



# Bible Student's Notebook™

## *The Herald of His Grace*

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

Volume XX  
Issue 477

## Heaven

### Part 1 of 2

by — Charles Welch (1880-1967)

#### FIRMAMENT<sup>1</sup>

Many, who oppose the teaching of the first chapter of Genesis on scientific grounds, are often guilty of a very unscientific approach to this part of the Scriptures. The chapter is dismissed as myth and legend, because it is supposed to teach that God created the universe in six days!

This, however, is not the teaching of Genesis 1. At Genesis 1:2, a great gap occurs. The work of the six days was not a creation, in the sense of Genesis 1:1, but a reclamation and a reconstitution of the earth for man.

For example, all that is said of the work of the third day is that upon the gathering together of the waters which are now called "seas," "the dry land" appeared – but the land was there all the time even though submerged. It is this dry land that is *called* earth, and this stated fact every truly scientific reader must note and credit – otherwise misunderstandings and misinterpretations are bound to occur. It is the same with the "heaven" of the second day. There, in Genesis 1:6-8,<sup>2</sup> we have a "firmament"<sup>3</sup> which is "called" heaven, but this must not be confused with the heaven of Genesis 1:1. The present "firmament" is temporary. It spans the ages, but is to pass away as Isaiah 34:4 and II Peter 3:10 make clear.

Some have been stumbled by the word "firmament" as though the book of Genesis endorsed the mythology of



the heathen and taught that over our heads was a solid vault. Our translators were influenced by the Latin *Vulgate* which reads *firmamentum*. By this word it sought to translate the Greek of the *Septuagint*, which used the word *stereoma*.

Yet it may be as unfair to these men of old to import into the terms they employed such a concept of solidity, as it would to affirm that reasonable men today actually believe that over their heads is a "sky" which is "blue," for most know that the azure color we see is produced by refracted rays of light; but who among us, knowing all of this, would wish to alter such terms as "above the bright blue sky," etc.?

The Hebrew word which is used in Genesis 1:6 is *raqia*, which is derived from the root word *raqa* meaning "to spread out."<sup>4</sup> This word is used of the thin plates of gold that were beaten and used in the work of the tabernacle (Exodus 39:3), and of spreading abroad the earth (Isaiah 44:24). *Riq*, *ruq* and *raq* likewise give us the idea "to empty" (Genesis 42:35), "to draw out" (Leviticus 26:33), "lean" (Genesis 41:19), and so by a recognized transition this root becomes a "particle of extenuation" being translated "only" (Genesis 6:5), "save" in the sense "except" (I Kings 8:9), and referring to the "thinness" of the *os temporis* the Hebrew *raqqah* is used in Judges 4:21, for the bone of the temples.

Finally the Hebrew word *raqiq* is translated "wafer" seven times in the book of the law (e.g. Exodus 29:2). Something *extended* is the basic meaning of all of these

1. [Editor:] This section, *Firmament*, is taken from: *An Alphabetical Analysis*, Part 2, pages 30-32.  
2. [Editor:] Scripture references used throughout are taken from the *King James Version and Young's Literal Translation*.  
3. [Editor:] or, *atmosphere* (*Concordant Literal Version*).

(see **HEAVEN**, page 4219)

4. [Editor:] *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, Robert Young (1879), *et passim*.

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## HEAVEN (continued from front page)

derived uses, and that is what is meant by the firmament of Genesis 1:6.

The entire point of this revelation has been missed by the interposition of mere human cleverness. Had men but humbly enquired about the purpose of this attenuated firmament over their heads, they might have learned something of the redemptive character of this world in which we live, for Isaiah declares,

*He ... stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in (Isaiah 40:22)*

Here the figure of the tabernacle is too plain to be missed. In like manner, pseudoscience has been so busy pouring ridicule upon the primitive idea of the “foundations” upon which the earth is “fastened,” according to Job 38:6, that they have missed for themselves, and scared the timid from appreciating, that the word here used is the very word employed over and over again by Moses, to speak of the “sockets” upon which the tabernacle rested.

This intention on the part of the Lord will become more evident when we examine the meaning and usage of *pleroma*.<sup>5</sup> Our present quest is limited to the implications contained in the reference to a “firmament,” the temporary heaven which is to pass away.

Solomon evidently knew that there were “heavens” above the present “heaven.”

*Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee (I Kings 8:27).*

Moses too and the Psalmist also knew of this distinction.

*Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is (Deuteronomy 10:14).*

*Praise Him, heavens of the heavens, and the waters that are above the heavens (Psalms 148:4).*

This fact is basic to the teaching of the epistle to the Ephesians, for Christ is there said to have “ascended up far above all heavens that He might fill all things” (Eph-

5. *An Alphabetical Analysis*, Part 3, pages 181-255.

sians 4:10). The *heavenly places* where Christ now sits is far above the temporary “firmament” of Genesis 1:6, and the church<sup>6</sup> of the One Body is the only redeemed company whose sphere of blessing takes them up beyond this firmament to the heaven of heavens at the right hand of God. The recognition of these two “heavens” makes it scripturally true to speak of *three spheres of blessing*, namely (1) the earth, (2) the heavenly Jerusalem, (3) the heavenly places where Christ now sits.

In the beginning there were but two spheres, namely “*The heaven and the earth*” (Genesis 1:1). When God is “*All in all*” at “*the end*,” there may be but two spheres once again; but during the ages and until the consummation, there are three.<sup>7</sup>

— ooo —

## **HEAVEN<sup>8</sup>**

There are five words employed in the Hebrew Old Testament translated “heaven” and one Greek word so translated in the New Testament.

### **Old Testament Usage**

*Galgal*. Of the Hebrew words, *galgal* (Psalm 77:18) refers to the “rolling clouds,” the word *galgal* being elsewhere rendered “wheel” and “rolling thing.”

*Shachaq*, used in Psalm 89:6, 37 means a “thin cloud,” and is elsewhere translated “cloud,” “sky” and “small dust.” It may be accidental, but it is nevertheless interesting, that the blue color, and hence the visibility of the “sky,” is owing to refraction of blue rays of light, and that “it is to the vapory and the earthy particles in the atmosphere that the refraction is due; but for these there would be total darkness until the instant of sunrise.”

*Arabah* “mixed cloud” (Psalm 68:4) and *ariphim* “dropping clouds” (Isaiah 5:30) complete the references that ►

6. [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”; klēsi = 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.
7. For a fuller examination of this theme the reader is referred to the article entitled “Three Spheres,” *An Alphabetical Analysis*, Part 5, page 110-129.
8. [Editor:] This section, *Heaven*, is taken from: *An Alphabetical Analysis*, Part 2, pages 91-96.



refer to the clouds under the covering figure of heaven.

*Shamayim*. This Hebrew word is the one that is translated “heaven” or “heavens” in the Old Testament, except in those portions where the Chaldee equivalent *shemayin* is used (Ezra, Daniel and Jeremiah 10:11). The Hebrew *shamayim* occurs in the Old Testament 419 times, of which twenty-one are translated “air,” as in Genesis 1:26.

### New Testament Usage

In the New Testament only one word, *ouranos*, is translated “heaven.” This Greek word occurs over 280 times, of which “air” accounts for ten occurrences and “sky” for five.

The name “heaven” in our own language has been explained, according to its etymology, as that which is heaved or lifted up, and a similar origin has been assigned to the Greek *ouranos*, and the Hebrew *shamayim*.<sup>9</sup>

We have discussed the nature of the temporary “heaven” stretched out like a tent over the earth during the ages of Redemption. Now we deal with heaven itself. Whether the translation reads “heaven” or “heavens,” the word is always plural in the original. This no more indicates a plurality of “heavens” than the plural Elohim “God” indicates a plurality of Gods.<sup>10</sup>

Creation is divided into two parts, “heaven and earth” (Genesis 1:1), which in Colossians 1:16 is expanded to mean “all things visible and invisible,” and the term “heaven” may include thrones, dominions, principali-

9. Imp. Bib. Dic.

10. There is a use of the plural in the Hebrew language known as “The Plural of Majesty” as, for example, “the sacrifices of God” in Psalm 51:17, which means “the great sacrifice.”

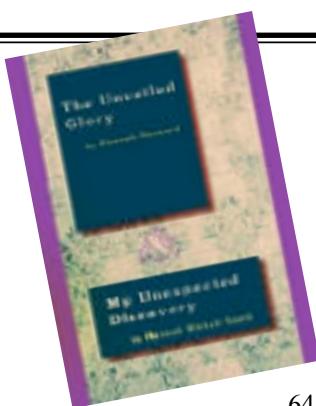
ties and powers, as well as physical sun, moon and stars. Heaven is often used as a symbol of authority, for example, when Nebuchadnezzar learned “that the heavens do rule” (Daniel 4:26). The superiority of the heavens to the earth is expressed in the words “on high” (Luke 1:78; Hebrews 1:3), “height” (Isaiah 7:11; Psalms 148:1; Proverbs 25:3). It is possible that, after Genesis 1:1, there are but nine or ten references to “heaven itself,” i.e., the heaven of Genesis 1:1, in the whole of the Old Testament. This can be put to the test by reading the book of Genesis, and noting every allusion to “heaven.”

