

# The Heaven Paper

## Outline

### Part 1: Intro to Heaven

- A. Why Heaven?
- B. Heaven is a REAL place (and angels are physical beings).
- C. A brief history of how Greek thinking managed to sneak into modern Christian thought.
- D. The Consequences: How Greek thinking has warped the way Christians think about Heaven.

### Part 2: What is Heaven?

- A. Heaven is a CREATED place (it had a beginning, just like earth).
- B. Different LEVELS of the heavens.
- C. Heaven is a CITY (not some vague 'realm').
- D. Heaven is a MOUNTAIN-city, NOT a CUBE.
- E. The Heavenly city is HUGE.

### Part 3: Heaven on Earth: past and future?

- A. Back to the beginning.
- B. Was the Heavenly city once on earth? Would this possibility shine fresh light on some troublesome passages in Genesis?



# Heaven, pt. 1:

## *Intro to Heaven*

An outline of part 1:

- A. Why Heaven?
- B. Heaven is a REAL place (and angels are physical beings).
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- D. The Consequences: How Greek thinking has warped the way Christians think about Heaven.

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### A. Why talk about Heaven?

1. **The Bible says our hope is in heaven.** *We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, <sup>4</sup>since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, <sup>5</sup>because of the HOPE laid up for you IN HEAVEN. – Col 1:3-5 (ESV)*

- ◇ The vast majority of self-respecting Christians today would say that their hope is in heaven. What they mean by that is that they *hope* to go to heaven after they die. That is a very different thing, however, than having your hope in heaven. A person whose hope is in heaven is a person who is actually LOOKING FORWARD to going to heaven. Most Western Christians today don't actually look forward to going to heaven; they much prefer their 'exciting,' comfortable lives in this lifetime to their picture of what Heaven is. This truth is made obvious by the fact that so few Christians think about heaven; very few Christians get up in the morning and long for Heaven; very few Christians make choices to sacrifice in this lifetime because of their longing for Heaven. The only sense in which most Christians hope in Heaven, is in the sense that, we all have to die at some point, and so, since that is true, it's a lot better to go to Heaven after you die than to Hell.
- ◇ But what kind of a hope is that? That's more of a default back-up plan than a hope. The kind of hope Paul is talking about in the Colossians passage above, is *real* – the kind of hope that motivates a person to take great steps of faith; the kind of hope that motivates a person to make huge sacrifices; the kind of hope that infuses everything a person does – the hope in a *real* place, called Heaven, which is so wonderful and so amazing that it's worth sacrificing *every temporal thing* in this lifetime in order to be successful and rewarded for eternity over there.

2. **The apostle John's revelation of the End Times started with a revelation of heaven.** *After this [Jesus' messages to the seven churches of Asia] I looked, and behold, a door standing open IN HEAVEN! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this [End Time events]."<sup>2</sup> *At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood IN HEAVEN, with one seated on the throne.* – Rev 4:1-2 (ESV)*

- ◇ Before Jesus shows John what's going to happen in the End Times He first shows Him Heaven. This is significant; End Time events can't be properly understood or prepared for without a solid foundation of revelation about heaven.
  - a) This has to do with hope, as I just mentioned above, but also with God's Sovereignty. It's only when we see the city where God lives, and the throne where He sits, that we can properly study the End Times, knowing that HE IS IN CONTROL. If we don't get a picture of how big God is, then the traumatic events of the End Times will loom too large for us, and they will defeat us.
    - God is bigger than the End Times.

- God is not afraid of the End Times.
  - God is in control of the End Times.
  - God is the One who instigates the End Times.
  - God is the One who ends the End Times.
  - God has good purposes for the End Times.
- b) An example of God’s Sovereignty over the End Times and the Antichrist: *And the beast [the Antichrist and his empire] was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed [the Antichrist has to get permission from God!] to exercise authority for forty-two months [the Antichrist doesn’t determine how long he gets permission to do his evil deeds – God does]. <sup>6</sup> It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. <sup>7</sup> Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, <sup>8</sup> and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. – Rev 13:5-8 (ESV)*
- Do you see how the Antichrist is not in charge here? He doesn’t take authority, it gets given to him. He doesn’t just determine when to make war on the world and on the saints, he first has to be allowed.
- c) It is essential that we understand the Sovereignty of God before we study the End Times. And in order to properly understand the Sovereignty of God we first have to get a revelation of heaven, the place where God lives and the seat of His authority and power.

### 3. A proper perspective of both Heaven and Hell is necessary for endurance in the End Times (and tough times in general).

- a) Horrible things are going to be done to believers and Jews in the End Times. There is going to be tremendous suffering. This is why one of the primary calls of the book of Revelation is ‘endure:’
- *If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints. – Rev 13:10 (ESV)*
  - *Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. – Rev 14:12 (ESV)*
- b) As stated before, a robust expectation of heaven is essential for pulling Christians through hard times. Only when a believer truly understands the prize at the end of the journey can he push through immense suffering with an overcomer’s hopeful mindset.
- *These [godly men and women of the Old Testament] all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.*
    - ‘Strangers and exiles on the earth.’ In other words, the saints of faith had their eyes firmly fixed on heaven. In fact, their eyes were so firmly fixed on heaven that they felt like strangers here on earth.
  - <sup>14</sup> *For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a HEAVENLY one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. – Heb 11:13-16 (ESV)*
    - What motivated Abraham and Moses and Noah and Abel to sacrifice comfort here on earth, to endure suffering, and to do great things of faith? The fact that they were looking past this lifetime to the next one. They were looking ahead to heaven; they weren’t looking for rewards or comfort in this life.
- c) This also applies to Hell. Jesus said, *“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” – Matt 10:28 (ESV)* In other words, ‘When the persecution gets really severe, and you’re really scared and you want to give up, just remember that HELL IS WAY WORSE!’ The key to enduring the horrible events of the End Times is to remember both how amazing Heaven will be when

the persecution is over, and how much worse Hell will be if we give up.

