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The Herald of His Grace

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Volume 25
Issue 617

The Three Spheres

The Earth – The New Jerusalem – Far Above All

Part 2 of 2

by — Charles H. Welch (1880-1967)

We have considered, a little more in detail, the characteristics of that sphere of blessing which belongs to Israel and the earth. We must now turn our attention to the next sphere, the one associated with the heavenly Jerusalem. The two epistles that speak of the heavenly Jerusalem are Galatians and Hebrews, and we must now acquaint ourselves with their teaching.



is at the very heart of the Jewish problem, the apostle never speaks of it in the epistle to the Hebrews. This would be difficult to explain or to understand if Hebrews stood alone, but if Galatians and Hebrews go together, then circumcision would have been effectively dealt with in the *cover letter*, leaving the way clear in Hebrews for the exhortation that it gives to go on to perfection.

Dr. J.W. Thirtle, in two articles (from which we quote),¹ presented a good case for his contention that the epistle to the Galatians was a *cover letter*, and that the epistle to the Hebrews was an *enclosure* written, in the first case, for the Hebrews in the Churches of Galatia.

The first definite indication of *the sphere of blessing* that is in view in the epistle to the Hebrews is found in chapter 3:1, where those to whom the apostle wrote are called “*holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling.*”

What in reality do we find? Just this – two epistles, or writings, in close succession, in a professedly Pauline section of the New Testament, are merely separated or divided off, the one from the other, by the words *pros Hebraious* “to Hebrews.”

This is the first of six occurrences of *epouranios*² in Hebrews, which we give below:

Both epistles quote Habakkuk 2:4, “*The just shall live by faith*” (Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38), both develop the allegory of Sinai and Zion (Galatians 4:24-31; Hebrews 12:18-24), both deal with “*perfection*” (Galatians 3:3, Hebrews throughout), both speak of Jerusalem which is above, and both speak of the Mediator.

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus (3:1).

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit ... to renew them again unto repentance (6:4-6).

Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, “See,” saith He, “that thou make all things

Another very cogent argument which supports this connection is the fact that, although circumcision

1. Contributed to *The Christian* of April 27th and May 4th, 1916.

2. [Editor:] Strong's G2032.



according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount” (8:5).

It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these (9:23).

But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city (11:16).

But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22).

We must now examine these passages, so that our conception of what is “heavenly” shall be molded, not by our own views, but by what is actually written.

In the first passage, we read that these Hebrews were “partakers of the heavenly calling;” but whether or not this means that they were going to enjoy their inheritance in the heavenly places “where Christ sitteth” is not here stated.

In the first place, however, let us note that there is the most positive testimony that the position occupied by Christ in Hebrews is identical with that of Ephesians.

In Ephesians, Christ is said to have ascended “far above all heavens” (4:10), while in Hebrews He is said to have “passed through the heavens” (4:14) and

“made higher than the heavens” (*hupseloteros*,³ 7:26).

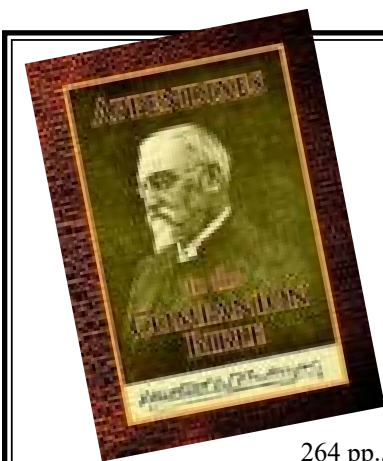
What is never taught in Hebrews, however, is that any of the redeemed could entertain the hope of being there, “where Christ sitteth.” The teaching is all in the other direction. We are reminded, for instance, that when the High Priest entered the most holy place (a type of Heaven itself) he entered “alone” (9:7). These Hebrews had certainly “tasted the heavenly gift,” but they did not ascend to Heaven to do so; they tasted this heavenly gift while *here on Earth*.

It is therefore folly to point to the fact that the [Greek] word *epouranios* occurs both in Hebrews and in Ephesians, and to deduce from this that there is nothing distinctive about the Ephesian sphere.

In Hebrews it is Christ, and Christ “alone,” Who sits in the heavenly place. In Ephesians, the essence of *the Mystery* is that an elect company of the redeemed sit there with Him. It is this fact that makes this *new sphere* of blessing unique; a fact which an indiscriminate list of the occurrences of *epouranios* can neither establish nor overthrow.

While Hebrews speaks of a “heavenly calling” and a “heavenly gift,” we are not left in doubt as to *where* this calling is to be enjoyed. The sphere of blessing connected with the “heavenly calling” is the “heavenly Jerusalem” which filled the vision of Abraham, and for which those who walked by faith in the Old Testament days suffered the loss of all things.

