

## Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography in the Bible

BY BRIAN GODAWA

Throughout history, all civilizations and peoples have operated under the assumption of a cosmography or picture of the universe. *Cosmography* is a technical term that means a theory that describes and maps the main features of the heavens and the earth. A Cosmography or “cosmic geography” can be a complex picture of the universe that includes elements like astronomy, geology, and geography; and those elements can include theological implications as well. We are most familiar with the historical change that science went through from a Ptolemaic cosmography of the earth at the center of the universe (geocentrism) to a Copernican cosmography of the sun at the center of a galaxy (heliocentrism).

Some mythologies maintained that the earth was a flat disc on the back of a giant turtle; animistic cultures believe that spirits inhabit natural objects and cause them to behave in certain ways; modern westerners believe in a space-time continuum where everything is relative to its frame of reference in relation to the speed of light. Ancients tended to believe that the gods caused the weather; moderns tend to believe that impersonal physical processes cause weather. All these different beliefs are elements of a cosmography or picture of what the universe is really like and how it operates. Even though “pre-scientific” cultures like the Hebrews did not have the same notions of science that we moderns have, they still observed the world around them and made interpretations as to the structure and operations of the universe. The Bible also contains a cosmography or picture of the universe that its stories inhabit.

I have said this before, and I will say it again: I am not a scientist, I am a professional storyteller, and so my interest in Biblical cosmography comes from my study of imagery, metaphor, and story. But a picture of the cosmos certainly has a bearing on scientific notions of the way the universe is and operates. Imagination and science are not completely unconnected. I am also a Christian who believes that the Bible is the Word of God. But does this mean that the Bible will have a cosmography that agrees with modern western science? I used to believe it did. I used to believe that if the Bible was scientifically errant in anyway, then it could not be the Word of God, since God would never communicate false information to us. That would make God a liar, or so I thought.

This led to the corollary that whatever modern science has proven would have to be in accord with the Bible’s own revelation. This is called “scientific concordism.” So, if we now know that the earth is a sphere and that the universe is expanding, then Scripture would not contradict that truth. What’s more, I might even be able to find a verse that would have that truth hidden it: Behold, I thought I found it: “It is he who sits above the circle of the earth...who stretches out the heavens like a curtain” (Isa. 40:22). In this scientific concordist paradigm, the Bible contains veiled scientific truths before their time in a gnostic hiddenness that is uncovered by initiates into such mysteries.

Unfortunately, this paradigm would lead to much cognitive dissonance for me as I tortured the text to fit whatever scientific theory I was trying to support at the time. First, I accepted Genesis as literally explaining material creation chronology and relegated evolutionary scientists to dishonest manipulators of facts.<sup>1</sup> Then I tried to find dinosaurs in the Bible by interpreting the Leviathan or Behemoth as references to ichthyosaurs and sauropods.<sup>2</sup> Then I tried to make six literal days and young chronology of Creation in Genesis square symbolically with the seriously old age of the earth.<sup>3</sup> Then I tried to creatively reconcile the billions of years of the Big Bang with 24-hour earth-bound solar days though gravity-warped space-time.<sup>4</sup>

I also thought that the best interpretation of the Bible was the “plain reading” of the text. That is, any interpretation that would turn the meaning into unwarranted figurative, symbolic, allegorical or

metaphorical language would be disingenuous hermeneutics. I didn't mean obvious figurative and allegorical language like parables of talking brambles and trees (Jud. 9:7-15) or clearly poetic expressions of singing mountains and clapping trees (Isa. 55:12). I meant that when the Bible talked about the physical order and events in heaven and earth it would mean just what it said since the Creator of the cosmos would know best what was actually happening.

But something started to seriously challenge these assumptions. First, as I studied the ancient Hebrew culture and its surrounding Near Eastern background, I began to see how very different a "plain reading" of a text was to them than a "plain reading" was to me.<sup>5</sup> The ancient Hebrew mind was steeped in different symbols, ideas, and language than I was. If I read a phrase like "sun, moon and stars," my western cultural understanding, which is deeply affected by a post-Galileo, post-Enlightened, materialist science would tend to read such references in terms of the physical bodies of matter, gas, and gravity spread out over vast light years of space-time. When ancient Israelites used that phrase, they would have pictures in their minds of markers and signs (Gen. 1:14), and more personal objects like pagan gods (Deut. 4:19), heavenly beings (1 Kg. 22:19), symbolic influential leaders (Gen. 37:9), or the fall of governing powers (Isa. 13:10).<sup>6</sup>

An ancient Jew hearing the words *leviathan* and *sea* conjured up notions of a disordered world without Yahweh's rule, and Yahweh's covenant creation out of chaos.<sup>7</sup> Whereas for me, hearing those words makes me think of a monster fish swimming in the ocean – or maybe *Moby Dick*, a symbol of man's hubris – but primarily the physical material being of those objects. It is easier to see now that my plain reading of the text through my modern western worldview could completely miss the plain meaning that the Scripture would have to an ancient Israelite. My so-called act of "plain reading" was ironically an imposition of my own cultural bias onto the text removed by thousands of years, thousands of miles, and thousands of cultural motifs.<sup>8</sup> We must seek the "plain reading" of the ancient authors and their audience, and in this way we can be "diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2Tim. 2:15).

Something else had always haunted me like a nagging pebble in the shoe of my mind, and that was the Galileo affair. There was a time (the 17th century) when brilliant godly Christian theologians and scientists that I greatly respect considered the new heliocentric theory as being against the plain teaching of the Bible. They believed the Bible could not be wrong about the way the cosmos operated without jeopardizing its authority as the Word of God. They asserted that the Bible plainly says *in clear and unambiguous language* that the earth does not move (Psa. 93:1; 104:5) and that the sun goes around the earth (Josh. 10:13; Ecc. 1:5).<sup>9</sup> These were brilliant men and not the ignorant anti-scientific bigots that they are still portrayed to be by critics with an axe to grind. They eventually accepted the theory as the evidence came in to back it up. But the point was that they learned a principle that has far reaching implications in Bible interpretation (hermeneutics): *Sometimes science can correct our interpretation of the Bible.*

There it is, I said it, a statement that draws the ire of some Evangelicals who will no doubt jerk their knees and accuse me of being a "liberal" and of not believing the Bible. But the fact of history is that science has corrected that very same Evangelical tradition of interpreting of the Bible. I really hated to admit this too, because I believe that the Bible is my ultimate authority on the truth of God, so if science could correct the Bible, then would that not make science a higher authority than the Bible? Only if you assume that your *interpretation of the Bible* is exactly what God is trying to communicate to you. But our *interpretation* of God's intent and meaning is not always the same thing as God's *actual* intent and meaning. So revising our understanding of the meaning of God's Word does not make God's Word wrong,

but rather it makes our *interpretation* of God’s Word wrong by showing us that we are expecting of the Scriptures something that the Scriptures are not offering us.

