

English Translations of *raqia'*

<u>Date</u>	<u>Version</u>	<u>Undefined</u>	<u>Space</u>	<u>Structure</u>
1530	Tyndales Old Testament	<i>firmament</i>		
1611	King James Version	<i>firmament</i>		
1862	Young's Literal Translation		<i>expanse</i>	
1885	Revised Version (British)	<i>firmament</i>		
1889	Douay-Rheims American Ed.	<i>firmament</i>		
1901	American Standard Version	<i>firmament</i>		
1952	Revised Standard Version	<i>firmament</i>		
1954	Amplified Bible	<i>firmament</i>		
1962	Jewish Publication Society Torah		<i>expanse</i>	
1966	Jerusalem Bible			<i>vault</i>
1969	New Life Version		<i>open space</i>	
1971	Living Bible		<i>vapors</i>	<i>dome</i> (margin)
1972	New American Standard Bible		<i>expanse</i>	
1979	New English Bible			<i>vault</i>
1982	New King James Version	<i>firmament</i>		
1984	New International Version		<i>expanse</i>	
1989	Revised English Bible			<i>vault</i>
1989	New Revised Standard Version			<i>dome</i>
1992	Good News Translation			<i>dome</i>
1995	Contemporary English Version			<i>dome</i>
1995	New Living Translation		<i>space</i>	
1996	Robert Alter			<i>vault</i>
1998	Complete Jewish Bible			<i>dome</i>
2001	English Standard Version		<i>expanse</i>	
2005	Today's New International Version			<i>vault</i>
2006	Easy-to-Read Version		<i>space</i>	
2005	New Century Version	<i>something</i>		
2011	New International Version			<i>vault</i>
2011	Common English Bible			<i>dome</i>

Occurrences of *raqa'* and *raqia'* in the Old Testament

(New Revised Standard Version)

raqa'

- Ex. 39:3 Gold leaf was hammered out and cut into threads to work into the blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and into the fine twisted linen, in skillful design.
- Num. 16:38 Make [the censers] into hammered plates as a covering of the altar.
- Num.16:39 The bronze censers . . . were hammered **out** as a covering for the altar.
- 2 Sam. 22:43 I beat them fine like the dust of the earth, . . . stamped them down like the mire of the streets.
- Job 37:18 Can you, like [God] spread out the skies, hard as a molten mirror?
- Ps. 136:6 [The LORD] spread out the earth on the waters.
- Isa. 40: 19 A goldsmith overlays [an idol] with gold.
- Isa.42:5 God the LORD . . . created the heavens and . . . spread out the earth and what comes from it.
- Isa.44:24 I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who by myself spread out the earth.
- Jer. 10:9 Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz.
- Ezek. 6: 11 Clap your hands and stamp your foot, and say, Alas for all the vile abominations of . . . Israel!
- Ezek.25:6 Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the malice within you against the land of Israel, therefore I have stretched out my hand against you. . . .

raqia' °

- Gen. 1:6 Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.
- Gen.]:7 God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome.
- Gen. 1:8 God called the dome Sky.
- Gen. 1:]4 God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night. . . .
- Gen]:15 . . . and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth."
- Gen. 1:17 God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.
- Gen.]:20 God said, "Let . . . birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky."
- Ps.19:1 The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament [mgn. dome] proclaims his handiwork.
- PS.150:1 Praise God in his sanctuary, praise him in his mighty firmament [mgn. Or dome].
- Ezek.]:22 Over the heads of the living creatures there was something like a dome, 'shining like crystal, spread out above their heads.
- Ezek. 1:23 Under the dome their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another.
- Ezek. 1:25 There came a voice from above the dome over their heads.
- Ezek. 1:26 And above the dome over their heads there was something like a throne, in appearance like sapphire.
- Ezek. 10: 1 Then I looked, and above the dome that was over the heads of the cherubim there appeared above them something like a sapphire, in form resembling a throne.
- Dan.]2:3 Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky [margin, Or dome], and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Occurrences of *raqa'* and *raqia'* in the Old Testament

