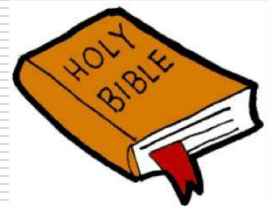


Cross-Examining the Creation Report in Genesis I

Seven honest questions
Seven exegetical answers

Martin Pröbstle, Ph.D.
Faith and Science Conference 2019
Ainsa, Spain



Two Steps

2

Interpretation of the biblical data within a scientific framework:

How does a scientist interpret the biblical data of Genesis 1?



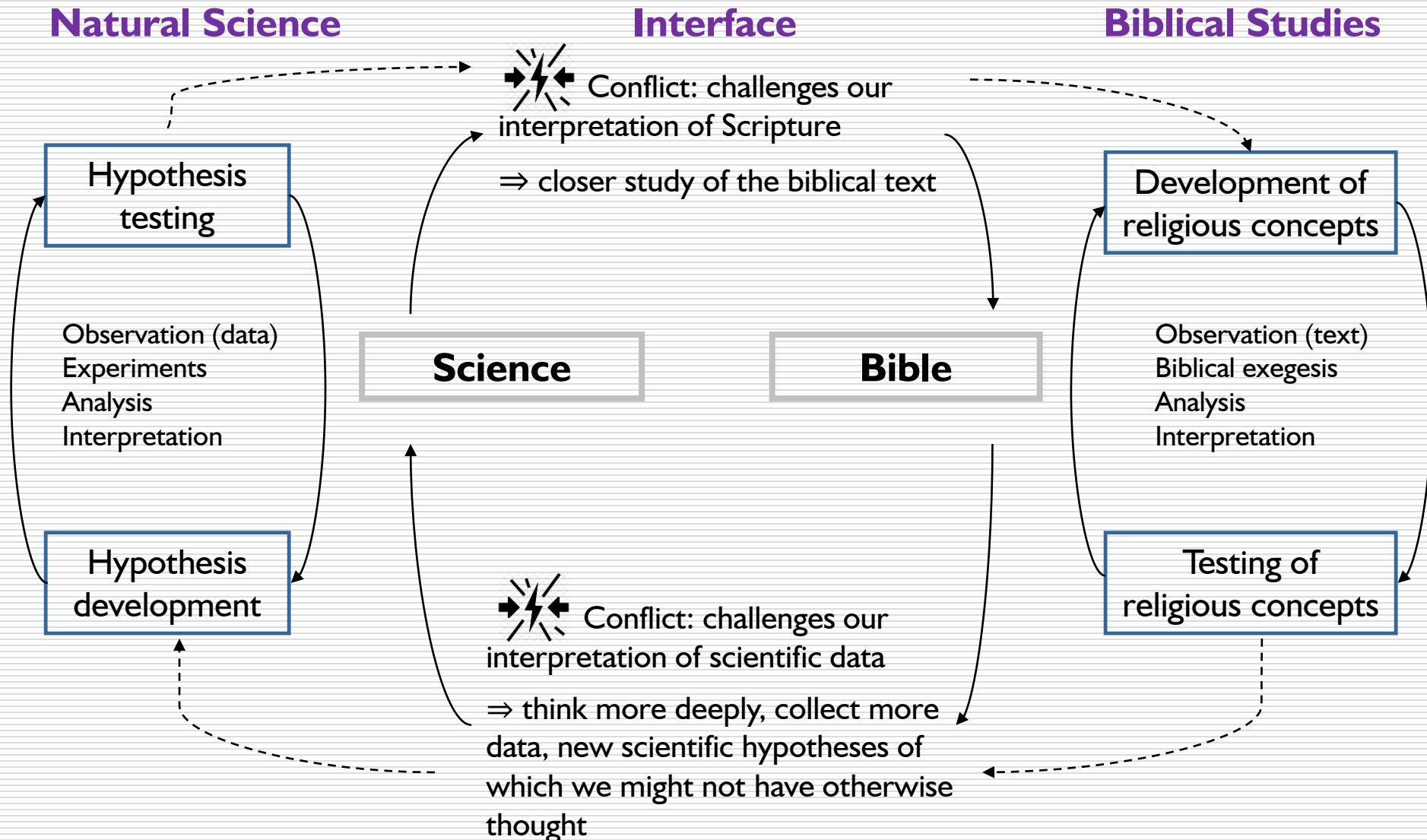
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Biblical Data from Genesis 1:

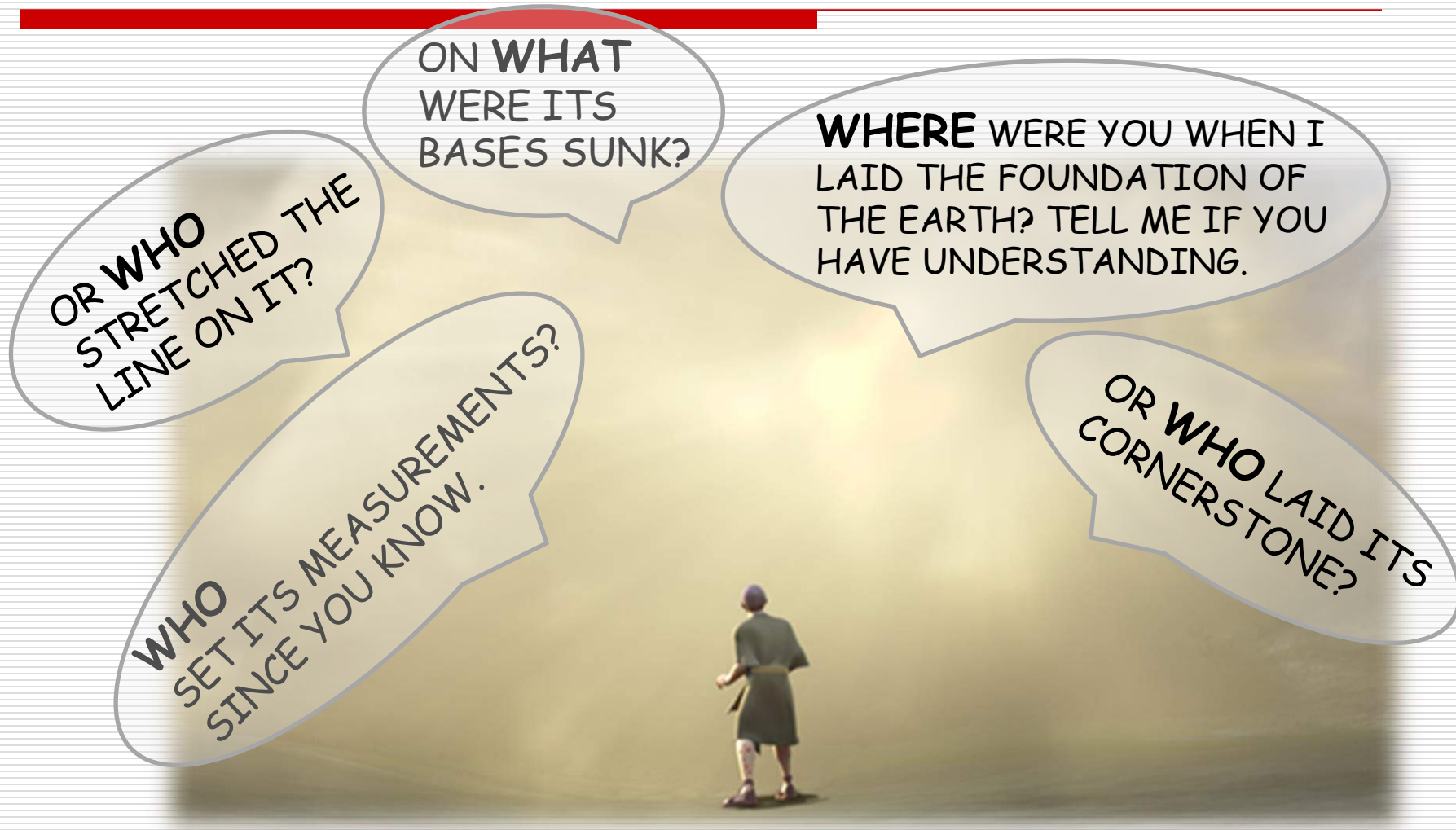
What does the text really say?

