

2. Biblical Worldview

Before looking at the Bible's theology in detail, we must establish the parameters of its worldview—its field of play, so to speak. The understanding of one's worldview is a difficult task because we are all confined within the world we are trying to comprehend. Because no one is able to transcend their existence, our worldview is inescapably an *internal*-view.

The human situation is thus something of a “fishbowl conundrum.” Ask ten fish to define the fishbowl within which they live, and you will get ten different “fishbowl-views.” Moreover, the task of understanding the fishbowl is complicated by the issues of mortality—the fish are mostly deaf, dumb, and blind, while the water is murky green, “subjected to frustration” (Rom. 8:20, NIV), awaiting a radical cleansing (cf. 2 Thess. 1:8; 2 Peter 3:7; Rev. 21:5).

Like fish trying to understand their fishbowl, humans throughout history have tried to understand the nature of their existence. Some set out on a quest to test the limits of their own half-deaf-dumb-and-blind sensibilities. Others sit around endlessly philosophizing and deconstructing the realities of their fishy existence. Others seek knowledge from sources that transcend their bowl. Unfortunately, various sources give conflicting accounts, since not all masters are truthful in their relations with fish. Strangely, the “sensible” fish often ridicule the “religious” fish because of their “superstitions” and “presuppositions.” They argue that the fishbowl consists of only that which we can understand, observe, measure, and test—a very *ichthus*-centric approach indeed!

This parable of the fishbowl gives us a picture of the true condition of humanity. Like fish in a bowl, humans construct various worldviews in an attempt to explain the nature and function of their existence. Based on a belief in the inerrant inspiration of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, we will seek to understand our existence by studying the worldview set forth in the Bible. This foundation will then sustain a biblical theology and, consequently, a biblical practice.

The Bible describes the totality of existence in its first verse: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The heavens and the earth, and all therein, are understood to make up “all things” (Isa. 44:24; John 1:3; Acts 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:28; Eph. 1:10; 3:9; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2; 2:10; 2 Peter 3:4; Rev. 4:11; 21:5), and they are referenced throughout the Scriptures as the basic playing field upon which God, humans, angels, demons, plants, and animals function. The delineation of the heavens and the earth, however, does not imply a metaphysical split between the two, but rather a functional and governmental categorization. As the psalmist summarizes, “The heavens are the LORD’s heavens, but the earth he has given to the children of man” (Ps. 115:16).

The verses following Genesis 1:1 describe how the heavens and the earth were formed. On day one, the Spirit of God hovered over the “waters” (Heb. *mayim*), and light was created (vv. 2–5), presumably within the waters.¹ On day two, God created “an expanse in the midst of the waters” (v. 6). Despite the attempts of modernists to circumvent the text, this “expanse” (Heb. *rāqîa’*) is simply equated with the “heavens” (v. 8, AT).² In this way, the heavens (Heb. *šāmayim*) were created in the midst of the waters (Heb. *mayim*). Far from a solid “dome over the earth,”³ the expanse/heavens are simply the cosmic “space amidst the waters”⁴—that is, the space between the eternal cosmic waters and the waters of the earth, commonly referred to as “the water planet.”⁵ Thus, not only

¹ The association of the “waters” (Heb. *mayim*) with the “deep” (Heb. *tēhôm*) in Gen. 1:2 is straightforward. *Tēhôm* is used some thirty-six times in the OT, and most of the references clearly refer to waters in the form of oceans, seas, lakes, and fountains (cf. Gen. 7:11; 8:2; Ex. 15:5,8; Deut. 8:7; Job 28:14; 38:16,30; Ps. 33:7; 42:7; 77:16; 78:15; 104:6; 106:9; 107:26; 135:6; Prov. 3:20; 8:24; Isa. 51:10; 63:13; Ezek. 26:19; 31:4,15; Jonah 2:5; Hab. 3:10).

² Though most English translations (e.g., KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV) translate here the plural *šāmayim* into the singular (“heaven”), this is purely arbitrary. The same word is generally translated as plural (“heavens”) in vv. 1, 9, 14, 15, etc. The translation of *šāmayim* in v. 8 as “sky” (NRSV, NIV, NLT) does not fit with the cosmological nature of the passage as introduced in v. 1. Moreover, other references to God creating and stretching out the *šāmayim* (e.g., Ps. 104:2; Isa. 42:5; Zech. 12:1) are nearly universally translated “heavens.”

³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1998), 20.

⁴ Though the etymology of *šāmayim* is claimed to be “obscure” (G. von Rad, “οὐρανός,” *TDNT*, 5:502), its derivation from the compound *ša* and *mayim*—i.e., “the space in the waters” or “the place of the waters” (*NIDOTTE*, 4:160)—is contextually sound.

⁵ Though the earth has an infinitesimally small amount of water relative to the cosmic waters, the point being made is the centrality of water to the life created in the following verses, though water in and of itself is rather unique and wonderful; see Lyall Watson and Jerry Derbyshire, *The Water Planet: A Celebration of the Wonder of Water* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988).

is the earth “formed out of water and through water” (2 Peter 3:5), but also the entire cosmos is understood to be forged and encapsulated by water.⁶

The process of separating the waters above the “expanse” from the waters below and calling it “heavens” (Gen. 1:8, AT) is elsewhere described as “stretching out the heavens” (Ps. 104:2; cf. Job 9:8; Isa. 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 51:13; Jer. 10:12; 51:15; Zech. 12:1). Consider the following verses:

I made the earth
and created man on it;
it was my hands that *stretched out the heavens*,
and I commanded all their host. (Isa. 45:12)

It is he who made the earth by his power,
who established the world by his wisdom,
and by his understanding *stretched out the heavens*. (Jer. 10:12)

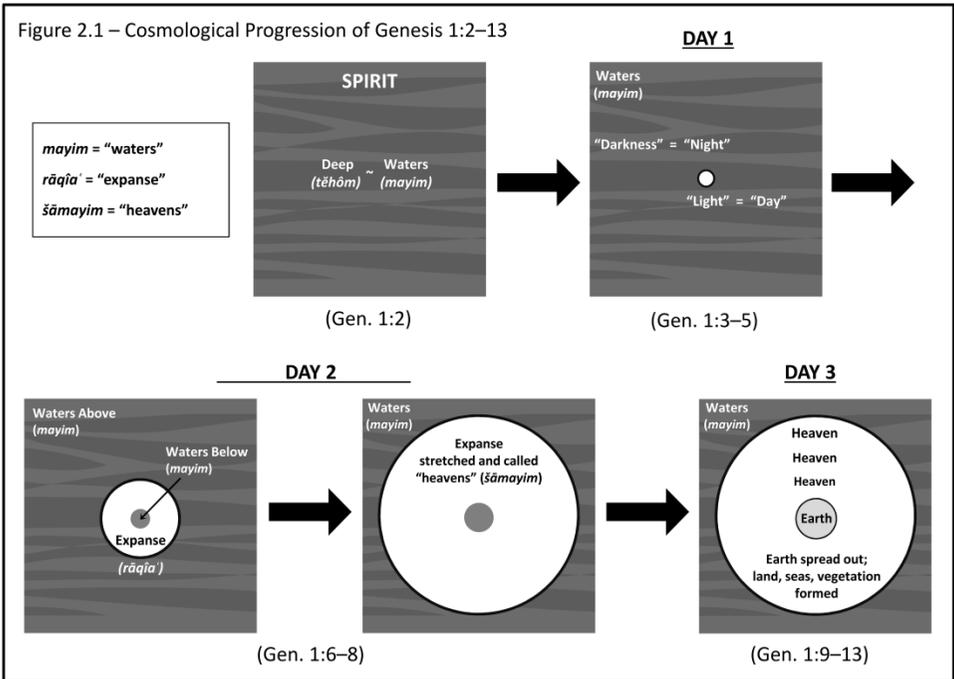
Thus declares the LORD, who *stretched out the heavens* and founded the earth
and formed the spirit of man within him . . . (Zech. 12:1)

The intended meaning of the *rāqîaʿ* and *šāmayim* is the “stretched expanse” in the midst of the cosmic waters. Hence we see a basic model for interpreting the first three days of creation (see figure 2.1).⁷

⁶ Though “white hole cosmology” seems speculative, note the cosmological interpretation of Gen. 1:3–8 in D. Russell Humphreys, *Starlight and Time: Solving the Puzzle of Distant Starlight in a Young Universe* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 1994), 31–38.

⁷ Fully aware of the limitations of a two-dimensional diagram, especially its circular nature, we must simply acknowledge the limitations of mortality. Though the biblical language of the heavens being “up” or “above” is incompatible with a spherical earth, there may be an issue of dimensionality at work, akin to how a three-dimensional coordinate would relate to a two-dimensional coordinate. The diagram is simply an attempt to portray faithfully the primary aspects of the nature and relations of the heavens and the earth, which ultimately find meaning and import in their theological extrapolation—i.e., “new heavens and new earth” (Isa. 65:17; cf. 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1).

Figure 2.1 – Cosmological Progression of Genesis 1:2–13



As seen in this diagram, the heavens are described as *plural*. The Hebrew word for heavens (*šāmayim*) is used over four hundred times in the Old Testament, and it is always in the plural form. Moreover, the plural is sometimes used in tandem (*šāmeḥ h'šāmayim*), "heavens of heavens" (Deut. 10:14; 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chron. 2:6; 6:18; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 148:4), which is often translated "height of the heavens" or "highest heavens" (NASB, NIV, NLT), referring to the region(s) of God's dwelling. The translation of *šāmayim* into the singular by various English translations is generally arbitrary.⁸ The biblical worldview clearly understands the heavens to be plural.⁹

⁸ The justification for the singular translation is the Hebrew use of the plural as superlative — e.g., "It probably does not mean a number of different heavens but is an expression for the superlative" ("שָׁמַיִם," HALOT, 4:1521). However, the commonly held view of the plurality of the heavens, both in the Scriptures and Jewish intertestamental texts (see n. 10 below), nullifies this statement. The judgment of when a word is superlative becomes quite arbitrary, as is seen between the various translations (cf. Gen. 1:1; 11:4; Deut. 10:14; 1 Kings 8:27; Job 22:12; 38:29; etc.).

⁹ The Greek word for heaven(s), *ouranos*, is used almost three hundred times in the NT, approximately one-third in the plural and two-thirds in the singular. This is not because the writers were sloppy or because they had converted to a Hellenistic understanding of the universe. The singular use is simply referencing one heaven of the heavens (usually God's dwelling place) or the heavens as a "collective singular" — i.e., referring to all that is above. The distinction is clear when

Within this framework, the heavens are described in the Scriptures as *continuous*. They are the abode of birds (Gen. 1:20; 2:19; Dan. 2:38); of clouds, rain, and thunder (Gen. 8:2; Job 38:29; Isa. 55:10); of sun, moon, and stars (Gen. 1:14–18; Deut. 4:19; Ps. 8:3); of idols, spirits, and powers (Ex. 20:4; Deut. 3:24; Isa. 24:21); and of God himself (Deut. 26:15; 1 Kings 8:30; Ps. 2:4). All of these things function together in the heavens, and there are no clear lines of distinction between them. There are delineations between different areas of the heavens, as Paul distinguishes the “third heaven” (2 Cor. 12:2), but there is not a substantial change of existence between these regions.¹⁰

This continuity between the heavens allows for ease of movement within the heavens and between the heavens and the earth. Thus God often “came down” to meet with people or evaluate their affairs (Gen. 11:5; cf. Gen. 18:21; Ex. 19:11; etc.). Likewise, individuals such as Enoch (Heb. 11:5; cf. Gen. 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) were “taken up” into the heavens. Conversely, it was commonly understood that Elijah would come back down before the day of the Lord (Mal. 4:5), which Jesus affirmed on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:11; cf. parallels). Paul likewise was “caught up,” whether in the body or out of the body (2 Cor. 12:2–3). And after Jesus was “taken up” before the disciples (Acts 1:2), two angels declared, “This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (v. 11). This was not abnormal to the disciples, since movement between the heavens and the earth was both familiar and logical.¹¹

both noun forms are used together (e.g., Matt. 6:9–10; 24:29; 2 Cor. 5:1–2). For example, in the Lord’s Prayer, “our Father” is in “the heavens” (plural), while the hope of the kingdom is that the will of God would be done on earth as it is in “heaven” (singular)—that is, the heaven of heavens where God sits enthroned, since the will of the Lord is not fully obeyed presently in other parts of the heavens.

