

# APPENDIX - A

## CONCERNING THE HEBREW GRAMMAR OF GENESIS 1:1-2

*By Jack W. Langford*

“Sometimes what appears to be a very bold, pontifical statement is made usually by one who is strongly engaged in establishing a certain opinion. Quite often this has the effect of numbing the motivation of any who would oppose that view. Whether this is done intentionally, either in an honest effort to open minds, or whether this is done in an effort to confuse the honest investigator, remains to be seen. Nevertheless, such a pontifical statement is made by Weston W. Fields in his book *Unformed and Unfilled*, on page 86. There he confidently asserts, after a study of the Hebrew grammar of Genesis 1:1 and 2, that the gap is “grammatically impossible.” Of course, if this is true, we might as well close our Bibles and go home, because it appears the matter is settled. However, I think we all realize that pontifical statements do not always survive scrutiny.

In his younger years, Weston Fields was a student of Dr. John C. Whitcomb, who taught Hebrew at Grace Theological Seminary in Winona, Illinois. John Whitcomb, of course, co-authored the book *The Genesis Flood* along with Henry M. Morris in 1961. This book, probably more than anything else, spawned the modern Young Earth Creationist movement. Later Arthur C. Custance of Canada produced the book *Without Form and Void* in 1970. Custance advocated not only a strong historical basis, but primarily a strong linguistic basis, for what had long been called the gap theory. Weston Fields’s *Unformed and Unfilled* of 1976, as I understand, was actually the title of his doctoral thesis. It very obviously was an attack on the work of Arthur Custance, and secondarily, it aimed to confirm the conclusions of his teacher, Dr. Whitcomb.

Others in the Young Earth Creationist movement have picked up on this rather pontifical statement and echoed it. For instance, more recently Dr. Jonathan Sarfati of the Creation Ministries International has confidently stated, “The Gap Theory . . . has not the slightest basis in the Hebrew of Genesis. In fact, it seriously violates the tenets of historical-grammatical exegesis” (pamphlet, *The Gap Theory*). One would think that men who make

such bold statements like this must be very confident, if not infallible. I can assure you, a little investigation proves that they are anything but infallible.

### *First of All,*

Surprising as it may seem, the fact of the gap is not dependent upon any grammatical exegesis of the first or second verses of Genesis 1:1 and 2. As demonstrated in the first *SECTION* of my study *The Gap Is Not a Theory*, the fact of a gap is mandated by the clear hermeneutic simplicity of observing the larger picture of the first chapter of Genesis. Herein the actual boundaries are revealed concerning the nature and work of the “six days.” The inspired Scriptural *framework* for each of the six days is clear and irrefutable. The actual *work* done on each of the six days is specific, simple, clear, and, again, irrefutable. Simply put, you cannot have a first day unless you have light. There is no light in verse 2. The first day begins in verse 3 with the words “And God said let there be light.” We found that this is the only allowable interpretation of the passage—if taken literally! We also found that this is how it has been long portrayed in historic Judaism. No matter what “grammar” one uses, whether Hebrew, Greek, or English, the conclusion is the same. The first day does not begin until verse 3, and that leaves verses 1 and 2 in other epochs of time.

Consequently, the condition of the earth as designated in verse 2, and whatever the relationship of its three clauses are to verse 1, does not determine the beginning of the first day. At best, it only determines the *setting* for the inauguration of the first of six successive days in the work of renewal of the earth. The earth *already existed* “without form and void (lit., waste and desolate), and darkness was upon the face of the abyss, and the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters” before the “six days” began. In addition, there is no statement in verse 2 to the effect of just how long the earth existed in this condition prior to the beginning of the first day. Such is stated in every edition of the Pentateuch & Haftorahs distributed in Jewish synagogues throughout the English speaking world today. In addition, there is no indication in verse 1 of how long ago God initially “created the heavens and the earth.” Hence, the gap or gaps are implanted in the revelation.