Interactive Model

Slightly adapted from **L. Brand** in L. Brand & A. Chadwick, Faith, Reason, & Earth History Berrien Springs, MI: AU Press 3d 2016), 92.



Warning No. 1



Warning No. 2

- ❑ Brevity of Genesis I
 - ❑ Genre: Not a scientific report, but a historical account (narrative of real events) presenting the main points of information
 - Does not mean that the events described are fictitious
 - ❑ Source of information in Genesis I: God Himself
 - If source is human, Genesis I is an invention, for how could humans know?
-



Seven honest questions



1. Is Genesis I a myth, history, or theology?
 2. What is the character of the Creator?
 3. Did God create the universe and our world at the same time?
 4. How long was a day of creation?
 5. How did God structure the days of creation and why?
 6. Did the ancient Hebrews believe in a solid dome (and a flat earth)?
 7. Which questions remain exegetically open?
-

And more honest questions



8. ...

9. ...

10.

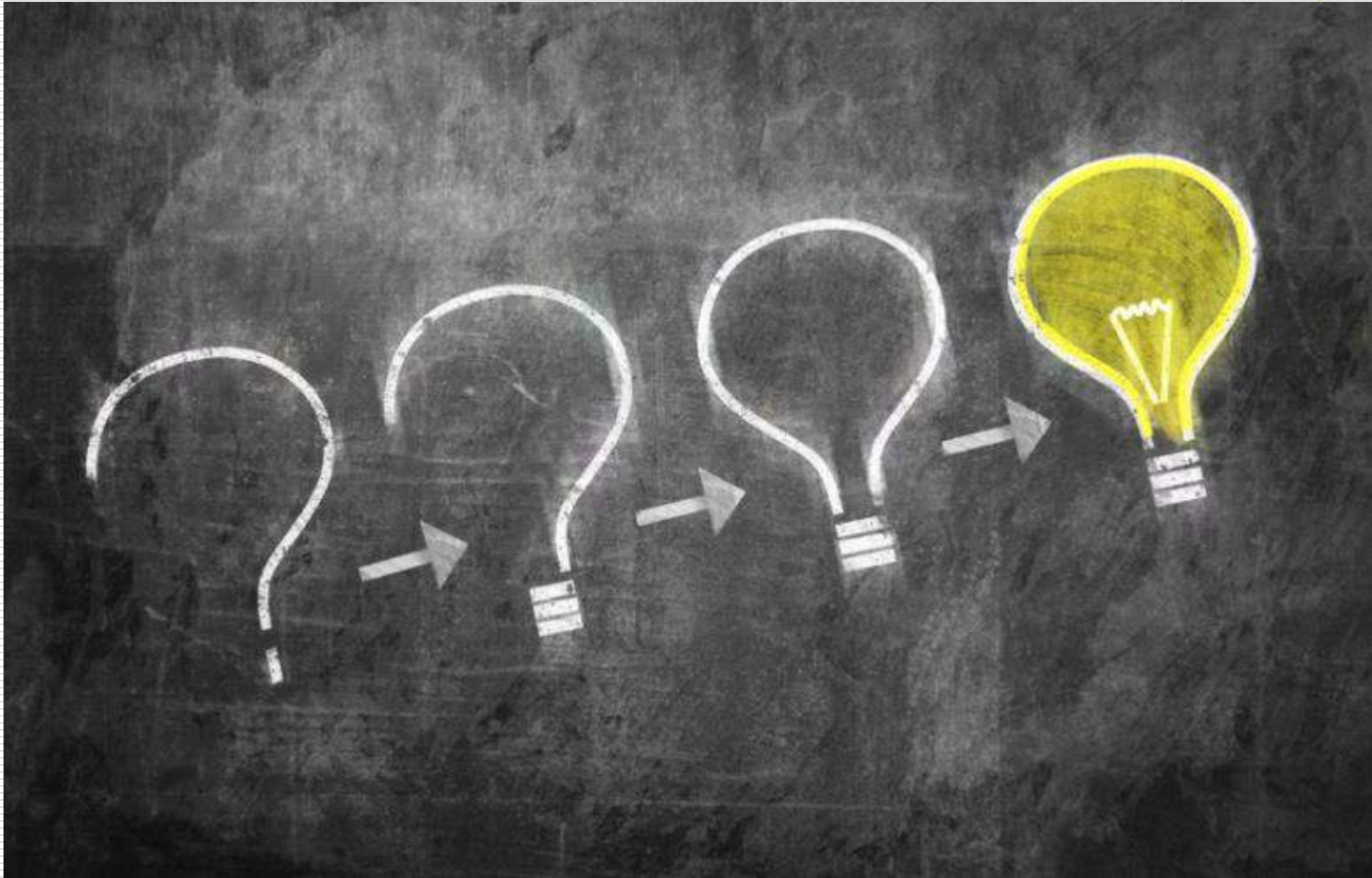
11. ...

12. ...

13. ...

14. ...

And more honest questions





Q1

**IS GENESIS I A MYTH, OR
HISTORY, OR THEOLOGY?**

Genesis I – myth, history, or theology?

- ❑ No vacuum
 - *Enuma Elisch* (12th cent. BC): Marduk's creation battle
 - Atrachasis-Epos (18th cent. BC): replacement workers
 - ❑ How does Genesis I itself want to be understood?
 - As myth (theology but no historicity)?
 - Historical account (historicity *and* theology)?
-

Genesis I – A Myth?

Biblical Creation	ANE Creation Myth
One God (monotheism)	Many gods (polytheism)
Tohuwabohu & darkness	Chaos & darkness
Effortlessness of creation	Battle of creation
Enjoyment: (very) good life	Sweat & blood, Death involved
Nobility of human beings: God's representative (<i>imago Dei</i>)	Work as servant or slave
Divine-human relationship	Insurmountable distance
Blessing, Sabbath	?? (Gods rest and celebrate)
Independent clause	Dependent clause

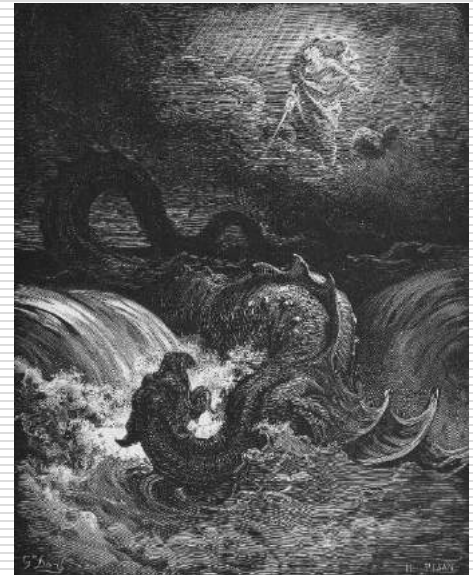
Why Genesis 1 Is Not a Myth



- Different to other ANE creation stories (*Gottesbild*)
- *Toledot* formula (13x in Gen)
 - 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1, 32; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 13, 19; 36:1, 9; 37,2.
 - Structural formula => Divides the book into parts
 - Interlocks parts (super- & subscription)
 - Identifies 1:1–2:4 as similar to the other parts (same genre)
- References do not rework or symbolize Gen 1
 - Exod 20:11; Mark 10:7-8; Rev 14:7; etc.
 - Jesus: „from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female [citation Gen 2:24]” (Mark 10:6-8)
 - Jesus: “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words? (John 5:46-47)

Who in the world is “Rahab”?