The implications of this principle forced me to re-evaluate my own understanding of just what the Bible is saying when it comes to science and cosmography. Because of my modern western scientific bias, I could easily misinterpret something as literal that was intended to be figurative, such as stars falling from the sky and the sun and moon losing their light (Isa. 13:10; Ezek. 32:7; Matt. 24:29).<sup>10</sup> But I also realized something just as important: My modern western scientific bias could also guide me to misinterpret something as figurative that the Bible intended to be literal! If I read about the “floodgates of heaven” for rain (Gen. 7:11), or the earth set upon a foundation of pillars (Psa. 75:3) or of Sheol being below the earth (Num. 13:32-33), I automatically think of these as poetic metaphors because modern science has revealed that none of these things are “literally” or physically there. But the ancient Israelite did not know these scientific facts that I know now, so what did these images mean to them?

As I pursued an intense Bible study on this issue, I started to learn more about the literary cultural context of Israel and her neighbors. What I discovered was that the Bible uses cosmic geographical language in common with other ancient Near Eastern (ANE) cultures that shared its situated time and location. Believers in today’s world use the language of Relativity when we write, even in our non-scientific discourse, because Einstein has affected the way they see the universe. Believers before the 17<sup>th</sup> century used Ptolemaic language because they too were children of their time. It should be no surprise to anyone that believers in ancient Israel would use the language of ANE cosmography because it was the mental construct within which they lived and thought.<sup>11</sup>

With regard to these Biblical and ancient Near Eastern literary parallels, critical scholarship tends to stress the similarities, downplay the differences and construct a secularized evolutionary theory of the transformation of Israel’s religion from polytheism into monotheism through plagiarism.<sup>12</sup> In other words, critical scholarship is anthropocentric, or human-centered. Confessional scholarship tends to stress the differences, downplay the similarities and interpret the evidence as indicative of the radical otherness of Israelite religion.<sup>13</sup> In other words, confessional scholarship is theocentric, or God-centered. In this way, both critical and confessional hermeneutics err on opposite extremes.

The orthodox doctrine of the Inspiration of Scripture is *God-breathed human-written words* (2Tim. 3:16). Human men wrote from God, moved mysteriously by the Holy Spirit (2Pet. 1:20-21). Even Evangelical inerrantists agree that human authorship involves literary and cultural conventions of their time period. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) summarized their view this way: “We affirm that canonical Scripture should always be interpreted on the basis that it is infallible and inerrant. However, in determining what the God-taught writer is asserting in each passage, we must pay the most careful attention to its claims and character as a human production. In inspiration, *God utilized the culture and conventions of His penman’s milieu*” (emphasis added).<sup>14</sup>

By studying the Bible within its cultural milieu and human genre conventions, I could no longer avoid the fact that it contains a different cosmography than our modern western post-Enlightenment cosmography. The evidence became so overwhelming that I had to change my theological view to fit the Bible rather than reinterpret the Bible to fit my theological system. That ancient cosmography was workable for its time, but is no longer so, (as no doubt, will ours also be eventually). What they accepted as literal reality we now accept only metaphorically. I do not believe that this jeopardizes the doctrine that the Bible is the Word of God, or that it reduces that Word to merely human authorship, but I do believe that it

jeopardizes our man-made traditions and interpretations about what the Word of God is intended to communicate to us.

## The Three-Tiered Universe

Othmar Keel, leading expert on ancient Near Eastern art has argued that there was no singular technical physical description of the cosmos in the ancient Near East, but rather patterns of thinking, similarity of images, and repetition of motifs.<sup>15</sup> A common simplification of these images is expressed in the three-tiered universe of the heavens, the earth, and the underworld. A good generic depiction of this cosmography is rendered in Denis Lamoureux's *Evolutionary Creation*<sup>16</sup>:

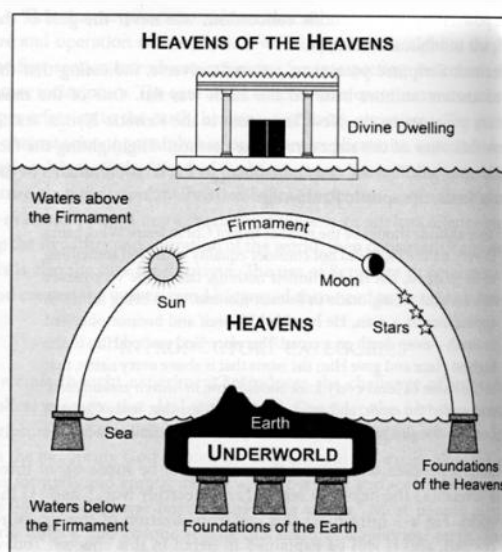


Fig 4-1. The 3-Tier Universe. Drawn by Kenneth Kully

Wayne Horowitz has chronicled Mesopotamian texts that illustrate this multi-leveled universe among the successive civilizations of Sumer, Akkad, Babylonia, and Assyria. The heavens above were further subdivided into “the heaven of Anu (or chief god)” at the very top, the “middle heavens” below him and the sky. In the middle was the earth’s surface, and below that was the third level that was further divided into the waters of the abyss and the underworld.<sup>17</sup>

Let’s take a look at the Scriptures that appear to reinforce this three-tiered universe so different from our modern understanding of expanding galaxies of warped space-time, where the notion of heaven and hell are without physical location. Though the focus of this essay will be on Old Testament context, I want to start with the New Testament to make the point that their cosmography did not necessarily change with the change of Old to New Covenants.

Phil. 2:10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth,

Rev. 5:3, 13 And no one in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look into it... And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.”

Ex. 20:4 “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.

Matt. 11:23 Jesus said, “And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades- [the underworld].

Both apostles Paul and John were writing about the totality of creation being subject to the authority of Jesus on his throne. So this word picture of “heaven, earth, and under the earth” was used as the description of the total known universe – which they conceived of spatially as heaven above, the earth below, and the underworld below the earth. And not only the human writers wrote of the universe in this three-tiered fashion but so did Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; as well as God himself, when giving the commandments on Sinai.