## *Field's Explanation*

Now let us look at the statement by Weston Fields. In explanation for his assertion, Weston Fields makes the following observations regarding the second verse:

“We conclude, therefore, that Genesis 1:2a consists of a noun clause which is circumstantial (subordinate and explanatory) to the main verb of 1:1. This means that 1:2 is *a description of the earth as it was created originally*, not how it became at a time subsequent to creation (pg. 80).

He continues to describe the “And” that begins the second verse

The *waw copulative* is also known as *waw disjunctive* (because it breaks narrative sequence) or *waw conjunctive* (because it adds circumstantial details). We have chosen to use the term *waw disjunctive* in our discussion because that best describe its usage in Genesis 1:2 (pg. 82).

Gesenius also states that ‘the noun-clause connected by a *waw copulative* to a verbal-clause, or its equivalent, always describes a state contemporaneous with the principle action . . .’ These are very important statements, for if Genesis 1:2, as both lexicons and grammars testify, is an explanatory circumstantial noun-clause, describing a *state contemporaneous* with the main verb, then there is absolutely no possible way of salvaging the Gap Theory, a theory which must assert that 1:2 describes a state *subsequent* to the action of the main verb if it is to survive. The grammar of verse two forces us to say that the earth was *created* unformed and unfilled, while the Gap Theory alleges that it should say the earth *became* unformed and unfilled after (perhaps centuries after) it was created! It is grammatically impossible!” (pg. 85 and 86).

Thus, Mr. Fields presents what he assumes is an ironclad argument that would most certainly prevent the idea of a gap between verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 1. As I said before, others have picked up on this argument and have repeated it as the sure death-blow to what they call the gap theory.

## *The only problem is*

Even before young Weston Fields made his pontifical assertion another older Hebrew scholar, of higher caliber at the time, had already corrected this faulty assumption. Of course, most do not realize that this

whole argument presented by Weston Fields is based upon the assumption that *verse 1* supplies the “verbal clause” for the *waw disjunctive* of verse 2. As we shall see, it is verse 3 that supplies the “verbal clause” and not verse 1. We will note this important fact as discussed by Edward J. Young in his book *Studies in Genesis One*, written in 1964, which apparently was overlooked by Fields.

### *First of all*

Young brings out that the traditional and orthodox position concerning verse 1 is that it is NOT a “dependent clause” with the main statement to be found in verse 2. If such were the case it would lead to the reading “When God began to create the heaven and the earth, the earth was without form and void . . .” Now it is a fact that there are some new translations which render the first verses in this manner. However, and on the contrary, the orthodox understanding is that Genesis 1:1, as it stands in the traditional Masoretic text, constitutes an “independent clause” which is not dependent upon verse 2—it stands alone, and is so translated by every ancient version. In chapter 7 of his book, Weston Fields himself contends very effectively for this traditional position. In other words, Genesis 1:1 must be translated “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (PERIOD).” Verse 2 with its *waw disjunctive* is better translated “But” or “Now,” and it actually begins a new thought! This is the way it is translated in the LXX (250 BC), Josephus (First Century), etc.

Edward J. Young, in his *Studies in Genesis One*, emphasizes “The first verse of Genesis therefore stands as a simple declaration of the fact of absolute creation” (pg. 7). Having established that foundation, he goes on to ask the question, “What, however is the relationship in which verse 1 stands to the following?” He begins his answer by pointing to the three circumstantial clauses of verse 2 and states, “The particular time in which this three-fold condition was present is to be determined by the finite verb, with which these three clauses are to be construed.” This, of course, is the same principle that Fields later observed. However, Young gives us some added information that Fields failed to mention; namely, that there are two possible answers.



## *The Answer*

Young then answers the question as to which verse supplies the verb thusly: “There would seem to be two grammatical possibilities. In the first place, the three clauses might be construed with the ‘*created*’ of verse 1. If that were the case, the meaning would be that when God began the activity expressed by ‘*created*’ the three-fold condition described in verse 2 was already present . . . We should simply be told that when God began to *create*, there was the world before Him, desolation and waste, covered with darkness and water, the Spirit brooding upon it. The work expressed by ‘*created*’ whatever else it might be, could not be that of absolute creation. Although such a construction is grammatically possible, it is to be rejected as unsuitable to the context” (pg. 8, underlining mine. I have also replaced the Hebrew verb script with the English “*created*”).

