

# The Geographical Meaning of "Earth" and "Seas" in Genesis 1:10

Paul H. Seely

Published in Westminster Theological Journal 59 (1997) 231-55

When one reads in Gen 1:1 that God created "the heavens and the earth", the modern western mind automatically interprets the text as speaking of the sun, moon and stars spread out in the unimaginable vastness of space with the planet earth as a globe in which seas are embedded travelling around the sun. It is proper to apply the verse in this way for the merism is clearly a reference to the entire universe. But if we are going to understand the original meaning of the words "earth" and "seas" in Gen 1, our first task, as Walter Kaiser Jr. pointed out, is to get back to the original writer's thought and that means we must interpret the Bible within its historical and biblical context.<sup>1</sup>

When a biblical text is interpreted outside of its historical context, it is often unconsciously interpreted and even rewritten in terms of the reader's own culture, time and beliefs. This, of course, distorts the text. The serious biblical exegete, therefore, will insist that a biblical passage be interpreted within its own historical context. As Silva has well said,

To a large extent, the interpretation of ancient literature consists of bridging the temporal and cultural gaps that separate us from its authors....

The (usually implicit) claim that proper exegesis may be done, or even can only be done, if one avoids commitments to broader issues seems to me not only to be a delusion, but to create an obstacle for interpretation.<sup>2</sup>

The immediate context of any biblical verse should be given priority to the extent to which it speaks clearly, but the sketchy nature of Gen 1 has in church history so frequently resulted in its being interpreted in terms of ancient, then medieval, then modern western science that it is incumbent upon anyone serious about interpreting Gen 1 validly to place it first of all in its own historical context. When we do this with reference to the meaning of "earth" and "seas" in Gen 1:10, we are led to a concept of the earth and sea quite different from the one that modern western man has. We must and will of course look closely and seriously at the immediate context of Gen 1:10 and at all the biblical data bearing upon its meaning; but, we begin this study of Gen 1:10 by looking at it first within its historical context beginning with what might be called the outer circle of that context, namely the conception of the "earth" which human beings in general automatically have until they are informed otherwise by modern science. This normal conception is readily seen in the thinking of prescientific tribal peoples everywhere in the world.

## The Scientifically Naive View of the Earth in Tribal Societies

Levy-Bruhl, commenting on the beliefs of scientifically naive tribal peoples and quoting from original reports wrote [italics mine], "Their cosmography as far as we know anything about it was practically of one type up til the time of the white man's arrival upon the scene. That of the Borneo Dayaks may furnish us with some idea of it. They consider the earth to be a flat surface, whilst the heavens are a dome, a kind of glass shade which covers the earth and comes in contact with it at the horizon." Alexander similarly spoke of "The usual primitive conception of the world's form" as "flat and round below and surmounted above by a solid firmament in the shape of an inverted bowl."<sup>3</sup>

It is to be noted that in the usual scientifically naive conception of the universe not only is the earth flat, but the sky is understood as an inverted bowl that literally touches the earth at the horizon. As Levy-Bruhl wrote of the Thonga, "Heaven is for them an immense solid vault which rests upon the earth. The place where heaven touches the earth is called bugimamusi...the place where women can lean their [cooking] pestles against the vault." Holmberg similarly mentions that in the hero tales of the Yakuts "the outer edge of the earth is said to touch the rim of a hemispherical sky." Levy-Bruhl also noted that the Polynesians

imagine that the sea which surrounds their islands was a level plain, and that at the visible horizon, or some distance beyond it, the sky or rai joined the ocean, enclosing as with an arch or hollow cone the islands in the immediate vicinity.<sup>4</sup>

The importance of this point is that since the sky is usually thought by tribal peoples to be a solid hemisphere literally touching the earth (or sea) at the horizon, the earth must necessarily be thought of as flat. It is impossible to conceive of the sky as a hemisphere touching the earth at the horizon, and yet conceive of the earth as a globe. If the earth were a globe but the sky just a hemisphere touching the earth, half of the earth would have no sky. The shape of the earth (or sea amongst island peoples) is accordingly explicitly or implicitly described by all tribal peoples as being flat, and usually circular. The earth then is a single disc-shaped continent.

Thus the earth of the Bavenda and Bathonga (African tribes) "is thought to be a large flat disk floating in water, roofed by the dome of the sky, makholi, which meets the circumference of the disk at the horizon..." Among the Australian aboriginals "there seems to be a universal belief ...that the earth is a flat surface, surmounted by the solid vault of the sky." The earth of the South American Yanomano is described as "an inverted platter: gently curved, thin, circular, rigid..." Indians in Mexico conceive of the earth "as a large wheel or disk..." The earth of the North American Indians is almost always described as "a circular disc." Among the Altaic peoples (Turkic, Mongols, Tungus), the "earth is thought to be a circular disk..." In Ob-Ugric cosmology "The earth ...is disk-shaped." In pre-Christian Scandinavian cosmology the earth is "a round disc."<sup>5</sup>

The earth has occasionally been described by scientifically naive people as a square, a rectangle or even a cross; but, significantly, even in these rare cases, the

earth is still a flat single continent, not a globe. There is, however, one case of the earth being thought of as a sphere: The Ainu of Japan considered earth to be "round like a ball." Even in this case, however, the earth is not being envisioned as a planetary globe. That is, the Ainu do not think of the earth as a globe in which the ocean is embedded, but as a ball of solid earth embedded in the ocean. The Ainu word for "earth" has reference only to an island and literally means "floating land."<sup>6</sup>

So we can see that all over the world scientifically naive tribal peoples regularly conceive of the earth as a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc; and, even when the rare exceptions are considered, in no case have they thought of the earth as a planetary globe. The human mind, as clearly evidenced by prescientific tribal peoples, just naturally defines the earth as flat--until informed otherwise by modern science. This tendency of the human mind to define the earth as flat is also shown in the thinking of pre-adolescent children even in modern Western societies--until they are taught otherwise.<sup>7</sup>

## The Ancient Far Eastern View of the Earth

Early Japanese writings do not describe the shape of the earth, but as was the case with the Ainu it was conceived of as floating on water and hence by implication not our planetary globe.

The ancient Chinese according to Christie described the sky as an "inverted bowl" but "The earth was a flat surface or a truncated four-sided pyramid." In this view "Earth is still and square, while the round sky (with "stars fixed to the surface") revolves: the yang sky contrasts with the yin earth." Discussing this same ancient view of the universe, Major says,

...the earth is flat or slightly domed and "square" (i.e., defined by the solstitial and equinoctial points projected onto the celestial equator), and the heavens are flat or domed, parallel to the earth's plane, and "round" (i.e., defined by the circle of the celestial equator).<sup>8</sup>

The earliest Chinese conception of the earth is then a single continent in the shape of a slightly domed, truncated four-sided pyramid. But giving a square shape to the earth raised questions as to how it could fit with a hemispherical dome; so "there was always much skepticism about this [shape for the earth]"; and many thinkers gave it up in favor of a circular earth. The Yin and Yang philosophically-influenced Taoist map shown in Major's paper mentioned above shows the earth in later Chinese thought as a square grid of nine square continents with the ocean surrounding the earth flowing within a perfect square. But, did the Chinese really believe the earth was composed of nine perfectly square continents or that the ocean had square corners? Even the earliest Chinese thought did not assume that. As Throver says, "The grid...was assumed for purposes of map-making but it must not be supposed that all scholars in China believed that this was the shape of the earth."

More mundane Chinese maps represent the ocean flowing around the earth in a circle and the earth as more or less disc-shaped.<sup>9</sup> So although the earth in earliest Chinese thought was considered square by the majority, the circular earth was apparently always a contender and in time won over many. In both cases, the earth was considered a single continent that was fundamentally flat, hemispherical at most, and certainly not a planetary globe.

The earliest conceptions of the earth in India are found in the Rig Veda and are given in conjunction with the sky. The earth and sky are compared to two wheels at the ends of an axle, but also to two bowls and to two leather bags. The concept of the earth as a wheel is the usual concept of the earth as a single continent in the shape of a flat round disc. The Indian concept of two bowls or leather bags, unlike the Chinese concept, represents the earth as a right-side-up bowl covered at its rim by the inverted bowl of the sky, the two halves composing the whole universe. Gombrich drew the conclusion from this that the earth was conceived of as concave. In the light of parallels, however, I think the concavity of the earth-half of the universe is reflecting either the earth bulging below to contain the realm of the dead (a common conception) or perhaps, as was enunciated in later Vedic thought, part of the bulge is really a subterranean ocean. I think, therefore, that in all Indian conceptions of the earth the surface of the earth was conceived of as a single continent that was flat and circular, and in any case never a planetary globe. Later Indian thought favored the concept of the earth as a flat disc; and classical Hindu, Buddhist and Jain cosmologies are all in agreement that "our level is a vast disc..."<sup>10</sup>

## The Ancient Near Eastern View of the Earth

The noted Egyptologist, John Wilson, tells us that in Egyptian thought the earth was conceived of

as a flat platter with a corrugated rim. The inside bottom of the platter was the flat alluvial plain of Egypt, and the corrugated rim was the rim of mountains which were the foreign lands.<sup>11</sup>

H. Schafer, however, although agreeing that the earth was conceived of as flat, doubted that there was any sure evidence for the circularity of the earth in Egyptian thought. He wrote off a fourth century BC Egyptian picture of the earth as circular on the basis that the Nile valley is oblong; and, he suggested that the circularity of the earth in that picture was due to foreign influence. His argument from the non-circularity of the Nile valley is very weak, however, for few if any countries are circular yet most peoples conceive of the earth as a disc including the Mesopotamians whose valley is also oblong. The concept of the circularity of the earth does not arise from observing the length or breadth of a country but from observing the curve of the horizon. Also, Keel, noting that the ocean around the earth was long conceived of by the Egyptians as circular, concluded contra Schafer: "This fact suggests that in Egypt,

visualization of the earth as a circular disc was from very ancient times at least an option." This conclusion is supported by evidence, as early as the fourteenth century BC, of circular representations of the figure of Osiris or Geb [the earth god].<sup>12</sup>

In addition, contrary to Schafer, who was primarily considering artistic representations of the earth, there is evidence for the circularity of the earth from the time of Rameses III (1195-1164 BC) in an inscription which reads "...they laid their hands upon the land as far as the Circle of the Earth."<sup>13</sup>

There is good reason then for believing that the ancient Egyptians conceived of the earth as a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc; and, in any case certainly not as a planetary globe.

In ancient Sumer, according to Kramer and Lambert, the earth was conceived of as a "flat disc." Kramer seems to reach this conclusion partly on the basis of the fact that the Sumerians conceived the sky to be a vault coming down to the earth (or surrounding ocean) on all sides. Lambert seems to reach this conclusion on the basis that the Sumerians would think of the earth as flat because that is self-evident and limited in extent because they saw the sun go down on one side of the earth and rise on the other. Both scholars also show awareness that the Babylonian view of the universe which thought of the earth as a disc was probably inherited from Sumer. Also, Heidel notes that in an early version of creation in the An-Antum list of gods (which are Sumerian) "Sky and earth are apparently to be viewed as two enormous discs..."<sup>14</sup>

In Babylonia one of the clearest indications that the earth was conceived of as flat is found in Tablet V of Enuma elish, where half the body of Tiamat, having been split in two by Marduk, is laid out as a base for mountains (lines 53, 57). Tiamat's half-body is laid out over the deep from whence the Tigris and Euphrates flow out from her eyes (lines 54, 55). Livingstone translates line 62 "Half of her [Tiamat] he made flat and firm, the earth."<sup>15</sup>

The circularity of the earth in Babylonian thought is possibly mentioned in several ancient texts and is seen directly in a sixth century BC clay map of the world, which most scholars believe is derived from much earlier models since the extent of the world known to the Babylonians of the sixth century BC was considerably larger than the world represented on the clay map. Clifford says the world in this map is conceived of "as a disk."<sup>16</sup>

The circular shape of the earth in Babylonian thought is also evidenced by a report in Diodorus Siculus (II:31:7) that the Babylonians told him the earth is "shaped like a boat and hollow." The boat is undoubtedly a coracle, used into modern times by natives on the Euphrates. The coracle is circular, rounded at the edges like the yolk of an egg, but, of course, hollow.<sup>17</sup>

Lambert while discussing the astronomy of the Babylonians noted that they were "without any understanding of a round [spherical] earth." He then went on to describe the Babylonian universe as several levels of discs, one above the other.

Livingstone deduced the same view of the Babylonian universe from Enuma elish and gives us a picture of it in the shape of a cylinder. This is echoed by Heidel who describes heaven and earth in Enuma elish as "two great discs...forced apart by wind so that the present universe is a sort of inflated sock surrounded by waters above and below."<sup>18</sup>

We may conclude that without any question the Babylonians thought of the earth as a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc, rounded perhaps like the yolk of an egg, but certainly not a planetary globe.

We conclude that in ancient Near Eastern thought the earth was always conceived of as a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc, never as a planetary globe.

## The Ancient Western View of the Earth

The earliest western witness to the shape of the earth is Homer. His view of the universe is the usual scientifically naive view. Kirk and Raven describe it: "The sky is a solid hemisphere like a bowl (Il. 17,425...5,504, Od.3,2...15,329 and 17,565.)...It covers the flat round earth." Heath describes the view of the earth in Homer (and Hesiod) similarly as a "flat disc" and says,

Over the flat earth is the vault of heaven, like a sort of hemispherical dome exactly covering it; hence it is that the Aethiopians dwelling in the extreme East and West are burnt black by the sun.<sup>19</sup>

Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities describes Homer's universe in the same way and specifically describes his view of the earth in the Iliad as a "large flat disc." No wonder Thomson entitles the first section of his first chapter on the history of Greek geography, "The Earth-Disc."<sup>20</sup>

Thales (c. 600 BC) conceived of the earth as a disc. Anaximander (c. 575 BC) thought the earth was disc-shaped. Anaximenes (c. 550 BC) accepted the flatness of the earth, but thought it was shaped "like a table." Xenophanes of Colophon (c. 525 BC) believed the earth was flat.<sup>21</sup>

Around the end of the sixth century BC, however, the idea of the earth as a planetary globe apparently began to emerge. The Pythagoreans (c. 500 BC) on the basis that the sphere and the circle are "perfect" figures (all points being equidistant from the center), speculated that the earth was a globe that travelled in a circle around a central fire. This was not a heliocentric universe for the sun also travelled in a circle around this supposed central fire. Parmenides (c. 475 BC) is also usually credited with accepting the view of the earth as a planetary globe.<sup>22</sup>

Some scholars, however, have argued that the idea of the earth as a globe did not emerge until the fourth century BC; and even if we credit the idea to the fifth

century BC, it was clearly not accepted on a widespread basis. Anaxagoras, Empedocles and Leucippus (all c. 450 BC) supposed the earth to be flat. Democritus (c. 425 BC) also compared the shape of the earth to a discus, but slightly concave.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, the majority of Greeks down to 400 BC still thought of the earth as disc-shaped, as is clearly evidenced by the fact that map makers in the time of Herodotus (c. 400 BC) uniformly rendered the earth just as Homer had described it, as a disc. Herodotus (4:36) writes,

I cannot help laughing at the absurdity of all the map-makers--there are plenty of them--who show Ocean running like a river round a perfectly circular earth, with Asia and Europe of the same size.

