

Article

Lessons from the Heavens: On Scripture, Science and Inerrancy

Denis O. Lamoureux



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Evangelical hermeneutics and the notion of inerrancy are marked by concordism. An examination of the structure and origin of the heavens in Scripture offers an opportunity to reconsider the popular assumption that statements in the Bible align with the facts of nature. The ancient Near Eastern notion of a solid firmament upholding a heavenly sea appears in the Word of God. An approach to inerrancy without concordism is proposed that is rooted in the very words of the Bible and modeled upon the Incarnation. The implications of ancient science in Scripture for the evangelical debate on origins are considered.

Is scientific concordism truly a feature of an inerrant Holy Scripture?

Most evangelical Christians assume that the Holy Spirit revealed scientific facts in the Bible well before their discovery by modern science. As a result, they believe that statements regarding the physical world in Scripture are inerrant like those assertions revealing the nature of God and his will. Today this hermeneutical approach characterizes the origins debate within evangelical circles.¹

The father of modern young earth creationism, Henry Morris, declares:

The Bible is a book of science! It contains all the basic principles upon which true science is built.² (My italics)

Similarly, leading progressive creationist Hugh Ross argues:

Obviously, no author writing more than 3400 years ago, as Moses did, could have so accurately described and sequenced these events [in Genesis 1], plus the initial conditions, without divine assistance. And if God could

guide the words of Moses to scientific and historical precision in this most complex report of divine activity, we have reason to believe we can trust him to communicate with perfection through all the other Bible writers as well.³

The interpretive approach embraced by Morris and Ross is known as “concordism.”⁴ I prefer to qualify this term as “scientific concordism” in order to include a wide variety of concordist views—from the strict literalism of creation science, to general harmonization of the days of Genesis 1 with cosmological and geological epochs of hundreds of millions of years, to the minimalist approaches which simply align Gen. 1:1 or 1:3 to the Big Bang and no more. It must be underlined that scientific concordism is a perfectly reasonable hermeneutic. God is the Creator of the world and the Author of the Bible, and an alignment or accord between his works and words is a legitimate expectation. But the question must be asked: Is scientific concordism truly a feature of an inerrant Holy Scripture?

In an attempt to answer this question, I will first examine the structure of the heavens according to the Bible. The advantage of dealing with astronomy is that it is a non-threatening science for most evangelical Christians. Next, I will draw examples from church history and modern evangelical Old Testament scholarship in order to outline the “conservative” interpretation of the heavens

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in Scripture. This biblical and hermeneutical evidence is then examined in light of the notion of inerrancy commonly held by evangelical leaders. In closing, I will suggest that we move beyond inerrant scientific concordism and introduce an approach to statements in Scripture regarding nature that reflects the Incarnation.

The Firmament and Waters Above

One of the best passages to explore the veracity of scientific concordism is the origin of the heavens on the second day of creation:

God said, "Let there be a firmament between the waters to separate the water from the water." So God made a firmament and separated the water under the firmament from the water above the firmament. And it was so. God called the firmament "heavens." And there was evening, and there was morning—The Second Day. (Gen. 1:6-8)

Popular evangelical Bibles like the New American Standard (1971) and New International Version (1978) replace the word "firmament" with the term "expanse."⁵ As a result, readers are given the impression that the expanse refers to the atmosphere and outer space. Such an understanding aligns well with the fourth day of creation and placement of the sun, moon, and stars in the expanse.

Leading anti-evolutionists follow this concordist approach in two basic ways. For example, in their classic *The Genesis Flood* (1961), Henry Morris and John Whitcomb assert:

On the second day of creation, the waters covering the earth's surface were divided into two great reservoirs—one below the firmament and one above; the firmament being the "expanse" above the earth now corresponding to the troposphere ... With the biblical testimony concerning a pre-flood canopy of waters, we have an adequate source for the waters of a universal flood.⁶

In another harmonization of Scripture and science, Hugh Ross claims that the "expanse" in Gen. 1:6-8 refers to the troposphere and the "waters above" are water vapor. He contends that "God's 'separation' of the water accurately describes the formation of the troposphere, the atmospheric layer just above the ocean where clouds form and humidity resides."⁷ Clearly, both of these concordist interpretations are dependent on the meaning of the term "firmament/expanse," which appears five times on the second day of creation.

The Hebrew word *rāqîa'* does not refer to the troposphere or outer space.⁸ Ancient Near Eastern astronomers believed that the world was enclosed by a solid dome overhead that upheld a sea of water.⁹ In fact, this ancient science is reflected in the etymology. The noun *rāqîa'* derives from the verb *rāqa'* which means to "flatten,"

"stamp down," "spread out," and "hammer out." That is, this Hebrew verb carries a nuance of flattening something solid rather than forming a broad open space like the atmosphere. Exodus 39:3 and Isa. 40:19 use *rāqa'* for pounding metals into thin plates, and Num. 16:38 employs *riqqa'* (broad plate) in a similar context. The verb *rāqa'* is even found in a passage referring to the creation of the sky, which is understood to be a firm surface like a metal. Job 37:18 asks, "Can you join God in spreading out the skies, hard as a mirror of cast bronze?"¹⁰

It is essential to understand that statements in Scripture about nature are from an ancient phenomenological perspective ... In contrast, we view the physical world from a modern phenomenological perspective.

The Bible also affirms the ancient astronomical concept of a heavenly body of water.¹¹ On the second day of creation, the Creator makes solid *rāqîa'* and lifts the "waters above." Psalm 104:2-3 states that "God stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters." In calling forth praise from the physical realities of the sun, moon, and stars, Ps. 148:4 appeals to the heavenly sea, another real astronomical structure according to the ancient writer: "Praise the Lord you highest heavens and you waters above the skies." And Jer. 10:12-13 claims, "God stretches out the heavens by his understanding. When he thunders, the waters in the heavens roar."¹² Notably, these last three passages appear *after* Noah's flood. In other words, the collapse of a pre-flood canopy as proposed by young earth creation betrays the biblical evidence since the "waters above" remain intact in the heavens. For that matter, the firmament holding up the heavenly waters is still there in David's day as revealed in the beloved nineteenth psalm: "The heavens declare the glory of God and the *rāqîa'* proclaims the work of his hands" (cf. Ps. 150:1). Moreover, attempts to argue that the water referred to in these passages is water vapor fail to acknowledge that Hebrew has the words, *'ēd*, *nāsi'* and *'ānān* which carry meanings of "mist," "vapor," and "cloud" (Gen. 2:6, 9:14; Job 36:27; Ps. 135:7), and the inspired writers did not use them. In particular, the common noun *mayim* appears five times on the second creation day and it is always translated as "water/s" in English Bibles.¹³

The conceptualization of the firmament and waters above makes perfect sense from a phenomenological perspective.¹⁴ The color of the sky is a changing blue similar



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to a lake or sea, and rain falls to the ground from above. The ancients logically reasoned that a solid structure upheld this body of water. However, it is essential to understand that statements in Scripture about nature are from an *ancient phenomenological perspective*. What the biblical writers and other ancient peoples saw with their eyes, they believed to be real, like the firmament and heavenly sea. This was the science-of-the-day in the ancient Near East (Figs. 1 and 2). In contrast, we view the physical world from a *modern phenomenological perspective*. Thanks to modern scientific knowledge, when we see the

blue dome of the sky, we know that it is only an appearance or visual effect caused by the scattering of short wave light in the upper atmosphere. Consequently, it is critical that these two different perspectives of nature be differentiated and not conflated in the reading of Scripture.

