

# Church Attendance, the Three-tier Universe, Scientific Concordism, and Accommodation by the Holy Spirit

Lorence G. Collins

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Email: [lorencecollins@gmail.com](mailto:lorencecollins@gmail.com)

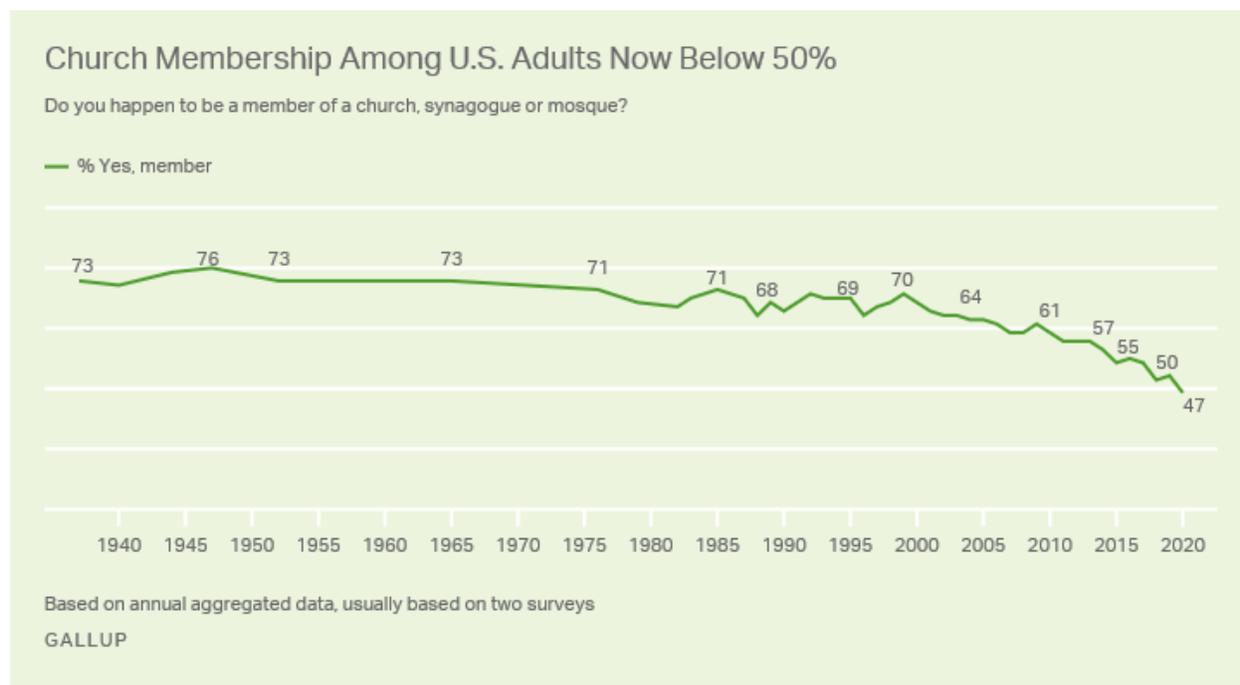
## Introduction

Many people, particularly young adults, are leaving the churches as well as synagogues and mosques as is illustrated in a Gallop poll (**Figure 1**). The reason for this departure from Christian churches is described at this link:

<https://www.csun.edu/~vcgeo005/Nr77Decline.pdf>

The basic reason is because when science that young adults learn in today's public schools does not logically fit what the Bible seems to teach and because if the Bible has errors, then why go to a church that teaches something that is not true. A science article demands accuracy and consistency, but in Genesis 1 and 2 are the following inconsistencies. In Genesis 1 birds are created before male and female humans (Adam and Eve) and in Genesis 2 the order is reversed. Genesis 1 also says

that fish and sea monsters (whales) and birds were created on day 5 when whales are mammals and not a kind of fish and when birds also do not form until land reptiles (dinosaurs) are formed on day 6.



**Figure 1.** Decline in church memberships.

With respect to Christians, part of the problem is that many Christians attempt to make modern science fit (concord) with what chapters Genesis 1 and 2 say in the Bible as to how the universe, Earth, and life are formed when Genesis 1 and 2 present an early Hebrew view of the science of a three-tier universe (**Figure 2**).