Herodotus seems to have rejected the idea that the earth was disc-shaped, but the ensuing context shows that his real objection to the maps of his day was that they showed Asia and Europe to be of the same size. That he still thought of the earth as flat seems evident in his statement (3:104) that India (being nearer the sunrise) "is hottest in the morning, not at midday as elsewhere." Thomson notes "Nowhere does Herodotus betray a suspicion that the earth may not be flat."<sup>24</sup>

It is in Plato (c. 375 BC) that one first finds a sure clear description of the earth as a globe. Plato's Phaedo describes the earth as "round" (108E) "like a ball"(110B) and as his Timaeus (38C,D) shows this is within the context of a geocentric universe. Thomson notes, "Certainly it was Plato's adoption that gave the globe a wider currency." Dreyer says, "From the age of Plato the spherical form of the earth was not disputed by any philosophers except the followers of Epikurus [c. 300 BC]." However, as Dreyer goes on to show there is evidence that nonscientific writers and common people went on believing the earth was flat. On into New Testament times most common people believed the earth was flat; and although with the rise of the globe concept some thinkers speculated that there was a second continent on the globe directly opposite the known one, this idea was also rejected by most people.<sup>25</sup>

The ancient western view of the earth's shape from Homer to Plato was then most commonly that of a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc; and until Plato with the possible exception of one or two philosophical schools, everyone believed the earth was a flat single continent. Further, even into new Testament times most common people continued to believe the earth was a flat single continent.

In summary we have seen that all scientifically naive tribal peoples and both eastern and western thinkers until the time of Plato conceived of the earth as a single flat continent, usually in the shape of a flat circular disc. We might note that this does not mean the earth was thought of as having the hard contours of a hockey puck. The edges of this disc could be softly rounded. The disc could be indented with seas, convex, concave or a little of both. But, even with these adjustments and taking into consideration the occasional exceptions to the disc concept, no one until the fifth century BC conceived of the earth as a planetary globe, and even then most people went on believing the earth was a flat single continent.

## The Historical Meaning of "Earth" in Gen 1:10

This brings us to the historical meaning of "earth" in Gen 1 and 1:10 in particular. Gen 1, regardless of when it may have been last edited, belongs conceptually to the second millennium BC--long before Plato's time and the rise of the concept of a planetary globe. Within its historical context, therefore, the conception of the "earth" in Gen 1 is most probably that of a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc. Given the fact that the early Hebrews were a scientifically naive tribal people, it is probable that they thought of the earth as a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc. In addition the Hebrews were influenced via the patriarchs by Mesopotamian "scientific" thought and via Moses and their time in Egypt by Egyptian "scientific" thought. Given this background, it is all the more probable that the writer and first readers of Gen 1 thought of the earth as a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc. Also there is archaeological and biblical evidence that the early Hebrews were technologically and hence by implication generally scientifically inferior to the peoples surrounding them.<sup>26</sup> So with all the peoples around them--including every educated person--thinking of the earth as a flat circular disc, it is highly improbable that the Hebrews were thinking of the earth in modern scientific terms as a planetary globe. Unless then we remove Gen 1 from its historical context, we must say that the historical meaning of "earth" in Gen 1:10 is very probably a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc.

## The Historico-Grammatical Meaning of "Earth" in Genesis 1:10

As we examine the historico-grammatical meaning of "earth" in Gen 1:10 we are of course still talking about its historical meaning; but, the emphasis now falls more upon the grammatical side and deals more with the biblical data than the extra-biblical. Within its historical context, as shown above, there is really no serious question about the meaning of "earth" in Gen 1. It is clearly defined as a flat, very probably circular disc and certainly not a globe. A heavy burden of proof, therefore, lies on anyone who believes the OT is rooted in history and yet says that the writer of Gen 1 was speaking of a planetary globe. It seems, in fact, a priori doubtful that God would even attempt to speak to a scientifically naive tribal people (ignorant slaves coming out of Egypt) in terms of a late Greek concept they had never heard of. Nevertheless, if the OT gives evidence that such indeed was the case, we are not only free to accept that meaning in Gen 1, but bound to do so.

The Hebrew word for earth ( , eres) in Gen 1 has several meanings in the OT, delineated in KB as (1) ground, piece of ground (2) territory, country (3) the whole of the land, the earth. In light of the universality of Gen 1:1, the meaning of eres in that verse is clearly the third listed meaning, "the whole of the land." If

isolated from its historical context, eres in Gen 1:1 could conceivably be a reference to the earth as a planetary globe. The word eres in Gen 1:10 could then be a reference simply to the continents on that planetary globe; and, in fact, it is the "dry land" (yabbasa) in contrast to the wet sea (cf. Exod 4:9; 14:16,22,29; Isa 44:3) which God in Gen 1:10 names eres, "Earth."

But, interpreting Gen 1:10 as a reference to continents on a planetary globe, although seeming quite reasonable to the modern Western reader, is completely contrary to its historical context. This is bad enough to make such an interpretation improbable; but, in addition, there is nothing whatsoever in the biblical context--either immediate or remote--which defines eres in Gen 1:1 as a planetary globe. This latter meaning is derived purely from our knowledge of modern Western science and simply read into the text. Interpreting eres in Gen 1:1 as a planetary globe is eisegetical, not exegetical.

Exegetically considered, the eres in Gen 1:1 is indeed the entire earth; but, we must let the context further define this. In Gen 1:2 the words, the eres ( ) clearly refer back to the eres mentioned in Gen 1:1; and show us that the eres in Gen 1:2 is also a reference to the entire earth. Gen 1:2 then, as it has historically been interpreted, is saying that the matter (or potential matter) of the entire eres was thoroughly intermixed with water; so that Gen 1:2 is looking forward to the formation of the entire eres as a solid body. When, therefore, the eres becomes a solid body in Gen 1:9, 10, it fulfills as it were the expectations of Gen 1:2; so that the most natural understanding of Gen 1:10a, "God called the dry land " eres," is that the dry land is the entire eres. This, of course, fits the historical context like a hand to a glove. The writer is not thinking of the entire eres as a globe, but simply as flat dry land.

In fact, the writer of Gen 1 makes it clear in verses six through eight that he is not defining eres as a globe, even in verses one and two. That is, in Gen 1:6-8 the entire sky is created in the form of a rock-solid firmament.<sup>27</sup> This firmament was understood by all peoples in OT times to be in the shape of a hemispherical dome (or a disc) which literally touched the earth (or the sea around the earth) at the horizon. The OT seems to reflect the belief that the firmament was a hemisphere which touched the earth at the horizon when it uses the phrase "from one end of heaven to the other" as synonymous with "from one end of earth to the other" (Deut 4:32; 28:64; 30:4), albeit the shape of the firmament seems to be more of a flat plane in Ezek 1. But, in either case, whether the sky was conceived as a hemispherical dome touching the earth at the horizon or a flat unbending disc above the earth, the earth below cannot be a sphere because if it were, half of the earth would have no sky. The biblical context, therefore, not only provides no basis for defining eres in Gen 1:1 as a globe (and in Gen 1:10 as the continents on that globe), it excludes this interpretation by giving us a concept of the sky which coheres perfectly with the ancient Near Eastern concept of the earth as a flat disc but cannot be harmonized with the modern concept of the earth as a globe.

It is worth noting also that interpreting eres in Gen 1:10 as the dry land on a globe does not fit the context of modern science any better than it fits the context of

Gen 1. For according to modern science the dry land on the globe preceded the formation of the sea by millions of years; but, according to Gen 1:1-10, the sea ( tehom) preceded the formation of the dry land.<sup>28</sup> This fact again tells us that the universe of Gen 1 is the universe as understood by all ancient Near Eastern peoples at that time and not as understood in our time. The earth of Gen 1:1, 2 and 10 is not a globe but a single flat continent in the shape of a flat circular disc.

There is one verse in the OT, however, which has often been cited at least by laymen as a proof that the earth was understood to be a globe. I refer to Isa 40:22 which speaks of God as "the One sitting above the circle of the earth...." This verse does imply that the earth is circular, but there is nothing either in the underlying Hebrew word ( hug) or in the context which necessarily implies anything more than the circularity of the flat earth-disc which the historical context and Gen 1 have given us as the meaning of "earth." If Isaiah had intended to speak of the earth as a globe, he would probably have used the word he used in 22:18 ( dur), meaning "ball."

In addition the phraseology of "sitting" in Isa 40:22 has reference to the Lord as King sitting upon his throne (cf. Isa 6:1; 14:13; 16:5) in "the heights of heaven" (Job 22:12-14) upon or above the firmament (Ps 2:4; 11:4; 29:10; Ezek 1:26) from whence he looks down on the earth (Ps 14:2; 102:19 [20]; Isa 63:15) and sees "all mankind," "all those dwelling on the earth" (Ps 33:13, 14); and from that height "earth's dwellers" as the rest of Isa 40:22 says, look like "grasshoppers." The "circle of the earth" upon or over which God is sitting, therefore, may refer not to the earth per se but rather, as many scholars have commented, to the firmament as a disc or hemispherical dome above the earth. If that is the case Isa 40:22 implies that the earth is flat for a firmament--whether hemisphere or disc--would leave half the earth without a sky if the earth were spherical. If the words, "circle of the earth" do not refer to the firmament, Isa 40:22 still implies that the earth is flat.

For as E. J. Young noted, Isa 40:22 describes God as seated on the zenith, the highest point directly overhead. Thus the verse implies that "earth's dwellers," "all mankind" according to Ps 33:13, 14, are clearly visible from a very high point directly overhead. This imagery fits most naturally the conception of the earth below as a flat disc, not a globe. For if the earth were a globe, part of "all mankind," namely "earth's dwellers" in Australia, Argentina, South Africa, etc. could not be seen from a point directly overhead. One could force the issue by appealing to God's omniscience, but Isa 40:22 (as well as the other verses which mention God looking down) is focused on God's height above the earth; and his seeing all mankind is derived from that height. That the phrase "circle of the earth" in no way implies sphericity is confirmed by the fact that in Egypt this phrase was used to refer to the earth as a flat circular disc.<sup>29</sup> So when interpreted within its historical and biblical context Isa 40:22 implies indeed that the earth is circular in shape but also that it is flat.

We find similar evidence that the earth was conceived of as flat in Daniel. In Dan 4:10, 11(7, 8) repeated in 4:20(17), it is said of a tree seen in a dream that it was of "enormous height...it's top touched the sky; it was visible to the end of all the

earth" ("visible to all the earth," 4:20). In the interpretation of the dream the tree is interpreted by Daniel to be King Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom: "your greatness grew until it reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth" (4:22[19]). Nebuchadnezzar of course did not really rule the entire earth even as known at that time, but this does not mean that the phrase "to the end of the earth" should be interpreted as limited to an area less than the entire earth-continent.

Ancient Near Eastern kings, regardless of the real size of their empire, were throughout the first millennium BC (and earlier) regularly described as rulers of the entire earth. Thus the kings Tiglath-Pileser I (1114-1076), Shalmaneser III (858-824) and Esarhaddon (680-669) were all described in inscriptions as "king of the world...king of (all) the four rims (of the earth)." Cyrus was apparently described similarly and Xerxes(485-465) says, "I am Xerxes...the king of this (entire) big and far(-reaching) earth." Nebuchadnezzar II himself says, "... (from) the Upper Sea (to) the Lower Sea [which means the whole earth continent]" and adds, "I have made...the city of Babylon to the foremost among all the countries and every human habitation."<sup>30</sup> As will be seen below ancient Egyptian kings also regularly claimed to rule over the entire earth. In all of these inscriptions it is the literal entire earth, that is, the entire flat earth-disc which is described as the extent of the king's dominion. Interpreted within their historical context, therefore, the words, "all the earth," in Dan 4;11 and 20 as a description of the extent of Nebuchadnezzar's empire refer literally to the entire earth.

The statement in Dan 4:11 that the tree was "visible to the end of all the earth" means, therefore, that the tree was so tall it was able to be seen by everyone living on earth. Yet the fact is, no matter how tall a tree might become it will not be able to be seen by everyone living on a globe (and there were thousands of people living south of the equator in the time of Nebuchadnezzar). Nor does the fact that this tree was seen in a dream give us any reason for obviating the implication of the text that the entire earth was conceived of as flat, for the universal visibility of the tree is predicated upon its height not upon its being seen in a dream. The statement only makes sense if the earth is defined as a flat continent. Daniel 4, therefore, confirms that "earth" in Gen 1 is properly defined as flat, not spherical.

Job 37:3 similarly implies that when God makes lightning, it is seen to the corners of the earth, that is, to the extent of the earth in all directions. The universality of these same terms in Isa 11:11, 12 show that Job is speaking of the entire earth, not just a part of it. Pss 77:18(19) and 97:4 make the thought of Job 37:3 explicit by saying that God's lightning "lit up the world ( ,tebel)." But lightning, no more than a tall tree, could be seen to the extent of a globe. Regardless of the hyperbole the most natural way of understanding these verses is that the authors were thinking of the earth as flat.

