

The Flat-Earth: Still an Embarrassment to Bible Inerrantists
by Adrian Swindler
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As I proved in an earlier article ("The Flat-Earth Belief of Bible Writers," Winter Issue, 1990, pp. 9-11), the Hebrews conceived the world as a three-storied structure that included a flat-earth belief. That they believed in such an unscientific concept should not surprise us, because they were surrounded by pagan cultures much older than theirs whose cosmologic views were very similar. The Hebrews had simply borrowed this concept from their pagan neighbors. In *Man and the Cosmos*, Lars Thunberg described the pagan cosmology of two of those pagan neighbors:

"The Babylonians thought of heaven as a great vault, immobile and solid, whose foundations rested on a vast ocean (apsu, meaning "the deep"). Above the vault (dome, firmament) was the "dwelling of the gods" from which the sun comes through a door every morning and returns every evening through another door. The earth was supposed to be a mountain, hollow underneath, also supported by ap-su. The abode of the dead, sheol, the land of darkness and the shadow of death, was just above the hollow interior but inside the earth' crust. The Egyptians held similar ideas. As fanciful, and even naive, as these ideas appear now, they represented the thinking of the day" (1985, pp. 26-27)."

The similarity of these pagan ideas to the Hebrew conception of the cosmos should be apparent to everyone who is familiar with the Old Testament scriptures.

In the lead article of this issue, however, Jerry McDonald, a Church-of-Christ preacher in Oskaloosa, Kansas, took exception to my first article on this subject. In so doing, he said that no scholar who believed in the inerrancy of the Bible would take the position that there are mistakes in the original autographs of the Bible. That was a rather simplistic observation. It states the obvious and needs no comment. It is a lot like saying a theist would never say that God does not exist.

But what is this "original autographs" business? There are absolutely NONE, so how could anyone know that there were no mistakes in them? The copies we do have are obviously not the same as they once were. In 1958, Professor Morton Smith of Columbia University discovered in a monastery near Jerusalem a letter containing a missing fragment of the Gospel of Mark that had been deliberately suppressed by Bishop Clement of Alexandria. It originally followed Mark 10:34 where Jesus, after predicting the approaching death of the "Son of man," said, "... and after three days he will rise again":

"And they came unto Bethany, and certain woman, whose brother had died, was there. And coming, she prostrated herself before Jesus and says to him, "Son of David, have mercy on me." But the disciples rebuked her. And Jesus, being angered, went off with her into the garden where the tomb was, and straightway a great cry was heard from the tomb. And going in where the youth was, he stretched forth his hand and raised him, seizing his hand. But the youth, looking upon him, loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him. And going out of the tomb they came into the house of the youth, for he was rich. And after six days, Jesus told him what to do and in the evening the youth comes to him, wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God. And thence arising, he returned to the other side of Jordan," (Secret Gospel, p. 14ff).

In present versions, this same young man is apparently mentioned in Mark 14:51: "And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body; and they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked."

This secret gospel was suppressed by Clement because the Carpocratians were using it to prove that Jesus approved of homosexual activity. This fragment was about the raising of Lazarus, and, like most accounts of the gospels, it varies from John's version. Professor Smith thinks that homosexuality was probably not involved here but rather the description of a typical mystery school initiation--a ritualized and symbolic death and rebirth of the sort so prevalent in the Middle

East at that time. The point is clear, however, that we don't have all of the old copies now, so how much more has been excised, added, and altered? No one can tell.

A similar case concerns what the voice in Luke 3:22 said after the baptism of Jesus. Justin Martyr quoted it as, "Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee." He said that this was in the "Memoirs of the Apostles," (Dialogue with Trypho, p. 190 & ciii 6). The Codex Bezae, the Old Latin, Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, and other western authorities quoted it the same. But is it that way in your copy? No! So is the Bible complete? Infallible? Inspired of God? The fact is that we can determine very little about who wrote and when they wrote most of the Bible.

In Harmony of the Gospels, A. T. Robertson, M. A., LL. D., Litt. D., one of Jerry's old fundamentalist scholars whom the Church of Christ has used for years, said this about the Bible writer Luke:

"Luke is the first critic of the life of Christ whose criticism has been preserved to us. Others had drawn up narratives of certain portions of Christ's work. Others still had been eyewitnesses of the ministry of Jesus and gave Luke their oral testimony. Luke sifted it all with care and produced an orderly and reasonably full narrative of the earthly ministry of Jesus. We cannot reproduce all the sources Luke had at his command, but it is clear that he followed in the main our gospel of Mark, as anyone can see for himself by comparing the two Gospels in this Harmony. Both Matthew and Luke made use of Mark. But they had other sources too."

