

Weaknesses of Six-Day Reconstruction Theories
Special Note for Advanced Students in Genesis Course
John Hepp, Jr.

Genesis 1 sketches six days in which God created. Most Jews and Christians over the years have believed that this was the original creation—and that verse 1 was the first step. Some, however, believe that the six days were a reconstruction (re-creation) of what had been created previously.

The **gap theory** was until recently the most popular reconstruction view. It sees Genesis 1:1 as the original creation, then a gap of time before verse 2, which verse pictures divine judgment. Some time after that judgment, God started again. The *New Scofield Reference Bible* (p. 752) gives arguments for the gap theory in its comments on Isaiah 45:18. The brackets and emphasis are theirs; we have put the arguments in a column.

“He created it not in vain [*tohu*].” This is one of the Scripture passages that suggest the Divine Judgment interpretation of Gen. 1:1-2...This interpretation views the earth as having been created perfect. After an indefinite period of time, possibly in connection with Satan’s sin of rebellion against the Most High (...Isa. 14:12 and Ezek. 28:12), judgment fell upon the earth and “it was [became] without form and void.” Another indefinite interval elapsed after which “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2) in a re-creation of the earth. Some of the arguments for this viewpoint are:

1. Only the earth, not the universe, is said to have been “without form and void.”
2. The face of the earth bears the marks of a catastrophe.
3. The word rendered “was” may also be translated “became,” as indicated above—*“became without form and void.”*
4. The Hebrew expression for “without form and void” (*tohu wabohu*) is used to describe a condition produced by divine judgment in the only other two texts where the two words appear in conjunction (Isa. 34:11; Jer. 4:23).
5. Such a prehistoric divine judgment would throw some light on Satan’s fall and the peculiar relation he seems to sustain to the earth. . . .
6. This interpretation leaves room for an undetermined period of time between the original creation and divine judgment. Adam, created after the events of Gen. 1:1-2, was the first man.

This Scofield note is based on Isaiah’s statement that God “created [the earth] not *tohu*.” Scofield later refers to *tohu* and (*wa*) *bohu*, a combination probably meaning “without order or inhabitants.” Since this condition is sometimes produced by divine judgment, Scofield concludes that its usage in Genesis 1:2 implies a divine judgment there, after an earlier, perfect creation in verse 1. This conclusion is not warranted. If God’s creation was in six stages, it was perfect in the final result—not in the first stage. And in fact, God did call it “very good” (Gen. 1:31). Consider some weaknesses in Scofield’s arguments, one by one as listed above.

1. Genesis 1 is indeed silent about the condition of the rest of the universe. That proves nothing because the creation narrative is strictly from the earth’s perspective.
2. The only clear Scriptural statements of worldwide catastrophe point to the flood, which made enormous changes. In fact, by the flood “the world of that time was deluged and destroyed” (2 Peter 3:6). As a result, Peter speaks of “the present heavens **and earth**” (2

Peter 3:7) as distinct from those before. In that case, how could we determine that any marks are pre-flood and belong to an earlier catastrophe?

3. Although a different Hebrew construction could be translated “and the earth became,” the one in Genesis 1:2 cannot (see technical discussion below). The construction used there describes a condition already existing, as it does in its next use (Gen. 3:1).
4. *Tohu wabohu* is indeed an undesirable final condition. Jeremiah (in 4:23-26) lamented that the LORD had brought his people to that condition. Isaiah 34:11 so pictures Edom after the future judgment. But in Genesis 1:2 it was not a final condition; it was an apt description of the first of several stages in which God put the earth in order and filled it.
5. We would like to know more about Satan’s fall. But no Bible passage implies that his fall brought physical ruin to earth. We should not assume that the earth was cursed before Adam’s fall. In fact, no Scripture tells when Satan was created, though he was already present when God “laid the earth’s foundation” (Job 38:4-7). Apparently he was perfect at first. It is possible that he did not fall until after the six days of creation.
6. This earth was designed as a “theater” to display God’s glory through man as co-ruler. What would be the purpose of an earth without human beings? No Bible passage suggests such a thing. Why then should we seek an “undetermined period” of time before the first man? Is it to harmonize the Bible with the theory held by evolutionists that the earth is ancient?

TECHNICAL: Genesis 1:2 begins with Hebrew *waw* (which often means “and”) joined to the subject *ha-aretz* (“the earth”). This combination is followed by the “perfect” verb form *hayatha* (“was”), then the two adjectives *tohu wa-bohu* (“formless and empty”). Here as elsewhere, this grammatical construction does not refer to a later condition but gives additional information about the situation already described: “When God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate” (TEV). The same construction next appears in Genesis 3:1: “Now the serpent was more crafty” (*waw* joined to the subject, followed by the verb *hayah* and an adjective). The condition it describes did not develop after chapter 2 but already existed at that point. See other examples of this usage in Judges 8:11 (NASB, “when the camp was unsuspecting”) and Jonah 3:3 (NASB, “Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city”). A different *waw* construction can give the meaning “became”: initial *waw* joined to the “imperfect” form of the verb instead of the subject. There are many examples of this construction in Genesis 1, such as those translated “And it was so” in verses 7, 9, 11, 15, and 24. But not verse 2.

The **summary theory**, now gaining popularity, is another reconstruction theory. This theory considers Genesis 1:1 a summary title for the story of re-creation (reconstruction) in six days. That story, it says, begins in verse 2. According to this theory, the original creation is not in Genesis 1 at all (and apparently, nowhere else). In effect, then, there is a gap **before** verse 1 rather than **after** it.

This theory also has weaknesses. Verse 1 is not a title but the beginning of a narrative. And verse 2 does not begin a story but—as you have seen—adds new information. Furthermore, if Genesis 1 does not relate the creation story, why does the Bible call it that? For example, the narrative begun in chapter 1 is concluded in 2:1-3, which says that “thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array” and that God “rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” The next section proceeds with “the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created” (2:4). Many Bible passages refer to one creation, but none refers to two

creations. They all agree with Exodus 20:11 that "**in six days** the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, **and all that is in them.**"