A final verse of Scripture which testifies that the "earth" was conceived in the OT as a single flat continent is Job 38:13. In a clearly cosmological context, not just local, this verse speaks of dawn grasping the earth by its "extremity or hem" ( , kanap; cf. Num 15:38; I Sam 15:27) and shaking the wicked out of it. The picture is

metaphorical, comparing the earth to a blanket or garment picked up at one end and shaken. A globe is not really comparable to a blanket or garment in this way. You cannot pick up a globe at one end. It does not even have an end. The picture fits in a natural way the concept of the earth as a single flat continent.

Similarly, phrases about the earth in a cosmological sense like "stretched out the earth" (Ps 136:6), "spread forth the earth" (Isa 42:4; 44:24), "breadth of the earth" (Job 38:18) and "longer than the earth" (Job 11:9) fit more naturally with a flat earth than a spherical one; and, this is all the more evident in that although the OT mentions the earth over two hundred and fifty times in a cosmological sense, it never once uses a phrase which implies that the earth is a sphere, much less a planetary globe.

There is one final significant concept in the OT which implies that the earth is a flat continent, not a globe, namely the fact that it was thought to be spread out over the sea. A full discussion of that data will be found in the next section about the sea. For now we conclude that there is no OT verse which implies the sphericity of the earth. Rather, all OT references which imply the shape of the earth confirm the historico-grammatical definition of "earth" in Gen 1:10: The earth is a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc.

## The Sea that Surrounds and Supports the Earth-Disc

As with the meaning of "earth" in Gen 1:10, one cannot expect to have a valid interpretation of the meaning of "sea(s)" in that verse if one removes it from its historical context. We begin, therefore, with the outermost circle of that historical context, the normal conceptions of pre-scientific minds, as seen in the thinking of tribal peoples around the world. Many of these peoples, however, have no concept (or no reported concept) of the sea in relationship to the earth. Those that do have such a concept, however, all seem to agree that the sea surrounds the earth-disc, both around its circumference and below it. In the reports below the italics are mine.

Speaking of the nomadic Altaic peoples of inner Asia (Turkic, Mongols, Tungus) Dupre writes, "Common to these cultures...is a cosmic mythology. The earth is thought to be a circular disc surrounded by an immense ocean." Holmberg seems to widen the geographical expanse of this notion when he says that the concept of an ocean all around the earth is "an essential feature in all the world pictures of the Asiatic peoples." Holmberg then goes on to relate creation stories which show that these Asiatic peoples believed that the earth floated on the sea that surrounded it. These stories all mention "the little earth-disc just formed upon the surface of the water," "on the surface in the middle of the ocean."<sup>31</sup>

Leon-Portilla, writing about ancient Mexican beliefs, says the "Nahuas conceived of horizontal space as an enormous disc of lands surrounded by water." He quotes Edward Seler, "In the manner of other peoples, the earth was conceived by

Mexicans as a large wheel or disc completely surrounded by water." The creation myths of the Chorti, Mayas of Guatamala, speak of "four seas that are surrounding and beneath the world."<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, "according to the cosmology of the Finno-Ugrians, a stream encircles the world..." This stream is called by some of them "a vast ocean." In their creation story the earth is "spread out over the primal sea."<sup>33</sup>

A few African tribes mention the earth surrounded by water. The west African Dan tribe disavow any knowledge as to the shape of the earth, but say heaven (an enclosing dome) "ends all around in the sea." Another African tribe (unidentified) say, "At the beginning everything was water." Then a god came to create the dry land, bringing some pieces of iron and earth with him. He "placed the iron on the water" and "spread the earth over it." Amongst the Bavenda and the Bathonga the earth "is thought to be a large flat disk floating on water."<sup>34</sup>

In North America both the Navaho and the Zuni believed the earth was encircled by an ocean, and the "earth-diver" myths which are often found among American Indians wherein the earth begins as an island also imply a surrounding ocean. In these "earth-diver" myths the completed earth "floats upon the primeval waters." Sometimes the earth is also given some extra support so that it does not sink into the ocean beneath it. The Huron Indians say that the creator took a little earth brought up by a toad and placed it carefully around the edge of the shell of a tortoise that was swimming in the primeval sea. This was the beginning of dry land which then grew and extended on every side. "All was sustained by the tortoise, which still supports the earth." The Cherokee along with other Southeast Indians say, "The earth is a great island floating in a sea of water, and suspended at each of the four cardinal points by a cord hanging down from the sky vault, which is of solid rock." They also appear to believe that because of sin the cords have been weakened, and hence they fear that "the earth would one day sink beneath the waters." The Bilquala Indians of British Columbia tell us, "The earth was raised from the sea by Masmalanich, who used a strong cable to do it. So that the new-won land would not sink again, Masmalanich fastened this cable to the sun, to which it is still affixed." Other North American Indians, however, do not mention the earth having any extra support. The Winnebago Indians just speak of "the subterranean waters that uphold the earth." The Athpascan peoples have a raven as their earth-diver and say, "On his descent to the ocean, the earth instantly rose, and remained on the surface of the water."<sup>35</sup>

Island peoples, perhaps quite naturally, think of the earth as surrounded by and floating on the sea. This is documented in the reports of tribal peoples in New Guinea, New Zealand, Micronesia, Polynesia and Japan.<sup>36</sup>

There are scientifically naive cosmologies which do not mention the sea at all; but, whenever the sea is brought into conjunction with the earth, it is, in every account that I have seen, always conceived of as surrounding the earth on all sides; and hence the earth (except in the case of a group of small islands) is perceived as a

single flat continent, an island floating on the sea. Also, just as the earth is usually conceived of as a flat circular disc, the sea surrounding it is also implicitly or explicitly conceived of as a flat circular body of water, one single circular sea. The circular earth may be indented by inlets from the sea surrounding it, but all of these inlets are just arms off of the larger circular sea in which the earth floats.

The conception of a circular earth set in a circular sea is, of course, the natural result of a scientifically naive person observing the circular horizon of both earth and sea. Even if the sea can not be directly seen on all sides of the earth, the prescientific human mind just naturally assumes that since the horizon of the sea that can be seen is circular, the sea must be circular and hence continue the rest of the way around the earth. Similarly, since the prescientific mind naturally concludes that the earth is a flat disc, it also just naturally concludes that since this disc is surrounded by a flat circular sea, it must be floating upon that sea. Thus it is that all over the world we find the belief in the earth as a flat circular disc floating in the middle of a single circular sea.

### The Ancient Far Eastern Belief in a Sea that Surrounds and Supports the Earth

Early Japanese writings perceived the earth as an island, so obviously in a surrounding ocean. The oldest Japanese sources also say, "of old when the land was young, it floated about as [if] it were floating oil."<sup>37</sup>

The oldest Chinese view of the universe clearly involved a "rim ocean" with four seas surrounding a square earth, but with the sea circular at the far edge in order to meet the inverted bowl-like firmament that comes down over the earth and sea on all sides. Later Chinese cosmology maintained this belief in an ocean surrounding the earth; and, although as mentioned above, a Taoist map shows the ocean squared, like a sidewalk going around a square block of nine square continents that make up the earth, I think this is an exception due to the influence of Yin and Yang philosophy and/or to the influence of grids used in map-making. Other ancient Chinese world maps show the surrounding ocean as circular. Thai cosmology has a clearly circular ocean surrounding the earth.<sup>38</sup>

There is no explicit statement in early Chinese literature which says the earth is floating, but since being surrounded by sea made the earth a large island, and since we know the Chinese thought of islands as floating on the sea, it is a fair presumption that they thought of the earth as floating. Further, this is implied by the relatively early Tao Te Ching which speaks of the importance of the power of "the One" without which the "settled earth might sink." In later Chinese cosmological systems we are specifically told "the earth floats on the water;" and we might add that this water is the same sea that surrounds the earth.<sup>39</sup>

The oldest Indian literature, the Rig Veda, does not explicitly mention an ocean around the earth; but, the idea seems to be present in texts like 1:116:5, "that ocean that has no beginning" [may mean that it flows in a circle] and 5:85:6 which mentions "the one single ocean." It also seems to be reflected in references to two oceans and to four oceans, apparently one at each cardinal point as in Chinese and Mayan cosmology. Sproul even identifies the word Rasa in Rig Veda 10:121 as the "earth-encircling stream." Later Vedic texts state explicitly that the earth is surrounded by water; and, this idea seems to have been present from the beginning. Buddhist and Hindu cosmologies both have a circular ocean around the earth.<sup>40</sup>

Gombrich says the concept of waters under the earth is not found in the Rig Veda though "alluded to several times in later Vedic literature, and we shall meet them in the earliest Buddhist texts." It would appear, however, that Gombrich is a stickler for explicit statements and may be missing some clear implications. Kuiper, in contrast, says that from references in the Rig Veda as understood in the light of myths and hymns outside the Rig Veda, "...the following picture can be reconstructed....the primeval hill, which is still floating on the primeval waters has to be riveted to the bottom...[After it is anchored it] starts growing on all sides, until it has the expanse of the earth." Kuiper's reconstruction goes on to speak of "the primeval waters on which the earth was believed to rest." Thus in Kuiper's view the Rig Veda refers to the earth floating on the primeval waters. Kuiper's view seems to be confirmed by other scholars who interpret the word Rasa in the Rig Veda to mean a river that goes around the earth and surrounds the earth from below. The earth thus floats on the sea that surrounds it. It would appear then that the concept of water under the earth is envisioned in the Rig Veda but only clearly enunciated in later Vedic texts such as the one that Kuiper quotes wherein the earth "while still floating on the surface of the water began to grow."<sup>41</sup>

The concept of a floating earth was incorporated into early Buddhism and is generally understood to have been inherited by Buddhism from earlier Indian thought. The Maha-Parinibbana-Sutra (c. 300 BC) says, "This great earth, Ananda, is established on water, the water on wind, and the wind rests on space." Another Buddhist sutra says, "On what rests the earth?" - "On the circle of water." - "And the circle of water?" - "On the wind." - "And the wind?" - "On the ether." Later Hindu thought also conceived of the earth as a floating island bearing so much progeny that "the gods must frequently prevent it from 'sinking' under the weight of all the beings."<sup>42</sup> So in both Buddhist and Hindu thought the earth was understood to be an island floating on the sea that surrounded it.

We conclude that although early texts are not always explicit, it seems that people in the Far East believed the earth was both surrounded by and floating on an ocean. This concept is clearly spelled out in later texts.

## The Ancient Near Eastern Belief in a Sea that Surrounds and Supports the Earth-Disc

In ancient Egypt the primeval ocean was thought to surround the earth and was called the "the great ring" or "great circuit or circle." This earth-encircling sea has been directly compared by Egyptologists to the earth-encircling Greek Okeanos.<sup>43</sup>

A Hymn of Victory for Thutmose III (1490-1436) speaks of him trampling down "the ends of the lands; that which the Ocean encircles is enclosed within thy grasp." Similarly a stela of Amenhotep II (1439-1406) in the context of world dominion ("all countries are under your fear" ... "His borders reach the rim of heaven" ... "He commanded him to conquer all lands") says, "His portion is that on which Re shines; To him belongs what Ocean encircles." An inscription for Queen Hatshepsut (1486-1469) likewise lays claim to universal dominion and makes the earth-encircling sea the boundary of the territory she rules, saying "the lands were hers, the countries were hers, all that the heavens cover, all that the sea encircles." An inscription exalting the queen of Thutmose III and undoubtedly unwilling to give her anything less than universal fame says, "Her fame has encompassed the 'Great Circle' (Okeanos)." Finally in the most explicit terms a hymn praising Ptah in the time of Rameses III (1195-1164) says, "who founded the earth...who surrounded it with Nun, and the sea."<sup>44</sup>

In addition, Morenz tells us that in the ancient Egyptian conception of the cosmos, "The earth rests on or in the primeval ocean." The Egyptologist, John Wilson, speaking of the earth as a "flat platter" says, "This platter floated in water. There were the abysmal waters below on which the platter rested, called by the Egyptians 'Nun'." Frankfort says Nun, the primeval ocean, "became Okeanos, surrounding the earth and supporting it....the earth floats upon Nun."<sup>45</sup> There does not seem to be any question that the Egyptians believed the earth floated on the ocean that surrounds it.

The idea of the earth floating upon Nun is related to the Egyptian concept of a hillock being the first earth to arise out of the primeval ocean: "The huge mound which emerged from Nun at the very beginning, when heaven and earth were still united." This primeval hillock was understood to be an island. This fact along with the similarity of this concept to that in the "earth-diver" myths as well as the fact that the god Atum who is associated with this mound is described as "floating" (e.g. CT 714) tell us that the primeval hillock from which the earth developed was floating on the waters of Nun. Additionally, a variant spelling of Nun wherein the sign for sky is upside down indicates that "The Primeval Waters also exist below the earth."<sup>46</sup>

That the earth was thought to rest on the primeval waters (Nun) is also seen in the Egyptian belief that Nun is the source of the Nile (and all other earthly waters). One Egyptian text describing the Nile as it gushes forth at its source interchanges the words "Nun" and "Nile": "...the Nile which comes out of both mountains, the Nun, which comes out of the cavern..." Gray displays an Egyptian

drawing that shows Nun "emitting the two or four sources of all waters from his mouth..."<sup>47</sup>

Kramer tells us that the Sumerians conceived of the earth as being surrounded by water. The evidence he offered for his view is that the goddess Nammu who is said to be "the mother of heaven and earth" is written with the ideogram for sea. Jacobsen, however, contended that this ideogram, engur, did not refer to the sea (a-ab-ba), but to the fresh water under the earth (abzu). This objection, though true, is, nevertheless, too narrowly based to refute Kramer for as Kramer and Tsumura have pointed out, the Sumerian concept of fresh water under the earth overlaps that of an earth-encircling sea. So it is that M. H. Pope agrees with Kramer that the Sumerian words for fresh water (engur and abzu) were more or less synonymous with the Sumerian word for sea (a-ab-ba). We also know that Babylonian cosmology was heavily indebted to Sumerian concepts, and Babylonian cosmology clearly has a sea around the earth, as Jacobsen admits. Further Jacobsen admits the existence of the earth-encircling sea in the context of the epic of Gilgamesh which certainly goes back to Sumerian sources.<sup>48</sup> So, it seems probable that the Sumerians did believe in an earth-surrounding sea.