## B. Heaven is a REAL place (and angels are physical beings).

1. The Devil knows how important a proper perspective about heaven is for forming an overcoming mindset in Christians, so he has attacked that knowledge relentlessly throughout the centuries (Hell too). And he has been successful! The Christian view of heaven today is so pathetic that most Christians are bored by their concept of heaven. I mean, this should be the most exciting topic in the whole universe. We're going to spend our whole eternity living in this place – but many Christians can't even be bothered to really know anything about it.
  - ◇ The progression of Satan's attack on the Christian perspective of heaven:
    - a) Make heaven seem pathetic in people's perspective.
      - Make heaven into this totally unreal place – like something out of a Philadelphia Cream Cheese commercial – with clouds and little boy-girl angels wearing dresses, with wings and harps just floating around all day. Once you do that to people's view of heaven, they stop wanting to go there!
    - b) Once the Church's view of heaven becomes pathetic, Christians will get bored of it.
    - c) Once Christians are bored with heaven, they will cease to study it and they will become ignorant.
    - d) When Christians become ignorant of heaven they will live for this life instead of the next one.
2. Biblical truth: Heaven is a real place – a physical place; with real buildings that had to be engineered and designed and built, piece by piece; and there are real trees there, and real dirt, and hot and cold temperatures; with real laws of physics and time. Angels are physical beings – they aren't wispy spirits just floating around: they had sex with women in Genesis 6; they can kill people and destroy things (Ps 78:49); they move things (Mt 28:2); they use similar measurements to human beings (Rev 21:17b); they have to be careful about touching things that are hot (Isa 6:6b); they can be chained up (2 Pet 2:4; Rev 20:2); etc..
  - ◇ The only reason we have trouble believing in the physicality of heaven and of angels is NOT because of the Bible but because of the Greek philosophy which has wormed its way into our Christian thinking, mostly without us even knowing about it.
3. **Objection: “Angels can't be physical beings because they are ‘spirit’”** (see Heb 1:14, and other such passages).
  - ◇ The word 'spirit' means something very different to Christians today than it should. Once again, Greek thinking has influenced how we read the Bible. Whenever we read that something is 'spirit' we immediately define that thing as non-physical, because the Greeks defined the word 'spirit' as the opposite of the word 'physical.' But that is an unbiblical definition of the term spirit; the fact that something is spirit does not automatically mean it is non-physical. The word 'spirit' in Scripture, when used of an angel simply means 'not of this world.' There are dozens of passages (as shown above) which prove that angels are indeed physical (they eat, they move things, they fight each other, they exist in time and space, they created offspring with women in Genesis 6, etc., etc.). Of course, angels aren't *human*. They also don't live on this earth like we do. So in that sense they are 'spirit.' They are not of this world. Their bodies are also able to do some things that our bodies aren't able to do, so in that sense, too, they are 'spirit' (they can travel between heaven and earth, for example – something we can't do; they can also make themselves visible or invisible, something we can't do either). But being spirit does not mean they aren't physical.
  - ◇ This is further confirmed in Matthew 22:30 when Jesus said that after the resurrection we (people) would be 'like the angels in heaven.' The Bible is very clear that human beings will live physical lives in physically resurrected bodies after the Resurrection . . . but that means that angels must be physical too, since we will be 'like' them!

## C. A brief history of how Greek thinking managed to sneak into modern Christian thought.

1. **Plato** – Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are three of the most famous philosophers of all time (most people reading this right now have at least heard of them at some point). They were all pagan Greek thinkers who lived in the 4<sup>th</sup>

century BC. Socrates was the first, Plato was his student and Aristotle was a student to Plato. With regards to philosophy and the present discussion about Christian thought, Plato was the most influential of the three.

◇ **Dualism:** One of the main pillars of Plato's world view is what is now called 'dualism.' Dualism is the belief that there are two kinds of realities: a 'spiritual' realm made up of 'spiritual' things, and a 'material' realm made up of 'material' things. The material realm is the physical world we see all around us; our bodies, the earth, the stars, food, hot and cold, etc. – all the things we can see, touch, feel, hear and smell. The spiritual realm, according to Plato, is a completely different realm with no physicality; spiritual things cannot be touched, seen, felt, heard or smelt. They have no material substance. According to Plato the spiritual realm is a better realm than the material realm; it is eternal; it is made up of knowledge; it is Truth; it is this abstract realm where the Supreme Good lives (Plato's version of God, a very abstract being); it is the plane in which each human soul operates. Plato believed that human souls continued on forever, reincarnating over and over again in various physical bodies – the body wasn't the important thing, though, it was only a temporary expression of the spiritual soul. Of course, if you would have asked Plato to describe what this spiritual realm was like, or what the Supreme Good was like, he wouldn't have been able to tell you because everything in his spiritual realm was so vague and 'spiritual.' But this is why, for him, thinking was more important than doing and knowledge was more important than behavior – because the spiritual realm cannot be accessed by observation (sight, sound, touch, etc.), it can only be accessed by abstract thinking.