## 2. Ancient Science (3-Tier Universe)

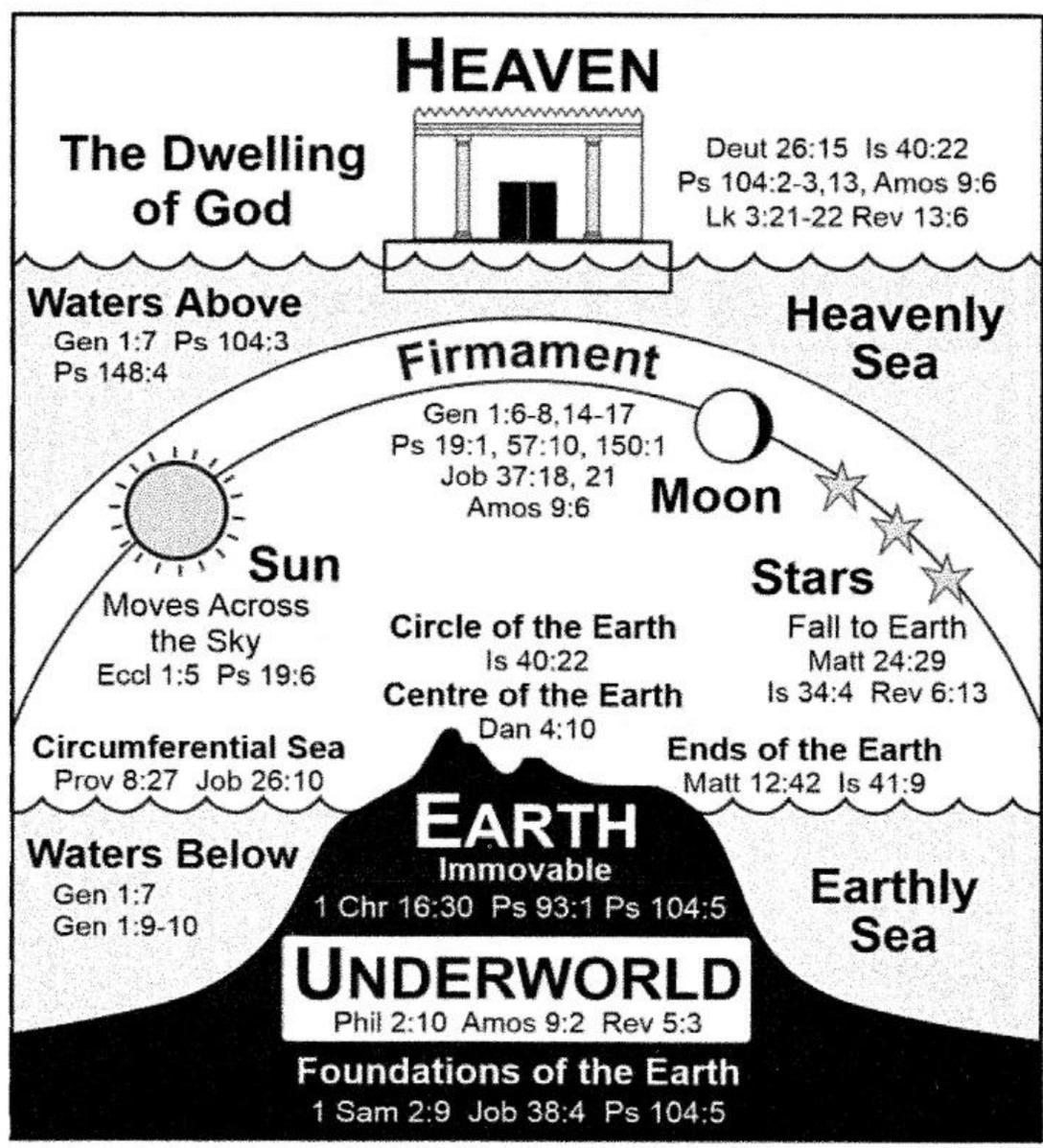


Figure 2. The three-tier universe.

## The three-tier universe

In the three-tier universe there is a solid dome (the firmament) in the sky over the Earth above which is heaven where God dwells and below which is the Earth surrounded by an earthly sea. In this model God was believed to be in a fixed place in a temple, but in modern Christianity Jesus taught that God is not fixed in heaven but is everywhere on Earth and can be in every human via the Holy Spirit. Below the Earth is the underworld and above the firmament is also a heavenly sea (the waters above). The waters above were the source of rain. In this model the sun and moon moved around below the firmament, and the sun travelled across the sky from east to west (Eccl 1:5, Ps 19:6). Sometimes stars fell from the sky (Matt 12:42, Is 41:9). Early Hebrews believed that the Earth was immovable (1 Chr 16:30, Ps 93:1, Ps 104:5). This made logical sense because they did not understand or know about the law of gravity. That is, if the Earth was a globe and spinning on its axis like a bicycle wheel, a Hebrew person living in Mesopotamia would be turning at a rate of nearly 900 mph. If that were true, that Hebrew person would think that he/she would be thrown off the Earth like mud going off a spinning bicycle tire. Because that did not happen, logically to this Hebrew person the Earth must be fixed in space.

