

# Is the word 'earth' ('*eretz*) equivocal?

Paul H. Seely

James Holding has argued that the word 'earth' (*'eretz*) in the OT has an equivocal meaning.<sup>1</sup> He has also complained that I have not provided any specific responses to his arguments. I am accordingly responding now with specifics because this is an important issue inasmuch as it deals with a fundamental assumption.

Holding's paper is based upon the assumption that inspiration demands that God could not accommodate his revelation to the science of the times. Holding assumes that God would have to make room in Scripture for the modern scientific belief that the Earth is spherical. God could not employ the ancient concept of a flat earth. This assumption is reasonable but not necessarily Biblical.<sup>2</sup> It may be that God has delegated the task of discovering scientific knowledge to mankind, as Genesis 1:26–28 suggests, and accordingly has accommodated his revelation of spiritual truth to the science of the times.

Jesus taught that the inspired law of Deuteronomy 24:1–4 was a concession to the thinking of the times. It is this revelation from Jesus about the ability of Biblical inspiration to encompass concession which undergirds the conclusion of the great conservative Baptist theologian Augustus Strong that 'Inspiration might leave the Scripture writers in possession of the scientific ideas of their time, while yet they were empowered correctly to declare both ethical and religious truth'.<sup>3</sup> It is also at the root of the conclusion of the great conservative Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge that the solidity of the firmament in Genesis 1 is an accommodation to the science of the times.<sup>4</sup>

In view of the teaching of Jesus and the understanding of both Strong and Hodge, one must be open to the possibility that the science in Scripture is an accommodation to the science of the times. Insisting that God would not speak of a flat Earth in Scripture may be a rejection of the Word of God.

I can only deal here with the major issues in Holding's paper. If a reader wants to hear both sides fully and see full documentation, I suggest he/she also reads my original paper.<sup>5</sup>

## The historical probability that the Hebrews believed in a flat Earth

Holding says I provided, '... an impressive and informative list proving that several early "scientifically

naïve" societies thought either that the Earth was flat and/or was surrounded by water on all sides, upon which the land floated'. This statement begins accurately, but then misrepresents both my original paper and a very important fact: It is not 'several' scientifically naïve societies (people who have no modern Western scientific knowledge) who thought the Earth was flat, but virtually *all* of them, hundreds of them all across the world, in every part of the Earth. It is such a universal belief that one scholar has called it 'the usual primitive conception'.<sup>6</sup> In the light of this universality, it would certainly be contrary to probability to think that the Hebrews, who were a scientifically naïve society, did not believe the Earth was flat.

In addition, the most influential and dominant cultures in the Near East in OT times, namely the Mesopotamian and the Egyptian, believed the Earth was flat. Since the forefathers of the Hebrews were Mesopotamians and their greatest leader, Moses, was trained in 'all the wisdom of the Egyptians', it is historically probable that they inherited the belief that the Earth was flat. Putting the universality of the belief in a flat Earth together with the specific historical background of the Hebrews, one must conclude that it is historically probable that the Hebrews believed the Earth was flat.

Holding's answer to this historical probability is that I seem to be forgetting that science is not the only source of true knowledge and that the Word of God gives propositional revelation which is the ultimate source of such knowledge. Further, he says the patriarchs and Moses worshipped the true God and believed his Word, and it is unlikely that they were influenced by Mesopotamian myths or Egyptian concepts.

I fully agree that Scripture is a source of true knowledge and that God revealed theological truths to the Hebrews which were contrary to the theological beliefs of the Mesopotamians and the Egyptians. But this fact does not overturn the historical probability that the Hebrews believed the Earth was flat unless God revealed the sphericity of the Earth to them. Holding's arguments would only be valid if God had revealed the sphericity of the Earth in the OT. Yet Holding does not cite even one OT verse as evidence that God had revealed the sphericity of the Earth. Presumably he knows there is no such verse in the OT and that the verses often cited do not stand up to close scrutiny. In fact, his own position that the word 'earth' in the OT is equivocal implies that the Hebrews did *not* have a revelation that the Earth was spherical. For he means by 'equivocal' that the Hebrews could read the word 'earth' in the OT and think 'flat earth' while we can read the same word today and think 'spherical earth'. His own position, therefore, accepts the strong historical probability that the Hebrews believed the Earth was flat.

