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The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume XX
Issue 478

Heaven

Part 2 of 2

by — Charles Welch (1880-1967)

HEAVENLY PLACES¹

This subdivision of the great term “*heaven*” is justified by reason of its dispensational importance, and the words play a great part in setting forth the distinctive character of the Mystery. These “*heavenly places*” were known at least in part in other ages – the expression “*the heaven, and the heaven of heavens*” already noted suggests that such a superior sphere was known – but no prophet, evangelist or apostle ever dreamed that a redeemed company would find their sphere of blessing there, least of all a company made up of alien Gentiles. First let us examine the word itself.

Epouranios. This word is composed of *epi*, “*upon*,” and *ouranios*, “*heavenly*,” the adjective form of *ouranos*, “*heaven*.”

Epouranios occurs in the New Testament twenty times. It is translated as follows: *celestial, heavenly, in heaven, heavenly places, heavenly things, high places* and *they that are heavenly*. It is attached to several nouns as “*heavenly Father*,” “*celestial bodies*,” “*heavenly kingdom*,” “*heavenly calling*,” “*heavenly gift*” and “*heavenly Jerusalem*.” Whether each and every one thus defined is not only “*heavenly*” but at the same time “*in heaven*,” the context must decide.

For example, the Hebrews had tasted the *heavenly gift* and the power of the age to come (Hebrews 6:4), but no one seriously believes that these Hebrews were in heaven at the time that they are said to have tasted this gift. The heavenly Jerusalem will *descend* from God out of heaven and come down either to the earth itself or near to it; it will be heavenly in character, but not be in heaven itself.

The word *epouranios* occurs in Matthew, John, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, 2 Timothy and Hebrews, and this wide distribution has given the unthinking



reader a reason to reject the peculiar claim of the church of the Mystery to these heavenly places as their sphere of blessing. A concordance is a most useful and valuable tool, but even valuable tools can do great damage if handled carelessly. Something more is needed than a quick glance at a list of occurrences in a concordance before judgment can be pronounced on the meaning of any particular reference.

Examining the Epistle to the Ephesians, we discover that the word *epouranios* is there used in a form which occurs nowhere else, and that this form occurs in five passages in the epistle. These occurrences we will indicate before passing on to their peculiar grammatical form.

Epouranios in Ephesians

- A Ephesians 1:3.
Spiritual blessings.
- B Ephesians 1:20.
Far above principalities and powers.
- C Ephesians 2:6.
Raised and seated together.
- B Ephesians 3:10.
A witness to principalities and powers.
- A Ephesians 6:12.
Spiritual wickednesses.

The form in which these five references to heavenly places occurs is unique. It is found in no other part of the New Testament. Where the remaining fifteen occurrences use the word *epouranios* simply, the Epistle to the Ephesians uses it in a phrase *en tois epouraniois*, “*in the heavenly [places, things, sphere]*” and never merely to define something as heavenly in character.

When Paul addressed this epistle to the saints which are at Ephesus, the words *en Epheso* do not mean that they

1. [Editor:] This section, *Heavenly Places*, is taken from: *An Alphabetical Analysis*, Part 2, pages 96-102.

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Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
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- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
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- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
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HEAVEN (continued from front page)

were "Ephesian" in character but that they were living somewhere. They were actually residing "in Ephesus." When the apostle reminded the Ephesian masters that they also had a Master in heaven, there could be no two thoughts about the fact that this Master was not only heavenly in character but in position. He was there. The word "where" indicative of place is used of the present position of Christ, "Where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). This is said to be "heaven itself" (Hebrews 9:24) and in "heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:20).

While *en* followed by a plural can mean "among" (Colossians 1:27), it can also mean "in"; for no one supposes that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob dwelt "among" tabernacles [tents] – they had enough common sense to dwell "in" them (Hebrews 11:9).² The strange expression "upon the heavens" loses its strangeness when we realize that the firmament is stretched out under the original heaven of Genesis 1:1.

The apostle has not only given these five references which indicate the exalted and peculiar position of Christ and His church, he has assisted us further by giving an explicit statement in Ephesians 4:10 concerning the *Ascension*. There Christ is said to have "ascended far above all heavens," the word translated "far above" being *huperano*. This position is so far above all heavens that, by ascending to this sphere, Christ is said to have filled all things.

Many words used in the English language are derived either from Latin or Greek. Some words are derived from both tongues, and are employed severally as the genius of the language dictates. Thus the Greek *huper* becomes the Latin *super*, and while we retain the Greek in such terms as hyperbolic, we often favor the Latin equivalent *super*, and say super-abundance, not *huper*-abundance; super-annuate, not *huper*-annuate; super-impose, not *huper*-impose.