History of Interpretation

For many evangelical Christians today, it comes as a surprise that biblical translators and leading Christian figures during a great part of history accepted the reality of the firmament and waters above. The Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint; ca. 250 BC) renders *rāqîa'* as *stereōma*, which ancient astronomers conceived as a physical structure overhead—either an inverted bowl covering over a flat earth in a three-tier universe, or a sphere enveloping a global earth in a geocentric world.¹⁵ This noun is related to the adjective *stereos*, a common term for “firm,” “hard,” and “solid.” The importance of the Septuagint cannot be overstated since New Testament writers often used it in quoting Old Testament passages. Similarly, the Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate, has *rāqîa'* as *firmamentum*. This word is also associated with an adjective (*firmus*), from which derives the English word “firm.” The Latin Bible was translated during the fifth century and served the church for over one thousand years. Its impact upon early English versions like the King James Version (1611) is obvious in that *rāqîa'* is rendered as “firmament.”

The towering church father Augustine also embraced an ancient astronomy. In a chapter entitled “The Motion of Heaven and the Meaning of Firmament” from *Literal Meaning of Genesis* (415), he cautions:

Bear in mind that the term “firmament” does not compel us to imagine a stationary heaven: we may understand this name as given to indicate not that it is motionless but that it is solid and that it constitutes an impassable boundary between the waters above and the waters below.¹⁶

Similarly, protestant reformer Martin Luther in his *Lectures on Genesis* (1536) noted that the Bible

simply says that the moon, the sun, and the stars were placed in the firmament

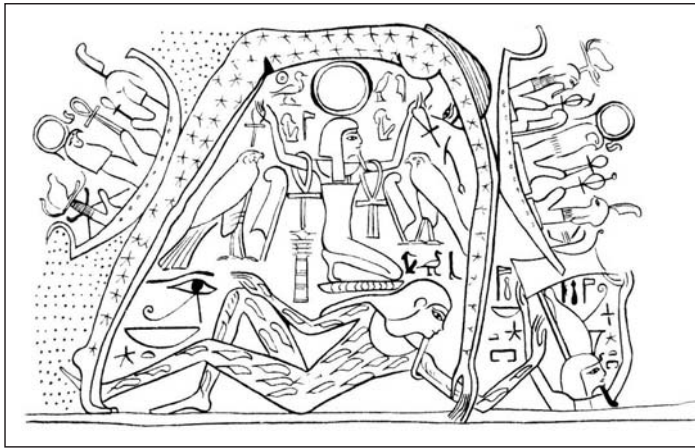


Fig. 1. Egyptian sun god Re travels in his boat across the heavenly sea. Stars adorn the firmament (1570–1085 BC). From Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 36, Fig. 32. Reprinted by permission of Eisenbrauns.

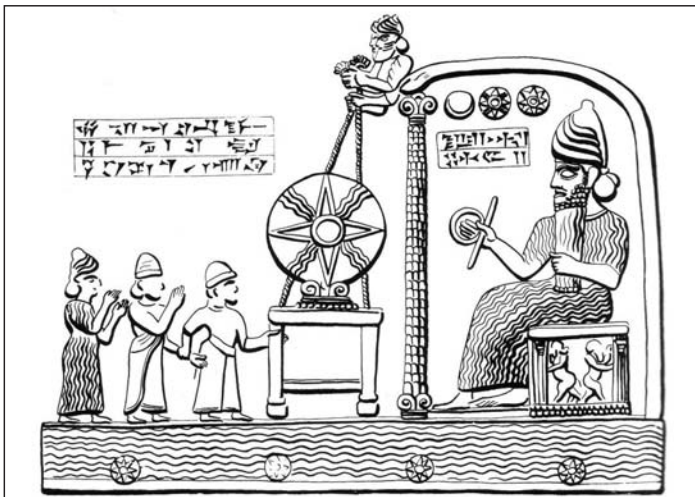


Fig. 2. Mesopotamian sun god Shamash seated in heaven on his throne over the heavenly sea. Mercury, Mars, Saturn, and Jupiter are seen below in the waters which are held up by the firmament (885–850 BC). From Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 174, Fig 239. Reprinted by permission of Eisenbrauns.

of the heaven (below and above which are the waters) ... The bodies of the stars, like that of the sun, are round, and they are fastened to the firmament like globes of fire.¹⁷ (Fig. 3)

In fact, Luther was quick to chastize anyone questioning concordism:

We Christians must be different from the philosophers in the way we think about the causes of things. And if some are beyond our comprehension like those before us concerning the waters above the heavens, we must believe them rather than *wickedly* deny them or *presumptuously* interpret them in conformity with our understanding.¹⁸ (My italics)

The concordist hermeneutic was not limited to theologians only. Scientists like Galileo attempted to align their astronomy with Scripture. In the "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina" (1615), he explained the stopping of the sun in Joshua 10 by using a heliocentric universe.

With the Copernican system one can very clearly and very easily give a literal meaning to another detail which one reads about the same miracle; that is, that the sun stopped in the middle of the heavens.¹⁹



Fig. 3. Martin Luther's geocentric universe. From his 1534 translation of the Bible. Redrawn by Andrea Dmytrash.

According to Copernicus, the sun was literally in the center of the universe and surrounded by spheres with their respective planet (Fig. 4). Galileo argued that since the rotation of the sun caused the movement of spheres and planets, then inhibiting the motion of the sun would also stop the earth's rotation and account for the miracle in Joshua 10. Regarding the firmament, which was the final sphere in Copernicus's heliocentric universe, Galileo argued that "the word firmament is literally very appropriate for the stellar sphere and everything above the planetary orbs, which is totally still and motionless according to this arrangement."²⁰

Scientific concordism and belief in the reality of the firmament and waters above characterizes the hermeneutical approach of Christians for over three-quarters of church history.²¹ In other words, the traditional and *conservative* interpretation of the creation of the heavens on the second day of Genesis 1 affirms that God called into existence a solid structure that lifted up a body of water over the earth. Of course, no one today believes in the firmament or heavenly sea, and I doubt anyone would see him or herself as a *liberal* Christian, let alone a "wicked" denier of Scripture or a "presumptuous" interpreter of it. With this being the case, the question naturally arises: should our scientific views determine the orthodoxy of our faith?

