



# Bible Student's Notebook™

## *The Herald of His Grace*

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

Volume 25  
Issue 616

# The Three Spheres

## The Earth – The New Jerusalem – Far Above All

Part 1 of 2

by — Charles H. Welch (1880-1967)

There are three spheres of blessing: the Earth, the heavenly city, and the position indicated in Ephesians 1, as “*far above all*.”



This aspect of truth is vital. It gathers up unto itself all that is distinctive in what is called “Dispensational Truth,” and we must spare no pains, nor begrudge the space needed to provide the scriptural evidence for believing these three spheres of blessing revealed in the Scriptures.

We will enumerate in scriptural terms the actual spheres of blessing spoken of in the Scriptures, and then compare and contrast them so that by trying the things that differ we may avoid confusion and keep each calling in its appointed place.

### “IN HEAVENLY PLACES”

Let us begin with our own calling as revealed in the Epistle to the Ephesians.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings **in heavenly places** in Christ (1:3).*

At the moment we are not concerned with the kind of blessings here set forth, namely, “*spiritual*,” but with the *province, range or domain* in which these blessings naturally find their setting. The sphere of blessing found here is defined as “*in heavenly places*.”

Again, we are not *yet* concerned as to whether these “*heavenly places*” are no higher than the firmament in which birds fly; whether they denote the starry heavens; or whether they refer to a position far above all. All that we are immediately concerned with is that a distinct sphere is indicated by the words “*in heavenly places*.”

### “THE EARTH”

We now turn to another part of the New Testament, where we read of another sphere of blessing:

*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit **the earth** (Matthew 5:5).*

A sphere of blessing is found in Matthew 5:5 which is defined as “*the earth*.” Once more, we are not concerned with the character of those here referenced, nor with their inheritance, but exclusively with the *sphere* of their inheritance.

We assume, but have not yet proved, that “*the earth*” and “*heavenly places*” are two distinct spheres. Common sense says they are distinct, but we leave the proof until later.

Here then are two spheres of blessing concerning which there is no controversy, but in addition to these two we discover what appears to be an intermediate sphere of blessing, a sphere above “*the earth*,” yet not “*in heavenly places*.” For this we turn to Galatians 3:14.



*That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.*

*heavenly places.”*

The question which now arises is, does this passage refer to a distinct sphere of blessing, or is the blessing of Abraham to be enjoyed in one or other of the two spheres already considered? A complete answer can be given only after careful examination, but for the sake of conciseness, we note that in this calling,

We therefore search further in this epistle, and in the chapter 4 we find the following statement:

*there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).*

*But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all ... now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise (4:26, 28).*

### **“THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM”**

This unity does not sound like the constitution of a kingdom, which is what is in view in Matthew 5. Rather it so resembles the later revelation of Ephesians that some have adopted the expression “*all one in Christ Jesus*” with the idea that it declares the Unity of the spirit of Ephesians 4.

“*Jerusalem which is above,*” is neither “*on the earth*” nor “*in heavenly places far above all principality,*” and as this city forms the theme of Hebrews 11:9-16 and 12:18-23, where it is contrasted with the “*earth,*” we are obliged to record a third sphere of blessing.

Before seeing the proofs, most, if not all, will agree that Galatians 3:14 does not refer to an inheritance on “*the earth.*” Yet when we read on to Galatians 3:29, we are prevented from asserting that it belongs to the sphere of the Mystery made known in Ephesians, for we find it stated,

A third sphere of blessing, differing from that of Ephesians 1:3 and that of Matthew 5:5, is recorded in the Epistles to the Galatians and the Hebrews, and is associated with “*the heavenly Jerusalem*” (Hebrews 12:22), a sphere distinct on the one hand from Earth and its kingdom, and on the other hand from the heavenly places which are the sphere of the church<sup>1</sup> of the Mystery.

*And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

We therefore set out our first conclusion.

So entirely contrary is it to the scriptural teaching concerning the Mystery to make it a fulfillment of any promise to Abraham that we must hesitate to place this company, which is Abraham's seed, “*in*

1. [Editor:] The Greek word often translated as “*church*” in most English versions is ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*, or *ecclesia*). The word is a compound word meaning “*called-out*” (*ek* = “*out*”; *kaleō* = *called*). The *ecclesia* is God's “*called-out*” ones. The *ecclesia* is not a building or denomination; not a meeting, or doctrinal creed; it is not somewhere we go, or something we do, it is who we as believers *are*.