Young continues, “The second possibility is to construe the three circumstantial clauses with the verb ‘And God *said*’ of verse 3. We may then paraphrase, ‘At the time when God said, “Let there be light,” a three-fold condition was in existence.’” (Again, I have replaced the Hebrew verb script with the English—“God *said*.”) He goes on to give examples in the Old Testament of circumstantial clauses which precede the verb with which they are to be construed, e.g., Gen. 38:25; Num. 12:14; Josh. 2:18; 1 Sam. 9:11; 1 Kings 14:17; 2 Kings 2:23; 6:5, 26; 9:25; Job 1:16; Isa. 37:38 (page 9).

In conclusion, Young states, “Verse one is a narrative in itself. Verses 2–31 likewise constitute a narrative complete in itself. In this narrative the first verb is ‘And God *said* [Eng.]’ No previous verb in the perfect appears” (pg. 11). In this case, verse 2 is understood as circumstantial to verse 3 rather than to verse 1.

In addition, Edward J. Young cites other earlier German Hebrew scholars who support his observation, such as Otto Procksch (1913), Karlheinz Rabast, Helmuth Frey (1953), etc. Therefore, Young explains, the purpose of verse 2 is to state the condition of the earth at the time when God says, “Let there be light.” In this regard, he states (pg. 30), “It is true that the second verse of Genesis does not represent a continuation of the narrative of verse 1, but as it were, a new beginning. Grammatically, it is not to be

construed with the preceding, but with what follows” (underlining mine). It is to be noted that Edward J. Young was not a gap theorist. His observations are objective and factual as to what he, as a Hebrew scholar, sees and understands the text to be saying.

Bruce Waltke, in his work *The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3* (BSac., July 1975, p. 226), states that he believes “this is the only viewpoint that completely satisfies the demands of Hebrew grammar.” Along with him, Von Rad, *Genesis* (pg. 47), says “verse 2 consists of three clauses that are circumstantial to verse 3 and describe the condition of the earth when God spoke.”

Allen P. Ross as well (*Creation and Blessing*, Grand Rapids, Mich., Baker Pub. 1996) more recently says, “This construction signifies that verse 2 is not the result of a development from verse 1” (pg. 103). He further states that “the syntax (*waw-disjunctive*) argues against that sequence”—that is, the idea that God created the earth “without form and void” (pg. 106). On page 721, he further explains concerning the first word of verse 2—“Verse 2 begins with the standard formation of a disjunctive *waw* . . . The *waw* introduces clauses here that are circumstantial to the main verb of the narrative, *wayyo-mer* [And God said] of verse 3. While most circumstantial clauses are placed after the clause they modify, Davidson says that at times the concomitant event or clause is placed first with the effect of greater vividness (A. B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902], § 141, p. 188).”

Arthur Custance was, therefore, absolutely right when he defended his view as recorded in the *Creation Research Society Journal* (Vol. 8, No. 2, Sept., 1971, page 137), “in Genesis 1:2 at the time that the writer has in mind, as he sets out to describe the reconstitution of the earth [verse 3], it had become a ruin [verse 2].” Furthermore Custance brings out how “the LXX . . . translate(d) the *waw* of Genesis 1:2” with the Greek conjunction *de*. Custance says, “Liddell & Scott give ‘but’ as the prime meaning. ‘It is used to call attention to the fact that the word or clause with which it stands *is to be distinguished* (their emphasis) from something preceding.’ Thayer says that it is a ‘particle, adversative, distinctive, disjunctive . . . it is added to statements opposed to the preceding statement . . . it opposes things previously mentioned or thought of.’ This is exactly my point.” In his work of 1976, Weston Fields himself acknowledges this fact which is taken from the Septuagint (LXX) translation. He says on page 83, “Furthermore, for the

disjunctive idea there would have been no better word in Greek [than the Greek *de*]. Thus, there can be no doubt that the translators of the LXX understood the significance of the Hebrew *waw disjunctive*” (pg. 83).