Since there is no OT evidence which clearly negates the strong historical probability that the Hebrews believed the Earth was flat, we are logically bound to believe that when the Hebrews in OT times heard or read the word 'earth' in a universal context—whether in the OT or out—they thought of a flat Earth. Holding does not deny this. He misses the

fact, however, that the concept which comes to mind when a people hear or read a word is the meaning of that word.

The historical probability that the OT Hebrew word '*eretz*' refers to a flat Earth is confirmed by the word's cognates in related languages like Ugaritic and Akkadian. For example, the Akkadian word for Earth, *ertzetu*, is cognate to the Hebrew word '*eretz*' and it certainly refers to a flat Earth. The anthropological, historical and linguistic data all agree that the word "earth" ('*eretz*') in the OT, when used in a universal sense, meant a flat Earth.

Words in the OT mean what they meant in OT times, not today. Holding's idea that the word 'earth' in the OT is equivocal in meaning is like someone reading 1 Thessalonians 4:15 in the KJV and then arguing that the word 'prevent' there has an equivocal meaning: it could mean *precede* to the reader in 1611, but it could also mean *hinder* to us. The fact that the word 'prevent' has changed in meaning since 1611 does not mean that the word has an equivocal meaning in the KJV. And the fact that the word 'earth' has changed in meaning since OT times does not mean the word has an equivocal meaning in the OT.

This raises the question, Where did Holding get the idea that the meaning of the word 'earth' in the OT is equivocal? Certainly not from anything in the OT, the historical context, or the cognate languages. Nor does he ever suggest he got it from any of those places. He got it from his *assumption* that God would not accommodate his revelation to the science of the times. Holding is begging the question. He is simply insisting that his *assumption* take precedence over the anthropological, historical, and linguistic data which tell us the word 'earth' in the OT refers to a flat Earth.

### Isaiah 40:22 and 'the circle of the earth'

Isaiah 40:22 says God sits above 'the circle of the earth'. Because most people are unaware of the historical setting of this verse, they take it out of context and read into it the modern scientific meaning of a spherical Earth. This verse and others like it which speak of the circularity of the Earth, however, can never be valid proofs that the OT speaks of the sphericity of the Earth because the language can just as well refer to the ancient view of a flat circular Earth. In fact the Babylonians and the Egyptians, who certainly believed in a flat Earth, also used the expression, 'the circle of the earth'.<sup>7</sup> Within its historical context, therefore, the phrase, 'the circle of the earth', refers to a flat Earth.

The Biblical context of Isaiah 40:22 also suggests that the 'earth' in that verse is understood to be flat. Look at the picture painted there. God is sitting on a throne far above the Earth and hence the inhabitants below look as small as grasshoppers. This picture is based on God looking down from his throne upon the Earth. A flat Earth is implied because from a throne high above, the inhabitants on the underside of a sphere would not be seen.

I pointed out that if God had wanted to speak of the sphericity of the Earth in Isaiah he probably would have

used the word used in Isaiah 22:18 (*dur*) which means 'ball'. Holding responded that this word is also used in Isaiah 29:3 to mean simply a circular pattern. He then laughed off the meaning 'ball' by saying that the soldiers in Isaiah 29:3 must have been 'professional gymnasts' if they formed themselves into a spherical pattern. Holding's argument, however, depends upon the completely false assumption that a word can only have one meaning. As can be seen by simply looking in a dictionary of any language, many words have more than one meaning.

In the case of the word *dur*, standard OT Hebrew dictionaries list *two* meanings: (1) a circle, and (2) a ball. The latter is, of course, a sphere. Contrary to Holding, the Hebrew language *does* have a word for a sphere. Yet, in spite of the Earth being mentioned hundreds of times in the OT, it is never described as or compared to a sphere (*dur*). On the other hand, there are Biblical passages which mention the Earth in a way that excludes the meaning of a sphere, and thereby also excludes the idea that the word 'earth' in the OT is equivocal in meaning.

