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**Publisher’s Statement**

This issue (April) of the Christadelphian EJournal of Biblical Interpretation sees Bre. D. Burke and J. Burke set up their own online journal through Lively Stones Publishing called “Defence and Confirmation”. The editors are to be Bre. D. Burke, J. Burke, C. Matthieson and K. Gilmore. The opening paragraph of the new journal states,

“Welcome to the first issue of Defence & Confirmation. This journal aims to provide high quality peer reviewed articles, supporting the preaching of the good news in Christ, addressing challenges to our faith, encouraging deep study of the Bible, and promoting honest consideration of our beliefs whilst defending our understanding of the gospel.”

The first issue of the new journal goes on to say

“D&C is produced by members of the Lively Stones Collective, an informal group of brethren offering knowledge and skills essential to a high standard of exegesis and apologetics. LSC contributors are deeply committed to the scholarly approach and intellectual honesty of the Christadelphian pioneers. We promote and facilitate personal development in the fields of Bible study, research, critical thinking and debate. We practise and endorse sound principles of interpretation, such as those defined by Bro. James Foreman in 1859. D&C welcomes regular and ad hoc contributions. We are also looking for several columnists. If you wish to submit material for publication, please contact one of the editors: jburke@berea-portal.com; dburke@berea-portal.com; kgilmore@berea-portal.com; cmatthiesen@berea-portal.com”.

With the launch of the new journal and looking at its emphases listed in the first issue, the chief of which seems to be apologetics, Paul and I (the publishers of the EJournal) judged that there was considerable overlap between the two journals with a potential for conflict of interest. So, in order to protect the integrity of the peer review process on the EJournal, we have decided to initiate parting company with Dave and Jonathan, and re-balance the EJournal so that it has more emphasis on textual study, thereby giving the new magazine space, although conservative apologetics and church history will still be covered in the EJournal. We would like to thank Dave and Jonathan for their contributions to the EJournal over the last few years.

**Editorial**

Christadelphian exegesis is currently under threat from two competing schools of thought. Both are subjective, anti-intellectual, and opposed to the practices of our pioneers.

The first is distinctly fideistic; its advocates claim that simply opening the Bible and praying for guidance is enough to guarantee good results. The second school of thought encourages deep exegesis but recommends poor methods. Its proponents prefer amateur Christadelphian scholarship over professional non-Christadelphian scholarship, and the works they rely on are often outdated. Alarmingly, among those today who claim they follow the pioneers’ approach, very few demonstrate familiarity with it.

A glimpse into the past may be instructive. Articles in the *Christadelphian* Magazine from the late 19th to early 20th Century generally reflect the following characteristics:

* Extensive knowledge of (and respect for) professional scholarship.
* Sound knowledge of ancient Hebrew and Koine Greek.
* Familiarity with the latest discoveries in archaeology, palaeography, textual criticism, and other Bible-related disciplines.
* Familiarity with past and current trends in biblical scholarship, textual problems, different textual streams, and higher criticism.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Use of the latest and most advanced Bible translations.
* High standards of literary composition.

Volume 18 of *The Christadelphian* (1881) contains a 3,800-word article by Bro. Thirtle (‘Remarks by Brother Thirtle’) in which he casually refers to the Alexandrian, Ephraem, Laud, Vatican, Sinaitic and Beza manuscripts, the KJV, the Revised Version, Rotherham’s Emphasised Bible, and the works of highly regarded scholars such as McClellan, Griesbach, Tischendorf, Scrivener, Green, Alford, Tregelles, and Lachmann. He also makes use of Westcott and Hort’s critical Greek text and the New Testament ASV—both newly published that year—and demonstrates a thorough grasp of Koine Greek grammar.

Bro. Thirtle’s article reflects an assumption that the reader will comprehend these academic references. Our pioneers were well-informed Bible scholars and wrote for a well-informed audience. We must ask if this is still true today.

Last year a brother sent me an anonymous comment posted on his blog:

‘In the late 1960s, as a convert to the Christadelphian brotherhood from the authoritarianism of Roman Catholicism, I was drawn by the scholarly and academic nature of the early Christadelphian writings and the sound reasoning associated with them.’

‘Scholarly and academic… sound reasoning.’ This is the legacy of the pioneers. We have a duty to uphold it.

**DB**

**Note**: Readers may be interested in the Wikipedia entry for Bro. Thirtle, who eventually moved from the fellowship of Christadelphians to that of the Baptist Union:

James William Thirtle (1854 – Stratford, London, December 5, 1934), LLD, DD, Member of the Royal Asiatic Society, was editor of *The Christian*, 1887–1934. J. W. Thirtle's father was converted to the Christadelphian faith while Thirtle was a child, and Thirtle himself was baptised in 1875. In 1881 he published in *The Christadelphian* magazine, a defense of two of the later works of John Thomas, *Eureka* and *Phanerosis*. In 1887 or 1888 Thirtle became editor of *The Christian* magazine. In 1904 he received the honorary degree of Master of Arts and divinity from Westminster College (Missouri). In 1904 Thirtle's magazine advertised for sale in *The Christian* the personal library of the late Charles Spurgeon, consisting of 12,000 volumes. In 1905, when the Baptist World Congress was being held in London, Thirtle arranged the sale of the core of the library, about 7,000 books, to William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri. In 1904 Thirtle published the work for which he is chiefly remembered, concerning the titles of the Psalms. His research in this work was confirmed in 1908 by his senior E. W. Bullinger. Thirtle was a friend of J. B. Rotherham and gave the address after at his funeral in 1910. When he died he was still editor of *The Christian*. [Cited Jan 2014]

**AP**

**Articles**

**Equality**

**R. Madden**

**Introduction**

Equality has a defined meaning but without a common standard of comparison it is impossible to measure. Biblically, equality is not a large theme, but the idea of ‘levelling’ is used in word pictures showing that moral parity is the goal of Biblical equality. Gender equality as a theme does not exist in the Bible. Modern hermeneutical approaches show that preconceived notions about social justice can affect the way we interpret the text. The Old Testament reveals that a rights-based morality was foreign to an Israelites’ understanding where social hierarchies were accepted. The ethical teachings of Jesus build on this concept showing a preference for motivation-centric morality rather than a rights-based teaching. Human orders of government have an individual-centric approach encouraging the common belief in rights to privileges. The Bible reveals a God-centred morality with equal access to the greatest privilege – salvation. In the future, the order of government will be an autocracy, revealing God as the being with ultimate rights: and that these are due to His moral perfection.

**Defining Equality**

Peter Westen provides some basic parameters that are helpful when considering the concept of equality. He points out that to call two things ‘equal’ one must at least have 1) two distinct entities, 2) a means of measurement, and 3) a common standard.

He notes that it is crucial to clarify the common standard of comparison, for ‘things that are equal by one standard of comparison are inevitably unequal by other standards.’[[2]](#footnote-2)

Egalitarians and complementarians have agreed that persons or groups of persons can be equal in many ways. One feminist writer notes that two persons, or groups of persons, can be equal in the following ways:

1. Equal human worth,

2. Equal ability,

3. Equal maturity,

4. Equal rights and opportunities,

5. Equal status,

6. Equal social value,

7. Equal identity (being the same, thus interchangeable in any role)[[3]](#footnote-3)

The point is, without a specified standard of comparison, it is impossible for either party to understand what one might mean by ‘men and women are spiritually equal’.

**Equal human worth**

The Bible appears to legitimize the concept of equal human worth: at the very least by its moral restrictions on murder, at the very most by its inclusion of every man and woman in the offering of salvation. (Gal 3:28). However, even the restrictions on murder are God-centric: the reason is given as ‘man is made in the image of God’ (Gen 9:6).

**Equal ability**

Ability is not measured in the Bible because morality is the measure of acceptability before God (2 Cor 5:10). The idea that ability trumps social hierarchy is absent in the pages of the Bible, where social hierarchies are presented as acceptable (1 Cor 11:1-16). Although, when measuring, two parties we may find they have equal ability, it is not a consideration for any of the themes of inclusion, either to tasks within the ecclesia or acceptability to God. Ability is not the measurement by which a person is excluded or included, Biblically speaking. One body but many members is a Biblical concept used to show differences in abilities working in harmony (1 Cor 12:12-14), yet even here, different roles are given a hierarchy (v. 28). Again, equality is shown to be a non-existent theme of the NT, where unity is the goal (1 Cor 12:13).

**Equal maturity**

Spiritual maturity is not measured by age, as the Biblical character of Elihu proves. Spiritual maturity is measured against Christ (Eph 4:13). However, defining maturity in themes of equality is irrelevant: the idea of spiritual maturity is not a method of inclusion or exclusion neither does it erase or validate human worth.

**Equal rights and privileges**

The Bible reveals rights as God-centric. None is equal to God (Isa 40:25; 46:5). Jesus did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped at (Phil 2:6), although the common perception of the Jews was that by calling himself the Son of God he made himself equal to God (John 5:18) Equal privileges are only in respect to salvation (Gal 3:28). Rights and privileges are based on obedience to God’s laws in the OT. In the NT, access to salvation is the method by which we are equal. Liberation is not associated with accessing previously forbidden areas but by understanding Biblical truths surrounding the salvation of man (John 8:31-36). It is the work of Christ that gives equal access to the mercy seat, previously the domain of one individual – the High Priest. Equality of rights and privileges is not an intrinsic right: we rely on the work of Christ to allow us the privilege of access to God. This privilege the NT highlights as the ultimate goal of the human condition.

**Equal status; Equal social value**

Status can be governed by gender or wealth. The Bible acknowledges inequality in matters of wealth distribution: it states that this is one of the things which Christ will eradicate at his return (Psalm 72, Isaiah 26). With Christ as the yardstick, cornerstone, and standard of measurement we are all levelled (Isa 40:4; Luke 3:6), yet the goal of this levelling is that ‘all people will see it (God’s glory) at the same time’ (Isa 40:5), not social reform. While this kind of social justice is a theme and intention of Christ’s message (Luke 4:16-21), as well as an identifying factor of Christ’s ministry (Matt 11:5), it reveals the purpose of God: equal access to salvation through Christ.

Gender is not given equal status under the Law of Moses. Social hierarchies are confirmed in the NT by gender, which trumps ability or other measures in 1 Tim 2:12; 1 Cor 14:34, 35. Therefore while humankind can be considered equal, regardless of gender, men and women should conform to the revealed social hierarchies which involve understanding of the way man and woman were created and God’s purpose with the family. Without God the understanding of Biblical truth can be warped to two extremes: oppression of women or a view of gender parity which is unbiblical.

**Equal identity**

None is equal in identity to another. We are individuals and appear as individuals before God (Rom 14:10-12). The concept of equality in conjunction with identity is a paradox. Since identity is a word used to separate and classify someone, equality is impossible to measure because, using Westen's definition, there is no common standard. Applying Westen's definition, to have equal identity erases the idea of two separate entities. Therefore the very phrase 'equal identity' is impossible to understand.

**Standard of measurement**

Using Westen’s definition of equality, and taking the Biblical standard of measurement as Christ, we find ourselves levelled. Both men and women are equalized or levelled by this measurement. Next to him we all fall short. The common standard is Biblical revelation. It is through the revelation of God that we understand ourselves in relation to God; this is part of the goal of His revelation. (Isa 40:5) This was the experience of Job: comparing his life with those around him resulted in self-justification: yet after seeing God he despised himself, and repented in dust and ashes (Job 42:6).

**Hermeneutics and Social Justice**

Norman Habel seeks to address possible hermeneutical approaches in his essay on social justice research.[[4]](#footnote-4) He identifies at least three distinct ways in which social justice has been and will be investigated in the Hebrew text.

The first approach which he styles *Social Injustice/Justice and History* involves investigation of the social forces in the historical world behind the text. It is illustrated by Norman Gottwald and others in a collection of essays entitled ‘The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics’.[[5]](#footnote-5) Essentially, this approach involves reconstruction of historical events to suit current social aims. For example, seeing the emergence of the nation of Israel as liberation theology: freeing a people oppressed. Romans 6:18, 22 shows that the freedom God offers is from sin and the purpose is to serve Him (Exodus 3:12; 4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7, 8, 11, 24, 26 (x2); 12:31).

Habel questions whether it is possible to reconstruct historical social justice issues in Israel’s early history. He queries the possibility of determining actual concepts or practices of social justice that existed in these social orders.

The second approach he calls *Social Injustice/Justice and the Text.* Habel identifies this as recognising that Biblical texts represent a range of documents from an alien time and culture. The aim of this approach is to ascertain the social order and ideals being promoted within the text. This approach attempts to identify from the text the social order or group being represented. An example of this form of hermeneutics is ‘This Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies[[6]](#footnote-6) (Habel, 1994). This study seeks to ascertain the distinctive land ideology being promoted in a given literary complex.

He challenges both approaches: while the first approach attempts to uncover history and has a particular sociological bias, the second is influenced by particular literary theories of textual analysis. He acknowledges that interpreters today tend to identify their particular bias before proceeding with their analysis, which he notes as desirable for future social justice research where people are likely to hold strong opinions that precede the reading of the text.

The third approach he identifies as *Social Injustice/Justice and the Reader.* In this approach, the centrality of the reader is fundamental to the interpretation. The text is like a mirror reflecting the reader’s own worldview and interests. An example of this would be the interpretation last century that Genesis 9 referring to the curse of Ham was referring to black people: this interpretation was used to justify slavery of black peoples.

The interpreter is likely to approach the text in light of his/her own social justice beliefs. The text is either agreeing or negating pre-held beliefs.

Some interpreters openly acknowledge their social bias when interpreting Scripture. An example of this would be feminists and liberationists. They cite gross injustice in experience as a valid background for interpretation. The critical stance of the oppressed constitutes valid interpretation.

This, according to Habel, means textual analysis will never be the same. With this method of interpretation the reader will be forced to look on their situation (as oppressor, oppressed, or someone seeking to identify with one of those groups) as part of the interpretive process.

In summary: the view that interprets the Bible in light of a reader’s understanding of human rights is acting in reverse. This belief overlays the text with a preconceived understanding of human rights and social justice without examining whether it is Biblical. It must be acknowledged that neutrality in interpretation is an impossible dream. All of us bring our unique backgrounds and viewpoint to the text. However, the postmodern method of interpretation which allows for different interpretations based on a reader's unique stance does not allow for the belief that God's revelation and unique message can be understood as it was intended. Variances in non-fundamental interpretations do not take away from the general message. However, if we bring our preconceived ideas of social justice we will be perplexed and dismayed at the God of the Bible because He does not appear to concern Himself with current ideas of social justice and in particular gender equality.

On examination, the OT is lacking in matters of human rights. While the biblical text recognizes the relative worth of social groups, there is no concern for the idea of equal worth. While the biblical laws recognize the relative rights of social groups, including widows, orphans and resident aliens, there is no concept of equal rights.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, rights are not portrayed as intrinsic to the human condition but as coming from God. These and other perceived injustices in the OT have led many Christians to consider it outdated, or second-class to the NT. The danger in this hermeneutic approach is that it leads to rejection of a God who does not fit in with our views of justice.

In contrast, others seek to articulate the relevance of the Hebrew Scriptures as a broad witness to the total character, activity and will of God. This approach allows for a diversity of socially unacceptable practices in the biblical text. While ‘socially unacceptable’ carries the idea of inappropriate behaviour, when we understand that social acceptability is subjective throughout times and eras we see that our views of social acceptability can only come from a present and therefore subjective understanding of social behaviour. An interpreter should prevent his or her own experience or ideology as a modern reader from becoming normative. The lack of social justice for the Canaanites which involved commands by God to completely annihilate them is justified Biblically by their worship of gods other than YHWH.

On examination of the OT, the Hebrew Scriptures reflect a number of social systems each of which assumes a social hierarchy. Within these systems particular social groups are regularly located at the lower levels of the social order and are consequently disadvantaged. Some of those are favoured in various law codes while others are excluded. Social justice is not really a theme of these laws: social restraint within the hierarchy is the revealed method of justice.

**New Testament**

The ground-breaking message of Christ was the intrinsically motivated disciple. Blessings were based on social inversions: the meek would inherit the earth, and the poor had the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5). The qualities sought by Christ for his disciples would result in blessings, not rights. Developing a godly character was invoked as the highest aim of humanity, not other social aims such as status, wealth or equality. Despite the consistent failing of the disciples to confuse their needs as practical rather than esoteric (Acts 1:6), the aims of the disciples of Christ are focused on a future kingdom rather than current political ideologies. The method of government of the future kingdom will be an autocracy with failure to submit to Christ’s rule resulting in direct consequences showing God’s ultimate power over nature: no rain for the nations who do not worship at Jerusalem (Zech 14:18, 19).

**Conclusion**

Gender equality is a non-existent theme in the Bible. It would appear that themes of social justice surrounding gender equality are a reflection of the values of society rather than Biblically founded. Other social justice themes like justice and equal distribution of wealth are readily apparent throughout Scripture. (2 Cor 8:13, 14)

The Bible seems to accept that social inequalities will persist until the end of time. (Matt 26:11; Mk 14:7) Instead, it exhorts us to do what we can where we are: support the weak, execute justice, and visit the fatherless (Deut 24:17; Isa 1:17).

Our political aims must wait until the Kingdom when Christ is in the earth. This does not mean we should not do good in the meantime where we are able (Gal 6:10; 1 Thess 5:15; 1 Tim 6:18; Heb 10:24; Heb 13:16). Despite this individual and collective good will, our political objectives are focused on the future. The Bible depicts believers of Christ as a small struggling group who exhibit qualities such as meekness resulting in their lack of social advancement. (1 Cor 1:26, 27).

The song sung in that day will be the levelling of the ‘towering cities’: where the oppressed will at last trample the elevated places, the soles of the poor trampling underfoot those who have ignored or overlooked them for personal advantage. (Isa 26:5, 6).

**Interpreting Genesis 1**

**P. Wyns**

This series of **mini-articles** will present an attempt to offer a fresh perspective on Genesis 1 - a feat which is hardly possible, as we all approach the narrative with preconceived ideas. Reader perception will always weigh heavily on the text and that is to be expected as a reader from two millennia (or more) in the past will have a different perception to a reader from the middle ages, a reader from the eighteen hundreds or a reader from the twenty first century; add to this the very real cultural differences between western and oriental worldviews and the task becomes daunting.

**The Unique Character of Genesis 1**

It is instructive to note the absolute unique character of the account in Genesis from an ANE (Ancient Near East) reader’s perspective. The nation of Israel came out of Egypt, where the universe was conceived in terms, not of *things*, but of *beings*[[7]](#footnote-7) created by the bodily emissions of the relevant god (sperm, saliva or mucous). In Babylon (where Israel was exiled), the primal elements were brought into being through a battle between the gods. This is a simplified summary of the many (and often complex) creation myths and cosmogonies that existed in the ANE.

Scholars refer to these myths with the terms ‘Theogony’ (the genealogy or birth of the gods) ‘Cosmogony’ (origins of the cosmos) and ‘Theomachy’ (a battle among the gods or against them).[[8]](#footnote-8) In this context the world view presented in Genesis is completely different to that commonly found in the ANE. Genesis does not “bring gods into existence” nor does it identify gods with primal elements or natural phenomenon (the sun or moon etc). The God of Genesis is not “self-developing” nor is the God of Genesis emerging from primal elements. The God of Genesis stands outside and above his creation (and yet is intimately involved with it) – the God of the Bible is both omniscient and omnipotent and the religion of Israel is (unlike its contemporaries) monotheistic. There was therefore no place for a theogony and no theogenic element in Israelite cosmogony. In fact, G. Hassel highlights the polemical nature of the Genesis account - as an argument against the prevailing contemporary worldviews[[9]](#footnote-9) – he speaks of the biblical narrative *not as reflecting the contemporary worldview but of overcoming it*.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The diagram above is by S. H. Hooke,[[11]](#footnote-11) and is a fairly typical example of how many commentators depict Israelite Cosmology (for example, see the quote from D. J. A. Clines later). The sky is understood as a solid dome punctuated by “windows” in order to enable the “waters above” to fall on the earth (which is supported by pillars).[[12]](#footnote-12)

Many of the texts employed to reconstruct this hypothetical cosmology are either found in the wisdom literature (like Job or Psalms) or by comparison with other ANE creation myths. However, wisdom literature is known for its extensive metaphoric, hyperbolic and poetic imagery and therefore literalism cannot be pressed. Comparative exercises with other creation myths need to demonstrate dependency and/or semantic equivalence; a difficult task considering the small range of texts that are available. For example, on the issue of translating *rāqîa‛* [[13]](#footnote-13)(firmament) as “solid dome” A. Perry observes,

However, it is because ANE cosmologies have multiple elements of a solid sky, air, an atmosphere, clouds, and wind that it is not historically out of place to read the reference to a *rāqîa‛* in Genesis in terms of what was apparent from the ground and **in phenomenal terms**.[[14]](#footnote-14) The historical meaning of *rāqîa‛* should and can be established from the Hebrew texts alone without referring to ‘the ancients’ of other ANE cultures. When we give proper priority to the Hebrew text and the literature of which it is a part, it is clear that the balance of argument favours ‘expanse’. We should do this against the prevailing world-view of both today and former ages.[[15]](#footnote-15)

The historical description of the flood speaks of “windows” and “fountains” in Gen 7:11 “...the fountains of the great deep broken up and the windows of heaven were opened.” The expression is a rhetorical parallelism, a phenomenon common to the Hebrew language; the parallelism here is about what is above and what is below:

When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep. Prov 8:28

By his knowledge the depths (i.e. the floods or waters) are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew. Prov.3:20

The opening of the windows of heaven betokens the breaking of the clouds where the water is contained: while at other times “the Lord **binds the water in the clouds**, and the cloud is not rent under them” (Job 26:8), now the Lord loosed the clouds, which being made as if full of windows, poured forth all the water kept in them. Note that the water is bound in the cloud (it does not come from a reservoir above the clouds). Job is quite aware that rain comes from clouds.

The problem of understanding for the modern reader lies not with ancient Israelite cosmology but with incorrect reconstructions that fail to recognize the Hebrew idiom employed in poetic literature and theories that place too much weight on comparative oriental creation myths. The use of similar ANE terms does not necessitate that they were understood the same way in their new context – especially with the OT penchant for demythologizing and polemical usage.

Let us contemplate the absolute unique quality of the Genesis account for a moment. It was an earth shattering revelation for ancient readers who were surrounded by mythical aetiologies and infantile theogonies and fear of offending an unknown deity (even the clever Greeks). **Genesis acted as a corrective to the other world views**. The case that Genesis makes is so powerful that it stood unchallenged for thousands of years because mankind had nothing else to offer. It is only the last two hundred years that we have become too clever for Genesis. Let us not forget then that for many thousands of years the Genesis account shined light into heathen darkness - the Genesis account was a unique and unprecedented revelation.

**The Structure of Genesis 1**

The macro structure of Genesis 1 presents as a chiastic staircase parallelism which also encompasses micro chiasms (see below). This demonstrates a carefully planned literary structure where theological considerations and the need for symmetry took precedence. The macro chiasm shows that the introduction to Genesis 2 belongs with the structure of Genesis 1. We note that **(A)** “In beginning”, and **(B)** “God moving” at the commencement of Genesis 1 forms an *inclusio* with **(A’)** Finished and **(B’)** “God resting” at the commencement of Genesis 2.[[16]](#footnote-16) The earth was initially “without form and void” (KJV) and the Genesis account then proceeds to inform us how “form” is given (how the earth is organised into day/night/seasons etc.) and how the void is filled (with vegetation/creatures etc.).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| A | In beginning [1:1] |  |
|     | B | God moving [1:2] |
|  | C | Light divided from Darkness [vv. 2-5]: **one day** |
|  |  | D | Waters divided - waters above (heaven) and waters below (sea) [vv. 6-8]: **day second** |
|  |  | E | Earth separated from Sea – Earth filling with vegetation [vv. 9-13] : **day third** |
| C’ | Day and Night divided by Luminaries [vv. 14-19] : **day fourth** |
|  | D’ | Waters filled with life – waters above (birds) waters below (fish) [vv. 20-23] : **day fifth** |
|  |  | E’ | Earth filled with living creatures and man [vv. 24-31] : **day the sixth** |
| A’ | Finished (2:1) |  |
|  |  | B’ | God Resting (2:2) : **day the seventh** |

A carefully planned literary structure is also shown by William D. Ramey who summarises some of the structural elements as follows:

The correspondence of the first paragraph, Genesis 1:2 with 2:1-3, is underscored by the number of Hebrew words in both being multiples of seven. Genesis 1:1 consists of seven (7x1) Hebrew words, Genesis 1:2 consists of fourteen (7x2) words, and Genesis 2:1-3 thirty-five (7x5) words. In addition, “God” is mentioned thirty-five (7x5) times, “earth” occurs twenty-one (7x3) times, and “heaven/firmament” also twenty-one (7x3) times.