Modern Evangelical Old Testament Scholarship

Interestingly, a review of evangelical commentaries published in our generation reveals that most interpreters

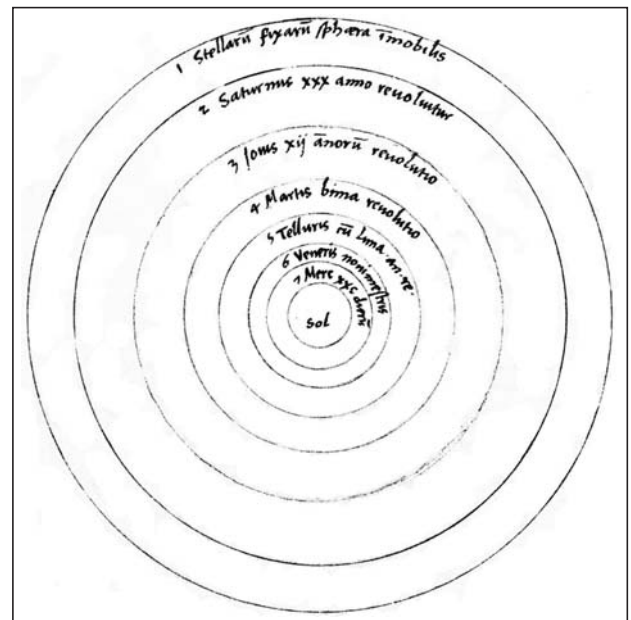


Fig. 4. Nicolas Copernicus' heliocentric universe. From his autograph manuscript for his *On the Revolutions*. The printed edition (1543) added "of the Heavenly Spheres" to the title. The outer sphere labeled '1' reads: immobile sphere of the fixed stars. Courtesy of Owen Gingerich.



Interestingly, a review of evangelical commentaries published in our generation reveals that most interpreters dismiss the originally intended meaning of the Hebrew word *rāqîa'* and fail to conserve the traditional Christian understanding of the origin and structure of the heavens in Scripture.

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dismiss the originally intended meaning of the Hebrew word *rāqîa'* and fail to conserve the traditional Christian understanding of the origin and structure of the heavens in Scripture.²² In order to do so, two basic hermeneutical approaches appear. First, the notion of a firmament has evolved conceptually from a solid dome overhead into the atmosphere and outer space. Similarly, the waters above no longer refer to a heavenly sea but to clouds, rain, and water vapor. Second, a number of evangelical Old Testament scholars employ a poetic or figurative language argument in order to mitigate conflicts between the Bible and modern astronomy. The former strategy is openly concordist, while the latter attempts to redirect attention away from difficulties produced by concordism.

Harris, Archer, and Waltke's *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (1980) depicts these interpretive approaches. Notably, the word studies in this two-volume set have been a powerful influence in shaping the meaning of Hebrew terms for the current generation of evangelical theologians, pastors, and students of Scripture. In the entry on *rāqîa'*, J. Barton Payne states:

Rāqîa' is the most important derivative of *rāqa'*. It identifies God's heavenly expanse. The Mosaic account of creation uses *rāqîa'* for [1] the "open expanse of the heavens" in which birds fly (Gen. 1:20 NASB), i.e., the atmosphere, and [2] that farther expanse of sky in which God placed "the light ... for signs and for seasons" (vv. 14, 17, referring apparently to their becoming visible through cloud cover; the stars, sun, and moon presumably having been created already in v. 3), i.e., empty space, over which, as Job said, "He stretches out the north" (Job 26:7). The former [the atmosphere] receives greater emphasis, particularly during that period before the second day, when the earth cooled sufficiently (?) to permit surface waters, separated from what must still have been a massive cloud-bank above, by the atmospheric expanse.²³

According to Payne:

In pre-Christian Egypt, confusion was introduced into biblical cosmology when the LXX [Septuagint], perhaps

under the influence of Alexandrian theories of a "stone vault" of heaven, rendered *rāqîa'* by *stereōma*, suggesting some firm, solid structure.²⁴

Embracing a similar concordist hermeneutic, Walter C. Kaiser asserts in his word study on *mayim* that the waters above are "the watery clouds of heaven."²⁵ He then sharply rebukes "liberal" interpreters for misunderstanding the nature of figurative language in Scripture.

Many liberal critics draw a crude picture of biblical cosmology in which the "waters on high" [i.e., waters above] are held back by a solid firmament, being permitted to fall to the earth through "windows." Actually, this is a strange mixture of mistranslation and misuse of poetic imagery ... An "expanse" (rather than the Greek and Latin derivative "firmament") was created between two bodies (Gen. 1:6). No idea of hardness, dome-like effect or solidity is attached here.²⁶

Ralph H. Alexander explains more precisely the poetic language argument in his entry on *shāmayim*, the Hebrew word for "heavens." He notes:

The heavens are frequently described in figurative language as having windows (Gen. 7:11 ...), gates (Gen. 28:7), doors (Ps. 78:23), pillars (Job 26:11), and foundations (2 Sam. 22:8). They are stretched out and spread out like a tent or a curtain (Isa. 40:22). The use of such figurative language no more necessitates the adoption of a pagan cosmology than does the modern use of the term "sunrise" imply astronomical ignorance. The imagery is often phenomenological, and is both convenient and vividly forceful.²⁷

Despite the unnecessary and uncharitable rhetoric in some of its entries, the *Theological Wordbook* presents an interpretation of the origin and structure of heavens in Scripture commonly held by evangelical Old Testament scholars today.

A few comments are in order regarding the poetic language argument. First, the use of metaphors is a common practice in science to describe physical reality. For example, the magnetic *field* theory employs

an agrarian category. In Scripture, the world is compared to a tent (Ps. 19:4; Ps. 104:2; Isa. 40:22), modeling exactly an ancient understanding of the structure of the universe—a flat earth (tent floor) with a heavenly dome overhead (tent canopy).