As to the earth floating on the sea, Lambert tells us that the Sumerians conceived of the earth as a flat disc which overlaid the Apsu [Sumerian, abzu]. Deimel says the Abzu is "the sweet-water abyss in which the earth swims." Jacobsen, who as we saw above opposed Kramer's translation of engur (a synonym of abzu) as "Sea" in the sense of a sea surrounding the earth, nevertheless said, "Enki (Ea) was god of the underground waters that come to the surface in rivers, pools and marshes. The Sumerians imagined them as a vast subterranean freshwater sea, which they called Abzu or Engur." Sumerian lexica define Abzu and Engur as "the ocean," understood to be below the earth. Albright defines the home of Enki (Ea), that is the Abzu, as "the subterranean fresh-water ocean whence the rivers flow"; and he gives a Sumerian text which he translated in part: "Water which down the pure Euphrates he (Ea) had guided, the product of the apsu...[Sumerian text, abzu]."<sup>49</sup>

The Sumerians then believed that the earth rested on an ocean, a fresh-water ocean that was the source of all rivers, including the great Euphrates, as well as of all pools, fountains and marshes. But being fresh water does not mean that this ocean was not a part of the sea around the earth. For as pointed out above the Sumerians did not sharply distinguish their concept of water under the earth from their concept of the surrounding sea. The two concepts overlapped so that in Sumerian as Pope said, "The sea was conceived as a single body of water."<sup>50</sup> Thus the earth was thought to float on the sea that surrounds it.

As to Babylonian cosmology, there is evidence in the Etana Legend that the Babylonians believed in an earth-encircling sea. In a neo-Assyrian version of the story an eagle carries Etana (a king of Kish after the Flood) up to heaven. As Etana rises higher and higher above the earth, he comments on how the land and sea appear.

He first says, "The wide sea is just like a tub," thus indicating that the sea was conceived of as circular in shape or at least encircling the earth. King translated this or a related version, "The sea is a girdle around the earth." As Etana rises higher, he says "the wide sea is just like a bread basket," again indicating a shape that encircles the earth.<sup>51</sup>

Clearer yet that the Babylonians believed the earth was encircled by water is the Mappa Mundi mentioned above. In that Babylonian map of the world, the flat circular earth is clearly surrounded by water called the "Bitter River." All scholars I have seen who discuss this map understand the "Bitter River" to be the earth-encircling ocean.<sup>52</sup>

Since the Babylonians inherited the concepts of the Sumerians, they also believed that the earth floated on an ocean. This is perhaps made most obvious in a creation text apparently from Eridu which begins with a primeval sea. To create the earth Marduk constructs a reed raft "on the surface of the waters," creates dust or dirt and piles it up on the raft. The same picture of the earth spread out over the waters is found in Enuma elish where Marduk having made half of the body of Tiamat into the firmament, uses the other half to construct the earth. He then opens "the deep" which is obviously below her body and "caused to flow from her eyes the Euphrates (and) Tigris" (5:54, 55). This is the same picture which we have in the Sumerian text cited above where the Euphrates is "the product of the Apsu." That Tiamat has water below her is also evidenced by Enuma elish 5:56 where Marduk "closed up her nostrils, reserved the water" and in 5:58 where he "drilled fountains in her." Other Babylonian texts also make reference to rivers coming up from the deep below. Both a section of the Code of Hammurabi and several sections of the Atrahasis epic mention "floods [rising] from the abyss." In Babylonian thought then, the earth floated on an Ocean, a Deep, an Abyss (Apsu). This ocean was spoken of as being as deep under the earth as the sky was high over the earth. Accordingly, it was an inexhaustible source of water for all springs and lakes as well as for mighty rivers like the Tigris and the Euphrates.<sup>53</sup>

Further, as shown above, this Apsu upon which the earth floated was thought of as the same sea that encircled the earth. Thus it is that Lambert commented on the sea which the Mappa Mundi shows surrounding the earth,

Although as preserved the text does not make this clear, the author must surely have accepted the idea that the water around the earth also extended beneath it.<sup>54</sup>

In summary it is clear that ancient Egyptians and Mesopotamians believed that the earth, a flat circular disc, was surrounded by a single circular sea. In addition they believed that the earth floated on this sea and that it was this underlying sea which supplied the water in springs, wells and all rivers including the mighty Nile and Euphrates.

## The Ancient Western Belief in a Sea that Surrounds and Supports the Earth-Disc

In Homer, our earliest western source, the earth-disc is surrounded by Ocean. The Iliad 14:200-1 reads, "Since I go now to the ends of the generous earth on a visit to Okeanos..." The Odyssey 11:21 says, "And now he reached earth's limits, the deep stream of the Ocean..." On Achilles' shield (II 18:483-607) was a picture of the earth; and running "around the uttermost rim of the shield's strong structure" was "the great strength of the Ocean River." Bunbury, in harmony with numerous classical scholars, concluded from these and other similar Homeric passages,

There can be no doubt that Homer in common with all his successors down to the time of Hecataeus [c. 500 BC], believed the earth to be a plane, of circular form, surrounded on all sides by the Ocean...<sup>55</sup>

In the time of Herodotus (c. 450 BC) the general conception of world geography was essentially the same as in the time of Homer. Herodotus as mentioned earlier (4:36), wrote of "all the map-makers--there are plenty of them--who show Ocean running like a river around a perfectly circular earth..." It is noteworthy that Herodotus ascribes the ancient conception of an ocean running around a circular earth to all the mapmakers of his day. Clearly, down to the fifth and probably fourth century BC, ancient western peoples went on believing that the earth was a flat circular disc with an ocean flowing around it. Herodotus himself apparently denied the perfect circularity of the earth; but, he held on to the belief that it was flat and largely went along with the idea of an earth-encircling ocean (I:205; II:24) stating only that he could not find eye-witnesses of a sea north and northwest of Europe (III:115).

Just as with regard to the flatness of the earth, virtually no doubts about the earth-encircling ocean appeared before the fifth century BC and no substantial doubts before the fourth century BC. In fact, even after the concept of an earth-globe was accepted, most people including most educated people just shifted their concept of the earth-encircling ocean to an "inhabited-earth" encircling ocean. No less minds than those of Eratosthenes (c. 250 BC), Posidonius (c. 100 BC), Strabo (c. 25 BC) and Pliny (c. 100 AD) believed that the inhabited earth was encircled by an ocean and cited reasons for their belief.<sup>56</sup>

In Homer there are also hints that the earliest Greeks thought of the sea as upholding the earth. II 9:183 describes Poseidon, the god of the sea, as "earth-holder or upholder." Leaf commented on this epithet, "perhaps originally supporting the earth, regarded as floating on the sea." The same verse in the Iliad also describes Poseidon as "earth-shaker"; and Poseidon was worshipped as the god of earthquakes. This concept corresponds with the idea encountered in tribal thought as well as in Thales (reported in Seneca QN 3:14) and others that earthquakes are caused by movement of the sea below the earth.<sup>57</sup>

Also, just as Babylonians and Egyptians thought of the sea below as the source of springs and rivers, Homer (II 21: 195-7) speaks of the Ocean being the source of all seas, rivers, springs and wells. Further just as the Egyptians sometimes referred to the Nile by the name of its source, the underground ocean Nun, the earliest Greeks referred to the Nile as Okeanos.<sup>58</sup> Herodotus also (2:25) says that a legendary theory of the Nile is that it comes from Okeanos. Aristotle (De Caelo B 13, 294a, 28) speaking of those who say "the earth rests on water," thus evidencing that this was at least a minor school of thought, mentions "the most ancient account" as coming from Thales who said the earth "stays in place through floating like a log..."

Nevertheless, classical scholars generally see the idea of an ocean undergirding the earth as a conception held by the Greeks prior to Homer and/or assimilated by some Greeks from contact with Near Eastern thought.<sup>59</sup> We would conclude, therefore, that although the earliest Greeks probably believed the earth floated on the sea, this idea continued into classical times only as a minor school of thought.

In summary, we have found that as was the case with the flatness of the earth, all scientifically naive tribal peoples (who bring an ocean into their cosmology) as well as both Eastern and Western thinkers down to the fifth and even the fourth century BC believed that the sea was a single circular body of water that surrounded the flat earth. In addition (with the exception of later Western thinkers) all of these peoples believed that the flat earth floated on the sea that surrounded it, and that the underlying sea upon which the earth floated was the source of all springs, wells, and rivers on earth including the great Nile and Euphrates.

## The Historical Meaning of "Sea(s)" in Gen 1:10

As we have seen, all scientifically naive tribal peoples who include a sea in their cosmology just naturally think that the horizon of the sea continues the rest of the way around the earth, and that hence the earth is surrounded by a circular sea and that since the earth is flat, it must be floating on that sea. It is probable, therefore, that the Hebrews, whose background was also tribal and scientifically naive, also thought of the earth as being surrounded by a circular sea and that since the earth is flat, it must be floating on that single surrounding sea.

The writer and first readers of Gen 1 also inherited Mesopotamian "scientific" concepts from their patriarchal fathers and no doubt were influenced by Egyptian "scientific" concepts during their stay in Egypt. Moses, in fact, was "educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22; Exod 2:10). It is highly probable, therefore, that the writer and first readers of Gen 1 defined the sea in the same way that all educated people in the ancient Near East did, namely, as a single circular body of water in the middle of which the flat earth-disc floated and from which all wells, springs and rivers derived their water.<sup>60</sup>

It is highly improbable from a historical point of view that the writer and first readers of Gen 1 defined the sea as a body of water embedded in a planetary globe; and the burden of proof lies on anyone who says they did define it that way since no one in the ancient world before the fifth century BC defined it that way. I conclude, therefore, that only a clear statement from Scripture could overthrow the highly probable historical conclusion that the sea in Gen 1:10 was defined by the writer as a single circular body of water in the middle of which the flat earth-disc floated.

## The Historico-Grammatical Meaning of "Sea(s)" in Genesis 1:10

The "Sea(s)" ( , yammim) in Gen 1:10 is the name God gave to the "gathered waters." The "gathered waters," 1:9 tells us, are the "waters under the firmament." The "waters under the firmament," 1:7 tells us, are those which were below the firmament as a result of creating a firmament "in the midst of the waters" as mentioned in 1:6. "The waters" of 1:6 refer back to "the waters" of 1:2b upon the face of which the Spirit of God hovered; and the waters upon the face of which the Spirit hovered, 1:2a tells us, are the Deep ( , tehom).

The "Deep" (tehom) as is seen in other biblical passages (Ps 104:6; Isa 51:10) and in Semitic cognates (Akkadian, Ugaritic, Eblaite) is a sea. So, the sea of Gen 1:10 is half of the sea of Gen 1:2. But the sea in 1:2 was unlit, undivided and unbounded (ungathered), that is, unlimited in extent--similar to the way we think of outer space today. The sea in 1:10, on the other hand, has been lit (1:3), divided (1:6,7) and bounded (1:9). Only in 1:9,10 does it become a bounded sea. Prior to the action of 1:9 the waters under the firmament were unbounded. For all practical

purposes they were located in all places. In 1:9 they were gathered into "one place." The LXX, reading (miqweh) instead of (maqom, "place") says the waters were gathered into one gathering or pool (Cf. Exod 7:10); and a number of scholars prefer this reading although Cassuto, Leupold, Westermann and others reject it. In either case, the unbounded primordial waters are gathered into one place, one pool.

More than one commentator over the centuries, however, has stumbled over the fact that God calls the waters in one place "seas," plural. T. L. Fenton was so sure this could not be done he argued that the word "one" ( , ehad) was not part of the original text.<sup>61</sup> His three-fold argument was that the Israelites always knew of and spoke of several bodies of water each being a sea (e.g., Sea of Chinnereth, the Dead Sea, the Great Sea), the singular "sea" is used of sea in general in Gen 1:26,28, and the plural "seas" in 1:22 is parallel to Lev 11:9-10 and therefore a real plural. So the Israelites would not use a plural for a single body of water, as is done in the MT in Gen 1:10. Granted that his basic facts are correct and the usage in 1:10 may be unusual, there is still no logical proof that the Israelites would not refer to a single body of water as plural "seas." That is, just because they sometimes or even usually used the singular to refer to sea in general and the plural to refer to several seas does not logically demand that this was always the case. The word "one" in MT (and in LXX) is the lectio difficilior and in spite of some plausible reasoning, Fenton has not proven that it is probably a textual error.

As to the word (yam, sea) being used in the plural for a single body of water, KB lists the very same singular meaning, "sea," for the plural of yam as it does for the singular. Further there is good reason to believe that KB is correct. The boundaries of the city of Tyre were located only in the Mediterranean Sea, yet Ezek 27:4 and 28:2 describe the city as being located "in the heart of the seas," plural. Further the singular yam and the plural yammim are occasionally used almost interchangeably in the OT. Jer 47:7, e.g., describes Ashkelon, which is on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, as being on "the shore of the sea," singular yam. Judges 5:17, on the other hand, describes Asher which is also on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea as being on "the shore of the seas," plural yammim. Also, with reference to the great number of descendants of David, Jer 33:22 refers to the "sand of the sea," singular yam. But, with reference to the great number of widows to come from the judgment of Jerusalem, Jer 15:8 refers to "the sand of the seas," plural yammim. It is logically possible that Jeremiah was making a distinction in the two cases, but the phrase in each case seems equally idiomatic and general.

In any case, one sea, as Judg 5:17 and Ezek 27:4 and 28:2 in particular show, can be called "seas." Fenton apparently would disallow these instances of plural "seas" meaning one "sea" because they are poetic whereas Gen 1:10 is prose. But, Gen 1, although primarily prose, incorporates poetic touches from v. 2 with its tohu wabohu to v. 27 with its overtly poetic structure. Cassuto, no mean Hebrew scholar, not only does not hesitate to accept yammim in v. 10 as a plural with a singular meaning but directly rejects Fenton's reasoning by identifying it as a "poetic plural" and citing Judg 5:17 as a parallel. Given the fact observed by GKC 124a that "The

plural is by no means used in Hebrew solely to express a number of individuals or separate objects, but may also denote them collectively," it is not surprising that the overwhelming majority of Hebrew scholars both past and present have had no problem accepting the plural yammim in Gen 1:10 as perfectly good Hebrew with the singular meaning "sea," usually identifying the plural as a plural of extension.<sup>62</sup> We conclude, therefore, that the Hebrew text of Gen 1:9 is sound and means just what it says: The unbounded sea of Gen 1:2, having been divided into an upper and lower half (Gen 1:6-8), the lower half was gathered together into "one place" or "one pool." As we saw above, the historical context of Gen 1 defines the sea of Gen 1:10 as a single circular body of water surrounding the earth-disc. In other words, the historical context defines the sea of Gen 1:10 as a body of water gathered together into one place or pool in the midst of which the earth appears--just as Gen 1:9, 10 describes.

