

## SCRIPTURE DOES NOT RULE OUT A VAPOR CANOPY

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*Although the subject of the vapor canopy has been discussed for years, some creationists remain unconvinced of its existence for both scientific and Scriptural reasons. This article is an attempt to refute two common objections from Scripture which opponents of the vapor canopy theory have frequently used: Genesis 1:14-17 and Psalm 148:1-10.*

For a number of years the idea of a water vapor canopy has been derived by creationists from Genesis 1:6-8. In this writer's opinion, the evidence for such a canopy is quite good and clearly arises out of a plain reading of the related texts. This evidence has been carefully developed elsewhere and will not be repeated here.<sup>1</sup> It is likely that Genesis 1:6-8 teaches the existence of a literal oceanic mass raised up above the ancient earth during the creation week. It is proposed by this writer that this liquid ocean was arranged in a water vapor phase by the Creator immediately after it was lifted above the atmosphere. Although there is not statement to this effect in the Bible, a vapor form (i.e., superheated invisible steam) is the only form in which such a vast canopy could be maintained without appeal to special miracle. The physics by which this canopy was maintained is a serious problem; but a plausible theory has been developed.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this article is to consider briefly two exegetical arguments commonly used by opponents of the vapor canopy theory to refute its Scriptural basis: Genesis 1:14-17 and Psalm 148:1-10.

### Does a Literal Emphasis on "above" in Genesis 1:6-8 Require a Canopy Beyond the Stars?

For some time it has been observed that there is a definite literary structure around which Moses presents his account, which from one viewpoint is a polemic. In showing us how the God of the Hebrews is superior to the pagan gods, Moses tells us that His creative activity involved giving of structure to that which was "formless," and filling of that which was empty. The problem that Yahweh had to overcome (to view the matter as an engineer might) was that the earth was "without form and void" (Gen. 1:2). Moses neatly divides the acts of creation into two groups: the first three days correct the "without form" condition, and the second three days correct the "void" condition,<sup>3</sup> as is shown in Table 1.

Waltke summarizes:

The parallelism of the last three days with the first three is apparent. Whereas on the first day there is light, on the fourth day the light is localized into luminaries; whereas on the second day there is separation of water and sky, on the fifth day there are created the fish to fill the seas and the birds to fill the skies; whereas land and vegetation were created on the third day, on the sixth day the land animals and man are formed who lived on the land and are sustained by its vegetation.<sup>4</sup>

This literary structure reveals to us that Moses intends to tell us something as to the "structuring" of that

**Table 1. The correspondence between days 1-3 and 4-6.**

<i>The creative acts.</i>	
To correct the "without form" condition	To correct the "void" condition.
Three acts of Day dividing.	Three acts of Day furnishing.
1 Light from darkness	4 Luminaries
2 Upper waters from lower waters. (Expanse)	5 Fish and birds
3 Lower waters from dry land.	6 Beasts and man.

which is formless on the first three days and the filling up of that which was empty (Heb. *bohu*, void, empty) on the second three days. This observation of the literary structure helps resolve an apparent difficulty in taking the *above* in a literal mechanistic sense in 1:7 and yet switching to an "observer true" sense when interpreting *in* in 1:15, "Let them be for lights *in* the expanse of the heavens . . ." Robert Whitelaw, e.g., has argued:

Those who insist on ultra-literalism in vs. 1:7-8 to teach a specific body of water above the firmament, should be equally literal in vs. 14-17 where God puts the sun, moon and stars *in* (not above) this same firmament. Taken literally then, if the canopy is taught here it lies beyond the stars.<sup>5</sup>

But WHY should one who is literal in 1:7-8 in regard to the "above" be "equally literal" in vs. 14-17 in regard to "in"? Whitelaw does not say. Literature is full of illustrations of authors using both "observer true" and "mechanistically true" language in the same paragraph. There is no known precedent for Whitelaw's assertion. Context must determine such things and not some arbitrary, inflexible principle. Furthermore, in this particular section, the context informs us that Moses himself may have had just such a distinction in mind. Structuring the unformed by "dividing" is the emphasis on the first three days, and "filling" the empty is the force of the last three. Since the intent of the placing of the stars is for observation, it seems justifiable to press for an "observer true" use of *in* in 1:15. But the purpose of the expanse was to divide between two bodies of liquid water in 1:7, hence a mechanistic use of *above* is probable.