¹⁰ The exact number of heavens is not stated explicitly in the Scriptures. Jewish tradition varies from three (*Testament of Levi* 2–3) to five (3 *Baruch* 11–17) to seven (*Apocalypse of Abraham* 10:8; 19:4; *Ascension of Isaiah* 7–10; *Life of Adam and Eve* 35:2) to ten (2 *Enoch* 20–22). As color classifications of a rainbow vary, so also might the delineation of the heavenly realms. Though Paul may have had in mind more than three strata to the heavens (2 Cor. 12:2), this arrangement—upper, middle, and lower heavens—preserves plurality while allowing for further dissection. See also discussions in Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 78–93; and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic, 1996), 21–54.

¹¹ For intertestamental background—e.g., 1 *Enoch*, 2 *Enoch*, *Testament of Levi*, *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *Ascension of Isaiah*, and 3 *Baruch*—see Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), esp. 29–71. Himmelfarb

The heavens are also assumed to be inherently *physical* in nature. In contrast to the later Platonic concept of a singular, ethereal heaven, the Scriptures describe the heavens as tangible, substantial, and concrete. There are audible sounds, voices, and songs (Isa. 6:3; 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 4–5). There are physical objects, such as thrones, altars, and thresholds (1 Kings 22:19–23; Isa. 6:1–7; Ezek. 1:25–28; Dan. 7:9–10). Furthermore, time exists in the various regions of the heavens (Rev. 8:1), and this time generally coincides with time on earth (cf. 1 Kings 22:19–23; Dan. 7:9–12; Rev. 11:18–19). The heavens are therefore clearly *dynamic* in nature, rather than static, as in Hellenistic thought. This perspective leads to the conclusion that the physicality seen in heaven is roughly analogous to the physicality known on earth.¹²

These plural, continuous, and physical heavens were universally understood as *real locations*, not “states of being.”¹³ In addition, their relationship to the earth was positional. The heavens are “above” and the earth is “below” (cf. Gen. 6:17; Deut. 4:39; 1 Kings 8:23; Ps. 50:4; etc.).¹⁴ Accordingly, God “looks down” from the heavens upon his creation (Ps. 33:13; 53:2; cf. Deut. 26:15; Ps. 80:14; 102:19; Isa. 63:15)—“Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and beautiful habitation” (Isa. 63:15). God’s habitation is understood to be at the height of the

seems to miss the mark, however, concerning the eschatological orientation of apocalypticism, believing the ultimate apocalyptic purpose to be “that human beings can become the equals of angels” (p. 4).

¹² Because of the Platonic perversion, it is commonly assumed in modern times that heaven is not designed to host human bodies, but this assumption is not supported by the Scriptures. Jesus clearly sits enthroned in heaven with a resurrected body. Enoch and Elijah went up in their bodies. And Paul might have been caught up in his body — “whether *in the body* or out of the body I do not know” (2 Cor. 12:2). Corporeal ascension was neither foreign nor beyond plausibility.

¹³ The naturalistic critic finds the biblical language insufferable. For example, Rudolf Bultmann wrote, “These mythological conceptions of heaven and hell are no longer acceptable for modern men since for scientific thinking to speak of ‘above’ and ‘below’ in the universe has lost all meaning, but the idea of the transcendence of God and of evil is still significant” (*Jesus Christ and Mythology* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958], 20). Though Bultmann calls this significance the “deeper meaning” (p. 18), one finds the transcendence of God magnified within a straightforward reading of the biblical worldview.

¹⁴ A fuller list would include Gen. 6:17; 7:19; 11:4; 28:12; Ex. 20:4; Deut. 4:39; 5:8; 11:21; 30:12; Josh. 2:11; 1 Kings 8:23; 2 Chron. 7:1; Job 28:24; Ps. 50:4; 85:11; 113:6; Isa. 14:12; 24:21; 44:23; 51:6; Jer. 10:11; Matt. 3:16; 28:2; John 1:51; 3:13; 6:33ff; Acts 1:9ff; 2:19; 7:55f; 10:11ff; Eph. 4:8ff; 1 Thess. 4:16; Rev. 12:10ff; 18:1; 21:2.

heavens (Job 25:2; Ps. 148:1; Isa. 14:13)—“Is not God in the heights of heaven?” (Job 22:12, NIV).¹⁵

The primary implication of God’s governance of creation from the heights of the heavens is his *dwelling within creation*. Though relatively foreign to the modern mind, the Scriptures universally declare that God dwells within what he has made (e.g., 1 Kings 8:43; Ps. 102:19; Isa. 57:15; 63:15; etc.).¹⁶ He does not dwell in the “great beyond” (as is common language in modern theological circles), nor does he dwell beyond the cosmic waters (as is common in reconstructions of ancient Near Eastern thought). He dwells within the heavens, as Isaiah described:

Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you *from the beginning*?
Have you not understood since the earth was founded?
He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,
and its people are like grasshoppers.
He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,
and spreads them out *like a tent to live in*.
He brings princes to naught
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. (Isa. 40:21–23, NIV)

God dwells within creation as a human being dwells within a tent. But why does this matter? *Proximity evokes pathos*. What would my children think if I lived

¹⁵ The supposed naïveté of popular conception will surely be vindicated in the end. D. L. Moody recounted,

Soon after I was converted, an infidel asked me one day why I looked *up* when I prayed. He said that heaven was no more above us than below us; that heaven was everywhere. Well, I was greatly bewildered, and the next time I prayed, it seemed almost as if I was praying into the air. Since then I have become better acquainted with the Bible, and I have come to see that heaven is above us; that it is upward, and not downward. The Spirit of God is everywhere, but God is in heaven, and heaven is above our heads. It does not matter what part of the globe we may stand upon, heaven is above us. (*Heaven: Where It Is, Its Inhabitants, and How to Get There*, Rev. ed. [Chicago: Revell, 1884], 15–16)

¹⁶ A fuller list would include Gen. 28:12f; Deut. 26:15; 1 Kings 8:30,39,43,49; 1 Chron. 16:31; 21:26; 2 Chron. 2:6; 6:18–39; 30:27; Neh. 9:27; Job 22:12,14; Ps. 2:4; 11:4; 20:6; 29:9f; 33:13; 68:5; 102:19; 103:19; 104:2f; 113:5; 123:1; 135:6; Eccl. 5:2; Isa. 40:22; 57:15; 63:15; 66:1; Jer. 23:24; 25:30; Lam. 3:41,50; Dan. 4:35; 5:23; Zech. 2:13; Matt. 6:9; 23:9; Acts 2:33; 3:21; 7:49,55; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 10:12; Rev. 4:2; 20:11; 22:3.

in a different house than them? How would they feel? What would they think of my heart and of my leadership? Would they trust me? Probably not. More than likely they would grow up with a deep sense of abandonment. So the modern church, under Hellenistic influence, suffers from a “cosmic loneliness,” so to speak, which pervades much of its theology and practice. The Scriptures, however, reveal to us a God whose habitation is within creation, because he loves what he has made, and it is very good in his sight.

Some may question if this cohabitation compromises God’s sovereignty. Does my living within a house mean my house limits me or rules over me? Of course not. God is completely separate from and transcendent over his creation, yet his greatness in sovereignty is only magnified by his nearness of presence. As Isaiah says, “For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: ‘I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite’” (Isa. 57:15, NIV).

In regard to his sovereignty, God also rules from a *real throne*. As the heavens are concrete and tangible, so also is the throne of God (cf. Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:26; Rev. 4:2–6). Biblical writers universally speak of the divine throne as they would the throne of an earthly king. The throne of God is not a metaphor, intended only to refer to a figurative “reign of God.” Rather, it is a real seat in a real place in real time from which God rules over a real domain.

The Bible means quite literally that God is the “great King” (Ps. 47:2; 95:3; Jer. 10:10; Mal. 1:14) and the “everlasting King” (Jer. 10:10), for his dominion includes all of creation. Not only is he the “Most High” (Isa. 14:14; Dan. 7:18; Luke 6:35), but he is also God “Almighty” (Gk. *pantokratōr*, Rev. 4:8; 16:7)—that is, “the ruler over all things.”¹⁷ Hence the eternal declaration, “Around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind. . . . Day and night they never cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty [Gk. *pantokratōr*], who was and is and is to come!’” (Rev. 4:6–8).

God’s domain is the whole of creation—that is, the heavens and the earth (cf. Deut. 10:14; 1 Chron. 29:11; Ps. 24:1)—which is his “universal kingdom,” so to

¹⁷ W. Michaelis, “παντοκράτωρ,” *TDNT*, 3:914; cf. Hab. 2:13; Zeph. 2:10; Zech. 1:3 in the LXX.

speak (cf. Ps. 103:19; 145:13; Dan. 4:34).¹⁸ As David said, “The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all” (Ps. 103:19). So also, at the end of his life, David said, “Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all” (1 Chron. 29:11).

God’s throne in the height of the heavens is also set within a *real temple* (cf. Ps. 11:4; 18:6; 29:9; 150:1; Isa. 6:1; Jonah 2:7; Mic. 1:2; Hab. 2:20; Rev. 11:19; 14:15–18; 15:5–8; 16:1). Like the divine throne, God’s heavenly “sanctuary” (Ps. 28:2; 96:6; cf. Ps. 102:19; Heb. 8:2,5; 9:24) is not a metaphor for an ethereal holy nature. God is indeed holy, but he is holy within a real temple.¹⁹ Consider the following texts:

The LORD is in his holy temple;
the LORD is on his heavenly throne.
He observes the sons of men;
his eyes examine them. (Ps. 11:4, NIV)

Praise the LORD!
Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens!
Praise him for his mighty deeds;
praise him according to his excellent greatness! (Ps. 150:1–2)

Hear, you peoples, all of you;
pay attention, O earth, and all that is in it,
and let the Lord GOD be a witness against you,
the Lord from his holy temple.
For behold, the LORD is coming out of his place,
and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. (Mic. 1:2–3)

¹⁸ This will be discussed further in chap. 6 and distinguished from the eschatological messianic kingdom—the restored kingdom of Adam upon the earth (cf. “son of Man,” “last Adam,” etc.)—referred to in the NT as the “kingdom of God” (cf. Mark 9:47; 10:23–25; 14:25; etc.).

¹⁹ For a survey of the heavenly temple in intertestamental literature, see Martha Himmelfarb, “Apocalyptic Ascent and the Heavenly Temple,” *Society for Biblical Literature 1987 Seminar Papers*, ed. Kent H. Richards (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 210–17.

Thus we have a context for the opening of the heavenly temple in the book of Revelation: “Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail” (Rev. 11:19). It is from his heavenly dwelling that God rules over all of creation, administrating all things in the heavens and the earth. Thus, the heavenly temple is the *locus of creation*. It is the reference point for all divine, angelic, demonic, and human activity. It is the “command center,” so to speak, of the universe. The earthly tabernacle was simply “patterned” after the heavenly one (cf. Ex. 25:40; Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:5; 9:24).²⁰ It was designed to inherently witness and testify to God’s governance over all of creation.²¹

From protological creation (cf. Gen. 2:2–3; Isa. 40:21–23) to eschatological consummation (cf. Rev. 11:19; 14:15; 15:5; 16:1), the heavenly temple is the reference point for all divine redemptive activity. So when someone saw the “footstool” (1 Chron. 28:2; Ps. 99:5; 132:7; Lam. 2:1), it was meant to point them to the throne above, and subsequently to the judgment to come, which is based upon humanity’s original sin. All of this would have been quite elementary to a believer living in the ancient world.²²

²⁰ Concerning this tradition in intertestamental literature, see *Wisdom of Solomon* 9:8; 2 *Baruch* 4:3ff; and *Testament of Levi* 5:1.

²¹ See the discussion on the reality of the heavenly temple and its earthly pattern (Heb. *tabnith*) in Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 187–90.

