119 MINISTRIES

"The following is a direct script of a teaching that is intended to be presented via video, incorporating relevant text, slides, media, and graphics to assist in illustration, thus facilitating the presentation of the material. In some places, this may cause the written material to not flow or sound rather awkward in some places. In addition, there may be grammatical errors that are often not acceptable in literary work. We encourage the viewing of the video teachings to complement the written teaching you see below."

The Firmament: What Does *Raqia* Actually Mean?

Many skeptics claim that the Bible teaches an outdated view of the universe. They say Genesis presents the sky as a hard dome, a solid ceiling over the earth, holding back cosmic waters above. Some even suggest that this proves Scripture borrowed from pagan ancient Near Eastern cosmology and therefore cannot be trusted.

That is a serious claim.

But before we accept it, we should ask some questions:

Does the Bible actually teach that? Or have we inherited an idea through English and Greek translation, Latin tradition, or later interpretation that may not be required by the Hebrew text itself? In other words, when Genesis speaks of the "firmament," what does the original Hebrew actually say?

Our goal is not to prove that Genesis is written in modern scientific categories. It is not. Our goal is simply to test whether the Hebrew text requires the solid-dome claim often imposed upon it.

As always, we want to test everything.

1 Thessalonians 5:21

> but test everything; hold fast what is good.

So let us test this carefully. We are not going to begin with modern skepticism. We are not going to begin with English translation tradition. We are not going to begin with later Jewish or Christian commentary. We are going to begin with the Hebrew text and allow Scripture to define Scripture.

The word “firmament” appears in older English translations of Genesis 1, in the account of the second day of creation. So, let us begin there.

Genesis 1:6-8 (KJV)

> And God said, Let there be a firmament [raqia] in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament [raqia], and divided the waters which were under the firmament [raqia] from the waters which were above the firmament [raqia]: and it was so. And God called the firmament [raqia] Heaven [shamayim]. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

The Hebrew word translated “firmament” here is *raqia*. Many modern translations, including the ESV, render it “expanse.” And before we look at translation history, Greek, Latin, or later interpretation, we should notice something very important: Genesis itself tells us what God called the *raqia*. He called it *shamayim*, “Heaven,” or sky.

So the question we are testing is not whether people have later understood the firmament in different ways. They have. The question is whether the Hebrew text itself requires the *raqia* to be understood as a hard, solid dome, vault, ceiling, or physical barrier.

What Genesis Calls the *Raqia*

There are several things we should notice in the passage we just read.

First, YHWH creates the *raqia*. Second, the *raqia* divides waters from waters. Third, YHWH names the *raqia*.

And what does he call it? The KJV says “Heaven.” The ESV does the same. In Hebrew, the word is *shamayim*, which can refer to heaven, heavens, or sky depending on context.

The text does not say that God called the *raqia* “metal.” It does not say he called it “crystal.” It does not say he called it “glass.” It does not say he called it “a dome.” It does not say he called it “a vault.” It says God called the *raqia* “Heaven,” or sky. That means Genesis gives us its own definition.

If YHWH himself calls the *raqia* heaven or sky, then that should be our starting point.

Some questions we should ask are these: Should we isolate later Greek or Latin terms from Genesis 1:8, or should we let the immediate context define the term? Should English translation tradition define Genesis for us, or should Genesis define the word for us?

The answer should be obvious. Scripture should define Scripture.

But What About the Waters Above?

Genesis says the *raqia* separates waters below from waters above. Those who argue for a solid firmament often say this separation requires a hard barrier. In other words, if there are waters above the *raqia*, then the *raqia* must be a solid dome holding those waters back.

That is understandable reasoning. But does Genesis actually say that?

Genesis clearly says the *raqia* separates waters from waters. That part is not debated. The question is whether the text says the separating agent must be solid.

And it does not explicitly say that.

Separation does not always require a solid physical wall. In Genesis 1, separation is about YHWH assigning order, place, and function within creation. The text tells us that the *raqia* separates the waters, but it does not explain that separation by giving us the material composition of the *raqia*.