2. **Alexander the Great: how Plato's worldview went around the world.**<sup>1</sup> After the death of his teacher Socrates, Plato founded the Academy of Athens in 387 BC; his most famous student, Aristotle, would study under him there for 20 years from 367 BC until his death in 347 BC. After Plato's death in 347 BC, Aristotle stayed in Athens for a couple of years until he went into the region of Macedonia to tutor a twelve-year old boy named Alexander. Historians would later dub this boy 'the Great,' and he would become the most famous conqueror of all time, subjugating basically the entire known world in a span of only 11 years. From 335 BC to 324 BC Alexander and his troops would battle across an astonishing 22,000 miles. Mostly by foot. They conquered everything from Greece all the way to India, and down into Africa. Then, at only 33 years of age, Alexander died suddenly of a fever.

◇ The interesting thing about Alexander the Great is that he was more than just a military conqueror – he was also an ardent evangelist of Greek culture and Platonic thought (Plato's worldview). He didn't want to just conquer the world, he wanted to change all the people in the world into Greeks! He thought he was improving the world by doing this, and so he intentionally spread Greek culture and laws throughout the nations he conquered. He was also a raving megalomaniac – he founded 70 cities across his Greek empire with his name on them, of which Alexandria of Egypt would become the most famous.

3. **Alexandria – Center of Greek culture, Judaism, Christianity and Greek-Christian syncretism.**<sup>2</sup> Alexandria is located at the mouth of the Nile river in Northern Egypt and it served as the capital of Egypt for nearly a thousand years, until the Muslim conquest of Egypt in 641 BC. It is still an important city today with 4.1 million people; the second largest city in Egypt and the biggest port city on the Mediterranean. Within a century of its founding by Alexander it had grown to be the largest city in the world and for many centuries after that it was second only to Rome. For the first thousand years of its existence, until the Muslim conquest, it served as the world center for Greek thought and culture.

◇ In addition to this, however, it was also a very multicultural city – a sort of ancient equivalent to modern-day New York City. Jewish people, for example, flocked there, and it was for many years the largest Jewish community in the whole world. The Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament that has been so vital

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<sup>1</sup> Factual information in this paragraph taken from a short bio of Alexander written on the website Interesting.com: <http://www.interesting.com/stories/alexander/> (accessed Oct 27, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Factual information in this paragraph taken from Wikipedia, *Alexandria*: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandria> (accessed Oct 28, 2011).

for modern Bible translations, was put together by the Jewish community in Alexandria between the third and second centuries BC.

- ◇ In addition to its Greek culture and huge Jewish community, Alexandria also became a major center for Christianity, beginning at the close of the first century AD. In fact, after the Roman emperor Constantine ‘converted’ to Christianity and established what is now known as the Roman Catholic church, Alexandria was considered as second only to Rome in terms of importance, influence and power in all of Christendom – church of Alexandria had jurisdiction over the whole continent of Africa.
- ◇ **Syncretism.** Alexandria was known as a very tolerant and philosophical city. People loved to explore different philosophies and religions, and as such, it also became a hotbed of syncretism. Syncretism is the merging and amalgamation of different religions, cultures, and/or schools of thought. For example, it was in Alexandria that the Jewish scholar Philo (20 BC – 50 BC) famously attempted to synthesize Greek thought with Judaism. Unfortunately, Alexandria is also the center where many Christian thinkers, totally steeped in the Greek worldview, first brought their Greek worldview into Christianity and changed Christianity in ways that are still affecting us today.

#### 4. **Origen (AD 184-253)– An early Church Father who has affected your Christian worldview more than you know.**<sup>3</sup>

Into this milieu of Greek, Jewish and Christian syncretism was born Origen Adamantius, to Christian parents, in 185 BC. Origen was a brilliant student, and his father Leonid had him schooled in both the traditional Greek education as well as in the Christian Scriptures. Leonid would later end up martyred for his Christian faith,<sup>4</sup> when Origen was just seventeen years old. Origen was so passionate for God that when he heard his father had been arrested, he wanted to rush to his father’s side and join him in martyrdom – but his mother hid his clothes and he could not go. Origen would go on to become a towering intellect and a prolific writer of Christian theological treatises, commentaries, sermons and apologetics.