The translation by Josephus in the first century further substantiates this particular conclusion. Josephus gave the translation, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. But when the earth did not come into sight, but was covered with thick darkness and a wind moved upon its surface, God commanded that there should be light” (emphasis mine). Notice that not only does Josephus begin the *waw* of verse 2 with “But” (*de* in Greek) to disconnect and distinguish it from the first verse, but he also immediately connects the second verse (by a comma) with the “*command*” of God in verse 3. This, obviously, again shows they not only understood the significance of the *waw disjunctive*, but also that they connected it with the verb of verse 3 and not that of verse 1. Consequently, the requirements of the Hebrew grammar are not only satisfied, but there is demonstration of the proper connection with verse 3 from the very beginning.

Other present-day Hebrew scholars could be cited, but this should suffice.

### ***“Context is sovereign”***

It has been properly observed by others in time past that the context of a given passage of Scripture is the foremost authority for understanding and establishing the meaning of a specific passage. Furthermore the contextual understanding is open to any person with or without scholastic education. It is possible that language experts can miss the revelation found within the whole of context by focusing too closely at some speck of text. This has been stated by another in the following words: “Contextual sense is available to anyone who understands the passage with or without knowledge of the original language. A language expert who misses points of context is not as competent as one working from translations but who gets the big picture right. Best of all, of course, is the language expert who also gets the big picture right. But context is sovereign for establishing the meaning and, with care, anyone can determine that.” This was stated by Gorman Gray, from his book *The Age of the Universe* (2005), pages 170 and 171.

## *Consistency*

The position of Weston Fields is actually the loser any way he chooses to take the passage. On the one hand, he labored to prove that only a *waw consecutive* could indicate sequential order. Since this is not the type of *waw* found in verse 2, he postulates that verse 2 could not possibly be sequential to verse 1. Instead, he assumes that verse 2 is the condition of the earth set out in the time frame of verse 1. Therefore, he pontificates there could be no gap between verses 1 and 2. However, lo and behold, the *waw consecutive* does show up as the very first word of verse 3—“And (*waw consecutive*) God said let there be light.” Consistency demands that, according to Fields’s own argument, verse 3 is SEQUENTIAL to verse 2. Of course, by now we all know what that means—there is a gap between verse 2 and verse 3! At the time the earth existed in the condition described in verse 2, God spoke light into existence in verse 3 to inaugurate a new time period beginning with six successive days of renewal. Verse 2 states one time period of unknown duration, whereas the *waw consecutive* of verse 3 SEQUENTIALLY inaugurates another time period of specified duration.

But then, on the other hand, in emphasizing that the “and” beginning verse 2 is the *waw disjunctive*, he unwittingly proves that verse 2 is not to be connected to verse 1, because, if anything, whether in the Hebrew or the Greek, that is precisely what a *waw disjunctive*, or the Greek *de* does—it disconnects. So inadvertently, whether he likes it or not, he has a gap between verses 1 and 2 for sure! Surprisingly, as it turns out, it is more surely the Young Earth Creationist position that is both “contextually and grammatically impossible.”

So actually, in these first three verses of Genesis 1 we have three distinct time periods revealed if we take the Scriptures literally: (1) That time period when the whole universe, that which is expressed by the words “heavens and earth,” was originally created. Every other time these words are used in the Scriptures in connection with their origin or creation it speaks of a finished, orderly product. How long ago this was done is probably beyond our comprehension. The original creation took place simply, “in the beginning.” (2) That time period in which the earth existed in a state of waste and emptiness, submerged under water, and smothered in darkness, until the moving of the Holy Spirit above the waters, and the voice of God activated the first day. (3) That time period, wherein in six successive days God prepares the already existing world for man’s habitation. Herein began chronicled time for mankind on earth.