Before examining the relevant OT verses, it should be pointed out that because of the anthropological, historical, and linguistic data which make it highly probable that the word 'earth' in the OT refers to a flat Earth, the burden of proof is logically upon anyone denying that conclusion. I do not need to prove from the OT that the Hebrew word '*eretz*' (earth) refers to a flat Earth. The only thing opposing that conclusion is an assumption that God would not accommodate his revelation to the science of the times. Unless someone can cite an OT verse which proves that the Hebrew word for 'earth' could not mean a flat Earth, that meaning is established by the fact that there is considerable evidence which supports it and no evidence which opposes it.

### Verses in the OT reflecting a flat Earth

In Daniel 4:10, 11 and 20 the Earth is represented as flat. The passage speaks of a tree so high that it can be seen from the end of all the Earth, which could not happen on a spherical Earth. The word 'earth' in this passage is universal, not limited, because in the ancient Near East, a king's dominions were always described as covering the *entire* known Earth. As 4:11 says 'all the earth' (cf. Daniel 4:1, 22). Holding replied,

'The Daniel passage is actually a statement by a pagan king, which does not mean that the Bible endorses that view. And it is a vision, and is therefore not intended to be a picture of reality any more than Pharaoh's dream of cannibalistic cows and even cannibalistic ears of wheat (Genesis 41).'<sup>8</sup>

Holding apparently recognizes that the Earth is being portrayed as flat in this Daniel passage, but he overlooks a very important fact: it was not the king's idea to speak of a tree so tall it could be seen from the ends of the Earth. The dream did not occur by chance, and then God just happened

to have an appropriate interpretation. Scripture implies that the dream, like Pharaoh's dream in Genesis 41, was given by God. As Joseph said to Pharaoh, so Daniel could have said to Nebuchadnezzar, 'God has showed Pharaoh what he is about to do' (Genesis 41:25). Holding overlooks that the dream, which he writes off as the statement of a pagan king, was *inspired by God*.

I agree that the dream was not intended to be a picture of reality, but that does not change the fact that the tall tree which is seen from the ends of the Earth (v. 11) only makes sense in terms of a flat Earth. The word 'earth' in this passage is not equivocal. It is portrayed as flat, and it is God who portrayed it that way. God's inspired message was accommodated to the science of the times. God's intention was not to teach Nebuchadnezzar the Earth was flat. He already believed the Earth was flat. God was simply speaking to the king in terms which he would readily understand.

As for the revelation to Nebuchadnezzar coming in a dream, the dream aspect does not make the portrayal of the Earth comparable to the cannibalistic cows of Pharaoh's dream. Pharaoh knew cows were not cannibalistic. Nebuchadnezzar did not know the Earth was not flat. If Nebuchadnezzar had thought that divine inspiration guaranteed scientific truth, he would have thought that God was confirming his belief that the Earth was flat. In reality, God was only accommodating his vision to what Nebuchadnezzar already believed about the shape of the Earth.

I also argued that Job 37:3 which speaks of 'his lightning unto the ends of the earth' implies that the Earth is flat. Holding replied that this verse just means that lightning occurs all over the Earth, and since the statement was made by Elihu, it is not endorsed by the Bible. Psalm 97:4, however, is 'endorsed by the Bible' and is parallel to Job 37:3. It makes the thought of Job 37:3 explicit by saying that God's lightnings 'lit up the entire world (*tebel*)'.<sup>9</sup> The Biblical context of both passages shows that they refer to local weather, not lightning all over the globe; but the local lightning is hyperbolically described as lighting up the entire Earth. If interpreted in a straightforward way, these passages only make sense in terms of a flat Earth.