- ◇ Unfortunately however, Origen’s passion for God and brilliant intellect were seriously tainted by his Greek worldview, specifically Plato’s dualism, and this dualism influenced the way he read and interpreted the Scriptures. Origen’s strong dualistic worldview caused him to interpret most Bible prophecy as allegorical rather than literal, and to conceive of Heaven and God in very spiritual terms, rather than physical terms. It is interesting to note that he did not deny the fact that his interpretation of Scripture was heavily influenced by his Greek worldview, since he saw both as being true and sought to synthesize them. Here are some examples:

- a) **Origen on what happens to the human soul in eternity:** *“If any one indeed be pure in heart, and holy in mind, and more practised in perception, he will, by making more rapid progress, quickly ascend to a place in the air, and reach the kingdom of heaven, through those mansions, so to speak, in the various places which the Greeks have termed spheres, i.e., globes, but which holy Scripture has called heavens; in each of which he will first see clearly what is done there, and in the second place, will discover the reason why things are so done: and thus he will in order pass through all gradations, following Him who hath passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, who said, “I will that where I am, these may be also.” And of this diversity of places He speaks, when He says, “In My Father’s house are many mansions.” He Himself is everywhere, and passes swiftly through all things; nor are we any longer to understand Him as existing in those narrow Limits in which He was once confined for our sakes, i.e., not in that circumscribed body which He occupied on earth [Jesus no longer inhabits a physical body*

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<sup>3</sup> Information about Origen and Augustine taken from the Catholic Encyclopedia online:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11306b.htm> (accessed Oct 28, 2011). Also, MANY THANKS TO STEVEN VENABLE of the International House of Prayer for this whole section on Origen – much of this section is based on his research.

<sup>4</sup> Though Alexandria was one of the most tolerant cities in the ancient world, occasional (and brief) persecutions broke out in the first couple of centuries AD due to the Roman Empire’s policies towards Christians (Alexandria was under Roman control at that time – all of Egypt had been made a province of Rome).

according to Origen!), *when dwelling among men, according to which He might be considered as enclosed in some one place* [Jesus is now like the air, according to Origen – He is everywhere].<sup>5</sup>

- Notice in this passage how Origen blatantly defines Scriptural terms by equating and interchanging them with Greek philosophical concepts. In this excerpt he defines the Scriptural term ‘heavens’ by equating it with the Greek idea of ‘spheres,’ making the two interchangeable. This is a subtle way to twist the Scriptures: don’t change the actual wording of the Biblical text, just change the meaning of the words themselves. The end result is incredibly dangerous because people feel safe reading the original words that the Biblical authors wrote, not knowing that the *meaning* of those words has been changed to something the original writers never intended.
- Notice also how Origen’s Greek worldview leads him to spiritualize and allegorize everything about Jesus and about heaven. For example, he states that Jesus is no longer in a body (*‘not in that circumscribed body which He occupied on earth’*), completely contrary to everything we are told in Scripture, but instead that Jesus now exists everywhere in spirit form. (Incidentally, doesn’t this sound very familiar to how a lot of Christians think about Jesus today?) He also allegorizes heaven and Jesus’ statement in John 14:2 that in the ‘Father’s house there are many mansions.’ Because of Origen’s Greek worldview about the physical and the spiritual, he cannot accept that heaven is a physical place, or that there are real mansions, with real rooms, waiting for physical-bodied believers in heaven. To him the physical is temporary and less-than-ideal, while the spiritual is non-material, eternal and the ultimate good. In his Greek-influenced mind believers leave their physical bodies (as well as the material realm) *permanently* at death, and live forever in a spiritual, non-material state. Thus, Jesus’ words about mansions and rooms must be allegorical; believers will have no need of such pathetic physical limitations (sarcasm) in eternity.
- This was a consistent habit of Origen’s in all of his writings: to allegorize any Scriptures which did not fit with his Greek worldview.

b) **Origen on the non-physicality of eternity:** *“For it has been said that we must suppose either that an incorporeal [def’n: not composed of matter; having no material or physical existence]existence is possible, after all things have become subject to Christ, and through Christ to God the Father, when God, will be all and in all; or that when, notwithstanding all things have been made subject to Christ, and through Christ to God...then the bodily substance itself also being united to most pure and excellent spirits, and being changed into an ethereal condition [def’n: spiritual, non-physical, not-of-this world] in proportion to the quality or merits of those who assume it (according to the apostle’s words, “We also shall be changed”), will shine forth in splendour; or at least that when the fashion of those things which are seen passes away, and all corruption has been shaken off and cleansed away, and when the whole of the space occupied by this world, in which the spheres of the planets are said to be, has been left behind and beneath, then is reached the fixed abode of the pious and the good situated above that sphere, which is called non-wandering, as in a good land, in a land of the living, which will be inherited by the meek and gentle; to which land belongs that heaven (which, with its more magnificent extent, surrounds and contains that land itself) which is called truly and chiefly heaven, in which heaven and earth, the end and perfection of all things, may be safely and most confidently placed . . .”*<sup>6</sup>

- In this passage Origen completely denies the Christian hope of a physical resurrection of our physical bodies on the day of Christ’s Return, instead misusing Paul’s statement “We shall all be changed” (1 Cor 15:51) to mean that we will be changed from a physical body to a non-physical (‘ethereal’ and ‘incorporeal’) body. This

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<sup>5</sup> Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Clevel and Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. IV : Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 299.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. IV : Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 275.

is exactly the opposite of Paul's whole point in 1 Corinthians 15, which is, that at Jesus' Return we will be *physically* resurrected with *better* physical bodies.