Things can be separated by distance, by placement, by ordering, by boundaries, or by appointed realms. Genesis 1 is full of separation language. Light is separated from darkness. Day is separated from night. Waters are gathered so that dry land appears. These are acts of ordering creation.

So when Genesis says the *raqia* separates waters below from waters above, the text is telling us what the *raqia* does. It is not necessarily telling us what material the *raqia* is made of.

This is important because the solid-firmament argument often assumes that separation must mean "hard barrier." But that is an assumption. It may be possible, but it is not directly stated by the text.

We also see "waters above the heavens" language elsewhere in Scripture.

Psalm 148:4

> Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

This shows that Scripture can speak of waters above the heavens, but again, it does not define the heavens as a solid physical dome. The focus is praise. All creation, from the highest heavens to the waters above the heavens, is called to praise YHWH.

So the waters above are real biblical language, and we should not ignore them. But they do not settle the material nature of the *raqia*.

The question remains: What does Genesis call the *raqia*?

Genesis says God called it *shamayim*, heaven or sky.

So the waters above do not force us to define the *raqia* as a metal dome, crystal shell, glass ceiling, or hard vault. They show that YHWH ordered creation by separating waters below from waters above. But the text does not require the separating expanse to be a solid structure.

Birds and the Face of the Expanse

Genesis gives us more information.

Genesis 1:20

> And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse [raqia] of the heavens."

The Hebrew is often understood more literally as birds flying above the earth "across the face of the expanse of the heavens."

So Genesis 1:20 may not be a standalone proof against every possible solid-firmament model. But it is still important evidence.

Why?

Because it continues the same identification we saw in Genesis 1:8. The *raqia* is called sky or heaven, and now birds are described as flying above the earth in relation to the face of that sky or heaven.

The passage does not move us toward a technical material definition of a dome, vault, metal shell, or crystal barrier. It keeps us in the realm of the visible heavens above the earth.

So far, Genesis has told us two things: YHWH called the *raqia* sky or heaven, and birds fly above the earth across the face of the *raqia* of the sky.

That supports the idea that *raqia* refers to the sky or heavenly expanse, not necessarily a hard physical structure.

The Lights in the Expanse

Now let us look at the fourth day.

Genesis 1:14-18

> And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse [raqia] of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse [raqia] of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made the two great lights--the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night--and the stars. And God set them in the expanse [raqia] of the heavens to give light on the earth,

> to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

The sun, moon, and stars are said to be in the *raqia* of the sky or heavens.

So the *raqia* is not only connected to the lower sky where birds fly across its face. It is also connected to the heavenly lights.

Now, we should be careful here as well.

Genesis is not trying to give us modern scientific categories such as "atmosphere," "stratosphere," or "outer space." Genesis is describing the heavens from the perspective of the observer on earth.

From that perspective, the sky above us includes both the region where birds fly and the heavenly expanse where the sun, moon, and stars are seen. That is normal observational language.

Even today, we say the sun "rises" and "sets." We do not mean the sun literally revolves around the earth. We are speaking from the perspective of observation. Genesis is doing something similar.

The *raqia* is the expanse above the earth, what we see as the sky and heavens. So again, nothing here requires a solid dome, vault, ceiling, metal sheet, crystal shell, or hard structure.

Raqia in the Rest of Scripture

Before we move further, it is worth asking another question: How many times does this word actually appear in the Hebrew Bible?

The noun *raqia* appears seventeen times across fifteen verses in Scripture:
Genesis 1:6; Genesis 1:7; Genesis 1:8; Genesis 1:14; Genesis 1:15; Genesis 1:17; Genesis 1:20; Psalm 19:1; Psalm 150:1; Ezekiel 1:22; Ezekiel 1:23; Ezekiel 1:25; Ezekiel 1:26; Ezekiel 10:1; and Daniel 12:3.

We see it in Genesis 1, where it is part of the creation account. We see it in the Psalms, where it is connected to the heavens and praise. We see it in Ezekiel, where it appears in visionary throne imagery. And we see it in Daniel, where it is associated with brightness and the stars.

That means we do not have to guess from only one verse. We can test the word by its usage.