So here is your scholar, Jerry! He admits that Luke and the writer of Matthew were about as inspired as you are. The very fact that Luke wrote his gospel shows that he considered all others questionable and that he was going to give the straight dope to Theophilus. If Luke had thought the other gospels were correct and complete, all he would have had to do was point to them as faithful accounts of the story.

So with the theory of "inerrant original autographs" put to rest, we can now turn to Jerry's views on scholarship. He didn't care too much for my scholars. Ian Wilson and Richard Friedman are indeed two of them, but others would include the 100+ translators of the New American Bible and The Good News Bible. To these can also be added the ones who gave us The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible and the 74 who compiled the New Jerome Bible Commentary. And that is only a start. My scholars are the professors of philosophy and religion at the major universities in this country and Western Europe. These are honest people in their fields, who will not sell out to ignorant and prejudiced fundamentalists. On the other hand, Jerry's "scholars" are the old manipulators who are adept at using possibility answers to "explain" the insurmountable inconsistencies, contradictions and absurdities in the Bible. Possibly this, maybe that, it could be, it might be--this is their strength. My! My! It's so easy to pull the wool over the sheep's eyes.

Jerry's 19th century scholars have presided over nearly 300 fighting fragments of Christianity that cannot agree on much of anything. Of course, even the scholars disagree on a multitude of interpretations. The Church of Christ has been relying on characters like these for almost two hundred years and has at least 10 divisions, all of which claim to be the "one true church." The "doctors" of this church are constantly at one another's throats, with J. D. Bales (Harding College) and Thomas B. Warren (Freed-Hardeman College) disagreeing vehemently over marriage issues and other interpretative matters. As editor of The Spiritual Sword, Warren tried with pontifical pronouncements and "definitive" treatment of all subjects to write the creed for the church. It didn't work!

Jerry even quoted three 19th century scholars whom, if they were still alive, he would not even allow in his pulpit on Sunday morning, men who believed that baptism is not essential, that babies should be baptized, that pouring and sprinkling in baptism is acceptable and that a 1000-year literal reign of Jesus is coming. Jerry loves them when he can use their deceptions, possibilities, and perversions, but he would never give them the right hand of fellowship.

As for the opinion of scholars, I think even Jerry has heard of Bultmann. He, knowing of the three-tiered structure of the world taught by the Bible, made this cogent observation:

"The whole conception of the world which is presupposed in the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament generally is mythological, i.e., the conception of the world as structured in three stories, heaven, earth, and hell; the conception of the intervention of supernatural powers in the course of events; and the conception of miracles, especially the conception of the intervention of supernatural powers in the inner life of the soul, the conception that men can be tempted and corrupted by the devil and possessed by evil spirits. This conception of the world we call mythological because it is different from the conception of the world which has been formed and developed by science since its inception in ancient Greece and which has been accepted by all modern men, (Jesus Christ and Mythology, 1958, p. 15)."

The pre-scientific character of the Bible is obvious to all who will read it objectively.

Jerry spoke of "faulty translations," yet he uses the KJV. "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God...." What? "Wot ye not...." This is the nearly 400-year-old language of the KJV. There are thousands of words that are either mistranslated or obscurely rendered and several others that are now obsolete. Besides this, the KJV was too highly colored in many places with the party opinions and ideas of those who translated it to be considered a faithful record. In the words of Dr. Macknight, "It was made a little too complaisant to the king in favoring his notions of predestination, election, witchcraft, familiar spirits, and kingly rights, and these, it is probable, were also the translators' opinions. Their translation is partial, speaking the language of and giving authority to one sect." And he imparted this not to the translators alone but to those who employed them, for even some of the translators complained that they could not follow their judgment in the matter but were restrained by "reasons of state." So the KJV is not a translation from the oldest MSS--there are no originals--but merely a revision of the versions then in use. Those versions had only eight MSS available, whereas there are about 700 Greek MSS now available. What do these facts say about the reliability of the KJV?