²² Though I believe John H. Walton is errant concerning his rejection of creation *ex nihilo* (see chap. 4, n. 1), his point concerning temple functionality in ancient Near Eastern thought is well-put:

In the traditional view that Genesis 1 is an account of material origins, day seven is mystifying. It appears to be nothing more than an afterthought with theological concerns about Israelites observing the Sabbath—an appendix, a postscript, a tack on.

In contrast, a reader from the ancient world would know immediately what was going on and recognize the role of day seven. Without hesitation the ancient reader would conclude that this is a temple text and that day seven is the most important of the seven days. . . .

How could reactions be so different? The difference is the piece of information that everyone knew in the ancient world and to which most modern readers are totally oblivious: *Deity rests in a temple, and only in a temple*. This is what temples were built for. We might even say that this is what a temple is—a place for divine rest. (*The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2009], 71; italics added)

The clearest demonstration of this belief in a real heavenly temple is found in Hebrews 8–10. The “throne of the Majesty” (8:1) is within the “true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man” (8:2, NIV). The “earthly tabernacle” (9:1, NIV) that Moses erected was simply “according to the pattern” (8:5) of the heavenly tabernacle (cf. Ex 25:9,40; 26:30; 27:8). It was a “man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one” (9:24, NIV). Moreover, not only was the structure itself a “copy and shadow of what is in heaven” (8:5, NIV), but the ministry of the priests (8:3–5; 9:6–7,21–22; 10:1–2,11) was also a “shadow of the good things to come” (10:1) found in the ministry of Christ.

As the earthly sanctuary and its “copies of the heavenly things” were purified with the blood of sacrifices, so also “the heavenly things themselves” were purified by the blood of Christ (9:23). He entered the heavenly sanctuary “to offer himself” (9:25) and “to bear the sins of many” (9:28). And after he had “offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God” (10:12), and since that time “he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool” (10:13, NIV) on the day of the Lord (cf. Ps. 110:1; Acts 2:35).²³

Within a biblical worldview, this is all very straightforward. There is no “mystical” language or “spiritual” rhetoric. It is simply an interpretive narration of historical events that have taken place within the biblical cosmos. What is more, Christ’s ascension into substantial heavens and into a real temple, offering his own blood on a literal altar on behalf of depraved humanity, is the actual *substitutionary mechanism* of the atonement in the sight of God.²⁴ Without a

²³ Thus we see vividly the two axes of apocalyptic thought: heavenly revelation and eschatological consummation. See the formative article by John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” in *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, ed. John J. Collins (Semeia 14; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 1–20; cf. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

²⁴ This presentation of the heavenly sanctuary is in no way in agreement with the novel and unfounded views of the Adventists. Though strumming a sound close to the Bible, they are completely out of tune. Adventists believe that the failed prophecy of Jesus’ return in 1844, as prophesied by William Miller and others, was simply a misinterpretation of Daniel 8:14. Instead of cleansing the earthly sanctuary after 2,300 symbolic “days” (i.e., years), Jesus actually began the final phase of his “atoning ministry” by moving from the heavenly Holy Place to the Most Holy Place and cleansing the heavenly sanctuary through “sin transfer” (in fulfillment of the antitypic “Day of Atonement”). This action also inaugurated a time of “investigative judgment” against the Babylonian, non-Adventist church. This time will come to fulfillment at the end of the age when the Babylonian church will fall away and only the “remnant” of Adventists will be saved. See General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Beliefs*, “24. Christ’s Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary”; available at <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/>.

definite event and a tangible sacrificial offering, the atonement breaks down into figurative abstraction—which, unfortunately, has been the norm throughout much of the history of atonement theory.²⁵

Not only does God “build his upper chambers in the heavens” (Amos 9:6), but the chambers of his temple are also surrounded by gardens, or a “paradise” (note that the Greek *paradeisos* translates the “garden” of Eden in the Septuagint—that is, the “paradise” of Eden).²⁶ So Paul references the heavenly paradise: “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up *into paradise*—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter” (2 Cor. 12:2–4).

Paul’s third-heaven experience was not unfamiliar in his day, and by no means would anyone have questioned the reality of a “paradise” in the height of the heavens.²⁷ It was common knowledge, since deities were understood to dwell in “garden-temples.”²⁸ Most of the ancient world believed the gods dwelled in

For more on the Adventist doctrine of the “heavenly sanctuary,” see Marc Rasell, *Exploring the Heavenly Sanctuary: Understanding Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Milton Keynes, England: AuthorHouse, 2009); and Samuele Bacchiocchi, *God’s Festivals in Scripture and History*, 2 vols. (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1995–1996). For a rebuttal, see Russell Earl Kelly, *Exposing Seventh-Day Adventism*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: Writer’s Club Press, 2005), 55–101.

²⁵ The nature, purpose, and effects of the death of the Messiah as an atonement will be discussed in chap. 8.

²⁶ “In Re 2.7 ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ ‘in the paradise of God,’ the reference may reflect somewhat more closely the historical background of this term, which is derived from an Old Persian word meaning ‘enclosure,’ and thus was applied to a ‘garden’ or ‘park.’ For that reason, a number of commentators have believed that in Re 2.7, it is appropriate to translate ‘the garden of God,’ especially since in the context the reference is to the fruit of the tree of life” (“1.14 παραδείσος,” *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, ed. J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, 2nd ed., vol. 1 [New York: United Bible Societies, 1988], 5).

²⁷ See J. Jeremias, “παράδεισος,” *TDNT*, 5:765–73; esp. 770. Note 2 *Enoch* 8:1: “And those men took me from there, and they brought me up to the third heaven, and set me down there. Then I looked downward, and I saw Paradise. And that place is inconceivably pleasant” (*OTP*, 1:114). And 2 *Enoch* 42:3: “And I ascended to the east, into the paradise of Edem, where rest is prepared for the righteous. And it is open as far as the 3rd heaven; but it is closed off from this world” (*OTP*, 1:168).

²⁸ See Gregory K. Beale’s overall discussion of the garden of Eden, the third heaven, and the new heavens and new earth as a “paradisaal city-temple” in *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 23–80. Beale summarizes his argument in “Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission in the New Creation,” *JETS* 48, no. 1 (2005): 5–31.

some sort of idyllic paradise above.²⁹ The polytheism is obviously perverse, but the metaphysical construct is an aspect of truth that people today have foolishly cast aside as mythical.³⁰

This basic framework of a plural, continuous, and physical heavens, within which God rules from a paradisaal-temple, ultimately informs the context and meaning of the statement, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule . . . over all the earth” (Gen. 1:26, NIV). As humanity was created in the image of God to rule, so also Eden was viewed as a garden-temple in the likeness of God’s garden-temple in the height of the heavens (see figure 2.2).³¹

²⁹ See Ioan Petru Colianu, “Ascension,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 1:435–41; and Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 259–87.

³⁰ Following in the footsteps of Rudolf Bultmann, who wrote,

The cosmology of the New Testament is essentially mythical in character. The world is viewed as a three-storied structure, with the earth in the centre, the heaven above, and the underworld beneath. Heaven is the abode of God and of celestial beings—the angels. The underworld is hell, the place of torment. Even the earth is more than the scene of natural, everyday events, of the trivial round and common task. It is the scene of the supernatural activity of God and his angels on the one hand, and of Satan and his daemons on the other. . . .

All this is the language of mythology, and the origin of the various themes can be easily traced in the contemporary mythology of Jewish Apocalyptic. . . .

Can Christian preaching expect modern man *to accept the mythical view of the world as true*? To do so would be both senseless and impossible. It would be senseless, because there is nothing specifically Christian in the mythical view of the world as such. It is simply the cosmology of a pre-scientific age. Again, it would be impossible, because no man can adopt a view of the world by his own volition—it is already determined for him by his place in history. (“New Testament and Mythology,” in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. H. W. Bartsch [London: SPCK, 1953], 1–3)

³¹ So John H. Walton articulates, “We must first recognize that the garden of Eden was not, strictly speaking, a garden for man, but was the garden of *God* (Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 28:13). ‘The garden of Eden is not viewed by the author of Genesis simply as a piece of Mesopotamian farmland, but as an archetypal sanctuary, that is, a place where God dwells and where man should worship him. Many of the features of the garden may also be found in later sanctuaries, particularly the tabernacle or Jerusalem temple. These parallels suggest that the garden itself is understood as a sort of sanctuary’” (*Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006], 124; quoting Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* [Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986], 19).

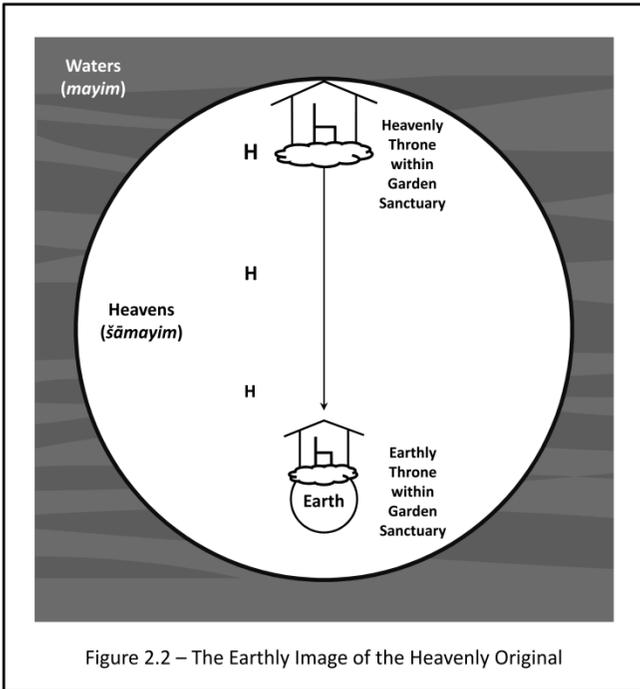


Figure 2.2 – The Earthly Image of the Heavenly Original

Though man’s kingship is obvious in the Genesis creation account (1:26,28; cf. Ps. 8:4–8), his priesthood is less apparent. However, the priesthood of humanity and the Edenic garden-temple are clearly inferred from eschatological texts that describe the end as a restoration of the beginning (cf. Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21; Rev. 21:3). Echoing the creation of humankind, the redeemed are declared to be “a kingdom *and priests* to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:10). This dual kingly and priestly function is the broad theme of the book of Revelation from beginning (1:6) to end (22:5). When Jesus returns and sets up his throne upon the earth, the redeemed “will be *priests* of God and of Christ, and they will *reign* with him” (Rev. 20:6). Thus the protological reality of humanity’s kingly priesthood before God is easily deduced eschatologically. It is not a novel development or an unforeseen revelation; it is inherent to being human, because we were designed to be kings and priests in the garden.

There are, however, explicit references to the protological priesthood of man in the Scriptures. Ezekiel 28 speaks of Eden as an idyllic “sanctuary” (v. 18),³²

³² The plural usage of sanctuary in Ezekiel 28:18 is found elsewhere in reference to the tabernacle (Lev. 21:23) and temple (Jer. 51:51; Ezek. 7:24), as Beale explains: “The plural reference to the one temple probably arose because of the multiple sacred spaces or ‘sanctuaries’ within the temple

which was then desecrated.³³ Psalm 36:7–9 also compares the temple to Eden, since the Hebrew word (*‘ēden*) means “luxury, delight, pleasure” — “The children of mankind [Heb. *‘ādām*] take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house [i.e., temple, cf. 1 Kings 6:1; Isa. 2:2; etc.], and you give them drink from the river of your delights [Heb. *‘ēden*]. For with you is the fountain of life [cf. tree of life]; in your light do we see light.”

Furthermore, many scholars have listed the various similarities between the garden of Eden and the tabernacle and/or Jerusalem temple.³⁴ A partial list follows:

- God “walked” (Heb. *hālak*) in both, representing his unique presence (Gen. 3:8; Lev. 26:12; Deut. 23:14; 2 Sam. 7:6–7).
- Human beings are commanded to “serve/work” (Heb. *‘abad*) and “keep/guard” (Heb. *šamar*) both, representing their priestly role and function (Gen. 2:15; Num. 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6; 1 Chron. 23:32).
- The structure of both is threefold, with an entrance facing east (Gen. 2:8; 3:24; Ezek. 8:16; 40:6). See figure 2.3 for illustration.³⁵
- Both are situated on a mountain (Gen. 2:10; 2 Chron. 3:1; Isa. 2:2; Ezek. 28:13–16), and both are guarded by cherubim (Gen. 3:24; Ex. 25:18–22; 26:31; 1 Kings 6:23–35; Ezek. 28:14).
- Rivers flow out of both Eden (Gen. 2:10) and the eschatological temple in Jerusalem (Ezek. 47:1–12; Rev. 22:1–2).