If the *same* "firmament" is referred to in vs. 7 and 14 (i.e., the atmospheric heavens), then in vs. 7 the text speaks of water which is actually above the "firmament" (mechanistically true), and in vs. 14 it speaks of

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lights which “appear to be in” the firmament (observer-true). On the other hand it may be that the heavens of vs. 7 are atmospheric and the heavens of vs. 14 are intergalactic. It is clear that the Hebrews *did* sometimes use the word *shamayim* for intergalactic space. The phrase, “heaven of heavens,” or the uppermost of the *created* heavens, distinguished it from the lower heavens just as the “holy of holies” is distinct from the “holy place.” The heaven of heavens is not the abode of God in that it was created (Neh. 9:6 and Ps. 148:5), and God does not dwell there (I Kings 8:27). The phrase is used seven times (Deut. 10:14, I Kings 8:27, 2 Chron. 2:6, 6:18, Neh. 9:6, Ps. 68:33, 148:4). Also, if 2 Corinthians 12:2 speaks of the abode of God (i.e., the *third* heaven), would not the *second* heaven refer to interstellar space?

Furthermore a glance at Table 1 reveals another clearly delineated structural feature mentioned above: there is a movement in both sets of three days from heaven to earth. A spatial sequence is implied. God first creates light somewhere “out there” above the earth. Next in the spatial sequence are the waters above the expanse, then the expanse and the waters below the expanse (1:7-8). Finally, *below* the “waters above” and *below* the expanse, is the earth. Clearly the sequence suggests that the “waters above” of the second day are *below* the light created on the first day and *above* the earth created on the third. If this is granted from the apparent structural intent of the author, then would it not follow that the luminaries of the fourth day which correspond to the light of the first day are, like that light, also *above* the “waters above”? This would reinforce the “observer true” interpretation of the “in” of 1:15, while allowing the “mechanistically true” interpretation of the “above” in 1:7. This is reinforced by the apparent correspondences between days 2 and 5 (fish and birds “fill” the expanse and lower waters); and between days 3 and 6 (man, animals, and vegetation “fill” the dry land).

#### Are the “Waters Above” Still Present Today? (Psalm 148)

A second text has often been used as Scriptural evidence against the vapor canopy: Psalm 148. In this Psalm of David, the psalmist calls upon the “waters that are above the firmament” to give praise to God. Coffin maintains that, since the psalmist lived long after the flood and is still referring to the “waters above the heavens,” that the parallel phrase in Genesis 1:7 cannot refer to a liquid ocean (or a vapor canopy) because that would imply it was still up there in David’s time; thus, the Genesis passage must refer to clouds.<sup>6,7</sup>

1. Praise the Lord  
Praise the Lord from the heavens;  
Praise Him in the heights!
2. Praise Him, all His angels;  
Praise Him, all His hosts!
3. Praise Him, sun and moon;  
Praise Him, all stars of light!
4. Praise Him, highest heavens,  
And the waters that are above the heavens,
5. Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
For He commanded and they were created.

6. He has also established them forever and ever;  
He has made a degree which will not pass away.
7. Praise the Lord from the earth,  
Sea-monsters and all deeps;
8. Fire and hail, snow and clouds;  
Stormy wind, fulfilling His word;
9. Mountains and all hills;  
Fruit trees and all cedars;
10. Beasts and all cattle . . . (Psalm 148:1-10, NASB).

Psalm 148 falls naturally into two divisions. In verses 1-6, psalmist gives us his praise of God “from the heavens,” and his focus is on the glories of the creation—the creation of the sun, moon, stars, angels, etc. In verses 7-12, the psalmist shouts his praises to the Lord “from the earth,” and his focus is on God’s sovereign control over wind, fire, beasts, cattle, kings, old men and children. In verse 4, the psalmist declares:

Praise Him, highest heavens,

And the waters that are above the heavens!

The phrase, “waters that are above the heavens,” is similar to the phrase, “the waters above the expanse,” of Genesis 1:7. These waters are associated with the *heavens*, and are declared to be above them. Furthermore, they are set in contrast, with the hail and snow, i.e., “waters,” which are associated with his praise of the Lord “from the earth” in verses 7-12. In verse 8, he says:

Fire and hail, snow and clouds;<sup>8</sup>

Stormy wind, fulfilling His word.