We read of the waters that are under heaven, lights in the firmament of heaven, fowl that fly in the “air,” the windows of heaven opened at the deluge, Abraham directed to look toward heaven, to the countless number of the stars, but no passage demands that the term “heaven” should be interpreted of the heaven of Genesis 1:1.

We cannot print here the 419 references to heaven, but we can print the nine or ten references that look beyond the present limited firmament.

*Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord’s thy God* (Deuteronomy 10:14).

Here Moses draws attention to the firmament which is called heaven, and the heaven of heavens, the heavens in the highest degree that were created long before the six days of Genesis 1:3 to 2:1. No further reference is made to the heavens themselves until the days of David and Solomon where, in Psalm 8:1; 57:5, 11; 108:5; 113:4; 115:16 and 148:4 we have six references to a glory that is above the present limited heavens – making, with Deuteronomy 10:14, seven in all, the perfect number. In all other places the heavens referred to are



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put into correspondence with the firmament (Psalm 19:1) either by actual statement, or by implication. Five hundred years after Moses, Solomon recognized that neither the present heavens nor the heaven of heavens could “contain” God (I Kings 8:27), and the last reference to the heaven of heavens, in contrast with the firmament, is found in the Levites’ prayer (Nehemiah 9:6).

Even when we bring these passages forward, they only emphasize the fact that “*the heaven*” of the Old Testament was the “*firmament*” of Genesis 1:8, stretched out like a curtain or a tent for God to dwell in (Isaiah 40:22), and any reference in Psalms or Prophecy that speaks of heaven as God’s “*dwelling place*” refers to this tabernacle formed by the firmament.

When we open the New Testament, it is pardonable if we there expect to find a great advance upon this limitation of the term “*heaven*.” Twelve times do we read in Matthew of the “*Father which is in heaven*”; but we also read that the heavens were opened at the baptism of the Lord, that the heavens are to pass away, and unless it is a matter beyond dispute that “*angels*” inhabit the heaven of heavens, we shall find no instance in the gospel of Matthew of a reference to any other “*heaven*” than the firmament of Genesis 1:8.

We have to wait until we reach the gospel of John for any explicit reference to the highest heavens, and there the Savior speaks of ascending up to heaven to where He was before (John 3:13; 6:62), to the glory that He had “*before the world was*” (John 17:5).

In these few references is contained practically all that is said of the “*heavens*” of Genesis 1:1 in the four gospels. The only calling and company, hope and sphere of blessing that pierces the present *firmament* above us and ascends to where Christ sits at the right hand of God is the Church of the Mystery. Christ is set forth, in Ephesians 4:10, as having ascended “*far above all heavens*” yet revealed as seated at the right hand of God “*in the heavenly places*.” These heavenly places therefore must be above the limitations of the outstretched heavens.

This is not invalidated by the fact that the selfsame sphere is called in Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, “*heaven*,” for we must not allow ourselves to rob “*heaven itself*” of its true title, simply because we have

used it so often of the limited *firmament*. In connection with this same calling, Christ can be said to be both “*far above all the heavens*” yet “*in heaven*” at the right hand of God.

There are eleven references to “*heaven*” in the epistle to the Hebrews, but one speaks only of “*heaven itself*” (Hebrews 9:24). The others refer to the lesser and lower heavens, for the heavens created as recorded in Hebrews 1:10 are to “*perish*,” but this can never be said of “*heaven itself*.” Christ is said to have “*passed through the heavens*,” (*dierchomai*, Hebrews 4:14), and as being made “*higher than the heavens*” (Hebrews 7:26), without involving any contradiction in the saying that He Who passed “*through the heavens*” and was “*made higher than the heavens*,” was at the selfsame time depicted as entering “*heaven itself*” (Hebrews 9:24). The contradiction exists in our minds only if we fail to distinguish the heaven of the beginning, Genesis 1:1, from the heaven of the ages, Genesis 1:8. The only references to the heavens of Genesis 1:1 that are found in the remainder of the New Testament are those of Peter and of the Revelation, which speak of a new heaven and a new earth (II Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1).

