

The Cosmology of Genesis: Flat Earth, Solid Dome, and Cosmic Ocean

A Plain-Language Guide to What the Bible Actually Says

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Note on genre: This is an open letter and historical-philological analysis, not a peer-reviewed journal article. It draws on mainstream biblical scholarship, standard Hebrew lexicons, and ancient Near Eastern comparative materials. The primary evidence comes from narrative and descriptive passages (Genesis 1, Job 37–38, Ezekiel 1, etc.). The analysis is addressed to scholars who have dismissed the flat-earth reading as “silly.”

Abstract

This paper examines the physical description of the universe in the Hebrew Bible. Using standard Hebrew dictionaries (BDB, HALOT, Holladay), ancient Near Eastern texts, and the plain meaning of the biblical passages, we show that the biblical authors believed:

- The earth is a **flat disc**.
- A **solid dome** (*rāqīaʿ*, “firmament”) covers it, separating the waters below from a **cosmic ocean above**.
- The sun, moon, and stars move inside this dome.
- Rain enters through literal **windows** or **sluices** in the dome.
- The earth rests on **pillars** and **foundations**, and has **ends** and **corners**.

We provide a representative list of verses, address common apologetic reinterpretations, and reference standard scholarly reconstructions of ancient Hebrew cosmology. The Bible’s cosmology closely matches those of Mesopotamia and Egypt. This poses no problem for a non-inerrancy reading, but it is a severe challenge for any claim of divine scientific inerrancy.

Introduction: What Did the Biblical Authors Actually Believe?

The question is not whether the Bible is “true” in a theological or moral sense. The question is: **what did its human authors believe about the physical structure of the world?**

Modern readers often project a post-Copernican, spherical, heliocentric universe onto the ancient text. But a straightforward reading – using standard Hebrew lexicons and the context of the ancient Near East – shows that the Hebrew Bible shares the common model of a flat earth under a solid sky-dome, with a cosmic ocean above and below.

For standard scholarly reconstructions (with diagrams), see:

- [Bible Odyssey \(Society of Biblical Literature\)](#) –

includes a clear diagram of the flat earth, solid dome, and cosmic waters.

- [Wikimedia Commons](#) – a modern, clearly labelled reconstruction.
- [Biblical Archaeology Society](#) – comparative diagrams of Israelite, Babylonian, and Egyptian models.

For print references, see Smith (1998) and Keel (1997).

The Solid Dome: *Rāqīaʿ* (רָקִיעַ)

The word *rāqīaʿ* occurs 17 times in the Hebrew Bible. Its verbal root *rāqaʿ* (רָקַע) means “to beat, stamp, or spread out by hammering” – the same word used for beating metal into thin plates (Exodus 39:3). The noun denotes a **solid, hammered-out dome**.

Lexical Evidence

Lexicon	Definition
Brown-Driver-Briggs (BDB)	“Extended surface, (solid) expanse (as if beaten out)”
Holladay	“Beaten metal ‘plate’, firmament (i.e. vault of heaven, understood as a solid dome)”
Koehler-Baumgartner (HALOT)	“Firmament, vault of heaven, understood as a solid dome”

Key Verses by Genre

Narrative (primary evidence)

- **Genesis 1:6–8** – God says, “Let there be a *rāqīaʿ* in the

midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” He calls the *rāqīaʿ shamayim* (sky/heaven). The dome is placed inside a cosmic ocean, dividing “waters below” from “waters above.”

- **Genesis 1:14–18** – The sun, moon, and stars are placed **inside** the *rāqīaʿ*. They are not above the dome; they are embedded in its inner surface.

Wisdom poetry (corroborative)

- **Job 37:18** – “Can you, like Him, spread out the skies, hard as a mirror of cast metal?” This unambiguously describes solidity.

Apocalyptic vision (structural)

- **Ezekiel 1:22–26** – Above the living creatures is “something like a *rāqīaʿ*, sparkling like ice (or crystal).” Above this *rāqīaʿ* is the throne of God. This is a solid platform, not empty space. Even though Ezekiel’s vision is symbolic, it describes physical properties (solid, crystalline) as part of the visionary architecture.