The number “seven” also dominates Genesis 1:1—2:3 in a startling way, not only in the number of words in a particular section, but also in the number of times a specific word or phrase recurs, which in all comprises the sevenfold patterning of this section. The arrangement of Genesis 1:1—2:3 consists of an introduction and seven paragraphs. The introduction identifies the Creator and creation (Gen. 1:1-2); six paragraphs correspond to the six creation days (1:3-21). The seventh paragraph marks the climactic seventh day, the day of consecration (2:1-3).

**The announcement of the commandment:** “And God said”, while occurring ten times, is grouped into seven (7x1) groups (Gen. 1:3; 6; 1:9; 1:11; 1:14, 1:20; 1:24; 1:26, 28, 29).

**The order formula:** “Let there be…”, while occurring eight times, the formula is grouped into seven (Gen. 1:3; 1:6, 9; 1:11; 1:14; 1:20; 1:24; 1:26).

**The fulfilment formula:** “And it was so” occurs seven times (Gen. 1:3; 1:7; 1:9; 1:11; 1:15; 1:24; 1:30).

**The execution formula:** “And God made” occurs seven times (Gen. 1:4; 1:7; 1:12; 1:16; 1:21; 1:25; 1:27).

**The approval formula:** “God saw that it was good” occurs seven times (Gen.1:4; 1:10; 1:12; 1:18; 1:21; 1:25; 1:31).

**The subsequent divine word:** God’s naming or blessing occurs seven times (Gen. 1:52; 1:8; 1:102; 1:22; 1:28).

**Seven days affirmed:** There are seven days mentioned (Gen. 1:5; 1:8; 1:13; 1:19; 1:23; 1:31; 2:2).

Although there are ten announcements of the divine word (#1 above) and eight commands actually cited (#2 above), the formulae are grouped in sevens. The intentional sevenfold patterning of Genesis 1:1-2:3 is only maintained by our author skilfully and intentionally omitting some of these formulae: the fulfilment formula is omitted in Genesis 1:5 (Day 5), the description of the act in Genesis 1:9 (Day 3), and the approval formula in Genesis 1:6-8 (Day 2). Whereas in each case the Septuagint (LXX; the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures by seventy men) mistakenly adds the appropriate formula, these additions obscure the original sevenfold pattern of this section.[[17]](#footnote-17)

**The Days of Genesis**

Before we discuss the “days” of Genesis it is instructive to determine what the text actually says. The Hebrew employs different kinds of numbering for the days. Both ordinal and cardinal numbering are employed (literally):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ...and was evening and was morning: one day | ....cardinal number |
| ...and was evening and was morning day second | .....ordinal number |
| ...and was evening and was morning day third  | .....ordinal number  |
| ...and was evening and was morning day fourth | .....ordinal number  |
| ...and was evening and was morning day fifth  | .....ordinal number |
| ...and was evening and was morning day the sixth  | .....ordinal with article |
| ....and finished God on day the seventh  | .....ordinal with article (no evening formula) |

Nearly all translations render Gen 1:5 as the “first day”, but the Hebrew is literally “one day” in stark contrast with second, third, fourth etc. Andrew Steinman does a thorough analysis on the Hebrew usage of ordinal and cardinal numbers and concludes that Gen 1:5 expresses: **Evening + morning = one day**[[18]](#footnote-18) and concludes that the use of dta (one; *echad*) in Gen 1:5 and the following unique uses of the ordinal numbers on the other days demonstrates that the text itself indicates that these are regular solar days.[[19]](#footnote-19)

If that interpretation is correct then Gen.1:5 stands as a definition of what compromises “a day”. However, we immediately encounter a problem because the day is firstly defined as the period of light (12 hours... God called the light Day) but then it continues by calling the darkness night and adding the evening and morning formula. It seems that we are dealing with synecdoche (a figure of speech in which a term for a part of something refers to the whole of something), so that the term “day” can also include a full 24 hour cycle.

The evening formula suggests that the “day” starts at the point of darkness (the Jews celebrate the Sabbath from Friday evening until Saturday evening) but even here difficulties present themselves because the Jews themselves argued about when the “day” commenced.[[20]](#footnote-20) A solar calendar (such as used by some Jewish sects) has the day starting in the morning – an evening commencement (more accurately a day consisting of – evening/morning/evening) would suggest a lunar calendar.

Many of the Jewish feasts commenced in the evening – some scholars suspect an early switch from a solar to a lunar calendar (and then back to solar by some sects). Whatever the case might be (I think evening commencement the most likely in conjunction with a lunar calendar) it appears that a 24 day-night cycle is intended.

J. H. Walton observes that,

God called the light *[* ’*ôr]* ‘day’ *[yôm]* , and the darkness he called ‘night.’ If God called the light *yôm*, why does the text continue throughout the OT to call the light ’*ôr* ? It is a question that anyone could answer with a little thought: It was not the element of light itself that God called *yôm* but the period of light. There is a term for the semantic phenomenon that is observed here, namely, metonymy. In metonymy the meaning of a term is extended to include things closely related to it. When the White House makes a statement it is understood that the building is not talking. And so it is not the physicist’s light that is being named *yôm* but rather the period of light –obvious enough because that is what *yôm* is often used to refer to in the rest of Scripture. But if the word ’*ôr* refers to a period of light in Genesis 1:5, what about in 1:4? There God separates the light from the darkness. Again, I find “period of light” much more plausible here. The physicist’s light cannot be separated from darkness, but alternating periods of light and darkness can be set up. Still, we cannot stop there. If the text means for us to understand “period of light” in both Genesis 1:4 and 5, what about 1:3? Hermeneutical consistency, I think, would lead us to believe that when God said “Let there be ’*ôr* , we must then understand it as, “Let there be a period of light.” We could only conclude, then, that day one does not concern itself with the creation of the physicist’s light, that is, light as a physical element with physical properties. Day one concerns itself with something much more significant, something much more elemental to the functioning of the cosmos and to our experience of the cosmos. On day one God created *time.* This is the first of the functions that God is going to use to bring order to the chaos of the cosmos: the orderly and regular sequence of time.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Although Walton’s approach holds merit, it is metaphysical and functional but somewhat abstract because the passage of time on earth can only then have been measured initially by alternating sequences of light and dark. Darkness is the primordial state; darkness cannot be created as it is the absence (and antithesis) of light.[[22]](#footnote-22) When light is first introduced it is without reference to darkness (Gen 1:3), up to that point there had only been darkness (Gen 1:2) – we move from complete darkness (1:2) to complete light (1:3) *on earth*, and then to a “period of light” called “day” which includes (and alternates) with night within an “evening/morning” framework. It is then the “evening/morning” sequence of light/dark commencing which marks the passage of time.

It seems to me that we are speaking of the ordinary “day” as the basic unit of time. Interestingly, the sequence climaxes with activity on *the* sixth day (note the article) and rest on *the* seventh day. This intimately links day six and seven (man/God/rest), and day seven is **not modified** with the evening formula. This suggests that day seven is to be understood in an eschatological sense. Day seven (rest) is the teleological objective of creation and is therefore not limited by the ordinary passage of time.

**Creation of the Sun and Moon**

Genesis 1:14-19 apparently describes the ‘creation’ of the sun, moon and stars on the fourth day, however, firstly we should note that the Hebrew word ‘create’ is not used on day four and, secondly, we ought to note that the words for the sun and moon are not used – they are simply called *lamp-lights* – the ‘greater light’ (sun) and the ‘lesser light’ (moon). This is obviously intended as polemic against the gods of the nations (sun/moon), and therefore they are not even named, moreover they are purposefully not mentioned on the first day (creation of light) to ensure that they have no participation in the creation process. Rather, they are regarded as mere physical objects **given by God** to regulate priestly functions (festivals and Sabbaths).

After extensive semantic analysis David J. Rudolph presents (in my view) a conclusive case for translating d[wm[[23]](#footnote-23) in Gen 1:14 as “festivals” or “festivals and seasons” rather than just “seasons” which is more common. The word is often translated as ‘appointed time’ in relation to feasts/festivals (e.g. Exod 13:10 23:15; NASB). Moreover, it is interesting that this is the word usually translated ‘congregation’ in the phrase ‘tent/tabernacle of the congregation’, which lends itself to the thought that the tabernacle was an appointed place for appointed times.

The use of the term rwam (‘lamp-light’) as a metonymy for the sun and moon is consistent with the priestly overtones of the fourth day. All other occurrences of this word in the Torah refer to lamps in the tabernacle of the congregation (Exod 25:6; 27:20; 35:8, 14, 28; 39:37; Lev 24:2; Num 4:9, 16). In this way, the inspired writer depicts the sun and moon as being like ‘sacred lamps in the sanctuary of the universe’.[[24]](#footnote-24) We are clearly dealing with priestly language as Roger Beckwith notes; “...when the lunar calendar appears in the Old Testament, it is often precisely in priestly, or cultic, contexts that it does so. Thus, it is hard to believe that Gen. 1:14-16 and Ps. 104:19 are referring simply to secular ‘seasons’”.[[25]](#footnote-25)

So the luminaries (lamps) are **appointed** (not made) in the *heavenly* sanctuary (God’s temple) in anticipation of the **appointed times** (festivals) that Israel will celebrate in the *earthly* tabernacle (**appointed place**).

**Creation-Uncreation-Recreation**

David J. A. Clines observes that an important principle of distinction and separation governs the creation process:

Perhaps the most prominent feature of the account of creation in Genesis1 is the fact that creation proceeds by a process of separation. Light is separated from darkness (1:4), the heavenly waters are separated from the earthly waters by a solid firmament (1:6-7), the dry earth is separated from the watery sea (1:9-10, the verb “to separate” not appearing here, however), the day is separated from the night (1:14) and light is thus separated from darkness (1:18). The separation of each element in creation from every other element is emphasized again by the repeated phrase “according to its kind”, which occurs five times in Genesis 1 (11, 12, 21, 24, 25). We touch here the fundamental outlook of the priestly author responsible for Genesis 1 and for much else in the Pentateuch,[[26]](#footnote-26) especially Leviticus. According to the priestly worldview, observance of distinctions is essential: between clean and unclean, between holy and common, between Israel and what is not Israel, between the sexes. Mixtures of “kinds” are anathema: a field must not be sown with two kinds of seed, a garment must not be made of two kinds of cloth Lev.19.19). The world is created as an ordered whole, everything has a place and is in its place. The naming of the elements of the created order (day, night, sky, earth, seas belongs with this stress on the individuality of the components of the world order. Separation and distinction are what makes creation a cosmos. The alternative is chaos.[[27]](#footnote-27) The structuring of the narrative of creation into the works of six days is another instance of the priestly ordering principle.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Accordingly, Clines sees that the flood narrative is a reversal of the creation process; creation is undone (chaos ensues) and then creation is renewed (but not in the former unblemished state). He observes,

The Flood, however, represents a reversal of these principles of order. Joseph Blenkinsopp has exactly described the significance of the Flood as ‘uncreation’: “The world in which order first arose out of a primeval watery chaos is now reduced to the watery chaos out of which it arose―chaos-come-again”. If Genesis 1 pictures the establishing of a firmament to keep the heavenly waters from falling upon the earth except in properly regulated measure, 7:11 depicts the “windows of heaven” as opening to annihilate this primal distinction. Likewise the distinction between the lower waters and the earth established in 1:9 is obliterated by the breaking forth through the earth of the “fountains of the great deep” (7:11). Significantly too “the destruction takes place in much the same order as Creation”: the water first covers the earth and its high mountains, then birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures, and men (7:19ff.). [[29]](#footnote-29)

A larger pattern exists, encompassing both the Old and New Testaments, were creation repeatedly falls into chaos before it is renewed:

* Creation – ordering chaos – by separation/division
* Sanctuary (Eden) – be fruitful and multiply
* Transgression (boundaries crossed) – expelled from Eden–creation degenerates
* **Flood** – “uncreation”, reverting to chaos–recreation/restoration
* Babel –races in chaos (divided by language Gen 10:25)
* Abraham – separated (called) – be fruitful and multiply
* Sanctuary (Tabernacle) (Jerusalem Temple)
* Transgression (boundaries crossed)
* **Flood** (Jer 47:2) Jews expelled from the sanctuary by the Babylonians
* –the Land degenerates, “uncreation” (Jer 4:23-26) –recreation/restoration
* Sanctuary (Christ the Temple John 2:19)
* Babel-reversed (Acts 2:4-6)
* Nation created (Rom 9:25-26) –separated (called)
* **Fire** (2 Pet 3:7), the Jews expelled from the sanctuary by the Romans
* –the Land degenerates, “uncreation”–recreation/restoration

Scripture depicts a “pattern” of creation, “uncreation” (chaos) and recreation; “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matt 24:35);“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea” (Rev 21:1). Although this language of destruction/creation is metaphorical it does establish divine processes – God allows the old to pass away and fall into chaos before establishing a new order.

**Priestly Creation Themes**

We have already noted that the priestly themes of separation and division are integral to the creation account. We have also noted the reference to “festivals” anticipating the religious feasts of Israel within a normal working week culminating in the Sabbath. Moreover, the “announcement command”, which occurs ten times, anticipates the Ten Commandments – the ordering of the moral framework given at the creation of the nation. To this we must add the creation of Eden (the sanctuary where man had communion with God) which bears a striking resemblance with the Tabernacle (and Temple).

Unlike the religions of the ANE who worshipped the “sun, moon and stars”, ancient Israelite religion comprehensively demythologized the “host” and subjected it to the creator. The **heavenly sanctuary** formed the *“*pattern*”* (Exod 25:40; Heb.8: 11) for the **earthly tabernacle** (and subsequent temple). Thus, we have a worldview which understands an intimate link between heaven and earth.

The first Sanctuary was the Garden of Eden: the entrance to Eden and the Tabernacle was from the east (direction of the rising sun); Cherubim guarded the way to the garden and tree of life and also the ark, which contained within the symbols of **new life** (the resurrection);[[30]](#footnote-30) the tree of life (in Eden) is represented by the seven-branched Menorah (in the tabernacle); and the description of the candlestick in the tabernacle clearly mimics the parts of a tree - trunk, branches, knops, flowers and almond fruit (Exod 25:31-37). However, the “heavenly sanctuary” was itself merely a representation, Solomon recognised that the even the “heaven of heavens” could not contain God, much less the temple that he had built (1 Kgs.8: 27).

For the Israelites the “heavenly sanctuary” had come down to earth. They had been chosen as a holy nation – God had made a “new heavens and earth”, a holy people consisting of priests and kings (Exod 19:6) to administer, not only Israel, but eventually the whole world. There is a persistent nexus between the heavenly realm and the realm of the world.

**Conclusion**

The priestly creation account in Genesis 1 cannot be detached from subsequent Israelite history and theology. When Genesis 1 is placed in a wider context it moves from the universal (mankind) to the specific (the Jews) and anticipates the separation and calling out of a nation for close communion with God. It represents a careful account of ordering and separation, set within the framework of an ordinary “working week” such as experienced by Israelites. Biblical chronology indicates that this creative ordering of chaos occurred within memory of the appearance of the first ancient civilizations (Gen 4:18-21) and the violent movement away from a pastoral lifestyle to an agricultural one (Cain and Abel). Furthermore, the location of these events is centred in the Ancient Near East. We are not informed what occurred before Gen 1:1 as it is not important to our salvation.

**Key Words and phrases in Genesis**

**P. Wyns**

Below are some of the key words employed in Genesis 1, although the primary meaning has been placed behind the Hebrew (for ease of reference), the semantic range of each of these words is obviously larger. Rather than use the older and out of date Strongs’ definitions, the respected *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*[[31]](#footnote-31) has been employed using their G/K (Goodrick/Kohlenberger numbers[[32]](#footnote-32))entries. Only the section relevant to the discussion has been reproduced sometimes supplemented with material from other sources (where indicated).

tyviare *re'shiyth*  **beginning** (Strongs 7225; G/K 8040)

“The Bible’s first word, *rēʾšît*, beginning, presents a complicated and unique problem. The noun *rēʾšît* occurs 51x, 19x indicating something’s beginning (wisdom, strife, sin, etc.). In 78 percent of its total occurrences (40x), it appears as the first of two nouns bound in a construct state indicating the genitive relationship. In another 5x, it is made definite by the use of a pronominal suffix. It is used in an absolute, independent construction 5x only one of which carry the meaning “beginning” (Isa 46:10).” *NIDOTTE*, 3:1025-1028 (1025)

After lexical and semantic analysis of Gen 1:1, Robert D. Holmstedt concludes,

“The literary significance of analysing Gen. i 1 as a restrictive relative is that the syntax dictates, by the very nature of restrictive relatives (i.e., they serve to identify their head over against other possible referents and define it), that there were potentially multiple rēʾšît periods or stages to God’s creative work. Put another way, the grammar of Gen. i 1 points forward only; it does not comment about whether this basic creative event was unique or whether there were others like it (see Andersen 1987). Grammatically, the introduction to Genesis simply indicates that it is this particular rēʾšît from which the rest of the story as we know it unfolds.” [[33]](#footnote-33)

Holmstedt contends that the traditional understanding of a reference to an ‘absolute beginning’ cannot be derived from the grammar of the verse. Instead, the syntax of the verse, based on well-attested features within Biblical Hebrew grammar, dictates that there were potentially multiple tyviare periods or stages to God’s creative work.

Hence, a selection of translations have, “When God *began* to create heaven and earth” (NJPS/NAB/NRSV); “In the beginning of creation, when God made heaven and earth” (NEB); and “When God *began* to create heaven and earth” (JPS, 1985).

hyh *hayah* **to be, become, come to pass** (Strongs 1961; G/K 2118)

“In the creation account (Gen 1:1-2:4) Moses utilizes three forms of *hyh* to emphasize the connection between Yahweh’s declarations and the fulfilment of his intentions. The jussive form (*yehî*, “let it be/come to pass”) occurs 6x (Gen 1:3, 6 [2x]; 14-15[3x]; two perfects with *waw* consecutive [*wehāyû*] in 1:14-15 continue the jussive nuance) to declare Yahweh’s intention to create something. The *waw* consecutive + preterite directly corresponds to the jussive in 1:3 (“let it come to pass....then it came to pass,” first creative day) and functions as a summary statement for the second to fourth and sixth days (*waye hî kēn*, “then it was so/came to pass so”). This intentional pattern echoes the affirmation by the psalmist that what Yahweh commands and brings to pass perfectly corresponds (Ps 33:8[9]; cf Isa 14:24).” *NIDOTTE* 1:1022-1026 (1023)

Genesis 1:2 is rendered in the KJV as, “And the earth was without form and void” and in the NIV/NIB as, “But the earth had become without form and void” (YLT: “the earth hath existed waste and void”). The question is whether to translate the Hebrew conjunction *waw* as ‘and’ or ‘but’ and whether to translate the verb *hayah* simply as ‘was’ or by pluperfect ‘had become’.[[34]](#footnote-34)

wht *tohuw* **formless** (Strongs 8414; G/K 9333)

whb *bohuw* **void, waste** (Strongs 0922; G/K 983)

The discussion around the phrase töºhû wäböºhû usually centres on the origins of the phrase (is it related to Canaanite/Babylonian etc., creation myths?) and whether it represents a situation of primordial chaos such as depicted in battles between the gods? The focus of the discussion is whether the world was formed *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) or out of already existing material that had fallen into a state of chaos. Of course, even if the Genesis account relates to the ordering of already existent matter (that has degenerated into chaos), that is not deny that God is the creator of all matter (*NIDOTTE* 1:606-609). The contrary view is put forward by D. Tsumura, who understands the phrase as describing a state of “unproductiveness and emptiness”, the initial state of barrenness that was not yet productive as it would come to be. Tsumura argues that the phrase has nothing to do with chaos and denies that there is any demythologization.[[35]](#footnote-35)

An alternative approach is taken in the Septuagint which translates the phrase töºhû wäböºhû as (in English) “unseen and unconstructed” (perhaps because it was covered by darkness and water). Josephus (*Ant*. 1:27) says, “But when the earth did not come into sight, but was covered with thick darkness, and a wind moved upon its surface, God commanded that there should be light: and when that was made, he considered the whole mass.” In this reading, the phrase töºhû wäböºhû is understood in phenomenal terms – the earth cannot be “seen” because it is covered and therefore light cannot penetrate to the surface. Job speaks of the earth being “wrapped it in a robe of mist and black clouds like swaddling bands” (paraphrase of the NJB).

arb *bara*’**create** (Strongs 1254; G/K 1343)

“Though *br’* does not appear with mention of material out of which something is created, it is regularly collocated with verbs that do (e.g., Gen 1:26-27; 2:7, 19; Isa 45:18; Amos 4:13). More significantly, *br’* is used of entities that come out of pre-existing material: e.g., a new generation of animals or humans, or “a pure heart” (Ps 104:29-30; 102:18[19]; 51:10[12]; cf. 1 Cor 4:6).” *NIDOTTE* 1:728-735 (731)

The above explanation should be compared with that of J. H. Walton,

“…the text [of Genesis 1] asserts that in the seven-day initial period God brought the cosmos into operation (a condition that defines existence) by assigning roles and functions. Though the theological belief based on all of Scripture would appropriately affirm that God made all the matter of which the cosmos is composed (and that he made it out of nothing), lexical analysis does not lead to the conclusion that Genesis 1 is making such a statement by the use of *bārā’* . The origin of matter is what our society has taught us is important (indeed that matter is all there is), but we cannot afford to be so distracted by our cultural ideas.”[[36]](#footnote-36)

hf[ ’*asah* **made** (Strongs 6213 G/K 6913)

“In ch. 1 the word is found 7x indicating that God created: the expanse between the water (v. 7), fruit trees that produced fruit (vv. 11, 12), (appointed? = *‘śh* ?) the two lights, sun/moon to regulate seasons, feasts, festivals, time, harvesting, and plowing, and to give light at appointed times (v. 16), and the wild animals, thus including all of the animal world under his Lordship/Creatorship (v. 25)…This short survey of all the uses of *‘śh* in Gen 1-11 illustrates its character. It is a word whose meaning is determined by the function its context assigns to it. In itself it simply indicates activity of whatever kind its context demands, making/doing. It is a marker with almost no restrictions placed upon what it might mean in all possible contexts.” *NIDOTTE* 3:546-552 (547)

**Review: A Cultural Handbook to the Bible
(Pilch, 2012)**

**D. Burke**

John J. Pilch immerses us in the world of the Ancient Near East (hereafter ‘ANE’), inviting us to view Scripture through the eyes of the text’s original audience. Making excellent use of recent sociological and anthropological research he carefully explains cultural traditions, practices, and beliefs which would otherwise be completely unfathomable to contemporary Western eyes. This paper will provide an overview of topics covered by Pilch’s book, with a particular focus on heaven, the Samaritans, and individualism vs. collectivism.