In Genesis, YHWH calls the *raqia* sky or heaven. In Psalm 19, the *raqia* is parallel with the heavens. In Psalm 150, it is connected with praise in the heavens or mighty expanse. In Daniel, it is connected with brightness and stars. In Ezekiel, it appears in a vision, where the prophet uses words like "likeness" and "like" to describe what he saw.

So when all of the biblical uses are placed together, they do not require solidity. The most consistent category is sky, heavens, or expanse.

Let us look at some of those passages more closely. We do not need to examine every occurrence one by one, since several occur in the same Genesis creation account and several occur in the same Ezekiel vision. Instead, we will look at the major categories of usage: Genesis, the Psalms, Daniel, and then Ezekiel. We will also address Job 37, even though it does not use *raqia*, because it is often raised in this discussion.

Raqia **in the Psalms**

Psalm 19:1

> The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above [*raqia*] proclaims his handiwork.

This verse uses Hebrew parallelism. "The heavens" declare the glory of God. "The expanse" shows his handiwork.

The heavens and the *raqia* are parallel. That means the *raqia* is associated with the heavens declaring YHWH's glory. Again, this fits the idea of the sky or heavenly expanse. It does not require a solid structure.

The point of Psalm 19 is not to describe a material ceiling. The point is that creation testifies to the glory of the Creator.

When we look up at the heavens, we are supposed to see a witness. The heavens are declaring something. The sky above, the *raqia*, is proclaiming something. Creation itself testifies to YHWH's handiwork.

Psalm 150:1

> Praise the LORD [YHWH]! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens [*raqia*]!

Some translations render this as "firmament of his power" or "mighty expanse." Again, the idea is the heavens, the mighty expanse above, the realm that displays YHWH's majesty.

This does not mean the *raqia* contains YHWH, as though the heavens could confine him. Rather, the verse associates the *raqia* with the mighty heavens where his power is displayed and where praise is fittingly directed.

Raqia **in Daniel**

Daniel 12:3

> And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above [*raqia*]; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Here the *raqia* is associated with brightness. The next phrase mentions stars. Again, the context points upward, to the heavens, brightness, and celestial glory. Nothing here requires the idea of a solid dome or any kind of hard physical barrier.

So when we examine Genesis, Psalms, and Daniel, the pattern is consistent.

The *raqia* is the sky, heavens, or expanse above the earth.

The Heavens Are Stretched Out

This positive case becomes even stronger when we notice how often Scripture says the heavens are stretched out.

Psalm 104:2

> covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent.

Isaiah 40:22

> It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in;

Here the heavens are described as stretched out like a curtain and spread out like a tent. This is exactly the type of language we would expect if *raqia* refers to an expanse.

But again, we should be careful. When Scripture says the heavens are stretched out like a curtain, it is not saying the heavens are literally made of cloth. When it says they are spread out like a tent, it is not saying the heavens are literally made of tent fabric.

The point is the image of extension, covering, order, and vastness. YHWH is the one who stretches out the heavens. The language gives us the picture of something expanded, spread out, and ordered by the Creator. That is very consistent with understanding *raqia* as an expanse.

It is much less natural to insist that the word must mean a solid physical structure when the broader scriptural language repeatedly emphasizes stretching and spreading.

The Problem with the Word "Firmament"

Now that we have looked at the biblical use of *raqia*, let us consider why the word "firmament" can be misleading to modern readers.

When we hear “firmament,” we naturally hear the word “firm.” That makes us think of something solid, fixed, rigid, or hard.

But “firmament” is not the Hebrew word. It is an English word that came through a history of translation. The Hebrew word is *raqia*.

The ancient Greek translation of the Tanakh, often called the Septuagint, translated *raqia* with the Greek word *stereoma*. That word can carry the idea of firmness, stability, support, or something established.

The Latin Vulgate later used *firmamentum*, following that Greek translation tradition. Then English inherited the word “firmament.”

So the word “firmament” comes to us through a translation path:

Hebrew *raqia*
Greek *stereoma*
Latin *firmamentum*
English firmament

That translation history matters because if we start with the English word “firmament,” we may begin by assuming solidity. Then we may read that assumption back into Genesis. But if we begin with the Hebrew word *raqia*, then we must ask what the Hebrew word means in context. And more importantly, we must ask how Scripture itself defines it.