3. [Editor:] Both *Young’s* and *Strong’s* (G5308) have *hupselos*, i.e., “higher.”



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Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen ... 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 . . . wherefore God ... hath prepared for them a city (11:1, 13, 16).

This calling differs from the one that is associated with Mount Sinai. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were all “before the law” (see Galatians 3:17-18), and the inclusion of Abel, Noah and Enoch shows that it is not essentially connected with the Abrahamic covenant.

Moreover the inclusion of Rahab, after the law, reveals that it is of wider scope than the covenant of Sinai, and the presence of such names as Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel (Hebrews 11:32) shows that after the law of Moses had been given, there were still those who reached out for this higher and heavenly sphere.

In contrast with Sinai and its terrors, we have Zion with its blessings.

Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly, and to a church of firstborn ones, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of perfected righteous ones, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than Abel (12:22-24).

The reader will notice a slight departure from the A.V. here. The “general assembly” should be linked,

not with the “church of the firstborn,” but with the “innumerable company.” The church of the firstborn is made up of “the spirits of perfected righteous ones” (:23), or “the spirits of righteous ones having been perfected.” This “perfecting” is the key to Hebrews and is the basis of its exhortation.

Either those to whom the Apostle wrote would leave the things that were connected with the beginning and go on unto perfection (6:1), or, failing to endure, would draw back unto “loss” and “waste” (10:32-39).

It is clear from Hebrews 11 and 12 that the sphere of blessing there in view is that of the city which will at the last come down from God *out of Heaven*. This reference takes us to the Book of the Revelation, where we discover two things.

First, that those whose blessings are found in the New Jerusalem are spoken of as the “Bride,” a company that differs from the divorced “Wife” who will be restored at the end; and secondly, that this company are “overcomers” who have a “crown” (3:11-12).

We discover, therefore, that the second sphere of blessing is in the nature of a reward. It is the “heavenly” phase of the *earthly* kingdom. Abraham could not have forfeited the land of promise, for it was his as an unconditional gift; but in addition to this, he received the “heavenly,” which was associated with his “perfecting.”

This “perfecting” of his faith is the theme of the Epistle of James, which regards the offering of Isaac as the “fulfilling” of the initial act of faith whereby Abraham was justified (2:23).

James also has much to say in the first chapter about ►



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patient endurance and its perfecting work in view of the crown (1:3-4, 12). The *heavenly city* is not for righteous ones, simply, but for *perfected* righteous ones.

If the *heavenly country* for which Abraham gave up so much differs from the land of promise in which he lived as a pilgrim, then we must obviously recognize this “*heavenly calling*” as a separate sphere. Moreover it is clear that one of the chief characteristics of this sphere is that it represents a reward for faithful obedience, as distinct from the land of promise which was quite unconditional.

We have not attempted to differentiate between the covenant made with Abraham regarding the land, and the covenant made at Sinai. As both operate *on the earth*, they are both included in the one sphere.

The distinctive place *where* and the time *when* the Church of the Mystery shall enjoy its blessings, and was chosen in Christ by the Father, are given in Ephesians 1:3-4. We are not now concerned with the true translation of the words, “*before the foundation of the world*” (:4), but with the latter clause of :3.

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

“*In heavenly places*” is the translation of the Greek words *en tois epouraniois*. *Epouranios* occurs six times in the Epistle to the Hebrews, but there it speaks of a “*heavenly calling*,” a “*heavenly gift*,” “*heavenly*” realities, and a “*heavenly*” city.

There can be no comparison between a “*heavenly*

gift” that was enjoyed *on Earth* with “*the heavenly places*” of Ephesians 1:3. The one refers to character, the other to a place.

The occurrences of *epouranios* in Ephesians must be segregated, for they form a group by themselves. The phrase *en tois epouraniois* occurs only in Ephesians and nowhere else.

The second occurrence of the phrase is found in Ephesians 1:20-21, where we learn that this sphere is “*where Christ sitteth*” at the right hand of God. Nothing is more certain than that there can be no conceivably higher position in the whole universe than the right hand of God. Such is the height of this exaltation of Christ that the passage continues:

Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come (:21).

Quite apart from the words “*far above all*,” there can be no denial of the fact that there is here indicated a sphere without comparison in the whole range of Scripture. To conclude the first part of our examination, we turn to Ephesians 2:6 where we have a categorical statement that there, where Christ sits, is the sphere of blessing for every member of the Church which is His Body.

In these three passages (1:3; 1:20-21; 2:6) we have indubitable evidence of a sphere of blessing that differs entirely from anything that had hitherto been revealed.

Of no other company of believers is it said that their sphere of blessing is “*IN the super-heavenlies*.” The special sphere of blessing which belongs alone to



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the Church of the One Body is mentioned five times in this epistle, and a study of these occurrences will supply us with valuable information.