**Afterlife**Pilch notes that the ANE conception of afterlife bears little resemblance to its Christian counterpart. The Hebrew word ‘*sheol’—*meaning ‘pit’, and synonymous with ‘grave’—was eventually associated with the ‘netherworld’, a spiritual realm where the shades of the dead resided in a state of darkness and diminished existence. Under Second Temple Judaism (largely as a result of Hellenic influence) *sheol* became an intermediate location for souls awaiting punishment or reward.[[37]](#footnote-37)

The Septuagint’s use of ‘*Hades*’ is not equivalent to the Greek mythological concept, but merely a translation of *sheol.* In the New Testament it refers specifically to a place of punishment for sin.[[38]](#footnote-38) The Greek word ‘*Gehenna*’, associated with fire and punishment (*Enoch* 54:1-2; Matthew 5:22) refers to the Valley of Hinnom, understood by some archaeologists as a public crematorium for refuse and the bodies of criminals. It later acquired an association with eternal punishment (Matthew 10:28; Mark 9:42-48).[[39]](#footnote-39)

**Heaven**The ancients described the cosmos in language modern readers would consider phenomenological; that is, language which describes the world and events as they appear to the observer. Today such language is commonly used in a figurative sense, but in the ANE it was understood literally.

Scriptural descriptions of ‘heaven’ are a case in point. In the Bible, ‘heaven’ is a generic term for the expanse above Earth and the dwelling place of God.[[40]](#footnote-40) Heaven is first mentioned in the Genesis creation account, where the Hebrew words *rāqîa* and *šāmayim* are variously translated ‘expanse’, ‘heaven’, and ‘sky.’

Modern readers can be forgiven for thinking that when Scripture uses words which are translated as ‘sky’ it refers to a vast open space high above our planet, but Pilch reveals the error of this assumption. The *rāqîa* is a physical dome; a ‘firmament’, as some Bibles render it.[[41]](#footnote-41) The primary function of this dome is to separate the waters upon the earth from those above.[[42]](#footnote-42)

In biblical cosmology the sky also contains heavenly bodies: sun, moon, and stars. These are not located far beyond our planet in the vacuum of space, but upon the face of the sky itself. While the stars are fixed, the sun and moon are capable of motion.[[43]](#footnote-43) The sky is presumably impermeable, but occasional reference is made to openings which allow the passage of natural elements and other objects[[44]](#footnote-44) sent by God.[[45]](#footnote-45) Divine communication also comes from the sky, sometimes in the form of extreme weather conditions.[[46]](#footnote-46)

The distinction between the sky and the realm of God is described in physical rather than metaphysical terms. One tradition implies it is possible to travel through a hole in the sky to God’s dwelling place on the other side.[[47]](#footnote-47) The same tradition provides examples of worthy persons who have made this journey.[[48]](#footnote-48)

The metaphysical heaven is described in later OT literature as a place where the enthroned Yahweh holds court with divine beings.[[49]](#footnote-49) This is an important affirmation of God’s sovereignty and omnipotence. He is Lord of the earth, of all living creatures, and even of the heavens themselves.[[50]](#footnote-50) By the Christian period ‘heaven’ has become synonymous with the presence of God,[[51]](#footnote-51) yet Pilch reminds us that the NT concept should not be conflated with modern theology.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Pilch’s analysis of the ANE heaven is extremely useful from an exegetical perspective. Too often we unintentionally superimpose modern meanings on biblical language, subconsciously driven by a need to reconcile the text with our own modern, scientific understanding of the world.

Genesis 1 is a case in point: even Christians who pride themselves on their literalism will nevertheless insist that ‘*rāqîa*’ is equivalent to our modern word ‘sky.’ But this is concordism,[[53]](#footnote-53) not literal interpretation. When we realise that the ancients must be allowed to mean what they say, passages such as the Genesis creation account actually become more comprehensible[[54]](#footnote-54) and harmonise properly with the rest of Scripture. There is no need to force anachronistic interpretations.

**Desert**Modern Westerners typically envisage deserts as barren, sandy wastelands hostile to animals and vegetation. Yet Pilch observes that most deserts of the Middle East are ‘tame deserts’ with a dry season and a wet season; the latter bringing storms, torrential rain and flash floods, rejuvenating plant life and refilling the natural reservoirs upon which native animals rely.

Peoples of the ANE typically defined deserts by reference to the scale of human occupation rather than climate or geography. A ‘desert place’ was largely undeveloped, with a sparse population (if any at all). Communities outside the city limits were considered of negligible value, since urban life represented civilisation as the educated classes understood it.

Pilch illustrates this by recalling Gaius Gracchus’ reference to Tuscany as a desert even though it contained ‘large estates developed by hordes of slaves.’[[55]](#footnote-55) Another example is the account of Jesus feeding the 4,000/5,000 (e.g. Mark 6:30-34; Mark 8:1-10) which describes the location as ‘desolate’ or ‘isolated.’ This is not a literal desert as we understand it, but a ‘wilderness’ area; a place of minimal human occupation.

**Citizenship**Citizenship in the ancient world was highly prized. It conveyed identity and unique socio-cultural privileges, including certain forms of legal protection. Roman citizens were entitled to full judicial process, exempt from torture, and could not be punished without trial (Acts 22:25-29; 16:37-39).

Yet ancient citizenship does not correspond to its contemporary counterpart.[[56]](#footnote-56) Hellenic citizenship identified a person with a city rather than a nation, and was reserved for those born to freeborn Athenian parents. In some areas citizenship was not a static concept but lay across a spectrum of entitlement.[[57]](#footnote-57)

Resident aliens grouped together for ‘protection, support, and acceptance’[[58]](#footnote-58) on the basis of common ethnicity, profession and/or ideology. Even a citizen would be considered an alien if he strayed too far from his home territory,[[59]](#footnote-59) but acceptance into a faith-based community could mitigate this and other distinctions.

**Samaritans**Pilch also examines the Samaritans, whose presence in the land was a source of ongoing tension for the Jews. Traditionally claiming descent from the northern tribes of Israel, the Samaritans are described by Josephus and the Deuteronomic Historian as the progeny of expatriates from lands conquered by the Assyrians.[[60]](#footnote-60)

While modern Samaritans claim most of them have always remained faithful to the God of Israel, Jewish literature—particularly the Bible and Josephus—paints them as unorthodox outsiders with a legacy of polytheism and other theological corruptions.[[61]](#footnote-61)

Conflict between Jews and Samaritans reached a flash point when the latter were excluded from participation in the rebuilding of the Jewish temple and city walls under Ezra, and responded with sabotage.[[62]](#footnote-62) The Jewish/Samaritan relationship was forged in the coals of this mutual antagonism. Seven centuries later, Jesus found it still burning fiercely.

During the Greek invasion Samaritans took the side of Alexander the Great, while Jews supported Persia. Unfortunately this did not stop Alexander from attacking Samaria, and the Jews exacted their own revenge on the Samaritans through John Hyrcanus.[[63]](#footnote-63)

Under Roman occupation the Samaritans were responsible for two major outrages which inflamed the Jews like never before. The first involved the defiling of the Jewish temple with human bones.[[64]](#footnote-64) The second involved the murder of one or more Jewish pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem for Passover.[[65]](#footnote-65) In the latter case Jews retaliated violently, and were brutalised in their turn by Roman authorities who supported the Samaritans.[[66]](#footnote-66) Yet the Jews appealed to Rome and Caesar finally delivered them a legal victory.[[67]](#footnote-67)

Even though Samaritans are rarely mentioned in the NT, these historic tensions and prejudices are clearly evident. Jews will not even share common objects with them,[[68]](#footnote-68) while the word ‘Samaritan’ itself has become a byword for heresy and demonic possession.[[69]](#footnote-69) Jesus acknowledges these tensions with his provocative choice of a Samaritan hero in an emotive and culturally subversive parable.[[70]](#footnote-70)

The gospel writers specifically mention devout Samaritans who accept Jesus,[[71]](#footnote-71) and the fact that they do so suggests they found this surprising and unusual. We also find a reference to Samaritan anti-Semitism: notice that Jesus is refused entry to a Samaritan village when they learn he is travelling to Jerusalem.[[72]](#footnote-72)

There is a tendency among modern Christians to romanticise the Samaritans as underdogs and view Jesus’ ministry to them as an act of emancipation which legitimised their relationship with God and His people.[[73]](#footnote-73) Yet the Samaritans were not underdogs, and Jesus shows no interest in changing attitudes on either side of the Jewish/Samaritan controversy. Far from legitimising Samaritan beliefs, he bluntly observed that they worshiped Yahweh in a state of ignorance and error.[[74]](#footnote-74)

Overall the NT makes no definitive statement about Jesus’ opinion of Samaritans, and his interaction with them varies across the gospels. Depending on which account we read, Jesus’ opinion of the Samaritans appears more or less indifferent but never explicitly negative or positive.[[75]](#footnote-75) While it is difficult to say how much these accounts are affected by cultural concerns, there is no doubt such concerns were not only present but also recognised and understood by the NT’s original audience.[[76]](#footnote-76)

**Individualism vs. collectivism**

Pilch opens a section entitled ‘Individuals? or Stereotypes?’ with an anecdote which neatly contrasts two radically different perspectives: Western and African.[[77]](#footnote-77) The former value individualism; the latter collectivism. Both are culturally inclined to interpret Scripture in a particular way; thus the message they see in the story of Joseph is unconsciously coloured by their own preconceptions.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Pilch notes that the collectivistic personality is normative throughout the world of the Bible,[[79]](#footnote-79) while individualism was virtually unknown in the biblical world. This remains true in the 21st Century, even though individualism is more common than ever before.[[80]](#footnote-80) To explain these subjects Pilch uses a mixture of sociological commentary and biblical case studies.

The individualistic paradigm measures personal worth and success on the basis of individual achievements, possessions and rights, while extolling the virtues of independence and personal freedom.[[81]](#footnote-81) Groups are considered little more than a means to an end,[[82]](#footnote-82) and the individual feels free to act in his or her own interests even at the expense of the group.[[83]](#footnote-83)

The prevailing personality type of the biblical world is overwhelmingly collectivistic.[[84]](#footnote-84) Under this paradigm identities are typically group-based; the individual is subsumed within categories such as race, family, tribe, and religion, which collectively define their personal worth.[[85]](#footnote-85) Aside from the traditional markers of age and gender, status is primarily dependent upon the reputation and standing of one’s family (as opposed to personal merit), hence the importance of genealogies.[[86]](#footnote-86)

The individualistic attitude prized by modern Western society was frowned upon by the ancients.[[87]](#footnote-87) Their sociocultural world was governed by a rigid system of honour and shame under which one person’s gain was another’s loss[[88]](#footnote-88) and the (unwarranted) promotion of individuals posed a threat to the stability of the group.[[89]](#footnote-89) The collectivistic paradigm also preferences consultation over individual action, but this does not imply a democratic model.[[90]](#footnote-90)

In an individualistic culture stereotypes are typically rejected, since it is considered unreasonable to generalise about a group on the basis of one member’s attitude or behaviour. In a collectivistic culture the opposite is true, since every member is assumed to be representative of the group.[[91]](#footnote-91) Due to the consistency of collectivistic behaviour, this assumption is often correct; thus stereotypes have a legitimate place in collectivistic culture and generalisations can be made without a pejorative implication.[[92]](#footnote-92)

Western readers might see evidence of individualism in certain psalms of praise[[93]](#footnote-93) and lament,[[94]](#footnote-94) and Jesus’ instruction to ‘deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.’[[95]](#footnote-95) But Pilch carefully contextualises these passages. The psalmists’ personalities are collective rather than individual;[[96]](#footnote-96) they identify with their group.[[97]](#footnote-97) Similarly, Jesus’ exhortation includes a collectivistic reference to family, not merely individuals.[[98]](#footnote-98) Yet his call to discipleship is still highly provocative, since it undercuts the common familial ties.[[99]](#footnote-99) Listeners would have considered this a radical message.

Again the value of Pilch’s work is found in its application to exegesis. His anecdotal hook on page 78 has great appeal, both for its humour and its explanatory power. The insights provided by Hofstede are invaluable for understanding relationships between individuals and groups within the ANE. This is particularly relevant to stories such as the condemnation of Cain, who rightly observes that expulsion from his community amounts to a death sentence.[[100]](#footnote-100) Loss of collective identity is potentially fatal in a world where safety is found in numbers and the group is valued over the individual.

Notice also Abraham’s desperate plea with Yahweh in Genesis 18:23-32. Modern readers commonly consider Lot the only person worth saving, and struggle to understand why Abraham doesn’t just ask for him. Yet Abraham will not reduce his ‘price’ below ten persons. Why? Because he is a collectivist; in his eyes Lot is not an individual but the head of a family. Thus to save Lot he must beg for them all.

**Marriage**Pilch challenges our cultural expectations with the provocative statement that ‘A good number of languages, including biblical Hebrew, have no word for marriage!’[[101]](#footnote-101) Instead the Bible uses terms which describe a change of relationship with the spouse and/or their family, such as ‘to take a woman as wife’ and ‘selects a certain man as his father-in-law.’

This concept of ‘taking’ a woman reflects the patriarchal norms of the ANE, under which the female becomes the property of the male—a transaction formalised via the ‘bride price’ paid by the groom’s family—although Pilch assures us ‘the woman is more than property.’[[102]](#footnote-102) Some may be surprised by his assertion that ‘marriage in the Bible… is not a religious event’[[103]](#footnote-103) but rather the uniting of two families through their respective representatives for mutual gain. Yet the evidence bears this out.[[104]](#footnote-104)

Marriages were carefully arranged events which included the matching of appropriate partners between two families, often at a very young age.[[105]](#footnote-105) This was as much the parents’ responsibility as their right. Betrothal carried the same moral obligations as marriage; infidelity during the pre-married state was equivalent to adultery.

**Noble death**

Pilch’s primary illustration of noble death comes from Eleazer, a scribe of the Maccabean era, who allegedly chose execution rather than eating pork forced upon him by the Hellenic invaders. His story is a morality play, providing a strong exhortation to uphold behaviours and values of critical importance to ancient Jewish society.[[106]](#footnote-106)

Eleazar is described in terms which define him as a paragon of virtue: very old, handsome, male, devout, honest, and a high ranking scribe. Each of these attributes was individually respected. Taken together, they add up to an exemplary individual.[[107]](#footnote-107)

When his friends invite him to escape death by eating permitted meat while feigning to eat pork, Eleazar refuses on the grounds that this is deceptive. He cannot die with a good conscience if younger Jews believe he has capitulated to the Greeks. There is a principle at stake, a public responsibility to uphold, and a fatalistic inevitability about his demise.[[108]](#footnote-108) In one sense, Eleazar dies because he has to; because the conditions of the story require it. There can be no alternative exit for a man of his calibre.

**Literacy**Modern readers take literacy for granted but Pilch reminds us it was extremely rare in the ancient world, with literacy rates at 10% or lower. This raises questions about Jesus’ own abilities, which were unusual for his time, place and socio-economic status.[[109]](#footnote-109)

Following Yaghjian (1996), Pilch identifies several different forms of literacy in the 1st Century AD which do not necessarily involve the ability to write: auraliteracy (remembering and understanding what is heard), oraliteracy (remembering, understanding and substantially repeating what is heard), oculiteracy (linguistically decoding what is read from a written text) and scribal literacy (the capacity to read and *interpret* a document).

The most gifted scribes were not only able to read, interpret and copy documents accurately, but could also read and interpret their own work.[[110]](#footnote-110) This was a sacred trust which placed them among the upper echelons of Jewish society. In light of the vast socio-economic gulf between them, Jesus’ regular victories over the scribes were as humiliating as they were baffling.[[111]](#footnote-111)

**Dreams**Pilch begins his consideration of dreams with a few notes on consciousness, observing that ‘consensus reality’ is invariably a cultural construct.[[112]](#footnote-112) States of consciousness we define as ‘alternative’ might be considered normative by other peoples.

Dreams were important to the ancients—particularly in the context of spirituality—though there seems to have been little agreement on their origins and interpretation. Plato was skeptical about the idea that dreams came from the gods, while Aristotle flatly denied it.

Artemidorus—a Greek mystic of the 2nd Century BC—composed an extensive guide to the interpretation of dreams, variously categorising them as symbolic (metaphorical), predictive (referring to a future event), and oracle (guidance for the dreamer). Some commonality notwithstanding,[[113]](#footnote-113) these definitions correspond reasonably well to the examples we find in Scripture.[[114]](#footnote-114)

**Jesus**Pilch’s reflections on ‘The Middle Eastern Jesus’ are especially valuable for what they teach us about the dangers of anachronistic thinking. Jesus did not share the cultural values, social norms and political biases of 21st Century Western Christians, and we should avoid reading them into the text. Instead we must accept that he was a product of his time.[[115]](#footnote-115)

Contemporary Christians may be surprised and even dismayed to find Jesus endorsed theocracy rather than disestablishmentarianism,[[116]](#footnote-116) and spoke primarily of the present rather than the future.[[117]](#footnote-117) He was no Calvinist or postmodern humanist, but instead viewed humanity as possessing inherently good and bad tendencies. This, too, was the result of cultural conditioning.[[118]](#footnote-118) Pilch laments that Jesus has been chronically misrepresented in the West, effectively rendering him the victim of identity theft.[[119]](#footnote-119)

**Music**Music played an important part in certain cultural practices of the ANE, as demonstrated by the presence of flute players at the death of the synagogue leader’s daughter in Matthew 9:23 (a common practice, as the Mishnah confirms[[120]](#footnote-120)). Yet this raises questions about the nature of the instruments and their specific role in the proceedings—questions the text leaves unanswered.[[121]](#footnote-121)

Instruments mentioned in Scripture may bear the same name as those we know today, but this is largely the result of translation decisions, which may not be strictly accurate. A case in point is the reference to ‘flute’ in Psalm 151:2, now regarded by some scholars to be more correctly translated ‘lyre.’[[122]](#footnote-122)

The challenge for modern believers seeking guidance from Scripture is that it was not originally written for them, but for an audience that lived thousands of years earlier, in a different place, with a different culture.

The inspired writers produced ‘high context’ literature in which sociocultural knowledge is frequently assumed. Scripture reflects this, making little effort to explain details we might prefer the authors to elaborate on.

The gulf between their knowledge and ours has serious implications for interpretation—a fact too often under-appreciated by exegetes. Pilch effectively bridges that gulf with a clever, accessible book which opens a window on the cultural world of the Bible.

**The Myth of the Solid Dome (Part I)**

**A. Perry**

**Introduction**

Comparing and contrasting Genesis with ANE creation myths and cosmology is an exercise influenced by the initial stance a scholar has towards the biblical text. A fundamentalist stance will produce a different result to that of a historian with a modern scientific outlook. The latter will be comfortable treating some or all of the elements of Genesis as mythical because of similarities that exist between Genesis and the ANE creation myths. The former will instead see the differences and argue that Genesis is a unique text that is true to the facts now and then. This essay is a theology paper set in this polemical context.

The method of biblical interpretation used here then is to first establish the meaning of a word or statement with regard to the literature in which it occurs, working our way out from the sentence to the wider literary units of discourse, book and canon. Our second step is to test this conception against ANE ideas to see if it is the same or if it represents a plausible competing conception in the context of the Ancient Near East.

The claim is made that *rāqîa*‛ (KJV, ‘firmament’[[123]](#footnote-123)) is a cosmological term meaning a solid ‘dome’ or ‘vault’. This choice is followed by some major translations and many critical commentators:

And God said, “Let there be a dome (*rāqîa*‛) in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters. Gen 1:6 (NRSV)

Conservative commentators tend to favour the meaning of ‘expanse’ which in turn allows them to offer a harmonization of the Bible and Science.[[124]](#footnote-124)

In order to establish the meaning of *rāqîa*‛ as a ‘solid dome’, one scholar, P. H. Seely, makes two arguments. The first is that,

* Historical evidence shows that virtually everyone in the ancient world believed in a solid firmament. Accordingly it is highly probable that the historical meaning of *raqia*‛ in Genesis 1 is a solid firmament.[[125]](#footnote-125)
* The second argument is lexical and linguistic and seeks to show that associated prepositions, related verbs and other uses of the word *rāqîa*’ in the Hebrew show that the word means a ‘solid’ firmament. We will consider this second argument first and then look at ANE mythology in a later paper.

These two arguments are configured[[126]](#footnote-126) to establish the point that the solid firmament is that of a ‘vault’ or ‘dome’. This geometric claim is based on the historical evidence which is used to supplement the linguistic argument that the firmament is solid.

J. J. Pilch’s interpretation of the firmament and the waters above the firmament is stated as follows:

The first creation story in Genesis reports how God created the world on the foundation of a watery abyss. God made a dome (or “firmament”) to separate these waters into a mass above the dome (Ps. 148:4) and a mass beneath the dome (Gen. 1:6-7). God named this dome “the sky” (šāmayim, Gen 1:8). It is as firm and solid as the earth (Job 37:18), yet the psalmist says that God stretched out the heavens “like a tent” (Ps. 104:2; see also Isa. 40:22). This sky is supported by pillars (Job 26:11). A countless number of stars (Gen 15:5) were affixed in the sky (Gen 1:14-18), but the sun and moon coursed across it. There were also windows in the sky (Isa 24:18) through which God could shower the earth with gifts or punishments: rain (Gen. 7:11; Luke 4:25; Acts 14:17), manna (Exod. 16:14; Ps. 78:24), even wind or spirit (Num. 11:31; Job 26:13; Ps. 135:7; Jer. 10:13; Matt. 3:16; Acts 2:2; 1 Pet. 1:12).[[127]](#footnote-127)

This view is illustrated in Wyns article elsewhere in this issue (p. 14) and he cites some of the scholarship *pro* and *con* which should be consulted. A Bible reader might suspect that Pilch was being far too literal in his reading and this is correct.

**The alternative view is that Biblical Cosmology is much like what we see around us today**. There is the land stretching before us; we look up and there is the sky, an open expanse in which the birds fly, and in which we see the stars; we see the sun and the moon moving in front of each other, and we see the moon changing shape; on the seashore we see the sea stretching before us, and under the earth there is subterranean water which comes out of the ground; rain comes from the clouds above; and, as we turn our head 360 degrees, looking up and around us on a clear day we see that the sky meets the ground as a dome.

This view is not our current scientific cosmology, nor is it particularly scientific but that does not make it false, as truth and falsity here is all about **appearance**. We should not read modern concepts of the planet, the solar system and the universe into Genesis. Equally, we should not read ANE cosmology into Genesis when such cosmology goes beyond **the language of appearance**. The problem with the interpretation of Genesis 1 is that it has been read through the ideas that readers have had about cosmology down the centuries which has led to errors.

**The Noun ‘Firmament’**

Is ‘solidity’ part of the meaning of the noun *rāqîa*‛? The database of texts is small—Genesis, Daniel, Ezekiel and Psalms.

*Psalms*

The first Psalms’ text suggests that ‘spatiality’ could be an aspect of the meaning of *rāqîa*‛ but not ‘solidity’.

Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Ps 150:1 (KJV)

Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty expanse. Ps 150:1 (NASB)

Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament! Ps 150:1 (NRSV)

There is a parallelism in Ps 150:1 between ‘sanctuary’ and ‘firmament’ where praise is to take place. A sanctuary is a spatial structure and the preposition ‘in’ (Heb: *be*) is appropriate for talk about such a structure. This could be a reference to the typical ‘heavens’ of the sanctuary on earth or the heavens where the angels praise God. The firmament is characterized as ‘of his power (‛*oz*)’ which associates God with the firmament and the expression of his ‘power’. This could be recognition of God’s governance of the earth from heaven. Interestingly, the NRSV does not choose ‘dome’ for *rāqîa*‛ here (unlike in Genesis and Ezekiel), presumably sensing its inappropriateness and preferring what is today the more obscure ‘firmament’.

The associations for *rāqîa*‛ here are **not those for a surface but for a space**. Within the Genesis account, a spatial aspect is supported by the factual detail of there being ‘birds *of* the heavens’ (Gen 1:26; cf. Deut 4:17) and the naming of the firmament as ‘the heavens’. In its own terms, Genesis is about the creation of these ‘local heavens’ that are the firmament rather than any wider concept that we may impose from our modern understanding or even from the rest of the Bible.

Seely does not discuss the linguistic contribution of Ps 150 to *rāqîa*’ and affirms,

…the word *samayim* (heaven[s]) is broader in meaning than *raqia*‛. It encompasses not only the *raqia*‛ (v. 8; Ps 19:6; 148:4) but the space above the *raqia*‛ (Ps 2:4; 11:4; 139:8) as well as the space below (Ps 8:8; 79:2). Hence birds fly in the heavens, but never in the *raqia*‛.[[128]](#footnote-128)

There are a number of problems with this analysis:

(1) Lexicons typically give several meanings for many words; which meaning we have in a text depends on the context of that text. The claim that *šāmayim* has a broader range of meanings doesn’t of itself settle its particular meaning in Genesis 1.