- Notice also in this passage how Origen describes heaven and earth in terms of 'spheres' and 'non-wandering,' Greek philosophical terms which have absolutely no basis in Scripture.

c) **Origen on the non-literality of the visions and prophecies recorded in Scripture.** Because of Origen's worldview about the non-physicality of the spiritual realm (heaven), he could not accept any of the many visions recorded in Scripture, which described God or heavenly things. He taught that the many visions recorded in Scripture (the ones about heaven and about God) were merely mental manipulations God did to the prophets minds in order to teach us 'deeper' spiritual things. Here is an excerpt from a passage where he is expounding on the non-literality of the opening of the heavens at Jesus' baptism (Matt 3:16-18): ". . . *in a dream impressions have been brought before the minds of many, some relating to divine things, and others to future events of this life, and this either with clearness or in an enigmatic manner,—a fact which is manifest to all who accept the doctrine of providence; so how is it absurd to say that the mind which could receive impressions in a dream should be impressed also in a waking vision, for the benefit either of him on whom the impressions are made, or of those who are to hear the account of them from him? And as in a dream we fancy that we hear, and that the organs of hearing are actually impressed, and that we see with our eyes—although neither the bodily organs of sight nor hearing are affected, but it is the mind alone which has these sensations—so there is no absurdity in believing that similar things occurred to the prophets, when it is recorded that they witnessed occurrences of a rather wonderful kind, as when they either heard the words of the Lord or beheld the heavens opened. For I do not suppose that the visible heaven was actually opened, and its physical structure divided, in order that Ezekiel might be able to record such an occurrence. Should not, therefore, the same be believed of the Saviour by every intelligent hearer of the Gospels?—although such an occurrence may be a stumbling-block to the simple, who in their simplicity would set the whole world in movement, and split in sunder the compact and mighty body of the whole heavens. But he who examines such matters more profoundly will say, that there being, as the Scripture calls it, a kind of general divine perception which the blessed man alone knows how to discover . . .*"<sup>7</sup>

- Although there is absolutely no justification for it exegetically, Origen, because of his Greek worldview, decided that neither Jesus, nor any of the prophets, actually encountered anything real in their experiences of heavenly things. In Origen's mind, the things these men experienced were merely allegorical dreams and visions that occurred in their minds, and from which we can learn deeper spiritual truths – but the things they experienced didn't actually happen, nor do the things they saw actually exist. Thus, for example, Origen believed that the visions of heaven that the apostle John saw (Rev 4-5), and that Paul saw (2 Cor 12:2-4) were not glimpses of a real place that actually exists, but were merely allegorical pictures God put into their minds, in order to reveal deeper spiritual truths. Origen didn't believe that heaven could be a real, physical place.

5. **How Origen's Greek worldview came to dominate Christianity.** If it wasn't for the fact that Christians today have somehow ended up thinking about heaven and spiritual things in the same dualistic way Origen did, all of this study of Greek thought and Origen would be nothing more than an interesting historical footnote. But we *have* ended up with much of Origen's worldview; Christians today *do* tend to think of heaven in very vague, spiritual and ethereal terms. How did this happen?

a) **The transition of leadership in the early church from Jewish to Greek.** In the very early days of the Church, as recorded in the first nine chapters of the book of Acts, the only believers in existence were all Jewish. In fact, the very first Gentile convert to Christianity – Cornelius (see Acts 10) – wasn't made until roughly 10 years after

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<sup>7</sup> Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and A. Cleveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. IV : Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), p. 416.

Jesus' Resurrection.<sup>8</sup> And for almost a hundred years after that, the early church continued to be dominated by the all-Jewish leadership of the apostles and their successors in Jerusalem, as the rest of the churches around the world continued to look to the church in Jerusalem for guidance and authoritative decisions on matters of doctrine and church practice (see Acts 11:1-18; 11:22-30; 15:1-21). This is how the Jewishness of the early Church's leadership was maintained: early church records record for us that after Jesus' death, His brother James was made a leader of the church in Jerusalem (see Acts 15:13-20 for an example); after James' death by martyrdom, Jesus' cousin Simeon was made the leader; after Simeon a succession of 13 Jewish men, all related by blood to Jesus, became the leaders of the church in Jerusalem, all the way up until the Bar Kochba Rebellion (AD 132-135).<sup>9</sup> These Jewish relatives of Jesus who led the early Church were called *desposynoi* in Greek, meaning 'heirs,' and were often persecuted because of their Davidic lineage and their relationship to the Messiah.<sup>10</sup> As long as the Church around the world was led by the church in Jerusalem, and as long as the church in Jerusalem was led by these Jewish relatives of Jesus, the Church around the world remained rooted in biblically Jewish thought patterns. After the destruction of the Jewish Temple by the Romans in 70 AD, however, the center of Christianity began to shift outwards, from Jerusalem to the Greek-speaking world, since many Jewish Christians were forced to flee the city. This process was completed after the Bar Kochba Rebellion (AD 132 – 135). The Roman emperor of that time, Hadrian, crushed the Jewish revolt brutally; he killed over half a million Jews, razed 985 villages, 50 fortified towns,<sup>11</sup> renamed Jerusalem *Aelia Capitolina* and made a law forbidding any Jew to enter Jerusalem for 100 years.<sup>12</sup> As these dramatic events were unfolding, many of the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem fled to the mountains of Pella, located in present-day Jordan, in obedience to Christ's instruction found in Matthew 24:16. This left only Gentile believers in control of the Church for the first time, and they quickly appointed a man named Mark as Jerusalem's first non-Jewish pastor.<sup>13</sup>