With Jerry's complaints and quibbles about inerrant original autographs, liberal scholars, and faulty translations out of the way, I can now address the "rebuttal" arguments in his article. Space will allow us to reprint only one of the graphics from my first article, so if you have saved the first issue of TSR, you might want to keep it close at hand for reference purposes as I analyze Jerry's "counterarguments."

PSALM 24:1-2. Jerry didn't seem to understand why I cited this passage. My point here and throughout was to show that the graphic illustrations of the NAB and The Interpreter's Bible were accurate in depicting the Bible writers' conception of a three-tiered universe, with heaven, hell, and a flat earth. A verse that touches on any one of those three tiers, as these do, confirms the graphics that contain all three. Jerry said nothing about this.

But one of his scholars has tried to circumvent the obvious embarrassment of this passage. Scholar Barnes said, "As the earth appeared to be surrounded by water, it was natural to speak of it as founded also upon the waters...." Natural indeed to the pre-scientific, ignorant primitive mind but absolutely false nevertheless! In fact, Barnes' statement is an admission that the writer was wrong and was basing his statements on appearance rather than fact. Furthermore, Barnes himself is in error in this statement: "The earth has been elevated above them (the seas)...." That is absolutely incorrect. The earth is not built upon the seas; it contains the seas. The vast majority of the land is under the water with some rising above it. The Bible is wrong; the earth (Barnes' and Strong's "globe") is NOT founded upon the seas! Anyone should easily recognize that Jerry's scholars lived recently enough to know from science that the earth is round, and that they simply inserted scientific knowledge into their definition of *tebel* as meaning "the earth" and by extension "the globe." By their extension, the earth is a globe, but their extending the meaning of the word results in a vicious lie! There is absolutely NO Hebrew word for globe in the sense of Earth, because those ancients thought the earth was flat. By their extensions, Barnes and Strong simply lied. They extended the truth, and that constitutes lying. Young's Analytical Concordance has every instance where the words translated earth are used, and NOT ONCE does the root mean globe. Jerry's fundamentalist scholars have been clearly discredited.

DANIEL 4:10. The dream and interpretation of it in this passage were, according to the story, inspired by God. This was not like one of Jerry's dreams, which is caused by something he eats, but was a sensible dream with a sensible interpretation. That dream clearly presented a flat earth with a tree at the center that could be seen from the ends of the earth. This expression was used over and over in the Bible, as it was here and in Job 38:13-14, and Bible writers used it because they thought the earth was flat and had ends, just as most people did at the time of Columbus and before. Jerry said, "We still use that language, even though we know the earth has no ends." That's true, but the expression originated in a time when people did think the earth had ends. Our language is filled with unscientific expressions, such as sunrise and sunset, that originated when people thought they conveyed scientific fact. They are in our language, because we have a tendency to retain such idioms long after we know them to be erroneous.

MATTHEW 4:8. The only reason for taking Jesus to an "exceedingly high mountain" was for a visibility factor that would show him ALL the kingdoms of the world, just as taking him to the highest point of the temple was to give falling distance. Jerry appealed to Dungan and the hermeneutic principle of word substitution. I agree wholeheartedly with this principle and will, to Jerry's embarrassment, shortly use it myself. However, Jerry wants to substitute Palestine for the world in this passage, so let's look at the consequences of this substitution. The same word kosmos was used in Mark 16:15: "Go into all Palestine and preach the gospel...." Well, well, well!

On this verse, Jerry had his scholars contradicting each other and himself. Barnes said, "... we need not suppose that there was any miracle when they (the kingdoms) were shown to the savior." But Boles said, "The devil may have had supernatural power and presented Jesus with a mental vision of 'all the kingdoms of the world....'" So Jerry goes along with Barnes who claimed only a tiny world was involved and therefore no miracle happened, but then he quoted Boles who gave the devil credit for a miraculous showing of all kingdoms of the earth in a vision! This is a fundamentalist nightmare. Their own scholars disagree with each other, and all they can propose is maybe, possibly, could be, perhaps, it is possible, ad infinitum and ad nauseam. So please explain something, Mr. Boles et al. Why take Jesus to an "exceedingly high mountain" only to show him a MENTAL VISION? Hogwash and balderdash! Barnes, Jerry, et al, how much could you tempt a person by showing him the glory of Palestine? Glory? What glory? A depressed, primitive, third-worldlike area! You and your pitiful scholars are batting exactly zero, and you don't get any better.