One may naturally wonder if this notion of “heaven above” may merely be a symbolic or figurative expression for the exalted spiritual nature of heaven. Since we cannot see where heaven is, God would use physical analogies to express spiritual truths. This explanation would be easier to stomach if the three-tiered notion were not so rooted in a cosmic geography that clearly was their understanding of the universe (as proven below). And this would further jeopardize the doctrine of the ascension of Jesus into heaven which also affirms the spatial location of heaven above and the earth below, in very literal terms.

Acts 1:9 He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. 11 They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

John 3:13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

John 6:62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?

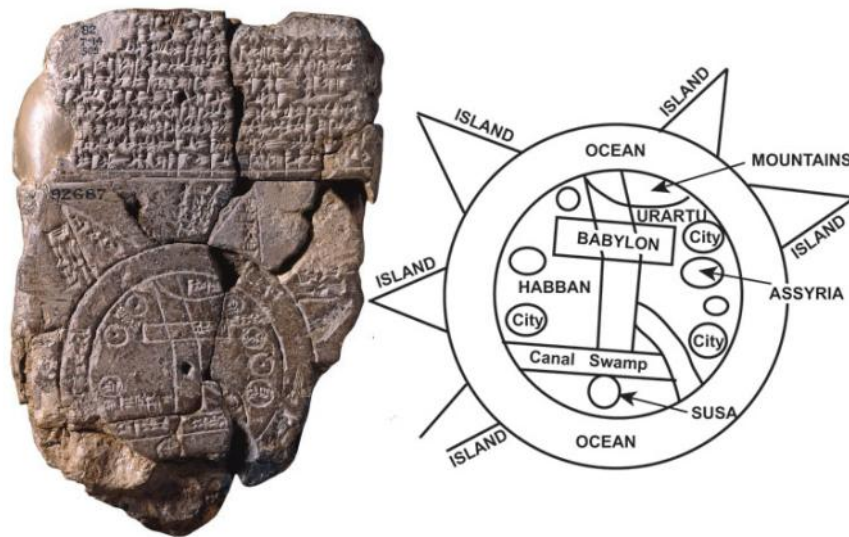
John 20:17 Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Eph. 4:8-9 Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” 9 (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? 10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

The location of heaven being above us may be figurative to our modern cosmology only because we now know it is not literally above us, but it was not figurative to the Biblical writers. Now let’s take a closer look at each of these tiers or domains of the cosmos through the eyes of Scripture in their ancient Near Eastern context.

### Flat Earth Surrounded by Waters

I want to start with the earth because the Scriptures start with the earth. That is, the Bible is geocentric in its picture of a flat earth founded on immovable pillars at the center of the universe. Over a hundred years ago, a Babylonian map of the world was discovered that dated back to approximately the ninth century B.C. As seen below, this map was unique from other Mesopotamian maps because it was not merely local but international in its scale, and contained features that appeared to indicate cosmological interpretation.<sup>18</sup> That map and a translated interpretation are reproduced below<sup>19</sup>:



The geography of the Babylonian map portrayed a flat disc of earth with Babylon in the center and extending out to the known regions of its empire, whose perimeters were surrounded by cosmic waters and islands out in those waters. Of the earliest Sumerian and Akkadian texts with geographical information, only the Babylonian map of the world and another text, *The Sargon Geography*, describe the earth’s surface, and they both picture a central circular continent surrounded by cosmic waters, often referred to as “the circle of the earth.”<sup>20</sup> Other texts like the Akkadian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and Egyptian, and Sumerian works share in common with the Babylonian map the notion of mountains at the edge of the earth beyond which is the cosmic sea and the unknown,<sup>21</sup> and from which come “the circle of the four winds” that blow upon the four corners of the earth (a reference to compass points).<sup>22</sup>

The Biblical picture of the earth is remarkably similar to this Mesopotamian cosmic geography. When Daniel had his dream *from God in Babylon*, of a tree “in the middle of the earth” whose height reached so high that “it was visible to the end of the whole earth,” (Dan. 4:10) it reflected this very Babylonian map of the culture that Daniel was educated in. One cannot see the end of the whole earth on a globe, but one can do so on a circular continent embodying the known world of Babylon as the center of the earth.

“The ends of the earth” is a common phrase, occurring over fifty times throughout the Scriptures that means more than just “remote lands,” but rather includes the notion of the very physical end of the whole earth all around before the cosmic waters that hem it in. Here are just a few of the verses that indicate this circular land mass bounded by seas as the entire earth:

Isa. 41:9 you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners

Psa. 65:5 O God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.

Zech. 9:10 his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Mark 13:27 And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

Acts 13:47 “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

Job 28:24 For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens.

Remember that Mesopotamian phrase, “circle of the earth” that meant a flat disc terra firma? Well, it’s in the Bible too. “It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers” (Isa. 40:22). Some have tried to say that the Hebrew word for “circle” could mean *sphere*, but it does not. The Hebrew word used here (*hûg*) could however refer to a vaulted dome that covers the visible circular horizon, which would be more accurate to say, “above the vault of the earth.”<sup>23</sup> If Isaiah had wanted to say the earth was a sphere he would have used another word that he used in a previous chapter (22:18) for a ball, but he did not.<sup>24</sup>

Two further Scriptures use this “circle of the earth” in reference to God’s original creation of the land out of the waters and extend it outward to include the circumferential ocean with its own mysterious boundary:

Prov. 8:27 When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep... 29 when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth.

Job 26:10 He has inscribed a circle on the face of the waters at the boundary between light and darkness [where the sun rises and sets].

Even when the Old Testament writers are deliberately using metaphors for the earth, they use metaphors for a flat earth spread out like a flat blanket.

Job 38:13 “take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it”

Job 38:18 Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?

Psa. 136:6 to him who spread out the earth above the waters

Isa. 44:24 “I am the LORD, who spread out the earth by myself,

## Geocentricity

In the Bible, the earth is not merely a flat disk surrounded by cosmic waters under the heavens; it is also the center of the universe. To the ancient Near Eastern mindset, including that of the Hebrews, the earth did not move (except for earthquakes) and the sun revolved around that immovable earth. They did not know that the earth was spinning one thousand miles an hour and flying through space at 65,000 miles an hour. Evidently, God did not consider it important enough to correct this primitive inaccurate understanding. Here are the passages that caused such trouble with those early Christians who took the text too literally because it did not seem to be figurative to them:

Psa. 19:4 Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun, 5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man to run his course. 6 Its rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them.

Psa. 50:1 The Mighty One, God, the LORD, has spoken, And summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

Eccl. 1:5 Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; And hastening to its place it rises there again.

Josh. 10:13 So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped...And the sun stopped in the middle of the sky, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day.

