

The Hebrew word *רָקִיעַ* is commonly translated *firmament*, after the example of the Septuagint, (*στερέωμα*), but many modern critics have sought to mollify the unphilosophical idea of a solid concave shell over our heads, by using the word *expanse*. No doubt they felt their minds acquiescing in this term, as expressing very well the diffused fluid which surrounds the earth; and so leaving us at liberty to conceive of its increasing tenuity, till it is lost in the planetary spaces. But this is the transferring of a modern idea, to times and persons which had it not. The Hebrew language has no word for *air*, properly speaking: because they knew not the thing. Their nearest approaches were with words that denoted condensed and so visible watery vapour, whether floating around them or seen in the breathing of animals; and words for smoke arising from substances burning; and for air in motion, wind, a zephyr-whisper, or a storm. But of elastic fluids they had no idea. The word under consideration strictly signifies a solid substance, *extended* by beating out, or rolling, or any other mode of working upon a ductile mass.* The old word, *firmament*, was therefore the most proper. Examining the whole subject, by connecting it with some passages which have been quoted, and some yet to be mentioned, we acquire an idea of the meteorology of the Hebrews. They supposed that, at a moderate distance above the flight of birds, was a solid concave hemisphere, a kind of dome, transparent, in which the stars were fixed, as lamps; and containing openings, to be used or closed as was necessary. It was understood as supporting a kind of celestial ocean, called "the waters above the firmament," and "the waters above the heavens." This was the grand reservoir containing water to be discharged at proper times in rain, with which

* See Jer. x. 9.