In this three-tier model, early Hebrews living in Mesopotamia believed that the Earth was essentially flat instead of a globe although mountains occurred on the flat Earth (as

shown on **Figure 2**) like the Zagros Mountains which they could see to the east in Iran. However, they had no idea of the lateral extent of the “earthly sea.” To them it seemingly had no visible limit in its extent except that it extended to the horizon. However, early sailors were afraid as they sailed away from shorelines and saw land disappear below the horizon that they would fall off the Earth and not get back to the shore.

On the basis of the above observations and thinking, Genesis 1 and 2 presents an ancient view of the universe and Earth that made sense to the early Hebrews. But in our modern times because many Christians want to make the Bible the Word of God and perfect, many Christians make attempts to make Genesis 1 and 2 and the three-tier universe model concord with modern science.

## **Concordism and Bible interpretations**

An example of this attempt begins immediately with the first verse of Genesis 1 that says: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” So, on that basis, concordists say that the first thing that God did was to create the universe of stars, nebulas, planets (including the Earth), and moons. That is, the only place in the creation story in which planet Earth is created is verse 1, and to make this creation fit modern science, the Earth must exist fully formed but is a dead planet, like all the others astronomers have found. But astronomers know from modern studies that this early time of

Earth creation is not correct. Concordists would have the Earth formed right in the beginning at the same time that the universe was created (the Big Bang). But the Big Bang is 13.8 billion years old and our sun and the Earth were formed much later, about 4.7 billion years ago. Our sun is a second generation star. Astronomers know this to be true because our sun has traces of heavy elements, such as gold and uranium, as does the Earth with greater amounts of these elements. Astronomers know that when a star consumes almost all its hydrogen to make helium that gravity causes the helium to fuse with left over hydrogen to continue making elements of greater mass (lithium, beryllium, boron, carbon) and on to the element iron. In each of these conversions, mass is destroyed by fusion processes and energy is released. During these fusions, protons and neutrons (a proton plus an electron) are packed into the nucleus of the newly-formed, fused, heavier atoms, and the packing continues until iron atoms are produced with 26 protons and 29 neutrons that are put into their nuclei with a total mass of 55. At this point, the nucleus of an iron atom is so tightly packed that no more protons and neutrons can fit into its nucleus and the fusion process ceases. Therefore, in the universe for many stars the most stable element that is formed is iron. Confirming this stability of iron is the observation that the core of the Earth is mostly iron.

However, a star that is much more massive than our sun with extra amounts of hydrogen fuel (protons) makes it unstable

in its evolutionary process and it explodes as a supernova. That explosion is so powerful with so much energy is released that protons and neutrons are forced into the nuclei of iron atoms so that they are converted to heavy elements like gold with a mass of 108 and uranium with a mass of 238. The later subsequent collection of the exploded “dust” of a supernova explosion has resulted in the formation of our sun (a second generation star) with our Earth (containing gold and uranium) eventually forming to orbit around the sun. We know that this accomplishment takes billions of years and did not happen instantly as described in the first verse of Genesis 1.

## **First light**

So, when did the first light appear – from the Big Bang process or from the sun? In the three-tier model with an earthly sea surrounding the land (**Figure 2**), presumably the atmosphere above this sea would be covered with thick, wet, dark clouds. Therefore, when verse 3 says: “let there be light,” concordists would say that the clouds were thinned enough to allow a little sunlight to the Earth’s surface, enough to be able to discern the evening and morning in verse 5. But this first light is not from the sun. In the timeline of what happens after the Big Bang explosion starts, the following is what happens. During a long period of cooling the universe is filled with plasma, a hot, opaque soup (in other words darkness of Genesis 1:2) of atomic nuclei and electrons. As the temperature falls to around 3,000 degrees C and as the density of the universe also continues to

fall, ionized hydrogen and helium atoms capture electrons and thus neutralize their electrical charges. With the electrons now bound to atoms, the universe finally becomes transparent to light, making this the time for the earliest observable appearance of light. That is, first light is not from the sun, as concordists suggest, but results from what is described in the previous sentences.

## **When was the sun first created?**

If we return to the belief of concordists that the sun was formed early in the universe in the heavens, they would say that as the clouds thinned there was just enough light for a viewer on Earth to tell day from night so that in verses 14 to 18, on the fourth day, the cloud cover was dissipated to reveal the before-hidden sun, moon, and stars, giving the Earth full daylight. However, Genesis 1:14-16 says:

**14** *And God said: “Let there be light in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years.*  
**15** *and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. **16** And God **made** the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night – and the stars.*

Note that this is the first indication of the time in which the sun and moon is described as being “made” in Genesis 1 and not the time in which concordists would state in which the heavens

(presumably including the sun in the three-tier universe model of **Figure 2**) were created.

All of the above clearly shows that concordists cannot use their version of science to provide a better interpretation of how the universe and Earth were formed in Genesis 1 and 2.