We are not trying to defend a favorite English translation. We are trying to understand what the inspired Hebrew text actually communicates.

Why Did the Septuagint Use *Stereoma*?

Before moving forward, we should spend a little more time on the Septuagint, because this is one of the strongest points someone could raise against our position.

If ancient Jewish translators rendered *raqia* with the Greek word *stereoma*, and if *stereoma* can communicate firmness, stability, support, or something established, does that mean those translators understood the *raqia* as something firm?

That is possible, and it is worth taking seriously.

The Septuagint is an ancient Jewish translation. It gives us a window into how at least some Jewish translators before the time of Yeshua understood, or chose to communicate, the Hebrew text in Greek. So yes, someone could say, “The Septuagint translators may have understood the *raqia* as something firm.” That is a fair historical observation.

But what does that prove?

It proves that the Greek translation is historically important. It may show that some ancient translators leaned toward the concept of firmness or stability. It may also help explain why later Latin and English translation tradition moved in the direction of "firmament."

But it does not prove that the Hebrew word *raqia* itself requires a solid dome.

And there are several reasons for this.

First, the Septuagint is a translation. It is valuable, but it is still a translation. A translation can preserve meaning, but it can also include interpretation. Every translation requires choices. Sometimes a translator chooses the closest available word. Sometimes a translator chooses a word that reflects how he understands the concept. Sometimes a translator uses vocabulary shaped by the common language and assumptions of his time.

This is not a criticism of the Septuagint. It is simply recognizing the difference between a Hebrew source text and an ancient Greek translation of that source text.

Second, even if *stereoma* communicates firmness, that does not automatically tell us material composition. "Firm" can mean fixed, stable, established, ordered, or dependable. It does not automatically mean metal, glass, crystal, or a hard physical dome.

For example, if we say YHWH "established" the heavens, or fixed them in his created order, we are not necessarily saying the heavens are made of a solid material. We may simply be saying that YHWH ordered them, appointed them, and caused them to function according to his will.

Third, the Septuagint itself does not leave the term undefined. In Genesis 1:8, the Hebrew text says God called the *raqia shamayim*. The Septuagint follows the same pattern. It uses *stereoma* for *raqia*, but then says God called the *stereoma ouranos*, heaven or sky. So even in Greek, the immediate context defines the firmament as heaven or sky.

That means we should not isolate *stereoma* from the verse that defines it. Whatever firmness *stereoma* may suggest lexically, Genesis 1:8 still gives us the controlling context.

Genesis 1:8

> And God called the expanse [*raqia*] Heaven [*shamayim*]. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

That is the inspired definition inside the Hebrew text itself.

So the Septuagint matters. It may preserve an ancient Jewish interpretive tradition. We should not pretend otherwise. But the Septuagint is not the final authority over the Hebrew wording of Genesis. It

can inform the discussion, but it cannot overrule the way Genesis itself defines the *raqia* as *shamayim*, heaven or sky.

The fair conclusion is this: the Septuagint may show that some ancient Jewish translators understood the *raqia* in terms of firmness, stability, or establishment. But it does not prove that the Hebrew word *raqia* requires a hard, solid dome. The Hebrew context must remain primary.

What Are the Solid-Firmament Views?

Before we continue into the objections, we should clarify something. Not everyone who believes the firmament is solid believes it is metal.

Some argue that the firmament is a metal-like structure because the root word *raqa* can be used for beating metal into thin plates, and because Job 37:18 compares the sky to a cast metal mirror.

Others argue that the firmament is crystal-like or glass-like because Ezekiel 1:22 describes an expanse "like an awesome crystal."

Others do not claim a specific material at all. They simply argue that the *raqia* is a hard dome, vault, barrier, or boundary over the earth.

So we do not want to misrepresent the opposing view. Our question is not merely, "Is the firmament metal?"

Our question is broader: Does the Hebrew text require the *raqia* to be any kind of solid physical structure at all?

That is what we are testing.

But What About the Root Word?

Now, some will raise an objection.