- ❑ “Thou Thyself didst crush Rahab like one who is slain; Thou didst scatter Thine enemies with Thy mighty arm (Ps 89:10)
- Rahab as God’s enemy, a demonic power similar/identical to
 - ❑ „the fleeing serpent (Job 26:13)
 - ❑ “Leviathan the twisted serpent” (Isa 27:1)
- Battle against Rahab
 - ❑ Ps 89:6-15; Job 26:5-13; Job 9:13: helpers of Rahab
 - ❑ Time is not given, possibly before creation
- Defeat of Rahab
 - ❑ Job 26:12 (shattered); Ps 89:10 (crushed)
- Egypt is compared to Rahab (Isa 30:7; 51:9, 10)
- Poetic texts!! => Rahab = God’s enemy; great controversy



Is Genesis I theology?

- Yes! Theological themes:
 - God's character
 - Creation theology
 - Anthropology: we are created
 - Responsibility for the world: ecological, morally
 - Sabbath – rest day
 - Sanctuary from the beginning
 - „Theological“ ≠ „fictional“, „ahistorical“, „mythic“
 - Historical *und* theological
 - Bible is *salvation history*: God's great deeds
-



Q 2

**WHAT IS THE NATURE AND
CHARACTER OF THE
CREATOR?**

The God in Genesis I

☐ No theogony

- God existed before the “beginning”
- Gott is not bound to time and space

☐ Name of God

- Elohim = mighty, transcendent God (Gen 1)
- YHWH = personal, immanent God (Gen 2)

☐ Other statements

- “For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth ... And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” (Col 1:16-17)
 - “Son, ... through whom also He made the world.” (Heb 1:2)
-

Uniqueness of Genesis I: God

- ❑ 1. God is an artist, not a warrior.
 - ❑ The Creator plans, takes time, shapes, and fills our world, and through his Word creates a harmonious masterpiece in space and time.
 - ❑ 2. God is sovereign, independent, outstanding.
 - ❑ 3. God is not a sexual being.
 - ❑ 4. God loved humans and gave them a special place in His creation.
 - ❑ Respectful image of humanity: animated by the „breath of life“ (Gen 2:7); image of God (Gen 1:26-27)
-

Uniqueness of Genesis I: God

- ☐ 5. God's creation is good, yes indeed, very good
 - ☐ Evil does not come from God.
 - ☐ 6. God gives three blessed institutions: marriage, work, day of rest.
 - ☐ No other ANE creation tradition cares about these elementary components of human life.
 - ☐ 7. God is love.
-



Q3

**DID GOD CREATE THE
UNIVERSE AND OUR WORLD
AT THE SAME TIME?**

So, When Was “In the Beginning”?

- ❑ Exact time is unknown
 - Ussher-Lightfoot-calendar: 4004 BC (flawed!)
 - ❑ Beginning [*bere'shît*] = Beginning (of a time period)
 - “Declaring the end from the beginning [*mere'shît*] and from ancient times things which have not been done ...” (Isa 46:10)
 - “In the beginning [*bere'shît*] of the reign of Jehoiakim ...” (Jer 26:1)
 - ❑ Beginning of *what*?
 - History of life on earth?
 - History of the universe?
 - Of time and space for humans: Our history
-

“The heavens and the earth”?

- Universe
 - Merism (“A to Z”, “Alpha and Omega”, etc.)
 - Cosmos: Gen 2:1, 4 shows that what God created in Gen 1 was “the heavens and the earth”
 - Meaning of “heaven(s)” and “earth” in Gen 1
 - Same/Similar expressions in the OT:
 - Exact same phrase, e. g. Exod 20:11 (+ sea); Hag 2:6, 21 (shaking)
 - New creation: Isa 65:17 (new heavens and new earth)
 - Flood: Gen 7:11-12 (windows of heaven, rain fell on earth)
 - Preexistence of other worlds and powers
 - Rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. (Eph 3:10)
 - Sons of God before the time of earth’s creation (Job 38:7)
 - Other worlds existed before the creation week (PP 41)
-

Possibilities for Genesis 1:1 and 2

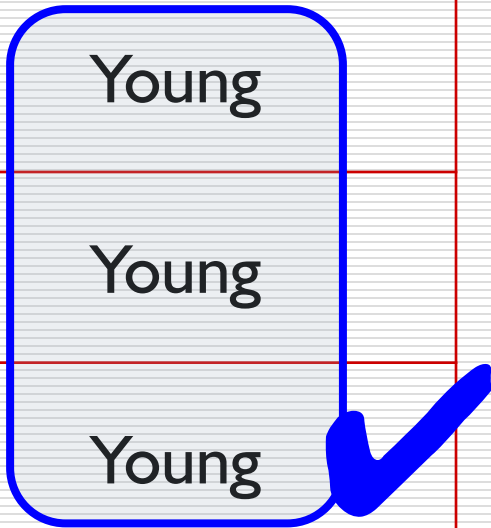
- ❑ Creation of universe **before** creation week
 - 1. Active gap (evolution, experiments [by Satan], etc.)
 - 2. Passive gap
 - ❑ Creation of cosmos (=human habitat) **in** the creation week
 - Meaning of heaven and earth
 - There was creation before creation week
 - ❑ Job 38:7 “Morning stars” and “Sons of God” sang and shouted for joy as God laid the foundations of earth
 - ❑ Isa 14 and Hes 28 (v. 13.15): creation of Luzifer
 - ❑ Creation of the universe **in** creation week
-

Interpretations of Genesis I

Universe	Earth	Life
Old	Old	Old
Old	Old	Young
Old	Young	Young
Young	Young	Young

Interpretations of Genesis I

Universe	Earth	Life
Old	Old	Old
Old	Old	Young
Old	Young	Young
Young	Young	Young



What about “the stars”?

- ¹⁴ Then God said, "Let there be **lights** in the expanse of the heavens
 - to separate the day from the night,
 - and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years;
 - ¹⁵ and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth";
 - and it was so.
 - ¹⁶ And God made **the two great lights**,
 - **the greater light** to govern the day,
 - and **the lesser light** to govern the night;

together with the stars / and the stars also.
- 

What about “the stars”?

□ “... and the stars also”

- Group of three: sun, moon, and stars

□ “... together with the stars” וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים

- Hebrew preposition “with” (אֵת ‘et)

- I have gotten a manchild **with** *the help of* the LORD. (Gen 4:1)

קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת־יְהוָה

- I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and **with** your descendants after you; and **with** every living creature that is with you (Gen 9:9-10)

- Syntax: verb “govern” / “rule” (Gen 1, 16b.c) is closer to the preposition than the verb “made” (16a)
 - Object of “made” is “lights” (v. 14), which are the two lights (v. 16) – the stars do not belong to them
-



Q 4

**HOW LONG WAS A DAY OF
CREATION?**

How long is one day of creation?

Literal (ca. 24 hours)

- ☐ Text in Genesis 1
- ☐ Back references to creation days in Sabbath texts
- ☐ Weekly cycle

Not literal (whatever)

- ☐ „Scientific“ argument
- ☐ Literature argument: myth
- ☐ Bible texts
 - Ps 90:4; 2 Pt 3:8

How long is one day of creation?