(2) His Psalms’ texts cited don’t include the word *rāqîa*‛ and so they don’t show any relation of ‘encompassing’. There is no ‘above’ or ‘below’ preposition in those texts to establish the relations asserted between the spaces.

(3) There are many uses of *šāmayim* (398) and very few uses of *rāqîa*‛ (15; 3 outside Genesis and Ezekiel); to assert that birds never fly in the *rāqîa*‛ is not statistically significant. Once the *rāqîa*‛ has been named *šāmayim* it is unexceptionable for *šāmayim* to then be the main term of use. The contrast that birds never fly in the *rāqîa*‛ is misleading.

(4) There being spaces above and below the *rāqîa*‛ does not exclude the *rāqîa*‛ **itself** being spatial. There is no ‘hence’ to be had from Seely’s premises to his conclusion.

(5) Even if we agreed that *šāmayim* is broader in meaning and encompasses the *rāqîa*‛, there is nothing in this argument that carries the implication that the *rāqîa*‛ is solid.

In the light of (1)-(5), we can instead observe that the **naming** of the firmament as ‘the heavens’ involves paronomasia: it is a typical aetiology explaining a Hebrew term. The waters (*mayim*) have a firmament between them and so it is called *šāmayim*.[[129]](#footnote-129) In Gen 1:6-8 therefore the firmament and the heavens are co-extensive.

The second Psalms’ text is less conclusive,

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Ps 19:1 (NRSV)

The parallelism in the clauses here reflects Genesis where the firmament is called ‘the heavens’. The text (‘the firmament proclaims the work of God’s hands’) could be an anthropomorphic metaphor in that it is just the wonder of what was made that ‘proclaims’ the work of God’s hands. Psalms 8:3 provides the obvious interpretation:

When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established… Ps 8:3 (RSV)

Again, perhaps oddly, the NRSV does not choose ‘dome’ for *rāqîa*‛ for Ps 19:1. So, as in the case of Psalm 150, the parallelism suggests that the meaning of *rāqîa*‛ could have a spatial aspect but there isn’t anything in this text to exclude the idea of surface.

*Ezekiel*

In Ezekiel, the appearance of a firmament is described in comparative terms (‘likeness’),

Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of a firmament, like an eye of ice/frost, fearful, spread out (*nātāh*) above their heads. Ezek 1:22 (RSV revised)

This is **not** the actual Genesis firmament; further, what we have described is not *as such* a firmament—it is something *like* a firmament (there are others?). The aspects of a firmament that are being picked up are (i) the appearance like an eye of ice/frost; and (ii) the stretched-out nature of what was seen above the heads of the living creatures.

The Hebrew is lexically ‘as an eye of ice/frost’. Translations vary, for example, the NRSV has the rather dynamic “shining like crystal” and the KJV has “as the colour of the terrible crystal”. The comparison ‘as an eye of’ uses the ordinary common noun for an ‘eye’. However, in the construct state, as part of an expression, we have a figure of speech as is obvious elsewhere:

…like the color of gum resin Num 11:7 (NRSV)

…like in colour to polished brass Dan 11:6 (KJV)

These are the two occurrences of the comparison outside Ezekiel and translators render the figure dynamically in terms of colour. Other versions may not use the word ‘colour’ but an expression of appearance such as ‘the gleam of’ or ‘the appearance of’. So, the comparison is **not about composition** (‘ice/frost’ or ‘crystal’) and therefore indicative of solidity; it is about colour and appearance. Colour is a phenomenal quality and hence Seely just gets it wrong when he avers,

As to the composition of this firmament, it looked like “terrible crystal or ice.”[[130]](#footnote-130)

*Composition* is not an aspect of meaning for the figure ‘as an eye of…’ but instead appearance and colour. The Hebrew is equally rendered as ‘ice’ or ‘frost’—either is possible, but of the seven occurrences of this figure, ‘crystal’ is only preferred for Ezek 1:22 following the lead of the LXX and possibly also the NT (Rev 4:6). This is just interpretation on the part of the Septuagint translator and it misapplies the NT. Since the figure is about *appearance* and not composition, there is no reason to discard ‘ice/frost’ for ‘crystal’ just because we have a theophany. Of course, ‘ice/frost’ and some ‘crystal’ are not unlike in colour.

Within Ezekiel, elsewhere, the comparison is consistently used in respect of colour and appearance (phenomenal qualities). The KJV and NRSV choices for the figure are:

…like gleaming amber/ as the colour of amber Ezek 1:4

…like the colour of burnished brass/like burnished bronze Ezek 1:7

…like unto the colour of a beryl/ like the gleaming of beryl Ezek 1:16

…as the colour of amber/ like gleaming amber Ezek 1:27

…as the appearance of amber/ like the appearance of brightness, like gleaming amber Ezek 8:2

…as the colour of a beryl stone/ like gleaming beryl. Ezek 10:9

We can only guess at the colour indicated by ‘eye of ice/frost’—perhaps a transparency or translucency, but the verb ‘to stretch out’ is a clear description.

Seely argues,

Inasmuch as the throne mentioned was apparently sitting on this firmament (cf. Exod 24:10) and the firmament looked like crystal or ice, it is apparent that the firmament is solid and is certainly not mere atmosphere or space or simply phenomenal language.[[131]](#footnote-131)

 The relevant verse is,

...there was a voice above and in respect of the firmament that was over their heads, when they stood, and had let down their wings. And from above and in respect of the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. Ezek 1:25-26 (KJV revised); cf. Ezek 10:1

The use of the definite article here is anaphoric and the added detail is that there was a voice ‘from above and in respect of’ (quoting Gen 1:7) the firmament that was over the heads of the living creatures.

There is no verb for ‘to sit’ being used here and so Seely’s “apparent sitting” is unwarranted and being deployed to bolster his ‘solidity’ thesis. The prepositions used can be ‘upon’ or equally ‘above’; in addition, the extra preposition adds the idea of ‘(from) above) which would be one way to suggest distance between the throne and the firmament. So, we cannot infer that the throne is literally ‘on’ the firmament. Accordingly, there is nothing in the prepositions chosen to argue that the throne was “apparently sitting on this firmament”.

We can decide our choice of preposition on the basis of what was being seen and this was a whirlwind, a cloud and a fire (Ezek 1:4); this phenomenon does not suggest solidity; rather, it suggests that ‘above’ is the correct reading of the preposition—the throne is not ‘on’ the firmament. Again, we don’t have the actual firmament of Genesis 1 described and the detail given doesn’t include a word from which we can argue that ‘solidity’ is an aspect of the meaning of *rāqîa*‛. A reasonable guess here is that what was being seen in the whirlwind was colour *extended* above the heads of the living creatures and below the throne. Seely is simply wrong to say that we don’t have phenomenal language. What we have in Ezekiel is a theophany in a whirlwind with an element that corresponds to Genesis.

There isn’t an identity between the two firmaments but a **relation of representation**:[[132]](#footnote-132) the firmament seen in Ezekiel’s vision is represented by the Genesis firmament. This is an important point because in visions of the divine throne there is the element of that which is stretched out before the ‘throne’:

* In Rev 4:6, 15:2 this is the sea of glass like crystal mingled with fire.
* In Exod 24:10 it is a pavement of sapphire like heaven for clearness.

There are interesting differences to note here: a sea of glass is not a pavement but both are on the horizontal plane before the ‘throne’. This is obviously a **different geometry** to that proposed by Seely for the firmament (dome/vault (?)) and a better fit for our proposal (expanse). The use of the verb ‘to stretch’ also supports ‘expanse’.

The sea of glass is not a ‘sea’; it is ‘glass’ and, moreover, mingled with fire which is odd. We know this because the waters are above the firmament; they are not the firmament. The glass is like crystal and this connects to the ‘ice/frost’ of Ezekiel. That is, the comparative relation is carried over: the firmament of Ezekiel is ‘like an eye of ice/frost’; the glass of Revelation is ‘like crystal’—this is about colour and appearance. The mingling of the fire adds to the mental picture.

The comparative element is also in Exodus, but now it is ‘*like* heaven for clearness’. This is an obvious correlation with ‘the firmament’ in Genesis which is called ‘heaven’. The pavement is clear like heaven—which rather identifies transparency/translucency as a quality of the firmament.

Ezekiel, Revelation and Exodus give us three different visions of the divine throne, but they are not descriptions of the actual firmament of Genesis. The Revelation and Exodus visions stress the appearance and the colour of what is being seen, but the ‘solidity’ of a pavement or glass is not found in the description of the firmament of the whirlwind, cloud and fire of Ezekiel’s vision.

The lack of a solid material word like ‘pavement’ and ‘glass’ in Ezekiel is telling; we cannot infer for its vision the presence of a solid firmament. The absence of the word *rāqîa*‛ in Exodus is to be noted, but clearly a pavement is solid, as is the glass in the vision of Revelation. The close association of Ezekiel, Revelation and Exodus, and their evident relevance to the understanding of Genesis, shows that what we have in the first two days of creation is a **natural display** of the ‘throne-room’ presence of God, but the leading evidence here is Ezekiel and its firmament of the whirlwind, cloud and fire.

*Daniel*

Daniel’s reference to the firmament of Genesis has nothing for the ideas of ‘solidity’ or ‘spatiality’, but rather, any information about the semantics of *rāqîa*‛ is dependent on Genesis:

And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. Dan 12:3 (KJV); cf. Ezek 8:2

The definite article here, with the mention of the stars, tells us that the firmament has brightness, which we can reasonably take to be from the stars. The verb ‘to shine’ with ‘the stars’ is a simile of the warning that the wise among the resurrected represent; its homonym (*tsāhar*) is mostly used for warning (e.g. 2 Kgs 6:10). The association of the stars with the firmament picks up on the Genesis detail of lights being ‘in’ (*be*) the firmament of heaven. The preposition is consistent with the firmament being conceived as an expanse as well as rather than a solid dome upon which the stars might be said to be placed.

Placing Daniel alongside Ezekiel, we have a term that can be used in similes for a local phenomenon (a whirlwind) and for the location of the stars.

*Summary*

While we have the most references to the firmament in Genesis, the evidence so far suggests that the firmament is **spatial**; it has **colour and light**; it is **stretched**; and it has **birds**. There is nothing so far to suggest a solid dome or a surface, but we still have to look at Genesis.

**Related Verbs and Metal-Working**

The related verb to *rāqîa*‛ is *rāqa*‛. It means ‘to beat out, spread out’. It is used in metalworking, e.g. “And they did beat the gold into thin plates” (Exod 39:3). Or again, bronze censors were hammered out as a covering for the oblong altar (Num 17:4; cf. Jer 10:9). Clearly, ‘shaping’ into a dome or any other shape is not part of the meaning of the verb. But also, neither is the verb tied to metal-working:

Can you, with him, spread out the skies (*shachaq*), strong as a molten mirror? Job 37:18 (NASB)

Here, the skies are spread out (*rāqa*‛), but no vault or dome-like shape is indicated in the use of the verb. Likewise, the earth is ‘spread out’ (*rāqa*‛, Ps 136:6; Isa 42:5; 44:24), but shaping is not part of the sense and neither is ‘to make solid/solidify’ or ‘to work with metal’. The verb therefore does not offer us semantic ingredients to allow us to say ‘solid dome’ is the meaning of *rāqîa*‛; rather, the Isaiah texts *parallel* the verb with ‘stretch out the heavens’ which reinforces the meaning of ‘spread out’ for the verb. If something is spread out, stretched out or beaten out, what do we say that we have in front of us? It depends on what it is, but if it was the sky or the earth (rather than a bronze plate), the natural suggestion for *rāqîa*‛ would be ‘expanse’.

The bronze or the gold, and the earth or the skies are not being made in the *rāqa*‛ texts; they are there to be beaten out or spread out. This suggests that *rāqîa*‛ would be used to describe a **characteristic** of (to use our examples) gold, bronze, the earth and the skies. This is turn shows that a question like ‘What is the firmament?’ is misconceived.

The Job text is interesting in that the ‘skies’ (*shachaq*, 7x) or, more likely, ‘clouds’ (*shachaq*, 11x) are spread out but compared to a molten mirror. They are not said to be made of metal or to be a mirror, but to be *like* a molten mirror. The Hebrew for ‘mirror’ is unique and is translated in the LXX by a word for ‘appearance/vision/spectacle’.

The chapter in Job is about an approaching weather phenomenon. The most likely aspect being referred to is stretched-out cloud in the distance reflecting light (Job 37:15). This is an important point because the idea of the firmament as a ‘dome’ is mythopoeic, but Job is describing appearances. We can think of this contrast in terms of perspective: in Genesis is the narrator looking to the distance towards the horizon and referring to an expanse, or is he looking straight-up and describing a vault? The narrator’s point of view in Gen 1:2 is that of someone seeing the Spirit of God hovering **in the distance** over the face of the waters but here the ‘face of the waters’ is not necessarily the ‘face of the deep’ and could imply the waters nearer to land. The verb used to describe the action of the Spirit of God is ‘hover’ and the form of the verb is used once elsewhere to describe the hovering of an eagle (Deut 32:11) over her young. The verb implies a land-based point of view for the narrator seeing the Spirit metaphorically hovering in the distance over water (waiting and looking). The metaphor carried by the verb is of instinctual protection and care.

**Related Nouns, Adjectives, and Thinness**

One related adjective is *riqua*‛ for something ‘hammered’ as in ‘hammered plate’ (Num 16:38, NASB, NRSV). The use is unique but this one example does not suggest we have something dome-shaped for *rāqîa*‛. Another related adjective is *raq* meaning ‘thin/lean’ (Gen 41:20, 27) which illustrates a consistency with *riqua*‛—of something hammered out (like a thin metal plate).

The related noun *rāqîq* is translated ‘wafer’ or ‘thin cake’ (e.g. Exod 29:2) which shows that we have here a family of words. This evidence lends support to seeing ‘thinness’ as an aspect of the meaning of *rāqîa*‛—‘Let there be a thin expanse in the midst of the waters’.

**Prepositions and the Birds**

Although we can treat ‘in’ (*be*) neutrally with regard to the lights[[133]](#footnote-133) ‘in’ the firmament, the preposition ‘in’ often carries a spatial connotation; however, this is not conclusive for determining whether *rāqîa*‛ has a spatial aspect.

Another prepositional phrase ‘*al penē* is used with ‘firmament’ in respect of the birds,

And God said, “Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open (‘*al penē*) firmament of heaven.” Gen 1:20 (KJV)

Then God said, “Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open (‘*al penē*) expanse of the heavens.” Gen 1:20 (NASB)

And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across (‘*al penē*) the dome of the sky.” Gen 1:20 (NRSV)

The different Hebrew preposition here is to be noted: the lights are ‘in’ the firmament but the action verb ‘fly’ has dictated the use of a different preposition for birds. The KJV and NASB also add an idiomatic element by adding ‘open’ to their rendering of the prepositional phrase. It makes little difference that the translations opt for ‘in’ and ‘across’ because each translation committee is following their respective idea about what they take to be ‘the firmament’. Who is right?

There are 129 occurrences of the prepositional phrase ‘*al penē* in the Hebrew Bible. The two main renderings for the phrase are ‘upon the face of’ and ‘in front of/before’ or close variations: the first of these is typically used in contexts where the associated noun denotes something *down* relative to the narrator’s point of view—i.e. ‘upon the face of the waters’ (e.g. Isa 19:8; Hos 10:7) or ‘upon the face of the ground/earth’ (many examples); and the second is typically used for relations along the *horizontal* relative to the narrator. So, for example, Jerusalem is ‘before’ the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:4); dust is cast ‘before’ the wind (Ps 18:43); the ark is before the Holy of Holies (2 Chron 5:9); and Jachin and Boaz are before the temple (2 Chron 3:17). Thus, one main use of the preposition is about ‘being upon’ something and the other principal use is about a relative position in spatial terms.

Rarer usage of the preposition includes priority in rank (Deut 21:16) and correspondence in measurement (2 Chron 3:8). Equally, the kind of use we have in Gen 1:20 is exceptional because it is used with that which is ‘up’ rather than that which is either ‘down’ or in a relative position along the ‘horizontal’. The sense of ‘being upon’ conveyed typically with ‘upon the face of the ground’ or ‘upon the waters’ is not the same as that which would be conveyed by being ‘upon the face of’ a dome, vault or ceiling. When we have rare (or unique) examples of Hebrew syntax, it is difficult to know precisely what is meant.

One way to proceed is to look at close parallels. So, there is a concept of being *under*[[134]](#footnote-134) (*be*) a roof as well as *on* a roof (Gen 19:8; Josh 2:8; Jud 16:27; 2 Sam 11:2)—but no use of *upon the face of* a roof. This analogous example of which prepositions are chosen does not lend support to the proposal that the firmament is a solid dome.

Or again, there is a regular concept of being ‘under’ (*tachath*) heaven (Deut 2:25; etc.) as well as a concept of heaven being ‘over’ (‘*al*) someone’s head (Deut 28:23); the birds fly ‘in’ (*be*) heaven (Deut 4:17; Prov 30:19; Jer 8:7); winds blow ‘in’ heaven (Ps 78:26); there are things ‘in’ heaven (Exod 20:4); thunder sounds ‘in’ heaven, as well as hail and lightening (1 Sam 2:10; Ps 18:14; Jer 10:13); and God is ‘in’ heaven (e.g. Ps 115:3). The point here is that spatiality is indicated for the heavens and the firmament is called ‘the heavens’ (Gen 1:8). There doesn’t seem to be scope for the idea of a *solid* firmament in this line of evidence. However, Seely makes the contrast,

Rather, birds fly upon the face or in front of the *raqia*‘ (Gen 1:20).[[135]](#footnote-135)

Seely hedges his bets for the preposition with “upon the face or in front of”, but he does not do the analysis necessary to ascertain how to distinguish the two senses. The two senses are not equivalent and come in different contexts of use for the preposition (as we have seen).

As a choice for Gen 1:20, the prepositional function of ‘being upon’ seems implausible compared to the main alternative of ‘before/in front of’ the firmament. However, the NASB and KJV include ‘open’ for the preposition to give respectively ‘in the open expanse’ and ‘in the open firmament’. Seely does not discuss this third option. This further choice for the preposition is reflected elsewhere in the phrases ‘in the open field(s)’ (Lev 14:7; 17:5; Num 19:16; 2 Sam 11:11; Jer 9:22; Ezek 29:5; 32:4; 33:27; 39:5) and ‘in the open valley’ (Ezek 37:2 (KJV)). What the translators are sensing is idiomatic use of the prepositional phrase and seeking to convey that in the English.[[136]](#footnote-136)

This is a **third kind of use** of the prepositional phrase and it is neither like the ‘upon’ or ‘before’ senses. We can appreciate the distinct nature of this use by comparing it with typical examples of the *positional use*:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Positional Use** | **Expansive Use** |
| died before Gen 11:28 | let the living bird loose into the open field Lev 14:7 |
| before Mamre Gen 23:19 | sacrifices…which they offer in the open field Lev 17:5 |
| that *is* before Egypt Gen 25:18 | whoever in the open field touches the slain Num 19:16 |
| served as priests before their father Aaron Num 3:4 | encamped in the open field 2 Sam 11:11 |
| before the son of the hated Deut 21:16 | the carcases of men shall fall as dung upon the open field Jer 9:22 |
| passed on before the king 2 Sam 15:18 | him that is in the open field will I give to the beasts to be devoured Ezek 33:27 |

These uses show (mainly static) position before in time; position before in a geographical space (cities, hills, etc.); or position before an individual. However, since a field is an open space or an expanse, the third kind of use of the prepositional phrase is typically rendered as ‘in’, except where the verb is directional we have the more appropriate ‘into’ and ‘upon’ prepositions.

With Gen 1:20 using a dynamic verb of movement (‘birds fly’) the positional sense of the prepositional phrase is ruled out by the pattern illustrated in the table for typical positional uses; an expansive kind of use is intended. This is why not only the NASB and KJV use ‘in’ but other versions like the NET (‘across the expanse of the sky’) and the ESV (‘across the expanse of the heavens’) follow this understanding.

However, Seely further affirms,

This phrase *upon the face* (surface) or *in front of* the *raqia*‘ is important in that it implies the *raqia*‘ was neither space nor atmosphere. For birds do not fly *upon the surface or in front of* space or air, but rather in space or air.[[137]](#footnote-137)

This further affirmation continues the mistake of thinking only in terms of ‘upon the face’ or ‘in front of’, and it compounds that mistake with an illicit inference that *rāqîa*‛ is ‘neither space nor atmosphere’. These notions are not in play with the translations ‘in the open firmament/expanse’, whether Seely means ‘outer space’ or just ‘space’ (it is not clear)—similarly ‘air’ is not part of the meaning of *rāqîa*‛.

**Readers, Hearers, and the Stars**

What knowledge did the first hearers and/or readers of the Genesis account bring to the table? Seely argues,

Gen 1:17 also testifies that the *raqia*‛ is not air or atmosphere for it says that God placed the stars (and probably the sun and moon) “in the *raqia*‛ or the heavens.” But the stars are not located in the air or atmosphere. So we know the *raqia*‛ (in which 1:17 locates them) cannot be air or atmosphere.[[138]](#footnote-138)

This is an argument based upon what *we* know rather than what the first hearers or readers might have known. Further, it is straw man for someone arguing that ‘expanse’ is the meaning of *rāqîa*‛ rather than “air or atmosphere”. Finally, it equates ‘physical location’ with the sense of ‘set…in’ for Gen 1:17 without any argument.

The Genesis account has no relative positional information regarding the lights and the waters. Commentators have asked how the waters can be above the stars in the firmament, but asking this question fails to take into account the limitation of the narrator’s **point of view**. The question assumes that the narrator is looking straight up and describing a vault, but in fact he is looking to the horizon and describing an expanse. We know this because the narrative description in v. 2 is all about *contact* with the surface of the deep/waters.

Once it is realized that the narrator is on the ground looking towards the horizon (the perspective of v. 2), it can be understood that the account is not fixing relative positions (falsely) of the waters and the stars in a solid firmament. Rather, at first, an expanse is brought about as the waters rise; subsequently, lights appear in that expanse. Their appearance is **not** related to the waters above the expanse but to the withdrawal of the Shekinah Light of Day One. The waters are not in the picture of Day Four; just the firmament. We cannot assume that the waters are there in a permanent way as a feature of the atmosphere. It is not difficult to picture the sun, moon and stars appearing low above the horizon. The account therefore has historical resonance.

In phenomenal terms, the sun and the moon are seen today ‘in’ the sky (irony). We have no reason to suppose that human visual experience has been different in the past when local atmospheric conditions prevent humans on the ground seeing the sun and the moon in the sky. The question therefore is whether ‘seeing’ or ‘needing to see’ the sun and the moon (or the stars) is a presupposition of the Genesis text. In fact, seeing and measuring the sun and the moon is presupposed by the text because one purpose of the lights is for signs seasons, days and years. However, the *location* of the lights is not important for this purpose—planetary satellites or a solar system and their location are therefore not the focus for the text. Such a focus foists modern concerns on the text.

We need to be careful not to smuggle in modern ideas about the planet, the atmosphere or outer space into a linguistic discussion of an ancient term of reference like *rāqîa*’ and also when considering the import of a preposition like ‘in’ (*be*).

What the original readers/hearers knew or believed is one thing; the meaning of a word in Hebrew is another. For example, if we place to one side our knowledge of the planet, the solar system and outer space, we might affirm some simple observational things about the original readers/hearers such as that they would have had notions of distance and depth in respect of the heavens. They would have seen birds and clouds pass in front of the sun, moon and stars; they would have seen the moon pass in front of the sun; we might also say that they had a notion of the air that they breathed; *and so on*.