The new heavens and the new earth spoken of by Isaiah are related to Jerusalem (Isaiah 65:17-18). Where we read in Revelation 21 of a “*first heaven*” and a “*first earth*,” the word translated “*first*,” *protos*, is rendered in :4 “*the former things*,” and we should possibly translate Revelation 21:1 “*the former heaven and the former earth*,” the reference to “*no more sea*” being an evident allusion to Genesis 1:2.

In connection with the subject before us, let us turn to the words of Paul ... in II Corinthians 12:1-4. ►

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In direct connection with the visions and revelations which he had received he refers to an extraordinary experience. Whether he was "*in the body or whether out of the body*" he could not tell, but he did know that he had been "*caught up to the third heaven ... caught up into paradise.*"

First, we must be clear as to the meaning of the term "*caught up*." The word "*up*" in this passage has no equivalent in the Greek, and to attempt to make it have any bearing on the subject betrays as much ignorance of the original as would be betrayed by anyone seeking to extract the idea of direction upward from such idiomatic phrases of the English language as "*shut up*," "*wash up*," "*lock up*" and the like. We can omit the word "*up*," for the Greek word *harpazo* is translated "*take by force*," "*catch away*," "*pluck*," "*caught away*" and "*pull*."

The phrase "*in the body*" translated from *en somati* is very like the phrase *en pneumati* ("*in spirit*") used of the occasion when John was translated to the Day of the Lord (Revelation 1:10). The closest parallel is that of the experience of Philip, who was "*caught away*" by the spirit of the Lord, and was "*found at Azotus*," some miles away.

It is evident that the third heaven to which Paul was caught away was Paradise, otherwise his reiteration would need a deal of explanation. Paradise has been located in different regions by different teachers, mainly in accord with their peculiar beliefs concerning the intermediate state. If we keep close to the scriptural meaning of "*Paradise*," we shall know that it is derived from the Hebrew *parad* (Nehemiah 2:8; Song of Solomon 4:13) and means "*a garden or orchard*." When we meet the word in the book of Revelation, it has no con-

nexion whatever with an intermediate state but is still a garden and orchard, and it is indeed the *garden of Eden* restored and extended.

In what way, we may ask, can this Paradise at the end of the age be in any way related to the "*third*" heaven? If we count the third heaven as being like the third story of a building, it will certainly appear incongruous. Yet as Revelation 21 has already spoken of "*a new earth*" and a "*former earth*," so consequently it would be true to say, even as Peter has indicated (II Peter 3), that there was a *first* heaven in the beginning (Genesis 1:1); a *second* heaven, at the making of the earth ready for man (Genesis 1:8); a *third* heaven, at the end when redemption shall be finished (Revelation 21:1). It was to this "*heaven*" and this "*paradise*" that Paul was caught away, and as he stresses more than any other writer in the New Testament the blessings of the New Creation, it is quite understandable that this great goal of the ages should be associated by him with the visions and revelation he had received in connection with his apostleship.

The great lesson that forces itself on our attention, however, is the fact that, apart from Paul's ministry, and especially his prison ministry, there is scarcely any reference in the Scriptures, either Old or New, to the heaven of Genesis 1:1. The hope of the Mystery alone pierces the intervening firmament and places the believer "*far above all*" even where Christ sits at the right hand of God. We must now go on to the consideration of the special term "*heavenly places*."

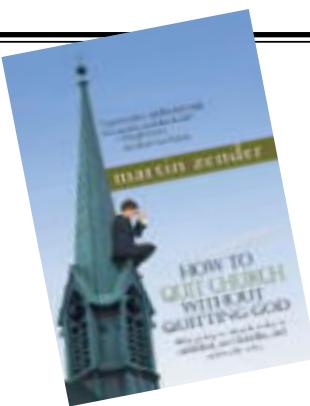
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(To be continued.)

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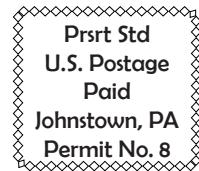
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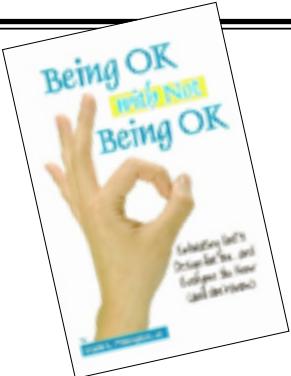


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