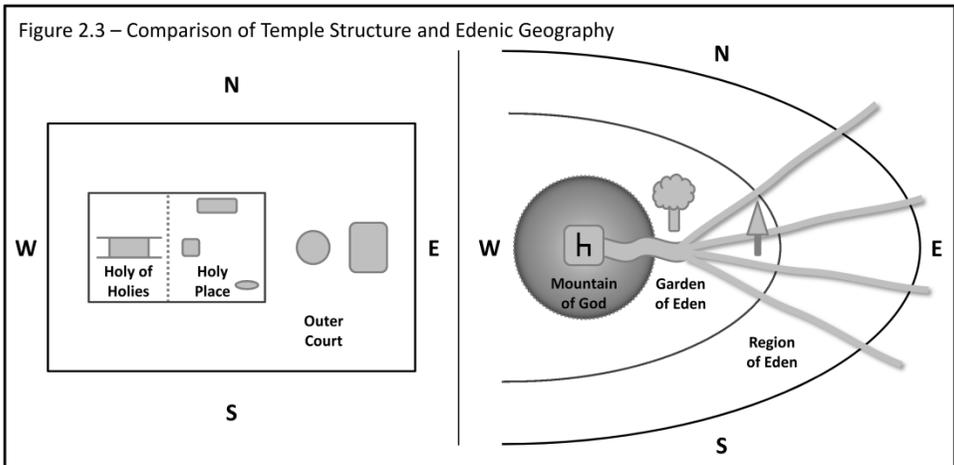
complex (e.g., courtyard, Holy Place, Holy of Holies)” (“Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission,” 10).

³³ Some scholars argue that the glorious being who had “fallen” in Ezekiel 28 is Adam, based on the Septuagint’s rendering of being anointed *with* (v. 14) and being banished *by* (v. 16) the guardian cherub (see Norman C. Habel, “Ezekiel 28 and the Fall of the First Man,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 38 [1967]: 516–24). This would picture Adam in all of his priestly wisdom (v. 12) and blamelessness (v. 15), ordained on the Edenic mount of God (v. 14), and adorned with the same precious stones (v. 13) that later priests wore (cf. Ex. 28:17–20; 39:10–13); see also Beale, *Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 75–76.

³⁴ See Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism,” 19–25; Beale, *Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 66–80; Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 81–108; T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 20–24; and J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1–3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 57–75.

³⁵ Diagram used by consent of Timothy Miller; see *Poised for Harvest, Braced for Backlash: Birthing New Testament Movements When Jesus Disrupts the Systems* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2009).

- Precious metals and stones are used in and adorn both (Gen. 2:11–12; Ex. 25:7–31; Ezek. 28:13).
- Trees filled the garden (Gen. 2:9), and arboreal decorations adorned the temple (1 Kings 6:18–35; 7:18–20). Moreover, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge (Gen. 2:9) seem to be symbolized in the sanctuary lampstand and law, respectively.³⁶



Later Jewish tradition also depicts Adam as a priestly minister in the Edenic temple.³⁷ The combination of Genesis, Revelation, and the prophets all paint a picture that I believe was clear in the minds of the New Testament writers (cf. Luke 24:51; 2 Cor. 12:2; Heb. 8–10; Rev. 15; etc.)—that God ruled over creation from a paradisaical-temple in the height of the heavens, and humans were created in his image as kingly priests to rule over the earth from the paradisaical-temple of

³⁶ On the “arboreal lampstand” representing light and life, see Carol L. Meyers, *The Tabernacle Menorah: A Synthetic Study of a Symbol from the Biblical Cult* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2003). On the law representing wisdom and death to those who touch it, see Beale, *Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 73–74.

³⁷ Robert Hayward explains, “Both ben Sira and Jubilees, in their different ways, bring Adam into direct association with the Temple understood as Eden. According to Jubilees, the first ritual act of worship was offered by Adam immediately after his expulsion from the garden. . . . Adam is thereby constituted the first priest in a succession which will lead to Levi, and then to Aaron and his sons” (C. T. R. Hayward, *The Jewish Temple: A Non-Biblical Sourcebook* [London: Routledge, 1996], 90).

Testament of Levi 18:6–14 and *1 Enoch* 24–27 also closely relate the temple and the garden of Eden (see Beale, *Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 77–79). For further study, see also Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK Publishing, 1991), esp. 68–72.

Eden. The heavens and the earth were created to enhance the glory of God as reflected in the creation of humankind, and consequently the two realities organically correspond to one another.³⁸

Within this patterned arrangement there is also a *divine hierarchy* under the governance of God, by which he holds together all things with absolute power, authority, and dominion (cf. Eph. 1:20–21; Col. 1:16–17). There are “powers” (Rom. 8:38; Eph. 6:12), “rulers” (Eph. 3:10; Col. 1:16), and “authorities” (Col. 2:15; 1 Peter 3:22; cf. Isa. 24:21; 34:4) in the “midheaven” (Rev. 8:13; 14:6; 19:17, NRSV). Note Paul’s descriptions of the heavenly hierarchy:

For by Him [Christ] all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether *thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities* — all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (Col. 1:16–17, NASB)

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against *the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers* over this present darkness, against *the spiritual forces* of evil in the heavenly places. (Eph. 6:11–12)

Such powers and rulers are clearly angelic and/or demonic entities, since they dwell in “heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10; 6:12; cf. 1 Peter 3:22). Some are “ministering spirits” (Heb. 1:14; cf. Ps. 104:4) who “do his bidding” (Ps. 103:20, NRSV) and “patrol the earth” (Zech. 1:10; 6:7). Others “did not stay within their

³⁸ Leonhard Goppelt summarizes, “Behind Ex. 25 stands the ancient oriental idea of a mythical analogical relation between the two worlds, the heavenly and the earthly, the macrocosm and the microcosm, so that lands, rivers, cities and esp. temples have their heavenly originals” (“τύπος as the Heavenly Original according to Exodus 25:40,” *TDNT*, 8:256–57).

The astute student will here recognize the apparent similarity to Platonism (as Goppelt and others have pointed out; see esp. Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 42–60). However, Platonism is simply a perversion. The Bible teaches earthly “images” (Heb. *tselem*, i.e., “representation”; see “מַלְאָכִים,” *HALOT*, 1028–29) of heavenly originals, both qualitatively real and metaphysically substantial. Platonism teaches earthly “copies” of heavenly “forms,” differing qualitatively and metaphysically. Ironically, modern supernaturalism views materiality as more substantial, whereas Platonism viewed materiality as the dreamlike-state from which we awake into the more “real” ideal world (though the latter is portrayed in the modern allegory by C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce: A Dream* [New York: HarperCollins, 1946]).

own position of authority” (Jude 6), and now go “to and fro on the earth” (Job 1:7; 2:2) like a lion “seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). In addition, there is often conflict between the two (cf. Dan. 10:20; Rev. 12:7), which presumably also takes place in the mid-heavens.³⁹ Such conflict, however, will come to an end in the future, as Isaiah describes: “In that day the LORD will punish *the powers in the heavens above* and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days” (Isa. 24:21–22, NIV).

The powers in the heavens are described in the Scriptures as divine intermediaries between God and humans (cf. Ps. 91:11; Dan. 7:10; Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 1:14; 2:2). These powers and principalities—that is, the “host of heaven” (1 Kings 22:19; Dan. 4:35; cf. Ps. 103:21; Luke 2:13), “sons of God” (Deut. 32:8; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7), or “heavenly beings” (Ps. 8:5; 29:1; 89:6)—were understood to be part of a *divine council*, which exists to “administer the affairs of the cosmos.”⁴⁰ For “God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment” (Ps. 82:1). This is how Micaiah would have understood “the LORD sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left” (1 Kings 22:19, NIV). Likewise, the psalmist declares,

³⁹ C. R. Schoonhoven aptly observes,

The popular conception of heaven revolves around clouds, harps, and angels, with humanity marching through the Pearly Gates to live a life of bliss. This conception is far removed from the biblical witness. Rather, the Bible depicts heaven under the wrath of God, the scene of cosmic warfare, and finally subject to dissolution prior to the creation of a new heaven. This ambivalence surrounding heaven is to be expected because of the fundamental antithetical structure of biblical eschatology, which is conceived in terms of this present evil age and the age to come. It must be stressed that in this framework this whole age experiences turbulence, disquiet, and flux; both heaven and earth experience the wrath of God, the powers of evil, personal incompleteness, and temporality. Only the age to come is “heaven” in any idyllic sense. (“Heaven,” *ISBE*, 2:654)

⁴⁰ “The term *divine council* is used by Hebrew and Semitic scholars to refer to the heavenly host, the pantheon of divine beings who administer the affairs of the cosmos. All ancient Mediterranean cultures had some conception of a divine council. The divine council of Israelite religion, known primarily through the psalms, was distinct in important ways” (Michael S. Heiser, “Divine Council,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008], 112).

See also E. Theodore Mullen, *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 24 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980); and Mullen, “Divine Assembly,” *ABD*, 2:214–17.

Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,
your faithfulness in *the assembly of the holy ones!*
For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD?
Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD,
a God greatly to be feared in *the council of the holy ones,*
and awesome above all who are around him? (Ps. 89:5–7)

According to this arrangement, it is assumed that in the beginning angels ministered to God by ascending and descending (cf. Gen. 28:12; John 1:51) between the heavenly and Edenic temples, administrating the glory of God throughout creation.⁴¹ And even though many powers and principalities have forsaken their positions of authority, God Most High still remains completely sovereign over his creation (cf. Jer. 27:5; Hab. 2:13; Zeph. 2:10; Rev. 4:8). The heavens and the earth still “belong” to the Lord (cf. Deut. 10:14; Ps. 24:1; 50:12). He still does “as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth” (Dan. 4:35, NIV; cf. Ps. 115:3; 135:6). They are still “under authority” (Matt. 8:9), and even demons are subject to “begging” (cf. Matt. 8:31). Thus rebellious powers encounter a divine “hedge” (Job. 1:10; Isa. 5:5) and have no liberty to wreak havoc beyond their ordained limits (cf. Job 2:6; 1 Cor. 10:13; James 4:7). Moreover, demons are even used by God to execute divine wrath (cf. 1 Kings 22:22; Judg. 9:23; Rev. 17:17) and to test people’s hearts (cf. 1 Sam. 16:14; Luke 22:31; 2 Thess. 2:11).

Like the powers in the heavens, all the treasonous kingdoms of men are like the “grass” that withers (Ps. 37:2; 90:5; 92:7; 103:15), like “flowers” that fade (Job 14:2; Isa. 40:7; James 1:10)—like “grasshoppers” (Isa. 40:22), “a worm” (Job 25:6), or “a drop from a bucket” (Isa. 40:15)—“they are nothing; together they are only a breath” (Ps. 62:9, NIV). The Lord simply “laughs” at them and “scoffs” at their games (cf. Ps. 2:4; 37:13; 59:8). And often, unbeknown to them, he orchestrates their rise and fall (cf. Ex. 9:16; Jer. 27:6; John 19:11; Acts 17:26). Effortlessly, “he

⁴¹ As in the pseudepigraphic *2 Enoch* 31:1–2, “And I created a garden in Edem, in the east, so that he might keep the agreement and preserve the commandment. And I created for him an open heaven, so that he might look upon the angels, singing the triumphal song. And the light which is never darkened was perpetually in paradise” (*OTP*, 1:154).

removes kings and sets up kings” (Dan. 2:21). The idea that God is “at war” is myopic at best.⁴²

Therefore, “for the Lord’s sake” (1 Peter 2:13) we are commanded to be “submissive to rulers” (Tit. 3:1) and “subject to the governing authorities” (Rom. 13:1), since God is *ultimately* responsible for their positions. So Jesus said to Pilate, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11). Likewise, Jesus was given all authority by the Father (cf. Matt. 28:18; John 5:22; Heb. 2:8), for “God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything” (Eph. 1:22, NIV). By this divine delegation of authority, Christ is “the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. . . . To him be honor and eternal dominion” (1 Tim. 6:15–16). In this way, God is truly the Almighty (Gk. *pantokratōr*), for “from him and through him and to him are all things” (Rom. 11:36).