The “waters above the heavens” of the creation week seem to be distinct in the psalmist’s mind from the hail and snow of earth which God sovereignly controls today.

In regard to the phrase, “the waters that are above the heavens,” in verse 4, Perowne says:

This is usually explained of the clouds, though the form of expression cannot be said to favour such an interpretation, nor yet the statement in Genesis, that the firmament or expanse was intended to separate the waters above from the waters below. Taken in their obvious meaning, the words must point to the existence of a vast heavenly sea or reservoir.<sup>9</sup>

Typically, the liberal commentators tend to see this text as proving that David in 1000 B.C. believed in the existence of the vast heavenly reservoir. Dahood observes, “Above the visible vault of heaven there was believed to be a reservoir, the source of rain.”<sup>10-12</sup> Conservative commentators generally take the traditional view that both Genesis 1:6-8 and Psalm 148:4 refer to clouds.<sup>13-14</sup> One difficulty with the cloud interpretation of this passage is that it contradicts a normal exegesis of Genesis 1:6-8.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, if the critical view, i.e., a heavenly sea, is valid, then it would follow that not only did the Hebrews believe in a celestial ocean prior to the flood, but they also embraced the world view of the metallic dome and present existence of the celestial sea held by the Canaanites! The latter view contradicts the inerrancy of Scripture and fails to note the differences in Israel’s cosmology from Canaanite myths.<sup>16</sup>

In favor of the cloud interpretation of Psalm 148:4 (and therefore by implication, Genesis 1:6-8) is the fact that the "waters that are above the heavens" are called on in *David's time* to praise God. Therefore, David, it is argued, must have assumed their present existence or he would not have asked to give praise. However, to press this highly figurative language to imply *present* existence of the heavenly ocean simply because this ocean is being addressed in the present and called to do something, i.e., praise God, in the present, is clearly unwarranted. Technically, this figure of speech is called "apostrophe," that is, "a turning aside from direct subject-matter to address others."<sup>17</sup> A characteristic of this figure of speech is that the person or thing being addressed and called upon to do something in the present *may not exist in the present, but may have existed in the past or may exist in the future*. For example, David laments over the departed Saul and addresses him as if present (2 Sam. 1:24, 25). The prophet Ezekiel addresses some hailstones that are to come upon the false prophets in the *future* as if those hailstones existed right then (Ezek. 13:11). Poetic language is characterized by "license." The poet is free to address anyone from the past as if he is present right now and to call upon him to do something. The point of such a figure must be determined by who is called upon and what it is he (or "it," in this case) is asked to do. By examining that question, clues are yielded up that reveal the intent of the author in using the apostrophe.

Now, in Psalm 148:4, it is quite clear that the actual presence of the "waters above" is irrelevant. They represent the chaos that God conquered (i.e., the deep). As those who have done battle with Yahweh and lost, they are called upon now to praise His name! ("... that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow..." Phil. 2:11). In the battle myths, the Chaos monster never praised her conqueror, but the chaos of creation has no choice—order has been imposed.

It has also been asserted that the fact that it says that God established these waters above "forever and ever" and "made a decree which will not pass away," suggests that if "waters above" refers to a celestial reservoir, then why did they "pass away" at the Flood? The phrases, "forever and ever" and "a decree which will not pass away," are commonly understood in the Biblical mentality to refer to God's providential control of creation. Thus, they will not pass away or change unless God permits; i.e., all is under His control. As Briggs says, "He established His law in the heavens... all have to submit to it. This is the nearest approach to immutable laws of nature that is known to Hebrew literature."<sup>18</sup> Hengstenberg points out that this decree, "... excludes all change in what has been made, that would be contrary to the will of the Creator, from Whom the different parts of Creation can never emancipate themselves to all eternity."<sup>19</sup> The fact that the Hebrew word, *ad*, "forever and ever," often means for a long period of time (or until God decides to change the situation) is well established.<sup>20</sup> Hence, nothing can be made of the fact that the waters will never pass away as evidence that clouds must be meant. This is highly poetic and metaphorical.