Further, we might note, there is a good reason why this one body of water surrounding the earth is called "sea(s)." It is because like the earth-surrounding Ocean in Homer's cosmology (II 21:195-7) as well as in Pliny's geography (NH 2:68:173) and, in fact, in all ancient geography this single body of water surrounding the earth was thought of as connected to all inland seas.<sup>63</sup> The biblical map of the world mentioned below (drawn from the data given in Gen 10) illustrates the ancient conception quite well. That map shows the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and all other seas as all just inlets off of a major surrounding sea. There is just one sea, but all inland seas are branches off of it. Hence, it is quite appropriate to call the whole gathered collection "Sea(s)." Indeed, given the ancient concept of one earth-encircling sea with all of the known seas as inlets off of it, it is difficult to think of a more apt name to describe this single yet many-armed sea than the collective name given to it in Gen 1:9, 10--"Sea(s)."

As to the shape of this one collection of seas, besides the fact that it is defined as circular by its historical context there is good evidence in Scripture to believe that the Hebrews conceived of it as circular. This shape is indicated in Prov 8:27b where speaking of creation, Wisdom says she was present "When he (God) inscribed a circle on the face of the Deep." The context of creation and the word "Deep" (tehom) in this verse take us directly back to Gen 1. But where in Gen 1 does God inscribe or firmly set a circle on the face of the Deep? Possibly in v. 7 when the circular dome of the firmament was set in place; but, I think more probably in v. 9 when the water below was "gathered into one place." In any case, the face of the deep had a circle imposed upon it, and the implication is that verse 9a's pool of gathered water was circular in shape.

Job 26:10 similarly says, "He has inscribed a circle on the face of the waters as a boundary of light and darkness." Pope, I believe rightly, regards this verse as a parallel to Prov 8:27 and says it refers to the primaeval ocean of Gen 1. The verse as a whole is well illuminated by a quote from Seler regarding the Nahua's view of the world: "From the water that surrounds the world, the morning sun rises from the East; in the evening, it sets in the West." The "water that surrounds the earth" is, of course,

circular, with the sun rising and setting at the horizon. Thus as Job says, the "circle on the face of the waters" is "a boundary of light and darkness." In Babylonian and Egyptian texts also, the rising and setting of the sun is related to the circular sea that surrounds the earth.<sup>64</sup> Job 26:10 thus coheres perfectly with the historical data, and tells us that the body of water which surrounds the earth in Gen 1:10 is circular in shape.

The bronze hemispherical (or cylindrical) sea which was set up in the temple courtyard in I Kgs 7:23 also seems to indicate by its shape that the earthly sea was conceived of as circular. For although it would not be unusual for a container of water to be circular, this basin of water could certainly have been called simply a basin or laver, as was the case with the simpler original (Exod 30:18). Instead, it was called a sea (yam). This name "sea" for the laver parallels the name of the laver which was set up in Babylonian temples and called apsu, the word for the water under the earth and around the earth as well. Thus A. R. Johnson having mentioned that in the Hebrew cosmology the earth is supported on the cosmic sea said,

Moreover, it seems clear that the "bronze sea" which figured so prominently in the furnishings of Solomon's Temple was intended as a replica of the cosmic sea...<sup>65</sup>

Prov 8:27, Job 26:10 and even I Kgs 7:23 thus testify that when the sea was gathered into one place in Gen 1:9 that one place was conceived of as circular in shape. This biblical definition of the "sea" as a single body of water circular in shape--with the earth as a flat disc in the midst of that circular sea--is in perfect agreement with the historical definition.

A map recently drawn to illustrate the Table of Nations described in Gen 10 gives striking biblical confirmation to this biblical description of the earth and the sea.<sup>66</sup> In that map the territories of the nations of Gen 10 form a squarish circle, with the varied seas of earth all being inlets off of the surrounding sea. The surrounding sea is not explicitly identified on the map; so no consideration was apparently given to Gen 1. It is all the more remarkable and confirmatory, therefore, that this map sets forth a world in the shape of a flat circular disc surrounded on all sides by the sea just as it is described in Gen 1:9, 10.

This picture of the earth surrounded by sea also seems to be reflected in several phrases used in Scripture. Rudhardt introduces us to one of those phrases when after noting that in the cosmographies of many people waters "make up a vast expanse, in the middle of which lies the earth, like an island," he goes on to say that these surrounding waters "may be divided into two oceans, on either side of the world..."<sup>67</sup> The phrase which he thereby introduces is "from sea to sea" as found in Ps 72:8 and Zech 9:10b, both of which describe the geographically universal rule of the coming Messiah as being "from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth."

The context of these verses which are clearly speaking of the geographically universal rule of the Messiah over all nations on earth (Ps 72:9-11; Zech 9:10b; Cf.

the Messianic Ps 2:8 and Mic 5:4) implies that the phrase "from sea to sea" is a reference to the "two oceans on either side of the world" which enclose within their grasp the entire earth, the two oceans "in the middle of which lies the earth like an island." The reference may be specifically to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf or perhaps even to the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, but not to these bodies of water just in themselves but as major representative parts of the "two oceans on either side of the world." This understanding of the phrase "from sea to sea" is strengthened by the fact that in Mesopotamia where a universal sea was understood to be surrounding the world, the phrase "from the lower sea to the upper sea" [both understood as parts of the sea surrounding the world] denotes the entire known world.<sup>68</sup>

When you understand the ancient concept of the sun rising out of the sea in the east, travelling across the sky over the entire earth, and going down into the sea in the west, you can easily understand how the phrase "from sea to sea" came to denote the entire earth. The biblical terms "eastern sea" and "western sea", especially as used in Zech 14:8 where the context is one of apocalyptic universality, regardless of which specific bodies of water the writer may have had in mind, seem to refer more importantly to the eastern and western halves of the ocean that surrounds the earth.<sup>69</sup>

There is also reason to believe that the yam sup of Scripture is not simply a reference to the Red Sea as we understand that name nor to the more popular "Sea of Reeds." Rather, it is a reference to the yam sop, the "Sea of the End," that is the sea at the end or edge of the earth.<sup>70</sup>

The biblical data is thus in complete agreement with the historical data that "earth" and "sea(s)" in Gen 1:10 refer to a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc lying in the middle of a circular sea.

As we come to that part of the historical definition which defines the earth as floating on the sea, we are in the happy position of having Ps 136:5, 6 and 7 refer back respectively to the second, third and fourth days of creation in Gen 1; so that Ps 136:6 is an inspired comment on Gen 1:10. R. L. Harris recognized this and said, "In Psalm 136:6 the reference to the earth above the waters is a reference to the record of creation of the earth in Gen 1:10." But, having earlier said that "the Bible gives no suggestion of...a sea on which the earth floats," he went on to say that Ps 136:6 "refers to land masses above the shoreline, that surely is all."<sup>71</sup>

But Harris made no attempt to exegete Ps 136:6 either historically or grammatically. Instead he lifted the Psalm out of its ancient Near Eastern historical context wherein the earth does float on a sea, set the Psalm down in the context of modern western science and thereby made verse 6 refer to "land masses" when, as we have seen above, the historico-biblical meaning of "earth" is a single land mass, a flat circular disc in the midst of the sea. In addition, he ignored the verb "spread out" ( raqa ) and thereby made verse 6 say simply "the earth is above the waters."

The verb in Ps 136:6, raqa, according to KB can mean "stamp, beat out" (e.g., II Sam 22:43; Ezek 6:11) or "spread out" (e.g., Isa 42:5). The meaning of the verb is derived from working with metals which when beat out, spread out. Thus in Ex 39:3 the builders of the tabernacle "beat out sheets of gold." If you beat a piece of metal long enough it spreads out into a sheet, which can then be used to overlay other materials. Thus bronze beaten into sheets was used to overlay the altar (Num 16:39 [17:4]).

The meaning "stamp, beat out" for the verb raqa does not fit the context of Ps 136:6 and virtually no one has attempted to translate it that way in this verse. This leaves the meaning "spread out." We conclude thus far that Ps 136:6 should be translated, "[The Lord who] spread out the earth \_\_\_\_\_ the waters."

The exact relationship of the earth to the waters is expressed by the preposition (al). The preposition al usually means "upon" and that is the first meaning given for it in both KB and BDB. Further, the other meanings of al all flow out from the meaning "upon." Thus the first thing BDB says about the preposition al is that its meaning is "upon, and hence...[then follows a list of its other meanings]." The meaning, "upon," therefore, is an appropriate translation of al in a text like Ps 136:6 where the immediate context does not lead us to any other meaning. The meaning "upon" is also the one most often chosen by modern translators of this verse; and interestingly, even though R. L. Harris was a major editor of the NIV, the NIV still translates Ps 136:6, "who spread out the earth upon the waters." The Hebrew invites this translation, and there is no contextual reason to translate the verse differently.<sup>72</sup>

Unfortunately, the only time the verb raqa is used with the preposition al in the OT is in Ps 136:6. But, raqa has a close synonym, namely (radad) which also apparently means "beat" or "spread out;" and, this synonym is used with the preposition al in I Kgs 6:32 where it describes overlaying the cherubim with gold plating: "he spread out the gold over or upon (al) the cherubim." It seems very probable, therefore, that the synonymous phraseology in Ps 136:6 (especially in the light of Isa 40:19 which uses raqa in the sense of "overlay") means that the earth is spread out over or upon the sea. As gold overlays the cherubim in I Kgs 6:32 so the earth overlays the sea in Ps 136:6.

It is noteworthy that not only does this concept of the earth spread out over the sea perfectly match the concept as defined by the historical context, but the very phraseology "spread over or on" was used in other cultures to describe the earth floating on the sea. Thus in the Ob-Ugric cosmology the earth is "spread out over the primeval sea." A Buddhist sutra says, "Even as the lotus leaf here lies spread on the water, so this earth lies spread on the waters." In the African creation story mentioned earlier a god placed iron on the water and "spread the earth over it."<sup>73</sup> The language is the same, of course, because the underlying concept is the same; and the underlying concept is the same because it is the natural conclusion of a prescientific mind that if a flat earth is surrounded by a sea it is spread out on top of that sea.

Ps 24:2 also speaks of the creation of the earth and hence is indirectly referring back to Gen 1:10. The Psalm says, God "founded" the earth-continent (eres-tebel, v.1) "upon the seas." The word "upon" is the same Hebrew word, al, as was used in Ps 136:6. Modern scholars of Hebrew regularly translate al in Ps 24:2 as "upon" and so do all English translations that I have seen (KJV, ERV, ASV, NASV, RSV, NEB, Berkeley, Amplified, Moffat, Jerusalem, and NIV).<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless Leupold with regard to Ps 24:2, says that choosing "upon" as the meaning of al is "the more difficult sense of the preposition." He chose the meaning, "by" or "by the side of."<sup>75</sup> Yet he not only gives no contextual reason for rejecting the primary meaning of al, like Harris he lifted the Psalm out of its historical context wherein the meaning "upon" is the most natural force of the preposition; and, he ignored the force of the verb.

The verb "found" ( , yasad) which is used in Ps 24:2 means to lay down a foundational base for a building or wall (I Kgs 5:17 [31]; 7:10; 16:34; Ezra 3:10-12) or to set something upon a foundational base (Cant 5:15; Ps 104:5). With either meaning the most natural meaning of al would be its primary meaning, "upon." This is confirmed by the three other times that al is used in the OT with the verb "found" (yasad): Cant 5:15; Ps 104:5; Amos 9:6. In all three cases, the meaning "upon" is demanded by the context. Employing the meaning "by the side of" with the verb yasad in these verses results in ludicrous translations. This is particularly evident in the case of Ps 104:5 which comes out, "He founded the earth by the side of its foundations." All of these verses testify that when the preposition al is used with the verb yasad, the most probable meaning of the preposition is "upon." Ps 104:5 especially demands that al be translated "upon" in Ps 24:2 because just like Ps 24:2 it is speaking of the founding of the earth.

Ps 24:2 is saying then that God "founded," that is, firmly placed the earth upon the seas, the seas being a foundational base. The flat earth-continent is resting on the seas. The word "seas" (yammim) reminds us of Gen 1:10b where God called the gathered waters of the tehom "Seas" (yammim); and this again tells us, as did Ps 136:6 that Gen 1:10 is saying that the flat earth-continent was fixed "upon" or on top of the sea, fixed in place but floating on the sea, in exact accord with the historical meaning. The word "rivers" ( , neharot) in 24:2b is known from Ugaritic to be simply a synonym of seas, and neharot is clearly used to mean seas in Ps 93:3.<sup>76</sup>

We have in Pss 136:6 and 24:2 a direct and an indirect comment respectively on Gen 1:10; and they both agree in telling us that the relationship between "earth" and "sea(s)" in that verse is that the earth is floating on the sea. It is a flat earth "spread out" upon the sea, set down upon the sea as a foundational base. The sea is around the earth and below the earth. The sea is "one pool," and the earth-disk floats in the middle--in perfect accord with the historical definition.

The picture given to us in Ps 24:2 and 136:6 is quite clear; but there is still more biblical evidence that the earth was thought to float on the sea. For just as the sea below the earth was thought of in the rest of the ancient Near East as an inexhaustible source of water for springs, wells and rivers, so it is in the OT. In the

blessings of Joseph first by Jacob (Gen 49:25 [24]) and later by Moses (Deut 33:13) there is a reference to the "deep sea (tehom) lying below" as the source of spring and/or river water for farming.