Our understanding of God’s kingship and governance are dramatically affected by how we view the heavens and the earth. Divine sovereignty simply “fits” better within a biblical worldview.⁴³

⁴² Cf. Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997).

⁴³ The Platonic intrusion perverts divine sovereignty by relegating it to a static state within the material/immaterial construct. Thus, instead of a *dynamic governance*, it is framed as an abstract existential “providence,” an unbiblical concept which implies a mechanistic relationship between God and creation (cf. Paul J. Achtemeier, “Providence,” *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985], 832).

The overlaying of sovereignty upon the material realm (dynamic and timely) versus the immaterial realm (static and timeless) creates the problem of “causation,” which in turn devolves into the endless debate concerning predestination and foreknowledge—that is, causative (Calvinist) versus historical (Arminian). The rejection of divine foreknowledge by the open theists (cf. C. Pinnock, G. Boyd, J. Sanders, W. Hasker, etc.) only exacerbates the situation and denigrates the truth of divine sovereignty (see John Piper, J. Taylor, and P. K. Helseth, eds., *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2003]; and Thomas R. Schreiner and B. A. Ware, eds., *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000]).

Note that I agree with the open theists concerning Augustine’s systematization of sovereignty within the Platonic framework; I disagree, however, regarding their solution of rejecting a straightforward understanding of divine foreknowledge. One cannot believe in limited-particular foreknowledge apart from universal foreknowledge, since all events happen within a tightly interconnected existential web (i.e., foreknowledge of one event demands foreknowledge of events directly connected, and so on and so forth).

It is only in its restoration within a biblical worldview that the cognitive dissonance concerning the paradox of human free will and divine foreknowledge is resolved. As the functioning

MODERN CONCEPTIONS OF THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

The worldview of the Bible and the interpretation of “the heavens and the earth” have become quite contentious in modern times.⁴⁴ Since around the turn of the twentieth century, scholars have reconstructed the biblical worldview based upon the mythical worldviews of the ancient Near East.⁴⁵ At first it was primarily Babylonian and Persian mythologies that were accommodated, but then studies were generalized to include Assyrian, Hittite, Canaanite, and Egyptian myths also. Today it is widely assumed that the Israelites held to the same “cosmic geography” as their neighbors.⁴⁶

Such an idea is not inherently problematic. Most scholars, though, take the next step and say *the Bible itself* teaches an ancient Near Eastern view of the cosmos, assuming the Scriptures arose out of human culture and understanding. For the evangelical, this is no small error. We believe the Bible is a recorded oracle, ultimately produced by the Holy Spirit (see 2 Peter 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16), and thus transcending the human steward. Though an ancient Israelite—the prophet Isaiah, for example—may have held the same worldview as his cultural neighbors, we cannot say that the oracles delivered through him teach such things. The Holy Spirit would stand just as critical of Isaiah’s ancient Near

of a child in a house is radically affected by the proximity and intent of his/her father, so also is our relating to our heavenly Father and his sovereignty affected by his metaphysical proximity and benevolent intent. When God is in the same metaphysical “house,” our hearts are set at rest with his intimate, loving sovereignty, and we can come to terms with his foreknowledge. Divine foreknowledge does not relieve us of our responsibility to respond or lessen our accountability when we choose to disobey. His foreknowledge of our choices is *his problem*, not ours. A biblical worldview, with its holistic integration and “closeness” of metaphysical proximity, helps us let go of control and let God be God.

⁴⁴ See M. W. Chavalas, “Assyriology and Biblical Studies: A Century of Tension,” in *Mesopotamia and the Bible*, ed. M. W. Chavalas and K. L. Younger Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 21–67.

⁴⁵ Beginning with the publication of the Babylonian creation account found in the *Enuma elish* tablets (see George Smith, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis* [London: Thomas Scott, 1876]), many OT scholars followed suit, and soon it was the general consensus of critical opinion that the Hebrew creation story depended on a Babylonian original (cf. Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis* [Chicago: Open Court, 1901]; and John Skinner, *Genesis*, ICC [New York: Scribner, 1910]).

⁴⁶ See Luis I. J. Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970); Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Near East and in the Bible* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 1994); and Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998). Evangelical scholars have likewise conceded to this approach to the Scriptures; cf. John Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), esp. 159–161.

Eastern worldview as he does of our modern anthropocentric worldview, which dichotomizes between material and immaterial.

For this reason, I believe the Bible uses *equivocal language*, meaning God chose to minimize the use and definition of language concerning the nature of the cosmos so that it would be equally open to interpretation throughout time and across cultures.⁴⁷ This was a loving decision on the part of God, considering the reality of human mortality. How would you describe the creation and properties of glass to a mostly deaf, dumb, and blind fish when referencing his fishbowl? You would probably limit the use and definition of words so as to be universally understood and received by a variety of fish.

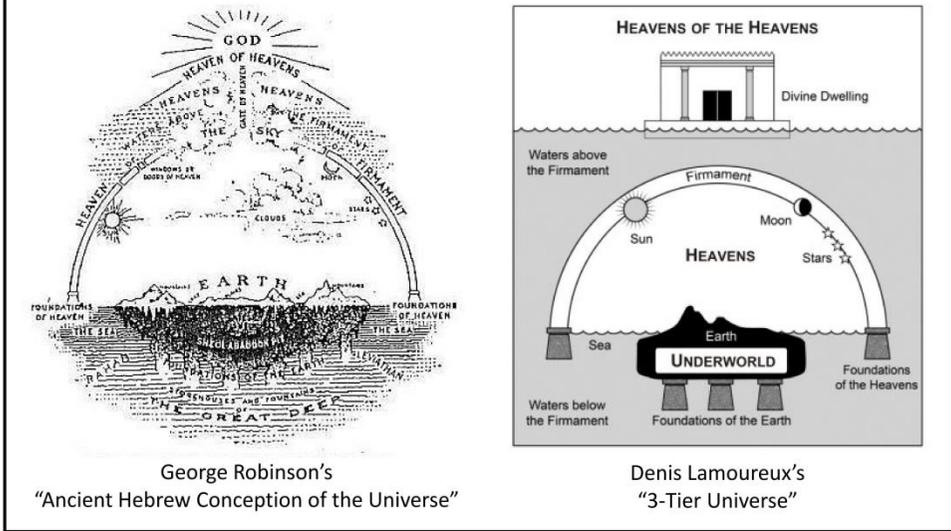
How then has modern scholarship reconstructed the worldview(s) of ancient Near Eastern peoples? The general consensus is summarized by the phrase “three-storied universe,”⁴⁸ which involves 1) the heavens, 2) the earth, and 3) the underworld. Such a view assumes the earth to be flat and surrounded by water, with a large metallic dome covering it. The sun, moon, and stars float across this dome like lily pads, and cosmic oceans surround everything. Finally, beneath the earth is Sheol/Hades; and beyond the oceans is the heavenly dwelling of God. Figure 2.4 shows two typical pictorial renditions.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See James P. Holding, “Is the *raqiya*’ (‘firmament’) a solid dome? Equivocal language in the cosmology of Genesis 1 and the Old Testament: a response to Paul H. Seely,” *Technical Journal* (now *Journal of Creation*) 13, no. 2 (November 1999): 44–51.

⁴⁸ This phrase seems to have been coined first by T. H. Gaster, “Cosmogony,” in *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 702.

⁴⁹ See George L. Robinson, “Figure 2: The Ancient Hebrew Conception of the Universe,” *Leaders of Israel* (New York: Association Press, 1913), 2; and Denis O. Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 108.

Figure 2.4 – Modern Reconstructions of the Biblical Worldview



The initial problem with this common rendering is that *not all ancient Near Eastern peoples saw the world this way*—that is, there is no “uniform primitive view.”⁵⁰ In fact, it is devilishly hard to find any sources that present this picture in a straightforward manner (most cosmologies have to be gleaned from far-fetched and fantastical mythology).⁵¹ But the commonalities that do exist, particularly a manifold vertical universe,⁵² ought to be interpreted as the remnants of true cosmology rather than as the imaginations of Stone Age peoples. Similar reasoning ought to be applied to the more than two hundred flood myths derived from the ancient world.⁵³ The commonalities between the stories do not mean the Bible coopted its flood narrative. Instead, the flood

⁵⁰ See esp. Noel K. Weeks, “Cosmology in Historical Context,” *WTJ* 68, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 283–93; in contrast, see Paul H. Seely, “The Geographical Meaning of ‘Earth’ and ‘Seas’ in Genesis 1:10,” *WTJ* 59, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 240–46; Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part 1,” *WTJ* 53, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 227–240; and Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above, Part 2,” *WTJ* 54, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 31–46.

⁵¹ See a survey of ancient Near Eastern creation myths in James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, 3rd ed. with supplement (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 1–155. See a survey of specifically Mesopotamian myths in Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*.

⁵² See the introductory diagram in Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, xii.

⁵³ H. F. Vos, “Flood,” *ISBE*, 2:319–21. For a listing of flood legends, see Byron C. Nelson, *The Deluge Story in Stone*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1968), 165–176; and James B. Frazer, *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1918), 107–331 (though Frazer is highly critical).

actually happened, and the hundreds of flood myths are simply corrupted accounts of the real event—so too concerning the parallels between the Bible and ancient cosmologies.

The second problem with the modern rendering of the biblical worldview is the portrayal of the *rāqîa* ' (Gen. 1:6–8) as a metal dome, or “vault,” over the earth. Many scholars and modern translations do translate *rāqîa* ' generically as an “expanse,” which provides room for interpretation.⁵⁴ Solid-dome advocates, however, prefer the antiquated “firmament,” which is a transliteration of the Latin *firmamentum* used to translate the Greek *stereōma* (both of which imply a firm or solid structure).⁵⁵ But since the Hebrew noun *rāqîa* ' has limited use in the Old Testament, its meaning is generally derived etymologically. Scholars typically argue that since *rāqîa* ' is derived from the verb *rāqa* ' , meaning to “flatten,” “beat out,” or “spread out,” then the *rāqîa* ' must be solid, akin to the object (e.g., a metal plate) being beaten out. However, *the emphasis carried over from the verb is the action of spreading or stretching, not the substance which is beaten out.*⁵⁶ This is clearly demonstrated by the many instances of prophetic

⁵⁴ See R. Laird Harris, “The Bible and Cosmology,” *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 5, no. 1 (March 1962): 11–17. “It is modern Bible students who have travestied the Biblical picture, paralleled it to Babylonian nonsense, then informed a secular public that the Bible is not believable by a modern mind. . . . Destructive criticism has sold the world a shabby substitute for the Biblical cosmology. We need to re-emphasize the Biblical teaching. The foolish notions of a three-storied universe or a flat square earth or a geo-centric universe are not Biblical. And we need to say so as loudly as possible” (pp. 11–12).

⁵⁵ I agree with Walter C. Kaiser Jr. that the use of *stereōma* in the Septuagint simply reflects the Greek view of the heavens at the time the translators did their work; see “The Literary Form of Genesis 1–11,” in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, ed. J. Barton Payne (Waco: Word, 1970), 48–65.

Kaiser also gives numerous reasons to believe Genesis 1–11 is “historical narrative”—i.e., a story relating historical facts, rather than poetry or nonhistorical narrative (allegory, parable, myth, etc.) designed simply to communicate generic principles or ideas. For example, in Genesis 2–11 are found “64 geographical terms, 88 personal names, 48 generic names, and at least 21 identifiable cultural items (such as gold, bdellium, onyx, brass, iron, gopher wood, bitumen, mortar, brick, stone, harp, pipe, cities, towers)” (p. 59). All of these indicate historical rather than nonhistorical literature and argue for a straightforward historical reading of Genesis.