48 pp., BK

## ***The Church Which Is His Body, and The Bride the Lamb's Wife***

We have reprinted a grand work on the subject of “*the Body*” in contrast to “*the Bride*” by the late J.H. Kessler.

“*In Scripture the church of this dispensation is symbolized as ‘the Body of Christ,’ never as ‘the Bride.’*” — Sir Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince*

*See order form.*

**The Three Spheres of Blessings**

“The Earth”	Matt. 5:5	The Kingdom
“Jerusalem which is above”	Gal. 4:26	The Bride
“In heavenly places”	Eph. 1:3	The Body

In the near context of Matthew 5:5, which speaks of the meek who shall “inherit the earth,” we learn of a kingdom which is yet to be set up on Earth:

*Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in Earth, as it is in Heaven (Matthew 6:10).*

In that prophecy of His Second Coming, The Revelation, one of the titles of the Lord is: “The Prince of the Kings of the Earth” (Revelation 1:5). The extent of this kingdom is defined in Psalm 72:8.

*He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.*

Again, in Psalm 2:8.

*Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen, Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth, Thy possession.*



**The Problem of Evil and The Judgments Of God**

by — A.E. Knoch

346 pp, PB  
(See order form.)

This book traces the divine function of evil from its inception to its consummation, by presenting scriptural solutions to the various long-debated questions concerning God and His sovereignty. Here is what one of our readers has written about *The Problem of Evil*:

“The litmus test for motive in any writer is whether or not the power of the ‘Cross’ is being diminished or supplanted in any way; Knoch unfolds each point with the loving simplicity of someone who has faced and answered the critics with the overarching victory of Calvary. One comes away from each chapter of this work once again realizing that the offense of the ‘Cross’ has driven so many wonderful and freeing truths out of what is traditionally taught and practiced.”

Yet again, the prophet Zechariah says:

*He shall speak peace unto the heathen: and His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth (9:10).*

Moreover, in The Revelation we read:

*The seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in Heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ ...” (11:15).*

This kingdom on Earth will have an administrative center:

*It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:2-3).*

This is supplemented by Zechariah the prophet:

*It shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain (14:16-17).*

It will be seen by the two latter references from Isaiah and Zechariah that, not only is the city of Jerusalem represented as the capital of the kingdom, but also as the center of worship, and this is in harmony with the destiny of Israel when that nation is at length saved, for Israel is to be a kingdom of priests unto God (Revelation 1:6).

They will be made so under the New Covenant and the blood of Christ in fulfillment of the original purpose of God expressed at the foot of Mount Sinai but, by ►

reason of the weakness of the flesh, rendered impossible of accomplishment under the law (Exodus 19:6).

Inasmuch as the bulk of Scripture is taken up with the history and prophecy of this earthly people and kingdom, no attempt on our part, particularly considering the limitations of our space, can possibly do more than indicate the fact of its existence.

There is, however, unanimity among most believers regarding this first, or lowest sphere of blessing, and while we shall have to return to the subject when certain of its features will be compared with those of other spheres, we now pass on to the consideration of the next sphere, having left nothing unproved or resting upon mere assumption.

Earth will be a sphere of blessing in which there shall be set up a kingdom, over which the Lord shall be King, with Jerusalem the chosen center, and Israel a Kingdom of Priests. This we will call the First Sphere.

We now come to the second sphere; that which is associated with the heavenly Jerusalem, and it must be recorded as a fact of importance that no hint of such a sphere is to be found in the whole of the Old Testament. Yet when we study the New Testament we learn that its existence was intimately known by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For this information we turn to the Epistle to the Hebrews.