GENESIS 11:4. The language and context here clearly shows an anthropomorphic god was afraid that, if he left the people to their own devices, they would reach heaven where his throne was. Yes, Jerry, those writers were just like you were in your childhood, but they had no one to teach them science as you had. The only reason you don't feel the same way about the distance to the stars now is because you have been taught scientific facts. It isn't because you're an adult but because you have been taught that the earth is not flat and that the stars are billions of miles away. Science is your teacher and not the Bible. Hold to the Bible and you, like the Amish and the people of Zion City, Illinois, will believe the earth is flat. We can at least credit them with honesty. They believe this because they believe the Bible, but you are trying to explain these things away.

Jerry's scholar Leupold carried no weight at all with his foolish comment: "It cannot but work harm to let this situation continue." How ridiculous! Those people couldn't have hurt a thing with their ziggurat. Many of them were built in that area at this time. Language didn't come from a god confounding their speech; it developed from grunts and growls and has been changing ever since. The English of 500 years ago was so different from ours that, if we were taken back in time, we wouldn't be able to understand it.

JOB 38:22. This Bible writer had no idea how snow and ice are formed, so he had his god pose this as a problem for Job. Jerry's Barnes gives us another idiotic and unsupported statement, but the scholars who translated the NAB, The Interpreter's Bible, and MATC understood clearly that god was telling Job that he stores up the snow and hail. But we know very well how hail and snow are formed; it is no mystery at all. Job's god lied to him and told him he kept the snow and hail "ready for times of trouble, for days of battle and war." We know, of course, that there was no god involved, merely an uneducated, pre-scientific writer.

Let's look, for example, at the questions this god allegedly asked Job. They are either questions that little children in school could easily answer or those that are based on erroneous conceptions. "What holds up the pillars that support the earth? Who laid the cornerstone of the world?" (v:6). ANSWER: There ain't any, and nobody! "Who closed the gates to hold back the sea?" (v:8). ANSWER: Nobody, because there are no gates. "Have you walked on the floor of the ocean?" (v:16). ANSWER: People have, so what? "Do you know where light comes from or what the source of darkness is?" (v:19). ANSWER: What a question! It reminds me of an old "little moron" joke. In a class discussing the relative importance of the sun and the moon, the teacher asked, "Which is more important, the sun or the moon?" The little moron answered, "Why, the moon is more important! It gives us light at night when we need it; the sun is there in the daytime when it's already light." This entire chapter in Job is laughable to anyone educated in science.

GENESIS 1:6-7. Jerry quibbled over the meaning of dome, expansion, firmament, and vault and then quoted Leupold again, who said that the firmament surrounding the earth is simply an air space. Now where did Leupold get that? Ipsi dixit will not do. What scripture did he rely on? It is simply an explanation without evidence. As fundamentalists are so prone to do, Jerry accepted it and then said that this air keeps the mist, fog, and rain apart from the earth. So Jerry is still a child. I've seen all of those elements in very close connection with the earth but never at all separated.

To test the soundness of his theory, let's use Jerry's hermeneutic trick and substitute air for firmament:

"And God said let there be lights in the air of the heavens to separate the day from the night... and let there be lights in the air of the heavens to give light upon the earth.... And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the air of the heavens to give light upon the earth, (Gen. 1:14-17)."

Now isn't that something? All of those heavenly bodies up there in the air! That means they are all within 200 miles of the earth. Does this mean the moon is not 238,000 miles away? The sun is not 93 million miles out in space? How do our space vehicles get past that vast array of bodies that are all up there in the air?

"Let there be air in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters. And God made the air and separated the waters which were under the air from the waters which were above the air. And it was so. And God called the air heaven, (vv:6-8)."

Now isn't that a shocker? Is there actually water above the AIR? Mind you, that is not in the air but above the AIR! Not water in the firmament but water above the firmament! Are the sun and moon and all the stars up there in the AIR? Jerry's Dungan (a real scholar) and hermeneutics are very useful, eh?

