



*Scripture and Cosmology:
Reading the Bible Between the
Ancient World and Modern
Science*

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What does Scripture say about the cosmos?

Kyle Greenwood helps us see how the best Christian thinkers have viewed the cosmos in light of Scripture, grappling with new understandings as science has advanced from Aristotle to Copernicus to Galileo and the galaxies of deep space. It's a compelling story that both illuminates the text of Scripture and helps us find our own place in the tradition of faithful Christian thinking and interpretation.

Who did you have in mind when you wrote *Scripture and Cosmology*?

Kyle Greenwood: *Scripture and Cosmology* is written for anyone who wants to be more engaged in the cultural context of ancient Israel. It is written for students of the Bible who are curious about what to do with biblical passages that seem out of date. It is written for Christians who want to get a sense of the history in which our Bible has been interpreted over the millennia. It is written for men and women who want their faith to be more engaged with the sciences. It is written for evangelicals who may be frustrated with interpretations of the Bible that don't seem to coincide with their own careful reading of the text. It is especially written for young believers who have begun to lose their faith for any of the reasons above.

Cosmology is a topic many people may not think about very often. Why did you decide to write about it?

Kyle: Cosmology is a topic that moderns take for granted. We live in a world of constant discovery. Most of us have seen images of space taken from the Hubble Telescope, or have seen videos of the first walk on the moon. Even very recently, NASA successfully landed a satellite on a comet! Though we can't exactly grasp the vastness of the universe, we get that it is in fact quite vast. While astronomers and astrophysicists have much to learn about the universe and its galaxies, our understanding of the cosmos is really quite sophisticated, especially in comparison to the ancients. However, many faithful readers of the Bible don't take into account the realities of the ancient thought world when they approach Scripture. They assume that the way we think about the cosmos is the same way Abraham, Moses or David thought about the cosmos. I hope that my book will help people become more acquainted with the ancient thought world so they may be better, more careful, more faithful readers of Scripture.

What is your main point in *Scripture and Cosmology*?

Kyle: It is my contention that a high view of Scripture employs a hermeneutic that accommodates the biblical writers' immersion in its ancient, pre-Enlightenment cultural context. As with other cultural matters, such as social customs and language, the biblical texts reflect that worldview in their written communication. So, I show how the ancient Hebrews thought of the cosmos as being constructed of three tiers: heaven, earth and sea.

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Kyle Greenwood (PhD, Hebrew Union College) is associate professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Colorado Christian University. He served as an editor for *Since the Beginning: Interpreting Genesis 1-2 Through the Ages* and contributed to books such as *The Ancient Near East: Historical Texts in Translation* and *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*. He sits on the editorial board for the *Journal of the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament* and *Bulletin for Biblical Research* and has written for several publications including *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* and *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions*.

This viewpoint was not borrowed from surrounding cultures, but it was part of a shared culture among ancient Near Eastern people.

I attempt to demonstrate this point by taking the readers through three phases of interpretation. First, the book establishes the diverse ways in which the ancient Near Eastern concept of the three-tiered cosmos projects itself into the biblical text. Next, I show that as astronomical advances were made concerning the structure of the universe, interpreters had to accommodate their views of Scripture in light of that new information. Finally, I draw conclusions regarding an appropriate posture toward biblical interpretation in light of other points of contact between science and Scripture, such as medicine and human origins.

What do you hope *Scripture and Cosmology* contributes to the scholarly community?

Kyle: My number one rule for biblical interpretation is, “Don’t put words in God’s mouth.” On that note, *Scripture and Cosmology* strives to complement many other excellent books that situate the biblical material (especially the Old Testament) in its ancient cultural context. This approach helps us all be better readers of Scripture, allowing us to hear more clearly God’s message and less of our message.

The general premise of the book is not particularly novel. However, treatments of the topic tend to be overly complex for the average reader or too limited in scope to be convincing. *Scripture and Cosmology* attempts to give a full and fair treatment of both the ancient Near Eastern cosmological worldview and the biblical cosmological paradigm. This book provides interested readers a single source for entering and engaging the world of ancient cosmology.

Although I am not a historian of the sciences, the book has allowed me to explore the long history of cosmological inquiry, investigation and discovery. The upshot of this for my readers is that they are able to recognize that biblical interpretation has often been influenced by external forces. Having some historical perspective on this should free modern readers from being wedded to a particular interpretation of Scripture despite scientific, archaeological or other evidence that might suggest otherwise. This does not mean that biblical interpretation is an entirely subjective enterprise based on experience or the latest scientific theory. It does mean, however, that biblical interpretation is by nature subject to my own understanding of reality. If and when my understanding of reality changes, I must be willing to accept that my interpretation of Scripture may require revision.