Second, poetic passages in Scripture often refer to actual physical realities. To illustrate, “Praise the Lord, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies” (Ps. 148:3–4). No one today doubts the existence of the sun, moon, and stars. However, attempts to write off the “waters above the skies” as merely “figurative” because this phrase appears in a poetic passage introduces a blatant inconsistency in the interpretation of these verses—acceptance of the first three heavenly bodies mentioned and then rejection of the last. To ancient Near Eastern peoples, the waters above were as real as the sun, moon, and stars, and not fanciful poetic dressing.²⁹

The poetic language argument is eisegetical in that it reads into the Word of God alien categories from the modern scientific world.

Third, if the biblical writers had intended the terms “firmament” and “waters above” to be poetic expressions, then it means that they had an understanding of the structure of the world *other* than that presented in Scripture. In other words, these inspired authors would be like us, knowing the real structure of the heavens. Consequently, they and other ancient Near Eastern people would have *both* poetic literary works and a distinct scientific literature that describes and explains physical reality. But there is no historical evidence whatsoever indicating that this was the case. The astronomy found in God’s Word is the same as that found in the written works of nations surrounding God’s chosen people.

Finally, the poetic language argument is ultimately rooted in a conflation of the ancient and modern phenomenological perspectives. To explain this categorical confusion, consider the fact that everyone today understands the “rising of the sun” is only figurative language based on a visual effect. When we see the sun “rise,” we know that it is only an appearance caused by the earth’s rotation. However, this was not the case in the ancient world. The biblical authors and surrounding peoples believed what their eyes saw—the sun literally moved across the sky. In fact, the idea that the earth rotates daily on its axis causing the visual phenomenon of “sunrise” only became accepted in the seventeenth century.

Consequently, the inspired writers of Scripture did not use poetic language regarding the heavens in the way we do because the modern phenomenological perspective had yet to be conceived. In sum, the poetic language argument is eisegetical in that it reads *into* the Word of God alien categories from the modern scientific world.

Modern Evangelical View of Inerrancy

Biblical inerrancy is a notion that is often seen as a distinguishing characteristic of evangelical Christianity. During this generation, it has been a hotly debated issue, resulting in a variety of conceptions. Three examples outlined in Erickson’s monumental *Christian Theology* (1998) include: (1) “absolute inerrancy” asserts that all scientific and historical statements in Scripture are completely precise and true; (2) “full inerrancy” also claims that the Bible is entirely true, but qualifies that assertions about nature and the past are phenomenological; and (3) “limited inerrancy” focuses on the messages of faith in the Word of God since references to science and history reflect ancient understandings.³⁰

Harold Lindsell’s *The Battle for the Bible* (1976) became the spearhead document that defined the notion of inerrancy in popular evangelical circles. He defended absolute inerrancy:

[T]he reliability of the Bible is that it can be trusted as truthful in all its parts. By this I mean that the Bible is infallible and inerrant. It communicates religious truth, not religious error. But there is more. Whatever it communicates is to be trusted and can be relied upon as being true. The Bible is not a textbook on chemistry, *astronomy*, philosophy, or medicine. But when it speaks on matters having to do with these or any other subjects, the Bible does not lie to us. It does not contain any error of any kind. Thus, the Bible, if true in all parts, cannot possibly teach that the earth is flat, that two and two make five, or that events happened at times other than we know they did.³¹ (My italics)

Notably, Lindsell directs sharp criticism at the American Scientific Affiliation (ASA) for having been “infiltrated” with members “in support of biblical errancy.”³² As an example, he takes Paul Seely to task for his ASA *Journal* paper which argues that an ancient astronomy appears in Scripture. According to Seely:

The Bible assumes that the universe consists of three stories ... but we do not believe that Christians are bound to give assent to such a cosmology, since the purpose of the Bible is to give redemptive, not scientific truth.³³

Insightfully, Seely then adds: “To insist that the Bible be inerrant every time it touches on science is to insist on an *a priori* doctrine that has been read into the Bible.”³⁴



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However, Lindsell charges that such an approach is a “disease” and “infection” that “has spread into parachurch organizations” like the ASA.³⁵ Given Lindsell’s central hermeneutical assumption—“the Bible does not lie to us”—it is clear that scientific concordism is an interpretative inevitability.

In response to a growing need within evangelicalism to define inerrancy, a coalition of professional scholars formed the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) in 1977. The first two of three “summit” meetings resulted in landmark statements with significant implications for scientific concordism. “The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy” (1978) includes a five-point Summary. The fourth tenet asserts:

Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teachings, not less in what it states about God’s acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives.³⁶

This 1978 statement also features nine-teen “Articles of Affirmation and Denial.” Article XII states:

We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free of falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

We deny that infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teachings of creation and the flood.³⁷

Given these hermeneutical assumptions, it is obvious why the majority of evangelical Old Testament commentaries render the *rāqîa’* as atmosphere and outer space, and the *mayim* above as clouds, rain, and water vapor. Modern astronomy must align or be harmonized with the structure and creation of the heavens in Scripture. In particular, astronomical statements in the Bible are on par with “its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives” and its “spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes.”

The second summit meeting of the ICBI resulted in the publication of “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics” (1982).

Following a similar interpretive approach to the 1978 “Statement on Inerrancy,” Article XXII asserts:

WE AFFIRM that Genesis 1–11 is factual, as is the rest of the book.

WE DENY that the teachings of Genesis 1–11 are mythical and that scientific hypotheses about earth history or the origin of humanity may be invoked to overthrow what Scripture teaches about creation.³⁸

The assumption of concordism is clear in Article XXI of the 1982 Statement:

WE AFFIRM the harmony of special with general revelation and therefore of biblical teaching with the facts of nature.

WE DENY that any genuine scientific facts are inconsistent with the true meaning of any passage of Scripture.³⁹

In his “Commentary” on this Chicago Statement, Norman Geisler explains further the meaning of the twenty-first article. He claims: “[I]t is insisted here that the *truth* of Scripture and the *facts* of science never contradict each other. ‘Genuine’ science will always be in accord with Scripture” (italics original).⁴⁰

However, a contradiction definitely exists between the Bible and science regarding the origin and structure of the heavens. Genesis 1:6–7 states:

God said, “Let there be a firmament between the waters to separate the water from the water.” So God made a firmament and separated the water under the firmament from the water above the firmament. And it was so.

But modern astronomy offers no evidence whatsoever for the existence of a solid heavenly structure upholding a body of water. To state this problem even more incisively, God’s *very words* (“Let there be a firmament ...”) in the Book of God’s Words do not accord with physical reality in the Book of God’s Works.

