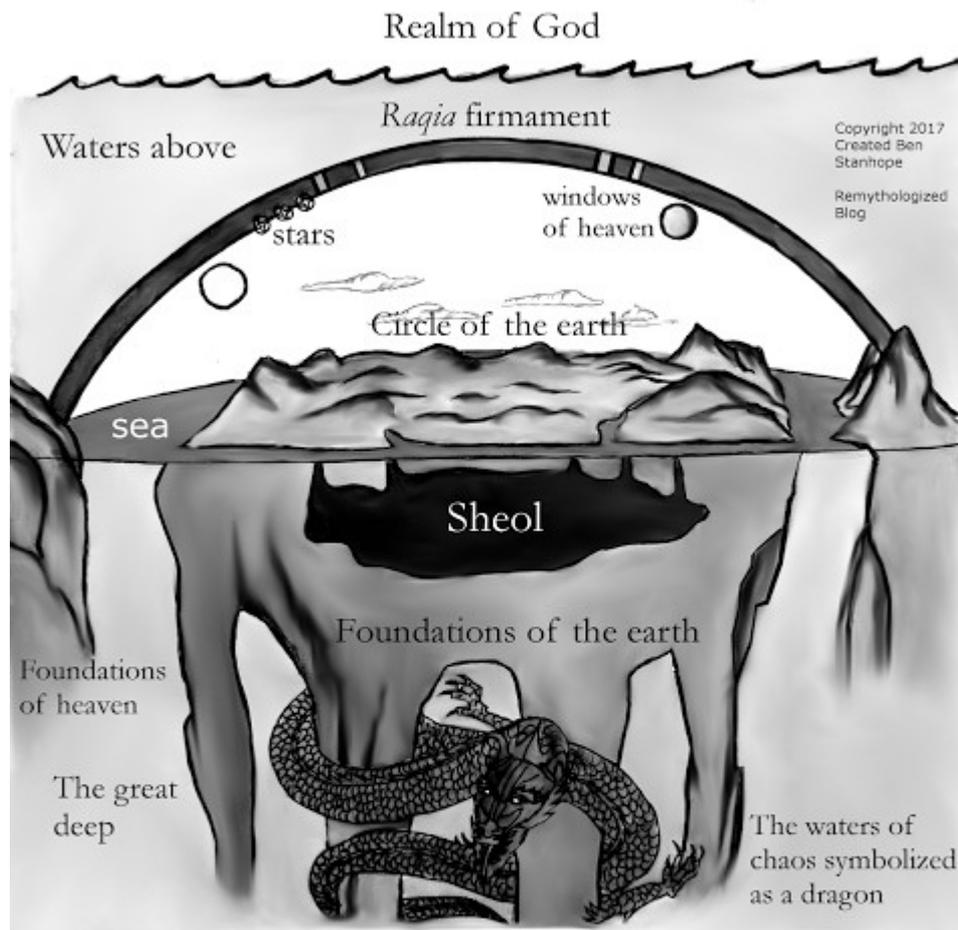


Creation ordering: Genesis 1-2

ANCIENT ISRAELITE COSMOLOGY



THE FIRMAMENT

Gen 1:7-8; Job 37:18;
Ex 24:10; Ezk 1:22-26

CIRCLE OF EARTH

Isa 40:22; Job 26:10;
Prov 8:27

WATERS ABOVE

Gen 1:7-8; Ps 148:4-6

FOUNDATIONS OF EARTH

Job 9:6; Ps 75:3;
102:25

REALM OF GOD

Ps 104:2-3; 29:10;
Job 22:12-14

FOUNDATIONS OF HEAVEN

Job 26:11; 2 Sam 22:8

WINDOWS OF HEAVEN

Gen 7:11; 8:2; Is 24:18

THE CHAOS DRAGON

Ps 74:13-15; Job 7:12;
9:13; 26:12-13

Cosmology of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)

Has both shared commonality with, and distinctive reaction against, prevailing Babylonian and Sumerian cosmology. See particularly in Genesis 1-11, the later chapters of Job and some Psalms.

Some commonality:

- Seas (great waters) represent chaos
- God seated above the created order
- Separation of the waters: below and above the earth (but methods very different)
- A solid dome ("firmament", "vault") in the heavens, with water above.
- An underworld ("Sheol")

Some distinctives:

- One God, not multiple gods.
- God simply subdues primordial chaos (Babylonian "Enuma Elish": a murderous battle)
- Sun and moon are merely created objects, not themselves gods. Not even named.
- Mankind in the "image of God", not slaves for the gods.

Seven days of creation

1-3: Establish order and form: light/darkness; heavens/waters; earth (including vegetation)

4-6: Populating that order: sun/moon; creatures of air/seas; creatures of earth (incl. humankind)

7: Rest: Not mere relaxation; also absence of earlier chaos/unrest.

Some points

- Ancient Near East (ANE) cosmology less concerned about "creation"; more concerned about how things attained and retain their order.
- Waters of chaos pre-existed (their origin not an issue for the ancients). God separates them.
- Humankind "image of God" represents God to the rest of creation.
- Gen 1: "God" (Hebrew: "Elohim") vs. Gen 2-3 "the LORD God" ("Yahweh"). Also different verbs for "create". Very likely two different sources edited together.
- Creation order in Gen 2-3 differs from equivalent (mostly day 6) in Gen 1. (NIV Gen 2:19 attempts to smooth this out "...had formed" but this translation is questionable.)
- Noah: Waters from above and below re-form "chaos". Afterwards, God re-separates them.

Summary

We think scientifically of "origins" (Big Bang, life, evolution) and are sceptical about God/gods.

But ANE cultures assumed the existence of God/gods and were far more concerned about the shaping and ordering by God/gods and about our assumed relationship to him/them.

When reading the Old Testament, be alert to these very different assumptions that we bring to (and even subconsciously impose on) what we read. Remember how massively different is our view of the solar system and universe from their view (pictured earlier).

Two translations

1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

6 And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

7 And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.

8 And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

Authorised (King James) Version (1611)

When God began to create heaven and earth,
and the earth then was welter and waste
and darkness over the deep
and God's breath hovering over the waters,
God said,
"Let there be light."
And there was light.

And God saw the light,
that it was good,
and God divided the light from the darkness.

And God called the light Day and the darkness He called Night.
And it was evening and it was morning, first day.

And God said,
"Let there be a vault in the midst of the waters,
and let it divide water from water."
And God made the vault
and it divided the water beneath the vault
from the water above the vault,
and so it was.

And God called the vault Heavens,
and it was evening and it was morning, second day.

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The Five Books of Moses; Robert Alter (2004); my layout