Consequently, with Ephesians 4:10 plainly written, we are at liberty to speak of the super-heavens as a definition of the peculiar sphere of the church of the Mystery, conscious that we are not adding a word to the inspired testimony but are honestly giving in this compact form the combined intention of the two sets of expressions *en tois epouraniois* and *huperano panton ton ouranon*.

The only calling or revelation that has pierced the present temporary heaven and touched that which can be spoken of as eternal, is that dispensation of the grace of God which has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the super-heavenlies far above all. This shows the unique character of the church of the One Body. It is connected both by time and place with that which begins before the present heavens were made, and

2. [Editor:] There are people who suggest that the Greek word should be translated "among" – but they would not do so in Hebrews 11:9.

goes on when the present heavens shall be no more. The church of the Mystery is the only link during this age between the time before sin entered and the time when sin shall be no more. All other purposes are "under the heavens." This one alone places those who are blessed under its terms "above the heavens." If these things are so, it would be very surprising if the doctrine and practice of this peculiar people were not different from all others.³

The nature and extent of this analysis makes it impossible for us to take note of every difference of opinion that is current, but in one or two cases, silence may be misinterpreted and damage done to the cause of truth. We therefore make an appendix to "Heavenly places" in order to examine a point of view expressed soberly by a believer and teacher who has stood for the principle of right division for a great number of years. We quote:

The Earth, not Heaven, is the Future Home of God's redeemed.

This is what I believe. It is a belief that is not based upon tradition, upon emotion, or upon wishful thinking. It is not a conclusion that I have arrived at hurriedly.

There is therefore, in the following comments, no thought of impugning the veracity, honesty and conviction of the brother who has abandoned the idea that "heavenly places" is the future sphere of blessing for the church of the Mystery, for that is the focal point both of his teaching and our examination.

We readily admit, in common with many commentators, that the words "in heavenly places" as found in Ephesians 1:3 are not necessarily the translation of the Greek *en tois epouraniois*, the word "places" being understood and supplied, and not found in the original, but the same criticism could be leveled at the translation "High places" in Proverbs 8:2, Ezekiel 16:24 and Numbers 23:3, for neither of the Hebrew words so translated has the word for "place" attached to it. It would be possible to object to the insertion of the word "place" in Numbers 23:3, the word there translated "an high place" being the Hebrew word *shephi*, yet Balak had no difficulty in suggesting to Balaam that he go to "another place" (Numbers 23:13) where the Hebrew word for "place," *maqom*, is inserted. We introduce these examples simply to show that we must beware of sweeping statements, for by proving too much we prove nothing.

Ephesians 1:3 may mean "among heavenly beings," but it can mean "in heavenly places," for if the addition of "beings" be legitimate so also can the addition of the word "places." It is evident that if Ephesians 1:3 is the only passage to which we can turn, we reach a position of stalemate. God however, has not left the members of this high call- ►

3. *The Berean Expositor*, Vol. 20, p. 111.

ing in the dark, the phrase *en tois epouraniois* occurs again in Ephesians 1:20. There the reference is to the Ascension which, as Ephesians 4:10 affirms, was “*far above all heavens, that He might fill all things,*” even as Ephesians 1:20-23 reveals that Christ our Head is seated at the right hand of God, far above all principality and power, the church thus associated with Him there being “*the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.*” Place seems to be indicated here.

Colossians 3:1-4 uses the adverb “*where*” (Greek, *hou*), indicating that the Savior is in a “*place,*” and that place “*the right hand of God.*” Now it is not denied that Christ is there, but it is taught that where we read in Ephesians 1:20, “*and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places,*” we should interpret the later phrase “*among heavenly beings,*” bringing the passage into line with the translation already offered of Ephesians 1:3. Let us examine the context.

Wherever Christ is conceived of as sitting now is not among heavenly beings, but far above them. “*Far above all,*” *huperano*, a word which is repeated in Ephesians 4:10

“*Far above all heavens.*” Hebrews 4:14 teaches us that the ascended Christ “*passed through the heavens,*” *dierchomai* (cf. I Corinthians 10:1; 16:5), but not only so, in Hebrews 7:26 Christ is said to be “*higher than the heavens.*” Again, the apostle goes out of his way to enumerate the orders of “*heavenly beings*” which are beneath the exalted position of the Savior.

