

## Some Misrepresentations about Heaven

by Harold P. Barker

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THERE are a few elementary data to which we must give heed by way of preparation for a study of this tremendous subject.

We find

### **Three Heavens Mentioned in Scripture.**

First, the ATMOSPHERIC HEAVENS that surround the earth. Here our little feathered friends fly, "birds of the heavens," as they are called (Jer. 4.25).

Second, the STELLAR HEAVENS, to which we look up with awe and amazement by night. Here shine those glorious orbs that testify to the creative wisdom and power of God. So we read of "the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof" (Isaiah 13.10).

Third, the Heaven to which Christ is gone, the HEAVEN OF OUR HOPES and longings. It is called "the third Heaven" in 2 Cor. 12.2.

Are all these Heavens Places? One can hardly speak of the air surrounding the globe as a "place." And the starry Heavens? Why, as far as human knowledge goes, they are commensurate with illimitable space!

Still less can we think of the **Heaven of Heavens in Terms of Geography or Locality**. When our Lord "looked up to heaven" in Mark 6.41, it was during the day; evening had not yet come (verse 47). But when on the night of His betrayal He offered His wonderful prayer recorded in John 17, He still "lifted up His eyes to Heaven." But He looked in an entirely different direction! What is above our heads at noon is beneath our feet at midnight.

When we pray we look up to Heaven. Our brethren in Australia do the same. But they, if praying at the same time, look in a diametrically different direction. Yet, both they and we, are looking up to Heaven.

If Heaven were a fixed locality; if, for instance, it were behind any particular group of stars, we could only look up to Heaven when the earth is in a certain position, and those stars in the firmament above our heads.

But to the Heaven of the Bible we may *always* look up. In our thoughts

it is above us; it is the home of our souls, whether in Europe or Australia. Is not this sufficient to show that Heaven is not the name of a limited locality? If it were, we could not at all times and in all places, look up to it. We do not, therefore, regard the word "Heaven" as a *topographical* term.

Again, we must not make the crude and elementary mistake of confounding Heaven with "that great city, **the Holy Jerusalem**" of Rev. 21.10, which John in vision, saw descending *out of heaven*. Surely it is clear to any one of ordinary intelligence that what comes out of Heaven cannot BE Heaven!

The angel said to John (in vision): "I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife," and immediately proceeded to show him the holy Jerusalem. It is the Bride, set forth under the figure of a city. What this suggests is that *the administration* of "the world to come" (the Millennium) will not be, as in ages past, by means of angels (Heb. 2.5), but through the saints of the present dispensation, who compose the Bride. The nations of the saved are to walk in the light of the city (Rev. 21.24). That is, I take it, that Heavenly influences will be brought to bear upon men on earth for their guidance by those who have learned God in the present period of grace.

In the first four verses of Rev. 21, the holy city is seen in

### **Her Eternal Glory,**

the tabernacle by means of which God dwells with men when the new Heaven and the New Earth have come into being. There will be no "nations" and "kings" then.

But from verse 10 onward the vision goes back and presents the city (i.e., the Bride) filling her place in "the world to come," then there will still be nations and kings (verse 24). In chap. 22, the vision enlarges somewhat and shows us more the surroundings, the home, the eternal state of the Bride. If any one says, "Well, this at all events is Heaven!" I shall heartily agree. Only, it is the Heaven of the future, not the Heaven of to-day.

There are, of course, many differences between the city (the Bride) and Heaven. To mention one more will suffice. There was

### **no temple seen in the city**

(Rev. 21.22); but in Heaven John saw a temple (Rev. 11.19).

The city of Rev. 21 having come down out of Heaven, we cannot make deductions as to what Heaven is like from the study of it; our concern is

rather as to *what was left behind* when the city was seen descending out of Heaven.

Now for our little talk on Heaven itself. It must necessarily be meagre, for our data are few. It is sometimes said that

### **the Presence of Jesus will make Heaven**

for us. True indeed! What would Heaven be without Him for those who love Him?

I do not forget for a moment that all Divine attributes were His, omnipresence among them. But as a Man He was only in one place at a time. Of Bethany He said: "I was not there" (John 11.15). Of the empty grave the angel said: "He is not here" (Mark 16.6). So there were places on earth where He was not, and we are, therefore, justified in saying that in the same way He was not in Heaven. As a Man here He looked up to Heaven. He was not there in *bodily presence*.

Some may refer to John 1.18, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the Bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."

### **The Bosom of the Father**

surely means the Father's affections, where the Son ever dwelt, whether in Heaven from all eternity or as a Man here on earth.

We may here quote *as a suggestion* what the late W. H. DORMAN used to speak of Rev. 4: "After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in Heaven; and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me, which said, Come up hither..."

He called it a picture of

### **"A Christless Heaven."**

He believed that it carries us there in thought during the time that Christ was on earth. He is clearly not in Heaven when the question of Rev. 5.2 is asked. For "*no man in Heaven* was found worthy to open the book." But neither was there one on earth. Where, then, was the Lord Jesus? Mr. Dorman answered the question by a reference to John 12.32. It was at the moment that Christ was on the Cross, "lifted up from the earth." Immediately afterwards the announcement is made in Heaven of a great victory: "The Lion of the tribe of Judah...hath prevailed " John gazes, and sees suddenly appear in Heaven "a lamb as it had been slain." It was

### **The Victor of Calvary,**

returned to Heaven from the arena of His triumph on earth. Then, for the first time, the great redemption song is raised, and all Heaven joins in acclaiming the Lamb as worthy.

The Heavens have always been profoundly interested in God's ways with men on earth. They have listened to His lament over the backsliding of the beloved nation (Isa. 1.2) ; they have been "astonished" and "desolate" at the sight of man's sin and ingratitude. (Jer. 2.12), and full of joy, many a time over the repentance of even one sinner (Luke 15.7).

#### As to **Our Future in Heaven,**

two things are certain. First, that *we shall never be infinite*, never Divine, never possessed of the attributes of Deity. Second, that we shall always be *in the Presence of the Infinite*.

Therefore, there will eternally be something beyond us and above us. For we can never compass infinity. There will for ever be something fresh to learn about God, fresh unveilings of Himself, even as there have been during the course of the ages on earth.

Perhaps this is why the word "eternity" is not used in describing our life in Heaven, but "the ages to come" (Eph. 2.7). Each age will be marked by afresh revelation of God, and that revelation will characterise the age, even as various revelations of Himself have characterised the successive ages of time. So that in the Heavens

#### **We Shall Find No Monotony.**

There will always be fresh cause for wonder and worship. But in all the ages the result will be glory to God by Christ Jesus, the Assembly being the vessel thereof (Eph. 3.21).

Probably when the present heavens and earth have perished (Heb. 1.11), and the new Heavens and new earth have been formed (2 Peter 3.13), there will not be much difference between them. For God, by means of His Tabernacle (compare Eph. 2.22) will dwell with men. They will be His happy flock and eternally He will find His pleasure in them.

*This* is what Heaven in the future, after the years of Millennial glory have rolled by, will mean for God and for us.

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