Hymnic (doxological, not load-bearing)

- **Psalms 19:1** – “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies (*rāqīaʿ*) proclaim the work of His hands.”
- **Psalms 150:1** – “Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty *rāqīaʿ*.”
- **Daniel 12:3** – “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the *rāqīaʿ*.”

These do not prove solidity on their own, but they assume the same conceptual framework. No text contradicts the solid-dome

interpretation.

Ancient Translations

- **Septuagint** (3rd century BCE, Jewish translation): *stereōma* (στερέωμα) – a solid or firm structure.
- **Latin Vulgate**: *firmamentum* – something firm, a support.

Scholarly Confirmation (Including Believing Scholars)

- **Seely (1991–1992)** – Demonstrates that *rāqīaʿ* in context refers to a solid dome.
- **Walton (2011)** – Affirms that the ancient Israelites believed in a solid *rāqīaʿ*, even though his main argument is that Genesis 1 assigns functions rather than making material claims.
- **Greenwood (2015)** – “A vaulted dome above the earth, a ‘firmament,’ like the ceiling of a planetarium.”
- **Parry (2014)** – “A flat earth at the centre of the cosmos, with a vast ocean in the sky.”

The Waters Above – A Cosmic Ocean

If the dome is solid and separates “waters above” from “waters below”, those waters must be literal.

- **Genesis 1:6–7** (as above).
- **Psalms 148:4** – “Praise Him, highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens.”
- **Genesis 7:11** – “All the fountains of the great deep

burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened.” The word *arubbah* means “lattice window” or “sluice.” Rain comes through openings in the solid dome.

- **Genesis 8:2** – “The fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven were closed.”
 - **2 Kings 7:2, 19** – “The Lord will open the windows of heaven.”
 - **Isaiah 24:18** – “The windows of heaven are opened, the foundations of the earth tremble.”
 - **Malachi 3:10** – “See if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour out blessing.”
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The Flat Earth: Pillars, Foundations, Ends, and Corners

A spherical earth does not have pillars, foundations, ends, or four corners. The Bible uses all these terms repeatedly.

Pillars of the Earth

- **1 Samuel 2:8** – “For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s, and on them He has set the world.”
- **Job 9:6** – “He shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble.”
- **Psalms 75:3** – “When the earth and all its dwellers quake, it is I who bear its pillars firmly.”
- **Job 26:11** – “The pillars of heaven tremble and are stunned at His rebuke.”

Foundations of the Earth

- **Psalms 104:5** – “He set the earth on its foundations, so

that it should never be moved.”

- **Job 38:4–6** – “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? ... On what were its bases sunk?”
- **2 Samuel 22:8** – “The foundations of the heavens shook.”

Ends of the Earth (assumes a bounded earth)

- **Deuteronomy 28:49** – “A nation from afar, from the end of the earth.”
- **Isaiah 45:22** – “Turn to Me and be saved, all you ends of the earth.”
- **Psalms 67:7** – “All the ends of the earth will fear Him.”
- **Psalms 72:8** – “He shall have dominion from sea to sea... to the ends of the earth.”

Four Corners of the Earth

- **Isaiah 11:12** – “He will assemble the scattered of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” The word *kanpôt* (wings/edges) is a directional idiom whose origin in a flat-earth, bounded-space worldview is widely recognised.

The Vaulted Dome Over a Flat Disc

- **Amos 9:6** – “The One who builds His upper chambers in the heavens and has founded His vaulted dome over the earth.”
- **Isaiah 40:22** – “He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth.”

On *chûg* (“circle”)

The word *chûg* occurs in three places: Job 26:10 (“He has inscribed a circle on the face of the waters” – a flat circular boundary), Proverbs 8:27 (same), and Isaiah 40:22. The Akkadian cognate *khâqu* means “to draw a circle.” The Septuagint translates *chûg* as *gyros* (circle), not *sphaira* (sphere). The same verse also says God “stretches out the heavens like a curtain” – a flat surface, not a spherical shell.

Therefore, *chûg* denotes a **disc**, not a ball.