“*All [not some] principalities and powers and might, and dominion,*” and then, as in Romans 8:39 where he adds “*nor any other creature,*” so, here, to ensure that the entire universe is conceived of, he continues “*and every name that is named*” – and yet further, every name that is named “*not only in this age, but also in that which is to come.*”

How is it possible, in view of these explicit statements, to teach that “*where Christ sits*” is “*among*” heavenly beings? But this is not all. Paul quotes from Psalm 8, “*And hath put all things under His feet.*” Now did this quota-

tion stand alone, we should admit that it does not add anything more to that already seen, but the fact is, Paul had quoted this passage on two other occasions, and has given them such a peculiar exposition as to render further discussion unnecessary. Here are his own words, and his own peculiar deduction:

Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet. For in that He put all in subjection under Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him (Hebrews 2:8).

But when He saith all things are put under Him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under Him (I Corinthians 15:27).

When, therefore, Paul added the quotation from Psalm 8, he clinched the interpretation “*in heavenly places,*” for it is impossible after seeing this isolated and exalted position to believe that it is after all “*among heavenly beings.*”

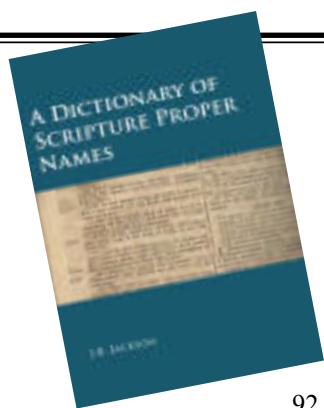
We are indebted to Mr. Alexander Thomson, in an article published in *The Differentiator*, for a clarifying word on Philippians 3:20.

Let me quote from the *Revised Standard Version*:

But our commonwealth is in heaven and from it we await a Savior.

From “*it*”? From what? It is out of our commonwealth or homeland that we are ardently awaiting Him. The Greek makes it very clear when it reads *ex hou*, and not *ex hon*, that is to say “*out of which*” (singular), not “*out of which*” (plural). The word heaven is plural, while *politeuma* is in the singular.

Now it is absurd to say that our Lord is to appear out of our “*manner of life.*” He is ardently awaited out of our *politeuma*. Therefore our *politeuma* is a country. Yes; it is our real homeland ... If the church of God is to spend its future existence on earth, we must see much



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by — J.B. Jackson

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— o0o —

THE EARTH, NOT HEAVEN, IS THE FUTURE HOME OF GOD'S REDEEMED?⁴

Not only has the translation, "before the overthrow⁵ of the world," been subjected to attack by one school of thought, and the meaning of all "spiritual" blessings been questioned, the sphere of these blessings has been so modified and explained by another that the idea that the earth and not heaven is the home of all the redeemed is assumed to have been justified.

The third feature of our high calling being imperiled, we must give the matter our most earnest and prayerful attention. There is nothing in the Greek to prevent the translation "in the heavenlies" being unquestioned.

We now take note of the objection to the word "places." We readily admit that the word "places" is not in the original, but neither are the words "beings" or "things." Whatever explanatory word is supplied, it must come from the context; all that the words *en tois epouraniois* can mean, if lifted out of their context, is "in the heavenlies," leaving other passages to supply the missing word. These "heavenlies" are spoken of again in Ephesians 1:20-21 where the risen Christ is said to be seated at God's own right hand in the heavenlies, far above all principality and power. Here we have a context which must influence our understanding of *en tois epouraniois*, and the remote context of Colossians 3:1-4 cannot be ignored. There, the believer in the same glorious truth as Ephesians is directed to set his mind on things above "Where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God."

4. [Editor:] This last section of the article is taken from: *An Alphabetical Analysis*, Part 6, pages 242-246.

5. [Editor:] or, *disruption (Concordant Literal Version)*.

Now, we are fully aware that the Bible, accommodating itself to the limitations of its human readers, uses expressions that must not be unduly pressed. It may well be that in a world of pure spirit, there is no "up" or "down," no size or magnitude, no here or there; but if that is so, such a world and such conditions are beyond our present powers to conceive and express. The believer, who at any one time ventures into this realm, must be consistent; he must leave all traces of present experience behind him, and this, of course, would make for sheer unintelligible gibberish. We read in Colossians 3:1-2 that "things above" are set over against "things on the earth" and that these things above are "where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." The Greek word *hou* is an adverb of place, and occurs twenty-seven times in the New Testament.