⁵⁶ H. J. Austel writes:

The heavens are frequently described in figurative language as having windows (Gen 7:11; II Kgs 7:2; Mal 3:10 . . .), gates (Gen 28:7), doors (Ps 78:23), pillars (Job 26:11), and foundations (II Sam 22:8). They are stretched out and spread out like a tent or a curtain (Isa 40:22).

The use of such figurative language no more necessitates the adoption of a pagan cosmology than does the modern use of the term “sunrise” imply astronomical ignorance. The imagery is often phenomenological, and is both convenient and vividly forceful. Thus

commentary describing the Lord “stretching out” the heavens (cf. Job 9:8; Ps. 104:2; Isa. 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 51:13; Jer. 10:12; 51:15; Zech. 12:1). The act of stretching out is clearly the point being made by Scripture’s use of *rāqîa*’.

It seems reasonable that the substance of the *rāqîa*’ is the “space-time fabric” within which creation functions.⁵⁷ Solid-domers would say this amounts to “concordism” – the mantric cry of modern critics of the Bible.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, a view of the *rāqîa*’/śāmayim as a stretched atmospheric expanse is the model that best corresponds to the Bible’s own description of birds flying across it (Gen. 1:20; Deut. 4:17), powers and principalities dwelling in it (Duet. 3:24; Isa. 24:21), people ascending and descending through it (John 3:13; Rev. 11:12), and the Lord sitting enthroned at the height of it (Ps. 2:4; 103:19) and executing his judgments in the midst of it (Isa. 11:4; 34:5; Joel 2:30).

Ultimately, those who argue for a solid *rāqîa*’ avoid the obvious: Genesis 1:8 equates the expanse with the heavens. So also do Psalm 19:1 and 150:1, which incorporate Hebrew parallelism, a poetic means of repetition designed to

a disobedient Israel would find the heavens to be like iron (Lev 26:19) or like bronze (Deut 28:23), not yielding the much-needed rain. Note that if the heavens were conceived of as a metallic vault, as is commonly suggested from Gen 1:8, 14 etc., the above passages would be meaningless, since the skies would already be metal. The word *rāqîa* (q.v.) comes from the verb meaning “to hammer out” and “stretch (a piece of metal) out” as an overlay. It is the idea of spreading out that carries over to the noun, not the idea of a metallic substance. “Expanse” is an acceptable translation. (“2407 אֶשְׁמַיִם (śāmayim),” TWOT, 935)

⁵⁷ Einstein recapitulated Newtonian physics within the framework of “space-time,” space relating to Newton’s three-dimensional calculations and time being the fourth dimension based on the speed of light. The theory of general relativity explained the mechanism of gravity (space-time curvature), which Newton lacked, with time and space functioning like a flexible “fabric” upon which objects of mass lie. For an introduction, see Steve Adams, *Relativity: An Introduction to Space-Time Physics* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1997).

⁵⁸ Concordism is the belief that there is “a correspondence or alignment between Scripture and science” (Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation*, xv.) The accusation of concordism has become the means of invalidating the work of anyone who would suggest that God might communicate through the Bible any post-Enlightenment knowledge. It also seems to have become the rallying cry of those bent on “reinterpreting” biblical inerrancy. Those who reject concordism argue that God “accommodated” the ignorance of the ancient Hebrews by speaking to them according to the false science of their time, because the Bible is supposedly designed to give redemptive truth rather than scientific truth. As Paul Seely made clear early in his career, “*The Bible assumes that the universe is three-storied; but, we do not believe that Christians are bound to give assent to such a cosmology, since the purpose of the Bible is to give redemptive, not scientific truth. The relationship of science to Scripture is this: The Bible gives redemptive truth through the scientific thoughts of the times without ever intending that those scientific thoughts should be believed as inerrant*” (Paul H. Seely, “The Three-Storied Universe,” *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 21, no. 1 [1969]: 18; italics in the original).

reinforce the same idea.⁵⁹ *Rāqīa'* equals *šāmayim*. All etymological arguments for a solid *rāqīa'* fail in light of this fact. Attempts by solid-domers to substantiate a difference between the *rāqīa'* and the *šāmayim* are groundless.⁶⁰

The third major problem with the common reconstruction of the biblical worldview involves the divorce of the heavens (*šāmayim*) from the heavens of heavens (*šāmeḥ h'šāmayim*). With the intrusion of a solid *rāqīa'*, God's dwelling in the "upper heavens" above the dome must be separated from the "lower heavens" under the dome.⁶¹ This, however, is another baseless assumption. Nowhere in the Scriptures is there a division between the heavens and the heavens of heavens, and nowhere are the heavens of heavens depicted as being beyond the cosmic waters.⁶² The heavens and the highest heavens are always

⁵⁹ Total occurrences of *rāqīa'* are as follows: Gen. 1:6ff, 14f, 17, 20; Ps. 19:2; 150:1; Ezek. 1:22f, 25f; 10:1; Dan. 12:3. Its use in Ezekiel is irrelevant, since the vision does not concern the cosmos as a whole. Its use in Daniel is clearly equated with the heavens (note that the LXX translates *rāqīa'* with *ouranos*).

⁶⁰ According to Seely, "The fact that it was named 'heaven(s)' in Gen 1:8 and birds fly in the heaven(s) (Deut 4:17) seems to imply the *raqīa'* was not solid. But the word *samayim* (heaven[s]) is broader in meaning than *raqīa'*. It encompasses not only the *raqīa'* (v. 8; Ps 19:6; 148:4) but the space above the *raqīa'* (Ps 2:4; 11:4; 139:8) as well as the space below (Ps 8:8; 79:2)" ("The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I," 237). There is a reason Seely only cites these verses and does not quote them. None of them say anything about the heavens being distinct from or extending beyond the firmament. Moreover, the firmament is not even mentioned in any of them. James Holding summarizes,

The problem with this argument is that the claim that *shamayim* is "broader in meaning" than *raqīya'* in Genesis is simply groundless—the result of circular reasoning. In Genesis 1:8, the implication is that the *raqīya'* has the name *shamayim* in an exact one-to-one correspondence, just as is the case for the "Earth" and the "Seas" when they are named (v. 10). There is no reason to see a broader meaning of *shamayim* than an exact equation with *raqīya'*.

In fact, Seely's only reason for saying that *shamayim* and *raqīya'* are not equal seems to be that it would result (because of verses like Deuteronomy 4:17, and other [sic] like Psalm 11:4) in the absurd conclusion that the birds fly or God sits enthroned "inside" a solid structure! In other words . . . he has started with the idea of the solid sky, based on the views of ancient people, and forced onto the text divisions in the *shamayim* that are simply not specified, and in the case of Genesis 1, not even permitted, by the text. ("Is the *raqīya'* ('firmament') a solid dome," 46)

⁶¹ See Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation*, 129–31. This framework is also assumed by M. J. Kline, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 48, no. 1 (March 1996): 2–15.

⁶² Psalm 104 and Psalm 29 are often quoted as evidence that God dwells above the cosmic waters, pitching his tent "on the waters" (104:3) and sitting enthroned "over the engulfing waters" (29:11, NET). However, the heavens as a whole are referenced as a "tent" in 104:2, and the "chambers" of verse 3 are the Heb. *ʿāliyā*, which speaks of the "roof-room." For this reason the NASB, NKJV, and NIV translate it "upper chambers," and thus the "beams" (Heb. *qārā*) of those chambers would logically be the ceiling "rafters" (NLT) set "in the waters" (NASB, KJV, NKJV) rather than the floor joists set "on the

part and parcel with one another (cf. Deut. 10:14; 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chron. 2:6; 6:18; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 148:4). Note their amalgamated relationship:

You alone are the LORD. You have made *the heavens, the heaven of heavens* with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. (Neh. 9:6, NASB)

To the LORD your God belong *the heavens, even the highest heavens*, the earth and everything in it. (Deut. 10:14, NIV)

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, *heaven and the highest heaven* cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built! (1 Kings 8:27)

Beginning with the pagan derivation of the Scriptures, critics project a reductionistic metal-dome interpretation upon the *rāqîa'*, which forces them to delineate between the *rāqîa'* and the *šāmayim*, which in turn forces them to divide the *šāmayim* from the *šāmeḥ h'šāmayim*, thus placing God's dwelling beyond creation. Such a hermeneutical approach to the "primitive cosmology" of the "scientifically naïve" is obviously prejudiced by a naturalistic bias.⁶³ No wonder the Bible's worldview has become the very source of skepticism for many in the last century, requiring either disbelief or a *sacrificium intellectus*.⁶⁴

waters" (ESV, NRSV, NIV). Psalm 29 is cosmologically irrelevant, since it primarily speaks of the sovereignty of God over creation, particularly in times of judgment. The Lord "thundering over the waters" (v. 3) is paralleled by breaking the cedars of Lebanon (v. 5), striking with flashes of lightning (v. 7), shaking the desert of Kadesh (v. 8), and stripping the forest bare (v. 9). These judgments are concluded by God's sovereignty over *the historical flood* (v. 10; Heb. *mabbûl*), which is used elsewhere only in reference to the flood of Noah (cf. Gen. 6:17; 7:6–7,10,17; 9:11,15,28; 10:1,32; 11:10).

⁶³ "Considering that the Hebrews were a scientifically naïve people who would accordingly believe the *raqia'* was solid, that both their Babylonian and their Egyptian background would influence them to believe the *raqia'* was solid, and that they naturally accepted the concepts of the peoples around them so long as they were not theologically offensive, I believe we have every reason to think that both the writer and original readers of Genesis 1 believed the *raqia'* was solid. The historical meaning of *raqia'* in Gen 1:6–8 is, accordingly, 'a solid sky'" (Seely, "The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I," 235; cf. 228, 230, 231, 234).

⁶⁴ This was Bultmann's cherished phrase, though he believed demythologization to be a third option.

It is, of course, true that de-mythologizing takes the modern world-view as a criterion. To de-mythologize is to reject not Scripture or the Christian message as a whole, but the world-view of Scripture, which is the world-view of a past epoch, which all too often is retained in Christian dogmatics and in the preaching of the Church. To de-mythologize is to deny that the message of Scripture and of the Church is bound to an ancient world-view which is obsolete.

THE CHRISTOPLATONIC WORLDVIEW

On the playing field of life, the average Westerner views reality in a simple, dualistic manner involving two worlds: one material, the other immaterial. Generally labeled “natural” versus “supernatural,” this structure has a long and complicated history of development. Its general ancestry, though, traces back to Hellenism and Greek philosophy.⁶⁵

Unfortunately, there is no single “Greek worldview,” but rather a conglomeration of different beliefs that molded a common way of thinking. Akin to Darwin’s relationship to modern evolutionism, the primary bellwether of ancient Greek thought was Plato (c. 427–347 BC), who was a self-proclaimed disciple and mouthpiece of Socrates (c. 470–399 BC). Plato established the Academy (c. 387 BC) on the north side of Athens and there schooled a young man named Aristotle (384–322 BC).⁶⁶ In turn, Aristotle mentored a number of young noblemen, including three future kings: Ptolemy, Cassander, and Alexander III of Macedon.

These three men, particularly Alexander, made it their life ambition to civilize and enlighten the entire known world of their time. And in a stunning display of zeal and ambition, Alexander conquered kingdoms from the Ionian Sea to the Himalayas in only ten years (333–323 BC), creating the largest empire

The attempt to de-mythologize begins with this important insight: Christian preaching, in so far as it is preaching of the Word of God by God’s command and in His name, does not offer a doctrine which can be accepted either by reason or by a *sacrificium intellectus*. Christian preaching is *kerygma*, that is, a proclamation addressed not to the theoretical reason, but to the hearer as a self. In this manner Paul commends himself to every man’s conscience in the sight of God (II Cor. 4:2). De-mythologizing will make clear this function of preaching as a personal message, and in doing so it will eliminate a false stumbling-block and bring into sharp focus the real stumbling-block, the word of the cross.

For the world-view of the Scripture is mythological and is therefore unacceptable to modern man whose thinking has been shaped by science and is therefore no longer mythological. (*Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 35–36)

⁶⁵ For a primer, see Colin Brown, *Christianity and Western Thought: A History of Philosophers, Ideas and Movements* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990).

