

## THE BIBLICAL FIRMAMENT

### The Problem

Early Jews and Christians commonly saw sky as dome  
e.g., Talmud, Theophilus  
Modern liberals claim this is what Bible teaches  
e.g., Fosdick, Schiaparelli, Von Rad

### Evidence Alleged for Dome View

Resemblance to other ancient views  
Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek  
Etymology of Hebrew word for firmament *raqiyah*  
hammer or beat out; but Ps 136:6, Isa 40:19  
"Pillars of heaven" imply solid sky, Job 26:11  
but pillars of temple support nothing  
Sky pictured as heavy metal mirror, Job 37:18  
translation problem with "mirror"; "sky"  
compare two alternative translations with context  
Building stories in heaven, Amos 9:6  
another transl. problem, cp. context

### Evidence for Atmosphere Firmament

Nothing about existence of space between firmament and earth, nor of opening such a  
space at creation  
Bible's picture of 3 heavens fits atmosphere-firmament rather than dome-firmament, 2  
Cor 12:2-4  
Heaven of heavens not God's dwelling, 1 K 8, Ps 148  
Heaven all around us, 2 K 6:17, Ex 20:21-22  
Birds fly upon firmament rather than under it, Gen 1:20  
compare atm. and dome views  
how do bird fly "upon" atmosphere?  
note Heb use of prepositions with non-solid objects  
Isa 17:13 carried "before" wind  
Job 26:8 clouds "under" water  
Gen 1:7 waters "upon" firmament

### Conclusions

Bible does not teach outmoded view here  
Translation tradition of Bible goes back to time when humans mistaken on this, though

Can't expect liberal theologians to correct translation errors that favor their position  
Evangelicals with multidisciplinary training needed in various academic areas plus  
Biblical studies

**For further reading:**

See Robert C. Newman, "The Biblical Teaching on the Firmament," STM thesis, Biblical  
Theological Seminary, 1972. Reprinted as *The Biblical Firmament: Vault or Vapor?*  
(Hatfield, PA: IBRI, 2000).