Matt. 5:45 Jesus said, “For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good.”

Two objections are often raised when considering these passages. First, they use phenomenal language. That is, they describe simply what the viewer observes and makes no cosmological claims beyond simply description of what one sees. We even use these terms of the sun rising and setting today and we know the earth moves around the sun. Fair enough. The only problem is they were pre-scientific and did not know the earth went around the sun, so when they said the sun was moving from one end of the heavens to the other they had absolutely no reason to believe that it was not doing so.<sup>25</sup>



The second objection is that some of the language is obvious metaphor. David painted the sun as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber or of being summoned by God and responding like a human. This is called anthropomorphism and is obviously poetic. But the problem here is that the metaphors still reinforce the sun doing all the moving around a stationary immobile earth.

1Chr. 16:30 Tremble before Him, all the earth; Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved.

Psa. 93:1 Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved.

Psa. 96:10 Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns; Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved; He will judge the peoples with equity.”

Understandably, these texts have been thought to indicate that the Bible is explicitly saying the earth does not move. But the case is not so strong for these examples because the Hebrew word used in these passages for “the world” is not the word for *earth* (*erets*), but the word that is sometimes used for the inhabited world (*tebel*). So it is possible that these verses are talking about the “the world order” as does the poetry of 2Sam. 22:16. But the problem that then arises is that the broader chapter context of these verses describe the earth’s physical aspects such as oceans, trees, and in the case of 1Chron. 16:30, even the “earth” (*erets*) in redundant context with the “world” (*tebel*), which would seem to indicate that “world” may refer to the physical earth. Lastly, *world* can be interchangeable with *earth* as it is in 1Sam. 2:8, “For the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S, And He set the world on them.”

And this adds a new element to the conversation of a stationary earth, *A foundation of pillars.*

## Pillars of the Earth

The notion of an immovable earth is not a mere description of observational experience by earth dwellers; it is based upon another cosmological notion that the earth is on a foundation of pillars that hold it firmly in place.

Psa. 104:5 He established the earth upon its foundations, So that it will not totter forever and ever.

Job 38:4 “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, 5 Who set its measurements, since you know? Or who stretched the line on it? 6 “On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone,

2Sam. 22:16 “Then the channels of the sea appeared, The foundations of the world were laid bare, By the rebuke of the LORD, At the blast of the breath of His nostrils.

1Sam. 2:8 “For the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S, And He set the world on them.

Psa. 75:3 “The earth and all who dwell in it melt; It is I who have firmly set its pillars.”

Zech. 12:1 Thus declares the LORD who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth,

Ancient man such as the Babylonians believed that mountains and important ziggurat temples had foundations that went below the earth into the abyss (*apsu*) or the underworld.<sup>26</sup> But even if one would argue that the notion of foundations and pillars of the earth are only intended to be symbolic, they are still symbolic of *a stationary earth that does not move*.

Some have pointed out the single verse that seems to mitigate this notion of a solid foundation of pillars, Job 26:6-7: “Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering. He stretches out the north over the void and hangs the earth on nothing.” They suggest that this is a revelation of the earth in space before ancient man even knew about the spatial location of the earth in a galaxy. But the reason I do not believe this is because of the context of the verse. Within that chapter Job affirms the three-tiered universe of waters of the Abyss below him (v. 5) and under that Sheol (v. 6), with pillars holding up the heavens (v. 11). Later in the same book, God himself speaks about the earth laid on foundations (38:4), sinking its bases and cornerstone like a building (38:5-6). Ancient peoples believed the earth was on top of some other object like the back of a turtle, and that it was too heavy to float on the waters. So in context, Job 26 appears to be saying that the earth is over the waters of the abyss and Sheol, on its foundations, but there is nothing under *those pillars* but God himself holding it all up. This is not the suggestion of a planet hanging in space, but rather the negative claim of an earth that is *not* on the back of a turtle or other ancient object.

## Sheol Below

Before we ascend to the heavens, let’s take a look at the Underworld below the earth. The Underworld was a common location of extensive stories about gods and departed souls of men journeying to the depths of the earth through special gates of some kind into a geographic location that might also be accessed through cracks in the earth above.<sup>27</sup> Entire Mesopotamian stories engage the location of the subterranean netherworld in their narrative such as *The Descent of Inanna*, *The Descent of Ishtar*, *Nergal and Ereshkigal*, and many others.

Sheol was the Hebrew word for the underworld.<sup>28</sup> Though the Bible does not contain any narratives of experiences in Sheol, it was nevertheless described as the abode of the dead that was below the earth. Though Sheol was sometimes used interchangeably with “Abaddon” as the place of destruction of the body (Prov. 15:11; 27:20)<sup>29</sup>, and “the grave” (*qibrah*) as a reference to the state of being dead and buried in the earth (Psa. 88:11; Isa. 14:9-11) it was also considered to be *physically* located beneath the earth in the same way as other ANE worldviews.

When the sons of Korah are swallowed up by the earth for their rebellion against God, Numbers chapter 16 says that “they went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly (v. 33).” People would not “fall alive” into death or the grave and then perish if Sheol was not a location. But they would die after they fall down into a location (Sheol) and the earth closes over them after that.

The divine being (*elohim*), known as the departed spirit of Samuel “came up out of the earth” for the witch of Endor’s necromancy with Saul (1Sam. 28:13). This was not a reference to a body coming out of a grave, but a spirit of the dead coming from a location beneath the earth.

When Isaiah writes about Sheol in Isaiah 14, he combines the notion of the physical location of the dead body in the earth (v. 11) with the location beneath the earth of the spirits of the dead (v. 9). It’s really a both/and proposition.

Here is a list of some verses that speak of Sheol geographically as a spiritual underworld in contrast with heaven as a spiritual overworld.

Amos 9:2 “If they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them; if they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down.

Job 11:8 It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?

Psa. 16:10 For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.

Psa. 139:8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

Isa. 7:11 “Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.”

These are not mere references to the body in the grave, but to locations of the spiritual soul as well. Sheol is a combined term that describes both the grave for the body and the underworld location of the departed souls of the dead.

In the New Testament, the word *Hades* is used for the underworld, which was the Greek equivalent of Sheol.<sup>30</sup> Jesus himself used the term Hades as the location of damned spirits in contrast with heaven as the location of redeemed spirits when he talked of Capernaum rejecting miracles, “And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades (Matt. 11:23).” Hades was the location of departed spirits in his parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Hades (Luke 16:19-31).