First of all, we translate the word “super-heavenlies” in recognition of the presence of the little particle *epi* with which the word begins. It is not simply *ouranos*,⁴ which is the usual word, but *epouranios*.

Secondly, the information supplied by the five references demands some such translation. Passing, therefore, to the second reference, we find, in 1:20-21, that this sphere of blessing is,

- (a) At the Father’s right hand.
- (b) Far above all principality and power.

That this tremendous height is the destined sphere of the Church of the Mystery, 2:6 declares. There the believer is associated with the risen Christ,

... made to sit together in the super-heavenlies in Christ Jesus.

Christ the Head and the Church His Body are blessed together *there*.

The next two references (3:10; 6:12), show the super-heavenlies as the abode of principalities, powers and rulers. Be it noted that angels are not mentioned. Angels

are heaven’s messengers. The Church of the One Body is blessed even above heaven’s nobility. Dominions and thrones are beneath it in its super-heavenly sphere ... While *epouranios* is used outside Ephesians, no other company of believers is blessed *IN* these exalted regions as their sphere. The blessings of the Church of the One Body are not only “heavenly,” but *up in Heaven*.

Having established from the Scriptures, quite independently of the occurrences or the meaning of either *epouranios* or *huperano*,⁵ the fact that there are three distinct companies of believers who are destined to inherit blessings in three distinct spheres, we can dismiss the question as to how *far* this exalted sphere is above all others; the answer to the question makes no difference to the fact that the Scriptures speak of three different spheres. For the sake of clarity we summarize our findings.

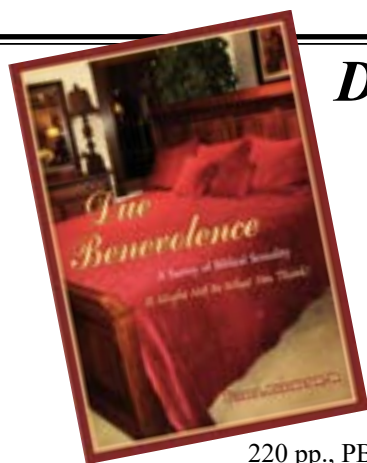
THE EARTHLY SPHERE

There are blessings that are to be enjoyed on Earth. Those who will occupy the central position in this sphere are Israel, and this calling is expressed in the terms of a “*Kingdom*.”

Gentile nations, while blessed in this same sphere, will be subservient, for to Israel, and Israel alone, is the Kingdom. Israel is the firstborn among the nations.

4. [Editor:] Strong’s G3772.

5. [Editor:] Strong’s G5231, “far above.”



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THE HEAVENLY SPHERE

There are other blessings that are to be enjoyed “in the holy city, new Jerusalem, **coming down from God out of Heaven**” (Revelation 21:2). These are the blessings of Abraham, and the calling is that of “*the Bride*” (a calling that must be kept distinct from that of the restoration of Israel, “*the Wife*”). Gentiles, as well as Israel, go to form this company called “*the Bride*,” where there is neither Jew nor Greek, but where both alike are reckoned as Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise.

Instead of nations being subservient to this company of the redeemed, it is angels who are associated with them in a subordinate position. This company in this sphere is the church of the Firstborn whose names are written in heaven.

THE SUPER-HEAVENLY SPHERE

There are, however, blessings that are neither those of Israel as a kingdom, nor of the heavenly calling of the Bride, and these are enjoyed in “*heavenly places*” where Christ sits, “*far above all*” principality and power and “*far above all heavens*” (Ephesians 4:10).

They who enjoy these constitute neither a Kingdom nor the Bride, but are the Body of Christ and a perfect Man. While individuals of Israel who believe to-

day are not precluded, this calling is mainly Gentile, for it operates during the period of Israel’s blindness.

This company also has a citizenship, but it is one which has nothing to do with either the earth or the New Jerusalem; not merely nation or angels are subservient to it, but principalities and powers.

To this company pertains the Firstborn from the dead, is its Head, each believer of the company forming a member of the Church which is His Body.

As this highest of all callings is the subject of THE SECRET that goes back before the overthrow of the world (Genesis 1:2), so it *goes up beyond* the “*firmament that was called heaven*” which spans the ages, and finds its sphere in *the super-heavens*; those heavens of Genesis 1:1 which remain unmoved by the ebb and flow of time, sin, death or dispensational change.⁶

— *Alphabetical Analysis*
(*edited & abridged*)

Topics:

Major: Spheres, Three; Israel; Mystery; Right Division; Kingdom of Heaven; Galatians; Hebrews; New Jerusalem

6. [Editor:] For more studies on these three spheres, see:

- *Three Spheres of Glory*, Dr. E.W. Bullinger, [Bible Student’s Notebook 596](#);
- *The Three Spheres: Distinguishing Between Them*, H.W. Fry, [Bible Student’s Notebook #613](#).

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