The phrase seems to parallel Genesis 8:22, and a

chronological sequence is implied. The psalmist takes us from the first created beings, the angels (148:1), through the creation week with the creation of the sun, the moon, the stars, etc. (148:2, 3), and the "waters above" (148:4); then, he pronounces the final decree establishing the uniformity of nature after the flood (compare Genesis 8:22 and Psalm 148:6). At that point, he turns his attention to the present era and begins praise of the Lord *from the earth*.

Several factors seem to weigh in favor of this interpretation.

(1) The psalmist tells us that the first six verses describe a creation context: "for He commanded and they were created" (148:5). Thus, he is telling us of the creation of the heavens and the imposition of order upon them.

(2) The psalmist clearly distinguishes between the "waters of heaven" in verse 4 and the hail and snow which are connected with the waters found in the clouds in verse 8.

(3) This view allows us to take the phrase, "the waters that are above the heavens," in its normal literal force of a heavenly reservoir without requiring its continued presence in David's time, and thus harmonizing with a normal exegesis of Genesis 1:6-8.

## References

- <sup>1</sup>Udd, Stanley V., 1975. The canopy in Genesis 1:6-8. *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 12(2):90-93.
- <sup>2</sup>Dillow, Joseph C., 1978. Mechanics and thermodynamics of the pre-Flood vapor canopy. *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 15(3): 148-159.
- <sup>3</sup>Griffith-Thomas, W. H., 1946. Genesis, a devotional commentary. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids. P. 29. Also Kidner, Derek, 1967. Genesis. Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, p. 46; Cassuto, U., 1961. A commentary on the book of Genesis. Part one, from Adam to Noah. (Translated by Israel Abrahams). The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem; p. 17; and Waltke, Bruce, 1974. Creation and chaos. Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland. P. 61.
- <sup>4</sup>*Ibid.* (Waltke)
- <sup>5</sup>Whitelaw, Robert, 1977. The canopy theory and the rift-drift-shift theory in the light of Scripture and physical facts. Also personal communication, 28 February 1976. See also Strickling, James E., 1976. The waters above the firmament. *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 12(4):221.
- <sup>6</sup>Coffin, Harold G., 1969. Creation, accident or design. Review and Herald Publ. Assoc., Washington, D.C. P. 22.
- <sup>7</sup>Young, Davis A., 1977. Creation and the Flood. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids. P. 124.
- <sup>8</sup>The word "clouds" *ketorah*, is commonly used of "smoke" (cf. Genesis 19:28; Psalm 119:83). Perowne sees it as chiasmic with "fire". See Perowne, J. J. Stewart 1878. The Book of Psalms, 2 volumes, fourth edition, revised. George Bell and Sons. Reprinted by Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1966. Vol. 2, p. 482.
- <sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup>Dahood, Mitchell, 1970. The Psalms in The Anchor Bible, 3 volumes. Doubleday and Co., Inc., Garden City. Volume 3, p. 353.
- <sup>11</sup>Weisor, Arthur, 1962. The Psalms. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia. P. 838.
- <sup>12</sup>Briggs, Charles, 1909. The Book of Psalms in ICC. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. P. 539.
- <sup>13</sup>Plummer, William, 1867. Studies in the Book of Psalms. J. B. Lippincott and Co., Philadelphia. P. 1202.
- <sup>14</sup>Hengstenberg, E. W., 1854. Commentary on the Psalms, in 3 volumes. T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh. Volume 3 p. 550.
- <sup>15</sup>Udd, *loc. cit.*
- <sup>16</sup>Waltke, *op. cit.*
- <sup>17</sup>Bullinger, E. W., 1898. Figures of speech in the Bible. Eyre and Spottiswoods, London. Reprinted by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1968. P. 901.

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Darwinian view of life as a constant murderous struggle as immortalized in Tennyson's "red in tooth and claw" view of nature is simply not an accurate picture of reality.

Most animals only kill what they need to live—and then the killing is quick and to a large degree painless. In addition, we are finding that this killing is necessary in order to maintain the balance in the natural world. If predators, such as lions and wolves, were destroyed in large numbers, many animals would reproduce at such fast rates that they would soon use up the food supply—and die anyway. Thomas, relying upon his own experiences, and the research by people such as Paul Moody of those people who were clinically dead and then revived, concludes that when death is imminent the brain apparently realizes that pain can no longer be useful as an alarm to spur escape. The result is that pain is turned off and replaced by "kind of blissful surrender"—thus we have numerous reports of the experience before death as being a very peaceful experience. Thomas concludes that "If I had to design an ecosystem in which creatures had to live off each other and in which dying was an indispensable part of living, I couldn't think of a better way to manage."