- Had Origen been born in the first century AD and attempted to spread his hybrid of Christian thinking and Greek dualism, he would have been immediately and devastatingly opposed by the Jewish leaders of the early church, including the apostles themselves. But, being born a hundred years later, towards the end of the second century AD, he lived in a time when Jewish influence in the Church was already very small. By the time of Origen, the Church was dominated by Greek speakers and thinkers. In this Greek-dominated setting, Origen's Greek method of interpreting Scripture made natural sense to many of his Christian contemporaries, and so his ideas spread quickly and took root.

b) **St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430).** Because many of the most influential Church Fathers after Origen were also Greek (eg. Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, etc.), Greek ways of thinking became rooted in the Church. It is widely acknowledged that one of the most important and influential Church Fathers in the development of Western Christianity was St. Augustine of Hippo, a philosopher and theologian in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, who served as bishop of Hippo (an important city in Africa, at that time a Roman province). Though Augustine did much good, he was so Greek in his worldview, that the Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church describes him as 'radically influenced by Platonism.'<sup>14</sup> Augustine's writings and philosophy became the backdrop for most Christian thinking that would take place until modern times, and even now his influence is felt everywhere. John Calvin (1509–1564), for instance, who spawned a large movement within the Christian church often called

<sup>8</sup> Ron Moseley, Dr., *Yeshua: A guide to the real Jesus and the Original Church*. (Clarksville, MD: Lederer Books, 1996), p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Wikipedia, *Bar Kochba Revolt*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bar\\_Kokhba\\_revolt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bar_Kokhba_revolt) (accessed Jan 3, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Ron Moseley, Dr., *Yeshua: A guide to the real Jesus and the Original Church*. (Clarksville, MD: Lederer Books, 1996), p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Cross, F. L., ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2005, article *Platonism*.

'Calvinism,' based much of his thinking on Augustine – in fact, some theologians think it more accurate that Calvinism be renamed 'Augustinianism.'<sup>15</sup>

- c) **Greek thinking persists in modern times through the Enlightenment.** The Greek thinking that took root in the Church in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century has not gone away – it saturates not only the Western Christian Church today, but also the Western Culture in which the Church lives. The philosophical foundation for Western society today can be found in the Enlightenment (otherwise known as the Age of Reason), a philosophy of reason, logic and science, born in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Of the Enlightenment it has been observed, *"The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato."*<sup>16</sup> Specifically related to Christian thought we find the following summary, characteristic of many others like it: *"All Christian theology is dependent, to an extent at least, on contemporary Greek philosophy, primarily Platonism, but some Christian thinkers fall particularly strongly under Platonic influence, and properly merit the title of Christian Platonists."*<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> This is widely acknowledged in theological circles – one place to confirm is Theopedia, a theological Encyclopedia online: [http://www.theopedia.com/Augustine\\_of\\_Hippo](http://www.theopedia.com/Augustine_of_Hippo) (accessed Jan 4, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (1929); corrected edition, ed. David R. Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (Free Press, 1979).

<sup>17</sup> David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1996, c1992), 5:380.

#### D. The Consequences: How Greek thinking has warped the way Christians think about Heaven.<sup>18</sup>

- Thanks to the Greek worldview most Westerner church-goers unknowingly carry around with them, Christians generally tend to think of Heaven in 3 ways:
  1. **REMOTE:** The first characteristic that dominates the contemporary view of heaven both in theological circles and across the wider landscape of Christianity is the misconception that it is exceedingly *remote*. Heaven is perceived as a vague ‘realm’ that is distant spatially and uninvolved relationally with our world. It has no relationship to life here on earth whatsoever. Though intellectually every Christian would acknowledge the existence of God and of heaven, practically speaking, heaven is not something most Christians ever think about, nor is it a place most Christians long to go to. For many Christians, heaven is such a remote place that they think they can’t know anything about it – it’s too different and distant from the world we live in here on earth for us to even comprehend it.
  2. **ETHEREAL:** The second characteristic that dominates the contemporary view of heaven is that it is *ethereal*. Ethereal means the opposite of physical. Christians today generally think of heaven in vague, wispy, and spiritual terms, rather than in concrete and physical terms. We don’t tend to think of things like work or sweat, or hot or cold, or building or farming, or harvesting or fishing or dirt, or hard or soft, or fun or humor, or time, when we think of heaven; we more tend to think of clouds and singing and floating and timelessness and stuff like that.
  3. **IRRELEVANT:** Because Western Christians think of heaven as such a remote, ethereal place, timeless place, most Western Christians can’t conceive of how heaven is relevant to their life in this world. For many Christians heaven is so different from this world that thinking about it can’t help a person do any good in this lifetime.

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<sup>18</sup> Many thanks to Stephen Venable for using these three words to describe the effect of Greek thinking on modern Christian thought about heaven in his course *Foundations of Worship* course, IHOP university, 2010.

# Heaven - Part 2

## *What is Heaven?*

# What is Heaven?

An outline of part 2:

- A. Heaven is a **CREATED** place (it had a beginning, just like earth).
- B. Different **LEVELS** to the heavens?
- C. Heaven is a **CITY**. (not some vague 'realm')
- D. Heaven is a **MOUNTAIN-city, NOT a CUBE**.
- E. The Heavenly city is **HUGE**.

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A. Heaven is a **CREATED** place (it had a beginning, just like earth).

- For by him [Jesus] ALL things were created, in HEAVEN and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—ALL things were created through him and for him. – **Col 1:16 (ESV)**
  - ◇ Many Christians today imagine Heaven as devoid of time and with no beginning. False! Heaven had a beginning – it was built and created by God somewhere around the same time that the earth was created.
  - ◇ This is very important because it means that in heaven there are real events that occur in real **TIME** – there are things that happened in the past, things occurring this very moment, and things still yet to come, in the future (in Revelation 8:1, for example, John describes there being silence in heaven for half an hour). This is not to say that those in heaven *experience* time the same way we do, but they *do* live in time (just as we do).
- By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city [the heavenly city] that has FOUNDATIONS, whose DESIGNER and BUILDER is God. – **Heb 11:8-10 (ESV)**
  - ◇ The Scriptures are clear – Heaven was created, designed and built by God. That means Heaven had a beginning and that it has not always existed. It also means that heaven has dimensions, and it is made of various materials, and it is a concrete, physical place.
- Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, <sup>2</sup> covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent. <sup>3</sup> He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters; he makes the clouds his chariot; he rides on the wings of the wind; <sup>4</sup> he makes his messengers winds, his ministers a flaming fire. – **Psalms 104:1-4 (ESV)**
  - ◇ Three things to notice from this passage:
    - a) First, God stretches out the heavens like a tent. This means that He lives in the heavens, and that He made the heavens, which means that the heavens have not always existed. They were made by God at a specific point in time.
    - b) Secondly, God 'lays the beams of His chambers,' which clearly means that God built the House/Palace/Temple/Throne Room that He lives in with *His own hands*! It also means that God's Dwelling Place is not some ethereal, spiritual place – it has *beams*! In other words it must be made out of huge pieces of *wood* (or possibly steel? I don't know . . . but something!).
    - c) Thirdly, God does NOT LIVE OUTSIDE OF HIS CREATION. We tend to think of God in very vague, spiritual terms, as living outside of the physical creation. Yet the Scriptures clearly depict God as living WITHIN the creation He created. He stretches out the heavens like a 'tent;' He lives in 'chambers' which He built out of 'beams.' This is confirmed in Isaiah 40: *It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to DWELL IN;* <sup>23</sup> *who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.* – **Isa 40:22-23 (ESV)**

## B. Making sense of the different heavens (first, second, and third) the Bible talks about.

- The Bible describes 3 levels to the heavens: *I [Paul] know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the THIRD heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.*<sup>3</sup> *And I know that this man was caught up into paradise [Note: we'll come back to this later, but paradise is in the third heaven]—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—<sup>4</sup> and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. – 2 Cor 12:2-4 (ESV)*

- What are these three levels?

### 1. The First Heavens – the SKY and STARS and ATMOSPHERE above us (basically, what we can see).

- ◇ The Bible nowhere uses the term 'first heaven' but does often use the term 'heavens' to describe the place where:
  - a) Birds live (cf. Gen. 1:20; 2:19; Dan. 2:38; etc.);
  - b) Rain, Snow, Thunder, etc. come from (cf. Gen. 8:2; Job 38:29; Is. 55:10; etc.);
  - c) The Sun, Moon and Stars reside (cf. Gen. 1:14ff; Deut. 4:19; Ps. 8:3; etc.).
- ◇ Obviously, when the Bible uses the word 'heavens' to talk about these things, it is not talking about the same 'heaven' that Jesus went back to at His Ascension (Acts 1:11) or the 'heaven' that John saw (Rev 4:1) when He was caught up into the very Throne Room of God (Rev 4). Therefore, since the Bible uses the word 'heaven' to describe both places and since Paul talks about being caught up to the 'third heaven,' which would correspond to the heaven where God lives, we find it helpful to label the sky, stars and atmosphere as the 'first' heaven.

### 2. The Second Heaven – the domain of ANGELS, particularly evil angels.

- ◇ There are other places in Scripture where the word 'heavens' does not describe the sky or stars or atmosphere that we can see, but rather, uses the word to describe the place where evil powers live and operate. This cannot be the same heaven that John saw in Revelation 4 and that Paul called the 'third heaven' in 2 Corinthians 12, the place where God dwells in Holiness, Love and Majesty. Therefore this must be yet a different heaven, we'll call it the 'second' heaven.
  - a) *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the HEAVENLY PLACES. – Eph 6:12 (ESV)*
    - Now we know that there are no evil forces of darkness living in paradise, nor in God's holy Temple and Throne Room where the worship of God goes on continuously, day and night (Rev 4:8-11). Therefore, the heavenly places spoken of in this passage must be another heavens – the second heavens.
  - b) *Now war arose in HEAVEN, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back,<sup>8</sup> but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in HEAVEN.<sup>9</sup> And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world— he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.<sup>10</sup> And I heard a loud voice in HEAVEN, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.<sup>11</sup> And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, rejoice, O HEAVENS and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!" – Rev 12:7-12 (ESV)*
    - Again, this passage must be talking about a different 'heaven' than Paradise, where God lives. There cannot be war in Paradise! Can you imagine the Devil and his angels fighting with Michael and his angels, in the very throne room of God, where worship and adoration goes on continuously, day and night (Rev 4:8-11)? It could never happen! Anyone who even thought about sinning and fighting in the Holy Presence of God would be consumed immediately.
    - Thus, the 'heaven' spoken of in Revelation 12 (above), from where the Devil and his angels are thrown down, onto the earth, must be a different heaven – the second heaven as opposed to the first or third heavens.

c) The Bible does not have much to say in description about the second heavens. But we do know that that this is a region where God on occasion goes, in order to be in the midst of the angels, to hear their reports, and to supervise their activities; it is also a place where Satan at present has access (Job 1:6, 2:1; Ps 82:1; Rev 12:10).