In Greek mythology, Tartarus was another term for a location beneath the “roots of the earth” and beneath the waters where the warring giants called “Titans” were bound in chains because of their rebellion against the gods.<sup>31</sup> Peter uses a derivative of that very Greek word Tartarus to describe a very similar location and scenario of angels being bound during the time of Noah and the warring titans called “Nephilim.”<sup>32</sup>

2Pet. 2:4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell [tartaroo] and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; 5 if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah.

## The Watery Abyss

In Mesopotamian cosmography, the Abyss (*Apsu* in Akkadian) was a cosmic subterranean lake or body of water that was between the earth and the underworld (Sheol), and was the source of the waters above

such as oceans, rivers, and springs or fountains.<sup>33</sup> In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Utnapishtim, the Babylonian Noah, tells his fellow citizens that he is building his boat and will abandon the earth of Enlil to join Ea in the waters of the Abyss that would soon fill the land.<sup>34</sup> Even bitumen pools used to make pitch were thought to rise up from the “underground waters,” or the Abyss.<sup>35</sup>

In the Bible the earth also rests on the seas or “the deep” (*tehom*) that produces the springs and waters from its subterranean waters below the earth.

Psa. 24:1-2 The world, and those who dwell in it. For He has founded it upon the seas, And established it upon the rivers.

Psa. 136:6 To Him who spread out the earth above the waters.

Gen. 49: 25 the Almighty who blesses you With blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath.

Ex. 20:4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”

Leviathan is even said to dwell in the Abyss in Job 41:32 (LXX). And when God brings the flood, part of the waters are from “the fountains of the great deep” bursting open (Gen. 7:11; 8:2).

## The Firmament

If we move upward in the registers of cosmography, we find another ancient paradigm of the heavens covering the earth like a solid dome or vault with the sun, moon, and stars embedded in the firmament yet still somehow able to go around the earth. Reformed Scholar Paul Seely has done key research on this notion.<sup>36</sup> His work helps make sense of the Bible passages that used to cause so much trouble for me as a concordist and “hyper-literalist.”

Gen. 1:6 And God said, “Let there be an expanse [firmament] in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” 7 And God made the expanse [firmament] and separated the waters that were under the expanse [firmament] from the waters that were above the expanse [firmament]. And it was so. 8 And God called the expanse [firmament] Heaven.

I used to think, what is that all about? Waters below separated from waters above by the sky? Young earth creationism tries to explain those waters above as a water canopy above the earth that came down at Noah’s flood. But that doesn’t make sense Biblically because birds are said to “fly over the face of the firmament” (Gen 1:20) with the same Hebrew grammar as God’s Spirit hovering “over the face of the waters” (Gen 1:2). But the firmament cannot be the “water canopy” because the firmament is not the waters, but the thing that is separating and holding back the waters. If the firmament is an “expanse” or the sky itself, then the birds would be flying *within* the firmament, not *over the face of* the firmament as the text states. So the firmament cannot be a water canopy and it cannot be the sky itself.

The T.K.O. of the canopy theory is the fact that according to the Bible those “waters above” and the firmament that holds them back were still considered in place during the time of King David, who wrote:

Psa. 104:2 stretching out the heavens like a tent. 3 He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters;

Psa. 148:4 Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

Seely shows how the modern scientific bias has guided the translators to render the word for “firmament” (*raqia*) as “expanse.” *Raqia* in the Bible consistently means a solid material such as a metal that is hammered out by a craftsman (Ex. 39:3; Isa. 40:19). And when *raqia* is used elsewhere in the Bible for the heavens, it clearly refers to a solid material, sometimes even metal!

Job 37:18 Can you, like him, spread out [raqia] the skies, hard as a cast metal mirror?

Ex. 24:10 and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement [raqia] of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness.

Ezek. 1:22 Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse [raqia], shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads. 23 And under the expanse [raqia] their wings were stretched out straight.

Prov. 8:27 When he established the heavens... 28 when he made firm the skies above.

Job 22:14 he walks on the vault of heaven.

Amos 9:6 [God] builds his upper chambers in the heavens and founds his vault upon the earth.

Not only did the ancient translators of the Septuagint (LXX) translate *raqia* into the Latin equivalent for a hard firm solid surface (*firmamentum*), but also the Jews of the Second Temple period consistently understood the word *raqia* to mean a solid surface in covering the earth like a dome.

3Bar. 3:6 And the Lord appeared to them and confused their speech, when they 7 had built the tower... And they took a gimlet, and sought to pierce the heaven, saying, Let us see (whether) the heaven is made of clay, or of 8 brass, or of iron.

2Apoc. Bar. 21:4 ‘O you that have made the earth, hear me, that have fixed the firmament by the word, and have made firm the height of the heaven.

Josephus Antiquities 1:30 (1.1.1.30) On the second day, he placed the heaven over the whole world... He also placed a crystalline [firmament] round it.

The Talmud describes rabbis debating over which remains fixed and which revolves, the constellations or the solid sky (Pesachim 94b)<sup>37</sup>, as well as how to calculate the thickness of the firmament scientifically (Pesab. 49a) and biblically (Genesis Rabbah 4.5.2).<sup>38</sup>

What's more, when the Scriptures talk poetically of this vault of heaven it uses the same terminology of stretching out the solid surface of the heavens over the earth *as it does of stretching out an ANE desert tent over the flat ground* (Isa. 54:2; Jer. 10:20) – not like an expanding Einsteinian time-space atmosphere.

Psa. 19:4 he has set a tent for the sun,

Psa. 104:2 stretching out the heavens like a tent.

Isa. 45:12 It was my hands that stretched out the heavens,

Isa. 51:13 the LORD...who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth.

Jer. 10:12 It is he who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.

Jer. 51:15 “It is he who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.”

Keeping this tent-like vault over the earth in mind, when God prophesies about the physical destruction he will bring upon a nation, he uses the symbolism of rolling up that firmament like the tent he originally stretched out (or a scroll), along with the shaking of the pillars of the earth and the pillars of heaven which results in the stars falling from the heavens because they were embedded within it.

Isa. 34:4 All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine.

Rev. 6:13 [an earthquake occurs] and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. 14 The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

Matt. 24:29 “the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”

Job 26:11 “The pillars of heaven tremble, and are amazed at His rebuke.

2Sam. 22:8 “Then the earth shook and quaked, The foundations of heaven were trembling And were shaken, because He was angry.

Is. 13:13 Therefore I shall make the heavens tremble, And the earth will be shaken from its place At the fury of the LORD of hosts.

Joel 2:10 Before them the earth quakes, The heavens tremble.