From the title of his latest book, Thomas discusses the case of the Nudibranch (a sea slug or snail) and the Medusa (a jellyfish) that live in the Bay of Naples. The Medusa lives permanently on the snail, parasitically attached near its mouth. In time, the Medusa reproduces; its offspring swim and become normal adult jellyfish. In the meantime, the snails, though, are not digested by the jellyfish but they begin to eat the jellyfish, browsing away at first at the jellyfish's radial canals. The snails progressively eat the jellyfish—until the snail outgrows its host. In the end, the jellyfish are once again tiny parasites, except that they now live off of the snail! The whole cycle then is repeated. This Thomas terms an underwater dance, and the implications of this symbiosis follows throughout the book. Life, in other words, is not a matter of to eat or be eaten—but being both eaten and eating.

### QUOTABLE QUOTE

"As sacred doctrine is based on the light of faith, so is philosophy founded on the natural light of reason. Hence, it is impossible for items that belong to philosophy to be contrary to those that pertain to faith; but the former may be defective in comparison with the latter. Yet, they contain some likenesses and some prolegomena to the latter, just as nature is a preamble to grace. If any point among the statements of the philosophers is found contrary to faith, this is not philosophy but rather an abuse of philosophy, resulting from a defect in reasoning. So, it is possible, from the principles of philosophy, to refute an error of this kind either by showing that it is an impossibility, or by showing that it is not a necessary conclusion. Just as items of faith cannot be proved demonstratively, so items that are contrary to them cannot demonstratively be shown to be false; yet, it is possible to show that they are not necessarily convincing.

Looking at the natural world as a whole, cooperation and not competition may be the rule of the day—indeed, competition may be our misunderstanding of what is truly cooperation. The implications of this are clear. The entire Darwinian view of life may be an inaccurate and narrow distortion of reality. Indeed, the key to the whole science of ecology is *balance*, not competition where one animal increases its gene pool, or expands its population in direct proportion to its ability to "eat and avoid being eaten" or outdo its competitors.

Nature enthusiasts, especially those who have travelled to parts of the world where there is a large number of wild animals, have noticed that the vast majority of time animals are at peace with one another and the world around them. Even the stereotypic predators, such as lions, tigers, wolves and other large carnivorous animals, spend most of their time lazily lying in the sun, tending their young, sleeping or playing. True, it is occasionally necessary for carnivorous animals to hunt their prey, but once a victim is killed, there is typically enough food for days, and the animal then is at peace with the world around it. It is not necessarily the animal that runs the slowest, or is somehow "least fit" that becomes prey to a predator. Typically, chance is the most important factor—the animal that happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. In hunting, place and time are extremely important—and both of these factors are highly influenced by chance, not "fitness." True, the extremely sickly may be prone to be caught; but many animals will not attack sick animals, and many sick animals die before they are caught. In addition, the elimination of sick animals likely serves to ensure that the species stay at the same level of fitness; but it does not advance the species. Selection may be an important mechanism only for preserving the status quo, and not for so-called advancement.

### Reference

Thomas, Lewis. 1979. *The Medusa and the snail*. Viking Press.

And so, we can use philosophy in sacred doctrine in three ways: (1) to demonstrate items that are preambles to faith . . . (2) to make known those items that belong to the faith by means of certain similitudes . . . and (3) to oppose statements against the faith, either by showing that they are false, or by showing that they are not necessarily true."

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Exposition of Boethius on the Trinity*, translated by V. J. Bourke.

This is contained in *The Pocket Aquinas*, edited by Vernon J. Bourke, 1960. Washington Square Press, New York. Pp. 292 and 293.

Note that in this quotation philosophy includes what would now be classified as science.

### Scripture Does Not Rule Out

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<sup>18</sup>Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 539.

<sup>19</sup>Hengstenberg, *op. cit.*, volume 3, p. 550.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Psalms 21:4, 6; 37:29; and 9:5; Habakkuk 3:6; Job 19:24, and 20:4; etc..