In Job 38:13 dawn is said to 'take hold of the ends (edges) of the Earth, that the wicked might be shaken out of it'. I pointed out that a sphere does not have 'ends' which can be grasped and hence cannot be compared to a blanket or carpet as this verse compares it. The figurative picture is based on the idea that the Earth is flat, and the context (the sections both before and after), show that the Earth is the entire Earth. Holding objected, saying,

'However, the full context of this verse makes it clear that the meaning Seely finds in it is not intended at all. How does the dawn "grasp" anything? Is Seely also suggesting some sort of primitive belief in an anthropomorphic sun god? Are the wicked literally "shaken" by the sunrise? Is the bringing of

dawn accompanied by the sight of nighttime burglars rolling through the dusty streets of villages like tumbleweeds? Clearly this verse refers to no more than the visible horizon that the dawn "grasps" as the sun rises. It is phenomenological and poetic in every sense of its expression.'<sup>10</sup>

Holding obscures the evidence here by confusing the figurative picture being drawn with its literal interpretation. The verses literally mean that when the light of dawn comes over the Earth, the wicked who thrive in darkness are forced to cease their evil doings. But, in the figurative picture Dawn is personified. No anthropomorphic sun god is necessary.

Dawn is like a person who picks up the Earth by its ends as if it were a blanket or carpet. She then shakes the flat carpet of Earth, and the wicked are shaken out of it as dust or vermin out of a carpet that is shaken. There is no question that the Earth is being *compared* to a blanket or carpet. Check any commentary. But, how can a *spherical* Earth be compared to a blanket or a carpet? And, how can a *spherical* Earth be picked up by its edges? The fact that the Earth is not literally shaken does not change the fact that the figurative picture drawn by God only fits an Earth that was thought to be flat.

Finally, I argued from Psalm 136:6 and 24:2 that the Earth must be flat because it is said to be 'stretched out upon the waters' and 'founded upon the seas'. Holding accepts my argument until I say the Earth is floating upon the sea. He says,

'... to say that it "floats" upon that sea is not at all indicated in the text. The Biblical description accords with an accepted creationist paradigm that postulates the pre-diluvian existence of the "fountains of the great deep" (Genesis 7:11) which produced most of the water of the Genesis Flood. It would be perfectly proper to have described the land as having been "spread out" over this vast subterranean water source ...'<sup>11</sup>

The crux of the issue here is that the word 'found' in Psalm 24:2 is taken from the world of architecture. Houses in the ancient Near East, just as today, were founded upon foundations. They rested upon those foundations. In Psalm 24:2 the seas are the foundation upon which the Earth is resting. So floating upon the sea is directly indicated by the text. What else would you call it when an object is resting upon water as a foundation, except to say that it is floating?

Secondly, creationist paradigms do not match Psalm 24:2. If a global spherical Earth were envisioned in this verse, the South Pole would be the first thing to go into the water. That is where foundations always go: at the very bottom. Creationist paradigms put the water barely under the top part of the crust of the Earth. That is not where foundations go. That is like saying the foundation of a house is under the shingles of its roof! Psalm 24:2 is not about the crust of the Earth, much less the very top portion of that

crust. It is about the entire Earth (v. 1). The creationist concept does *not* agree with Psalm 24:2 at all. Psalm 24:2 demands that the seas go under the bottom of the entire created Earth. This only makes sense with a flat Earth.

In addition, Psalm 136:6 speaks of the entire created Earth, not just its crust, as being 'spread out' upon the waters. One cannot speak of a globe as being 'spread out'. Consequently, Psalm 136:6 only makes sense with a flat Earth. Holding is not interpreting these verses in a straightforward way. Interpreted in a straightforward way, the word 'earth' in Psalms 24:2 and 136:6 can only refer to a flat Earth. A spherical global Earth is excluded, and thus so is equivocal language.

In closing, I note that the picture of a flat Earth floating upon a sea as is presented in Psalms 136:6 and 24:2 matches exactly the science of the times as we find that science in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. This is clear evidence that God has accommodated Scripture to the science of the times, just as we saw in the case of Nebuchadnezzar's God-given dream. This is *not* the same thing as *teaching* that the Earth is flat and resting upon the sea. God used the image of a flat Earth in some of his OT teachings in order to communicate theological truth in a way that would avoid distraction, prevent stumbling, and facilitate the ready acceptance of the theological truth. God did in Scripture what wise missionaries still do: contextualize the Word of God.