⁶⁶ Though Plato and Aristotle agreed on a dualistic split between material and immaterial, Aristotle disagreed with his teacher concerning the relationship between the two. Aristotle argued that the universals (“forms”) did not produce the particulars (“copies”), but rather the universals were present in the particulars (see esp. *Metaphysics*, Book VII)—i.e., materiality is real in and of itself without the need of a separate metaphysical pattern.

in the ancient world at his time. Founding nearly twenty cities that bore his own name, Alexander settled Greek colonists everywhere he went and ushered in what is known in history books as the “Hellenistic Age” (323–30 BC).⁶⁷ From this point it was only a matter of time before the ardent zeal of Hellenism would consume the ancient world, laying the historical foundation for the development of Western society.

Such philosophical “good news” was ultimately derived from the worldview within which it was framed. Plato’s understanding of the universe involved two basic parts: the “intelligible” world and the “perceptual” world. The intelligible world is comprised of perfect “forms,” which then produce corrupt “copies” in the perceptual world (see figure 2.5). The form, or “idea,” of something is its true essence, while the copy is its debased manifestation.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Many attribute Alexander’s superhuman ambition to egotism, power hunger, or madness. Akin to Hitler, however, his intentionality and calculated approach seem to argue for ideology and philosophy as his primary motivation. He conquered the world so that he could Hellenize, civilize, and enlighten the world.

⁶⁸ See chap. 1, n. 57. For example, Plato stated:

And having been created in this way, the world has been framed in the likeness of that which is apprehended by reason and mind and is unchangeable, and must therefore of necessity, if this is admitted, be a copy of something. Now it is all-important that the beginning of everything should be according to nature. And in speaking of the copy and the original we may assume that words are akin to the matter which they describe; when they relate to the lasting and permanent and intelligible, they ought to be lasting and unalterable, and, as far as their nature allows, irrefutable and immovable—nothing less. But when they express only the copy or likeness and not the eternal things themselves, they need only be likely and analogous to the real words. As being is to becoming, so is truth to belief. (*Timaeus* 29; *DP*, 3:449)

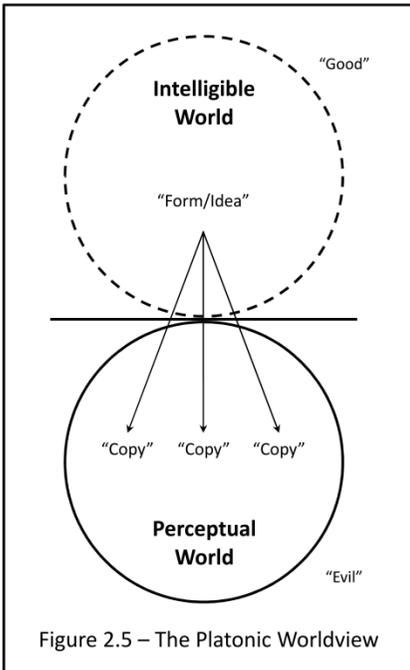


Figure 2.5 – The Platonic Worldview

Forms are universal realities, such as “chair-ness” or “red-ness.” Copies are particular expressions of those forms that we are able to perceive or sense, such as the red rocking chair in the corner of the living room. Though immaterial, the intelligible world is actually more “real” than the material perceptual world because it is the eternal source of existence.⁶⁹ Those who seek reality in materiality by their senses are “barbarians” who live without divine inspiration.⁷⁰ Thus, those who seek to see with their eyes are actually blind.⁷¹

⁶⁹ As such, a better pictorial representation (cf. figure 2.6) would entail dotted lines for the perceptual world and solid lines for the intelligible world. However, for consistency of communication, as related to its later accommodation into Judeo-Christian thought (cf. figures 3.14, 3.15, etc.), lines representing a simple material versus immaterial framework are retained.

⁷⁰ *Theaetetus* 156 (DP, 4:210). Socrates’ characterization is preceded by this description, “Take a look round, then, and see that none of the uninitiated are listening. Now by the uninitiated I mean the people who believe in nothing but what they can grasp in their hands, and who will not allow that action or generation or anything invisible can have real existence” (*Theaetetus* 155; DP, 4:210).

⁷¹ This view is most famously portrayed in the “Allegory of the Cave” (*Republic* 7.514a–520a), which is related to the “Metaphor of the Sun” (6.507b–509c) and the “Analogy of the Divided Line” (6.509d–513e), both of which immediately precede it at the end of Book 6. The common theme in these parables is the “sun,” a metaphor for the source of illumination, which Plato held to be the “Form of the Good,” generally interpreted as his notion of God.

The Platonic worldview is technically termed “metaphysical dualism” — that is, reality is composed of two substantially and qualitatively different parts.⁷² However, the qualities and their distinction from one another are ultimately determined by human perception. The perceptual, or “sensible,” world refers to the perception and senses of humanity. Thus, anthropocentrism, or “human-centeredness,” is the defining characteristic of the entire system of thought. The starting point of Hellenistic philosophy and all subsequent Western tradition is this: *The parameters of reality are defined by human perception*. Though no one in the modern world actually believes in forms and copies, this broad approach to interpreting reality was passed on to later generations.⁷³

Such metaphysical wranglings may seem unimportant to many. Nevertheless, anthropocentrism lies at the very heart of original sin. Pride and moral autonomy are derived from the exaltation of self, which is based upon an orientation to self. To bind reality at a worldview level to human perception provides the ultimate greenhouse for humanism and every form of ungodliness—the floodgates of which broke during the Enlightenment and continue to inundate to this day. Though many regard Greek philosophy as benign (or even beneficial) to the Christian faith, it should be remembered that Socrates was widely believed in his day to be demonized, a fact greatly mitigated or completely ignored by modern historians.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, many early Christians also disregarded this testimony.

⁷² See John M. Dillon, “Platonism,” *ABD*, 5:378–81.

⁷³ As Alfred North Whitehead articulates in his famous statement: “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato. I do not mean the systematic scheme of thought which scholars have doubtfully extracted from his writings. *I allude to the wealth of general ideas scattered through them*” (*Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. David R. Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, corrected ed. [New York: Free Press, 1979; originally published 1929], 39; italics added).

⁷⁴ Tertullian (c. 160–230) speaks of the demonization of Socrates as though it were widely known and commonly understood, “Socrates, as none can doubt, was actuated by a different spirit. For they say that a demon came to him from his boyhood” (*A Treatise on the Soul*, chap. 1). This no doubt refers to the “inner voice” that Socrates frequently relied upon, which he referred to as the “Daimonion” but has been modernly equated with the conscience.

Socrates, though, claimed divine inspiration from the Daimonion (*Phaedrus*, 242) and related to it as a “monitor” assigned uniquely to him among humanity (*Republic*, 496). Having never heard of the Daimonion, Socrates’ fellow Athenians regarded it as a new divinity, and Xenophon equated it to divination (*Memorabilia*, 4.3.12). Generalizing some passages in Xenophon and Plato, where Daimonion is employed metaphorically, as a symbolic expression for the inner conviction, “The attempt has been made to deliver Socrates from an embarrassing and, for a wise man and

In the centuries following Alexander's conquests, one of the cities he named after himself—Alexandria, Egypt—became a hub of Hellenistic teaching and propagation, and the home of the largest library in the ancient world. It was here that a catechetical school was established which, under the leadership of Clement (c. 150–211) and Origen (c. 182–251), sought to assimilate Christianity and Greek philosophy.⁷⁵ The progeny was neither Platonism nor Christianity but “Christoplatonism,” a mongrel child that continues to grow to this day both in size and stature.⁷⁶

Akin to its heretical Gnostic cousins (note especially Basilides and Valentinus, both educated in Alexandria), Christoplatonism gained momentum

pattern of virtue, unworthy eccentricity by explaining the Daimonion as a figure of speech” (Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, vol. 2 [New York: Harper, 1971], 591; quoting K. Joel, *Der Xenophon-tische und der echte Sokrates* [Berlin, 1893], 67).

⁷⁵ Note Philip Schaff's concise and timeless testimony:

The Alexandrian theology aims at a reconciliation of Christianity with philosophy, or, subjectively speaking, of *pistis* with *gnosis*; but it seeks this union upon the basis of the Bible, and the doctrine of the church. . . . Clement came from the Hellenic philosophy to the Christian faith; Origen, conversely, was led by faith to speculation. The former was an aphoristic thinker, the latter a systematic. The one borrowed ideas from various systems; the other followed more the track of Platonism. But both were Christian philosophers and churchly gnostics. As Philo, long before them, in the same city, had combined Judaism with Grecian culture, so now they carried the Grecian culture into Christianity. (*History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2 [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910], 779)

Likewise, James Orr summarized,

Alexandria was, next to Athens, the city of the Greek world in which intellectual tendencies of every sort met and commingled. It was to be expected, therefore, that in this busy centre the attempt would early be made to unite Christianity with what was best in the thought and culture of the time. This, accordingly, is what we see taking place in the famous Catechetical School at Alexandria. It is characteristic of the Alexandrian School that it takes up a genial attitude to heathen learning and culture; regards Greek philosophy and science as in its way also a providential preparation for the Gospels; seeks to meet an antichristian Gnosis by a better Gnosis, which grows out of faith and love. It is speculative, liberal, idealistic in spirit; in its Scriptural methods allegorical, though not to the subversion of the history, as in the heretical Gnosticism. (*The History and Literature of the Early Church* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913], 116)

⁷⁶ J. M. Dillon describes Christoplatonism, “All Christian theology is dependent, to an extent at least, on contemporary Greek philosophy, primarily Platonism, but some Christian thinkers fall particularly strongly under Platonic influence, and properly merit the title of Christian Platonists.” (“Platonism,” *ABD*, 5:380).

However, Tertullian's cry at the end of the second century concerning the distance between Athens and Jerusalem (cf. *Prescription Against Heretics*, VII) argues that the “extent” of dependence in the apostolic church is quite small, if not nonexistent (cf. Acts 17:18–32).

throughout the third and fourth centuries with the rise of Egyptian monasticism and the Catechetical School of Alexandria, both of which found liberty under the Alexandrian Patriarchate.⁷⁷ The impact of the Alexandrian school of thought, especially through the spread of desert monasticism, cannot be overstated.⁷⁸ As Athanasius said, “The desert had become a city.”⁷⁹ Darkened as it was, it did indeed become something of a “city on the hill” for the future not only of Western monasticism but also of the Western theological tradition in general.⁸⁰ However, such a trajectory must be wholeheartedly rejected from its inception. With Tertullian, we cry,

These are “the doctrines” of men and “of demons” produced for itching ears of the spirit of this world’s wisdom: this the Lord called “foolishness,” and “chose the foolish things of the world” to confound even philosophy itself. . . . Indeed heresies are themselves instigated by philosophy. From this source came the Aeons, and I know not what infinite forms, and the trinity of man in the system of Valentinus, who was of Plato’s school. From the same source came Marcion’s better god, with all his tranquility; he came of the Stoics. Then, again, the opinion that the soul dies is held by the Epicureans; while

⁷⁷ See the timeless and comprehensive treatments by Charles Biggs, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria: Eight Lectures* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886); and Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*, 6th ed. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1897).

⁷⁸ See John Chryssavgis, *In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*, revised ed. (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008). Beyond their direct influence on medieval monasticism, the “desert fathers” substantially influenced many modern movements, including the German evangelicals, the Pennsylvania Pietists, and the Methodist revival in England (see Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993], 7–9).

⁷⁹ Quoted in Chryssavgis, *In the Heart of the Desert*, 15; see Athanasius, *Life of Anthony* 14 (NPNF2, 4:200).

⁸⁰ Thomas C. Oden summarizes the relationship:

This point must be savored unhurriedly to sink in deeply: The Christians to the south of the Mediterranean were teaching the Christians to the north. Africans were informing and instructing and educating the very best of Syriac, Cappadocian and Greco-Roman teachers. This flow of intellectual leadership in time matured into the ecumenical consensus on how to interpret sacred Scripture and hence into the core of Christian dogma.