Biblical Inerrancy without Scientific Concordism

To the credit of ICBI scholars, they wisely qualified in the “Preface” to the 1978 document on inerrancy that they “do not propose

that this Statement be given creedal weight.”⁴¹ Their humble, tentative, and open approach to understanding the nature of biblical revelation is also seen in the prospect of further development on this issue:

We invite response to this Statement from any who see reason to amend its affirmations about Scripture by the light of Scripture itself, under whose infallible authority we stand as we speak.⁴²

Led by the gracious spirit reflected in ICBI scholarship, I suggest that biblical inerrancy not be extended to statements in Scripture regarding the origin, structure, and function of the natural world.

*Everyone agrees that the goal of understanding any written work is to determine and respect the intended meaning of the author. The original meanings of *rāqîa’* and *mayim* ... reveal that scientific concordism is an alien preunderstanding and not an inerrant feature of Scripture.*

Similar to the ICBI leadership, my central hermeneutical assumption emphasizes a thoroughly committed and unapologetic *submission* to the Word of God, in particular, to the very words. As the Bible judges our thoughts, and remodels our mind (Heb. 4:12; Rom. 12:1–2), so too the ancient words in Scripture assist us in evaluating and reshaping our position on how the Holy Spirit revealed inerrant messages of faith through the inspired writers. Of course, the preunderstandings brought to the interpretation of a biblical word are critical in determining its meaning. As Article XIX of “Biblical Hermeneutics” astutely acknowledges:

WE AFFIRM that any preunderstandings which the interpreter brings to Scripture should be in harmony with scriptural teaching and subject to correction by it.

WE DENY that Scripture should be required to fit alien preunderstandings, inconsistent with itself, such as naturalism, evolutionism, scientism, secular humanism, and relativism.⁴³

Notably, evangelical Old Testament scholarship brings to the Bible a dictatorial preunderstanding—scientific concordism. Consequently, *rāqîa’* and *mayim* above are forced to fit modern astronomy. More precisely, alien scientific

categories are being imposed upon the words in the Word of God. Instead of an exegetical (Greek *ek* “out, out of;” *ēgeomai* “to guide”) reading of this Hebrew terminology, most evangelical commentaries are eisegetical (*eis* “in, into”). But everyone agrees that the goal of understanding any written work is to determine and respect the intended meaning of the author. The original meanings of *rāqîa’* and *mayim* above reveal that scientific concordism is an alien preunderstanding and not an inerrant feature of Scripture.

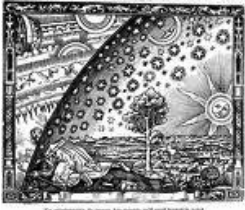
To be sure, recognizing that the Bible features an errant ancient science is at first disconcerting for most evangelical Christians. However, the Greatest Act of Revelation—God becoming flesh in the person of Jesus—offers the archetype to help us appreciate the Holy Spirit’s revelatory process.⁴⁴ A corollary of Divine revelation is that the Infinite Creator has to descend to the level of finite creatures in order to communicate. In other words, accommodation is an inherent and necessary characteristic in God revealing to men and women.⁴⁵ To illustrate with a simple example, in a parable on the kingdom of heaven, Jesus stated that the mustard seed “is smaller than all the seeds on the earth” (Mark 4:31).⁴⁶ Of course, science has discovered that there are many smaller seeds, like those of orchids. But by entering history in first-century Palestine, the Lord lowered himself and employed an incidental ancient botany in order to reveal as effectively as possible an inerrant message of faith prophesying the growth of the church.⁴⁷

Similarly, the Holy Spirit accommodated to Paul’s understanding of the structure of the cosmos. In the beloved Kenotic Hymn testifying to God emptying himself through the Incarnation, the apostle concludes:

Therefore God exalted him [Jesus] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, [1] in heaven and [2] on earth and [3] under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9–11)

Today most Christians are unaware of the three-tier universe presented in this passage, but they all recognize the inspired revelation that Jesus is Lord over the entire creation.⁴⁸ In fact, English Bibles fail to render fully the meaning of the third phrase in the original Greek. Translated more precisely, *katachthoniōn* refers to “the beings down (*kata*) in the chthonic (*chthovios*) or subterranean world.” For the biblical writers, “the underworld” was every bit as real as the heaven overhead and the surface of the earth. These terms were not merely poetic figures of speech, nor were they only “an appearance” or “phenomenological” as some understand today. Once cognizant of this ancient astronomy, it becomes necessary to separate, and not conflate, the incidental ancient science and the inerrant message of faith.

Finally, it must be emphasized that the intention of the Holy Spirit in biblical revelation is absolutely inerrant.



The astronomy and biology in Scripture are rooted in an ancient phenomenological perspective, and it follows that the Word of God must have a similar understanding of human origins ... and the origin of physical death ... The historicity of Adam and the entrance of sin and death into the world can now be seen in a new light with the aid of evolutionary biology.

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God knew exactly what he was doing by using ancient astronomy in the revelatory process. This was not a mistake. Nor was it a lie! Lying requires deceptive and malicious intent. The Lord is not a God of deception and malevolence. Of course, the Holy Spirit could have disclosed modern scientific facts such as the Big Bang and cosmological evolution. But it is doubtful ancient peoples would have understood these modern concepts, and more than likely such a revelation would have been a stumbling block to faith. Instead, in an Incarnational fashion, God graciously descended and employed ancient human words to reveal the inerrant message *that* the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created the heavens, not *how* he created the heavens.⁴⁹

Historical Perspectives and Modern Implications

The history of hermeneutics reveals that Christians have wrestled with the relationship between Scripture and science. Without a doubt, scientific concordism has characterized biblical interpretation throughout the ages. Yet in the midst of debates over the structure of the heavens, Augustine put these exchanges in proper perspective. He notes:

It is also frequently asked what our belief must be about the form and shape of heaven according to *Sacred Scripture*. Many scholars engage in lengthy discussions on these matters, but the sacred writers with their deeper wisdom have omitted them. Such subjects are of no profit for those who seek beatitude, and, what is worse, they take up precious time that ought to be given to what is spiritually beneficial. What concern is it of mine whether heaven is like a sphere and the earth is enclosed by it and suspended in the middle of the universe, or whether heaven like a disk above the earth covers it over on one side? ... The Spirit of God, who spoke through them [sacred writers], did not wish to teach men these facts that would be of no avail for their salvation.⁵⁰ (My italics)

In retrospect, it is obvious that the concordist attempts in Augustine's generation over the structure of the heavens were ultimately fruitless. No Christian today argues

for an accord between Scripture and either a geocentric or three-tiered universe. In the light of history, will future generations look back at the current preoccupation with scientific concordism in evangelical circles and conclude it of "no profit" and "no avail"?