The star that stood over where the young child was, stood over a geographical "place" (Matthew 2:9). It was a localized "house" which the wise men could enter or leave. When the Savior "found the place where it was written" the Greek word *topos* is used together with *hou*, and "the place where" indicated a particular portion of the "book" that had been handed to Him.

We must beware lest we whittle away the power of the adverb "where" when dealing with *epouraniois*. Not only so, but the present session of Christ at the right hand of God is consequent upon the Ascension. Did He actually ascend, or is this ascension to be explained, or explained away, as having no reference to direction or place? The word translated "ascend" is the Greek word *anabaino*, as in Ephesians 4:8, "He ascended up on high."

Christ could not have ascended up into a mountain (Matthew 5:1), if that mountain were not actually there. He could not have said, "We go up to Jerusalem" (Matthew 20:18) if Jerusalem had not been geographically there. We learn from Hebrews 4:14 that Christ "passed through [dierchomai] the heavens," and in Hebrews 7:26 that He was "made higher than the heavens." If the Savior never actually ascended up far above all heavens, then He never descended to the lower parts of the earth. ►

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He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things (Ephesians 4:10).

It is an essential item of our faith that “*The Man Christ Jesus*” is at the right hand of God. If we empty the Ascension, or the heavens, of any reference to “*place*”; if, in other words, we spiritualize away Ephesians 4:8-10 and make it simply a reference to the Savior’s gracious condescension; if we deny that He has ascended up “*where He was before*” (John 6:62); if we have no room for the argument of John 3:13, “*No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven*”; if the Lord is not actually to descend from heaven with a shout (I Thessalonians 4:16); if, in other words the Lord at present is nowhere, then The Man Christ Jesus cannot be, for a body must occupy space. We read of the actual Ascension of the Lord in Acts 1, thus:

*And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was **taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight.** This Same Jesus, which is **taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven** (:9, 11).*

Identity and continuity of person is here implied. He was the Man, Christ Jesus, and when He comes again He will be still “*this same Jesus*.” Is He not “*this same Jesus*” Who now sits at the right hand of God in those heavenly places to which He ascended? Can a man be “*nowhere*,” or are we, to quote the writer we have in mind, “*grabbing at the first idea that appears on the surface?*” We are glad, however, that we have not used such ungracious terms of one whose teaching we believe to be most dangerous and unscriptural.

Those readers who may be fortunate enough not to have come across this evaluation of Ephesians 4:8-10 in the attempt to explain away the “*place*” element in “*heavenly places*,” must allow the occupation of so much space in the refutation of the teaching that heavenly places has no reference to a sphere of blessing “*in heaven*.” We feel like echoing the cry of Mary as we contemplate the dread possibilities of this spiritualizing system, when she said, “*They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him!*” – but we find reassurance as she did, in the reply of the Lord Himself, “*Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend ...*” (John 20:13, 17). If *epouraniois* can be translated “*mighty*” in Ephesians 1:3 [*i.e.*, “*mighty places*” instead of “*heavenly places*”], what is to prevent anyone suggesting “*mighty Jerusalem*” (Hebrews 12:22), or “*mighty gift*” (Hebrews 6:4), or “*mighty country*” (Hebrews 11:16)?

In plain language the only thing we learn from the LXX translation of Psalm 68:14 is that El Shaddai is “*The heavenly One*,” which has no bearing either way on the phrase *en tois epouraniois*.

We are told that those who use Philippians 3:20 to teach that the destiny of these Philippians was heaven, “*are guilty of expunging the real message in order to read into it some idea of their own.*” Most expositors see in Paul’s exhortation a call to those members of a Roman colony, to live accordingly, remembering that the only difference between the Philippian Roman and the actual citizen of Rome itself, was just this, that while the Roman was in Rome itself, the Philippian Roman was at a distance, but, as the apostle wrote,

Our conversation [citizenship] is [exists all along; Greek, huparcho] in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior (Philippians 3:20).

The word “*heaven*” here is plural, the words “*from which*” are singular and refer to the citizenship which is in heaven. If the Savior is to come from heaven, He must first of all have returned there from the earth, and anyone who denies this must not object if the words quoted above return like a boomerang on themselves. All attempts to explain away the heavenly city or country, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to limit it to the restored earthly city, must be prepared to deny what John says that he saw in Revelation 21:2, or the description that he gives at the dictation of the Lord in Revelation 3:12, both affirming that this heavenly city “*cometh down out of heaven*,” which by no possibility can be made to mean already, and only, existing on the earth. ■

(edited)



The Problem of Evil and The Judgments Of God

by — A.E. Knoch

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