### References

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8. Holding, Ref. 1, p. 52.
9. *Tebel* tends to be universal, and the universality of 'eretz in 97:1 and 5 implies the universality of 'erets and *tebel* in v. 4.
10. Holding, Ref. 1, p. 52.
11. Holding, Ref. 1, p. 54.

Once again Paul H. Seely has seen fit to stump for a Bible endorsing factual errors, and once again has equivocated in order to compose a reply. He appeals to Jesus' teaching that 'the inspired law of Deuteronomy 24:1–4 was a concession to the thinking of the times'. We have already answered this point in a previous response to Seely by noting that a moral concession, in which a hierarchy of morals may be considered, is not of the same nature as a factual concession, in which there can be no hierarchy in this context. The parallel would only match if the Earth used to be flat but is not now.

Seely also shows that he does not read carefully in this initial comment:

'Holding says I provided, "... an impressive and informative list proving that several early 'scientifically naïve' societies thought either that the Earth was flat and/or was surrounded by water on all sides, upon which the land floated.'

'This statement begins accurately, but then misrepresents both my original paper and a very important fact: it is not 'several' scientifically naïve societies (people who have no modern Western scientific knowledge) who thought the Earth was flat, but virtually all of them, hundreds of them all across the world, in every part of the Earth.'

There is no 'misrepresentation' here at all, as my comment was that Seely provided a list of *several* societies and their views. Nothing was said with reference to any other societies on Earth in my paper. I described what Seely did accurately, as he did not provide, obviously, a *list of all* societies.

Seely states that 'it would certainly be contrary to probability to think that the Hebrews, who were a scientifically naïve society, did not believe the Earth was flat'. As I believe my article made clear, what any given Hebrew believed need not even be at issue. Even if Moses believed that the Earth was flat; even if he believed that hippopotamuses could fly or that bricks had wings, or believed any particular wrong thing, any believer in the inspiration of Scripture is bound to conclude that God is able to 'work around' such deficiencies in thinking. As noted, again in my article, if we say to a 'primitive' native, 'the sky is blue', and they define 'sky' as 'that solid thing up there', this does not make their repeating of the statement in error. Under the paradigm of inspiration, God is the one telling the 'primitive' the facts, and in light of accommodation to human *finitude* (not human *error*) inspires the writer to present equivocal language when necessary. This is a point Seely continues to miss.

Regarding Moses particularly, Seely merely restates his original argument that Moses, 'was trained in "all the wisdom of the Egyptians"' and that 'it is historically probable that they inherited the belief that the Earth was flat'. It is only historically probable that Moses *was taught and heard* this belief; whether he *believed* it or not can only be determined by the Pentateuch, and we have seen

## J.P. Holding replies:

that that evidence is equivocal. And again, as noted in the last paragraph, it would not even matter if Moses did hold such a belief, since he is not the ultimate author of inspired Scripture.

Seely goes on to say that my arguments about equivocal language 'would only be valid if God had revealed the sphericity of the Earth in the OT'. One is hard pressed to see how this logic works out, but since this point was raised, it is an opportune time to make another point relating to this matter.

A common skeptical complaint I have seen (especially from less mature skeptical sources) asks, 'Couldn't God have *really* impressed everyone by providing predictions about the Nazis, or space travel? Couldn't Jesus have impressed his audience by comparing the mustard tree to the redwoods?' Could he have? More likely, God would have confused people with predictions about the Nazis and space exploration; more likely Jesus would have offended even more people than he did, with talk of giant trees that were over the ocean. Paul had a hard enough time preaching a crucified Messiah;<sup>1</sup> he didn't need to defend obscure issues of botany and the existence of trees no one else had ever heard of as well.