The Galileo affair led to further insights into the relationship between the Bible and astronomy. Well known for his popularization of Cardinal Baronio's aphorism ("The intention of the Holy Spirit is to teach us how one goes to heaven and not how heaven goes"), few are aware that Galileo had a remarkable grasp of biblical hermeneutics.⁵¹ In the "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina," he argued that "the primary purpose of the Holy Writ [is] ... the worship of God and the salvation of souls."⁵² At the same time, Galileo recognized that Scripture "speak[s] *incidentally* of the earth, water, sun, or other created thing" because "propositions dictated by the Holy Spirit were expressed by the sacred writers in such a way as to *accommodate* the capacities of the very unrefined and undisciplined masses" (my italics).⁵³ And most importantly, Galileo recognized the critical role that science plays in hermeneutics. Believing that scientific facts were "a gift from God," he argued that "after becoming certain of some physical conclusions, we should use these as very appropriate aids to the correct interpretation of Scripture."⁵⁴ The historical record leads to more questions: Are the modern evolutionary sciences "a gift from God"? Will geology, paleontology, and evolutionary biology ever be used by born-again Christians as "very appropriate aids to the correct interpretation of Scripture"?

Lessons from the heavens have significant implications for the modern origins debate within evangelical circles. The current anti-evolutionary positions of young earth creation and progressive creation are undergirded by a concordist hermeneutic.⁵⁵ However, the astronomy in Genesis 1 is ancient, indicating that scientific concordism not only fails, but the very words of Scripture reveal that such an interpretive approach is impossible.⁵⁶ Moreover, the attribution of Divine creative action in the origin of the heavens on the second day is cast in the ancient category of *de novo* creation. The quick and complete creation by God of the firmament and waters above

is an accommodation by the Holy Spirit to the conceptual level of the ancient Hebrews. Consequently, Scripture does not reveal how the Creator made the astronomical world. Consistency demands that this, then, is also the case with biology. In particular, the notion of creating plants and animals “after their/its kinds” in Genesis 1 reflects the retrojection of an ancient phenomenological perspective of living organisms. To the eyes of ancient peoples, hens always gave birth to chicks, ewes to lambs, women to infants, etc., and it was perfectly logical to assume that God had created original chickens, sheep, and humans. In the light of Scripture, biblical inerrancy cannot extend to the incidental statements regarding the origin of the physical world in the creation accounts. Christian orthodoxy rests in embracing the eternal messages of faith delivered through the incidental vessel of an ancient origins science.

Of course, most readers by this point will recognize where I am heading. The astronomy and biology in Scripture are rooted in an ancient phenomenological perspective, and it follows that the Word of God must have a similar understanding of human origins. And if the *de novo* origin of life is an ancient conception, then this must also be the case for the origin of physical death presented in the Bible. The implications of these notions for the traditional and evangelical interpretations of Genesis 3, Romans 5–8 and 1 Corinthians 15 are profound. The historicity of Adam and the entrance of sin and death into the world can now be seen in a new light with the aid of evolutionary biology.

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to Anna-Lisa Ptolemy, Trevor Froehlich, Esther Martin, and Lyn Berg for their assistance.

Notes

- ¹A survey of American adults found that 87% of evangelical Protestants believe the Genesis 1 creation account is “literally true, meaning it happened that way word-for-word.” ABC Prime Time Poll conducted February 2004 with a random sample of 1011 adults; 3% margin of error. Surveyed by ICR-International Communications Research Media, PA.
- ²Henry M. Morris, *Many Infallible Proofs: Practical and Useful Evidences of Christianity* (San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, 1980), 229.
- ³Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 154.
- ⁴The term “concordism” in evangelical circles often refers to a progressive creationist hermeneutic of Genesis 1. I suspect this is due to the influence of Bernard Ramm’s work on the relationship between science and religion in the mid-twentieth century. He notes that age-day, geological-day or Divine-day interpretative approach “is called *concordism* because it seeks a harmony of the geological record and the days of Genesis interpreted as long periods of time briefly summarizing geological history” (italics original). Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 145. See note 21 for a wider definition of concordism by Jaki.
- ⁵Interestingly, the TNIV (2006) now employs the term “vault.”
- ⁶Henry Morris and John Whitcomb, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian &

Reformed Press, 1961), 77, 229. A recent attempt by young earth creationists places the waters above at the outer edge of the universe (Russell Humphreys, “Creation Cosmologies Solve Spacecraft Mystery,” *Acts and Facts* [October 2007]: 11–12). But as I will argue, this is not the original meaning of the waters above.

⁷Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances & the Accuracy of Genesis* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998), 34, 199, 201. Also see his *The Finger Print of God* (Orange, CA: Promise Publishing, 1989), 165–8; *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004), 236. Other progressive creationists embracing this approach include the following: Alan Hayward, *Creation and Evolution: Rethinking the Evidence from Science and the Bible* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1985), 179–81; H. Donald Daae, *Bridging the Gap: The First Six Days* (Calgary: Genesis International Research Publishers, 1988), 56–68; John L. Wiester, *The Genesis Connection* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 202.

⁸Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1906] 1951), 956; Paul H. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above. Part I: The Meaning of *raqia’* in Gen. 1:6–8,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 227–40. Though a concordist hermeneutic ultimately undergirds the translation of *raqia’* as “expanse” in evangelical Bibles, the terms “expanse” and “expansion” appear with this noun and a cognate in one of the most respected and used Hebrew lexicons (Brown, Driver and Briggs above). However, the entries clearly point out that solid structures are being referred to. I suspect part of the confusion is that the English word “expanse” commonly meant a flat two-dimensional “extended surface” (like an expansion bridge) in 1906, the year this lexicon was published, but since that time has evolved conceptually to denote a three-dimensional open space.

⁹See Luis I. J. Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970); Paul H. Seely, *Inerrant Wisdom: Science and Inerrancy in Biblical Perspective* (Portland: Evangelical Reformed, Inc., 1989), 32–7; John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 165–78; Lloyd R. Bailey, “The Cosmology of the Ancient Semites,” in his *Genesis, Creation and Creationism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 172–85; Stanley Jaki, *Genesis 1 through the Ages* (New York: Thomas More Press, 1992), 275–9.

¹⁰Other verses implying the solidity of firmament include Exod. 24:10; 2 Sam. 22:8; Job 26:11; Ezek. 1:22, 25–26; 10:1; and Dan. 12:3.

¹¹For literature, see note 9 and Paul H. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above. Part II: The Meaning of ‘The Water Above the Firmament’ in Gen. 1:6–8,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (1992): 31–46.

¹²In fact, the Hebrew word for “thunder” (*qōl*) means “voice.”

¹³Other verses implying the heavenly sea include Gen. 7:11; 2 Kings 7:2, 19; Rev. 4:10.