- ❑ Day (*jom*) in the singular => 24-hours-day
- ❑ Day (*jom*) with numerals (c. 150 x) => 24-hours-day
 - What about prophetic “days”?
- ❑ Day (*jom*) with ordinals (135 x) => 24-hours-day
- ❑ Succession of ordinals
 - Num 7:10-83; Num 29:12-38
- ❑ “There was evening and there was morning” => 24-hours-day
 - dark period + bright period



How long is one day of creation?

☐ Sabbath is anchored in creation

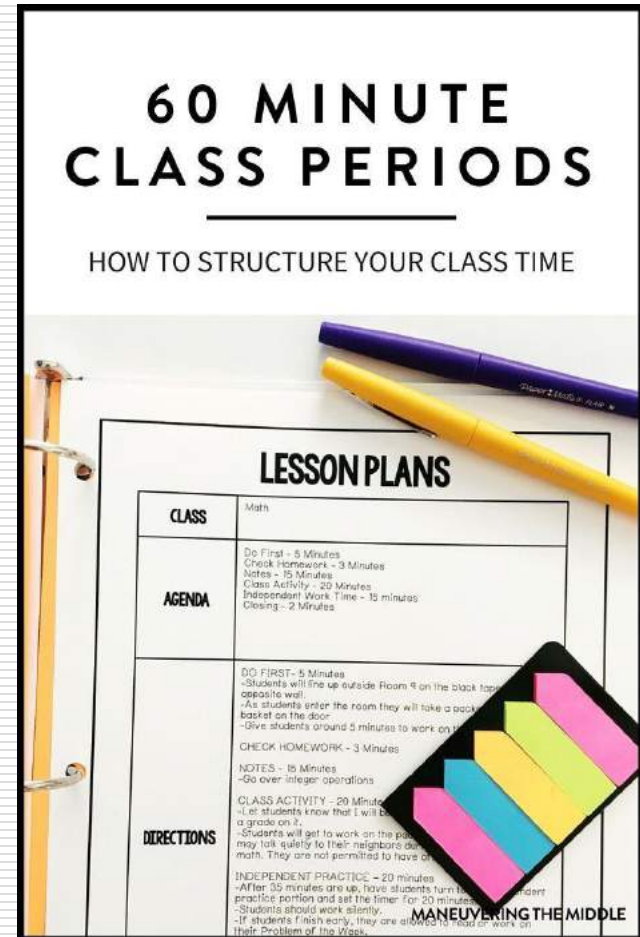
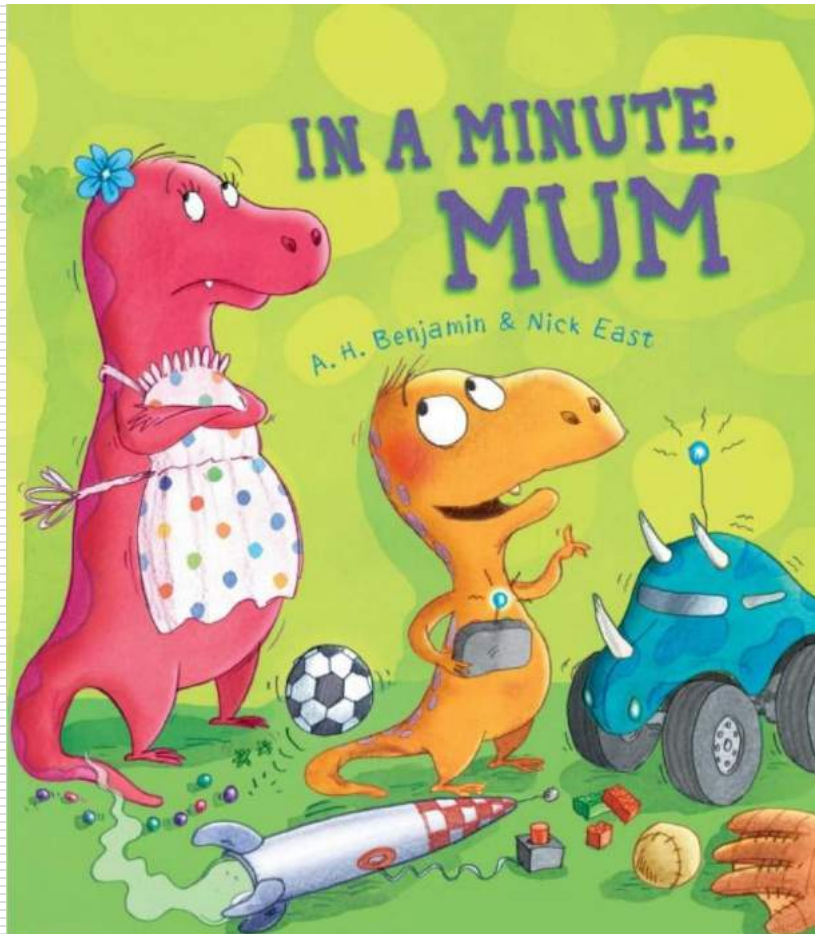
- “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.” (Exod 20:11)
- „for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased *from labor*, and was refreshed.” (Exod 31:17)
- Sabbath as „seventh day“ (Exod 16:28-29)

☐ Weekly cycle (not anchored in astronomy)

☐ *Toledot* formula (13x in Genesis) => historical genre

- 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1, 32; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 13, 19; 36:1, 9; 37,2.
-

“In a minute”



“In a minute”



“We cannot be content to ask, ‘Can the word bear the meaning I would like it to have?’ We must instead try to determine what the author and audience would have understood from the usage in the context. With this latter issue before us, **it is extremely difficult to conclude that anything other than a twenty-four-hour day was intended**. It is not the text that causes people to think otherwise, only the demands of trying to harmonize with modern science.”

- **John H. Walton**, *Genesis*, NIVACThe NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 81.
-

What do critical scholars have to say?



What do critical scholars have to say?



“In fact, **the only natural exegesis is a literal one** in the sense that this is what the author intended. As we know from other parts of Genesis, he was deeply interested in chronology and calendar, and he depicted the story of creation in a carefully and deliberately arranged scheme of one week. As Kevan, cited above, rightly sees, the ‘evening’ and ‘morning’ phraseology clearly indicates that he thought of a day such as we understand a day to be; but that is only one of the multitudinous details of the story which show that the seven-day scheme is essential to his way of describing the creation.”

□ **James Barr**, *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster; London: SCM, 1977), 42.

What do critical scholars have to say?



“so far as I know there is no professor of Hebrew or Old testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of Genesis 1–11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that: (a) creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience; ...”

□ **James Barr**, Letter to David C. C. Watson, April 23, 1984.

What do critical scholars have to say?

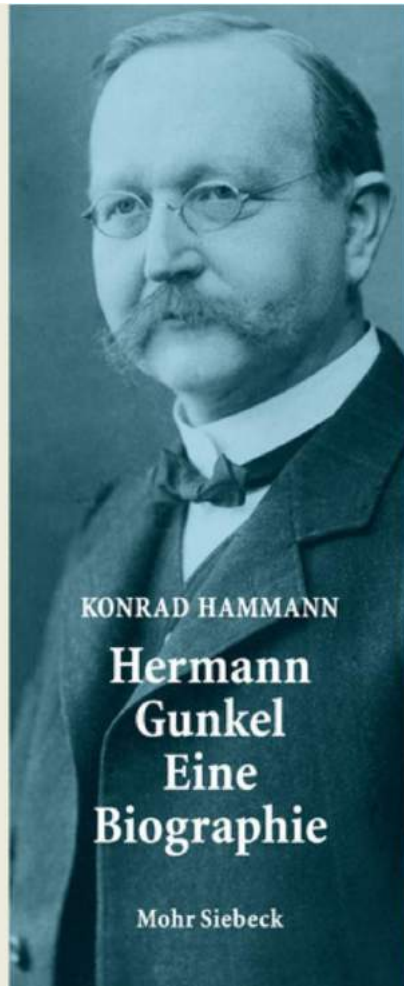


Gerhard v. Rad

“... the inclusion of the events of creation within the course of a series of days provides the last possible delimitation to every kind of mythical thinking. The events that are recorded happened once and for all and their results are irrevocably permanent. **The seven days are unquestionably to be understood as actual days and a unique, unrepeatable lapse of time in the world.**”

□ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, OTL (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster; London: SCM, 1972), 64-65.

