

climate became drier and continental, and the glaciers melted, wind borne dust accumulated on the costal plains, burying many animals in what is now known as *yedomas*.

Some aspects of my interpretation are problematical, controversial and need additional research. However I believe the main ideas of this interpretation are valid because they are based on detailed geologic investigations into the location of the mammoth remains in the lithostratigraphic record of Cenozoic sediments in north-eastern Arctic region.

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Is the ’erets (earth) flat?

With regard to James Holding’s paper, *Is the ’erets (earth) flat?*¹ I have never said or implied that the Bible ‘teaches’ either that the ‘firmament’ is solid or that the ‘earth’ is a flat disc. Rather, I believe both are divinely inspired concessions to the views of the times, as Deuteronomy 24:1–4 and 21:10–14 are concessions to the ethics of the times (Matthew 19:8/ Mark 10:5). This later interpretation of Matthew 19:8/Mark 10:5 is part of mainstream evangelical theology and was greatly employed by Calvin. I am simply understanding Scripture in the light of this Biblical revelation.

As to Holding’s main point, he lifts all the relevant OT verses out of their historical context and some of them out of their Biblical context; and then assumes that if he can get rid of the OT evidence which infers the earth is flat, we have the right to read in a spherical globe as the meaning of the word ‘earth’ in the OT. But there is not a single OT verse which infers that ‘earth’ in the OT is a spherical globe. Holding is rationalizing away the relevant Biblical evidence, and then dragging in the concept of a spherical earth from modern science and reading it into the text. That is exactly what concordists do with the 24-hour days of Genesis 1, the creation of the sun, moon and stars on the fourth day, etc.

Holding’s only positive Biblical case for a spherical earth is a caption to a picture which cites Luke 17:34–35 and Matthew 24:40–41 (NT verses, not OT) and says these verses do ‘not make sense if the world was flat. On a flat earth, the sun would rise on everybody at the same time. You would not expect to find people in bed, while others were out in the field’. [Ed. note: even if Seely were right, which is questionable as Holding shows below, this diagram was inserted by the editors so

they, not Holding, are responsible for any error.]

But, neither passage says that some people were in bed while others were out in the field. Matthew 24:40–41 does not mention anyone being in bed. Luke 17:34–35 mentions two people being in bed and two others grinding grain. Only v. 36 (which Holding does not cite) mentions two men out in the field; and that verse is widely acknowledged to be a textual addition to Luke, not part of the inspired original (and hence rejected by the NIV among others).²

As for Luke 17:34–35, ‘the passage refers to the period just before dawn when some people are still asleep and others are up early to perform their tasks’.^{3–5} And, this could well apply to men in the field as well.

So Holding’s positive Biblical case that ‘earth’ in the OT can refer to a spherical earth is resting on a single NT text which is from a considerable different time period, is probably not part of the inspired original, and can be explained other ways. Holding’s position is, therefore, no different in principle from that of those who rationalize away the contextual meaning of Genesis 1 and put in its place the finding of modern science.

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References

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3. Marshall, H., *The Gospel of Luke*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, p. 667, 1978.
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5. Bock, Ref. 2, p. 1438.



J.P. Holding replies:

Paul Seely tells us that he has ‘never said or implied that the Bible “teaches” either that the “firmament” is solid or that the “earth” is a flat disc.’ I find this disclaimer curious in light of statements in his original articles such as, ‘the language of Genesis 1 suggests solidity’, ‘the historical-grammatical meaning’ is such, ‘Gen. 1:17 also testifies’, etc. If this is not saying that the Bible teaches these things, then what is it saying?

Seely’s comparisons to ethical concessions are without merit. There does exist a **hierarchy** of morals, wherein under certain conditions one moral imperative may supersede another (which is not the same as saying that morality is subjective¹), but there is no corresponding hierarchy of scientific data. It’s a category mistake—moral statements are in the **imperative** mood, i.e. about what is **permitted** and **forbidden**; propositions about the Earth’s shape are in the **indicative** mood, and are either **true** or **false**. Despite his obfuscations, Seely is claiming that the Author of truth inspired a false teaching.

Another important point is that **Scripture itself** teaches that some moral imperatives were concessions, but there is nothing in Scripture countermanning the alleged scientific errors claimed by Seely. So his views have baneful implications for the doctrines

of the sufficiency of Scripture and that Scripture is its own best interpreter, which are foundational to Seely’s own denomination (Reformed)!

It is clear from Seely’s vague and generalized comments that I lift ‘verses out of their historical context’, etc.—without providing any specific responses!—that he has completely missed the point of my articles concerning the use of **equivocal language** in Scripture, or else is unable to provide a response. He is as before unable to distinguish properly between adaptation to human finitude and accommodation to human error. It is tempting to ask how he could have missed this point about equivocal language, which was in the very **title** of both my responses to him, in light of his own equivocation above!

In terms of Luke 17:34–35 and Matthew 24:40–41, while I did not choose the Biblical citation and the illustration it accompanied [true, as we note in Seely’s letter—Ed.], Seely seems to be trying to separate the two passages somehow, and imply that one of them is not an authentic representation of the words of Jesus—if so, this is not legitimate, and places Seely yet again outside the camp of genuine evangelicalism.² As the New Testament scholar N.T. Wright has observed, the things Jesus said, he most likely said many times, and with many minor variations.³ These two verses certainly reflect variations upon the same general warning which Jesus made several times during his years of preaching.

That said, we could of course argue that the people in bed were sick during the day while others were grinding grain; or perhaps the word (*klinē klinē*) used by Luke indicates a couch for eating or reclining; or perhaps it was early when some people were up and others were not—but an implication of a spherical earth is certainly possible.

In conclusion, Seely has done nothing to defend his original thesis.

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References

1. Norman Geisler makes a good case that such **graded absolutism** is consistent with Scripture, *Christian Ethics*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, USA, Part 1, 1989.
2. If Luke 17:36 were not part of Luke’s autograph, then it must have been incorporated by a later scribe from Mt. 24:40. This means that the teaching and context were part of the autographs of the NT **as a whole**, so reflect Jesus’s teaching accurately. For more explanation on such textual considerations, see White, J., *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?* Bethany House, pp. 154 ff., 1995.
3. Wright, N.T., *The New Testament and the People of God*, SPCK, London / Fortress Press, Minneapolis, pp. 422 ff., 1992.