¹⁴The Koran also has a three-tiered understanding of the cosmos: “Throned above the waters, God made the heavens and the earth in six days, to find out which of you shall best acquit himself” (Hud. 11:7).

¹⁵Lancelot C. L. Brenton, ed., *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, [1851] 1995). Greek lexical sources include the following: Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, ed. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University Press, 1958), 766–7; Henry George Liddell, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. Henry Stuart Jones, 9th ed. (Oxford: University Press, 1966), 1640. For ancient astronomical models see Charles Hummel, *The Galileo Connection: Resolving Conflicts between Science and the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 23–38; David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious, and Institutional Context, 600 B.C. to A.D. 1450* (Chicago: University Press, 1992), 41–3, 54–62.

¹⁶St. Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, 2 vols. (New York: Newman Press, 1982), I:61. In August-

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tine's day, debate existed with regard to whether the structure of the world was three-tiered or geocentric. See passage with note 50.

¹⁷Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5*, J. Pelikan, ed. (St. Louis, Concordia 1958), 42-43.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 30. Luther was aware of Copernicus' heliocentric theory, but wrote-off the famed scientist because "the fool will turn the whole science of astronomy upside down" (Agnus Armitage, *The World of Copernicus* [New York: Signet, 1963], 90). Also see Martin Luther, *Table Talk in Luther's Works*, vol. 54 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 359.

¹⁹Galileo Galilei, "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina," in *The Galileo Affair: A Document History*, ed. and trans. Maurice A. Finocchiaro (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 117.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 118.

²¹For a history of concordist interpretations dealing with the creation of the inanimate world in the first four days of Genesis 1, see Jaki, *Genesis 1*. Jaki notes:

Around 1900 or so, two leading Catholic exegetes, Lagrange and Hummelauer, admitted that none of the countless interpretations of Genesis 1 that had been offered during the previous eighteen hundred years could carry conviction. The source of that debacle was concordism, or the belief that Genesis 1 was cosmogenesis in a scientific sense, however indirectly (quoted from back cover).

²²C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2006), 45-6, 264; Carl J. Lawrenz and John C. Jeske, *A Commentary on Genesis 1-11* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing, 2004), 52-6; Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, vol 1, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 149-51; John Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996), 115-23; Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 109; Meredith G. Kline, "Genesis" in *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, ed. D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer (London: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 82; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 19-20; Ronald F. Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis: An Introductory Commentary*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 28; Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 61; John Phillips, *Exploring Genesis* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 41; G. Ch. Aalder, *Genesis: Bible Student's Commentary*, vol. 1, trans. William Heynen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 60; Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introductory Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 47; Harold G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 56; John C. Jeske, *Genesis* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1971), 15. Study Bibles include the following: Charles C. Ryrie, ed., *The Ryrie Study Bible New American Standard Translation* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 6; Kenneth L. Barker, general ed., *Zondervan Today's International Version Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 6. For a monograph on "the waters above," see Robert C. Newman, *The Biblical Firmament: Vault or Vapor?* (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 2000). Bruce Waltke, who is arguably the most important American evangelical Old Testament scholar today, offers a paltry and confusing entry regarding the second day of creation in his 656-page commentary on Genesis:

expanse [*rāqia'*]. This seems to be the atmosphere or sky, which in 1:8 is called *šamayim*, "heavens" or "skies." The expanse separating the waters is part of the sky. Elsewhere it is said to be hard as a mirror (Job 37:18) and like a canopy (Isa. 40:22).

water from water. The expanse separates the source of rain from the waters on earth (Bruce Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003], 62).

He also refers to the firmament on three occasions (57, 58, 62), but makes no attempt to explain its meaning. A notable exception in the evangelical commentaries includes John H. Walton, *Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 110-3. I am grateful to John Walton for introducing me to Keel's *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*.

²³R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. and Bruce Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:862. The NASB states, "Let the birds fly over the earth in the open expanse of the heavens." However, the literal translation of the Hebrew is "Let the birds fly above the earth and *across the face* of the *rāqia'* of the heavens." There is no mention whatsoever of an "open" *rāqia'*. Commitment to a concordist hermeneutic is clearly reshaping the meaning of Scripture. Those unfamiliar with Hebrew can affirm this point by checking any Hebrew-English interlinear Bible. For example, see John R. Kohlenberger III, ed., *The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament*, vol. 1, *Genesis-Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 2.

²⁴*Theological Wordbook*, 2:862.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 1:501.

²⁶*Ibid.* Of course, the irony is that Kaiser fails to conserve the traditional and Christian interpretation of *rāqia'* and the *mayim* above it.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 2:935. Alexander's concordist presumption also appears with the meaning of *rāqia'*. "It is the idea of spreading out that carries over to the noun, not the idea of a metallic substance. 'Expanse' is an acceptable translation." He appeals to Lev. 26:19 and Deut. 28:23 to suggest a "metallic vault ... would be meaningless since the skies would already be metal." However, ancient astronomy held that sluice-gates and windows existed in the firmament (Gen. 7:11, 2 Kings 7:2, Mal. 3:10) through which water and rain poured. Thus, the Divine judgments in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are threats to seal these passages off. A more subtle example of Alexander's concordism appears in his assertion that "the usage of *šamayim* falls into two broad categories, 1) the physical heavens, and 2) the heavens as the abode of God" (*Ibid.*). Distinguishing the "physical heavens" from the "abode of God" fails to recognize that the latter for ancient Near Eastern peoples was indeed a physical place that was set on the waters above (see Figs. 1 and 2). It is for this reason that the idea of a tower (Genesis 11) or a stairway (Genesis 28) reaching to the heavenly realm makes perfect sense for the biblical writers. In other words, Alexander eisegetically imposes our modern theological notion that God's realm is in a dimension beyond the one in which we live.

²⁸The power of fruitful models is critical in science. See Ian G. Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 31-92.

²⁹This was also the case with God's dwelling place. It was not in another dimension as most suggest today. Rather, the Divine abode was a physical reality that rested upon the heavenly sea as stated in Ps. 104:2-3, "God stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters."

³⁰Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 248-50. Regrettably, Erickson collapses all historical statements in Scripture into one category—history. In particular, no attempt is made to distinguish the history in Genesis 1-11 from that in the New Testament. Consequently, this leaves the creation of the firmament on par with the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Such a conflation is indefensible if the former is an ancient understanding of the past and the latter actual history.

³¹Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976): 18. There are over 100,000 copies of this book. Lindsell notes that some theologians distinguish between the terms "inerrancy" and "infallibility." But he uses them synonymously when he asserts "that the Bible is free from error in the whole and in the part" (*Ibid.*, 27); and note 1.

³²*Ibid.*, 129.