Concordists must understand that the author of Genesis 1 and 2 was giving the best understanding of the science at that time and culture in which early Hebrews lived and this view as expressed in the three-tier universe model cannot be made to fit modern science.

## **Principle of accommodation**

Nevertheless, we can still say that the author of Genesis 1 and 2 was inspired by God and told the truth as this author thought was the truth at that biblical time and that modern science need not be interpreted as being in conflict with the Bible. This is explained by Denis Lamoureux (Lamoureux, 2020) at this link: <https://sites.ualberta.ca/~dlamoure/bas467.pdf>

Among other things he says:

*“The God of Christianity is a God of truth and love. To reveal himself to an ancient people, he graciously came down to their intellectual level to communicate his life-changing spiritual truths. In Philipians 2:9-11, the Holy Spirit allowed the apostle Paul to use the ancient notion of the 3-tier universe as an incidental vessel to deliver an inerrant message of faith. As a result, Paul and his readers*

*would have fully comprehended that Jesus is the Lord of the whole world, because of their ancient phenomenological perspective; the 3-tier universe was understood to be the entire universe. Of course, God could have revealed to Paul modern scientific concepts like galaxies, solar systems, and neutron stars, etc. But do you think that this apostle and his readers would have understood what these astronomical structures were? I doubt it. They did not have powerful telescopes as we do today. Such a revelation would have been confusing to ancient people and most likely a stumbling block that would have stopped them from embracing the inerrant spiritual truth of Jesus' lordship over the entire creation. Therefore, God did not lie in Philippians 2:9-11. Instead, the Holy Spirit graciously accommodated and descended to the level of ancient men and women in the process of inspiring the Bible.*

Lamoureux continues with the following observation.

*“The principle of accommodation is one of the most important hermeneutical concepts for interpreting statements in Scripture that deal with the physical world. The Bible is the Holy Spirit inspired Word of God. As 2 Timothy 3:16 states: “All Scripture is Godbreathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.” But we must always remember that the inspired biblical writers were ancient people. In order to*

*reveal the inerrant spiritual truth that God was the only Creator of the world, the Holy Spirit had to descend to their level of comprehension and accommodate by using origins science-of-the-day.*

*Let me further explain. Assume for a moment that you are God and that you have decided to reveal yourself to the world through an ancient community like the Hebrews about 3,500 years ago. Being God, you have the power to inspire writers to record your every word and thought in Scripture. And let's also assume that you created living organisms through an evolutionary process. In your creation account, would you have inspired the biblical author to write: "In the beginning God created plants and animals through evolution." I doubt that ancient men and women thousands of years ago would have understood the meaning of the term "evolution." The theory of biological evolution was only accepted after the scientific discoveries of Charles Darwin in the late nineteenth century. In fact, many surveys of American adults today show that even though we are the most scientifically informed generation that has ever lived, about half of us reject evolution. So it seems highly unlikely that ancient people would have understood a creation account about God creating living organisms through an evolutionary logical perspective; they saw that living organisms were immutable and never changed. It was created de novo (quick and complete).*

*Therefore, by accommodating to the intellectual level of ancient people, would you not say that you created plants and animals rapidly and fully formed? And isn't this exactly what the Holy Spirit did by revealing that the God of Christianity was the Creator of life in Genesis 1 and 2?"*

## **A plausible explanation for Genesis 1**

It is logical that Genesis 1 was not written necessarily to be a science text to explain the scientific origin of the heavens and the Earth but to be an answer to a serious problem facing the early Hebrews. This problem is suggested by Conrad Hyers, a Presbyterian minister. He suggests that the issue facing the early Hebrews at that time was what their neighbor tribes believed. That is, these tribes thought that the sun, moon, stars, planets, water, night, etc. were gods and were "bad" and out to get them unless they worshiped them by making sacrifices on altars to them. The author of Genesis 1 said that there is only one God and this God made all these things and they are GOOD and not bad. That understanding is excellent theology that was needed by the early Hebrews at that time. On that basis, Genesis 1 need not be a science text and concordists need not attempt to make it have modern scientific sense to fit the three-tier universe model.

## **Conclusion**

On the basis of the observations made in this article God has given us two books to read and they are the Bible/theology

and science/nature (Collins, 2021). Both are from God and true. The first answers the questions of who and why. The second answers the question of when, where, and how. Both books are not in conflict and God does not lie. On that basis, young adults need not leave the church because the truth that comes from the teachings of Jesus and the example of the way He lived sets people free. Leaders of churches need to teach the truth because TRUTH MATTERS and if they do, the youth will come back to the church.

## **References**

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- Lamoureux, D, O., 2020, The Bible & Ancient Science Principles of Interpretation, McGahan Publishing House, Tennessee, 216 pages.