Seely goes on to compound his misdirection,

For the stars do not look like they are located in the air or atmosphere. Rather (as anyone can tell on a clear night away from city lights) they look like they are embedded in a solid vault which is exactly why scientifically naive peoples believe in a solid vault, and why 1:17, in accordance with that belief, says God placed the stars in the *raqia*‛.[[139]](#footnote-139)

Seely continues to think in terms of ‘location’ and about the stars, rather than the ‘lights’ and what it means for them to be given ‘in the firmament’ (Gen 1:17). He also offers a guess as to why scientifically naïve people believe the stars were embedded in a solid vault (cf. Eliphaz—Job 22:14). However, the scenario of the text is not about the stars and it is not about location, so this argumentation is a red herring.

The scenario for the text is set in v. 2 and it is about darkness and the Spirit of God over the face of the deep-waters. This scenario is nothing like seeing the stars on a clear night. When the text then describes the making of an expanse between the dark-waters of the theophanic cloud and the deep-waters, again, this is nothing like looking up and imagining a vault. When the text then describes giving lights to rule in this firmament, the narrator hasn’t moved his position; he is still looking towards the horizon from the land. The expanse he sees there is the space where God commands that the lights ‘be’ to rule over the day and the night. The metaphor of rule signifies their being in the firmament rather than the Shekinah Light.

**Making the Firmament**

The second separation of the Genesis account of creation is that relating to the waters, so that there are waters above and below a firmament.

And God said, Let there be a firmament (*rāqîa*‛) in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. Gen 1:6 (KJV)

Then God said, “Let there be an expanse (*rāqîa*‛) in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” Gen 1:6 (NASB)

And God said, “Let there be a dome (*rāqîa*‛) in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” Gen 1:6 (NRSV)

Set against the scene setting of v. 2, the firmament is **seen in relation to the waters** **rather than a land** that was without form and void. This is an important limitation because it prevents us thinking of the atmosphere of the planet as a whole and think instead of a more local phenomenon. A detail given (and stressed twice) concerns ‘a surface’. In terms of the narrator’s perspective, this detail fixes the **line of sight** as one that is towards the horizon rather than upwards into the middle distance of the sky or more vertically towards the heavens. This militates against there being a dome-cosmology implied in the use of the word *rāqîa*‛.

And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. Gen 1:7 (KJV)

And God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. Gen 1:7 (NASB)

So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. Gen 1:7 (NRSV)

The verb here is ‘*āšāh* and this is very common and has a broad range of meanings, with “to do, to make” (BDB, 793) being the most common and the most likely sense for this statement. What God did was to separate the waters and bring about a firmament between the two waters. The conjunction here is epexegetical, i.e. the dividing of the waters specifies what the making of the firmament consisted in—so, the use of the verb ‘to make’ doesn’t imply anything about whether the firmament was solid. Of course, if the firmament was a solid divider, it would not be *between* the two bodies of water; rather, it would just be *under* the heavenly waters—it would have no function in respect of the earthly waters.

Further, if the firmament was ‘solid’ then the natural verb to use would have been *rāqa*’(‘to hammer out, spread out, stretch out’)—the related verb to *rāqîa*’; instead we have the general ‘doing’ verb ‘*āšāh*. Moreover, if reference to a ‘divider’ was intended, a different noun related to the verb ‘to divide’ would have been chosen instead of *rāqîa*‛. The sense of *rāqîa*‛ is not that of a ‘divider’ because what is beaten out (*rāqa*‛) is not just plating material (Exod 39:3), but enemies (2 Sam 22:43); the earth (Isa 42:5); and even just a gesture (Ezek 6:11). The minimum that the verb suggests for the noun is the basic idea of ‘that which is beaten or stretched /spread out’, for which we have the abstract noun in English—‘expanse’. If we want to ask what is between the waters below and above, we might say that it is the air or the atmosphere, or it is empty space, *and so on*. When we do this, we are bringing our perceptions to the table rather than showing that such observation is part of the meaning of *rāqîa*‛.

In short, the related verb cannot contribute any more detail about the nature of ‘that which is beaten or stretched/spread out’. In the absence of other detail in the text, it is the interpreter’s imposition to add details like, ‘dome’, ‘solid’, ‘divider’, ‘air’, ‘atmosphere’, ‘outer space’, ‘space’, *and so on*.

Seely’s contrary argument is stated in this way,

For when God divided the light from the darkness (two intangibles) nothing was made. But in order to divide the tangible upper ocean from the lower ocean the *raqia*‛ was made (‘*āšāh*). The combination or dividing two tangibles (as opposed to intangibles) with something that was made (‘*āšāh*), a verb which often means “manufacture,” implies a tangible, i.e., solid divider. It would be unnatural to use ‘*āšāh* to say that God made space. Nor is it a particularly apt word for saying God made air.[[140]](#footnote-140)

There are a number of points to make about this contrary argument. First, we don’t know that the darkness in Gen 1:2 was an intangible; secondly, we need to consider whether the waters above the firmament are an ‘ocean’ in biblical terms; and thirdly, we need to ask whether ‘*āšāh* is an inappropriate verb for making an expanse.

Seely’s opponent is someone arguing that God made a planetary atmosphere, air itself, or the ‘space’ between earthly and heavenly ocean-waters. However, if the scene in v. 2, of darkness upon the face of the deep and the Spirit of God upon the face of the waters, is one of dark-waters enveloping God’s presence at creation, hovering upon the face of the deep-waters, then the making of the firmament is just the making of an *expanse* separating such dark-waters from the deep-waters; any physics is irrelevant From the perspective of a narrator looking towards the horizon, the choice of Hebrew verb is therefore quite natural, as it is the general Hebrew verb for ‘to do/make’ (cf. Isa 63:12).

This raises the question as to why we have an ‘expanse’ rather than another concept such as ‘space’ (Josh 3:4, *rāchōq*; Gen 32:16, *revach*); or why do we not have ‘air’ or ‘wind’ (Exod 14:21, *rūach*) as that which divided the waters? Perhaps the word for a ‘place’ (Ezek 43:7, *māqōm*) would have been better?[[141]](#footnote-141) The problem with the question is that it could be asked for any of these alternatives if they had been chosen. The question is really about determining why the theology of the concept of an ‘expanse’ is different from that of a ‘place’ or a ‘space’ or the ‘air’ or ‘wind’. Here, the obvious proposal is that the ‘expanse’ **separates** God.

**The Heavens**

The firmament is called ‘the heavens’ and commentators usually assume that ‘the heavens’ *embrace* the firmament, i.e. they say that the two are not co-extensive. They make this judgment in order to make sense of the biblical data: the birds fly *in* heaven; God dwells *in* heaven; and the sun, moon and stars are *in* heaven. This is one way to harmonise the biblical data, but in its own terms Genesis 1 is a self-consistent account; there is no distinction between the firmament and ‘the heavens’—there is identity.

It is significant that the verb ‘to stretch’ is used of the created heavens:

Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein… Isa 42:5 (KJV); see also Isa 44:24

The simile is that of a curtain belonging to a tent:

It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a drape, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in… Isa 40:22 (KJV revised)

The Tabernacle (alluded to here) was an angular tent (not a dome-like structure), and it required drapes to be stretched out supported by poles, and inside there was a curtain separating the two holy places. This is the simile that Isaiah uses to describe heaven as the dwelling place of God. The motif of ‘stretching’ the heavens is common in Isaiah and elsewhere (Isa 40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 48:13; 51:13).[[142]](#footnote-142) The point here is that this simile of the drapes of an angular tent fits with the notion of the firmament as an expanse (or even an expansive thinness) that **separates** where God dwells.

Modern readers will try to make sense of this language in relation to their understanding of the planet, the solar system and outer space, but this is an exercise in interpretation rather than anything to do with the meaning of *rāqîa*‛. Understanding *rāqîa*‛ is just a matter of correctly analysing its occurrences in actual usage, taking into account related words in Hebrew and other Semitic languages. How we understand heaven vis-à-vis our modern knowledge is irrelevant to the linguistics. The simile of a drape contributes nothing to the meaning of *rāqîa*‛ except that it is consistent with the firmament understood as expansive and thin.

**Conclusion**

We have set out the linguistics of *rāqîa*‛ and argued that it means ‘expanse’. The expanse is whatever God did with the sky to separate the waters. ‘Expanse’ is a common choice for translators and commentators. The alternative of ‘dome/vault’ and the insistence that the *rāqîa*‛ is solid is based on a faulty analysis of the Hebrew linguistics.

The liberal-critical interpretation of scholars such as Seely rests on two assumptions:[[143]](#footnote-143) i) that God cannot *teach* everybody particular details about his work of creation, but only the general truth that he is a creator; and ii) that God cannot teach everybody *new things* about creation, things that oppose ANE ideas, but only use the cosmological ideas of the peoples. However, God chose the Hebrews out of all the nations of the earth and it is consistent with this rather singular choice that there be a rather singular revelation. The liberal-critical reading is a denial of the revelation that we have in Genesis.

The conservative interpretation is better (although not perfect). It recognises that God can communicate using the language of the day; it is just that there is no evidence that this is what he has done in the foundational account of Genesis 1. It recognises that we can mis-interpret Genesis to make it conform to our scientific understanding; but equally, it sees that we can mis-interpret Genesis by making it conform to the ‘scientific’ (mythical) understanding of its day (a mistake of the liberal-critical scholars). And so instead, it provides an interpretation based on the premise that God can teach men using their language for **describing what they can see**—darkness, light, land, water, sea, lights, cattle, birds, *and so on*. There is nothing mythical in this language and so God is not using the ANE cosmological ideas of the day.

The book ‘A Cultural Handbook to the Bible’ (reviewed elsewhere) is a book aimed at a general readership, written in an accessible style with lots of useful information. There are many sections presenting different information and readers should get a general picture of the book from the previous reviewer. The main problem with the book is its presentation of Biblical Cosmology. Pilch presents a common view in scholarship but it is not the only view as we have seen in this first part of our article.

Modern readers of English versions are used to differing translations of terms like *rāqîa*‛ (KJV, ‘firmament’) and this is an illustration of differences of opinion among translators and therefore scholarship. Readers also bring their own background of ideas to Scripture and this influences their interpretation. We have ideas about the sky, the solar system and the universe and we can (mistakenly) just read these ideas into the Bible without allowing the Bible to guide our thinking. Equally, we can interpret a Bible text through the lens of socio-cultural information from the ANE and fail to appreciate that the Bible text is not carrying *that* information. These are the pitfalls in this area and readers should be aware that Pilch is presenting a common view but not the only view.

How do you approach an interpretation that is new to you or one to which your first reaction is negative? One of things you would do is jot down all the texts (biblical and non-biblical) that the author uses and comments upon and perform your own analysis. Christadelphians have a tradition of doing textual analysis of biblical texts and providing alternative analyses to church scholarship. We have done this in this essay.

The point here though is that the same kind of analysis is needed for the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) texts and *all* the relevant texts have to be done. Pilch and Seely require this response because they interpret Biblical Cosmology to be similar and comparable to ANE cosmology. In **Part Two of this essay** (in the next issue) will analyse the ANE texts.

**Columnists**

**Archaeology**

**(J. Burke)**

**Did Jesus Exist? (Part 2 – Concluded)**

This article continues the assessment of sources outside the New Testament which are commonly cited as witnesses for the historicity of Jesus. They are not all of equal value, and some of them do not contribute very useful historical data.

**Pliny the Younger (Roman senator), c. 111-113 CE.**

While he was the governor of Pontus-Bythinia from c. 111-113 CE, Pliny wrote to the emperor Trajan asking for advice on how to deal with Christians.[[144]](#footnote-144) However, Pliny’s letters tell us only about the beliefs and practices of the Christians in his day; he does not refer to Jesus specifically, and does not provide any independent information on Jesus as a historical figure.[[145]](#footnote-145) Like Thallos, Pliny does not provide any useful information confirming the existence of Jesus.[[146]](#footnote-146)

**Tacitus (Roman historian), c. 116 CE.**

In his historical work ‘Annals’ (written around 116 CE), Tacitus refers explicitly to Jesus as the founder of Christianity, and his crucifixion by Pontius Pilate.[[147]](#footnote-147) Arguments that this passage was not written by Tacitus, and was inserted by later Christians, have failed to convince mainstream scholarship.[[148]](#footnote-148) This remains one of the earliest historical references to Jesus, and to his crucifixion under Pilate.

**Suetonius (Roman historian), c. 120 CE.**

In his work ‘Lives of the Caesars’ (c. 120 CE), Suetonius refers to the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by the emperor Claudius, which Suetonius says was ‘since they were always making disturbances because of the instigator Chestus’.[[149]](#footnote-149) The vast majority of scholars consider this passage to be genuine,[[150]](#footnote-150) and the word ‘Chrestus’ was a common mistaken spelling of ‘Christus’ (meaning ‘Christ’ in Latin).[[151]](#footnote-151)

Nevertheless, this passage speaks of Jews making disturbances in Rome as a result of ‘Chrestus’, which does not seem to be a reference to Jesus (who was never in Rome).

Although Suetonius refers elsewhere to Christians (whom he calls ‘Christiani’), he does not do so in this passage; consequently, this reference in Suetonius is of little use in establishing the historicity of Jesus.[[152]](#footnote-152) [[153]](#footnote-153) [[154]](#footnote-154)

**Mara bar Serapion (Syrian writer), c. 73-150 CE.**

A non-Christian Syrian writer named Serapion, in a letter to his son (the date of which is still uncertain and debated), refers to a ‘wise king of the Jews’, for whose death God held the Jews responsible, punishing them by exiling them from Judea and scattering them throughout the earth.[[155]](#footnote-155)

The only surviving copy of this letter is dated to the seventh century, and Serapion does not name Jesus, but the context suggests he is the ‘wise king’ referred to.[[156]](#footnote-156) [[157]](#footnote-157) This provides some evidence for the historicity of Jesus. As a result of these sources, Jesus’ existence is considered well established by professional historiography, and the idea that he did not exist is typically not taken seriously.

‘The theory of Jesus’ nonexistence is now effectively **dead as a scholarly question**.’ [[158]](#footnote-158)

**Contemporary Scholarship**

Although details of the life of Jesus are still hotly disputed, there is still a very broad agreement on the key events of his life. The following statements are all agreed on by the overwhelming consensus of peer reviewed professional scholarship on the historicity of Jesus, from those as conservative as Witherington, Bloomberg and Habemas, through those less conservative such as Thiessen,[[159]](#footnote-159) and Sanders,[[160]](#footnote-160) to those as skeptical as Ehrman (agnostic),[[161]](#footnote-161) Vermès (Jew),[[162]](#footnote-162) [[163]](#footnote-163) [[164]](#footnote-164)and Lüdemann (atheist).[[165]](#footnote-165) [[166]](#footnote-166)

1. Jesus was born to a woman named Mary, during the reign of Herod the Great.
2. He had a father (biological or not), called Joseph.
3. He was baptized in Galilee.
4. He became an itinerant teacher.
5. He proclaimed the kingdom of God.
6. He conducted a healing ministry which involved certain genuine acts of healing.
7. He taught a subversive and counter-cultural socio-religious ethic expressed in wisdom sayings and parables; Mark 2:19; 3:27; 4:21; 10:25; 12:17, Matthew 5:38-48; 6:9-23; 7:7-8; 11:7-8; 18:12-14; 18:23-25; 20:1-15, Luke 6:20-21; 6:41-42; 9:58; 9:59-60; 10:30-35; 11:24-26; 12:22-31; 13:6-9; 13:20-21; 14:16-24; 15:11-32; 16:1-8a; 17:33; 18:1-8; 20:46 are all considered authentic sayings of Jesus by the Jesus Seminar.
8. He associated and identified with social outcasts.
9. He criticized the established Jewish religious elite.
10. He was arrested and crucified during the prefecture of Pontius Pilate, for being a public nuisance and social threat.
11. He died at around 30 years of age.

**Exegesis/Analysis**

**Benedict Kent**

**Simeon’s Song**

Having identified that Luke shows interest in three major motifs from the servant discourse of Isaiah (in our January column), it is now possible to explore how he crafts them into his own narrative episode, complete with their own ‘songs’ at the centre. The encounter with Simeon at the Temple is structured in four sections. The song (Section B) is the focus of our analysis in this column.

A. Introduction (2.25-28)

B. Song (2.29-32)

C. Audience reaction (2.33)

D. Additional comments (2.34-35)

In the song, Luke reworks imagery and phrases from the servant discourse to proclaim two of Luke’s programmatic themes: God’s tangible salvation (2.29-31) and salvation for Jew and Gentile (2.32). In Simeon’s additional comments to Mary (Section D), described by some commentators as an oracle, Luke reworks a third Isaianic motif: reversal of statuses (2.34). However, in his additional comments Simeon also introduces a significant new motif specifically from the servant song of Isaiah 52-53: the rejection and suffering of God’s servant (2.34-35). This significant motif significantly changes the mood of the narrative from one of exultation to one of foreboding.

The song itself is constructed as three couplets**[[167]](#footnote-167)** and each pairing contains the same or a similar number of syllables. Luke 2.29a and 29b have 12 and 10 syllables. Luke 2.30 and 2.31 have 15 syllables each. 2.32a and 32b have 9 syllables each. This tightly controlled metre helps give the song a musical quality and reveals its careful construction. Its regular structure lends itself to developing parallel ideas within the couplets.

29a Νῦν ἀπολύεις τὸν δοῦλόν σου, δέσποτα,

29b κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου ἐν εἰρήνῃ·

30 ὅτι εἶδον οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου τὸ σωτήριόν σου

31 ὃ ἡτοίμασας κατὰ πρόσωπον πάντων τῶν λαῶν,

32a φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν ἐθνῶν

32b καὶ δόξαν λαοῦ σου Ἰσραήλ.

“29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; 30 for mine eyes have seen thy salvation 31 which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel.” (Luke 2.29-32, RSV)

Simeon’s song is a patchwork of allusions to Isaiah’s servant discourse, particularly employing a lexical web very similar to the servant songs in the LXX. Luke maintains the lexicon of the servant songs by using servant and master language for the addressor and the addressee, thus linking Simeon to a wealth of passages from the Servant songs in the LXX, including Isa 42.1, 49.3, 5, 6, 7 and 52.13. Occasionally the LXX uses pai/j (as in 42.1, 49.6, and 52.13) but this term is interchangeable in Isaiah 42-53. Simeon addresses God as δέσποτα (master) and refers to himself as δοῦλόν (servant). He requests he be dismissed or released as a servant from his duty. Luke creates the intertextual relationship by **establishing Simeon as a servant figure** – a point that raises issues to be discussed later.

Luke’s lexical choices also allow for **Simeon to be interpreted as a watchman**.**[[168]](#footnote-168)** In the opening passage of the pericope he is described as one ‘waiting for the consolation of Israel’ evoking the image of a watchman waiting for dawn. This wait is completed by Simeon’s declaration that ‘my eyes have seen your salvation’ (Luke 2. 30). This salvation is described as light (2.32). τὸ σωτήριόν σου is reminiscent of Isa 46.13 and 52.10 amongst other passages, whilst ‘light for revelation to the Gentiles’ alludes to Isa 42.6, 49.6 in the LXX. ‘All people’ (v31) is reminiscent of ‘all flesh’ (Isa 40.5 LXX) and alludes to Is 52.10 LXX. Finally, δόξαν λαοῦ σου Ἰσραήλ (v32b) uses the same lexical choices as Isa 46.13 and 60.1 LXX. In fact Luke 2.30-32b is very close in concept to Isa 49.6 where the conceptual order of ‘all people – Gentiles - Israel’ is reversed for ‘Israel – Gentiles - end of the earth’. Luke communicates Isaiah’s servant-watchman motifs by appropriating a similar lexical network. The emphasis on sight, and that Simeon is promised he would ‘not see death until he had seen the Lord’s Christ’ (Luke 2.26) carries a second implicit allusion, placing **Simeon in the shadow of Moses**, God’s servant who was allowed to see the promised land but not enter it.**[[169]](#footnote-169)** The privilege of entering the land is instead reserved for Joshua, a servant of the next generation.

Luke employs noticeable repetition of second person pronouns to focus Simeon’s song on God as the source of salvation. The repetition of σου in τὸν δοῦλόν σου (v29a), ῥῆμά σου (v29b), τὸ σωτήριόν σου (v30) and λαοῦ σου Ἰσραήλ (v32b) contrasts with the single μου in οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου. Even in this particular case, Simeon’s μου is only relevant in being a witness to God’s activity. This repetition emphasises possession, as Simeon’s addressee is acknowledged as the source of identity, power and, most significantly, salvation.

As well as having metrical parallelism, the couplet structure also facilitates conceptual parallelism. The ‘light for revelation for the Gentiles’ in 2.32a strongly parallels the ‘glory of your people Israel’ in v32b. This is supported by the mirrored syntactical structure of two nouns (φῶς – δόξαν, ἐθνῶν – λαου) and a modifier (ἀποκάλυψιν – Ἰσραήλ) per line. ‘Light’ and ‘glory’ function in apposition to one another and expand the idea of God’s salvation in v30, whilst ‘Gentiles’ and ‘people’ are conjoined with ‘all people’ in v31.**[[170]](#footnote-170)**

The morphological elements of the passage emphasise one of the major Isaianic themes from Luke 3.3-5, the present accessibility of God’s salvation. Luke begins Simeon’s song with Νῦν, thus establishing a tone of immediacy appropriate to his recent revelation. This immediacy, evidencing the temporal accessibility of God’s salvation in the infant Jesus, will later be repeated by Jesus himself in the Nazareth sermon.

Luke’s choice of voice and tense also lends itself to the tone of immediacy. All verbs in the song are in the active voice. None are in the perfect tense thus avoiding the implication of completed action. The tense and voice emphasise uncompleted activity and support the tone of urgency.

The shift in emphasis across the passage supports the reading that the passage is simultaneously a fulfilment of prophecy and is itself prophetic, as the imagery shifts from micro fulfilment to macro fulfilment. The synecdoche of Simeon’s eyes (2.30)**[[171]](#footnote-171)** is a miniature of the larger image of the face of all people (2.31). Simeon’s sight, communicated by the verb εἶδον, is overshadowed by the ‘revelation’ (2.32). This shift in emphasis from a singular witness of God’s salvation to the larger, future witnessing gives the passage its prophetic element as well as supporting the image of Simeon as a watchman who sees the light of dawn before the city does.

Alliteration, consonance, sibilance and assonance are heavily utilised in Simeon’s song, increasing the passage’s musical quality, as well as linking words through their repeated phonetics. This is immediately evidenced in v29a’s δοῦλόν and δέσποτα which establishes the titles in apposition to one another. Assonance of the ‘υ’ and ‘οῦ’ in Νῦν ἀπολύεις and δοῦλόν σου gives the line its fluid and musical quality by its repeated vowel sounds. These stylistic devices are repeated in v29b with the ‘η’ and ‘ει’ sounds, in v30 with the ‘μ’ and ‘σ’ sounds and in v31 with the repeated ‘ω’ sound. The final couplet contrasts with the previous two by its lack of overt consonance or assonance, distinguishing it by its cacophonous sound and thus shaping it as an emphatic ending to the passage.

The third theme from Luke’s rendering of Isaiah 40 in Luke 3.5-6 is the **reversal of statuses**. Whilst this theme is not evident in Simeon’s song itself, it is alluded to in the form of Simeon’s additional comments to Mary: Ἰδοὺ οὗτος κεῖται εἰς πτῶσιν καὶ ἀνάστασιν πολλῶν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ (2.34, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel”). The two nouns in πτῶσιν καὶ ἀνάστασιν, whilst not lexically linked to 3.5-6, are conceptually linked as they communicate the reversal of statuses and create the same undulating image. This pattern is more evident when Simeon’s song is read in light of Mary’s song (particularly 1.52-53), which includes the same undulating shape and is lexically closer to 3.5-6.

It is only through this theme of reversal of statuses that Jesus’ rejection is foretold and suffering mentioned as part of the ‘package’ of salvation, as Simeon continues, καὶ εἰς σημεῖον ἀντιλεγόμενον, καὶ σοῦ δὲ αὐτῆς τὴν ψυχὴν διελεύσεται ῥομφαία (2.34-35). Whilst being programmatic of Jesus’ ministry, Simeon’s song itself does not mention suffering as the means to salvation. Simeon has to make an additional comment to foretell Jesus’ rejection. This additional comment functions as a hint to the audience that Jesus’ ministry will not always be so positively received. It alters the jubilant tone of the narrative and ends the pericope on a sinister note.