Gen 49:25(24) speaks simply of the "blessings of the heaven above; blessings of the deep sea (tehom) lying below." Deut 33:13 speaks more fully of Jehovah blessing the land of Joseph "with the precious dew of the heavens and with the deep sea (tehom) lying below." Harris commenting on Gen 49:25's phrase "the deep (tehom) that lies below," said "the previous line shows that this is the deep that lies below the heavens above, not below the earth." As his earlier paper, "The Bible and Cosmology" makes clear, he is saying that "the deep that lies below" refers to nothing more than the visible sea, like the Mediterranean.<sup>77</sup>

But, does the "previous line" of Gen 49:25 show that "the deep sea that lies below" is referring to the sea "below the heavens" not to a sea below the earth? It seems to me that the previous line shows the exact opposite. The previous line speaks of "blessings of the heaven above." If one asks, Above what?, the obvious answer is, above the earth. The previous line then is speaking of "blessings of the heaven above the earth." What then does the next line mean when it speaks of the "blessings of the deep sea that lies below"? Below what? Since the first line speaks of blessings from above the earth, surely the most natural meaning of the second line is that it is speaking of blessings from below the earth.

Even more importantly, the context of Gen 49:25 and Deut 33:13 has to do with fruitfulness (Gen 49:22, 25), especially agricultural fruitfulness (Deut 33:13-16). The "dew from the heavens above" was a prime source of the water necessary to make agriculture flourish (Gen 27:28; I Kgs 17:1; Hos 14:5; Zech 8:12) and the implication of this context is that the blessing of "the deep sea that lies below" was also to make agriculture flourish (cf. Ezek 31:4). The question is then, was the sea below the heavens, as Harris would have it, that is the Mediterranean Sea or the like, ever a source of water to make agriculture flourish? Being salt water, the answer is, of course, No; and even if you force the text to refer to a small fresh water sea like the sea of Galilee, the answer is still, No. Harris's interpretation of the "sea that lies below" in Gen 49:25 and Deut 33:13 is clearly out of context, not only historically but biblically as well. In context both verses are clear references to a sea (tehom) below the earth just as was believed in by everyone else in the ancient Near East. We see again, therefore, in these verses that the earth was understood in the OT as floating upon a sea, from which, as in all ancient Near Eastern thought, springs, wells and rivers derived their water.

There is yet another reason why we know Gen 49:25 and Deut 33:13 refer to a sea below the earth: It was customary in the ancient Near East to pair references to fertilizing water from above with references to fertilizing water from the sea below the earth. In the Akkadian Atrahasis epic D: 4: 54, 55, for example, we read,

Above Adad made scarce his rain

Below was dammed up the flood,

So that it rose not from its source.

In the Ugaritic Aqhat C: 1: 45, 46, we read,

No dew. No rain.

No welling up of the Deep

In Weinfeld's instructive paper, to which the reader is referred, there are more examples and discussion of this ancient Near Eastern pairing of references to water from above with references to water from the deep sea below the earth.<sup>78</sup> Since there is no question that the ancient Near Eastern references to the water below are references to the sea beneath the earth, it is most probable that when such pairing occurs in the OT, the references to a "deep that lies below" or the like are also references to the sea beneath the earth. The biblical context makes it clear that this is the case in Gen 49:25 and Deut 33:13, and the probability is that other biblical references to water below are also references to the sea beneath the earth. For example in Gen 2:5, 6 where the ed-water from below is contrasted with no rain from above, we believe that Tsumura rightly concluded,

Since the ed-water flooded out of the subterranean water in Gen 2:6, in this regard it is related to the tehom(ot)-water, the water of the subterranean ocean.<sup>79</sup>

We see the same thing in Gen 7:11 and 8:2 where the water that floods the earth in Noah's time is described as coming both from above and from "all the springs of the great deep (tehom)." The great tehom is, of course, the sea mentioned in Gen 1:10 which was half of the original tehom mentioned in Gen 1:2. Seeing this some have suggested that "the springs of the great deep" in Gen 7:11 simply refer to the springs of the visible sea, not to earthly springs from a sea below the earth.<sup>80</sup> This interpretation, of course, removes the verse from its historical context wherein the visible sea cannot be separated from the sea below the earth and wherein the phrase "springs of the great deep" would be understood as inland earthly springs; but ignoring the historical context for a moment, we see that this suggestion also overlooks the fact that the pairing of this phrase with reference to the waters from above indicates biblically (Gen 49:25; Deut 33:13) as well as historically that the reference is to the earthly fresh-water springs that come up from the sea that was believed to exist below the earth. Earthly fresh-water springs were, in fact, so closely linked in people's minds with the great tehom below the earth (Gen 49:25; Deut 33:13) that the earthly springs were themselves sometimes called tehom (Ezek 31:4) or tehomot (Deut 8:7). In context--both historical and biblical--Gen 7:11 is speaking of the water for Noah's flood not only pouring down from above, but, as Wenham put it,

water gushing forth uncontrollably from wells and springs which draw from a great subterranean ocean ("the great deep")<sup>81</sup>

Prov 3:20, another verse that pairs water from above (in the form of dew) with water from below, parallels Gen 7:11's reference to the water from below

grammatically for it uses the same verb ( , baqa ) to speak of splitting open the springs as was used in Gen 7:11. In addition, the springs in Prov 3:20 are called tehomot which parallels the description of springs in Gen 7:11 where they are called "springs of the great tehom." The springs of Prov 3:20 are thus identified with the springs of Gen 7:11. Since the springs mentioned in Prov 3:20 are in a context of agricultural blessing (paired with "dew"), they must be earthly fresh-water springs. Prov 3:20 thus shows us that the springs of Gen 7:11 are also earthly fresh-water springs and reciprocally Gen 7:11 shows us that the fresh-water springs (tehomot) of Prov 3:20 were fed by the great tehom (sea) of Gen 7:11. The grammar, the historical context, and the fact that the pairing of water from above with water from below regularly refers the water from below to the sea beneath the earth, makes this interpretation sure. Scott, therefore, correctly comments on Prov 3:20:

An echo of Gen vii 11 where the water which submerged the world in the days of Noah is said to have surged up like a tide from the subterranean ocean and fallen from sluices in the sky.<sup>82</sup>

Gen 2:5, 6; 7:11; 8:2 ; Prov 3:20 (and II Sam 1:21 as emended by Gordis) all make reference to fresh-water springs having their water supplied by a sea (tehom) beneath the earth.<sup>83</sup> These verses all thus indicate that the earth in Gen 1:10 was understood to be resting on a sea.

In summary, according to inspired comments on Gen 1:10, that is, Pss 24:2 and 136:6, the earth of Gen 1:10 was founded upon the sea, spread out upon the sea. The earth of Gen 1:10 is thus a flat earth-continent floating upon the sea. This is in perfect agreement with the historical definition. Gen 49:25 (24) and Deut 33:13 speak of a tehom, a deep sea, lying below the earth; so, they also testify that the earth was conceived of in the Pentateuch as floating upon a sea, a subterranean sea which served as the source of water for springs, wells and rivers just as was believed by every educated person in the ancient Near East. Various additional OT references which pair water from above with water from below the earth conform to a customary literary formula used in the ancient Near East and confirm still further that the earth in Gen 1:10 was conceived of as floating on a sea.

In final summary we see then that when Gen 1 is interpreted within its biblical context, the "earth" and the "sea(s)" of Gen 1:10 do not refer to the continents and oceans on a planetary globe for there is no contextual basis--either historical or biblical--to see a planetary globe in Gen 1. Rather, the historico-grammatical meaning of "earth" and "sea(s)" in Gen 1:10 is that the earth is a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disk floating in the middle of a circular sea, which sea was thought to be the source of water for earthly springs, wells and rivers.

## Two Questions: Salt Water/Fresh Water and Job 26:7

There are two remaining questions related to our discussion which should be answered. One is, How could the sea which is salt water provide fresh water for inland springs? And two, If the earth is floating on the sea, why does Job 26:7 say, "He [God] hangs the earth upon nothing"?

Harris, lifting the OT out of its historical context and slighting the biblical-grammatical data, said,

They [the Hebrews] probably had not thought of a connection of springs with an underlying ocean because of the simple observable fact that oceans are salt water and springs are fresh.<sup>84</sup>

Given that everyone surrounding and interacting with the Hebrews thought there was a connection of springs with an underlying ocean, it is historically extremely improbable that the Hebrews "probably had not thought of a connection..." The biblical verses cited above show they had not only thought of a connection but believed in a connection of springs with an underlying ocean. The question, nevertheless, remains, How did they think a salt-water sea could provide fresh water for inland springs?

To answer this question we need first to realize that in the ancient Near East both springs and rivers are sometimes salty. And, the sea at that point where large rivers flow into it is more or less fresh for some distance out. Also, off the coast of the island of Bahrein, as well as off the Levantine coast near Arad, there were famous fresh water springs in the sea.<sup>85</sup> Hence, although people in the ancient Near East certainly distinguished between fresh water and salt water, they may not have distinguished between them as sharply as we do and hence felt little or no pressure to either ask or answer our question. The commonality of water may have been more important to them than the difference between salt water and fresh--at least when thinking cosmologically. Nor is this just speculation for we know that the Sumerians did not distinguish between fresh and salt water in their cosmology; and, Pope, in fact, came to the conclusion that neither did the Hebrews.<sup>86</sup>

We also know that the Mesopotamians believed that the sea beneath the earth was a fresh-water sea. If the Hebrews thought the same thing, as they well might

have, there is and was no occasion to ask, How could a salt water sea provide fresh water for inland springs? The modern mind, however, asks, Did they not realize that their fresh-water sea beneath the earth would mix with the water of the contiguous salt-water sea around the earth and thus become salty? To which the ancient mind may well have answered, Not necessarily. This problem did not bother the Babylonians, and the Greeks who were even more sophisticated intellectually had no trouble believing that Okeanos was a fresh water sea that ran around the circumference of the salt-water seas surrounding the earth. So the Hebrews could certainly have believed, as the Sumerians did, that the sea below the earth was a fresh-water sea around which ran the salt-water sea that surrounds the earth. The simple fact is that ancient Near Eastern people thought about many issues, especially scientific ones, very differently from the way we do. We cannot read our questions and objections into their mentality.

Finally, if the Hebrews did ask our question, a simple natural answer lay ready at hand, the answer that people in classical times and the Middle Ages gave to our question, namely: As the salt water of the sea makes its way through the earth, the earth acts as a filter to purify it. As St. John of Damascus said, "...the sea water is strained and filtered through the earth and thus is made sweet." This answer is so simple and natural that people of biblical times could easily have thought of it. This is confirmed by the fact that when God turned the Nile to blood so that, like salty water, it could not be drunk, the simple Egyptians dug "round about the river" to find water--filtered by the earth--that they could drink (Exod 7:24). As Ellison noted,

by digging near the river, the people were able to filter out enough of the impurities to make the water drinkable.<sup>87</sup>

In short, the Hebrews may not have sharply distinguished between fresh and salt water in their cosmology and/or may well have believed the sea beneath the earth was a fresh-water sea. In either case there would be no occasion for our question. If they did ask our question they could easily have answered it without giving up their belief in a sea beneath the earth.

Our second question concerns the meaning of Job 26:7b, "He [God] hangs the earth upon nothing." If you remove this verse from its context and set it down in the context of the modern western world, it can be interpreted to mean that the earth-globe is suspended in space, in perfect accord with modern science. If you leave the verse in context, however, it does not have this meaning.

First of all, Job understands the earth to be a single flat continent, not a globe. As pointed out earlier it is Job that speaks of lightning lighting up "the ends of the earth" under "the whole heaven," that is, the entire earth, not just a part of it (37:3). This fits the concept of a single flat continent. It is impossible on a globe. As also noted earlier it is Job that likens the earth to a garment or blanket that can be picked up at one end (38:13), thus again indicating that Job's concept of the earth is a flat continent, not a globe. Everyone in Job's time believed the earth was a flat disc, not a globe; and, Job nowhere gives any evidence of believing the earth is a globe.

So there is no contextual basis for interpreting "earth" in Job 26:7 as a globe; but, there is a contextual basis for rejecting that interpretation.

If then Job is speaking of the earth as suspended in space, the most that can be claimed is that a flat earth-continent was conceived as floating in space, similar to the way Anaximenes' flat earth-continent floated on air. But, is even this interpretation correct? I do not think so for in Job 38:4 God says, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?" The verb is yasad just as in Ps 24:2. Interpreted within its biblical (and historical) context, this verse means that the earth was firmly planted on the sea. No one in the ancient Near East or the rest of the OT believed that the earth was planted in space. Should we then interpret Job 26:7 as a new speculative idea and then on the basis of that interpretation set aside the historico-grammatical meaning of verses in the rest of Scripture (Gen 1:10; 49:25; Deut 33:13; Ps 24:2; 136:6; etc.) including Job 38:4? Admittedly, it is possible that Job 26:7 is about a flat-earth disc floating in space; but, I think it is much more likely that we ought to interpret Job 26:7 within the context of the ancient Near East, the rest of the Bible, and the rest of Job. Within that historical and biblical context there is no question that Job 26:7 is speaking of the earth floating on a sea; so, it is within that context that we ask, What does Job 26:7 mean by saying the earth is suspended over nothing?

I believe a good place to begin an answer to that question is Job 38:6, where speaking of the earth's foundation, God asks, "On what were its footings set or who laid its cornerstone?" There is no question that the earth is founded on water (Ps 24:2; et al); but, this poses a great mystery. On what were its footings set? Water cannot hold up a solid object of the size and density of the earth. What is under the earth to keep it from sinking? This is a question which fits the historical context. This is a question which even scientifically naive people asked. Thus as we saw above, some people have thought the earth's footings were set on a tortoise, a fish or some other object. Their thought was that there must be some thing to hold up the earth, not just water! The earth is too heavy to be floating on water with no thing below it. The earth cannot be suspended over no thing. What is holding it up, keeping it from sinking? What Job 26:7 is saying is that God is the answer to this mystery. He suspends the earth over no thing, that is, He alone holds it up so that it does not sink.

Job 26:7 interpreted in this way not only fits the historical and biblical context, it fits the grammar better than the modernizing interpretation. For as Tsumura pointed out the word "nothing" in Job 26:7 ( beli-mah) does not refer to an abstract "nothingness," but to a concrete "place (mah) where there is nothing."<sup>88</sup> The place over which the earth is suspended is a place like a barren desert, as the word tohu means in Job 6:18; 12:24 and most importantly in the parallel line in 26:7a. The sea, like a barren desert is a concrete place; but a place where there is no thing for sustenance, no thing to support the earth, no thing to keep it from sinking into the depths. No thing, that is, but God alone.