My use of Psalm 104:3, 13 was misunderstood by Jerry (so what else is new?). Check the NAB graphic illustration again, and you will see that the throne of god is above the dome and the floodgates (sluices) need merely be opened from god's palace. Also, the expression "who lays the beams of his chambers in the waters" has reference to his throne established on the waters above the dome. Since this language supports the graphic illustrations I referred to, it teaches the three-tiered structure, including the flat earth.

Job 38:12-14. Jerry tried to justify the Bible writers for saying "the ends of the earth" on the grounds that people still say this. Just a tiny bit of thought should have suggested to him that the expression originated in a time when people did believe the earth was flat. In my comments on Daniel 4:10, I addressed the issue of unscientific idioms. The same principle applies here, so nothing more needs to be said about it.

Job 26:7. Apparently, Jerry didn't realize I was answering an argument that claims this verse

teaches a global earth. It teaches no such thing, and my statement on this should be read again with that context in mind.

Job 26:11. The fact that the writer speaks of the "pillars of the earth" proves again that my graphic illustrations are correct. Jerry hangs in there with his discredited Barnes who speaks of "mountains which seem to support the earth," (emphasis, AS). Can you believe an adult of even average intelligence would make a statement like that? Job 38:6 asks, "What holds up the pillars that support the earth?" I suppose Barnes would have said the pillars "seem" to support the earth. Barnes adds to what is written and deserves the condemnation of Revelation 22:18.

Isaiah 14:13. Jerry misunderstood my use of this passage, even though my argument was clearly directed against those who use it to prove the writer thought the earth was round. My original statement should be reread with that context in mind.

Isaiah 40:22 was used for the same purpose as above. I showed that this verse does NOT teach a round earth. Poor Jerry thinks the old King James per-Version is the correct one, even with its 20,000 errors. I wonder if those translators were right when they substituted easter for passover in Acts 12:4? The NAB and GNB translators made Isaiah 40:22 quite clear: "He sits enthroned above the vault of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; he stretches out the heavens like a veil, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in." Isn't that exactly what the graphic illustrations showed? Of course it is! Isn't it nice to know that the heavens are spread out like a tent? All the tents I have seen were domed over a flat surface. My, my, what you can learn from the Bible! This is the very verse medieval churchmen quoted to prove the earth was flat! Now comes Jerry McDonald to tell us it teaches the earth is round.

Those old churchmen understood the Bible much better than Jerry and his deceptive, shifty, sly, and crooked commentators. Consider, for example, this quotation from Man and the Cosmos:

"We now come to the "dark ages" in the development of cosmology. From Aristotle and Ptolemy until Copernicus thirteen centuries later, no apparent advance had been made. It even took until A.D. 1000 for the West to accept a round earth and Ptolemy's system. However, to understand the background of the Copernican revolution that was to follow, we should know the important factors of those intervening, nonproductive years, which included political and religious considerations affecting the study of cosmology.... In its desire to stamp out any pagan influence, the church soon adopted a rigid interpretation of Scriptures and rejected anything that might even remotely challenge her influence. Lacantius (A.D. 240 ca.- 320), writing on the false wisdom of the philosopher, ridiculed the belief in a round earth. His arguments were the ancient ones about the impossibility of walking upside down and places where the rain and snow fall upward. He quoted Isaiah 40:22, "It is He that sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; he stretches out the heavens as a curtain, and spreads them out as a tent to dwell in," (pp. 64-65)."

Strange, isn't it, that Jerry and Lacantius quoted the same verse, one to prove the earth is flat and the other to prove it is a globe? Lacantius had a better understanding than Jerry, because the idea in this verse was the ancient one in which God sat enthroned above a dome (vault, firmament, expanse) that he had stretched out as a tent to dwell in.

Jerry alleged that Farrell Till is not sure of his position and assumes that I take the same position. Well, he assumes far too much. I know Farrell quite well, and both he and I are very sure of our position. Also, I am very sure the Bible is inspired but not by a god. No god would make those horrendous mistakes.

Jerry bragged that he has shown my position to be false, but in fact he has failed most miserably in this regard. That kind of attitude reminds me of the little boy whistling to cover his fear as he goes by the graveyard.

I have clearly established the correctness of the graphic illustrations of NAB, The Interpreter's Bible, and Man and the Cosmos. A dome over a flat earth, which was built on the seas, with pillars

reaching into the seas to support the earth and sheol deep in that flat earth--this was the three-tiered world of the Hebrews, the world their writers described in the Bible.

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