Complaints such as the above are manifestly silly, because they are the words of an egotistical modern person asking why God did not do something that would impress *them* personally. Such information given to the ancients would have been a distraction from the truth, and in their finite ignorance, a reason not to believe the Scriptures. So do the critics like Seely care more about their own desire for precision (when he can adjust his thinking to language that is equivocal, having all the knowledge at hand) than that of the ancients (who could not, not having the needed resources)?

Seely tells us *all* ancient societies believed in a flat Earth—very well, what if the Bible did categorically state that the Earth was spherical? What would an ancient Jew or Roman have thought? We would be no more patient with one today who came and spouted off about 'glep plants' on 'the planet Glorp' which was 'around Alpha Centauri'. Even if we discovered 250 years from now that this person was right, what good is that *today*? Do you listen to such a one, or lock him up as a madman? Equivocal language about such matters, which is what we see in the Bible, is the only way to accommodate human finitude.

It is especially ironic that Seely speaks later of the need 'to communicate theological truth in a way that would avoid distraction, prevent stumbling, and facilitate the ready acceptance of the theological truth', without seeing that to mention that the Earth was a sphere would have been a distraction to the ancients. And more importantly, and failing to perceive as well that his 'flat earth' proposal would cause stumbling, and the rejection of theological truth, by modern bioskeptics! Seely should not have even brought up the suggestion as it implies that God is an incompetent.

On this note, it's quite staggering, and *should* cause Seely to examine his own conscience, how many blatant enemies of Christ gleefully cite Seely's paper as proof that the Bible errs on earthly things (the shape of the Earth certainly qualifies!). Then they ask why should it be trusted on heavenly things (*cf.* what Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:12).

Seely goes on to make a false comparison:

'Holding's idea that the word "earth" in the OT is equivocal in meaning is like someone reading 1 Thessalonians 4:15 in the KJV and then arguing that the word "prevent" there has an equivocal meaning: it could mean precede to the reader in 1611, but it could also mean hinder to us. The fact that the word "prevent" has changed in meaning since 1611 does not mean that the word has an equivocal meaning in the KJV. And the fact that the word "earth" has changed in meaning since OT times does not mean the word has an equivocal meaning in the OT.'

This is an illicit comparison, since the KJV's 'prevent' is a translation of a Greek word into a language that did not exist at the time 1 Thessalonians was written. The Earth has always been here, and has not changed in terms of sphericity. And again, the issue is not what man means, but what God means. Seely thereafter states that my argument for equivocal language begs the question. If it does, it begs no more than Seely's assumption that God could not work around human finitude with equivocal language.

Next Seely tackles my response on Isaiah 29:3:

'I pointed out that if God had wanted to speak of the sphericity of the Earth in Isaiah he probably would have used the word used in Isaiah 22:18 (*dur*) which means "ball". Holding responded that this word is also used in Isaiah 29:3 to mean simply a circular pattern. He then laughed off the meaning "ball" by saying that the soldiers in Isaiah 29:3 must have been "professional gymnasts" if they formed themselves into a spherical pattern. Holding's argument, however, depends upon the completely false assumption that a word can only have one meaning. As can be seen by simply looking in a dictionary of any language, many words have more than one meaning.

'In the case of the word *dur*, standard OT Hebrew dictionaries list two meanings: (1) a circle, and (2) a ball. The latter is, of course, a sphere. Contrary to Holding, the Hebrew language does have a word for a sphere. Yet, in spite of the Earth being mentioned hundreds of times in the OT, it is never described as or compared to a sphere (*dur*).'

Once again Seely is equivocating and begging his own question: in this case, that *dur* has two meanings. If this is so, then could he not argue that if the Earth was described as a *dur*, it has the 'circle' meaning favorable to his case, rather than the 'sphere' meaning that would defeat

it? *Dur* has the clear contextual meaning of a sphere in only one place (Isaiah 22:18). There, it is used to refer to a *dur* that is thrown through the air and is *moving*. *Strong's Concordance* indicates that the word has a root that comes from a meaning to *gyrate or move in a circle*. What is at issue is not the shape, but the *invisible axis around which the object described moves*. Hence *dur* has absolutely no unique connotation in terms of sphericity and Seely merely begs the question of two meanings—and if Hebrew dictionaries do the same, they more likely do so in terms of context than because of the direct definition of the word.