They will say:

"The noun *raqia* comes from the Hebrew verb *raqa*, and *raqa* can mean to beat out metal into thin plates. Therefore, the *raqia* must be a beaten metal dome."

That sounds convincing at first. But is that how language works?

Not exactly.

It is true that *raqa* can be used for hammering or spreading metal into thin plates. For example, metal can be beaten out, spread out, or flattened. But the broader idea of the root is not simply "metal." The broader idea is spreading, stretching, extending, or beating out. Context determines how that spreading is happening and what is being spread.

Now we need to be careful not to make a common mistake, the "root fallacy." That is when someone assumes that a word must always carry the full meaning of its root in every context. Roots can be helpful. They can show us a word family. They can show us possible conceptual connections. But roots do not automatically define every related word in every passage.

In English, the noun "expanse" comes from the verb "expand." But calling something an expanse does not tell us what material it is made of. It simply tells us that something is spread out or extended. Likewise, even if *raqia* comes from a root connected to spreading or beating out, the root does not tell us the material composition of the *raqia*.

For example, the Hebrew root *barak* can mean "to kneel." But a related word, *berakah*, usually means "blessing." There may be a conceptual relationship between kneeling, honor, favor, and blessing, but we would not say that every blessing is literally a kneeling. The root may help us see a connection, but context determines how the word is being used.

The same is true with *raqa* and *raqia*.

Even if *raqa* can describe beating metal thin, that does not mean *raqia* must mean a metal dome. The root tells us there is an idea of spreading or extending. But Genesis tells us what that spread-out thing is called. YHWH called it sky or heaven.

For example, Scripture also uses spreading language for the earth.

Isaiah 42:5

> Thus says God, the LORD [YHWH], who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it:

Here, spreading language is used for the earth. Does that mean the earth is a hammered sheet of metal?

Of course not. We cannot say that because *raqa* can describe hammering metal, every word related to that root must refer to something metallic or solid. That is not careful interpretation. The root may help us see the idea of something being spread out, stretched out, or extended. That fits the concept of an "expanse." But the root does not tell us what material the *raqia* is made of, nor does it prove that the *raqia* is a solid structure.

That is the key distinction. The root may suggest the action or idea of spreading out. But Genesis gives us the identity of what was spread out. YHWH called the *raqia* sky or heaven. So we should let the root inform the discussion, but we should let Genesis define the word.

Now we need to deal with one of the strongest passages in this discussion. This passage is often brought forward as evidence that the Bible teaches a solid sky, especially a metal-like firmament.

Job 37:18

> Can you, like him, spread out the skies, hard as a cast metal mirror?

At first glance, this sounds like a strong argument for a solid sky. After all, the ESV says the skies are "hard as a cast metal mirror."

But we need to slow down and examine the verse carefully.

First, Job 37:18 does not use the word *raqia*. He uses the Hebrew word translated as "skies". It is a word often used for the skies, clouds, cloud-filled heavens, especially in Job. That means Job 37:18 should not be treated as a direct definition of the Genesis *raqia*.

Second, the word translated "hard" can also carry the sense of strong, firm, mighty, or established. It does not automatically mean physically hard in the sense of a solid object. In context, Elihu is emphasizing the greatness of YHWH's power compared to man's weakness. Man cannot spread out the skies with YHWH. Man cannot establish them, strengthen them, or govern them.

Third, the verse says the skies are "as" a cast metal mirror. That is comparison language. It is simile. It is poetry.

The verse does not say, "The skies are a cast metal mirror." It says the skies are as a cast metal mirror.

So even the "hardness," "strength," or "firmness" is being described through comparison. In other words, Job is not saying, "The sky is a hard metal object." He is saying the skies are strong, firm, brilliant, or awe-inspiring like a cast metal mirror.

If Job intended to teach that the sky was literally cast metal, then why compare it to cast metal?

If something is literally metal, we do not usually say it is "like metal" to communicate its material composition. If someone says, "That shield is like bronze," we do not naturally conclude that the shield must literally be bronze. We understand that the shield resembles bronze in some way, perhaps in color, brightness, hardness, strength, or appearance.

The word "like" or "as" tells us we are dealing with comparison, not identity.