Unlike the idea that Job 26:7 is speaking of the earth floating in space, this interpretation fits the broad context of scientifically naive thinking, the historical context of the ancient Near East, the biblical context (Ps 24:2; 136:6; Gen 49:25; Deut 33:13; etc.), the context of Job (38:4 and 6), the parallel in the previous line, and the grammar. And finally, it is confirmed by the fact that it is not a novel modern interpretation, but the ancient Targumic interpretation. Tg. Job paraphrases Job 26:7, "He erects the earth over the waters without anything to support it."<sup>89</sup>

There are a number of other interpretations of Job 26:7 offered in the various commentaries on Job. They almost all harmonize with the historico-grammatical interpretation of Gen 1:10, for very few scholars have been persuaded that Job 26:7 is a reference to the earth floating in space; but I do not believe that any of them match the anthropological, historical, biblical and grammatical contexts as well as the ancient Targumic interpretation.

## Conclusion

Not surprisingly, after the Church accepted the concept of the earth as a globe, it began interpreting "earth" in Gen 1:10 as a reference to the land on the globe, the inhabited part of the world. But, even then the Church continued to understand this land as being surrounded by a sea-- until after the discovery of the new world (note new world). Even as late as the sixteenth century Luther could speak of the earth being the "center" and "water flows around it."<sup>90</sup> Nor was the concept of a sea beneath the earth completely given up until modern times. The majority and orthodox Christian view of the earth until the eighth or ninth century (when the sphericity of the earth was broadly accepted) was that the "earth actually floated on water."<sup>91</sup> Even after the sphericity of the earth was broadly accepted, the biblical concept of a deep sea beneath the earth was not completely given up. Rather, it came to be understood as existing within the interior of the globe. Thus Matthew Poole (1700) understood Gen 1:9 as referring to "the great abyss, the deep water which is shut up in the bowels of the earth"; and, as late as 1820 Adam Clarke said of Ps 136:6, "This seems to refer to a central abyss of waters, the existence of which have not yet been disproved."<sup>92</sup>

Only with the rise of modern geology in the latter half of the nineteenth century did the Church slowly but completely give up the ancient Near Eastern notion of a sea beneath the earth or in its modernized form within the bowels of the earth. But, having given up the historico-grammatical meaning of Gen 1:10; 49:25 (24); Deut 33:13; Pss 24:2 and 136:6 and others, did the church lose biblical truth? I think not. The biblical references to a flat earth-disc floating in a circular surrounding sea are simply references to the "scientific" opinions of the writer's day and a fulfillment as it were of the words of B. B. Warfield, who as he defined biblical inerrancy said that an inspired writer could (*italics ours*)

share the ordinary opinions of his day in certain matters lying outside the scope of his teachings, as, for example, with reference to the form of the earth, or its relation to the sun [or, mutatis mutandis, its relation to the sea]; and, it is not inconceivable that the form of his language when incidentally advertent to such matters, might occasionally play into the hands of such a presumption.<sup>93</sup>

The inspired writer's point in Gen 1:9, 10 is certainly not about the form of the earth and its relation to the sea. Those issues lay "outside the scope of his teachings." He was absorbed in presenting a polemic in favor of the one true God and was only "incidentally advertent" to the form of the earth and its relation to the sea. Hence in these matters he was simply reflecting "the ordinary opinions of his day" just as Warfield said. It was in this form that the naive readers of his day could most readily accept his inerrant eternal teaching that the God of the Hebrews is the Creator and Ruler of both earth and sea and hence the only God whom all human beings should trust, love and serve.

As Calvin said with regard to this very issue of a sea beneath the earth, the inspired writer is not attempting to

dispute philosophically [that is, scientifically] when he says the earth is "founded upon the seas" (Ps 24:2). [Rather] he uses popular language, and adapts himself to the capacity of the unlearned.<sup>94</sup>

Bruce Waltke was correct when he wrote,

Israel's cosmology has two aspects: a heavenly, revelatory aspect and an earthly, phenomenological aspect. The revelatory dimension of their cosmology, namely that God created the world, belongs to their theology and presents us with eternal, unchanging truth. Their earthly observation of it, however, as a three-tiered universe consisting of heaven above, earth beneath, and waters below the earth is phenomenologically conditioned and has no abiding theological significance.<sup>95</sup>

Let us give thanks then for the revelation God has given in Gen 1, for it rises above, indeed soars above the theological darkness of its day and of ours. And let us not look with ingratitude at the incorporation of the ordinary scientific opinions of the writer's day into inspired revelation, but rather stand in awe and thankfulness before the extraordinary grace of an all-knowing Father who was yet willing, in Calvin's words, to "adapt his language to the capacity of the unlearned"(cf. Mark 10:5). For in spite of our modern understanding and sophistication we too are yet unlearned children deeply in need of that same grace.

1544 S. E. 34th Avenue  
Portland, Oregon 97214

## Endnotes

1. TDOT1, 390; W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Literary Form of Genesis 1-11" in New Perspectives on the Old Testament, ed. J. B. Payne (Waco: Word, 1970) 48
2. M. Silva, Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 145, 158
3. L. Levy-Bruhl, Primitive Mentality (repr. Boston: Beacon, 1966) 353; H. B. Alexander, The Mythology of All Races 10: North American (repr. New York: Cooper Square, 1964) 249
4. Levy-Bruhl, Primitive, 354, 353; U. Holmberg, The Mythology of All Races 4: Finno-Ugric (repr. New York: Cooper Square, 1964) 308
5. H. A. Stayt, The Bavenda (New York: Frank Cass & Co, 1968) 225; A. W. Howitt, The Native Tribes of South-East Australia (London: Macmillan, 1904) 426; N. A. Chagnon, Yanomano: The Fierce People (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968) 44; M. Leon-Portilla, Aztec Thought and Culture (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1963) 48; Levy-Bruhl, Primitive, 355; W. Dupre, Religion in Primitive Cultures (The Hague: Mouton, 1975) 85; "Khanty and Mansi Religion" in The Encyclopedia of Religion 8 (ed. M. Eliade; New York: Macmillan, 1987) 281; H. R. E. Davidson, "Scandinavian Cosmology" in Ancient Cosmologies (ed. C. Blacker and M. Loewe; London: Allen & Unwin, 1975) 175
6. The Tungus drew the earth as a square (Holmberg, MAR 4, 418). The Thompson River Indians "consider the earth to be square" (Alexander, MAR 10, 135). The earth is "four-cornered" in the Satapatha-Brahmana (repr. Sacred Books of the East 41; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1963) 301. The Aztecs described the earth of the fourth successive universe as being in the shape of a cross ("Immortality," The Encyclopedia of Religion 7, 129); C. Etter, Ainu Folklore (Chicago: Wilcox & Follet, 1949) 18,19
7. A. J. S. Ray, "The Flat Earth Kids," Omni 10 (Sept, 1988) 30
8. A. Christie, Chinese Mythology (Feltham, Middlesex: Hamlyn House, 1968) 57; J. S. Major, "The Five Phases, Magic Squares, and Schematic Cosmography" in Explorations in Early Chinese Cosmology (ed. H. Rosemont, Jr.; Chico: Scholars Press, 1984) 133
9. J. Needham and W. Ling, Science and Civilization in China 3 (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1959) 498; N. J. W. Throver, Maps & Men (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1972) 23; See the Chinese map of the world in D. J. Li, The Ageless Chinese (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965) 179
10. R. F. Gombrich, "Ancient Indian Cosmology" in Ancient Cosmologies (ed. C. Blacker and M. Loewe; London: Allen & Unwin, 1975) 112-13 Cf. A. B. Keith, Mythology of All Races 6: Indian-Iranian (repr. New York: Cooper Square, 1964) 16; "Cosmology: Hindu and Jain Cosmologies" in The Encyclopedia of Religion 4, 109-10
11. H. and H. A. Frankfort, J. A. Wilson, and T. Jacobsen, Before Philosophy (Baltimore: Penguin, 1949) 54
12. H. Schafer, Agyptische und heutige Kunst und Weltgebäude der alten Ägypter (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1928) 85; O. Keel, The Symbolism of the Biblical World (New York: Seabury, 1978) 37

13. J. H. Breasted, Ancient Records of Egypt 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906) 38, #64; It is possible that the "Circle of the earth" is a reference to the surrounding sea; but, even if that is so, there is an implication here that the earth is also circular.
14. S. N. Kramer, The Sumerians (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963) 113; W. G. Lambert, "The Cosmology of Sumer and Babylon" in Ancient Cosmologies (ed. C. Blacker and M. Loewe; London: Allen & Unwin, 1975) 47; A. Heidel, The Babylonian Genesis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) 172, 180
15. ANET 3d ed., 501-2; A. Livingstone, Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986) 79
16. See texts cited by A. Jensen, Die Kosmologie der Babylonier (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977) 162; See a drawing of the Mappa Mundi in Keel, The Symbolism, 21; See a photograph of it in The Illustrated Bible Dictionary I (ed. N. Hillyer; Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1980) 168; The two best discussions of the Mappa Mundi that I have seen are in Lambert, "The Cosmology," 59-60 (although I think the two lines in the center of the map mark only the Euphrates, not the Tigris and the Euphrates) and B. Meissner, "Babylonische und griechische Landkarten," Klio 19 (1925) 97-100; R. J. Clifford, The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972) 21
17. See a picture of an ancient coracle in G. Contenau, Everyday Life in Babylon and Assyria (London: Edward Arnold, 1954) Pl III (opposite p. 48) or in ANEP 2d ed., 32 fig 108
18. Lambert, "The Cosmology," 59; Livingstone, Mystical and Mythological, 81; Heidel, Babylonian Genesis, 180; Although the Neo-Babylonians developed a highly sophisticated mathematical astronomy, they developed no concept of a spherical earth. See O. Neugebauer, A History of Ancient Mathematical Astronomy 1 (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1975) 550; 2, 575-6
19. G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, The Presocratic Philosophers (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1969) 10; T. Heath, Aristarchus of Samos (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1913) 6
20. "Geographica" in Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities (repr. ed. H. T. Peck; New York: Cooper Square, 1965) 722; J. O. Thomson, History of Ancient Geography (New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1965) 94-6; Cf. E. H. Bunbury, A History of Ancient Geography (2d ed., repr. New York: Dover, 1959) 76
21. Thomson, History, 96; Bunbury, A History, 122, 123; See original sources in Kirk and Raven, Presocratic, 133-4; 151-3; J. L. E. Dreyer, A History of Astronomy (2d ed., repr. New York: Dover, 1953) 18,19
22. Thomson, History, 111, 112
23. "Anaxagoras" in The Oxford Classical Dictionary (ed. N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard; 2d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) 61; Dreyer, A History, 26, 27, especially note 3; Bunbury, A History, 124
24. Thomson, History, 98
25. Ibid., 114; Dreyer, A History, 171-72; R. J. Forbes, Studies in Ancient Technology 7 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966) 4; Pliny NH 2:161-5; cf. Seneca, Nat. Quest. 2:1:4 and consider the natural implication of Matt 4:8 that the earth is flat.
26. On the second millennium BC background of Genesis 1, see K. A. Kitchen, The Bible in Its World (London: InterVarsity, 1977) 35-36; W. G. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," JTS 16 (1965) 300; W. F. Albright, Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan

(Garden City: Anchor, 1969) 91; On the scientific naivete of the Hebrews and their technological inferiority to those around them see my discussion in "The Firmament and the Water Above, Part I: The Meaning of raqia in Gen 1:6-8," WTJ 53 (1991) 234; B. Waltke, Creation and Chaos (Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974) 46; M. Burrows, What Mean These Stones? (New York:Meridian, 1957) 99, 140-41, 166-8. On the influence of Mesopotamia and Egypt particularly with reference to Gen 1, see Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian," 287-300 and J. D. Currid, "An Examination of the Egyptian Background of the Genesis Cosmology," BZ 35:1 (1991) 18-40

27. On the solidity of the firmament see P. H. Seely, "The Firmament," 227-240 and Notes 3 and 4 above.

28. "Oceans," The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia 13 (Chicago: Helen Benton, 1982) 476; John Wiester, The Genesis Connection (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1983) 50, 52, 202

29. E. J. Young, The Book of Isaiah 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 58; Note 13

30. ANET 3d ed., 274, 276, 289, 315, 316, 307; On Cyrus, cf. Ezra 1:2

31. Dupre, Religion in Primitive, 85; Holmberg, MAR 4, 310, 315, 319, 328-29; Howitt, The Native Tribes, 426; "Water" in The Encyclopedia of Religion 15, 351

32. Leon-Portilla, Aztek Thought, 48; "Mesoamerican Religions: Postclassic Cultures" in The Encyclopedia of Religion 9, 421; "Oceans" in The Encyclopedia of Religion 11, 55

33. "Finno-Ugric Religions: An Overview" in The Encyclopedia of Religion 5, 334; "Finnic Religion" in The Encyclopedia of Religion 5 (ed. M. Eliade; New York: Macmillan, 1987) 325; "Khanty and Mansi Religion," in The Encyclopedia of Religion 8, 281

34. H. Himmelheber, Die Dan (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1958) 202; W. Goldschmidt and G. Goldschmidt, Culture and Behavior of the Sebei (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) 304; The Origin of Life and Death: African Creation Myths (ed. U. Beier; London: Heinemann, 1966) 47; H. A. Stayt, The Bavenda (New York: Frank Cass & Co., 1968) 225

35. Alexander, MAR 10, 159; "North American Indians: Indians of the Southwest" in The Encyclopedia of Religion 10, 517; "North American Religions: Mythic Themes" in The Encyclopedia of Religion 10, 536; B. Sproul, Primal Myths (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 246-7, 254; "North American Indians: Indians of the Southeast Woodlands" in The Encyclopedia of Religion 10, 486; P. Freund, Myths of Creation (New York: Washington Square, 1965) 51; "Oceans" in The Encyclopedia of Religion 11, 55; "Cosmogony and Cosmology (American)" in Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics 4 (ed. J. Hastings; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, no date) 126

36. Freund, Myths, 51, 50; Sproul, Primal, 334; A. Dundes, The Flood Myth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 132; Cf. "Earth, Earth Gods" in ERE 5, 128 section 2; Etter, Ainu Folklore, 18