## Waters Above the Heavens

Now on to the highest point of the Mesopotamian cosmography, the “highest heavens,” or “heaven of heavens,” where God has established his temple and throne (Deut. 26:15; Psa. 11:4; 33:13; 103:19). But God’s throne also happens to be in the midst of a sea of waters that reside there. These are the waters that are above the firmament, that the firmament holds back from falling to earth (Gen. 1:6-8).

Psa. 148:4 Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

Psa. 104:2 Stretching out the heavens like a tent. 3 He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters.

Psa. 29:3 The voice of the LORD is over the waters...the LORD, over many waters...10 The LORD sits enthroned over the flood [not a reference to the flood of Noah, but to these waters above the heavens]<sup>39</sup> the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.

Jer. 10:13 When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens,

Ezek. 28:2 “I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas.”

The solid firmament that holds back the heavenly waters has “floodgates” or “windows of heaven” that let the water through to flood the earth in Noah’s day.

Gen. 7:11 all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened.

Gen. 8:2 Also the fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky were closed, and the rain from the sky was restrained.

Isa. 24:18 For the windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble.

## Summary of Mesopotamian Cosmography in Scriptures

The sheer volume of passages throughout both Testaments illustrating the parallels with Mesopotamian cosmography seems to prove a deeply rooted ancient pre-scientific worldview that permeates the Scriptures, and this worldview is not coincident with modern science. Here is a summary listing of its elements (extra-biblical 2nd Temple literature in parentheses):

### Three-Tiered Universe

Gen. 28:12, 17; Ex. 20:4; Rev. 5:3, 13; Phil. 2:10; Luke 16:19-31; (2Esdr. 4:7).

### God's Throne on Waters Above the Heavens

Gen. 7:11; 8:2; Deut. 26:15; Psa. 11:4; 33:13; 103:19; 104:2; 29:3, 10; 104:2-3; 148:4; Jer. 10:12-13; Ezek 28:2; (2Esdr. 4:7-8).

### Floodgates in the Heavens

Gen. 7:11; 8:2; Isa. 24:11.

### Solid Firmament Vault over the Earth

Gen. 1:6-8, 20; Job 37:18; Ex. 24:10; Job 22:14; Ezek. 1:22-26; Psa. 19:4-6; 104:2; Isa. 40:22; Prov. 8:27-28; Isa. 45:12; 51:13-14; Jer. 10:12; 51:15; Isa. 34:4; Amos 9:7; Rev. 6:13-14; (3Baruch 3:6-8; 2 Apoc. Baruch 21:4; 2 Enoch 3:3; Pesachim 94b; Peab. 49a; Gen. Rabbah 4.5.2; Josephus Antiquities 1:30).

### Stars Embedded in the Firmament

Matt. 24:29; Isa. 34:4; Rev. 6:13; Dan. 8:10; (Sibyl. 5:514).

### Flat Disc Earth Surrounded by Circumferential Sea

Prov. 8:27-29; Job 26:10-11; Psa. 19:6; 72:8; Zech. 9:10; Isa. 40:22; Rev. 7:1; 20:8; Isa. 11:12; Ezek. 7:2; Dan. 4:10-11, 32-33; Matt. 4:8; Isa. 13:5; 41:8-9; Matt. 12:42; Job 37:3; Matt 24:31; Job 38:12-13; Psa. 136:6; Isa. 42:4; 44:24; Job 11:9; 38:18.

### Geocentricity

Psa. 19:4-6; 50:1; Ecc. 1:5; Josh. 10:13; Matt. 5:45.

### Immovable Earth

1Chron. 16:30; Psa. 75:3; 93:1; 96:10; 104:5.

### Pillars under the Earth

Psa. 75:3; 104:5; Job 38:4-6; 26:6; 1 Sam. 2:8; 22:16; Zech. 12:1; Prov. 8:29; (Targum Job 26:7).

### Pillars under the Heavens

Job 26:11; 2Sam. 22:8; Isa. 13:13; Joel 2:10.



### Watery Abyss Below the Earth

Gen. 49:25; Psa. 24:1-2; 136:6; Dan. 33:13.

### Sheol Below the Earth

Num. 16:31-33; 1 Sam. 28:13-15; Isa. 14:9-11; Amos 9:2; Matt. 1:23; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Rev. 20:14; 2Pet. 2:4-5 (with 1Pet. 3:18-20).

## So, What's Wrong With the Bible?

As I stated earlier, if I believe that the Bible cannot be scientifically inaccurate without jeopardizing its authority as God's Word, then I am in big trouble because the Bible clearly contains the Mesopotamian cosmic geography of a three-tiered universe with God on a heavenly throne above a heavenly sea, underneath which is a solid vaulted dome with the sun, moon, and stars connected to it, covering the flat disc earth, founded immovably firm on pillars, surrounded by a circular sea, on top of a watery abyss, beneath which is the underworld of Sheol.

Some well-intentioned Evangelicals seek to maintain their particular definition of Biblical inerrancy by denying that the Bible contains this ancient Near Eastern cosmography. They try to explain it away as phenomenal language or poetic license. Phenomenal language is the act of describing what one sees subjectively from one's perspective without further claiming objective reality. So when the writer says the sun stood still, or that the sun rises and sets within the solid dome of heaven, he is only describing his observation, not cosmic reality. The claim of observation from a personal frame of reference is certainly true as far as it goes. Of course the observer describes what they are observing. But the distinction between appearance and reality is an imposition of our alien modern understanding onto theirs. As Seely explains,

It is precisely because ancient peoples were scientifically naive that they did not distinguish between the appearance of the sky and their scientific concept of the sky. They had no reason to doubt what their eyes told them was true, namely, that the stars above them were fixed in a solid dome and that the sky literally touched the earth at the horizon. So, they equated appearance with reality and concluded that the sky must be a solid physical part of the universe just as much as the earth itself.<sup>40</sup>

If the ancients did not know the earth was a sphere in space, they could not know that their observations of appearances were anything other than reality. It would be easy enough to relegate one or two examples of Scripture to the notion of phenomenal language, but when dozens of those phenomenal descriptions reflect the same complex integrated picture of the universe that Israel's neighbors shared, and when that picture included many elements that were *not* phenomenally observable, such as the Abyss, Sheol or the pillars of earth and heaven, it strains credulity to suggest these were merely phenomenal descriptions intentionally unrelated to reality. If it walks like a Mesopotamian duck and talks like a Mesopotamian duck, then chances are they thought it was an Mesopotamian duck, not just the "appearance" of one having no reality.