What do critical scholars have to say?



„Naturally the ‘days’ are ‘days’ and nothing else. The narrative intends to say that the regular alternation of night and day that we now see stems from the first day. Otherwise, the institution of the seventh day as the holy day would be entirely superfluous if one did not understand the ‘days’ as days.“

- **Hermann Gunkel**, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press; 1997), 108. [original German: 1911]

What do critical scholars have to say?



“day” (*yôm*) in Genesis 1 has the literal meaning in the sense of a “full day”

- **Magne Sæbø**, “*yôm*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 6:23



“‘day (of 24 hours)’ in the sense of the astronomical or calendrical unit.”

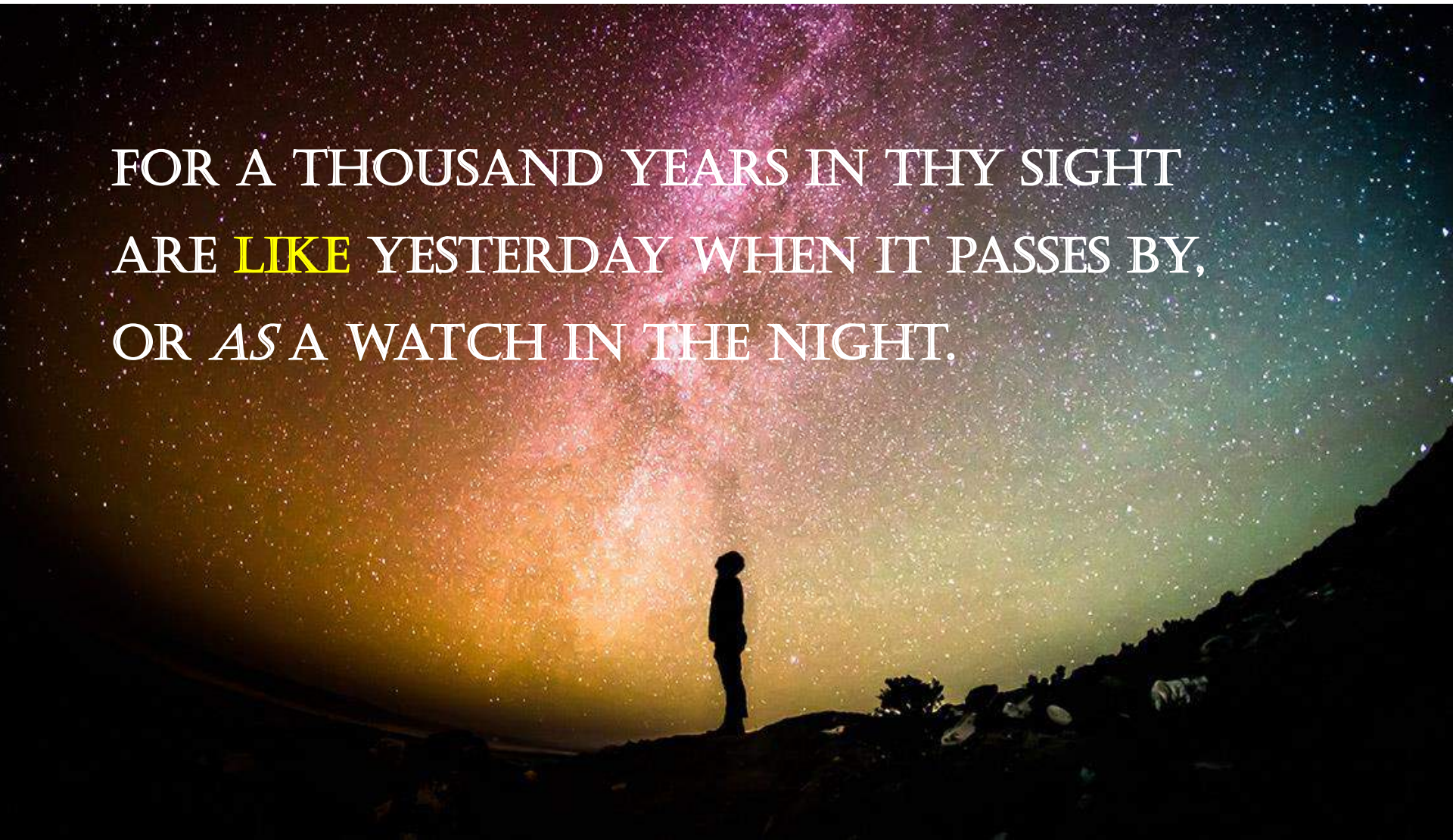
- **Ernst Jenni**, “*yôm* day,” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 2: 528. [German: THAT, 1:709, 1971]
-

What about Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8?

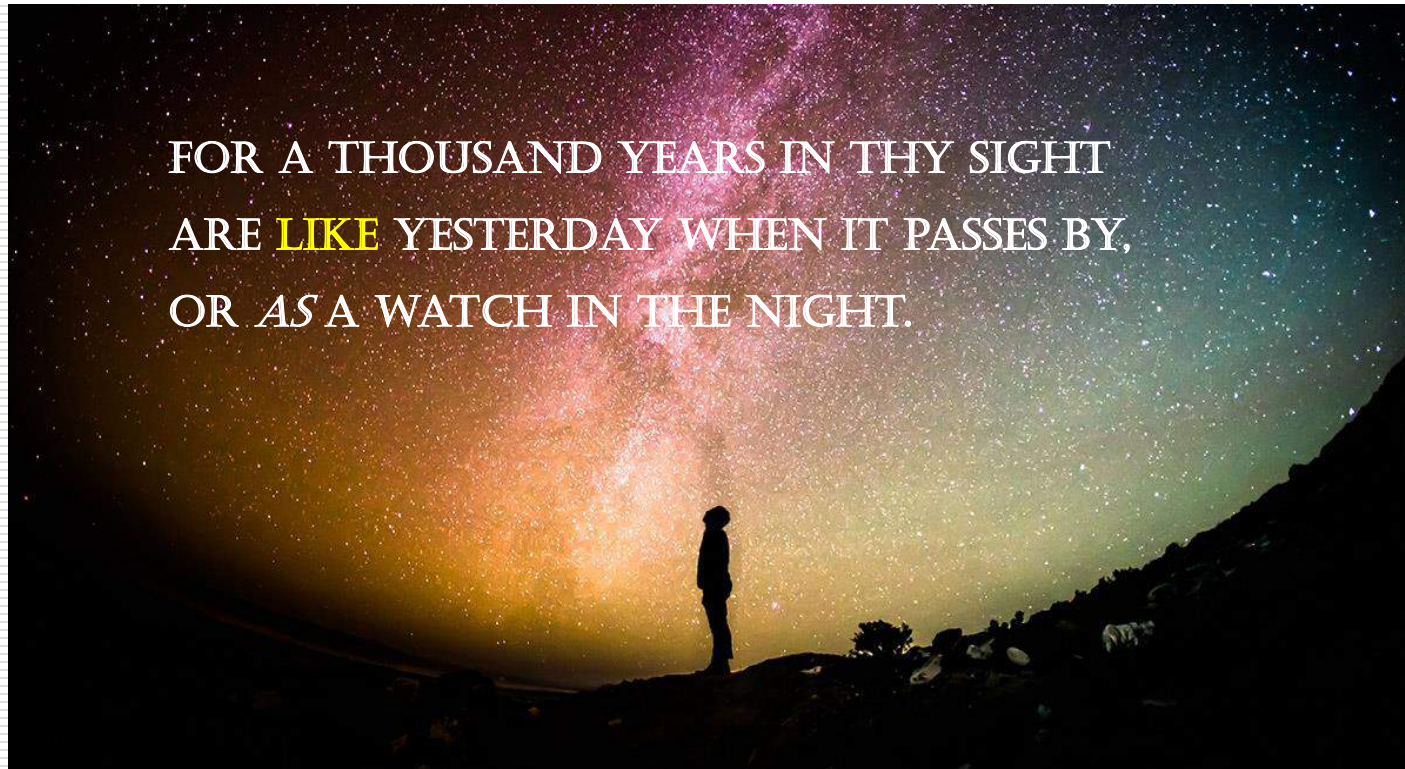


What about Psalm 90:4 und 2 Peter 3:8?

FOR A THOUSAND YEARS IN THY SIGHT
ARE **LIKE** YESTERDAY WHEN IT PASSES BY,
OR AS A WATCH IN THE NIGHT.



What about Psalm 90:4 und 2 Peter 3:8?



FOR A THOUSAND YEARS IN THY SIGHT
ARE **LIKE** YESTERDAY WHEN IT PASSES BY,
OR AS A WATCH IN THE NIGHT.

Theme: Human conception of time is not comparable to the divine view of time.

What about Psalm 90:4 und 2 Peter 3:8?

BUT DO NOT LET THIS ONE FACT
ESCAPE YOUR NOTICE, BELOVED,

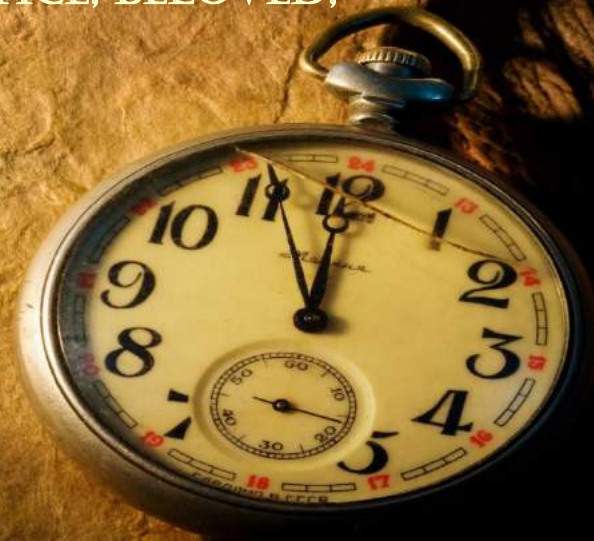
THAT WITH THE LORD
ONE DAY IS **AS**
A THOUSAND YEARS,
AND A THOUSAND YEARS
AS ONE DAY.



What about Psalm 90:4 und 2 Peter 3:8?

BUT DO NOT LET THIS ONE FACT
ESCAPE YOUR NOTICE, BELOVED,

THAT WITH THE LORD
ONE DAY IS **AS**
A THOUSAND YEARS,
AND A THOUSAND YEARS
AS ONE DAY.



Theme: God is not inferior in time.
He keeps his promises, even if it takes 1000 years.



Q5

**HOW DID GOD STRUCTURE
THE DAYS OF CREATION AND
WHY?**

Structure of Creation Days

Genesis I – God creates		
<i>tohu</i> – unformed Separation & Naming God forms <i>Lebensraum</i>	v. 2	<i>bohu</i> – unfilled Function & Purpose God fills <i>Lebensraum</i>
Day 1 He separates light from darkness	Light	Day 4 Light sources at the firmament
Day 2 He separates water above from water below a <i>raqia</i> (sky)	Water Air	Day 5 Fish fill the water, Birds fill the sky
Day 3 He separates water from dry land; vegetation	Land	Day 6 Land animals & humans Vegetation for their food
7th Day (Sabbath) – God rests		

Structure of Creation Days

<i>tohu</i> “unformed” Separation & Naming		<i>bohu</i> “unfilled” Function / Purpose	
<i>Day 1</i>	Light S: Licht / Finsternis N: Tag / Nacht	<i>Day 4</i>	Two lights F/P: govern the day & the night
<i>Day 2</i>	Atmosphere Water below S: Water above / water below N: <i>raqia</i> = heaven, sky	<i>Day 5</i>	Birds Fish F/P: multiply and fill
<i>Day 3</i>	Land Vegetation S: Dry land / water below N: earth / seas	<i>Day 6</i>	Land animals, humans Food F/P: rule, multiply, fill
<i>7th Day (Sabbath) – God rests</i>			



Q6

**DID THE ANCIENT HEBREWS
BELIEVE IN A SOLID DOME
(AND A FLAT EARTH)?**

Concepts

- ❑ The idea that “Hebrew cosmology is prescientific, even naïve, is related/based on the idea that the “expansion” in Genesis 1:6 was understood to be a solid sky dome resting on a flat earth
 - ❑ Reasoning:
 - 1. Ancient Hebrews used ANE conceptions
 - 2. The Hebrew term *raqia*’ refers to a metal expansion/dome
-

Examples of modern ideas about the conception of the Hebrews

- ❑ Giovanni Virginio Schiaparelli, *Astronomy of the Old Testament* (1903-1905)
 - ❑ Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York, 1966)
 - ❑ Just search for illustrations of the Hebrew concept of the cosmos
-