Luke’s decision to depict Simeon as God’s servant requires interpreters to consider whether Luke is depicting Simeon as the Isaianic servant or, on the other hand, is simply infusing his narrative with servant language. Consideration of the co-text of Luke 1-2 and the intertext of Isaiah 40 sheds light on the issue.

In the Introduction, Luke describes Simeon as waiting for ‘the consolation of Israel’, a phrase not in the LXX but strongly echoing Isa 40.1-2 which repeats ‘Comfort ye’ in its opening verse. That Simeon asks to be released from service also ties into the motif of an end to a period of waiting, which in Isa 40.2 is describing the consolation due to Jerusalem who has ‘served her term[[172]](#footnote-172)’ (NRSV). Simeon’s duty, to witness to the salvation of God in Jerusalem, strongly mirrors the command to Zion to ‘”Lift up your voice with strength […] say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!”’ (Is 40.9). Finally, the image of Simeon taking the infant Jesus in his arms (Luke 2.28) mirrors the description of the YHWH holding lambs in his arms (Isa 40.11). Similar to the Nazareth sermon, the Simeon pericope also echoes something of the liberation language from the Pentateuch. As a liberated Hebrew servant (Deut 15.12) he is not sent away empty-handed (Deut 15.13) but is given a lamb from his master’s flock (Deut 15.14).

By echoing Isaiah 40 in the narrative description, Simeon is closely associated with a herald to Israel, who is also referred to as YHWH’s servant (Isa 41.8). In Isaiah it is the herald figure’s duty to testify to Israel regarding God’s salvation, later seen as being mediated by God’s suffering servant of the servant poems. Simeon’s own words confirm it is Jesus who is being identified as the central Isaianic Servant who will be a light to the Gentiles (Isa 42.6) and marked by rejection and suffering (Isa 52.13-53.12). Whilst Luke is certainly saturating his narrative in the language of the servant songs, the character of Simeon is also strongly associated with a network of images from Isaiah 40, many of which centre around a servant figure who testifies to God’s salvation.

In the context of Luke 1-2, Simeon’s song is paired with the blessing of Anna the prophetess (Luke 2.36-38), forming a male-female partnership that parallels the earlier figures of Mary and Zechariah.**[[173]](#footnote-173)** These four are grouped together by Luke’s Isaianic allusions and by their association with the Holy Spirit, which is either ‘on’ them or ‘in’ them as they prophesy (1.35, 67, 2.25, 36). Joel Green comments that Simeon’s association with the spirit is part of Luke’s attempt to portray Simeon in prophetic terms.**[[174]](#footnote-174)** However, whilst prophetic is certainly one aspect of Simeon’s character, it seems that the co-text of Mary, Zechariah and Anna’s spirit-filled utterances identify Simeon primarily in an eschatological framework. The out-pouring of the spirit frames the beginning of Luke’s gospel with Joel 2.28-29, implicitly announcing an eschatological fulfilment that will later be made explicit by Peter at the beginning of Acts.**[[175]](#footnote-175)** By associating Simeon with the herald figure in Isaiah 40, and positioning him within a co-text of spirit-filled men and women Luke is, effectively, lending Isaiah new servant figures by which he can herald the salvation of God.

**Exposition**

**R. Benson**

**Introduction**

Psalm 110:1[[176]](#footnote-176) is one of the most frequent Old Testament quotations in the New Testament, occurring five times (Matt 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42-43; Acts 2:34-35; Heb 1:13). It is alluded to a further fourteen times (Matt 26:64; Mark 14:62; Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69; Acts 5:31, Acts 7:55-56, Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 8:1, 10:12-13, 12:2). This article will explore the way the New Testament writers use Psalm 110:1, particularly how they focus on different words depending on the purpose of the context.

**“My Lord”**

The first three occurrences of the quotation refer to the same incident and can be considered together.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Matt 22:43-45** | **Mark 12:36-37a** | **Luke 20:42-44** |
| He said to them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, | David himself said in the Holy Spirit, | For David himself says in the book of Psalms, |
| ‘The Lord said to my Lord,“Sit at My right hand,Until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet”’? | ‘The Lord said to my Lord,“Sit at My right hand,Until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet.”’ | ‘The Lord said to my Lord,“Sit at My right hand,  Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”’ |
| If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?” | David himself calls Him ‘Lord’; so in what sense is He his son?” | Therefore David calls Him ‘Lord,’ and how is He his son?” |

Jesus is at pains to highlight the authorship of the psalm, mentioning David before and after the quotation. This is in order to identify the “my” of “my Lord”. Since David is author of the Psalm, “my Lord” indicates David’s subservience to the Messianic figure in the Psalm.

Jesus’ question may at first be understood as casting doubt on the idea that the Messiah would be David’s son. However, the extensive references to Christ as the Son of David elsewhere in the Gospels (Matt 1:1, 9:27, 12:23, 15:22, 20:30-31, 21:9, 21:15, etc.) show that this cannot be the case. Rather Jesus is challenging the scribes’ perception of what sonship means. In the case of David and Jesus, sonship does not indicate subservience; Jesus is Lord – even of David.

**“At my right hand”**

Peter explains what is meant by “Sit at my right hand” (Acts 2:33-36). Commenting on Christ’s exaltation to “the right hand of God”, Peter continues “it was not David who ascended into heaven”. Thus, exaltation to the right hand means Christ’s ascension to heaven (also mentioned in Mark 16:19). Lest we miss the allusion in v. 33, Peter makes it explicit by quoting directly from Psalm 110 in the following verses.

Peter affirms that the quotation has now been fulfilled: “having been exalted to the right hand of God” (v. 33), “God has made him both Lord and Christ (v. 36).

The subsequent references to “the right hand of God” in the New Testament make it clear that it is not simply location which is in view, but the status and role of Jesus, and how that relates to those who follow him.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ref.** | **Allusion** | **Explanation** | **Result or consequence** | **Comment**Christ has been exalted… |
| Acts 5:31 | He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand | …as a Prince and a Savior,  | …to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. | … to bring repentance and forgiveness |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ref.** | **Allusion** | **Explanation** | **Result or consequence** | **Comment****Christ has been exalted…** |
| Rom 8:34 | …who is at the right hand of God, |  | …who also intercedes for us | … to intercede for believers |
| Eph 1:19-21 (ESV) | …when he […] seated him at his right hand  | …in the heavenly places, | …what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ | … by a power which also works in the lives of believers (who have also been “seated in the heavenly places”, Eph 2:6) |
| …far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come | …above all things, forever |
| Col 3:1-2 | …seated at the right hand of God. | […] above, where Christ is, | …keep seeking the things above […]Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. | … so believers should focus on heavenly things |

**“Sit”**

In the Letter to the Hebrews, each of the references to Psalm 110:1 begins with forms of “sit”, and this word seems to be the primary focus of the writer. Jesus’ sitting down is a result of (a) making “purification of sins” (v.3) and (b) “having becoming […] better than the angels” (v.4).

The angels theme is developed later in the chapter. God’s invitation to Jesus to “Sit at my right hand” (v. 13) is contrasted to the position of the angels who are “sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation. A similar sit/serve contrast made in Luke 17:7-8 illustrates the difference between lord and servant.

The purification/offering theme is alluded to elsewhere in Hebrews. Sitting “at the right hand of the throne of God” is the climactic result of “endur[ing] the cross” and “despising the shame” (Heb 12:1-2). More explicitly, Christ’s sacrificial ministry is contrasted with that of the Levitical priests (Heb 8:1-2, Heb 10:11-13). They stand, “daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices” but Christ “having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb 10:11-12). Christ’s sitting down is a result of the completion of his offering. Now he “wait[s] from that time onward until his enemies be made a footstool for his feet” (Heb 10:13).

The focus on sitting is somewhat puzzling in the light of the allusions to Psalm 110:1 in Acts 7:55-56. In reference to Stephen’s vision, Jesus is twice said to be “standing at the right hand of God”, indicating perhaps the continuing care of Christ for the saints.[[177]](#footnote-177)

**“Until”**

For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:25-28)

The quotation in this text is from Psalm 8:6: “You have put all things under his feet.” Yet this verse speaks neither of enemies, nor of a time limit (“until” or “when”). Rather, Paul has interpreted Psalm 8 in the light of Psalm 110. Drawing a parallel between “footstool of your feet” (Psalm 110) and “under his feet” (Psalm 8), Paul inserts “put… enemies” into his allusion to Psalm 8, replacing the verb *hupotassó* (“to make subject” from Psalm 8, as translated in 1 Cor 15:27) with *tithēmi* (“to put” from Psalm 110, as translated throughout the New Testament).

How does this inform our understanding of Paul’s use of Psalm 110:1? Paul’s focus in 1 Corinthians is on “until”. The “until” of the psalm indicates that the reign of Christ at the right hand of God will not be eternal. Once the promised subjugation of enemies is complete, “then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power” (1 Cor 15:24).

Paul’s composite allusion has precedent in the Gospels. The eagle-eyed reader may have noticed above a distinction between the quotation used by Matthew and Mark and that used by Luke, a distinction preserved in NASB, ESV, NIV, NET and NLT but obscured in KJV and NKJV. Matthew 22:44 and Mark 12:36 read “I put your enemies beneath your feet” (*thō tous echthrous sou* ***hupokatō*** *tōn podōn sou*), while Luke 20:42-43 has “I make your enemies a footstool for your feet” (*thō tous echthrous sou* ***hupopodion*** *tōn podōn sou*). Luke is a close translation of the Hebrew of Psalm 110:1, as is the LXX. Why then do Matthew and Mark change the quotation? Are they simply removing redundancy?

“Beneath your feet” is identical in Greek to “under his feet” in Psalm 8:6 (as quoted in Hebrews 2:8). It seems possible, then, that Matthew and Mark are alluding to Psalm 8 within their quotation from Psalm 110.

This accords with the theme of Jesus’ authority found particularly in Matthew’s gospel (Matt 7:29, 8:27, 9:6, 9:8, 28:18). The triumphal entry (Matt 21:1-11) and the cursing of the fig tree (Matt 21:18-22) illustrate Jesus’ authority and between these two instances, Jesus cleanses the temple and quotes from Psa 8:2: “Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself” (Matt 21:16).

Matthew follows this with a section on Jesus’ authority:

**A** Chief priests and elders: “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?”

**B** Question from Jesus: John the Baptist

**C** Three parables from Jesus

**D** Three questions from the Jewish authorities

**B** Question from Jesus: The son of David

 **A** “No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question.”

It seems entirely appropriate, therefore, for this section on the authority of Jesus to conclude with a quotation from Psa 110:1, combined with an allusion to Psa 8:6. Both passages indicate that his authority is God-given, and thus Jesus answers the Pharisees and Sadducees with Scripture, having previously done so through authoritative action and teaching.

**The “Son of David” is the “Son of Man”**

Another composite allusion is found in Jesus’ own use of Psalm 110:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Matt 26:64** | **Mark 16:42** | **Luke 22:69** |
| Jesus said to him, “You have said it *yourself*; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” | And Jesus said, “I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” | But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” |

This time the allusion is to Dan 7:13: “with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man.” Jesus is paralleling the “my Lord” of Psalm 110 with the “one like a son of man” of Daniel 7, and as such the invitation to sit at the right hand corresponds to the subsequent verses in Daniel: “and to him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him” (Dan 7:14a).

**Summary**

In reviewing the use of Psa 110:1 in the New Testament, we can appreciate the depth of meaning seen in one verse by the New Testament writers. They use it to show:

* the lordship of Jesus
* the superiority of the Messiah over David
* the role of the Messiah as “son of man”
* the difference between Jewish and Biblical ideas of sonship
* the authority of Jesus derived from God
* the completion of Jesus’ sacrificial ministry for all time
* the ascension of Jesus into heaven
* Christ as the divinely appointed king
* the supremacy of Christ over all things
* the ministry of Jesus in bringing repentance and forgiveness
* the ongoing intercessory work of Jesus
* the power of God at work in the lives of believers
* the spiritual position of believers with Christ at God’s right hand
* the need for believers to focus their minds on heavenly things
* the subjugation of all Christ’s enemies, including death
* the consummation of Christ’s work, when the kingdom is delivered to God.

# Intertextuality


# R. Dargie

### Apocalypse

**Introduction**

In his magnum opus, *Biblical Hermeneutics*,[[178]](#footnote-178) Milton S. Terry, comments on the historical standpoint of the Apocalypse[[179]](#footnote-179) and in a footnote[[180]](#footnote-180) summarises the positions of those exegetes who argue for and against either a late or early date for the writing of the Apocalypse. In the footnote, Terry draws attention to the work of James Glasgow DD in his book “The Apocalypse Translated and Expounded,”[[181]](#footnote-181) on which Terry comments as follows:-.

“...Glasgow (The Apoc. Trans. And Expounded, pp 9-38) adduces proof not easy to be set aside that the Revelation was written before any of the Epistles, probably between AD 50 – 54. Is it not supposable that one reason why Paul was forbidden to preach the word in Western Asia (Acts xvi. 6) was that John was either already there, or about to enter? The prevalent opinion that the First Epistle of John was written after the fall of Jerusalem rests on no certain evidence. To assume, from the writer’s use of the term “little children” that he was very far advanced in years is futile. John was probably no older than Paul, but some time before the fall of Jerusalem the latter was wont to speak of himself as ‘Paul the aged’ ( Philem 9).”[[182]](#footnote-182) [My emph.]

We shall look into the work of Glasgow and draw some conclusions about his work and test Terry’s analysis that Glasgow’s work is “not easy to be set aside” with respect to an early date for the writing of the Apocalypse. All quotations from the KJV.

**Intertextual Links between the Apocalypse and the Epistles?**

Glasgow deploys three main lines of argument to justify his early date conclusion. In making his case for the writing of the Apocalypse (somewhere between 51 and 54 CE), Glasgow quotes extensively from the evidence gleaned from the writings of the Early Church Fathers. He also uses the first century historical record with respect to the movements of the apostles (particularly the Apostle John) and posits dates for the writing of the Apocalypse based on the flight of John from Judea to Rome (following the Herodian persecution which killed his brother James). He further suggests that John moved from Rome to his eventual sojourn in Ephesus and then to Patmos. And at Patmos prior to the arrival of Paul he commenced the writing of the Apocalypse (see quotation above). Finally, his most telling appeal is to the intertextual evidence between the Apocalypse and other NT writings and it is this intertextual evidence that is of interest to us for the purposes of this article.

With respect to the intertextual evidence Glasgow’s central premise is that the epistle writers were all familiar with the content of the Apocalypse **prior to penning their epistles**. Thus, Paul, Peter, James, and more obviously John, were already versed in the Apocalypse and used the language / idiom of the Apocalypse in their writings - ergo, the Apocalypse was written early, certainly before the writing of the Epistles and possibly before the Gospels.

Clearly, there is a question to be discussed here with respect to scriptural quotations /allusions between the Epistles and the Apocalypse and their correct provenance. Glasgow takes this question head-on and comes down emphatically on the side of the apostles quoting from Jesus rather than the other way around as the following extract makes clear

“..VI And particularly we must keep in view the fact that many parts of the Apocalypse are the express words of Jesus Himself. Especially is this the case with the second and third chapters containing his epistles to the seven churches. Now we cannot think of the Lord as quoting or referring to the words of his own disciples as authorities or illustrations of his meaning. He referred to the Old Testament prophecies when reasoning with those who did not receive Him as Messiah. But to them the testimony of his disciples would have been as nothing. In every coincidence between words of Jesus in the Apocalypse, and of Apostles in the Acts or the Epistles the former are in the very nature of the case the original; the latter the citation or the allusion.”[[183]](#footnote-183)

So, having set out his case, and put forward the intertextual methodology he intends to rely on, Glasgow then proceeds to undertake an exhaustive review of NT documents (commencing with the Epistles) and draws attention to those passages which appear to be quotes from the Apocalypse.

We shall review three samples shortly (see table below). However, before doing this we must make comment on Glasgow’s premise concerning the provenance of clear allusions between the Apocalypse and other works.

On an objective view Glasgow’s intertextual line of reasoning appears plausible. It is more likely that the apostles would quote the words of Christ as the ultimate authority for doctrine and discipline rather than Christ quoting his disciples. As the firstborn of a new creation – this would seem fitting. There is however an obvious challenge to his argument which I set out in the following points.

If for sake of argument we take Glasgow’s position that the apocalypse was written sometime between 51-54 CE then it would predate most if not all of the Epistles, Acts of the Apostles and certain of the Gospels (all possibly save Matthew). If we also accept his argument that the apostles would only quote Jesus and not the other way around then surely there should be **copious and irrefutable examples** of the apostles clearly quoting from the Apocalypse within the NT record? And yet all we get are rather tantalising glimpses of quotation / allusions (see table below for a sample.

If there is a weakness in Glasgow’s thesis it is surely this i.e. there is no clinching passage or series of passages that **proves beyond a reasonable doubt** that the apostles quote from an early date Apocalypse. However, we could counter this objection. The general point has been made that the sign and symbol idiom of the Apocalypse (whilst in keeping with OT symbology) was useful to obscure and protect an avowedly subversive message in the fevered political atmosphere of a Roman world full of intrigue, suspicion and anti-Semitism. This of course pre-supposes that the Apocalypse has an application to the first century, a view which we follow.

So, did the Apostles in their writings merely hint at the Apocalyptic message, a kind of “sub-textual use” to ensure that Jewish mischief makers and others would be prevented from using the epistles as *prima facie* evidence of sedition against the Roman state (e.g. citing the coming King and judgement messages as harmful to the Pax Romana)?

It is an interesting speculation to consider that if a copy of the Apocalypse had ever fallen into the hands of a presiding Roman magistrate could it ever have been used to successfully prosecute a prima facie (Christian) seditious plot?

## **Sample passages**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Apocalypse | Epistle |
| 17:11 | The beast …and goeth into perdition | 2 Thess 2:3 | And that man of sin be revealed the Son of perdition |
| 7:3  | Till we have sealed the servants of God in their foreheads | 2 Cor 1:22 | Who hath sealed us |
| 3:20 | Behold I Stand at the door… | James 5:9 | …behold the judge standeth before the door |

**Conclusion**

The intertextual evidence is one strand of Glasgow’s early date thesis and is intriguing. Viewed as a whole (Glasgow devotes some 16 pages as he covers most of the NT documents), this intertextual evidence is persuasive that the language / idiom used by the Apostles could have an earlier provenance. That the Apocalypse was a “sub-text” to the writings of the Apostles is, I think, a distinct possibility. There is however, no clinching evidence that puts the matter beyond a reasonable doubt.

However, the sheer weight of potential Apocalypse allusions across the genre of NT documents is impressive. In this case “the whole” is definitely greater than the “sum of the parts”. Terry says that Glasgow’s work adduces proof “not easy to set aside”.We think Terry is correct in his analysis and in keeping with an open mind. Whilst Glasgow speaks in terms which betray his personal conviction about his thesis, to the objective reader, the full unequivocal proof is tantalisingly absent. Apocalyptic intertextuality deserves an in depth and systematic review.

**Reviews**

Jonathan Burke, Living On The Edge: Challenges To Faith. Living Stones, 2014. 580pp., ISBN 978-1-304-84253-4.[[184]](#footnote-184)

Being a Christadelphian is a marginalising identity, separated doctrinally from other Christians yet sharing in pressures of atheism and secularism. Those trying to live as a Christadelphian face an array of intellectual challenges. From popular atheism to academic scepticism, the questions are considerable. How timely then is Jonathan Burke’s latest reference work, *Living On The Edge,* which seeks to address head on many of the challenge to faith in the modern world.

The book has four main sections. The first, “Living on the edge of certainty” (pp8-27), addresses issues about argumentation, skepticism and interpretation. The second, “Living on the edge of credibility” (pp28-143), tackles the New Atheist movement and its main lines of argument. Issues covered here include the rationality of faith, the existence of Jesus and the relationship between science and religion. The third, “Living on the edge of doubt” (pp144-280), addresses a range of questions about the Bible, including the textual criticism, apocryphal gospels, biblical archaeology and the interpretation of Genesis. The final section, “Living on the edge of society” (pp281-487), discusses the relationship of the Bible and Christianity to social issues. The chapters in this section range from chapters about the intellectual credibility of Christadelphian doctrine to chapters about the benefits of conservative Christian moral values.

Whilst the book opens with an introduction for non-Christadelphians, it is Christadelphians who are the intended audience of the book. And the book does not pull punches when the author feels Christadelphians have been unhelpful or misleading. Burke promotes the approach to science advocated by the “pioneers” and criticises those who have abandoned this approach for a more fundamentalist position. He equally criticises those who continue to place the King James Version on a pedestal, despite its known imperfections. Whilst often reminding readers of the views of the pioneers, Burke does not advocate slavish devotion to their writings instead urging that readers recognise their value but also recognise the developments in scholarship.

One of the major themes of the book is respecting scholarly and scientific consensus wherever possible, and not dissenting from this consensus without good reason. Burke rejects anti-intellectualism and particularly anti-science polemic. Such attitudes do a disservice to the gospel, by making believers appear ignorant, and ultimately undermine faith by building on poor foundations. Burke argues that academic research is actually an ally for Christadelphians, as scholarly consensus has shifted towards Christadelphian doctrinal positions and as social scientific research demonstrates the benefits of Christian morality.

This book is not a novel. It is a reference work. Readers should not expect a page-turner, but should approach it as a way of getting answers to interesting and troubling questions. Burke has collected through much research a massive amount of information that rigorously addresses many of the challenges to faith in the modern world. This work will be a great asset to those facing questions about varied aspects of their faith and for that the author is to be commended.

**TG**

Jonathan Burke, Crucified with Christ. Lively Stones Publishing, 2013. 79pp. ISBN 978-1-304-76437-9. Available from www.lulu.com.

*Crucified with Christ* is written for a Christadelphian audience and explores, what for many will be, unfamiliar territory. Unlike other Christadelphian books about the atonement, *Crucified with Christ* is not primarily aimed at trying to explain the atonement or to promote some particular perspective on the atonement, but rather seeks to demonstrate that the view of the atonement advocated by the Christadelphians ("representative" or "participatory") has had some adherents throughout history and has now become the dominate theory amongst modern scholars.

The book begins by describing the various models of the atonement that have been posited throughout history, including some information about their most prominent proponents. For example, the representative model is most often associated with Peter Abelard (d. 1142) but, the author proposes, can be found as early as Clement of Rome's letter to the Corinthians (c.96).

After this introductory material, there is a chapter about the history of the understanding of the atonement. Though the majority of early Christian writers from the fourth century onwards adopted a substitutionary or ransom model of the atonement, Burke identifies a number of early Christian writers who held a participatory view, either exclusively or in combination with another model. It is fair to say that this is not an in-depth analysis of early Christian understandings of the atonement; the purpose is to demonstrate that such views existed, not to engage in historical exposition. A similar exercise is undertaken for the medieval and early modern era, giving a clear if succinct overview of those advocating a participatory model of the atonement.

The next chapter charts the rise and fall of penal substitutionary atonement. Burke identifies a number of problems with the penal substitutionary model that, despite its prior dominance, have eroded its support amongst scholars and laity. Not only is penal substitution not taught in the Bible, nor by some of the earliest Christian writers, it is also considered morally objectionable. The idea that God requires a price prior to forgiveness is inconsistent with the moral stipulation for us to forgive freely, and the idea that God should punish the innocent for the crimes of the guilty is opposite of justice. Burke also highlights that penal substitution can pose problems for Trinitarians as it seems to place Father and Son in opposition to one another. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of this analysis is the proposal that the penal substitution is spiritually damaging. Substitution makes believers inactive in their own salvation, leading some who have ‘accepted Christ’ to live their life no differently than they had before. It is even noted that some commentators worry that substitution has encouraged acts of violence by Christians.

The subsequent two chapters illustrates the rise of the participatory model in modern scholarship, leading to the current dominance of this view amongst scholars both liberal and (to a lesser degree) conservative.