Next Seely addresses my point about Daniel 4:10, 11 and 20. I noted that the statement was made by a pagan king, and also being a dream is no more to be taken as reflecting reality than Pharaoh's dream of cannibalistic cows. Seely replies that I overlook a 'very important fact: it was not the king's idea to speak of a tree so tall it could be seen from the ends of the Earth. The dream did not occur by chance, and then God just happened to have an appropriate interpretation'. Well, Pharaoh's dream did not happen by chance either, did it? And God still happened to have an appropriate interpretation. Of course if Seely wants to take the matter further, as he does in making the point that Pharaoh knew that cows were not usually cannibalistic whereas Nebuchadnezzar 'knew' the Earth was flat, one might ask whether Nebuchadnezzar in his dream actually ran or transported himself all the way to each end of his flat Earth and confirmed that the tree could be seen from each end. As far as is recorded, he didn't. At best the statement would therefore be one of Nebuchadnezzar's own description, based on *his own* idea that the tree was so tall that it *must* have been able to be seen from such a distance. Hence my point about the unreality of the dream as a genre, comparable to Pharaoh's cows, remains standing: Nebuchadnezzar also would know that no real tree could grow so tall! Nebuchadnezzar's description does not guarantee that he properly and accurately described what God inspired, any more than looking at a Bible guarantees a proper interpretation of its words.

Seely next appeals to Psalm 97:4, 'His lightnings enlightened the world: the Earth saw, and trembled.' Seely admits that the context of this passage shows that it:

'refer[s] to local weather, not lightning all over the globe; but the local lightning is hyperbolically described as lighting up the entire Earth. If interpreted in a straightforward way, these passages only make sense in terms of a flat Earth.'

However, 'world' and 'earth' here are two different words. 'Earth' is '*eretz*' and is obviously poetic in context (since we doubt even the most hardened skeptic would suppose that the Earth itself 'sees' and 'trembles') while 'world' is '*tebel*'. When used, 'world' carries the connotation of the *peoples* of the world, not the physical planet. Compare 1 Samuel 2:8: 'He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne

of glory: for the pillars of the Earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the *world* upon them.' It refers to the 'civilized world' (rather like the Greek word *οικουμένη/οικουμένη*), and in the context of Psalm 97:4, arguably refers poetically to the 'enlightening' revelation of God at Mt. Sinai.

In regard to Job 38:13, and my point about this referring figuratively to the dawn grasping the visible horizon, Seely says, 'Holding obscures the evidence here by confusing the figurative picture being drawn with its literal interpretation.' He then essentially agrees with my assessment that the picture given is figurative, with a personified Dawn, but then asks, 'how can a *spherical* Earth be compared to a blanket or a carpet? And, how can a *spherical* Earth be picked up by its edges? The fact that the Earth is not literally shaken does not change the fact that the figurative picture drawn by God only fits an Earth that was thought to be flat.' Of course it does! A flat Earth could not be picked up and shaken, either, as it lacks the needed flexibility (unless the critic wants to argue that the Hebrews also believed that the Earth had a rubber crust). So we interpret the picture figuratively until we need a literal 'interpretation' to bolster our case? That is a rather convenient hermeneutic! But if a skeptic wants to argue, we may point out that dawn metaphorically 'grasps' the horizon as it moves along, and 'grasps' relative to the viewer. If the point of the passage is that the dawn grasps the *very end* of the flat Earth, then how are the wicked shaken out of places that are still dark over the entire flat Earth? Even the 'naïve' Hebrews, as they allegedly pictured a flat Earth, knew well enough that the sun reached Babylon, for example, before it reached them! So at 6 PM in Jerusalem, would the criminals be shaken out of their places by the dawn grasping the end of the Earth at 6 AM out past Cathay?