So Job 37:18 is not proof that the sky is literally metal. In fact, it is evidence against that specific conclusion.

Why?

Because if the point were that the sky is literally a stretched-out metal structure, comparison language would be unnecessary and unnatural.

The verse does not identify the sky as metal. It compares the sky to a cast metal mirror. That means the sky is like a cast metal mirror in some respect, but not identical to one.

So what is the comparison? It could refer to brightness. It could refer to polished appearance. It could refer to strength, stability, or firmness. It could refer to the awe-inspiring appearance of the sky. It could also refer to something man cannot create, establish, or spread out.

The larger point in Job is not the material composition of the heavens. The larger point is the greatness of YHWH and the smallness of man. YHWH spreads out the skies. Man does not. YHWH orders creation. Man does not. YHWH governs the heavens. Again, man does not.

This is exactly how poetic comparison works throughout Scripture. Scripture says YHWH is a rock. That does not mean YHWH is literally made of stone. Scripture says YHWH is a sun and shield. That does not mean YHWH is literally a burning star or a piece of battle equipment. Scripture says YHWH covers himself with light as with a garment. That does not mean light is literally woven fabric.

So when Job says the skies are “hard as a cast metal mirror,” we should not ignore the “as.” The “as” is doing important work. It tells us we are reading a comparison.

Now, this does not by itself disprove every solid-firmament view, because not every solid-firmament view argues for literal metal. Someone could still argue that Job means the sky is hard or firm like metal without being made of metal.

So let us be precise.

Job 37:18 strongly weakens the claim that the Bible identifies the sky as literal metal. It also warns us not to turn poetic comparison into material definition. But by itself, Job 37:18 is not the whole argument against every possible solid-firmament model.

That broader argument must come from the full biblical usage of *raqia*, especially Genesis 1:8, where YHWH calls the *raqia* heaven or sky.

So rather than being a simple proof-text for a literal metal firmament, Job 37:18 is better understood as poetic comparison. The skies are compared to a cast metal mirror. They are not identified as one.

Ezekiel's Crystal-Like Expanse

Another passage often brought into this discussion is Ezekiel 1.

Ezekiel 1:22

> Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse [*raqia*], shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads.

This sounds firm or crystal-like. So does this prove that the *raqia* is a solid crystal or glass-like structure? Again, we need to read carefully.

Ezekiel says it was the "likeness" of an expanse. He says it was "like" an awesome crystal.

The chapter is a prophetic throne vision. It includes living creatures, wheels within wheels, fire, brightness, and the glory of YHWH. This is visionary imagery. Ezekiel is describing the majesty of YHWH's throne, not giving us a physical-material definition of the heavens in Genesis 1.

And again, just like Job 37:18, the language of comparison matters. Ezekiel does not say the expanse was literally crystal. He says it was like awesome crystal. That means crystal is being used to communicate appearance, brilliance, purity, splendor, transparency, or awe.

It is not necessarily a statement of material composition. That does not mean Ezekiel is unimportant. Of course Ezekiel is important.

But Ezekiel's throne vision should not become the controlling definition of the creation account.

Historical Translation and Interpretation

Now let us consider historical evidence. This part is important because sometimes people will say:

"Ancient Jews believed the firmament was solid. Therefore, that must be what Genesis teaches."

But that conclusion does not follow. Ancient interpretation may tell us how some people understood the text. It does not automatically tell us what the inspired text requires.

Still, we should be honest. There are ancient translations and ancient interpreters who used more solid-sounding language.

The Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, translated *raqia* with *stereoma*. That word can carry the idea of firmness or something established.

This is not a criticism of the Septuagint. It is simply recognizing the difference between a Hebrew source text and an ancient Greek translation of that source text.

The Latin Vulgate then used *firmamentum*, which gave us the English word "firmament." That translation history matters. It likely contributed to the idea that the *raqia* must be firm or solid.

Josephus is sometimes cited in this discussion because Whiston's English translation includes the word "firmament" in brackets. But that bracketed word appears to be interpretive, not a direct translation of Josephus's Greek term. Therefore, we should not lean on Josephus as clear evidence that he was defining *raqia* as a solid firmament.

