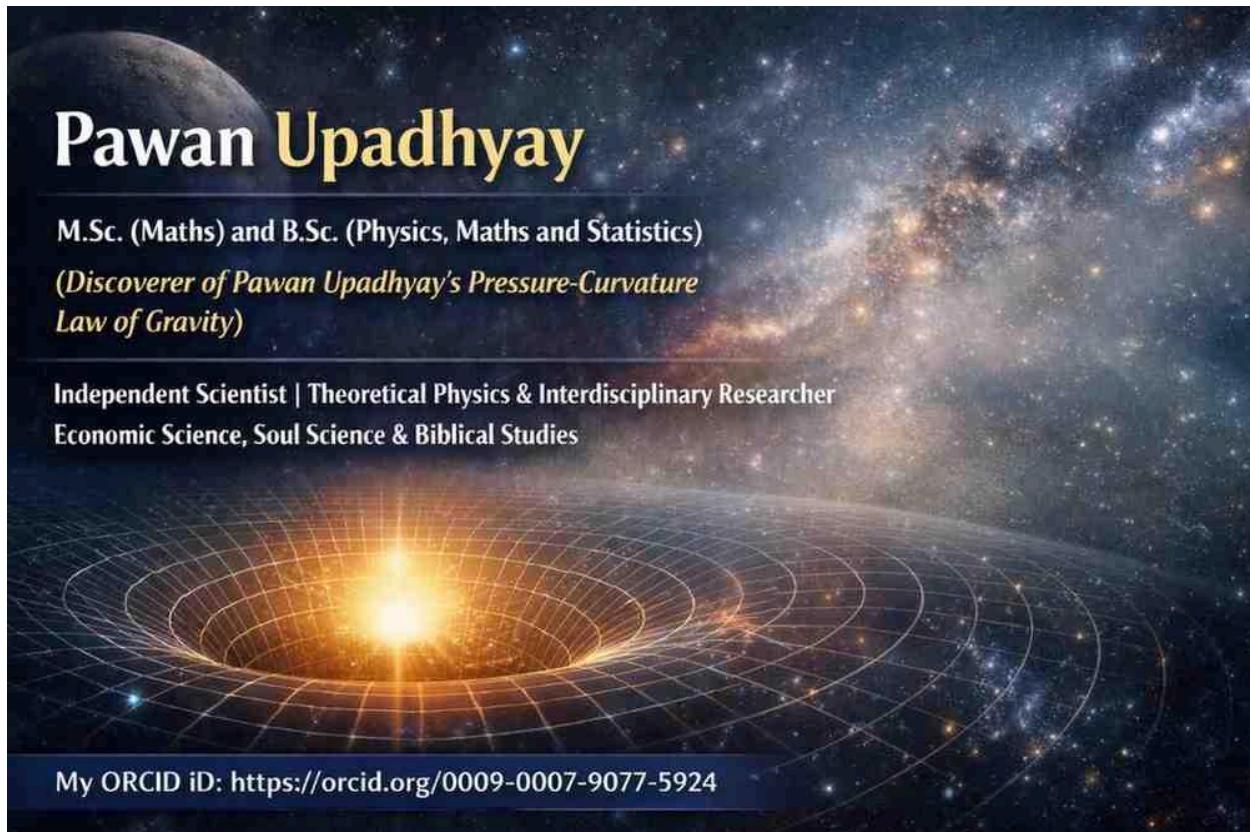


Biblical Language and the Shape of the Earth: A Theological and Textual Study

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Abstract

The shape of the Earth has been a subject of scientific measurement and philosophical inquiry for centuries. Modern science describes the Earth as an oblate spheroid—slightly flattened at the poles and bulging at the equator. The Bible, however, is not a scientific textbook but a theological work that uses observational and poetic language. This research paper examines biblical passages often cited in discussions about the Earth's shape and evaluates whether Scripture supports, contradicts, or remains neutral regarding the concept of a spherical or oblate Earth. The study concludes that while the Bible does not explicitly describe the Earth in scientific terms, its language is compatible with a round or spherical Earth and does not support a flat-earth model.

1. Introduction

Questions concerning the relationship between the Bible and scientific knowledge frequently arise, particularly regarding cosmology. One such question concerns the shape of the Earth. Some critics claim that the Bible teaches a flat Earth, while others argue that Scripture anticipated modern discoveries. This paper approaches the issue carefully, recognizing the Bible's primary purpose as theological rather than scientific. The aim is to analyze relevant biblical texts, their original languages, and their literary context.

2. The Bible's Purpose and Language

The Bible communicates divine truth using phenomenological and poetic language—describing the world as it appears to human observers. Biblical authors were not attempting to provide scientific models but to reveal God's sovereignty over creation. Therefore, biblical cosmological language should be interpreted within its literary and theological framework rather than through modern scientific expectations.

3. Biblical Passages Suggesting Earth's Roundness

Several passages describe the Earth using imagery of circularity or curvature.

3.1 Isaiah 40:22

- *"It is he who sits above the circle of the earth."*

The Hebrew word **hûg** (חָג) denotes a circle, compass, or rounded horizon. While it does not technically mean “sphere,” it clearly implies roundness rather than flatness.

3.2 Job 26:10

- *"He has inscribed a circle on the face of the waters, at the boundary between light and darkness."*

This verse reflects the day–night boundary, which appears curved due to the Earth's rotation—consistent with a spherical form.

3.3 Proverbs 8:27

- "When he drew a circle on the face of the deep."

Again, the imagery is circular and harmonious with a round Earth.

4. Curvature, Horizon, and Seal Imagery

4.1 Job 38:13–14

- "It is changed like clay under a seal."

A seal leaves a curved impression, suggesting a rounded surface rather than a flat plane. This metaphor aligns naturally with a spherical Earth.

5. Day and Night Simultaneity

5.1 Luke 17:34–36

Jesus speaks of people sleeping, working, and grinding grain at the same time. This implies different times of day occurring simultaneously across the Earth—consistent with a rotating spherical planet.

6. What the Bible Does Not Say

It is crucial to clarify what Scripture does not claim:

- The Bible does not use scientific terminology such as *sphere*, *axis*, or *oblate spheroid*
- The Bible does not describe polar flattening or equatorial bulge
- The Bible does not provide measurements of Earth's dimensions

Thus, Scripture neither defines nor denies the Earth's oblate shape.

7. Compatibility with Modern Science

Modern astronomy and physics confirm that the Earth is an oblate spheroid. Biblical language, though pre-scientific, is remarkably compatible with this understanding. No biblical text requires belief in a flat Earth, and several texts naturally align with Earth's roundness.

8. Theological Implications

Understanding the Bible's approach to cosmology protects readers from false conflicts between faith and science. Scripture teaches who created the world and why—not the technical mechanics of how it is shaped. Proper interpretation preserves both scientific integrity and theological meaning.

9. Conclusion

The Bible does not explicitly state that the Earth is spherical or oblate, but its language consistently reflects circularity, curvature, and global simultaneity. When interpreted responsibly, Scripture is fully compatible with the scientific understanding of Earth as an oblate spheroid. Claims that the Bible teaches a flat Earth arise from misunderstanding poetic language rather than from the text itself.

Keywords

Bible and science, shape of the Earth, spherical Earth, oblate spheroid, biblical cosmology, theology