

The Flat-Earth Bible

by Robert J. Schadewald

When I first became interested in the flat-earthers in the early 1970s, I was surprised to learn that flat-earthism in the English-speaking world is and always has been entirely based upon the Bible. I have since assembled and read an extensive collection of flat-earth literature. The Biblical arguments for flat-earthism that follow come mainly from my reading of flat-earth literature, augmented by my own reading of the Bible.

Except among Biblical inerrantists, it is generally agreed that the Bible describes an immovable earth. At the 1984 National Bible-Science Conference in Cleveland, geocentrist James N. Hanson told me there are hundreds of scriptures that suggest the earth is immovable. I suspect some must be a bit vague, but here are a few obvious texts:

I Chronicles 16:30: "He has fixed the earth firm, immovable."

Psalms 93:1: "Thou hast fixed the earth immovable and firm..."

Psalms 96:10: "He has fixed the earth firm, immovable..."

Psalms 104:5: "Thou didst fix the earth on its foundation so that it never can be shaken."

Isaiah 45:18: "...who made the earth and fashioned it, and himself fixed it fast..."

Suffice to say that the earth envisioned by flat-earthers is as immovable as any geocentrist could desire. Most (perhaps all) scriptures commonly cited by geocentrists have also been cited by flat-earthers. The flat-earth view is geocentricity with further restrictions.

Like geocentrists, flat-earth advocates often give long lists of texts. Samuel Birley Rowbotham, founder of the modern flat-earth movement, cited 76 scriptures in the last chapter of his monumental second edition of *Earth not a Globe*. Apostle Anton Darms, assistant to the Reverend Wilbur Glenn Voliva, America's best known flat-earther, compiled 50 questions about the creation and the shape of the earth, bolstering his answers with up to 20 scriptures each. Rather than presenting an exhaustive compendium of flat-earth scriptures, I focus on those which seem to me the strongest....

Scriptural quotes, unless otherwise noted, are from the New English Bible. Hebrew and Greek translations are from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. The Biblical cosmology is never explicitly stated, so it must be pieced together from scattered passages. The Bible is a composite work, so there is no a priori reason why the cosmology assumed by its various writers should be relatively consistent, but it is. The Bible is, from Genesis to Revelation, a flat-earth book.

This is hardly surprising. As neighbors, the ancient Hebrews had the Egyptians to the southwest and the Babylonians to the northeast. Both civilizations had flat-earth cosmologies. The Biblical cosmology closely parallels the Sumero-Babylonian cosmology, and it may also draw upon Egyptian cosmology.

The Babylonian universe was shaped like a modern domed stadium. The Babylonians considered the earth essentially flat, with a continental mass surrounded by ocean. The vault of the sky was

a physical object resting upon the ocean's waters (and perhaps also upon pillars). Sweet (salt-free) waters below the Earth sometimes manifest themselves as springs. The Egyptian universe was also enclosed, but it was rectangular instead of round. Indeed, it was shaped much like an old-fashioned steamer trunk. (The Egyptians pictured the goddess Nut stretched across the sky as the enclosing dome.) What was the Hebrew view of the universe?

The Order of Creation

The Genesis creation story provides the first key to the Hebrew cosmology. The order of creation makes no sense from a conventional perspective but is perfectly logical from a flat-earth viewpoint. The earth was created on the first day, and it was "without form and void (Genesis 1:2)." On the second day, a vault, the "firmament" of the King James version, was created to divide the waters, some being above and some below the vault. Only on the fourth day were the sun, moon, and stars created, and they were placed "in" (not "above") the vault.

The Vault of Heaven

The vault of heaven is a crucial concept. The word "firmament" appears in the King James version of the Old Testament 17 times, and in each case it is translated from the Hebrew word *raqiya*, which meant the visible vault of the sky. The word *raqiya* comes from *riqqua*, meaning "beaten out." In ancient times, brass objects were either cast in the form required or beaten into shape on an anvil. A good craftsman could beat a lump of cast brass into a thin bowl. Thus, Elihu asks Job, "Can you beat out (*raqa*) the vault of the skies, as he does, hard as a mirror of cast metal (Job 37:18)?"

Elihu's question shows that the Hebrews considered the vault of heaven a solid, physical object. Such a large dome would be a tremendous feat of engineering. The Hebrews (and supposedly Yahweh Himself) considered it exactly that, and this point is hammered home by five scriptures:

Job 9:8, "...who by himself spread out the heavens (*shamayim*)..."

Psalm 19:1, "The heavens (*shamayim*) tell out the glory of God, the vault of heaven (*raqiya*) reveals his handiwork."

Psalm 102:25, "...the heavens (*shamayim*) were thy handiwork."

Isaiah 45:12, "I, with my own hands, stretched out the heavens (*shamayim*) and caused all their host to shine..."

Isaiah 48:13, "...with my right hand I formed the expanse of the sky (*shamayim*)..."

If these verses are about a mere illusion of a vault, they are surely much ado about nothing. *Shamayim* comes from *shameh*, a root meaning to be lofty. It literally means the sky. Other passages complete the picture of the sky as a lofty, physical dome. God "sits throned on the vaulted roof of earth (*chuwg*), whose inhabitants are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the skies (*shamayim*) like a curtain, he spreads them out like a tent to live in..." (Isaiah 40:22). *Chuwg* literally means "circle" or "encompassed." By extension, it can mean roundness, as in a rounded dome or vault. Job 22:14 says God "walks to and fro on the vault of heaven (*chuwg*)." In both verses, the use of *chuwg* implies a physical object, on which one can sit and walk.