Seely now moves to my second article, about the idea that the Bible teaches that the Earth floats on a sea. I had noted:

'... to say that it 'floats' upon that sea is not at all indicated in the text. The Biblical description accords with an accepted creationist paradigm that postulates the pre-diluvian existence of the "fountains of the great deep" (Genesis 7:11) which produced most of the water of the Genesis Flood. It would be perfectly proper to have described the land as having been "spread out" over this vast subterranean water source ...'

Seely disputes this:

'... the word "found" in Psalm 24:2 is taken from the world of architecture. Houses in the ancient Near East, just as today, were founded upon foundations ... In Psalm 24:2 the seas are the foundation upon which the Earth is resting. So floating upon the sea is directly indicated by the text.'

Again, why? Under this paradigm, the subterranean waters are still the primary support for the land above. Take them away, and the result is cataclysmic, as the Flood would suggest! (One might also quibble about the fact that Seely

is willing to grant *dur* two meanings to support his thesis, but apparently cannot suppose that there might be similar latitude for how one might use ‘found’ based on the object described!)

Beyond this, Seely claims:

‘... creationist paradigms do not match Psalm 24:2 or 136:6. If a global spherical Earth were envisioned in this verse, the South Pole would be the first thing to go into the water. That is where foundations always go: at the very bottom ... Psalm 24:2 is not about the crust of the Earth, much less the very top portion of that crust. It is about the entire Earth’ (v. 1).

All that Seely is doing here is yet again reading into equivocal language what is not there. The texts only say that the land was spread out or founded upon the waters. It does not say in what shape or what form; it does not say that the land floats; it merely said it was laid upon the waters, and that is all. It neither speaks of nor denies any accessory support.

As in his previous letter to the editor, Seely has done nothing more than restate his original argument and read into the Scriptures what simply isn’t there. Those who speak of being ‘stumbling blocks’ need to check their own eyes for such blocks before pulling ‘stumbling notes’ from the eyes of others.

### References

1. Holding, J.P., The impossible faith: or, how **not** to start an ancient religion, <[www.tektonics.org/nowayjose.html](http://www.tektonics.org/nowayjose.html)>, 9 May 2002.

# A geocentrist replies to ‘Geocentrism and Creation’

M. Bowden

Danny Faulkner wrote this article which was published in *TJ* 15(2).<sup>1</sup> I wrote a reply, but Bouw’s letter and Faulkner’s reply was published in *TJ* 16(1). I have read these articles and would like to comment on some points and then raise two crucial issues that both authors have omitted.

Let me first consider some issues very briefly.

### The Bible

Faulkner spends considerable space criticizing Bouw’s geocentric reading of the Bible, dealing with the precise meaning of Hebrew words, but I regret that it seemed to me very much like sniping from the bushes, rather than confronting Bouw with any major errors of exegesis.

One question I pose to all heliocentrists is; Where in the Bible does it ever say, or even imply, that the Earth is moving either through space or around the Sun? If God wanted to tell people that the Earth is moving, why did he never refer to this with any clarity. Why is it always the Sun that is portrayed as moving?

### *Ad hominem*

Faulkner says that Bouw accuses him of *ad hominem* arguments but does not give any evidence. Let me supply that lack. In his first article Faulkner says that Bouw ‘trashes’ ancient Greek philosophy, ‘blasts’ heliocentrists, and ‘takes a swipe’ at Copernicus. This sounds remarkably like *ad hominem* arguments to me.

There are a number of items (VLBI, relativity, exegesis, etc.) raised in Faulkner’s first article which I dealt with in my first reply. To save space I have placed it on my website ([www.mbowden.info](http://www.mbowden.info)) and will, therefore, not repeat them here. There are far more important aspects that should have been dealt with by both writers. So let me raise the two major points—one not considered (A) and the other (B) only briefly mentioned in the exchanges so far.

### (A) A major Biblical problem facing heliocentrists

All creationists would accept the veracity of the Genesis account. However, those who are heliocentrists (i.e. the vast majority of the readers of this journal!) have a major