It would be a mistake to claim that there is a single monolithic Mesopotamian cosmography.<sup>41</sup> There are varieties of stories with overlapping imagery, and some contradictory notions. But there are certainly

enough commonalities to affirm a generic yet mysterious picture of the universe. And that picture in Scripture undeniably includes poetic language. The Hebrew culture was imaginative. They integrated poetry into everything, including their observational descriptions of nature. Thus a hymn of creation such as Psalm 19 tells of the heavens declaring God’s glory as if using speech, and then describes the operations of the sun in terms of a bridegroom in his chamber or a man running a race. Metaphor is inescapable and ubiquitous. And herein lies a potential solution for the dilemma of scientific inaccuracy of the Mesopotamian cosmic geography in Scripture: *The Israelite culture, being pre-scientific, thought more in terms of function and purpose than material structure.* Even if their picture of the heavens and earth as a three-tiered geocentric cosmology, was scientifically “false,” from our modern perspective, it nevertheless still accurately describes the teleological purpose and meaning of creation that they were intending to communicate.

Othmar Keel, one of the leading scholars on Ancient Near Eastern art has argued that even though modern depictions of the ancient worldview like the illustration of the three-tiered universe above are helpful, they are fundamentally flawed because they depict a “profane, lifeless, virtually closed mechanical system,” which reflects our own modern bias. To the ancient Near East “rather, the world was an entity open at every side. The powers which determine the world are of more interest to the ancient Near East than the structure of the cosmic system. A wide variety of diverse, uncoordinated notions regarding the cosmic structure were advanced from various points of departure.”<sup>42</sup>

John Walton has written recently of this ANE concern with powers over structure in direct relation to the creation story of Genesis. He argues that in the ancient world existence was understood more in terms of function within a god-created *purposeful order* than in terms of material status within a natural physical structure.<sup>43</sup> This is not to say that the physical world was denied or ignored, but rather that the priority and interests were different from our own. We should therefore be careful in judging their purpose-driven cosmography too strictly in light of our own material-driven cosmography. And in this sense, modern material descriptions of reality are just as “false” as the ancient pictures because they do not include the immaterial aspect of reality: Meaning and purpose.

Biblical writers did not *teach* their cosmography as scientific doctrine revealed by God about the way the physical universe was materially structured, they *assumed* the popular cosmography to teach their doctrine about God’s purposes and intent. To critique the cosmic model carrying the message is to miss the meaning altogether, which is the message. God’s throne may not be physically above us in waters held back by a solid firmament, but he truly does rule “over” us and is king and sustainer of creation in whatever model man uses to depict that creation. The phrase “every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth” (Rev. 5:13) is equivalent in meaning to the modern concept of every particle and wave in every dimension of the Big Bang space-time continuum, as well as every person dead or alive in heaven or hell.

The geocentric picture in Scripture is a depiction through man’s ancient perspective of God’s purpose and humankind’s significance. For a modern heliocentrist to attack that picture as falsifying the theology would be cultural imperialism of the worst kind. Reducing significance to physical location is simply a prejudice of material priority over spiritual purpose. One of the humorous ironies of this debate is that if the history of science is any judge, a thousand years from now, scientists will no doubt consider our current paradigm with which we judge the ancients to be itself fatally flawed. This is not to reduce reality to relativism, but rather to illustrate that all claims of empirical knowledge contain an inescapable element of human fallibility and finitude. A proper response should be a bit more humility and a bit less hubris regarding the use of our own scientific models as standards in judging theological meaning or purpose.

The skeptic who says that the Bible is scientifically false and therefore unreliable myth reducible to mere human construction assumes the same criteria of judgment as the Evangelical Christian who says that the Bible must be scientifically accurate or it is not the Word of God. They both assume the fallacy that precision of physical description verifies the accuracy of transcendent meaning or interpretation. The worldview that most accurately depicts material structure is the one that knows true meaning. The proposition that a scientifically “false” description can communicate spiritual truth or meaning becomes an outrageous truth claim. But is it really so outrageous?

If a young child asks where babies come from, who is right: The father who says, “from mommy’s tummy,” the scientist who says, “no, from *both* your mother and father,” or the pastor who says, “from God.”<sup>44</sup> Answer: They are all right and all wrong, depending on the frame of reference (my Einstein bias). The father is scientifically imprecise in his structural definition. The baby actually comes from the uterus. But for a young child, the father must alter his language to accommodate the child’s own context and understanding or the child will simply not understand. But the truth claim is still true enough despite the lack of scientific precision. Though the scientist is more precise, he too must adapt his description to the child and suffers the falsity of attributing creative powers to the humans whose genetics are not determined by their choices. Lastly, the pastor is imprecise in that the baby does not come *directly* from God to the world, as his statement may imply, but is mediated through human behavior and genetics. But he is right in that ultimately, God is the origin of all created things and certainly in terms of meaning, God gives that baby its meaning of existence. Knowledge of the material world is simply not the only form of legitimate knowledge.

So now, imagine the foolishness of that scientist spending his time and energy trying to discredit loving fathers and pastors for using imprecise descriptions of biology in their answer to the child. As the child grows into a young adult, she will become more precise or accurate in her understanding of just exactly where babies come from in a scientific sense, but that knowledge has no bearing on the enduring truth that babies come from mommy’s tummy and from God. God remains the transcendent origin of that baby as well as its provider of significance and meaning, something science simply cannot discover in material processes alone.

So, now our modern cosmography/cosmology is more precise and accurate than the Mesopotamian cosmography assumed by the Biblical writers, but that does not discredit the intent of the Scriptural picture which is to give glory to God for his sovereign origin and control of creation. Even in today’s modern world I can still affirm with full truthfulness that...

The heavens declare the glory of God,  
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours out speech,  
and night to night reveals knowledge.  
There is no speech, nor are there words,  
whose voice is not heard.  
Their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.  
In them he has set a tent for the sun,  
which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,  
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.

