

Science and Faith at the Crossroads of Creation: How To Take Genesis Seriously

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Jesus loved the Old Testament. It was his Bible. He studied it, he embraced it, he taught it. How do we take Jesus seriously without taking his book seriously?

Rules for Biblical Interpretation

- The Bible includes different kinds of writing
- The rules of interpretation depend on what kind of writing it is: history, poetry, parable, epic, etc. To respect scripture we read it on its terms, not ours.
- The meaning of a text is rooted in whatever the original author intended the readers to understand
- To understand a text we need “get inside” the author’s world—culture, language, worldview

Genesis 1-2 is a story. That doesn’t mean untrue! “Story” as I’m using it means a narrative designed to instruct. Like a “life story” or a “news story.” A story is intended to tell us something beyond the facts.

When you listen to a story like this, you’re supposed to ask “What’s the point?”... “What’s the significance?” “How does this relate to me?”

The author of Genesis is separated from us by a huge gulf:

- distance of time
- distance of language
- distance of culture
- distance of worldview

The Ancient Understanding of the Physical Universe

- The earth is a disc, surrounded by water—not only on the sides, but below and above as well. A firm bowl (the “firmament” or “expanse”) keeps the upper waters back, but has gates to let the rain and snow fall through.
- The sun, moon, and stars move in fixed tracks along the underside of this bowl.
- Above this firmament sits the throne of God.
- From below, the waters break through as wells, rivers, and oceans. But the earth stands firm on pillars sunk into the waters like the pilings of a pier.
- Deep below the earth is Sheol, the abode of the dead.

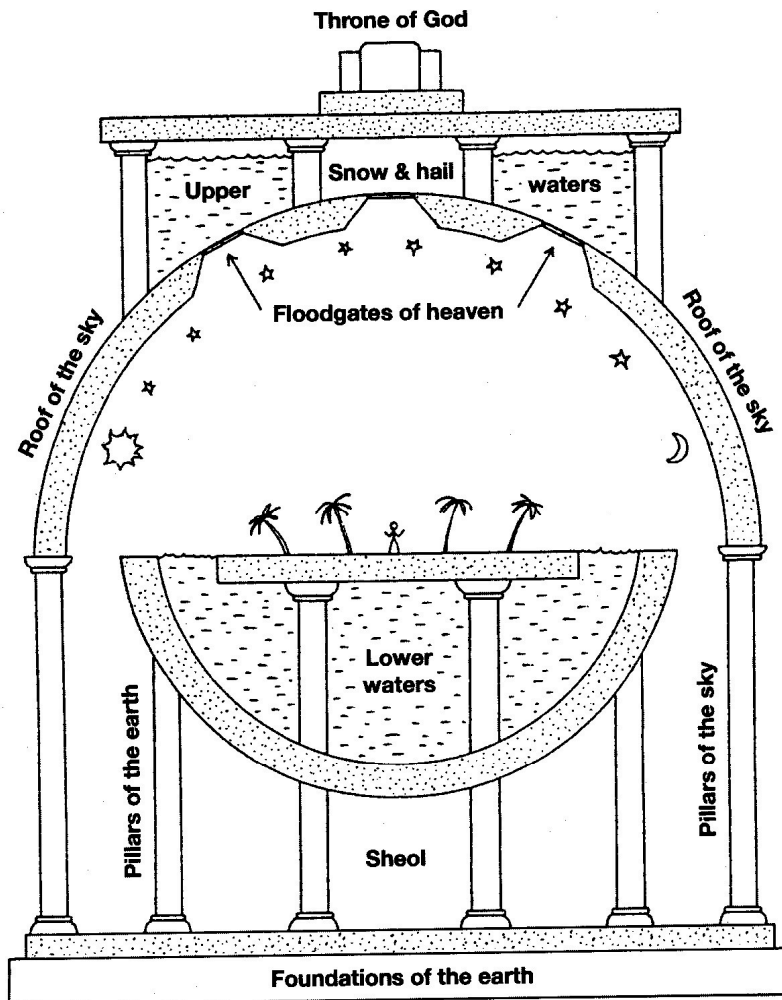
Understanding this worldview helps us to better understand the Bible.

There’s just no evidence that the ancient Hebrews had a more advanced scientific understanding of the world than their brethren. The word of God came to transform our understanding of him, not our understanding of science.

Compare Genesis to the *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian creation epic.

What Genesis teaches us:

- 1) there is one God, without sexual gender, alone from the start,
- 2) who created from his goodness and wise plan a world of order,
- 3) in which matter is good and not the result of whim or magic,
- 4) but God's *word* decrees what is to be and established limits;
- 5) he gave humans a place of honor, made in his own image;
- 6) they were to have responsibility over what was created,
- 7) and share divine gifts of pro-creating life, sharing his Sabbath rest and knowing God personally.



Recommended Reading

[The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary](#) by Robert Alter

[Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament](#)
by Peter Enns

[How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth](#) by Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart