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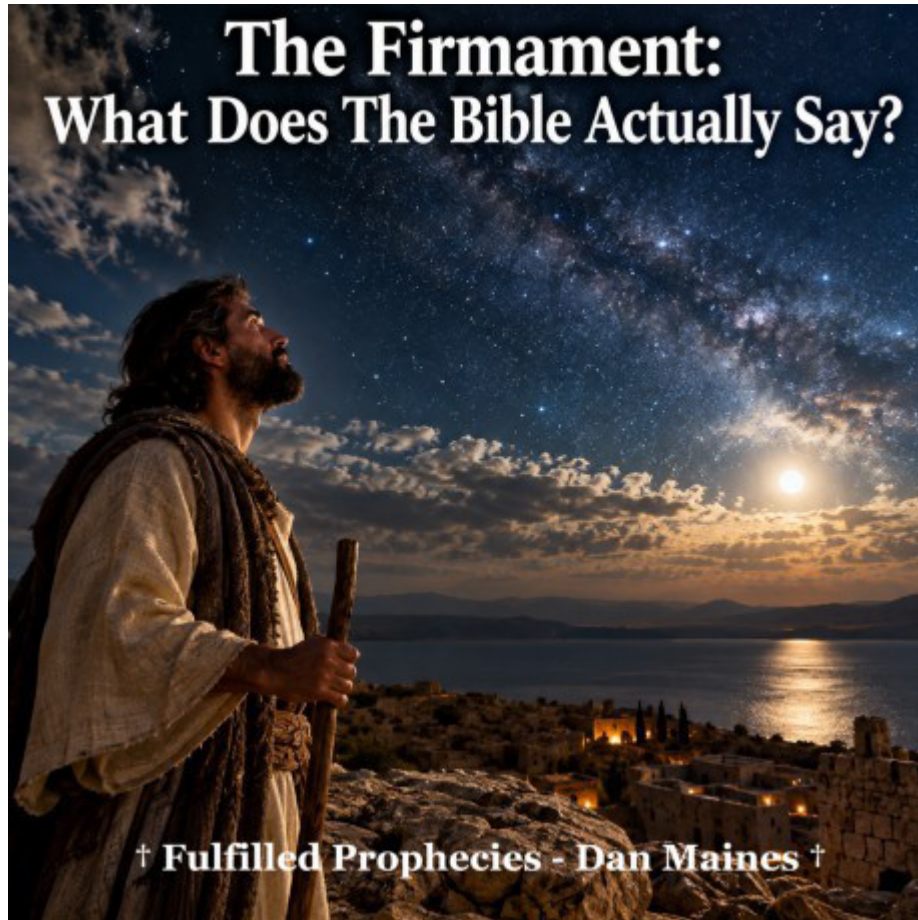
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The Firmament: What Does The Bible Actually Say?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† The word firmament appears prominently in the creation account, but we shouldn't build our understanding of it from modern arguments, pictures, or theories. We need to let Scripture explain Scripture.

† Genesis describes God creating an expanse that divided waters, calling that expanse Heaven, and later placing the lights of heaven in that expanse. The Bible's own descriptions give us the framework for understanding what the firmament is.

† The firmament displays God's creative power and order. It isn't presented as another god, a mysterious supernatural barrier, or something humanity should worship. It's part of God's created heavens. (Psalm 33:6; Jeremiah 10:11-12)

Genesis 1:6-8

Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." God made the expanse, and separated the waters that were below the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse; and it was so. God called the expanse "heaven." And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

† Scripture gives us the first definition we need, God called the firmament Heaven. We shouldn't ignore the definition supplied by the creation account itself. (Psalm 19:1; Psalm 33:6)

† The firmament separated waters below from waters above as God brought order to His creation. The emphasis of the passage is God's authority, God spoke, God made, God divided, and God named. (Job 38:8-11; Psalm 148:4-5)

† Nothing in this passage makes the firmament divine. It's a created part of God's ordered world, completely subject to the Creator. (Nehemiah 9:6; Revelation 4:11)

Genesis 1:14-17

Then God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and they shall serve as signs and for seasons, and for days and years; and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also. God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth,

† The same creation account tells us that the sun, moon, and stars were associated with the firmament of heaven. This gives us another biblical description of the heavens above the earth. (Deuteronomy 4:19; Psalm 136:7-9)

† God established these lights for signs, seasons, days, and years.

Creation has order because its Creator established that order.
(Psalm 74:16-17; Jeremiah 31:35)

† The lights weren't gods to be worshiped. Israel was repeatedly warned against worshiping the sun, moon, and stars. The heavens declare God's greatness because they were made by Him.
(Deuteronomy 17:2-5; 2 Kings 23:5)

Psalm 19:1

The heavens tell of the glory of God; And their expanse declares the work of His hands.

† David connects the heavens and firmament with God's handiwork. The creation points beyond itself to the Creator. (Psalm 8:3-4; Psalm 104:1-2)

† When people look upward and see the greatness and order of the heavens, they're seeing evidence of God's creative work. The firmament doesn't receive the glory, God does. (Romans 1:20; Acts 14:17)

† This is important because biblical creation language is God-centered. Scripture's purpose isn't to turn the heavens into an object of speculation, but to reveal the greatness of the One who made them. (Isaiah 40:25-26; Jeremiah 32:17)

Ezekiel 1:22

Now over the heads of the living beings there was something like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal, spread out over their heads.

† Ezekiel is describing a prophetic vision. Notice his language carefully, he says the likeness of a firmament. Visionary language shouldn't automatically be treated as a technical description of the physical structure of the universe. (Ezekiel 1:1; Ezekiel 1:26)

† Ezekiel repeatedly uses comparison language such as likeness and appearance. His vision communicates heavenly glory through visible symbols. (Ezekiel 1:5; Ezekiel 1:28)

† This protects us from forcing every prophetic image into a literal physical model. Scripture contains historical narrative, poetry, prophecy, visions, symbols, and apocalyptic imagery, and context tells us how the language is being used. (Numbers 12:6; Hosea

12:10)

Daniel 12:3

And those who have insight will shine like the glow of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

† Daniel uses the brightness of the firmament as prophetic imagery. The firmament was something associated with brightness and heavenly glory, making it a powerful picture for the vindication of God's faithful people. (Matthew 13:43; Philippians 2:15)

† Daniel wasn't giving an astronomy lesson here. He was using familiar heavenly imagery to describe the glory and vindication of the righteous. (Daniel 12:1-2; Matthew 13:40-43)

† This also shows why context matters. The same word can appear in creation history, poetry, and prophetic imagery without every passage serving the same literary purpose. (Psalm 19:1; Ezekiel 1:22)

Psalms 150:1

Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty expanse.

† The Psalm closes the book of Psalms by calling creation to praise God. The firmament becomes part of the grand biblical picture of God's majesty and authority. (Psalm 148:1-5; Psalm 150:6)

† God's power isn't confined to a building made by human hands. Heaven and earth belong to Him because He created them. (1 Kings 8:27; Acts 17:24)

† From Genesis to the Psalms, the message remains consistent, the heavens belong to God, reveal His handiwork, and testify to His power. (Psalm 24:1-2; Psalm 89:11)

Historical References

† Josephus described the creation account and wrote of God placing heaven over the universe and separating it from the other parts, reflecting how a first-century Jewish historian understood Genesis as an account of God's ordering of creation.

† Philo of Alexandria also discussed the firmament while

commenting on the Genesis creation account. His writings show that questions about the heavens and Genesis existed long before modern debates.

† Early Jewish and Christian writers didn't all explain the physical details in exactly the same way. Their differences are a good reminder that our doctrine should rest on Scripture itself rather than making any historical writer our final authority.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't need to make the firmament into something Scripture never says it is. We can begin with the simple biblical statement that God made it and called it Heaven. (Genesis 1:8)

† We also shouldn't allow modern debates about cosmology to become tests of salvation or Christian fellowship. Salvation is in Christ, not in accepting someone's preferred diagram of the physical universe. (Acts 4:12; Romans 14:1)

† When we look at the heavens, our response should be worship. Creation points to God's wisdom, power, and glory. (Psalm 8:3-4; Romans 1:20)

† Scripture interprets Scripture. Genesis describes the firmament, the Psalms celebrate it, Ezekiel uses its likeness in prophetic vision, and Daniel uses its brightness prophetically. Context keeps us from forcing every occurrence into exactly the same type of description. (2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Peter 1:20)

† The important message isn't that we need to construct a modern scientific model from the word firmament. The important message is that the heavens are God's creation and declare His glory. (Psalm 33:6; Isaiah 40:26)

Q & A Appendix

Q: What is the firmament in Genesis?

A: Genesis says God made the firmament to divide the waters and then called the firmament Heaven. We should begin with Scripture's own description rather than importing a definition into the passage. (Genesis 1:6-8)

Q: Does the Bible say the firmament is a solid metal dome over the earth?

A: Genesis doesn't use the words metal dome. It says God made the firmament, separated waters with it, and called it Heaven. Later, the lights are described as being in the firmament of heaven. We shouldn't claim more than the text actually says. (Genesis 1:6-8, 14-17)

Q: What are the waters above the firmament?

A: Genesis clearly says there were waters above the firmament, and Psalm 148 also speaks of waters above the heavens. Scripture establishes their existence in its creation language without giving us every physical detail about their nature or arrangement. (Genesis 1:7; Psalm 148:4)

Q: Does Ezekiel's description prove that the sky is literally crystal?

A: No. Ezekiel says he saw the likeness of a firmament, like crystal. He was reporting a prophetic vision filled with likenesses, appearances, and symbolic imagery. We shouldn't turn a visionary comparison into a scientific measurement or material description. (Ezekiel 1:22, 26-28)

Q: Should Christians fight over competing models of the firmament?

A: No. We should stand firmly on what Scripture actually says while refusing to make human conclusions equal to Scripture. The heavens declare God's glory, and our focus should remain on the Creator. (Psalm 19:1; Romans 14:1; Colossians 2:8)

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Genesis 1:6-8; Genesis 1:14-17; Psalm 19:1; Ezekiel 1:22; Daniel 12:3; Psalm 150:1

† Historical writers: Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 1; Philo

of Alexandria, On the Creation

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