Its rising is from the end of the heavens,  
and its circuit to the end of them,  
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

Psa. 19:1-6

And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." Rev. 5:13

## Notes

1. I never believed they were all lying, but many were certainly blinded by their worldview bias. I still believe that some scientists do in fact lie, cheat, and manipulate facts and studies just as in every other discipline because they are human like everyone else and can be just as driven by political and personal agenda as everyone else. A good book that documents this is *Betrayers Of The Truth: Fraud And Deceit In The Halls Of Science* By Nicholas Wade William Broad (Ebury Press, 1983); Michael Fumento is a science journalist who reports on current scientific fraud and its widespread economic and political effects at [www.fumento.com](http://www.fumento.com).
2. *Scientific Creationism* by Henry M. Morris (Master Books, 1974, 1985) is an example of this viewpoint.
3. *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation-Date Controversy* by Hugh Ross (NavPress, 1994) is an example of this viewpoint.
4. *Genesis and the Big Bang: The Discovery Of Harmony Between Modern Science And The Bible* by Gerald Schroeder (Bantam, 1990) is an example of this viewpoint.
5. The seminal book that opened the door for me to a better understanding of this ANE cultural context of the Bible was John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006).
6. "The worship of the host of heaven [was] often set in parallelism to the worship of foreign gods (Deut 17:3; 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3; 23:4-5; Jer 19:13; Zeph 1:4-5)." K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking and Pieter Willem van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible DDD*, 2nd extensively rev. ed., 429 (Leiden; Boston; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 429.
7. Brian Godawa, "Biblical Creation and Storytelling: Cosmogony, Combat and Covenant," The BioLogos Foundation, [http://biologos.org/uploads/projects/godawa\\_scholarly\\_paper.pdf](http://biologos.org/uploads/projects/godawa_scholarly_paper.pdf).
8. Othmar Keel's *The Symbolism of the Biblical World* (Eisenbrauns) is an encyclopedia of imagery and motifs that Israel shared with her ANE neighbors that are quite alien to our thinking.
9. In *John Calvin's Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Psalm 93:1, Psalm 104:5-6 he affirms the Ptolemaic notion in Scripture. See "Calvin and the Astronomical Revolution" Matthew F. Dowd, University of Notre Dame: <http://www.nd.edu/~mdowd1/postings/CalvinAstroRev.html> accessed March 21, 2011.
10. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), p. 320-367. For more biblical examples of this collapsing universe and earth shattering hyperbole used of the fall of worldly powers see Jeremiah 4:23-30; Amos 8:9; Isaiah 24:1-23; 40:3-5; Nahum 1:4-6. For an excellent book about the nature of this apocalyptic imagery and symbolism in the Bible, a must-buy book is *Last Days Madness*, by Gary DeMar, Powder Springs, GA; American Vision, 1999.
11. The book that opened my mind to the Mesopotamian cosmography in the Bible was *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution* by Denis O. Lamoureux, Eugene, OR, Wipf & Stock, 2008. I owe much of the material in this article to Mr. Lamoureux's meticulous research on the ancient science in the Bible.
12. A significant author of this view is Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*; Oxford: Oxford University, 2003.
13. A significant author of this view is Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*; Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2007.
14. [http://65.175.91.69/Reformation\\_net/COR\\_Docs/01\\_Inerrancy\\_Christian\\_Worldview.pdf](http://65.175.91.69/Reformation_net/COR_Docs/01_Inerrancy_Christian_Worldview.pdf)
15. Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, Winona Lake; IN: Eisenbrauns, 1972, 1997, 16-59.
16. Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation*, p 108.
17. Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, Winona Lake; IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998, xii-xiii.

18. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 25-27.
19. Photo is public domain (Courtesy of the British Museum). Illustration is my reproduction from Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*.
20. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 320, 334. This interpretation continued to maintain influence even into the Greek period of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (41).
21. A Sumerian hymn to the god Enlil, Lord of the Wind, represents these ends of the earth within the context of the god's rule over all the earth: "Lord, as far as the edge of heaven, lord as far as the edge of earth, from the mountain of sunrise to the mountain of sunset. In the mountain/land, no (other) lord resides, you exercise lordship. Enlil, in the lands no (other) lady resides, your wife, exercises ladyship." Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geograph*, 331. "Circle of the earth" in Egyptian understanding meant the disc of the earth unto the horizon. "(These) lands were united, and they laid their hands upon the land as far as the Circle of the Earth." "Inscription on the second pylon at Medinet Habu," J.H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, Part Four, University of Chicago, 1906, p 64.
22. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 195-97, 334.
23. "ḥûg" Harris, R. Laird, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. electronic ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, p 266-67.
24. Even the Septuagint (LXX) does not translate the Hebrew word into the Greek word for sphere. "Isaiah 40:22," Tan, Randall, David A. deSilva, and Logos Bible Software. *The Lexham Greek-English Interlinear Septuagint*. Logos Bible Software, 2009.
25. ["The Firmament And The Water Above: Part I: The Meaning Of Raqia In Gen 1:6-8,"](#) Paul H. Seely, *The Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991) 227-40.
26. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 98, 124, 308-12, 336-37.
27. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, p 348-362
28. "Sheol," *DDD*, p 768.
29. "Abaddon," *DDD*, p 1.
30. "Hades," *DDD*, p 382.
31. "They then conducted them [the Titans] under the highways of the earth as far below the ground as the ground is below the sky, and tied them with cruel chains. So far down below the ground is gloomy Tartarus...Tartarus is surrounded by a bronze moat...above which the roots of earth and barren sea are planted. In that gloomy underground region the Titans were imprisoned by the decree of Zeus." Norman Brown, Trans. *Theogony: Hesiod*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1953, p 73-4.
32. 1.25 τάρταρῶ [tartaroo] Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*. electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. New York: United Bible societies, 1996. Bauckham, Richard J. Vol. 50, *Word Biblical Commentary : 2 Peter, Jude*. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002, p 248-249.
33. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, p 334-348.
34. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* XI:40-44. *The Ancient Near East an Anthology of Texts and Pictures*. Edited by James Bennett Pritchard. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958, p 93.
35. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, p 337.
36. "The Firmament And The Water Above: Part I: The Meaning Of Raqia In Gen 1:6-8," Paul H. Seely, *The Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991) 227-40.
37. Quoted in *The Science in Torah: the Scientific Knowledge of the Talmudic Sages* By Leo Levi, page 90-91.
38. Seely, "The Firmament," p 236.
39. Bratcher, Robert G., and William David Reyburn. *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Psalms*. Helps for translators. New York: United Bible Societies, 1991, p 280. Psalm 29 takes place in heaven amidst God's heavenly host around his throne.
40. Seely, "The Firmament," p 228.
41. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*.
42. Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, Winona Lake; IN: Eisenbrauns, 1972, 1997, 56-57.
43. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: IL, InterVarsity Press, 2009), 23-36.
44. The genesis of this analogy is from Michael Heiser, "Genesis & Creation - Class 3 of 4" - September 29, 2010 at Grace Church Bellingham, video lecture, at 20'35", <http://vimeo.com/16031751>, accessed April 8, 2011. Michael probably got it from Calvin who said, "'For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in measure to 'lisp' in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accomodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this he must descend far beneath his loftiness" (Calvin, Institutes, Book 1, Chapter 13, Section 1).