The Cosmic Ocean Below

- **Genesis 7:11** – “The fountains of the great deep burst forth.” (Subterranean ocean)
 - **Psalms 24:2** – “For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.”
 - **Exodus 20:4** – “You shall not make an idol... of anything that is in the waters under the earth.”
 - **Psalms 136:6** – “He spread out the earth upon the waters.”
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Comparison with Ancient Near Eastern Cosmologies

The Hebrew cosmology is closely analogous to those of Israel’s neighbours.

- **Mesopotamia:** The *Enuma Elish* describes Marduk fixing a

solid sky-barrier to hold back the cosmic waters. This is the functional equivalent of the Hebrew *rāqīaʿ*.

- **Egypt:** The sky goddess Nut arches her body over the earth god Geb, forming a solid vault with stars attached. The Pyramid Texts describe the sky as “a metal vault” or “iron” – directly parallel to Job 37:18 (“hard as a mirror of cast metal”).

The Hebrew *rāqīaʿ* fits comfortably within this regional intellectual context. The Bible is not scientifically unique; it reflects the common ancient Near Eastern worldview.

Geocentric Passages (Consistent with the Model)

These verses are not flat-earth proof on their own, but they presuppose a geocentric, non-rotating, bounded cosmos – fully consistent with the flat-earth, solid-dome model.

- **Joshua 10:12–13** – The sun and moon stand still at Joshua’s command. This implies a moving sun and a non-rotating earth.
- **2 Kings 20:11 / Isaiah 38:8** – The shadow on the sundial moves backward. Again implies a geocentric system.
- **Ecclesiastes 1:5** – “The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries to its place where it rises.” Phenomenological geocentrism.
- **Psalms 19:4–6** – The sun runs its circuit from one end of the heavens to the other.

These passages are not necessary to demonstrate flat-earth cosmology, but they are part of the broader biblical cosmic picture.

The Verse Often Misused by Apologists: Job 26:7

Job 26:7 – “He stretches out the north over the void and hangs the earth on nothing (*belî-māh*).”

This is the only verse that might suggest a free-floating earth. However:

- *Belî-māh* is a rare construction; it may mean “**without any visible support**,” not “without any support at all.” Clines (1989) notes that the phrase indicates “no visible means of support” rather than absolute suspension.

One ambiguous verse does not overturn the dozens that describe pillars, foundations, and a solid dome. The majority witness of the Hebrew Bible is flat-earth, solid-dome cosmology. If Job 26:7 is taken as a late, more abstract cosmological statement, it represents a minority view and does not negate the consistent picture in Genesis, Psalms, and other prophets.

The Inerrancy Dilemma (and the Phenomenological Language Defence)

If one affirms that the Bible is a human document, the presence of ancient cosmology presents no crisis. But if one claims divine inerrancy – that the Bible is without error in all that it affirms – one faces a dilemma:

- **Admit** that God described His creation in terms that are scientifically false (a flat earth, a solid dome).
- **or Reinterpret** the plain meaning as metaphor or accommodation – but then the words lose stable meaning, and any verse can be explained away.

A common inerrantist response is the “phenomenological language” defence: the Bible describes things as they appear to human observers (e.g., “sunrise”) without making scientific claims. This defence works for atmospheric or observational descriptions (sunrise, sunset, the shadow on a sundial). However, it **fails** for the structural, material claims of Genesis 1: a solid dome, a cosmic ocean, and windows in the sky. These are **not appearances**; they are physical mechanisms. No one “observes” a solid dome or waters above the sky.

Therefore, the phenomenological defence cannot rescue the inerrancy of Genesis 1 without effectively admitting that the text is making false scientific statements.

This paper does not require any particular theological conclusion. It simply presents the evidence.

Conclusion

The evidence is consistent and extensive. The Hebrew Bible presents the universe as:

- a **flat disc**,
- covered by a **solid dome** (the *rāqīaʿ*),
- with a **cosmic ocean above** and a **cosmic ocean below**.
- The sun, moon, and stars move inside the dome; rain enters through literal windows.
- The earth rests on pillars and foundations and has ends

and corners.

This cosmology is closely analogous to that of Israel's ancient Near Eastern neighbours. It is the plain meaning of the text, confirmed by every standard Hebrew lexicon and by believing scholars such as Walton, Greenwood, Parry, and Seely.

The mountain does not negotiate. Neither does the Hebrew text.

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