

S T U D Y G U I D E

HARD SAYINGS

UNDERSTANDING

DIFFICULT PASSAGES

OF SCRIPTURE

R.C. SPROUL

Hard Sayings

STUDY GUIDE



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

Hard Sayings Study Guide

© 2023 by Ligonier Ministries

Published by Ligonier Ministries

421 Ligonier Court,

Sanford, FL 32771

Ligonier.org

ISBN 978-1-64289-549-0

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the publisher, Ligonier Ministries.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

How to Use This Study Guide

This study guide includes a chapter synopsis, a lesson objective, key passages, key points, and discussion questions from each chapter in *Hard Sayings*, as well as questions that focus on a relevant passage of Scripture from each chapter. Participants should first read each corresponding chapter of the book in order to make the best use of this guide.

Chapter Synopsis: This section summarizes the material in the chapter and provides a reminder of what the chapter covered. It serves to help readers remember what they've already read in the book.

Lesson Objective: This section explains the purpose of the chapter and the intended outcome of the study guide lesson.

Key Passages: This section quotes several passages from the chapter so that readers can remember some of the more significant things the author said. It can also serve as a starting point for discussion if the group leader would like to ask questions or provide thoughts related to excerpts from the book.

Key Points: This section outlines many of the basic ideas that the author mentioned in the chapter. It helps readers recall not just the big idea of the chapter but also its supporting ideas and their flow.

Scripture Reading: This section highlights one of the chapter's key points in God's Word. It helps readers identify the scriptural basis of important Christian doctrines and develops their ability to understand Scripture through questions about the reading. These questions are also ideal for group study.

HARD SAYINGS STUDY GUIDE

Reflection Questions: This section provides readers with questions that could be asked of themselves or in a small-group setting. The questions are designed to help readers understand the chapter and apply that knowledge to their lives.

Prayer: This section closes the study with an opportunity to come before the Lord in prayer based on what readers have learned.

Without Form and Void

Genesis 1

CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

When did God create the heavens and the earth? This controversial question is the source of countless pages of heated debate. Scientists inform us that the universe is billions of years old, while young-earth creationists raise their eyebrows in suspicion. The question also becomes more challenging because faithful Christians disagree about its correct answer. The *gap theory* is an interpretation of Genesis 1:2 that suggests that there was a significant time gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, one attempt to harmonize the Bible with science.

LESSON OBJECTIVE

This chapter will introduce you to an issue in the interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2 so that you may become better equipped to understand the controversies surrounding creation.

KEY PASSAGES

It's one thing to say that the earth was without form and void and quite another to say that the earth became without form and void. (p. 4)

The idea is that there is a historical gap between verse 1 and verse 2. The gap, which could be as long as several million years or even billions of years, would mean that what we read about the six days of original creation refers instead to the six days of re-creation rather than the original work of God. (p. 4)

This historic interpretation does not see Genesis 1:2 as describing some kind of

cosmic battle between God and an equal, opposite force of evil or the force of darkness but instead sees it as simply referring to the beginning stages of divine creation. (p. 7)

Certainly the gap theory is a possible interpretation of Genesis 1:2. But I am persuaded that though it is a literary possibility and even a theological possibility, there really is no compelling reason to assume it. (p. 7)

KEY POINTS

The Gap Theory (pp. 3–4): Genesis 1:2 is a *hard saying* because of the disagreements over its interpretation. The gap theory is one interpretation of Genesis 1:2 that attempts to provide an answer to satisfy the demands of science and the biblical text. This view suggests that Genesis 1:1 refers to God’s original creation and that Genesis 1:2 occurs billions of years later—hence, there is a historical gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. According to this view, the Bible’s six days of creation are actually a “re-creation” of the original.

The Gap Theory and Science (pp. 4–5): Why and how would an interpretation such as this arise? Throughout history, people have debated the age of the earth. Recently, this debate has heightened because modern science suggests that the earth is very old. The gap theory developed as a clever solution to the apparent conflict between science and the Bible. It does so by suggesting that the original creation took place billions of years ago (Gen. 1:1). After cataclysmic disordering, God restored His creation, and this restoration occurs in Genesis 1:2.

The Gap Theory and Scripture (pp. 5–6): One of the primary differences between adherents of the gap theory and those who disagree lies in the translation of a Hebrew word. The common English way to translate this word is “was.” Gap theorists translate this word as “became” rather than “was.” Although the Hebrew word could be translated as “became,” it appears that the motivation to do so is not because of exegetical reasons, but because of scientific pressure.

The Historic and Classical Interpretation (pp. 6–7): Although the gap theory provides one option for interpretation, there are many other ways to understand Genesis 1:2. The historical and classical interpretation of the verse is that Genesis 1:1–2 refers to God’s original but unfinished work of creation that would be completed through the six days. The biggest difference is that the

WITHOUT FORM AND VOID

classical interpretation sees a direct connection between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, whereas the gap theory inserts a large space of time between them.

SCRIPTURE READING

Psalm 33:6–9 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. . . . Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

- In this chapter, Dr. Sproul explained that the gap theory is an interpretation of creation that proposes a historical gap between the creation of the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1) and all their host (Gen. 1:2). In what ways does Psalm 33:6–9 inform our understanding of creation? How might this verse be a challenge for someone who affirms the gap theory?

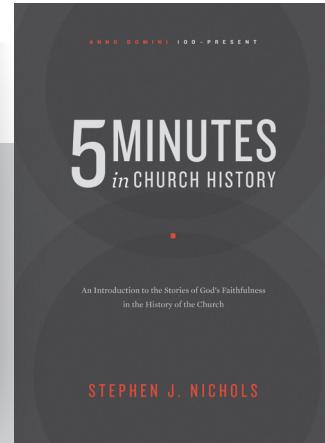
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is the gap theory? Why is it controversial?
2. What is the difference between the earth's "being without form and void" or the earth's "becoming without form and void"?
3. In what ways have you felt pressured to let science or other modern theories dictate the way you approach a biblical text?
4. How do you interpret Genesis 1:2?

PRAYER

- Praise God for His creation of the heavens and earth and all that is in them.
- Confess any areas in which you fail to trust God's Word because of external pressures.
- Thank God for revealing Himself in a dependable and trustworthy way through His Word.
- Ask God to help you grow in your understanding of Scripture and your ability to interpret it.

We want to see men and women around the world connect
the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



Order your copy of this title, download the digital version,
or browse thousands of resources at **Ligonier.org**.



LIGONIER MINISTRIES