³³Paul H. Seely, "The Three-Storied Universe," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 21 (March 1969): 18.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 22.

³⁵Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, 131. Notably, Lindsell also casts this very criticism against the Evangelical Theological Society.

³⁶Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 494. The 1978 Statement on inerrancy remains prominent within evangelical circles in that it was added to the bylaws of the Evangelical Theological Society in November 2006.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 496.

³⁸Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus, *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 886. Also see related Articles XIX, XX and XXI. Papers dealing with the relationship between Scripture and science from this second ICBI summit appear in a chapter entitled "Trustworthiness of Scripture in Areas Relating to Natural Science" (*Ibid.*, 283-348). Contributors were all anti-evolutionists, including progressive creationist Walter Bradley and young earth creationist Henry Morris.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 886.

⁴⁰Norman L. Geisler, "Explaining Hermeneutics: A Commentary on The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics Articles of Affirmation and Denial" in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible*, 902.

⁴¹Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 493.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³Geisler, "Explaining Hermeneutics," 901.

⁴⁴For a similar Incarnational approach to understanding the nature of Scripture, see Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

⁴⁵For the notion of accommodation, see Clark Pinnock, "The Accommodation of Revelation" in *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), 95-100. Pinnock argues that the Incarnation is

the prime example of accommodation ... It is natural to see an analogy between the incarnational character of revelation and the Bible. As the Logos was enfleshed in the life of Jesus, so God's Word is enlettered in the script of the Bible. In both cases there is some kind of mysterious union of the divine and the human, though of course not the same kind. But in each case both the divine and the human are truly present (p. 97).

Galileo notes that the concept of accommodation "is so commonplace and so definite among all theologians that it would be superfluous to present any testimony for it" ("Christina," 106).

⁴⁶The NIV translates this verse as "the smallest seed *you* plant in the ground" (also Matt. 13:32). However, the personal pronoun "you" and verb "plant" are not in the Greek New Testament or any variants. Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger and Allen Wikgren, *The Greek New Testament*, 3d ed. (West Germany: United Bible Societies, 1983), 49, 136; Alfred Marshall, *The New International Version Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 56, 153. Clearly, this is an attempt by NIV translators to avoid an unnecessary conflict in the mind of modern readers. In other words, they accommodate to the level of the average person. The TNIV does not add "you" or "plant," and attempts to mitigate the problem in a footnote. Kenneth L. Barker, ed., *Zondervan TNIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 1632, 1676.

⁴⁷Other examples of the Lord's use of ancient science include botany (Mark 4:26-29, John 12:24-25), astronomy (Matt. 24:27, 29, 31) and geology (Matt. 12:42).

⁴⁸The possibility exists that Paul might have held a geocentric (Platonic/Aristotelian) understanding of the cosmos with the "underworld" either in the core of the earth or at the antipode. Nevertheless, my point remains in that he accepted an ancient science.

⁴⁹Ladd incisively presents this concept in his aphorism: "*The Bible is the Word of God given in the words of men in history*" (George Eldon Ladd, *New Testament & Criticism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967], 12).

⁵⁰St. Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 1: 58-9.

⁵¹Galileo, "Christina," 96.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 93.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 92-3. In recognizing the ancient science in Scripture, namely the "current opinion of those times," Galileo appreciated the pastoral implications of this accommodation so as "not to sow confusion into the minds of the common people and make them more obstinate against dogmas involving higher mysteries" (p. 106).

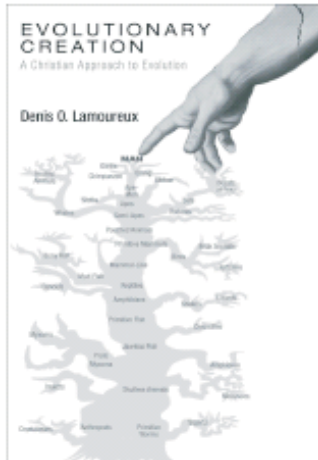
⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 105, 93. This approach is anticipated in the hermeneutics of Sir Francis Bacon, who popularized the notion of Two Divine Books. Reprinted in Stephen Jay Gould, ed., *The Advancement of*

Learning, Modern Library Science Series (New York: Modern Library, 2001 [1605]), 43. He states:

Our Savior says, "You err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God," laying before us two books or volumes to study, if we will be secured from error; first the Scriptures, revealing the will of God, and then the creatures expressing his power; whereof the latter is a *key* unto the former: not only opening our understanding to conceive the true sense of the scriptures, by the general notions of reason and rules of speech; but chiefly opening our belief, in drawing us into a due meditation of the omnipotency of God, which is chiefly signed and engraven upon his works (my italics, 1.6.16).

⁵⁵I have intentionally not included intelligent design theory since it remains too vague as an origins model. It could be classed as a form of progressive creation with fewer creative interventions and less concordist alignment between the Bible and nature. Leading ID theorists are careful not to appeal to Scripture, yet their scientific concordism at times emerges. See Phillip E. Johnson, *An Easy-To-Understand Guide for Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 87; William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 264; Stephen C. Meyer, quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for a Creator: A Journalist Investigates Scientific Evidence That Points Toward God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 88; and especially Jonathan Wells, "Darwinism: Why I Went for a Second Ph.D.," found at www.tparents.org/library/unification/talks/wells/DARWIN.htm.

⁵⁶For further examples regarding the failure of scientific concordism, see chapters entitled "The Ancient Science in the Bible" and "The Bible and Science: Beyond Conflict and Concordism" in my *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008).

<p>EVOLUTIONARY CREATION A Christian Approach to Evolution DENIS O. LAMOUREUX ISBN 13: 978-1-55635-581-3</p>  <p>DENIS O. LAMOUREUX is an associate professor at St. John's college in the University of Alberta.</p> <p>AVAILABLE IN BOOKSTORES Tel. (541) 344-1528 orders@wipfandstock.com VISIT WWW.WIPFANDSTOCK.COM</p>	<p>WIPF and STOCK Publishers</p> <p>"This book forthrightly and unflinchingly addresses difficult issues at the interface of science and theology. In doing so, it remains faithful to the authority of scripture, the historical testimony of the church, and the observed record of Creation's history." —KEITH MILLER editor of <i>Perspectives on an Evolving Creation</i></p> <p>"What a magnificent understanding, reaching far beyond stereotypical received views on evolution and Christianity! This [is a] well-informed case, with teeth." —THADDEUS J. TRENN President of Canadian Science and Christian Affiliation</p> <p>AVAILABLE SPRING 2008 ESTIMATED RETAIL: \$45</p> <p>This title can be pre-ordered at a 20% discount off the retail price.</p>
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