The final chapter compares Christadelphian interpretations of the atonement with scholarly interpretations, illustrating that much of what Christadelphians have advocated for over a century is now not only academically respectable but dominant. Burke notes how Christadelphians have accepted the moral influence view as a valuable aspect of, but not a sufficient explanation of, the atonement. He also notes that at times Christadelphians have accepted Grotius’ ‘governmental’ view of the atonement (where Christ’s death is seen as an example of what sin deserves), as part of their representative model. He argues that this was a regrettable over-reaction to Clean Flesh theories. Burke illustrates the inadequacy of Grotius’ view by saying that it would be impossible for us to adopt the same pattern of forgiveness (i.e. forgiving the sin, but punishing someone to make an example of them).

Anyone familiar with Jonathan Burke’s writings will be aware of his style, whereby he places a lot of supporting information in footnotes. This approach has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, allows the author to present a succinct overview of, say, a list of writers who adopt the participatory model whilst also giving justification for that assertion, should be queried, in the footnotes. On the other hand, this sometimes creates pages that are bottom-heavy and some readers may find this distracting.

The author has a good grounding in historical and modern scholarship, as well as works from within our community. As one having an interest in early Christian literature, I would have liked to see more discussion of early Christian writers - particularly Ignatius of Antioch - but this may have been a distraction from the purpose of the work. In addition, it would have been nice to see engagement with recent Christadelphian treatments of the atonement, including Graham Jackman's *Language of the Cross* and John Launchbury's *Change Us Not God.* However these omissions do not detract from the main purpose of the book, which is demonstrate that participatory view of the atonement, which Christadelphians have long advocated, is winning the argument amongst modern theologians. As Burke concludes, though we do not depend on vindication from scholars, our community should be pleased by this scholarly support. He urges, “we should not waste this valuable assert. We should find ways of incorporating it into our preaching and our outreach to other Christians, especially those confused or concerned by the contradictory and violent substitutionary models of the atonement” (p. 71).

**TG**

Andrew Perry, *Special Creationism* (First Edition;[[185]](#footnote-185) 166 pp; Willow Publications; 2014). Available from www.lulu.com/willowpublications.

This book puts forward the case for “Special Creationism”, a creation that occurred as described in Genesis 1 in the locale of Mesopotamia and that becomes paradigmatic for the understanding of the creation of everything, demonstrating that God is the creator of all things. This approach does three things (1) It dispenses with the need for a young earth creation because the earth and the universe were already established (2) It dispenses with the need to understand evolution as the *only* process by which God could create (3) It allows the reader to understand Genesis in a more (though not entirely) literal sense without the need to harmonise the account with science (i.e., this book does not accept the premise of Theistic Evolution as that would undermine the Genesis account).

Perry approaches the task from a philosophical background rather than a scientific one as he readily admits that while he is able to assess popular scientific arguments, he is not scientifically qualified in the specialised fields that would allow an in-depth criticism of the science. Perry does not equate “creation” with “evolution” although he does accept that natural processes form a “baseline upon which divine action takes place” (p. 72). This seems to me a sensible starting point as it is becoming scientifically undeniable that the age of the earth and naturalistic processes have *some* role to play in where we are “now”; however, that does not exclude God from any naturalistic processes and certainly cannot stop God from intervening at any stage of these processes from initiating a “special creative” act. We might think here of the difference between God transforming already existing material (water into wine) or when He creates *ex-nihilo* (out of nothing).

Of course, evolution denies any input from God in naturalistic processes and certainly denies that God can intervene at any given moment either by re-ordering existent material or with “new creative acts”. The choice to deny God in any creative process is essentially a *philosophical choice* and not a scientific one – neither evolutionists (nor creationists for that matter) have any empirical evidence that can confirm or deny their beliefs, it becomes therefore a matter of philosophy for *both* creationists *and scientists* to either accept creation or evolution. However, evolutionist theory does not really perceive acceptance of what they consider as “hard evidence” as a philosophical choice, but as Perry points out, “there is a philosophical layer embedded in popular evolution writing and that the conflict with religion lies in this layer” (p. 13).

The largest obstacle in understanding Genesis 1 as a new creative act (i.e., “Special Creationism”) is the connection between the present (where we are now) with what happened in the past. Naturalistic processes posit an *unbroken link* (origin of the species) from the present to the past on the basis of the fossil record and DNA evidence. This evidence suggests an uninterrupted progression from simple life forms in the past to higher life forms in the present. However, a master builder is able to use “new bricks” or “old bricks” when building a house and in the case of a renovation perhaps a combination of both. Perry notes that, God’s work (at this level) was with existing common ‘material’, using and varying common designs (cf. Eve)” (p. 66). Evolution is based on uniform development even though the earth sciences demonstrate periods of mass extinction and renewal (punctuated equilibrium) and although evolution explains *some* of the developments of life on earth it cannot exclude special creative interventions – denial of this possibility is based on *naturalistic philosophy rather than science* (p. 67).

A good deal of Perry’s book examines the philosophical underpinnings of arguments both for and contra evolution and he does this in an even handed way. Topics under discussion include Natural Selection, Universal Common Descent, Evidence and Explanation, Intelligent Design and Bad Design. For non-philosophers it may be difficult to follow the minutiae of some of the arguments but the overall thrust is to test the epistemological basis of evolution. I believe that he has successfully demonstrated that evolution is as much a belief system as is creation. Like any other subject, the natural sciences require interpretation and context and this influences the way “facts” are perceived.

Evolutionary science is relatively speaking a “young science” and (as is appropriate for all the sciences) new discoveries (such as DNA) will require that theories are tested and adjusted, perhaps the philosophical basis for understanding the processes will at some stage require updating. Evolution does not have all the answers, in fact no science does – the more we know the more aware we become how little we actually understand.

Personally I would have liked to have seen a chapter on horizontal gene transfer (HGT is a relatively recent discovery) that refers to the transfer of genes between organisms in a manner other than traditional reproduction. This mechanism (HGT) lies at the basis of antibiotic resistance in bacteria but higher organisms have been demonstrated to possess large amounts of “foreign” material. For example, cows are known to possess 25% reptile (snake) DNA. Prof. David Adelson, study lead and head of Molecular and Biomedical Science at the University of Adelaide, told Australian ABC News. “But what we’ve shown is that there are DNA segments...called jumping genes…which are able to jump between species.” The similar DNA sequence that the two species share is able to “cut and paste itself within the genome,” and thus replicate itself and jump to another species, Adelson explains. In that way, it’s similar to how a retrovirus like HIV works, except it has “no way of making an infectious particle, so it’s a bit of a mystery how it gets from [one] species to another,” Adelson concedes.[[186]](#footnote-186)

Although HGT is known to occur in bacteria because they form connective tubes (called pili) and exchange little bits of DNA, like sharing software, it occurs rarely in a multicellular host and that mostly through retroviral infection. However, such large scale incorporation of new material smacks of the type of “genetic engineering” that humans practice when they add jelly fish genes to pigs to make them glow in the dark, it is therefore difficult to understand how (and why) a retro virus can accomplish this.[[187]](#footnote-187) Moreover, evolutionists admit that it wreaks havoc with the phylogenetic tree (tree of life) as it contradicts a linear progression. If genes can jump laterally across the “branches” of the tree how can one state with confidence that all commonality can be explained by vertical (up the tree trunk) reproduction/adaptation?*[[188]](#footnote-188)*

This book is to be commended as it allows us to read the Genesis account as it is (as a relatively ‘new creation’), without attempting to harmonise it with science neither does it demand the implausibility of a ‘Young Earth’ and it leaves evolutionary science its allotted space to work in (the ‘old pre-Adamic creation’ and naturalistic processes). The ‘old pre-Adamic’ and the ‘new’ creations are both established by the same God and related to each other by common ‘materials’ and processes. God is at work now preparing the earth for another ‘Special Creation’ where he will introduce a “new heavens and earth” (Rev 22:1), “for we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now” (Rom 8:22).

Evolution cannot deny ‘Special Creation’ on scientific grounds, nor can it plausibly deny God in its ‘spontaneous’ (some would say miraculous) processes – to do so is a philosophical choice, as much as believing in God, the creator of all things, is a faith choice. **PW**

**Marginal Notes**

**Gen 2:5 – AP**

The Jewish commentator Rashi observes about the ‘forming’ of Adam that God acted as “a kneader of dough who puts water into flour, and afterwards kneads dough”.[[189]](#footnote-189) This observation is interesting because Adam was formed from the ‘dust’ of the ground and the Hebrew for ‘dust’ would normally indicate what lies of top of dry baked ground (e.g. Job 2:12). Many translations choose ‘dust’ but some get it wrong and go for something like ‘soil’ or ‘clay’.

What Rashi has noticed is that the Hebrew word has been chosen to refer to what the ground was – it **had been** ‘dust’ and was usually dust but the ground had more recently been flooded and it was now saturated, and with the heat of the sun a mist was rising up from the ground as the ground water evaporated.

The situation being described is very particular and from a retrospective point of view: it is that in the Mesopotamian area there was as yet no rain at the time of Adam’s formation; the sun was again baking hot; the ground (our region) was usually dry but there had been local flooding; and the ground water was evaporating. This detail from Day Six dovetails with that of Day Three in which God rolls back flood waters to reveal new land. This kind of language has the same sort of local colour that ANE myths of creation have, but without the mythology.

**News**

A lot of change has happened at the EJournal this quarter. As well as Bre. D. Burke and J. Burke starting their own journal, Bro. R. Dargie has resigned from his column due to upcoming unexpected work commitments. We would like to thank Richard for his contributions in the last couple of years and hope he can return when his commitments allow.

Sis. Kay McGrath has agreed to take over the Archaeology column. Readers who frequent Christadelphian forums and Facebook will know that Kay often posts on archaeological news. Her email will be: kaymcgrath@christadelphian-ejbi.org.

**Postscript**

Wikipedia [Jan 2014] says that “Fideism is an epistemological theory which maintains that faith is independent of reason, or that reason and faith are hostile to each other and faith is superior at arriving at particular truths”. It is rather the case that reason is integral to faith. The follower of Jesus is presented with reasoning all the time, whether it be from the platform, in a magazine, or in a book. The reasoning is presented as a way of building up faith. The reasoning may be simple or complex and it may contain mistakes. This is a truism for reasoning that originates in the community as well as outside. Our responsibility is to discriminate the true from the false with one another. There will be errors and mistakes in our thinking, and perhaps more so the more complex the reasoning. But the bottom line is that the Word is fixed, and although an unusual thing to say today, it is in our own language. We should not be daunted by complex reasoning when we encounter it; we should have confidence in our basic ability to read Scripture as the Word of God.

**AP**

‘Begging the question’ is not ‘evading the question’ but the fallacy of founding an argument on the basis of what is to be proved (F. T. Wood, *Current English Usage*, 1962). In dialogue, it is often a fair and helpful point to be told that ‘you have begged the question’. What a dialogue partner has seen in what you have said is an assumption of some premise which you need to prove for your argument to succeed.

**Editorial Policies**: The **Christadelphian EJournal of Biblical Interpretation** seeks to fulfil the following objectives: offer analytical and expositional articles on biblical texts; engage with academic biblical studies that originate in the various Christian confessions; defend the biblical principles summarised in the common Christadelphian statements of faith; and subject the published articles to peer review and amendment.

**Submission of Articles**: Authors should submit articles to the editors. Presentation should follow *Society of Biblical Literature* guidelines (www.sbl.org).

**Publication**: E-mailed quarterly on the last Thursday of January, April, July, and October; published as a collected annual paperback obtainable from: www.lulu.com/willowpublications.

**Subscriptions**: This is a ‘free’ EJournal to communities and individuals who recognise that it is produced within the Christadelphian community.

**EJournal Book Fund**: A fund exists for small book grants for baptised young people who are unwaged. Details can be found on the EJournal website: www.christadelphian-ejbi.org.