Likewise, the context in both cases requires elevation. In Isaiah, the elevation causes the people below to look small as grasshoppers. In Job, God's eyes must penetrate the clouds to view the doings of humans below. Elevation is also implied by Job 22:12: "Surely God is at the zenith of the heavens (shamayim) and looks down on all the stars, high as they are."

This picture of the cosmos is reinforced by Ezekiel's vision. The Hebrew word *raqiya* appears five times in Ezekiel, four times in Ezekiel 1:22-26 and once in Ezekiel 10:1. In each case the context requires a literal vault or dome. The vault appears above the "living creatures" and glitters "like a sheet of ice." Above the vault is a throne of sapphire.... Seated on the throne is "a form in human likeness," which is radiant and "like the appearance of the glory of the Lord." In short, Ezekiel saw a vision of God sitting throned on the vault of heaven, as described in Isaiah 40:22.

The Shape of the Earth

Disregarding the dome, the essential flatness of the earth's surface is required by verses like Daniel 4:10-11. In Daniel, the king "saw a tree of great height at the centre of the earth ... reaching with its top to the sky and visible to the earth's farthest bounds." If the earth were flat, a sufficiently tall tree would be visible to "the earth's farthest bounds," but this is impossible on a spherical earth. Likewise, in describing the temptation of Jesus by Satan, Matthew 4:8 says, "Once again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world (cosmos) in their glory." Obviously, this would be possible only if the earth were flat. The same is true of Revelation 1:7: "Behold, he is coming with the clouds! Every eye shall see him..."

The Celestial Bodies

The Hebrews considered the celestial bodies relatively small. The Genesis creation story indicates the size and importance of the earth relative to the celestial bodies in two ways, first by their order of creation, and second by their positional relationships. They had to be small to fit inside the vault of heaven. Small size is also implied by Joshua 10:12, which says that the sun stood still "in Gibeon" and the moon "in the Vale of Aijalon."

Further, the Bible frequently presents celestial bodies as exotic living beings. For example, "In them [the heavens], a tent is fixed for the sun, who comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, rejoicing like a strong man to run his race. His rising is at one end of the heavens, his circuit touches their farthest ends; and nothing is hidden from his heat" (Psalm 19:4-6). The stars are anthropomorphic demigods. When the earth's cornerstone was laid "the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted aloud (Job 38:7)." The morning star is censured for trying to set his throne above that of other stars:

You thought in your own mind, I will scale the heavens; I will set my throne high above the stars of God, I will sit on the mountain where the gods meet in the far recesses of the north. I will rise high above the cloud-banks and make myself like the most high (Isaiah 14:13-14).

Deuteronomy 4:15-19 recognizes the god-like status of stars, noting that they were created for other peoples to worship.

Stars can fall from the skies according to Daniel 8:10 and Matthew 24:29. The same idea is found in the following extracts from Revelation 6:13-16:

... the stars in the sky fell to the earth, like figs shaken down by a gale; the sky vanished, as a scroll is rolled up ... they called out to the mountains and the crags, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits on the throne..."

This is consistent with the Hebrew cosmology previously described, but it is ludicrous in the light of modern astronomy. If one star let alone all the stars in the sky "fell" on the earth, no one would be hollering from any mountain or crag. The writer considered the stars small objects, all of which could fall to the earth without eradicating human life. He also viewed the sky as a physical object. The stars are inside the sky, and they fall before the sky opens. When it is whisked away, it reveals the One throned above (see Isaiah 40:22).

Immovable Earth

I Chronicles 16:30: "He has fixed the earth firm, immovable."

Psalm 93:1: "Thou hast fixed the earth immovable and firm..."

Psalm 96:10: "He has fixed the earth firm, immovable..."

Psalm 104:5: "Thou didst fix the earth on its foundation so that it never can be shaken."

Isaiah 45:18: "...who made the earth and fashioned it, and himself fixed it fast..."

The essential flatness of the earth's surface

Daniel 4:10-11. In Daniel, the king "saw a tree of great height at the centre of the earth ... reaching with its top to the sky and visible to the earth's farthest bounds."

Matthew 4:8 "Once again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world (cosmos) in their glory."

Revelation 1:7: "Behold, he is coming with the clouds! Every eye shall see him..."

The Vault of Heaven

The vault of heaven is a crucial concept. The word "firmament" appears in the King James version of the Old Testament 17 times, and in each case it is translated from the Hebrew word *raqiya*, which meant the visible vault of the sky. The word *raqiya* comes from *riqqua*, meaning "beaten out." In ancient times, brass objects were either cast in the form required or beaten into shape on an anvil. A good craftsman could beat a lump of cast brass into a thin bowl.

Thus, Elihu asks Job, "Can you beat out (*raqa*) the vault of the skies, as he does, hard as a mirror of cast metal (Job 37:18)?"

Elihu's question shows that the Hebrews considered the vault of heaven a solid, physical object.

Job 9:8, "...who by himself spread out the heavens (*shamayim*)..."

Psalm 19:1, "The heavens (*shamayim*) tell out the glory of God, the vault of heaven (*raqiya*) reveals his handiwork."

Psalm 102:25, "...the heavens (*shamayim*) were thy handiwork."

Isaiah 45:12, "I, with my own hands, stretched out the heavens (*shamayim*) and caused all their host to shine..."

Isaiah 48:13, "...with my right hand I formed the expanse of the sky (shamayim)..."