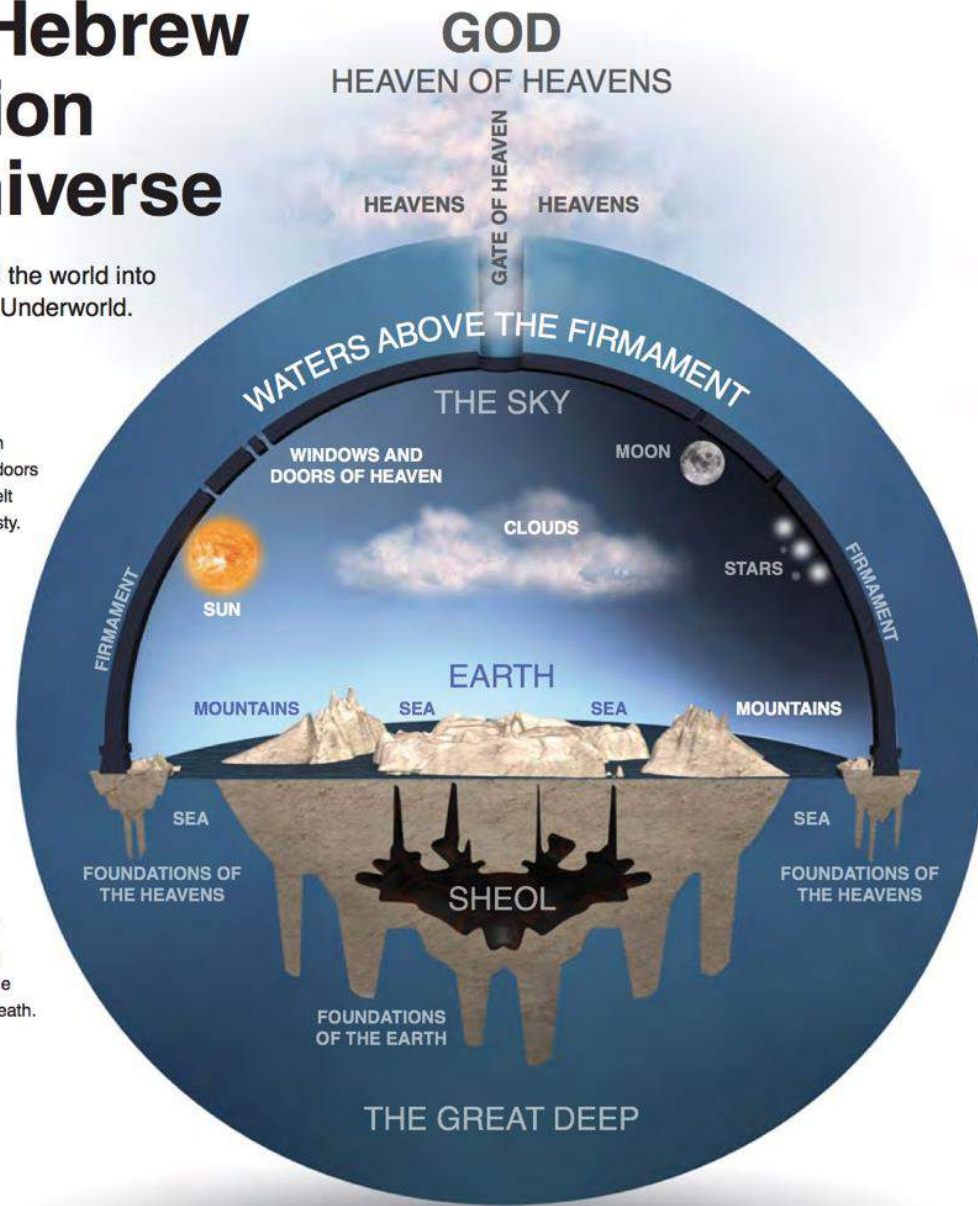
Ancient Hebrew Conception of the Universe

The ancient Israelites divided the world into Heaven, Earth, Sea, and the Underworld.

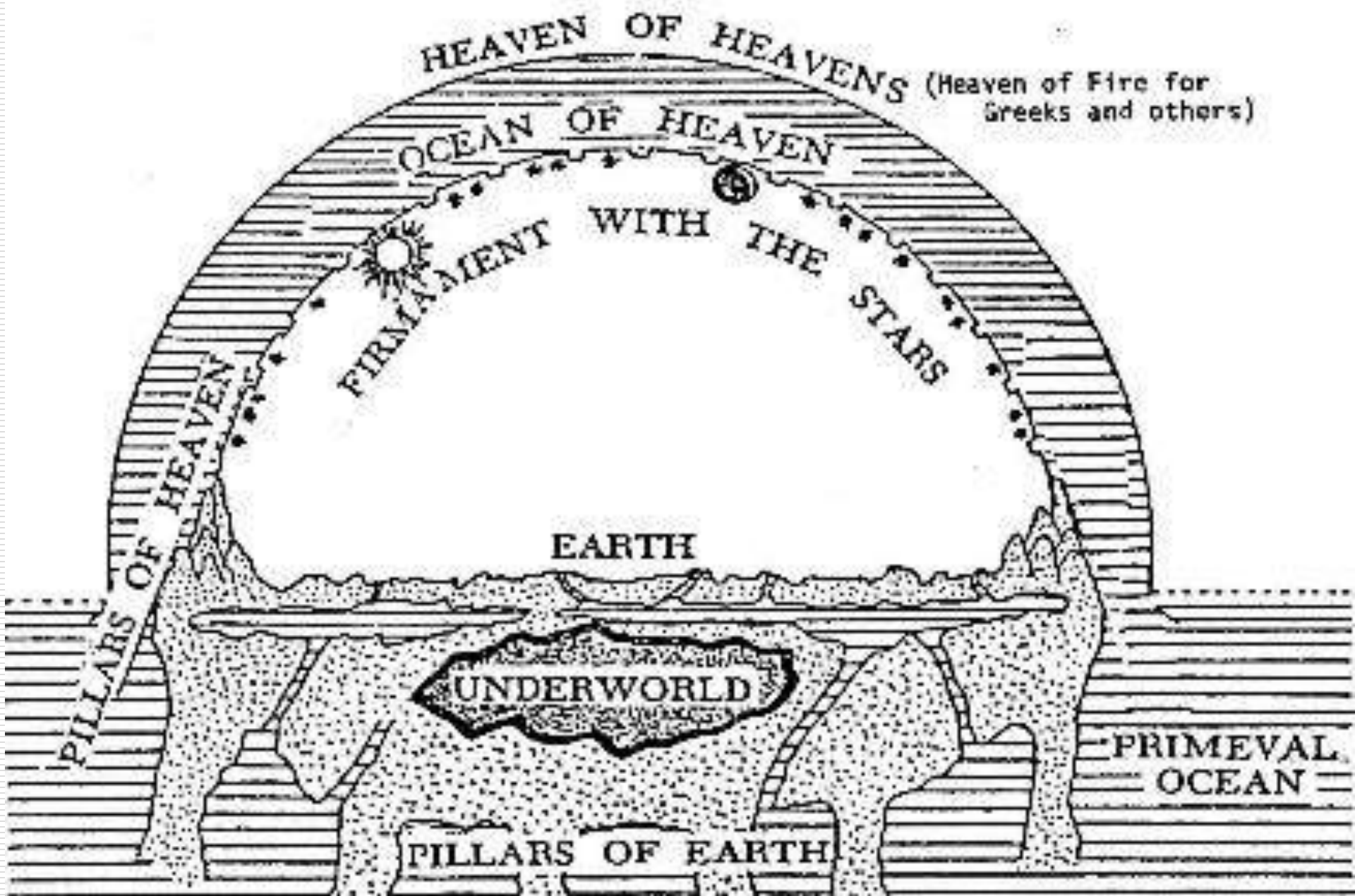
They viewed the sky as a vault resting on foundations—perhaps mountains—with doors and windows that let in the rain. God dwelt above the sky, hidden in cloud and majesty.

The world was viewed as a disk floating on the waters, secured or moored by pillars. The earth was the only known domain—the realm beyond it was considered unknowable.

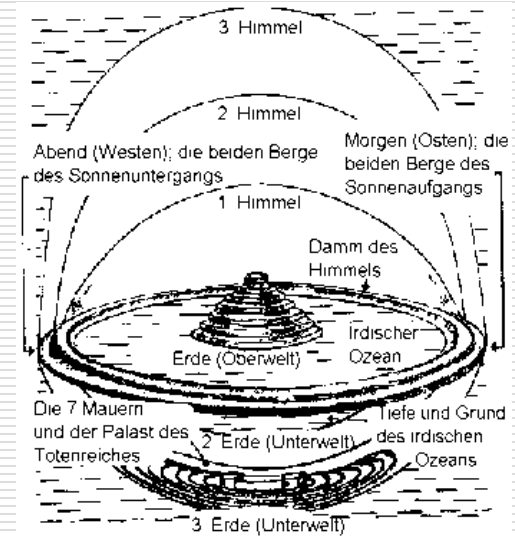
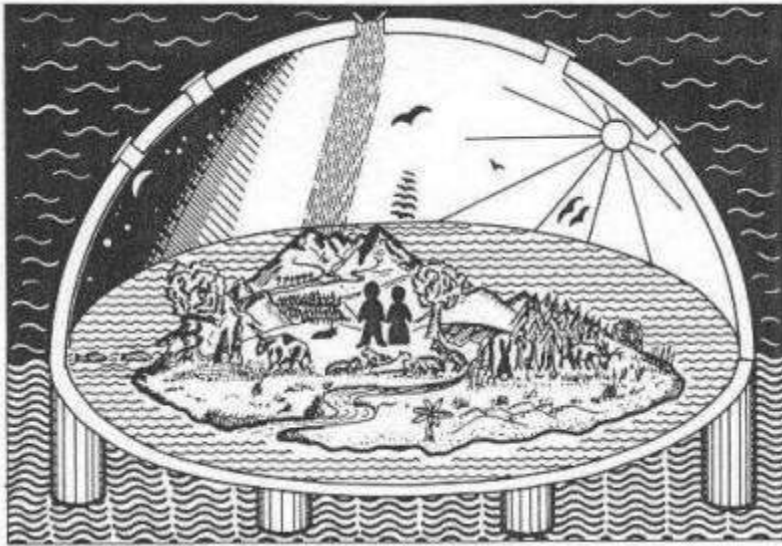
The Underworld (Sheol) was a watery or dusty prison from which no one returned. Regarded as a physical place beneath the earth, it could be reached only through death.