37. Nihongi (repr., London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956) 4, 11

38. J. Needham, "The Cosmology of Ancient China" in Ancient Cosmologies (ed. C. Blacker and M. Loewe; London: Allen & Unwin, 1975) 88, 89; Christie, Chinese Mythology, 57, 69; "Oceans," The Encyclopedia of Religion 11, 54; Sproul, Primal Myths, 200; Major, "The Five Phases," 134; Li, The Ageless Chinese, 179; R. Davis, Muang Metaphysics: A Study of Northern Thai Myth and Ritual (Bangkok: Pandora, 1984) 106

39. Christie, Chinese Mythology, 57, 69, 70; Sproul, Primal, 203; Needham, "The Cosmology of Early China," 89

40. Gombrich, "Ancient Indian Cosmology," 117; Sproul, Primal, 177; Satapatha-Brahmana, 301; "Cosmogony and Cosmology (Buddhist)" in ERE 4, 131; "Cosmology: Hindu and Jain Cosmologies," 109

41. Gombrich, "Ancient Indian Cosmology," 117; F. B. J. Kuiper, Ancient Indian Cosmogony (New Delhi: Vikas, 1983) 11, 12, 14, 101; W. D. O'Flaherty, The Rig Veda (New York: Penguin, 1981) 29; Sproul, Primal, 177

42. Buddhist-Sutras, The Sacred Books of the East 11 (repr. ed. F. M. Muller, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1963) 45; Cf. the Buddhist book, The Questions of King Milanda III:5, The Sacred Books of the East 35, 106; "Cosmogony and Cosmology Buddhist" in ERE 4, 131; "Cosmology: Hindu and Jain Cosmologies" in The Encyclopedia of Religion 4, 108-109

43. S. Morenz, Egyptian Religion (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960) 25; J. M. Plumley, "The Cosmology of Ancient Egypt" in Ancient Cosmologies (ed. C. Blacker and M. Loewe; London: Allen & Unwin, 1975), 20; Keel, The Symbolism, 37; A. Erman, Die Religion der Aegypter (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1934) 16; W. M. Muller, The Mythology of All Races 12: Egyptian (repr. New York: Cooper Square, 1964) 47; S. A. B. Mercer, The Pyramid Texts 2 (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1952) 307; Vol. 4, 60; Breasted, Ancient Records 2, 31, 137 et al; H. Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 155

44. ANET 3d ed., 374; M. Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature 2 (Berkeley: University of California, 1976) 41; Breasted, Ancient Records 2, 89 #220; 137 #325; Breasted, Ancient Records 4, 163 #308; There are also various pictures from ancient Egypt which illustrate the belief in an earth-encircling ocean: See Keel, The Symbolism, 38 (fig 33), 40 (fig 34), 42 (fig 38)

45. S. Morenz, Egyptian Religion (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973) 8; H. and H. A. Frankfort, et al, Before Philosophy, 54; H. Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods, 155-156

46. A. Saleh, "The So-called 'Primeval Hill' and other Related Elevations in Ancient Egyptian Mythology," Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archaologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo 25 (1969) 118; E. O. James, Creation and Cosmology (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969) 17; J. P. Allen, Genesis in Egypt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 4; Cf. Plumley, "The Cosmology of Ancient Egypt," 26. Interestingly, just as Gen 1:9 speaks of letting the dry land "appear," the first land in Egypt, the floating hillock, was called "hillock of appearance" because it appeared out of the waters. H. Frankfort, Before Philosophy, 30, 60

47. Plumley, "The Cosmology of Ancient Egypt," 26; S. A. B. Mercer, The Pyramid Texts 4 (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952) 65; Frankfort, Kingship, 154; W. F. Albright, "The Mouth of the Rivers," AJSL 35 (1919) 167; O. Kaiser, Die Mythische Bedeutung des Meeres in Agypten, Ugarit und Israel (Berlin: Topelmann, 1959) 28; L. H. Gray, The Mythology of All Races 12: Egyptian Mythology (repr. New York: Cooper Square, 1964) 47

48. Kramer, The Sumerians, 13; S. N. Kramer, "Review of Frankfort, Intellectual Adventure," JCS 2 (1948) 43 n. 6 and 44 n. 8; S. N. Kramer, Sumerian Mythology (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1972) 39; T. Jacobsen, "Sumerian Mythology: A Review Article," JNES 5 (1946) 139-40; Kramer, "Review of Frankfort," 43 n. 6; D. T. Tsumura, The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1989) 61;

To prove his point Jacobsen cited a text wherein engur=apsu, and this does refer to the fresh water under the earth; but Livingstone (Mystical and Mythological, 191) cites a text where apsu=tamtu (sea). Technically, the Sumerian word was abzu; but, since the Akkadian apsu was

directly derived from it and as Jacobsen himself said, "As apsu is used in Akkadian so is engur and its approximate synonym abzu...in Sumerian" (Jacobsen,139), I think the fact of overlapping concepts is well established, and Kramer has the best of the argument.; M. H. Pope, El in the Ugaritic Texts( Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955) 63, 64; Cf. Mercer's statement in Hastings ERE 12, 708 "This 'great deep' or Apsu encircled the earth..."; T. Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) 204

49. W. G. Lambert, "The Cosmology," 47; A. Deimel, "Enuma Elis" und Hexaemeron (Rome: Papstliches Bibelinstitut, 1934) 22; "Mesopotamian Religion" in The Encyclopedia of Religion 9, 455; J. D. Prince, Materials for a Sumerian Lexicon (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1905) 16; Repertoire Sumerien (ed. De Chosat; Lyon: Louis Perrin, 1882) 5; G. Komeroczy, "The Separation of Sky and Earth," Acta Antiqua Academia Scientiarum Hungaricae 21 (1973) 36, n. 68; Albright, "Mouth of the Rivers," 165, 177-178

50. Pope, El in the Ugaritic Texts, 63; Tsumura gives further evidence from Ebla that Sumerian did not distinguish the source of wells (fresh water) from the sea (salt water): Tsumura, The Earth and the Waters, 61

51. ANET 3d ed., 118; L. W. King, Babylonian Religion and Mythology (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1899) 28

52. E. Unger, "Ancient Babylonian Maps and Plans," Antiquity, 1935, 314; Meissner, "Babylonische und griechische" 98; Thomson, History, 39; Lambert, "The Cosmology," 60; W. Heimpel, "Das Untere Meer," ZA 77 (1987) 67

53. R. Labat, "Les Origines et La Formation de la Terre dans Le Poeme Babylonien de la Creation," An Bib 12 (1959) 213; A. Heidel, Babylonian Genesis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) 62; Cf. the African story above where iron is placed on the water and earth is spread over it.; B. Landsberger and J. V. Kinnier Wilson, "The Fifth Tablet of Enuma Elish," JNES 20 (1961) 161; M. Weinfeld, "Gen. 7:11, 8:1, 2 Against the Background of Ancient Near Eastern Tradition," Die Welt des Orients 9 (1978) 242-248; "Water, Water Gods (Babylonian)" in ERE 12, 708; R. Borger, Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Konigs von Assyrien (Osnabruck: Biblio-Verlag, 1967) 5

54. W. G. Lambert, "The Cosmology," 59

55. Bunbury, A History, 33; Heath, Aristarchus, 6; Cf. Aeschylus (c. 450 BC) "Ocean who coils his energetic current all round the world." (Prometheus Bound, 148-149

56. Thomson, History, 98, 163, 213, 324; Cf. P. H. Seely, Inerrant Wisdom (Portland, OR: Evangelical Reform, 1989) 31

57. W. Leaf, Iliad, 1, 2nd ed.(London: Macmillan, 1900) 385; "Poseidon" in The Oxford Classical Dictionary, 866 ; "C. M. Bowra, Homer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972) 22; Pseudo-Bede: De Mundi Celestis Terrestrisque Constitutione (ed. C. Burnett; London: The Warburg Institute, 1985) 23

58. "Oceanus" in Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities, 1119

59. G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, M. Schofield, The Presocratic Philosophers (2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 10

60. Note 26

61. T. L. Fenton, "'One Place', Maqom ehad, in Genesis 1:9: Read miqwim, 'Gatherings'," VT 34,4 (1984) 438-445

62. U. Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, 1 (repr. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961) 40; GKC #124a,b. Cf. J. Skinner, Genesis (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1910) 23; O. H. Steck, Der Schöpfungsbericht der Priesterschrift (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975) 84 n. 321. Delitzsch (A New Commentary on Genesis 1; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1890; 89) said "the plural is here conceived of as singular and intensive."

63. Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities ("Oceanus," 1119) tells us that Oceanus in Homer signified "an immense stream, which...circulated around the terraqueous plain, and from which the different seas ran out in the manner of bays. This opinion, which is also that of Eratosthenes, was prevalent even in the time of Herodotus (iv. 360)." Cf. note 68.

64. M. H. Pope, Job (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965) 184; Leon-Portilla, Aztek Thought, 49; Livingstone, Mystical and Mythological, 77: "The upper sea of the setting sun...the lower sea of the rising sun..."; Egyptian Book of the Dead 5739: "I praise thee [the sun] at thy setting in the Deep; Praise to thee who rises from the Deep."

65. Jensen, Die Kosmologie, 247-253; King, Babylonian Religion, 31; W. F. Albright, Archaeology and the Religion of Israel (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1956) 148-149; A. R. Johnson, Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967) 59, 60; Notes 49, 53

66. C. G. Rasmussen, Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Regency, 1989) 71

67. "Water," The Encyclopedia of Religion 15, 354

Notice that referring to the water around the earth in terms of two oceans is common.

68. TDOT 6, 88; TDOT 1, 396; M. Lubetski, "New Light on Old Seas," JQR 68 (1977)5-77; A. J. Wensinck, The Ocean in the Literature of the Western Semites (repr., Wiesbaden: Dr. Martin Sandig, 1968) 22

69. Note 64

70. J. A. Montgomery, "Hebraica (2) yam sup ('The Red Sea')= Ultimum Mare?" JAOS 58 (1938) 131-132; N. H. Snaith, " : The Sea of Reeds: The Red Sea," VT 15 (1965) 395-398; B. F. Batto, "The Reed Sea: Requiescat in Pace," JBL 102 (1983) 27-35, popularized somewhat in "Red Sea or Reed Sea?," BARev 10, 4(1984) 57-63

71. R. L. Harris, "The Bible and Cosmology," BETS 5 (1962) 15

72. Even if one translates Ps 136:6, "He spread out the earth above the waters," the verse still harmonizes better with the historical conception of the earth as flat and floating than with the definition of the earth as a globe. The idea that Ps 136:6 only means that the dry land of our globe is higher than the sea (a la Harris' rationalizing explanation) is historically out of context and grammatically stilted.

73. Note 22; Note 7; Satapatha-Brahmana 7:4:1:8 in Sacred Books of the East 41, 364

74. Cf. P. C. Craigie, Psalms 1-50 (Waco: Word, 1983) 209; M. Dahood, Psalms I (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965) 150; H. J. Kraus, Psalms 1-59 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988) 310; A. Weiser, The Psalms (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 231

75. H. C. Leupold, Exposition of the Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969) 218

76. Cf. M. Dahood, Psalms I (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965) 151; Psalms II (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968) 120-121; J. C. L. Gibson, "The Last Enemy," SJT 32 (1979) 158

77. Section 2495a in Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament 2 (ed. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, B. K. Waltke; Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 966; Harris, "Bible and Cosmology," 14-15

78. Weinfeld, "Gen. 7:11, 8:1, 2 Against the Background," 242-248
79. Tsumura, The Earth and the Waters, 122
80. Note 77; J. C. Whitcomb, Jr. and H. M. Morris, The Genesis Flood (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966) 9
81. G. J. Wenham, Genesis 1-15 (Waco: Word, 1987) 181
82. R. B. Y. Scott, Proverbs - Ecclesiastes (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965) 48
83. On II Sam 1:21 see P. K. McCarter, Jr., II Samuel (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984) 69-71; J. Gray, The Legacy of Canaan (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965) 281
84. Harris, Archer, Waltke, Theological Wordbook 2, 965
85. G. A. Smith, The Book of Deuteronomy (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1918) 65; Wensinck, The Ocean, 37; Tsumura, The Earth and the Waters, 61; Grotzfeld, "Die 'beiden Meere'," 129; G. Herm, The Phoenicians (New York: William Morrow, 1975) 68; Albright, "The Mouth of the Rivers," 184
86. Pope, El in the Ugaritic, 64
87. J. K. Wright, The Geographical Lore of the Time of the Crusades (repr. New York: Dover, 1965) 27; E. g., St. Basil, Exegetic Homilies (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963) 64; Die Quaestiones Naturales des Adelardus von Bath (ed. M. Muller; Munster: Aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1934) 52 section LIV; St. John of Damascus, Orthodox Faith (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1958) 225; H. L. Ellison, Exodus (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) 46
88. Tsumura, The Earth and the Waters, 33
89. The Targum of Job, The Targum of Proverbs, The Targum of Qohelet (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991) 62; Cf. N. H. Tur-Sinai, The Book of Job (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1967) 381; II Enoch 47:5 as translated by F. I. Andersen in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha I (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983) 174; Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews 1 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968) 59
90. M. Luther, Luther's Works 1: Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958) 34, 35
91. G. H. T. Kimble, Geography in the Middle Ages (London: Methuen, 1938) 162
92. A. Clarke, The Holy Bible...A Commentary 3 (New York: Hunt & Eaton, no date) 657
93. B. B. Warfield, "The Real Problem of Inspiration" in The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1948) 166-167
- Calvin showed similar theological insight with regard to the geographical extent of the kingdom of Christ on earth being described in Scripture as of significantly less geographical size than is actually the case when he commented on Ps 72:8 [italics ours]: "If it be objected that such narrow [geographical] bounds do not correspond with the kingdom of Christ, which was to be extended from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof, we reply that David obviously accommodates his language to his own time, the amplitude of the kingdom of Christ not having been, as yet, fully unfolded." (Commentary on the Book of Psalms 3; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949) 109
94. J. Calvin, Commentary on the Book of Psalms 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949) 403

95. B. K. Waltke, "Historical Grammatical Problems" in Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible (ed. E. D. Radmacher and R. D. Preus; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 118