The common misperception is directly the opposite—that intellectual leadership typically moved from the north to the south, from Europe to Africa. But in Christian history, contrary to this common assumption, the flow of intellectual leadership demonstrably moved largely from Africa to Europe—south to north. (*How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007], 28–29)

the denial of the restoration of the body is taken from the aggregate school of all the philosophers. . . . *What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians?* Our instruction comes from “the porch of Solomon” [cf. Acts 3:11], who had himself taught that “the Lord should be sought in simplicity of heart.” *Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition!* We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the gospel! With our faith, we desire no further belief. For this is our palmary faith, that there is nothing which we ought to believe besides.⁸¹

Though it has become common today to downplay the differences between Greek and Hebrew thought, Tertullian clearly presents a chasm of thinking between Athens and Jerusalem.⁸² It can be confidently asserted that the dominant source of heresy in the early church was Hellenistic philosophy and mythology, which are diametrically opposed to the Jewish faith. These are indeed two different ways of thinking, or “patterns” of thought.⁸³

Moreover, beyond the symptomatic concerns of Greek versus Hebrew thought (e.g., abstract versus concrete, stoic versus emotive, secular versus sacred, individualistic versus communal)⁸⁴ lies the fountainhead of divergent worldviews—that is, the “Greek view” of the universe (material and immaterial) versus the “Hebrew view” of the universe (heavens and earth).⁸⁵ As the biblical

⁸¹ Tertullian, “Pagan Philosophy the Parent of Heresies,” *Prescription Against Heretics*, Chap. 7 (ANF, 3:246–47); italics added.

⁸² See Thorlief Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (London: SCM Press, 1960). After Boman’s idiosyncratic work (though we might say that many of his conclusions were true despite his faulty linguistic approach), many have followed the pendular lead of James Barr: *The Semantics of Biblical Language* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961]; and *Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of the Two Testaments* (London: SCM Press, 1966).

⁸³ See G. E. Ladd, *The Pattern of New Testament Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), esp. 9–40.

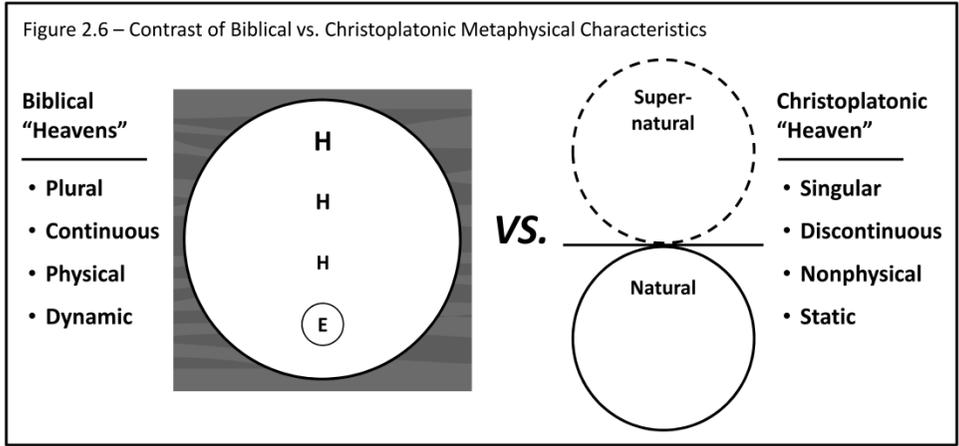
⁸⁴ See, for example, Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 135–92.

⁸⁵ Ladd, *The Pattern of New Testament Truth*, 40.

For our present purpose, the important thing to note is the difference between the Hebrew and the Greek views of reality. For the Greek, the world, nature, human history—in sum, the sphere of the visible—formed the realm of flux and change, of becoming, of the transient. Reality belonged to the realm of the invisible, the good, the unchanging, which could be apprehended only by the mind of the soul transcending the visible. Thus salvation was found in the flight of the soul from the world to the invisible world of God.

heavens were *consolidated and relegated* to ideal immateriality (and the earth was conversely relegated to evil materiality), the prime eschatological doctrines of the apostolic church—that is, the day of the Lord, the resurrection of the dead, and the messianic kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 15:19–26; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Peter 1:13; etc.)—were abandoned.⁸⁶ The biblical heavens were transformed into the distant, detached, and ethereal realm of “heaven” so common to Western tradition, and the hope of the return of Jesus and a new creation slowly became marginalized amidst the multitude of polemical Christoplatonist controversies during the fourth and fifth centuries.

The perversion of the first verse of the Bible is thus an ultimate source of perversion throughout the rest of the Scriptures. Instead of beginning with plural, continuous, physical, and dynamic heavens, we start with a *singular, discontinuous, nonphysical, and static* “heaven,” which in turn becomes the field upon which the rest of redemptive history is played out (see figure 2.6).



For the Hebrew, reality was found in God who makes himself known in the ebb and flow of both nature and historical events by his acts and by his words. God comes to men in their earthly experience. Thus the final redemption is not flight from this world to another world; it may be described as the descent of the other world—God’s world—resulting in a transformation of this world. (Ibid., 36–37)

⁸⁶ “Origen clearly represents and develops a construction of the Christian faith in which eschatology has been swallowed up in an emphasis upon transcendence. The only time which truly matters is that time until one’s death, which determines one’s experience in paradise and in the resurrection. ‘Heaven’ as cosmographic place now occupies the central position once occupied by the eschatological kingdom of God in Jesus’ teaching. That, too, occurs on the authority of progressive dialectics, the refinement of Pauline metaphysics” (Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton, *Jewish and Christian Doctrines: The Classics Compared* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 183; italics added).

The whole “spiritual” hermeneutic of the School of Alexandria, which in turn ultimately determined the Western theological tradition, operated upon the basis of this distortion.⁸⁷ As Origen articulates,

And again [Paul] says, “We shall be caught up in the clouds to meet Christ in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” We are therefore to suppose that the saints will remain there [in their progress to ideal immateriality] until they recognize the twofold mode of government in those things which are performed in the air. . . . If anyone indeed be pure in heart, and holy in mind, and more practiced in perception, he will, by making more rapid progress, quickly ascend to a place in the air, and reach the kingdom of heaven, through those mansions, so to speak, in the various places *which the Greeks have termed spheres, i.e., globes, but which holy Scripture has called heavens*; in each of which he will first see clearly what is done there, and in the second place, will discover the reason why things are so done: and thus he will in order pass through all gradations, following Him who hath passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, who said, “I will that where I am, these may be also.”⁸⁸

In like manner, most modern believers reinterpret what “holy Scripture has called heavens.” Rather than opening their Bible and reading, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” they intuit, *In the beginning God created the natural/material and the supernatural/immaterial*.⁸⁹ But the words natural and supernatural simply do not exist in the Bible.⁹⁰ The continued use of them is

⁸⁷ See a history of the “spiritual vision model” by Craig A. Blaising, “Premillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 160-74.

⁸⁸ Origen, *On First Principles*, 2.11.5–6 (ANF, 4:299); italics and bracketed portions added.

⁸⁹ Modern theologians likewise drift into such categories—e.g., Jürgen Moltmann: “Finally, compared with the invisible heaven in which the glory of God dwells, the earth means the whole visible and temporal world in which God does not dwell—or not as yet. In this symbolic sense, the earth is not merely this planet. It is the whole material world of which this planet is a part” (*God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. M. Kohl [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 160).

Moltmann continues, “Heaven is, as it were, the preparing and making available of the potentialities and potencies of the world’s creation, redemption and glorification” (p. 166). This view of heaven as “the space of the possible” (p. 167) is rather Platonic, as is evident in Moltmann’s interaction with Plato’s Ideas (pp. 167–68): “That is the essential reason why the Greek Fathers of the church took over the Platonic doctrine of Ideas, appropriating them for Christian theology. The archetypes for all created realities are also prepared in the kingdom of *the Creator’s* potentialities” (p. 167).

⁹⁰ The Bible is completely devoid of the metaphysical concepts of “natural” and “supernatural.” There is no word in the Hebrew language that can be translated as “nature” or “natural”; and the Greek

unhelpful and destructive—not to mention untruthful.⁹¹ Biblical terminology (such as “divine,” “miraculous,” “heavenly,” etc.) is much more appropriate and profitable. Nonbiblical terminology confounds the issues and makes the quest for true correspondence with the Word of God all the more difficult.⁹²

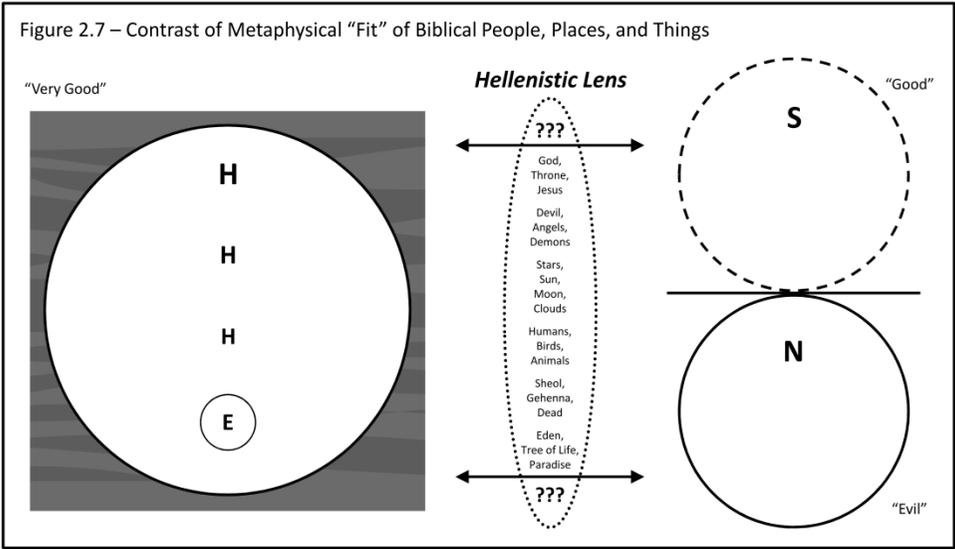
When trying to identify the lack of correspondence between the Scriptures and modern presentations of the gospel, we must begin with the issues of worldview. Otherwise we are doomed to perpetual theological dissonance, akin to placing a soccer team on a basketball court and exhorting them, “Score!” Once you change the field of play, all the rules and roles of the game get confounded. So it is when you try to place biblical entities in a Hellenistic worldview (see figure 2.7).

phusis/phusikos, sometimes translated “nature/natural,” universally refers to something’s inherent quality or makeup (cf. Rom. 1:26f; 2:14; 11:21ff; 1 Cor. 11:14; Gal. 2:15; 4:8; Eph. 2:3; James 3:7; 2 Peter 2:12), thus carrying no metaphysical connotations. Moreover, the term *supernatural*, which is so commonly used to describe the heavens and all therein, is *never* used in the Bible. How can a word that is so unbiblical, both conceptually and linguistically, find such consistent use in the modern church? Its use is highly symptomatic and reveals the bedrock of our Hellenistic worldview.

⁹¹ Thus believers are encouraged to participate in a “supernatural fast” —no verbalizing of the term *supernatural* for at least thirty days. This helps break the habitual use of nonbiblical terminology.

⁹² Craig Keener articulates the linguistic struggle, “I felt I had to use the category of supernatural because, to address the questions as they exist in our culture, I needed to articulate it in terms that were at hand. But the category of supernatural really isn’t a biblical perspective. It’s using Hume’s paradigm. If we believe that God is the Creator and is sovereign, then he is at work in the whole world around us” (“It’s Okay to Expect a Miracle,” *Christianity Today*, December 9, 2011, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/december/okay-to-expect-miracle.html>). See also Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

Figure 2.7 – Contrast of Metaphysical “Fit” of Biblical People, Places, and Things



As discussed previously, one’s worldview is the ultimate determining factor of one’s hermeneutics. Once the first verse is changed, then the interpretation of the rest of the Bible is changed. From Genesis to Revelation—the creation, the fall, the covenants, the prophets, the cross, the church, the day of the Lord, and the new heavens and new earth—everything takes on a different meaning. And it is this meaning, the theology and “good news” of the Bible, which is ultimately at stake in the enterprise of articulating and clarifying a biblical worldview.