

The Heavens and Eternal Salvation

March 22, 2020

When the Scriptures refer to the heavens it is in three general locusts. In Genesis 1.1 God created the heavens and the earth. What are these heavens referring to? The term definitely points in the upward direction, yet is used in various ways, just as we noted punishment is directed in a downward direction as indicated by the “depths of Sheol” references from the last lesson.

In General: Heaven as the skies and the expanse above it (inclusive):

Thus God made the firmament (expanse) , and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. ⁸*And God called the firmament Heaven.* Gen. 1.7-8;

Praise the Lord from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights!

²Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts!

³Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all you stars of light!

⁴*Praise Him, you heavens of heavens, And you waters above the heavens!*

Sense 1: Heaven as the sky above.

I beheld, and indeed there was no man, And all the *birds of the heavens* had fled. Jeremiah 4.25

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all *the birds that fly in the midst of heaven*, “Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, ¹⁸that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.” Revelation 19.17f;

Sense 2: Heaven as the space above the sky; the cosmos

To Abraham: “Blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the *stars of the heaven* and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. Gen. 22.17;

Sense 3: Heaven in the sense as above the stars and the Nature of our Creation; God’s dwelling place

“Is not God in the height of heaven? And see the highest stars, how lofty they are! ¹³And you say, ‘What does God know? Can He judge through the deep darkness?’ ¹⁴Thick clouds cover Him, so that He cannot see, And He walks *above the circle of heaven*.’ Job 22.12f suggesting a heaven of God’s dwelling above the stars...

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. 2 Cor. 12. 2-4...

So as a spacial entity or locality, the heavens in Scripture has at least three connotations expanding from the earth (which was created first) outward in three senses. The firmament and sky in the midst of which the birds fly. The expanse above the sky which possess the heavenly bodies, Sun, Moon and stars. And the expanse above the stars, the third heaven, where God and the angels dwell and to which Paul makes a shy claim in 2 Cor. 12 to have seen.

Also noted in this connection is the mention of waters above in addition to the waters below; and this is to be contrasted with Hell being referred to as the “waterless pit”. A place of no refreshment nor what can sustain life. The believers’ passage to heaven out of trouble and into the promises of God are not infrequent in Scriptures. Besides God’s separating the waters in Creation, We recall the passing through the Red Sea out of Egyptian captivity where God turned slaves who were not a people into His people. We recall that passing through the Jordan when Israel entered the holy Land after 40 years of wandering in the desert. Elijah and Elisha also had their own partings of the River Jordan. Have these partings/crossings of water relevance to the waters of Baptism and our ultimate entrance to God in Heaven?

Heaven as the Dwelling Place of God and His Saints

Walther's Sermon "The New Heaven" based on Rev. 21.1-5; a beautiful vision and idea of what heaven will be like for God's Saints, His children to dwell with them in that sacred home....