(New International Version)

raqa'

- Ex. 39:3 They hammered out thin sheets of gold and cut strands to be worked into the blue, purple and scarlet yam, and into the fine linen—the work of skillful hands.
- Num. 16:38 Hammer the censers into sheets to overlay the altar.
- Num. 16:39 Eleazar the priest collected the bronze censers . . . he had them hammered out to overlay the altar.
- 2 Sam. 22:43 I beat them as fine as the dust of the earth, I pounded and trampled them like mud in the streets.
- Job 37:18 Can you join [God] in spreading out the skies, hard as a mirror of cast bronze?
- Ps. 136:6 [The LORD] spread out the earth upon the waters.
- Isa. 40:19 As for an idol, a metalworker casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold.
- Isa. 42:5 God the LORD . . . who created the heavens and . . . spread out the earth with all that springs from it.
- Isa. 44:24 I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself.
- Jer. 10:9 Hammered silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz.
- Ezek. 6:11 Strike your hands together and stamp your feet, and cry out, "Alas!" because of all the wicked and detestable practices of the house of Israel!
- Ezek. 25:6 Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet, rejoicing with all the malice of your heart against the land of Israel, therefore I will stretch out my hand against you.

raqia'

- Gen. 1:6 Let there be a vault between the waters, to separate water from water.
- Gen. 1:7 So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water that is above it.
- Gen. 1:8 God called the vault "sky."
- Gen. 1:14 God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night.
- Gen. 1:15 Let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth."
- Gen. 1:17 God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.
- Gen. 1:20 God said, "Let . . . birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky."
- Ps. 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
- Ps. 150:1 Praise God in his sanctuary, praise him in his mighty heavens.
- Ezek. 1:22 Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked something like a vault, sparkling like crystal, and awesome.
- Ezek. 1:23 Under the vault their wings were stretched out one toward the other.
- Ezek. 1:25 There came a voice from above the vault over their heads.
- Ezek. 1:26 Above the vault over their heads there was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli.
- Ezek. 10:1 I looked, and I saw the likeness of a throne of lapis lazuli that was above the vault that was over the heads of the cherubim.
- Dan. 12:3 Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

Chapter Four: "The Vault of the Sky"

What We Bring to the Text

What the Bible says to us is significantly influenced by the presuppositions we bring to the text. When we assume that the author(s) thought **about** reality in the same way we do, the words we read reinforce that presupposition. We then interpret an ancient Biblical text in the light of our modern understanding, and we (perhaps unconsciously) make (modern) sense of whatever the ancient text says-as if it were an inspired encyclopedia of infallible information about whatever it discusses. Most of us also take for granted that the truth is perfectly conveyed in the version of the Bible we are reading.

If, however, we believe that the way the author(s) conceived reality was shaped by their own experience, and that that experience was very different from ours, we are more likely to regard the text as intended for the contemporaries of that author and that we are, as it were, reading someone else's mail. In that case, we have to put ourselves in the place of the original audience (as best we can) in order to "get" the message that was intended in the text. To the extent that we do this, we can avoid the common mistake of supposing that the text was intended to provide answers to our modern scientific and historical questions. Thus we can hear the message of the text on its own terms, without forcing it to address questions or solve problems that did not exist when it was composed. Ancient Hebrew "cosmology" raises this kind of issue. It is ambiguous: does "cosmology" here refer to planetary bodies interacting with stars in a gravitational field? That could not have been their "cosmology". They knew nothing of gravity, and the interaction of spherical bodies in deep space.

Viewing the available evidence, we are convinced that the primary subject of the Creation narratives in Genesis is not cosmology but theology. The question being addressed is not when and how things originated, but why there is anything at all, why there is something rather than nothing. The answer is contained in one word, "God," which occurs 35 times in the first Creation narrative.. "God" is the grammatical subject of almost all of the active verbs-God created, said, saw, separated, named, made, set, blessed, finished, and rested. *This* is the subject of Genesis 1:1-2:4a. In short, what we see depends not only on what we are looking at, but also on the eyes with which we look.

