבֵּי) was *not* repeated before “earth” yielded 0 results.