Later rabbinic discussions include speculation about the firmament, including its thickness and the sun's movement in relation to it. In fact, some of this later discussion speaks of the sun passing through the firmament, which complicates the claim that rabbinic literature clearly supports a simple hard-dome model. At minimum, it shows that later Jewish speculation was not uniform and should not be used as the controlling definition of *raqia* in Genesis.

So we should not pretend that all ancient Jewish interpretation supports a modern idea of "space." It does not. Some ancient interpretation does lean in a more solid direction.

But here is the key: that does not prove the Hebrew word itself requires that meaning.

So history does not give us a unanimous non-solid reading. Our argument is not that no one has ever read it as solid. Our argument is that the Hebrew text itself does not require that reading.

Josephus is not Scripture. Later rabbinic commentary is not Scripture. The Septuagint is an ancient translation, but it is still a translation. The Latin Vulgate is a translation. The English word "firmament" is a translation tradition.

Our authority is the Hebrew text of Scripture.

So while ancient interpretation is historically interesting, it cannot override Genesis itself. And Genesis itself says YHWH called the *raqia* sky or heaven.

Did Genesis Borrow Pagan Cosmology?

Another claim we sometimes hear is that Genesis borrowed from pagan ancient Near Eastern cosmology.

The idea is that the ancient world believed in a solid dome, and Genesis simply adopted that worldview. But this claim needs to be tested.

Even if some ancient cultures had cosmological ideas involving domes, waters, or heavens, that does not mean Genesis is teaching pagan cosmology.

Genesis may use language that ancient people could understand, but its theology is radically different from pagan accounts.

In many ancient cultures, the sun, moon, stars, sea, and storm could be treated as divine powers or forces of chaos. Genesis gives us a very different picture. The waters do not fight YHWH. The sun and moon are not even named as deities. They are simply called the greater light and the lesser light, created and appointed by YHWH for his purposes.

As we already read in Genesis, the heavenly lights are given for signs, for appointed times, for days, and for years.

In Genesis, the heavenly lights are not presented as objects of worship. They are created things with assigned functions. YHWH gives them to mark signs, appointed times, days, and years. In other words, the sun, moon, and stars are servants within YHWH's created order. They point to his authority, not their own.

That is very different from pagan cosmology. Genesis does not exalt the heavenly bodies as gods. It demotes them, so to speak, to created lights with assigned purposes. Rather than borrowing pagan theology, Genesis corrects it.

So even if Genesis speaks in terms familiar to the ancient world, it does so in a way that declares YHWH alone as Creator and King.

What We Can Prove and What We Cannot Prove

At this point, it is important that we remain honest. What can we prove?

We can prove that *raqia* comes from a word family related to spreading or stretching.

We can prove that Genesis 1:8 says YHWH called the *raqia* sky or heaven.

We can prove that Genesis 1:20 associates the *raqia* with the visible face of the sky above the earth, where birds fly.

We can prove that Genesis 1:14-18 associates the *raqia* with the sun, moon, and stars.

We can prove that Psalm 19 parallels the *raqia* with the heavens declaring YHWH's glory.

We can prove that Daniel 12 connects the *raqia* with brightness and stars.

We can prove that Job 37:18 does not use the word *raqia*, and that it does not identify the sky as literal metal, but compares the skies to a cast metal mirror. That strongly weakens the literal metal-firmament

argument and shows that the metal language is simile, not material definition. However, we should not overstate this verse as though it alone disproves every solid-firmament model.

We can prove that Ezekiel 1:22 likewise uses “likeness” and “like” language, meaning its crystal imagery is visionary comparison, not necessarily material definition.

We can prove that the Hebrew word *raqia* does not require the idea of a solid dome or hard physical structure.

But what can we not prove?

We cannot prove that every ancient Israelite had a modern scientific understanding of atmosphere and outer space.

We cannot prove that no ancient Jewish interpreter ever imagined the sky as solid.

We cannot prove that *raqia* is a technical modern word for outer space.

We cannot prove that extra-biblical Hebrew literature gives us a unanimous non-solid meaning of *raqia*.

So we should not overstate our case.