The Overarching (!) Importance of the "Vault"

The Hebrew word *raqiaseems* to have puzzled the translators of the early English versions. They settled on the word "firmament," following the Latin *firmamentum* of the early Latin translations of the Hebrew Bible. Whatever it was, it must have been important, for it was the first "thing" (the very first entity) that God made and the only thing made on the second Creation Day. Because "firmament" doesn't mean much to modern readers, a few recent versions, influenced more by scientific knowledge than by the Hebrew text, have translated *raqia* as "expanse" (NIV 1973) "atmosphere" (Urim-Thummim Version, 2001) or even "something" (NCY) translations unsupported by the underlying Hebrew verb *rq'.*(to beat out) Moshe would, of course, have had no difficulty whatever with the idea of a "beaten-out sky-vault" or dome separating the primeval waters "above" from those "underneath." When he looked up at night, what he saw looked like an enormous vault or the inside of a gigantic dome; and he had no reason to envision anything else. However, Ian Michael-standing in

for all of us moderns—has a problem. He knows that there is no such thing as a sky-vault or dome above his head (he has seen rockets on TV leaving for Mars), whereas there clearly is an atmosphere. Equipped with the knowledge of that atmosphere and also knowing that there is no sky-vault or dome, Ian Michael can make no sense out of *raqia*. He gets into this quandary by *forgetting that he is reading someone else's mail*. The Genesis description of how everything came-to-be raises many questions in Ian Michael's mind that did not puzzle Moshe. Ian Michael wants a description of the process by which Ian Michael's universe, Ian Michael's solar system, and (most importantly) Ian Michael's Earth, came to be.

Whose Question? What Answer?

If Ian Michael is going to make sense of *raqia* and the rest of Genesis 1, he must first understand what it meant to its original audience—Moshe and his contemporaries. Ian Michael is reading a text in a different language and from a different culture in a different era *addressed to someone else*. Ian Michael who lives on this side of the scientific revolution, (which transformed the way the way he thinks about everything), is interested immediately in *processes—in* how cosmological events happen and how things come to be the way they are. By contrast, Moshe, having very limited information about the *how* of the physical universe, is interested primarily in *reasons and purposes—in why* events occur the way they do and *why* things are the way they are.

Perhaps an analogy will help us explore this difference. If a woman dying of cancer asks, "Doctor, why does it hurt so much?" she doesn't need or want a technical description of the physiology of pain; what she wants and needs is some insight into the *purpose* of her extreme discomfort, some way to *make sense* of her agony. Similarly, Moshe is not interested in natural history (since the concept of Nature and Natural Law is still far in the future!). He is much more interested in, "Why is there anything at all? Why is there something and not just nothing?" In other words, "Does existence—especially human existence, including my own *existence—make sense? Does it mean anything?*" The answer from Genesis is an eloquent and powerful "Yes! Because God freely chose to create." This answer comes more as an *ultimate explanation* than as a *factual description*; but it is of enormous importance for it enabled him (and it enables us) to affirm transcendent meaning for our collective and individual lives.

Ian Michael, on reading Genesis 1 is going to find it difficult to keep from thinking of it as a *description—prescientific*, to be sure—of the origin of Planet Earth and of the solar system of which it is a part. But Genesis 1 was addressed to Moshe and told of the origin of the world that Moshe lived in. In Moshe's world there was no Planet Earth, there was no solar system—just "greater" and "lesser" "lights" "set" in a *raqia* which protected the fixed, immovable "land" from the waters of chaos that threatened it from above and from below. The "greater light" was what moved; not the "land". It circled Moshe's "land" once each day. For Ian Michael (and for us) Genesis 1 should be read as a profound explanation of the meaning and significance of human existence—just as it was for Moshe more than 2,000 years ago!

