By Sean Pitman In their new book, God, Sky, and Land, Drs. Bull and Guy argue that “the ancient Hebrews were operating with only two explanations, God and Humans. Therefore, any humanly unexplainable phenomenon was by default attributed to God.” They go on to suggest that Genesis must...
In their new book, *God, Sky, and Land*, Drs. Bull and Guy (former president of La Sierra University) argue that, “The ancient Hebrews were operating with only two *explancepts*, God and Humans. Therefore, any humanly unexplainable phenomenon was by default attributed to God.” They go on to suggest that Genesis must be read through this and other limited perspectives and therefore cannot be taken literally from the modern perspective. For example, they discuss what they claim is the ancient Hebrew concept of a flat Earth and a solid metallic or crystalline half-dome covering the Earth. Certainly these concepts cannot be accepted by the modern reader and therefore the text of Genesis simply cannot be taken to be a literal historical account in any empirically-trustworthy or factual sense of the word.
At least part of the problem with the thesis proposed by Bull and Guy is that, contrary to their assertion, the Biblical authors did seem to have a rather good concept of "chance" occurrences outside of the direct action of either God or man – i.e., the Biblical authors had a concept of natural laws that function independent of the direct actions of either God or man.

For one example of this understanding, consider the experiment described in the Bible where the Philistines put the Ark of God into a cart to send it back to Israel.

"Now then, get a new cart ready, with two cows that have calved and have never been yoked. Hitch the cows to the cart, but take their calves away and pen them up. Take the ark of the Lord and put it on the cart, and in a chest beside it put the gold objects you are sending back to him as a guilt offering. Send it on its way, but keep watching it. If it goes up to its own territory, toward Beth Shemesh, then the Lord has brought this great disaster on us. But if it does not, then we will know that it was not his hand that struck us and that it happened to us by chance." – 1 Samuel 6:1-12

Notice that the concept of random chance events or natural law was well established in the mind of this biblical author.
Another problem with the arguments presented by Bull and Guy is in regard to the supposedly Hebrew concept of “raqi’a” as an inverted metallic or otherwise solid half dome covering of a flat Earth. According to Randall Younker (Andrews University):

“The idea that the ancient Hebrews believed the heaven(s) was a solid vault appears to emerged for the first time only during the early 19th century when introduced as part of the flat earth concept introduced by Washington Irving and Antoine-Jean Letronne. Scholars who supported this idea argued that the flat earth/vaulted heaven was held throughout the early Christian and Medieval periods, and indeed, was an idea that goes back into antiquity and was held by both ancient Mesopotamians and Hebrews. However, more recent research has shown that the idea of a flat earth was not held by either the early Christian church nor Medieval scholars. Indeed, the overwhelming evidence is that they believed in a spherical earth surrounded by celestial spheres (sometimes hard, sometimes soft) that conveyed the sun, moon, stars and planets in their orbits around the earth. Moreover, research of ancient Babylonian astronomical documents shows that they did not have the concept of a heavenly vault. Rather, this was erroneously introduced into the scholarly literature by a mistranslation of Enuma Elish by Peter Jensen.

A review of the linguistic arguments that the Hebrews believed in the idea of a flat earth and vaulted heaven shows that the arguments are unfounded. The arguments derive from passages that are clearly figurative in nature. Indeed, one of the great ironies in recreating a Hebrew cosmology is that scholars have tended to treat figurative usages as literal (e.g. Psalms and Job), while treating literal passages such as in Genesis as figurative. The noun form of raqia is never associated with hard substances in any of its usages in Biblical Hebrew; only the verbal form rqa. And even the latter cannot be definitely tied to metals, etc. Rather it is understood as a process in which a substance is thinned—this can include pounding, but also includes stretching. The noun raqia is best translated as expanse in all of its usages.”

Randall Younker, The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome: Another Look at the Hebrew [raqia], pre-published version, July 2009

If the writer(s) of Genesis believed that the raqi’a was a solid structure, it seems odd to me that God would be quoted as defining it as “sky” – a place were birds can also fly (Gen. 1:20). Now I know that some argue that the description is of birds flying across, not within, the raqi’a. However, everything seems to fit better, as far as I can tell, if this term is understood as an expanse – similar to the space or raqi’a that contains the sun, moon, and stars (Gen. 1:14). It just seems to me like the context in which this word is used needs to be taken into account before one automatically assumes that the author(s) were clearly talking about some solid
crystalline or metallic dome-shaped structure. In context, this doesn’t seem clear to me at all – and was probably why the original NIV translators used the word “expanse” instead of definitively indicating something more solid.

Now, I understand that this is an attempt by many to undermine a literal view of the Genesis account – despite the fact that the author(s) of this account clearly intended it to be taken literally. The problem is that you don’t have to be a scientist to be a good witness in describing what you saw in the language that you understand. It is very difficult to misinterpret something as basic and easy to understand and describe as “evenings and mornings”. In other words, it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to notice “evenings and mornings”. It also wouldn’t take a rocket scientist to understand God if God had said, “By the way, it took me a bit longer than one week to make everything on Earth . . .”

Really, if God doesn’t actually speak to us in language that we can understand when he is talking about our origins, why even bother? Why say that it took a “week” when it really took hundreds of millions of years? Why even bother describing evenings and mornings in such detail and in such consistency? – so much so that the authors themselves believed in the literal interpretation of their own work? It would only hurt the credibility of the metaphysical claims of the Bible to find out that its physical claims, especially those that are so easily investigated, aren’t actually true.

God knows this. In fact, he often uses physical evidence to support his metaphysical claims within the Bible – just read the story of the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2:9 – “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’?…” Clearly, the falsification of the physical claim says something about the validity of the metaphysical claim as well . . .

Suffice it to say that there are plenty of scholars on both sides of most of these issues. One has to somehow weigh the evidence on a personal basis rather than blindly go along with the consensus view of the so-called “experts” all the time.