The best conclusion is that *raqia* is best understood as an expanse, sky, or heavens. It describes the stretched-out region above the earth. It includes the visible sky where birds fly across the face of the heavens and the visible heavens where the lights are set. That conclusion does not require us to force modern astronomy into Genesis, and it also does not require us to accept the claim that Genesis teaches a crude solid-dome cosmology. It simply follows the language of the text as closely as we can.

That is enough to answer the accusation that Scripture clearly teaches a primitive solid-dome cosmology.

It does not.

Answering the Skeptic

So when someone says, “The Bible teaches a solid dome,” we can simply ask: where does Genesis say the *raqia* is solid? Where does Genesis say it is a dome? Where does Genesis say it is a vault?

Genesis says YHWH called it sky or heaven. It connects the *raqia* with the visible heavens where birds fly across the face of the sky and where the lights are set. Psalm 19 parallels the *raqia* with the heavens declaring YHWH’s glory. Daniel 12 connects it with brightness and stars.

Job 37 does not use the word *raqia*, and its cast-metal-mirror language is poetic comparison. Ezekiel's crystal language is visionary comparison. So the solid-dome claim is not demanded by the Hebrew text. It is an interpretation, and we would suggest it is not the strongest one.

Why This Matters

This matters because attacks against Scripture often work through assumptions. Someone assumes "firmament" means solid dome. Then they assume Genesis teaches error. Then they assume Scripture cannot be trusted. But every step needs to be tested.

We should not let critics define Scripture for us. We should not let later tradition define Scripture for us. We should not let an English word define a Hebrew meaning for us. We should return to the text.

This is especially important because the heavens are presented in Scripture as a witness.

Psalm 19:1

> The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above [*raqia*] proclaims his handiwork.

The point of the *raqia* is not controversy. The point is glory. YHWH made the heavens. He stretched them out. He appointed the heavenly lights for signs, appointed times, days, and years. The same heavens people sometimes try to use against Scripture are the very heavens Scripture says declare the glory of God.

Conclusion

So what is the firmament? The Hebrew word is *raqia*. It is best understood as an expanse, sky, or heavens. It describes the stretched-out region above the earth, the visible sky where birds fly across the face of the heavens and the visible heavens where the sun, moon, and stars are set.

The word does not require a hard, solid dome. It does not require a metal structure. It does not require a crystal structure. It does not require a glass structure. It does not require a physical vault or ceiling. Yes, some ancient translations and interpreters used more solid-sounding language. Yes, the Septuagint uses *stereoma*, which can communicate firmness or stability. Yes, the English word "firmament" can make us think of something firm. Yes, Job and Ezekiel use strong poetic and visionary imagery.

But that is exactly why we must test the matter carefully.

The Septuagint is historically important, but it is still a translation. The English word "firmament" is historically important, but it is not the Hebrew word.

Job does not say the sky is metal. It says the sky is as a cast metal mirror, and Job does not even use the word *raqia*. Ezekiel does not say the expanse is crystal. It says it was like awesome crystal. Those words matter. "Like" and "as" show comparison, not identity. They show imagery, not material definition.

So Job is especially strong against the claim that Scripture identifies the sky as literal metal. Ezekiel is especially important as visionary throne imagery. Neither passage should be ignored. But neither should be forced into Genesis as the controlling definition of *raqia*. Genesis itself gives us the anchor:

Genesis 1:8

> And God called the expanse [*raqia*] Heaven [shamayim]. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

That should be our starting point. YHWH called the *raqia* heaven or sky. That is the definition we must keep returning to.

The birds fly above the earth across the face of the *raqia* of the heavens. The lights are set in the *raqia* of the heavens. The heavens declare the glory of God. The expanse shows his handiwork. So we do not need to force a solid dome into the text. We also do not need to force modern scientific vocabulary into Genesis. We simply need to let Scripture speak. And when Scripture speaks, it points us upward, not to confusion, but to the glory of the Creator.

Psalm 19:1

> The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above [*raqia*] proclaims his handiwork.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may YHWH bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

EMAIL: Info@119ministries.com
FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/119Ministries
WEBSITE: www.TestEverything.net
TWITTER: www.twitter.com/119Ministries#