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How does this look like?



Cosmological Conceptions

□ Babylon

- More interested in astrology than cosmology
- Mistranslation of “heavens” in *Enuma Elisch* with “solid dome” (Peter Jensen, 1890 – discovered in 1975 by W. G. Lambert)
- W. Horowitz: six flat heavens, suspended one above the other by cables

□ Greece

- Spherical (not flat!) earth that was suspended inside a complete, hollow heavenly sphere, which, in turn, was also suspended inside additional (min. 8) outer spheres, all transparent and solid – a geocentric model (Ptolemy, 2d cent. AD),

□ Hellenistic Judaism

- Takes over Greek ideas of hard spheres
- => LXX in Gen 1:6 reads *stereoma* (= solidity, firmness)

Cosmological Conceptions

☐ Early Christianity

- Bible *and* Greek understanding:
- Vulgate (405): *firmamentum* for the Greek *stereoma*
- => Concept of earth as a spherical globe and the biblical firmament as one of the celestial spheres (usually solid)
 - ☐ Basil (4th cent. AD): fluid firmament
 - ☐ Augustine: solid or soft/fluid sphere

☐ Scholasticism

- Translate *expansium* instead of *firmamentum*

☐ Late Medieval Christianity

- Numerous hollow spheres or orbs around the spherical earth
 - Debate: soft/fluid (13th cent.) or solid (14th to 16th cent.)?
-

Cosmological Conceptions

□ Renaissance (16th – 17th/18th cent))

- Rejection of a solid sphere (Brahe, Kopernikus, Galileo)
- => non-literal hermeneutic (Antoine Augustine Calmet): Gen 1:6 sounds like a solid dome (ignorance of original audience) but is none.
- Voltaire: “These childish and savage populations imagined the earth to be flat, supported, I know not how, by its own weight in the air; the sun, moon, and stars to move continually upon a solid vaulted roof called a firmament; and this roof to sustain waters, and have flood-gates at regular distances, through which these waters issued to moisten and fertilize the earth.” (entry “Heaven (ciel matériel),” in *Dictionnaire philosophique*, 1764)

□ 18.–19. Jh.

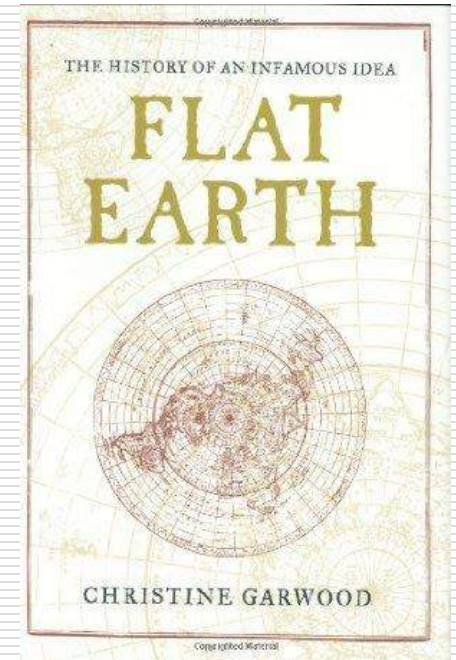
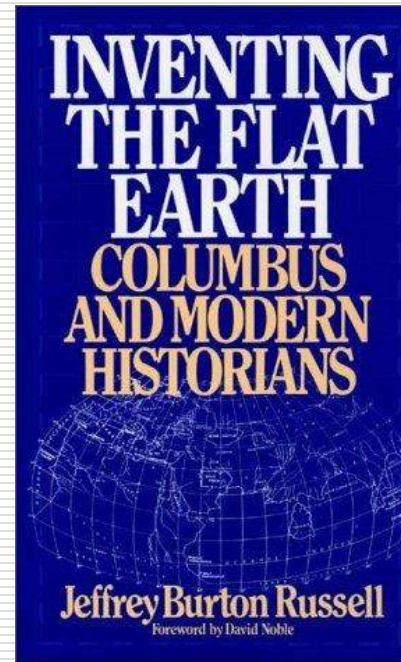
- *rāqîaʿ* means expansion/atmosphere (mostly fluid)
-

Myth of the Flat Earth & Heavenly Dome

- ❑ Apart from a few individuals, no one believed in a flat earth & a heavenly solid dome
- ❑ Where did this idea come from?

In the 19th century, the lie about the conception of a flat earth and the lie about the eternal conflict of science and religion was used in defense of Darwinism.

Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Inventing the Flat Earth* (1991) und Christine Garwood, *Flat Earth: History of an Infamous Idea* (2007)



Myth of the Flat Earth & Heavenly Dome

- Then, Bible critics used that myth and claimed that the ancient Hebrews believed heaven to be a metal dome.



What does *rāqîa'* mean?

☐ No Hebrew cosmology

☐ *raqia'* (17x)

☐ Genesis 1:6, 7, 8, 14, 15, 17, 20 (9x)

☐ Expansion at the theophany (5x): Ezek 1:22, 23, 25, 26; 10:1

☐ Psalm 19:2 (creation); 150:1

☐ Dan 12:3

■ => Nowhere a metal structure

☐ Verbal form *raqa'* (12x)

■ Meaning: to stretch out

What does *rāqîa'* mean?

☐ „Water above“

- And God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. (Gen 1:7)
- When He made firm the skies above, When the springs of the deep became fixed (Prov 8:28)
- Yet He commanded the **clouds above**, And opened the **doors of heaven** (Psa 78:23)

☐ „Windows/doors of heaven“

- the floodgates of the sky were opened (Gen 7:11)
 - Ps 78,23: doors of heaven // clouds
 - „above from“ can mean „from above“, e. g. “the dew of heaven from above” (Gen 27:39).
-

What does *rāqîa'* mean?

☐ Heaven

- Stretching out heaven like a *tent* curtain. (Psa 104:2)
- that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in (Isa 40:22)
- and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. (Exo 24:10)
- "Have you understood the expanse of the earth? Tell Me, if you know all this. (Job 38:18)

☐ Irony: Using figurative texts for literal understanding (e. g. Psalm, Job), while literal texts are understood figuratively (Genesis 1).



Q6

**WHICH QUESTIONS REMAIN
EXEGETICALLY OPEN?**

More honest questions



8. When was the „beginning“?
 9. How did God „create“?
 10. Why the text say that the earth was *tohowabohu* in v. 2?
 11. Which „light“ did God create on day 1?
 12. What is the water above the firmament on day 2?
 13. What happened on day 4?
 14. Why does the next report about creation in Genesis 2 supposedly differ from the one in Genesis 1?
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