In Hebrews 11 the apostle illustrates the statement that “*faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,*” by the examples of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Coming to the example of the patriarchs, the writer pauses to add,

*By faith he [Abraham] sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles [tents] with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God (11:9-10).*

After speaking of Sarah’s faith, the apostle reverts to the subject of this city, saying,

*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and*

*were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country ... that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He hath prepared for them a city (:13-16).*

After a further and fuller expansion of the theme of Hebrews 11:1 the apostle returns to the subject of the Heavenly City in chapter 12, but approaches it from another angle. We reserve comment upon the significance of this new angle until we have established the fact of the revelation of all three spheres, and meantime pass on to :22-23:

*But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.*

Other references to this sphere of blessing are found in The Revelation:

*Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of Heaven from my God: and I will write upon him My new name (3:12).*

The significance of the fact that this is associated with the overcomer, together with the similar significance

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of the context of Hebrews 12, will be considered when we come to deal with the subject of the spheres themselves: at present we confine ourselves to establishing the fact that the Scriptures speak of such spheres:

*And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Revelation 21:2).*

*He carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven from God (:10).*

The testimony of Hebrews 11:16 alone is sufficient proof that this *heavenly city* is a separate sphere of blessing from that of the Earth, and while much must yet be studied if we would appreciate its true significance, we can, without hesitation, affirm that there is full Scriptural testimony to the existence of this second sphere of blessing.

Granting that these two spheres of blessing are actual Scriptural facts, the question that now awaits an answer is: Do they exhaust the teaching of Scripture on the subject?

In other words, is there a third sphere of blessing distinct from both the Earth and the *heavenly city*? We believe there is, and proceed at once to state the evidence for this belief.

The epistle to the Ephesians was written by Paul as “*the prisoner of Jesus Christ*” (Ephesians 3:1). Israel,

as a nation, had been set aside by the quoting of Isaiah 6:10, as recorded in Acts 28, and with that setting aside had of necessity gone the hope and the blessings of which they were the appointed channel.

While Israel remained as a nation before God, the Gentile believer could be “*blessed with faithful Abraham*” (Galatians 3:9); could be associated with Israel under the “*New Covenant*” (II Corinthians 3:6); could entertain the hope of Israel (Romans 15:12-13); and could “*partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree*” (Romans 11:17).

However, with Israel set aside, there arose the necessity of a further revelation from God, if all was not to be plunged into confusion and end in despair. This revelation is claimed by Paul in the epistle to the Ephesians:

*If ye have heard of the **dispensation** of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward [Gentiles]: how that by **revelation** He made known unto me the Mystery (3:2-3).*

This Mystery has particular reference to the new position assigned to the Gentiles:

*That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel: whereof I was made a minister (3:6-7).*

Here we have a “*dispensation*” which was particularly concerned with the Gentiles; a “*revelation*” that makes known that which was a “*mystery*,” and that, hitherto, this mystery had been “*hid in God*” (:9). ►



258 pp., PB

See order form.

## *World Affairs and National Politics*

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by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

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Not only was it “*hid in God*,” but “*from the ages and from generations*,” but NOW is “*made manifest to His saints*” (Colossians 1:26).

In order that no statement shall be accepted as true that is not proved from the Scriptures, we pause to justify the remark that *the dispensation of the Mystery was revealed after the setting aside of Israel*.

Usually it is enough to produce the missing link in a chain; but, if the play of words may be pardoned, we have a complete chain of evidence, and that none other than the one which fettered the apostle Paul in his Roman prison.

Until the conference with the leaders of the Jews which concluded with their dismissal at the quoting of Isaiah 6, there was the human possibility of the national repentance of Israel and the realization of that nation’s hope. Consequently, the apostle rightly says in Acts 28:20,

*For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.*

The next time he speaks of his bonds as his chain, the *Dispensation of the Mystery* had been entrusted to him, and in Ephesians and Colossians his chain is most intimately associated with *the Mystery* (Ephesians 6:20; Colossians 4:3).

While there is much more to be said concerning the unique character of this *new revelation*, enough has been adduced to prove beyond dispute that this *Dispensation of the Mystery*, revealed after the setting aside of Israel, must be different from both the earthly sphere and the new Jerusalem, and as we have seen that these latter terms represent two very distinct spheres, we are compelled to subscribe to the doctrine of three spheres of blessing, thus:

### 1. **First Sphere: The Earth**

- *Subject of Old Testament and part of New Testament.*
- Israel dominant.

### 2. **Second Sphere: New Jerusalem**

- *Subject only of part of the New Testament.*
- Both Jew and Gentile as seed of Abraham.

### 3. **Third Sphere: The Mystery**

- *Subject of the Prison Epistles only.*
- Gentiles especially.

*(to be continued)*

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- union in His death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6);
- adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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