1. An article entitled *‘The Gospels’ Independent, Historic Witnesses’* in Volume 12 of *The Christadelphian* (1875) approvingly refers to *Godet’s Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (newly published that year) as a sound refutation of criticisms advanced by the Tübingen School, birthplace of German higher criticism. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Peter Westen, Speaking of Equality: An Analysis of the Rhetorical Force of ‘Equality’ in Moral and Legal Discourse (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Rebecca Groothius, *Good News*, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Norman C. Habel, “The Future of Social Justice Research in the Hebrew Scriptures: Questions of Authority and Relevance” [Available Online]. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Norman K. Gottwald & R. A. Horsley, eds., *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Norman C. Habel, *The Land is Mine Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. J. P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation* (Yale Egyptological Studies 2; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In the Babylonian account of creation Marduk killed the goddess Tiamat (the salty sea) compare the similarity with the Hebrewand used her carcass to create heaven and earth. The form of the Hebrew word for “deep” is distinct enough from the name “Tiamat” to deny direct borrowing; however, it is possible that there is a polemical stress here. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. G. Hassel, “The Polemical Nature of the Genesis Cosmology”, *EvQ* 46 (1974): 81-102. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Hassel, “The Polemical Nature of the Genesis Cosmology”, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. S. H. Hooke, *In the Beginning* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1947), 20. [Ed AP]: See O. Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), for a more recent presentation. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Two commonly cited papers supporting this view are: P. H. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I: The meaning of *raqia‛* in Gen 1:6-8” *WTJ* 53 (1991): 227-240; “The Firmament and the Water Above. Part II: The Meaning of ‘the Water above the Firmament’ in Gen. 1:6–8” *WTJ* 54 (1992): 31–46. [The first paper is available online at www.biblicalstudies.org.uk, cited Jan 2014]. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “The verbal root of *rāqîa’* is *rq’*, hammer out (pi.); its nom. Form means the hammered out plate (*HALAT* 1203; P. Collini, *SEL* 4, 1987, 19; also M. C. A. Korpel, *UF* 23, 1991, 220). The verb describes God’s creative actions of spreading out the earth (Ps 136:6; Isa 42:5; 44:24) or the skies (*še hāqîm*, Job 37:18)”. David T. Tsumura, “[yqIrl” in the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Exegesis* (5 vols; ed. W. A. VanGemeren; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 3:1198 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Phenomenal terms are perceptual beliefs; the way things “appear” or “seem” e.g., we say the sun “rises and sets” we do not say the earth has rotated one hundred and eighty degrees on its axis and the sun has become visible on the horizon. Phenomenal descriptions relate to an earth centric viewpoint – how something is perceived on earth- phenomenal terms are common to every language and every time period because they are part of the human experience of the world. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A. Perry, “The Myth of the Solid Dome” (Parts One and Two): Part Two, page 14; available online @ www.academia.edu [cited Jan 2014]. [Ed AP]: Two other papers that should be consulted are Younker R. W. and R. M. Davidson, “The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome: Another Look at the Hebrew [;yqir' (*rāqîa*‛)” *AUSS* 1 (2011): 125-147; and N. K. Weeks, “Cosmology in Historical Context” *WTJ* 68 (2006): 283-293; both available online. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. [Ed AP]: This of course assumes that ‘the spirit of God hovered’ is equivalent to God moving. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. William D. Ramey, *Literary Analysis of Genesis 1:1—2:3* (Christian Publishers’ Bookhouse, 1997), 4; online @ www.inthebeginning.org [cited Jan 2014]. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Andrew E. Steinmann, “dta An Ordinal Number and the Meaning of Genesis 1:5” *JETS* 45/4 (2002): 577–584 (583). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Steinmann, “dta An Ordinal Number and the Meaning of Genesis 1:5”, 584. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Yosef Green, “When does the day begin?” *JBQ* 36/2 (2008): 81-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. J. H. Walton, “Creation” in the *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (eds., T. D. Alexander & D. W. Barker; InterVarsity Press, 2003), 155-168 (163-4). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Note Isa 45:7, “I form the light and *create* darkness, I make peace and create calamity.” Darkness as such cannot be “created”; darkness can only be “created” when the light source is removed or covered (switching of the light). In this context “create” is to be understood as designatory and organizational (appointing a period without light), rather than absolute and physical (forming light sources or light waves). Isaiah 45:7 is polemic against polytheism; for Isaiah good *and* evil, light *and* dark, come from God. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. D. J. Rudolph, “Festivals in Genesis 1:14” *Tyndale Bulletin* 54/2 (2003): 23-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Rudolph, “Festivals in Genesis 1:14”, 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. R. T. Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology, Jewish and Christian* (Biblical, Intertestamental and Patristic Studies; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. [Ed AP] Standard scholarship ascribes Genesis 1 to a late exilic or post-exilic priestly author; see R. N. Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 24-25. Of course, on the traditional view of Mosaic authorship, such priestly features fit with Moses being a Levite. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. [Ed AP]: The classic statement of this approach is that of the 1895 work, only recently translated - H. Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton* (trans. K. William Whitney Jr.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). For a critique see D. Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. D. J. A. Clines, “Varieties of Creation in the Bible”. Paper for the conference on *New Directions in Cosmology*, St John’s College, Durham University, 10–11 January 2013. [Available online: www.academia.edu; Jan 2014]. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. D. J. A. Clines, “The Theology of the Flood Narrative” in his two volume book of essays *On the Way to the Postmodern* (2 vols; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 2:508-523 (518). His citations from Blenkinsopp are from J. Blenkinsopp, *et.al*., *Pentateuch: Genesis* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1971), 46, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. G. J. Wenham also notes further correspondences between Eden and the later Sanctuaries; God walks in Eden (Gen 3:8; *cf.* Lev 26: 12; Deut 23:15; 2 Sam 7: 6-7); the command to “work” is also applied to the Levites (*cf.* Num 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:5-6); the river from Eden (*cf*. Ezek 47:1-12); and the gold and onyx of Eden (Gen 2:11-12) matches what was used to decorate the later sanctuaries and priestly garments (*cf.* Exod 25:7, 11, 17, 31) G. J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden” in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood* (eds. R. S. Hess and D. T. Tsumura; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 399-404. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. W. A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (5 vols; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997); hereafter *NIDOTTE*. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. These are from E. W. Goodrick and J. R. Kohlenberger III, eds., *Exhaustive Concordance of the NIV* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Robert D. Holmstedt, “The Restrictive Syntax of Genesis i 1”, *Vetus Testamentum* 58 (2008): 56-67 (66). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. The case for ‘became’ is advocated by A. C. Custance, “Without Form and Void” online @ http://www.custance.org/library/wfandy [cited Jan 2014]; the case for ‘was’ is argued by J. Adey, “Should ‘was’ be ‘became’ in Gen 1:2a” *CEJBI* 4/2 (2010): 38-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. D. T. Tsumura, “The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation” *JSOTSup* 83, (1989): 13-83). Tsumura’s book Creation and Destruction (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005) is cited in support by Adey in his paper (43), previously cited, and also by A. Perry, *Historical Creationism* (Sunderland: Willow Publications, 2012), 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. J. H. Walton, “Creation”, in the *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, (Eds., T.D. Alexander & D.W. Barker, InterVarsity Press, 2003), 155-168, (162). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. J. J. Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. ‘In the Bible, heaven refers either to the physical sky above the earth or to the realm of God.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. ‘It is as firm and solid as the earth (Job 37:8), yet the psalmist says that God stretched out the heavens “like a tent” (Ps. 104:2; see also Isa. 40:22). This sky is supported by pillars (Job 26:11).’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Genesis 1:6-7, ‘God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters and let it separate water from water.” So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. ‘A countless number of stars (Gen. 15:5) were affixed in the sky (Gen. 1:14-18), but the sun and moon coursed across it.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. This applies equally to *rāqîa* and *šāmayim*; see for example Genesis 7:11, where God opens ‘the floodgates of the heavens [*šāmayim*].’ Such statements suggest there was little distinction between *rāqîa* and *šāmayim* in the minds of the ancients. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. ‘There were also windows in the sky (Isa. 24:18) through which God could shower the earth with gifts or punishments: rain (Gen. 7:11; Luke 4:25; Acts 14:17), manna (Exod. 16:14; Ps. 78:24), even the wind or spirit (Num. 11:31; Job 26:13; Ps. 135:7; Jer. 10:13; Matt. 3:16; Acts 2:2; 1 Pet. 1:12).’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. ‘The sky serves as a vehicle for audio-visual communication from God. “He works signs and wonders in the sky and on earth” (Dan. 6:27). The rainbow is one such sign (Gen. 9:12-17). Thunder, the “voice of God”, is another sign (Exod. 20:22; Jer. 25:30). Meteorological phenomena announce God’s intentions to those who know how to interpret them (Luke 21:11, 25).’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. ‘According to the ancient Israelite tradition, God created an open sky for Adam “so that he might look upon the angels singing the triumphal song. And the light, which is never darkened, was perpetually in paradise” (*2 Enoch* 31:2-3). Of course, after the disobedience of the first creatures that opening to the other side was closed. In fact, Israelite tradition in general believed that this hole or opening was permanently closed. Yet God could open it as desired.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. ‘These were mainly holy people like Enoch (see Gen. 5:21-23 and the books of Enoch dating from the third century B.C.E. to the third century C.E.) but especially prophets like Elijah (2 Kings 2:11), Daniel (Dan. 7-12), Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:1), and John (Rev. 4:1-2).’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. ‘The prophet Micaiah reports this experience: “I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven [Hebrew *šāmayim*, thus literally the sky] standing beside him on his right hand and on his left” (1 Kings 22:19). The throne is the symbol of royal authority in a monarchic society. It symbolises the monarch’s ability to effectively control the behaviour of the kingdom’s subjects and to extract loyalty from those subjects.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. ‘In the Israelite tradition, Isaiah wrote: “Thus says the Lord: The sky is my throne” (Isa. 66:1 LXX). And Matthew’s Jesus echoes this belief: “But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven [the sky], for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool…” (Matt. 5:34-35; see also Matt. 23:22).’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. ‘In the New Testament, heaven is clearly the destiny and destination of righteous believers (2 Cor. 5:1; Eph. 2:6; Phil. 3:20; Rev. 11:12). Yet heaven in these instances is less a place than a presence or, more accurately, being with God for all eternity. Heaven, especially in Matthew, is a metonym for God.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. ‘It is very useful to keep in mind the differences between the Bible and theology in their use of the word “heaven.” Readers of the Bible can’t go wrong by substituting “sky” all of the time, whether referring to the physical sky or to the divine realm, the abode of God and the spirits. When contemporary theologians speak of heaven, they usually are referring to a human state or condition of bliss and happiness which is rooted in the vision and enjoyment of God, technically called the “beatific vision.”’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Concordism is the idea that Scripture is consistent with scientific evidence, when both are correctly understood. It is particularly common among fundamentalists whose view of inerrancy does not allow the *prima facie* meaning of Scripture to contradict verifiable scientific facts (though they tend to draw the line at evolution). This requires them to insist that ‘*rāqîa*’ does *not* refer to a solid canopy—despite the clear meaning of this word—because we all know the sky is actually a vast expanse of air. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. For example, it is difficult to see how the *rāqîa* can separate ‘the water under the expanse’ from ‘the water above it’ (Genesis 1:7) unless it is a physical canopy. You cannot support a large body of water on thin air. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. ‘It is a place inhabited by barbarians, who are by nature little inclined to live in cities. In such an ethnocentric perspective, barbarians are considered intermediate beings between the human and animal kingdoms.’ They were fated to be slaves, but slavery allows them to improve their lives in some way.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 28-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. ‘The Bible has no real equivalent to the modern understanding of citizen and citizenship.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. ‘For instance, Ptolemy Is reported to have allowed those Judeans living in Egypt who were “initiated into the mysteries” to be “on the same footing as the citizens of Alexandria” (3 Macc. 2:30). Josephus insists that this was full-citizen status (*Antiquities* 12:1; 10.5.2), but scholars recognize that various grades of citizenship existed in Alexandria.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. ‘One commonality between biblical and modern cultures is a basic distinction people make between insiders and outsiders. A citizen is an insider in the country of birth but an outsider everywhere else.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. ‘Contemporary Samaritans claim that they have directly descended from the Northern Israelites tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. …The Deuteronomic Historian, in contrast, relates that the Samaritans descended from colonists who were relocated in regions of Samaria from lands that the Assyrians had conquered: Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sephar-vaim (2 Kings 17:24). …This view is also reflected in Josephus (*Antiquities* 9.277-91).’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. The Samaritan self-identification insists that the majority of them have always been and still are loyal to Israel’s God and to Israelite tradition. …However the identification given by the Bible places Samaritan faith and loyalty to God in doubt. Indeed, the biblical record describes these colonists as henotheists, worshippers of Yahweh, true, but also of other gods brought with them to Samaria from their lands of origin or former residence.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 73-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. According to the biblical record (Ezra 4), the Samaritans at first rejoiced to learn that those returning from Babylonian exile were charged with rebuilding the temple. But when their offer of assistance was rejected by the returnees, the Samaritans opposed and sabotaged that project (Ezra 4:4-5, 25) as well as the rebuilding of the walls (4:17-23).’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. ‘The Samaritans rallied behind Alexander the Great, while members of the house of Israel remained loyal to Persia. When Alexander destroyed Samaria, the Samaritans obviously became wary of the Greeks. …anti-Samaritan sentiment reached a peak in 128 B.C.E. when John Hyrcanus, governor and high priest in Judea, destroyed the Samaritan sanctuary at Gerizim.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. ‘Sometime during 6-9 C.E., a group of Samaritans secretly joined some Judean pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for Passover. They scattered human bones in the porticoes and sanctuary of the temple, thereby defiling it.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. ‘The basic report is that Samaritans living in Gema, on the border between Galilee and Samaria, murdered one (or many) Judean pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for the festival of Passover.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. ‘In retaliation, Judeans from Jerusalem came and massacred the inhabitants of Gema. …the Samaritans managed to keep the sympathies of the local Roman representatives on their side. These Romans imprisoned and murdered Judeans.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. ‘The Judeans remained persistent and eventually had the entire affair moved to Rome, where Caesar ruled favourably in behalf of the Judeans and ordered that the Samaritans be punished.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. John 4:9, ‘So the Samaritan woman said to him, “How can you—a Jew—ask me, a Samaritan woman, for water to drink?” (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.)’ [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. John 8:48, ‘The Judeans replied, “Aren’t we correct in saying that you are a Samaritan and are possessed by a demon?”’ [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Luke 10:30-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Luke 17:15-19; John 4:28-30, 30-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Luke 9:52-53, ‘He sent messengers on ahead of him. As they went along, they entered a Samaritan village to make things ready in advance for him, but the villagers refused to welcome him, because he was determined to go to Jerusalem.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Conclusions of this sort are typically based on Jesus’ single conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4. But although this event is countercultural it provides no evidence of social emancipation. Whatever else they might have thought about him, the Samaritans viewed Jesus first and foremost as a Jew—not a social emancipator preaching liberation theology—and their interaction with him was conducted primarily on that basis, as we see from their anti-Semitic prejudice toward him in Luke 9:52-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. John 4:19-24, ‘The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you people say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus said to her, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem You people worship what you do not know. We worship what we know, because salvation is from the Jews.  But a time is coming—and now is here—when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers. God is spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”’ [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. ‘Matthew’s Jesus sees his mission exclusively to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:5; 15:24) and explicitly prohibits his disciples from going among the Samaritans (Matt. 10:5). In contrast, John’s Jesus interacts with a Samaritan woman (John 4), while Luke’s Jesus not only interacts with a Samaritan (Luke 17:11) but tells a parable about a Samaritan who risks his very life tending to a nearly dead stranger who is surely a member of the house of Israel (Luke 10:33).’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. ‘Our high-context ancestors in the faith readily understood the reports they had heard about the Samaritans or about Jesus and the Samaritans in the different accounts of the evangelists. These ancestors were quite aware of the cultural elements that a preacher or evangelist such as Luke or John would be skewing one way or another to make a point. We who live in a very different culture must exert more effort to gain the understanding that came so readily to them.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. ‘A Christian minister in Africa once asked a mixed group of Africans and European missionaries to tell him the main point of the story of Joseph (Ge. 37-50). The European missionaries all noted how Joseph, as an individual, remained faithful to God no matter what happened to him. In contrast, the Africans observed how Joseph never forgot his family no matter how far he travelled away from his homeland or what he had to endure from his brothers.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. ‘The differing interpretations of this story highlight two kinds of human relationships and human behaviours which flow from distinctive personality types: individualist and collectivist.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. ‘The vast majority of the people described in the Bible represent collectivist personality types. Individualist personality types are rather rare in the Bible and in Mediterranean culture in general.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. ‘The social analyst Geer Hofstede points out that individualism as a personality type is represented among only 20 percent of the current population of this planet (Hofstede 1980; 1994). This percentage is higher than it has ever been in human history.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 78-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. ‘Individual worth is based on individual achievements or individual possessions. …Individualists value independence very highly and put a premium on uniqueness. Individualists seek autonomy from social solidarity.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. ‘If [individualists] join a group, it is on the basis of an implicit renewable contract. …Individualists remain with the group only as long as it suits their purposes, or they lose interest or motivation. In this view, a group is simply a collection of individuals.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Any personal decision is made by the self alone even if it is not in the group’s best interests.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. ‘Such people prefer to be identified by the major group to which they belong rather than be recognised as individuals.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 79-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. ‘This is why appellations based on family belonging, such as “son of Jonah,” are so common in the Bible. Consider also how few Pharisees are named in the gospels. References usually are just to “a Pharisee.” For this reason, collectivist personalities are also called socio-centric or group-centered personalities. …As a result, the individual or personal worth of a collectivist personality is rooted in familial status, social position, status, or caste.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 79-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. ‘Hence, personal status is ascribed, that it, it derives principally from being born into a given family. Such a child immediately inherits all the family’s honour built up over generations, as well as all the family’s enemies! This is the point of genealogies in antiquity. They were ordinarily constructed only after a person died and became famous.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. ‘In this context, inner-group achievement and competition are viewed as disruptive.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. ‘Recall the occasion on which the mother of the sons of Zebedee requested from Jesus places of honour for her sons in his kingdom (Matt. 20:20-21). On the face of it, one might think this is a fair request in pursuit of honour. But life in the Mediterranean world is a zero-sum game. If someone gains honour, others have lost it.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. ‘It is hardly surprising that when the ten heard of this request, they became indignant (Matt. 20:24). This is not because the mother beat these ten to an honour they would have sought for themselves. Rather, their indignation demonstrates how disruptive and harmful to the group is the desire of any member to excel over others.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. ‘Any personal decision is made in consultation with the group and often in obedience or deference to its will. When Joshua challenges the Israelites to choose whether they want to serve Yahweh or other gods, he is not soliciting personal decisions. Notice his own judgement: “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh. 24:15). This was not the result of a democratic vote by members of that household.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 80-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. ‘Because collectivistic personalities are generally not interested in individuals, they tend to accept stereotypes as authentic and trustworthy assessments of people. If one were to read Mark’s gospel and jot down the names of the people Jesus healed, only one appears: “Bar Timaeus” (Mark 10:46). Yet this is not the blind man’s personal name. It is rather his father’s name, the patriarch’s name. …All members of the household, the entire group, will be identified by the patriarch’s name.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. ‘When he identified his place of origin, Paul said, “I am a member of the house of Israel, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city” (Acts 21:39). Trading on his city’s reputation, Paul, like all its inhabitants, could claim similar honourable status.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 81-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. E.g. Psalm 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. E.g. Psalm 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Mark 8:34-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. ‘Upon a closer reading, however, it becomes clear that this person is not an individualist but rather a collective personality. He hides behind “our fathers” (v. 4), who are obviously Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The composer of this psalm is living long after those “fathers”, but he makes no reference to his own father. He aligns himself with the patriarchs.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. ‘In the first thanksgiving verses (22-26), the collectivist sentiment continues to shine through. The lamenter will publicise his blessings in the midst of the community and urge them all to praise God. …This shift from singular to plural further illustrates the thinking and behaviour of a collectivistic personality. I am not really different from the others in the group.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. ‘In the two instances when Jesus exhorted listeners to take up their cross and follow him, he urged denial of the family… In other words, when a collectivistic person hears the words “self,” or “me,” or “I,” such a person does not think of an individual “I” but rather of an “I” who is so strongly embedded in a group such as a family to be almost invisible.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Matthew 10:40, ‘“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”’ [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Genesis 4:13-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Perhaps Israel’s symbolic marriage to Yahweh is the only one which can be considered a religious union, since it was based on a spiritual covenant. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Pilch, A Cultural Handbook to the Bible, 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. ‘A close reading of the account cannot help but notice the repetition of words associated with the semantic field of “honour”, the core cultural value in the ancient and contemporary Middle Eastern world. Eleazar, a scribe in high position, of noble appearance, preferring death with honour, had the courage to refuse the easy way out, made a high resolve worthy of his years and dignity of his old age, and so on and so on. A core value is one that drives human behaviour. Since a value conveys meaning wrapped in feeling, it is easy to understand the power of core values. Eleazar’s story illustrates this well.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. ‘Whether factual or hyperbolic, this story in which the intersection of his noble status as a scribe, the esteem his advanced age demands, and the respect he shows to God all converge, is quite remarkable. The convergence places Eleazar in a very honourable position.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. ‘But does not this behaviour also demonstrate that he was well trained by his feather to endure physical pain, indeed death itself, fearlessly? In other words, he dies like a man in this culture is expected to die.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. ‘If Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah in his village synagogue (Luke 4:16-17), did he belong to an elite minority? Where did he learn how to read (see John 7:15)? If he could read, did he know how to write? Who were the “scribes” with whom Jesus was often in conflict? What did they write?’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. ‘This kind of scribe is described by Ben Sira (Sir. 38:24-39:5). The Sage first contrasts this person with the farmer, the craftsman, the smith, and the potter (Sir. 38:25-42). All of these are necessary for civilisation, but none have the status of the scribe (Sir. 38:33-39:5). Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. ‘Consider the fact that Jesus often not only beats scribe in verbal conflict but leaves them utterly bewildered in verbal jousting. They admire his mysterious ability to interpret the tradition.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. ‘Anthropologists who study and compare many cultures point out that the state of consciousness that we in the West consider “ordinary” or “normal” is actually a construct, not a fixed fact of existence. Indeed, our “ordinary” state of consciousness is, in many ways, quite arbitrary. In other words, human consciousness is capable of a wide horizon of potentials that each culture shapes into a fixed and stable “state.” …We are uncultured into our culture’s consensus reality. In the Bible, we encounter an ancient, Middle Eastern culture’s consensus reality.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. ‘Scholars sometimes distinguish between dreams (only Matthew uses the Greek word *onar*) and visions (Luke favours these words: *horama*, *optasia*, *horasis*), but anthropologists caution that one should not press the distinction, for they actually overlap and both belong to the category of altered states of consciousness experiences.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. ‘As noted above, prophets and dreamers (prophecy and dreams) are usually paired. Saul laments when he senses that God has ceased communicating with him “either by prophets or by dreams” (I Sam. 28:15). God is understandably disturbed when prophets claim to have received communication in dreams from the deity, but God has not so communicated (Jer. 23:16-32).’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. ‘Thus from a biological point of view Jesus was no different from any other male, but from a cultural viewpoint he was definitely a typical Middle Eastern male very concerned about his honour, his reputation. …Like others in his culture and like 80 percent of the current world population, Jesus was a collective personality. He drew his identity from his group and its opinions.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. ‘If anything is certain about the preaching of Jesus, it is that he promoted theocracy, “the kingdom or reign of God.” Theocracy is the union or identity of “church and state” (to use these anachronistic terms).’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. ‘Jesus shared all the values of his contemporary, fellow Middle Easterners. Just like them, he was focused on the present, albeit a rather expansive present.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. ‘As for human nature, Jesus firmly believed what his tradition taught. Human nature is a mixture of good and evil because, when creating the first humanoid, God implanted in him an inclination or tendency toward good and toward evil. …Jesus was aware of and enumerated the evils that come forth from the heart of a person (Mark 7:21-23) who follows the evil inclination or tendency.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. ‘Contemporary Westerners are familiar with the concept of identity theft. …In a certain sense, time has done that to the Middle Eastern person known as Jesus of Nazareth. Subsequent generations of believers reinterpreted the Middle Eastern Jesus in many ways,, some of which ill fit his distinctive cultural heritage.’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. ‘Commentators offer various comments about the flute players. Most refer to the Mishnah (*Ketubbot* 4:4; early-3rd cent.-C.E. compendium of opinions in the Israelite tradition): ”Even the poorest in Israel must not furnish less than two flutes and one woman wailer (at the funeral of his wife).”’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. ‘But what exactly is the “flute” in the ancient world? What instrument are the people playing? Why are flute players playing their instruments at a wake?’ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 254. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. ‘But the discovery of the Hebrew text of Psalm 151 at Qumran in 1956 sheds new light on this Hebrew word. Sanders’ translation of verse 2, reported in the New Revised Standard Version, reads: “My hands have made an instrument (*ugab*), and my fingers a lyre (*kinnor*).’ *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, 254. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. We will use this archaic term (which derives from the Latin Vulgate) in a neutral way, while discussing the competing alternatives of ‘expanse’ and ‘dome’. While we are concerned with the meaning of the Hebrew and the correct translation into English, it is worth noting that other target languages have different problems; see the remarks on ‘firmament’ in S. F. Westberg, “Some Experiences in the Translation of Genesis and Exodus into Lingala” *BT* 7/1 (1956): 117-122 (118); W. J. Bradnock, “Questions and Answers” *BT* 7/1 (1956): 163-164. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. So, for example, the standard critical Bible dictionary favours “dome-shaped covering over the earth”—see M. C. Reddish, “Heaven” in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols; ed. D. N. Freedman et al; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:90-91. A standard conservative dictionary offers “expanse of the sky” D. T. Tsumura, “[:yqIr”l”” in the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Exegesis* (5 vols; ed. W. A. VanGemeren; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 3:1198. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. P. H. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I: The meaning of *raqia‛* in Gen 1:6-8” *WTJ* 53 (1991): 227-240 (236). [Available online.] [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. This is an important point. In Seely’s treatment, the solidity thesis is better supported than the dome/vault thesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. J. J. Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Another example nearby is the term for the woman ’*ishshāh* who was brought out of the man ’*îsh*. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Hence, Seely is not quite right to affirm, “The NT confirms the virtual identity of the firmament in Ezekiel and the firmament in Genesis by combining them into one image (Rev 4:6; 15:2)”— Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. In the account, it is the sun and the moon that is ‘set’ in the firmament (Gen 1:14, 17-18) not the stars—the stars are mentioned in parenthesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. The question here is that if the firmament is a dome, why is the preposition not ‘under’ in Genesis? It is assumed that the face of the dome is the underside, but why is it not the topside that is the face above which there is a throne as in Ezekiel? [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Equally, when translators sense a better match in English they will not be overly literal with a translation. So, for example, where we have cities on the top of a hill, they are said to ‘look down upon the face of (‘*al penē*)’ another city, but translators render the Hebrew as ‘looking towards’ or a close variation (Num 21:20; 23:28). [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 237. [Seely uses Hebrew script for ‘*āšāh* which I have changed to the transliteration.] [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. These are questions posed by Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I”, 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. For a discussion, see N. C. Habel, “He who stretches out the Heavens” *CBQ* 34 (1972): 417-430. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. N. K. Weeks, “Cosmology in Historical Context”, *WTJ* 68 (2006): 283-293 (284). [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. ‘Because he has not been present at such trials before his appointment to Bithynia (to judge from what follows), Pliny has several questions: How should Christians be punished? What are the grounds for investigation, and how far should investigation be pressed? Are any distinctions to be made for age, or for renouncing Christianity? Are Christians to be punished just for being Christians, “for the mere name of Christian,” even though they may not be guilty of “crimes associated with the name”?’, Van Voorst, ‘Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence’, p. 24 (2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. ‘**Pliny does not deal explicitly with the “historical Jesus.”** If he has learned anything in his investigations and interrogations about Jesus, he does not relate it to the emperor.’, ibid., p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. ‘None of these features, of course, **add to our knowledge of the Jesus of history**.’, Evans, ‘Jesus in Non-Christian Sources’, in Chilton & Evans (eds.), ‘Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research’, p. 459 (1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. ‘The founder of this name, **Christ, had been executed in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate**’, Tacitus quoted in Van Voorst, ‘Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence’, p. 41 (2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. ‘**The textual integrity of this section has on occasion been doubted**. The text has some significant problems, as attested by the standard critical editions. These and other difficulties in interpreting the text have also led to a few claims that all of it, or key portions of it, has been interpolated by later hands. **But there are good reasons for concluding with the vast majority of scholars that this passage is fundamentally sound**, despite difficulties which result in no small measure from Tacitus’s own compressed style. The overall style and content of this chapter are typically Tacitean. The passage fits well in its context and is the necessary conclusion to the entire discussion of the burning of Rome. Sulpicius Severus’s Chronicle 2.29 attests to much of it in the early fifth century, **so most suggested interpolations would have to have come in the second through fourth centuries.**’, ibid., pp. 42-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Suetonius quoted in Van Voorst, ‘Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence’, p. 30 (2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. ‘We conclude with the overwhelming majority of modern scholarship **that this sentence is genuine**.’, ibid., p. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. ‘“Christus” was often confused with “Chrestus” by non-Christians, and sometimes even by Christians.’, ibid., p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. ‘Although Suetonius did view Christ as an historical person capable of fomenting unrest,55 his glaring mistakes **should caution us against placing too much weight on his evidence for Jesus or his significance for early Christianity**.’, ibid., p 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. ‘The “Jews” may really refer to Christians, who in the first century were viewed as no more than a sect within Judaism itself; or the designation may refer to Jews who quarreled with Christians (along the lines of what we find in Acts). **Of the two, the latter interpretation is the more probable**.’ Evans, ‘Jesus in Non-Christian Sources’, in Chilton & Evans (eds.), ‘Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research’, p. 457 (1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. ‘The confusion involved is hardly the work of artifice or contrivance, but certainly weakens the historical value of the text.’ Dunn, ‘Jesus Remembered’, volume 1, p. 142 (2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. ‘What advantage did the Athenians gain by murdering Socrates, for which they were repaid with famine and pestilence? Or the people of Samos by the burning of Pythagoras, because their country was completely covered in sand in just one hour? **Or the Jews [by killing] their wise king, because their kingdom was taken away at that very time?** God justly repaid the wisdom of these three men: the Athenians died of famine; the Samians were completely overwhelmed by the sea; **and the Jews, desolate and driven from their own kingdom, are scattered through every nation**.’ Van Voorst, ‘Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence’, p. 54 (2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. ‘The text contains no specific Christian ideas — except for the expression "the wise king of the Jews," **which may refer to Jesus**127 — and therefore is presumably of pagan authorship.’, Possekel, ‘Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian’, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, volume 580, number 102, p. 29 (1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. ‘The value of this curious comment lies in the apparent fact that by the end of the first century **Jesus was regarded in at least some non-Christian circles as the Jews’ “wise king.”**’, Evans, ‘Jesus in Non-Christian Sources’, in Chilton & Evans (eds.), ‘Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research’, p. 456 (1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Van Voorst, ‘Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence’, p. 14 (2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Thiessen & Merz, ‘The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide’, pp. 569, 571-572 (1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. ‘Sanders offered a more concise sketch in ‘The Historical Figure of Jesus’ (1993). - Jesus was born c. 4 BCE, near the time of the death of Herod the Great; - he spent his childhood and early adult years in Nazareth, a Galilean village; - he was baptized by John the Baptist; - he called disciples; - he taught in the towns, villages and countryside of Galilee (apparently not the cities); - he preached "the kingdom of God"; - about the year 30 he went to Jerusalem for Passover; - he created a disturbance in the Temple area; - he had a final meal with the disciples; - he was arrested and interrogated by Jewish authorities, specifically the high priest; - he was executed on the orders of the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate.’, Broadhead, ‘Jewish Ways of Following Jesus: Redrawing the Religious Map of Antiquity’, pp. 64-65 (2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Ehrman, ‘Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium’ (1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Vermès, ‘Jesus and the World of Judaism’, pp. 11-12 (1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. ‘Why, then, was Jesus crucified? In Vermes's subsequent volume, ‘The Religion of Jesus the Jew’, he succinctly summarizes his conclusion: “The arrest and execution of Jesus were due, not directly to his words and deeds, but to their possible insurrectionary consequences feared by the nervous authorities in charge of law and order in that powder-keg of first-century Jerusalem... He died on the cross for having done the wrong thing (caused a commotion) in the wrong place (the Temple) at the wrong time (just before Passover)” (x).', Keck, ‘Who is Jesus? History in Perfect Tense’, p. 41 (2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. ‘”The Synoptists are unanimous in presenting him as an exorcist, healer and teacher. They also emphasize that the deepest impression made by Jesus on his contemporaries resulted from his mastery over devils and disease, and the magnetic power of his preaching.”’, Vermès, quoted by Scott, ‘New Options in An Old Quest’, in Greenspoon et al. (eds.), ‘The Historical Jesus Through Catholic and Jewish Eyes’, pp. 7-8 (2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Lüdemann, ‘The Great Deception: And What Jesus Really Said and Did’, pp. 77, 83, 96-97 (1999), and ‘Jesus After Two Thousand Years: what he really said and did’, pp. 689-690 (2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. ‘Lüdemann even concludes that ‘the activity of Jesus in driving out demons is one of the most certain historical facts about his life’ (Jesus 13).’, Dunn, ‘Jesus Remembered’, p. 677 (2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Frederic Godet, *A commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke; Vol. 1* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1890), 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. See Num 20.12, Deut 34.1, 4, Josh 1.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Martin Culy, Mikeal Parsons, Joshua Stigall, *Luke: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2010), 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Culy, Parsons, Stigall, *Luke: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. [Ed AP]: The word ‘term’ is often translated in versions as ‘warfare’ (KJV, NASB, RSV); the Jewish commentator Rosenberg is more literal to the Hebrew ‘for she has become full from her host’ translating the relevant word as ‘host’. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-XI* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006), 423. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1997), 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. A. Perry, “The Manifestation of the Spirit in Luke 1-2,” *Academia.edu*, May 7, 2012, www.academia.edu/2152259/The\_Manifestation\_of\_the\_Spirit\_in\_Luke\_1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. [ED AP]: Other studies are A. Perry “Psalm 110” *CeJBI* 2/2 (2008): 24-29; J. Adey “Psalm 110” *CeJBI* 2/3 (2008): 38-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. [ED AP]: This topic is covered in detail in J. Adey, “Stephen and the Divine Council” *CeJBI* 2/4 (2008): 3-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974). [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, Part Second Chapter 9 paragraphs 5 & 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 241, n. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. J. Glasgow, *The Apocalypse Translated and Expounded* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1872). [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Footnote No. 1 to paragraph 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Glasgow, *The Apoc. Trans. And Expounded,* p. 19, Para VI. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Electronic copies of the book are available http://www.lulu.com/shop/jonathan-burke/living-on-the-edge/ebook/product-21434354.html, and hard copies can be obtained by email to jb@btdf.org. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. [Ed AP]: This has now had an extra chapter added on ‘Divine Agency’ and is 185pp with the new chapter; as a result it is now in its Second Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. See studies by Erika Eichelberger: “Cows Are 25 Percent Snake” online @ http://www.motherjones.com/blue-marble/2013/01/dna-cows-snakes-adelaide-flinders-study and “Genes jump from snakes to cows” online @ http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-01-03/snake-genes-27hitchhike27-into-cow-dna/4451308 [cited Feb 2014]. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. On retroviruses see Perry, *Special Creationism*, 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. “The flow of genes between different species represents a form of genetic variation whose implications have not been fully appreciated. Here I examine some key findings on the extent of horizontal gene transfer (HGT) revealed by comparative genome analysis and their theoretical implications. In theoretical terms, HGT affects ideas pertaining to the tree of life, the notion of a last universal common ancestor, and the biological unities, as well as the rules of taxonomic nomenclature”. Michael Syvanen, “Evolutionary Implications of Horizontal Gene Transfer” *Annual Review of Genetics* Vol. 46: 341-358 (Volume publication date December 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. *The Torah: With Rashi’s Commentary*, vol. 1, *Bereishis: Genesis* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1995), 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)