▪ Here are several examples:

1) *Now there was a day when the sons of God [angels] came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. <sup>7</sup> The LORD said to Satan, “From where have you come?” Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” – **Job 1:6-7 (ESV)***

- As stated repeatedly, Satan cannot enter the heavenly city or the Throne Room of God. Therefore this has to be taking place somewhere else – what we are here calling the ‘second’ heaven.

2) *Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. <sup>2</sup> And the LORD said to Satan, “From where have you come?” Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” – **Job 2:1-2 (ESV)***

3) *God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment . . . I [God] said, “You are gods, sons of the Most High [the term ‘sons of God’ is used exclusively in the Old Testament to describe angels], all of you; nevertheless, like men [in other words, God isn’t talking to men in this passage] you shall die, and fall like any prince.” – **Psalms 82:1, 6-7 (ESV)***

- In this passage, the Psalmist saw a vision of God taking His place among the angels to judge them. Note that the angels did not come into His Throne Room, He *took His place* among them.

d) **The second heaven may be invisible to us, but this does not mean that it isn’t a physical, material, concrete place.** Although the mid-heavens are not described in detail in Scripture, we should not infer from that the mid-heavens are not a concrete, physical place. Just because we can’t see them doesn’t mean they aren’t physical and material.

- For example, in Numbers 22 Balaam’s donkey went off the road three times trying to avoid the Angel of the Lord who was standing in Balaam’s way, in order to kill him. Was the Angel of the Lord a real physical being? Most certainly! The donkey could see him, and he carried a sword with which to kill Balaam. Just because he was invisible to Balaam didn’t mean he wasn’t a concrete, material, physical being. Once Balaam’s eyes were ‘opened’ (Num 22:31) he could see the angel too.

- **Dark Matter:** Physicists believe that 95% of the universe’s mass and energy is made up of dark matter.<sup>19</sup> Dark matter is matter which we cannot see with our eyes or telescopes or machines – that’s why it’s called ‘dark.’ But it is real; it has weight and substance and affects the way Galaxies move and Gravity operates. This is astounding; almost all the weight and energy of the universe – 95% of the ‘stuff’ in the universe – is invisible. Yet scientists acknowledge that it is physical and concrete and real. I would imagine that angels are a little bit similar – they may be invisible to our eyes most of the time, but this does not mean that they aren’t physical, concrete beings:

1) The angel Gabriel, for example, is described as flying from one location to another in Daniel 9:21; in the next chapter he is described as being physically detained by the ‘Prince of Persia’ (10:13).

2) We also know that angels are physical beings because in Genesis 6 some of them had sex with women. *When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, <sup>2</sup> the sons of God [angels<sup>20</sup>] saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. <sup>3</sup>*

<sup>19</sup> NASA website, article entitled *Dark Matter, Dark Energy*. <http://science.nasa.gov/astrophysics/focus-areas/what-is-dark-energy/> (accessed Jan 5, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> We know that the ‘sons of God’ means angels, since every time (100%) of the time that phrase is used in the Old Testament it means ‘angels.’ For example: Job 38 says, “Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: <sup>2</sup> “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? <sup>3</sup> Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. <sup>4</sup> “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. <sup>5</sup> Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who

*Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years."<sup>4</sup> The Nephilim [Hebrew for 'giants'] were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown. – Gen 6:1-4 (ESV)*

- 3) The Bible also records angels destroying things (Ps 78:49), moving things (Mt 28:2) and having to be careful about touching things that are hot (Isa 6:6b). It also records that they can be chained up (2 Pet 2:4; Rev 20:2).
- **Conclusion: Angels are real, physical, concrete BEINGS, therefore the second heaven – where they predominantly live and operate – is a real, physical, concrete PLACE; even if we can't see it (at this time) with our eyes.**

### 3. The Third Heaven – the DWELLING PLACE of God.

- ◇ The Bible talks many times about yet another heaven, what Paul calls the 'third heaven' in 2 Corinthians 12, this heaven being the place where God lives. When most people think of the word 'heaven,' it is of this place that they are thinking.
  - a) Some Old Testament Scriptures which speak of heaven as being the dwelling place of God (these are just a small sampling, there are far too many to look at):
    - *And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive. – 1 Kings 8:30 (ESV)*
    - *Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies. – Neh 9:27 (ESV)*
    - *The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man. – Psalm 33:13 (ESV)*
  - b) Some New Testament Scriptures (these are just a small sampling, there are far too many to look at):
    - *And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,<sup>11</sup> and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." – Acts 1:10-11 (ESV)*
    - Jesus spoke of His Father being 'in heaven' fourteen times in the Gospel of Matthew alone.
    - The New Testament also assures us that this third heaven (the dwelling place of God) is the place where:
      - 1) Our treasure and reward is being stored up (Matthew 6:20; 1 Pet 1:4);
      - 2) Mansions are being built for us (John 14:2-3);
      - 3) Our hope is (Colossians 1:5);
      - 4) Our citizenship is (Philippians 3:20);
      - 5) Our names are registered (Luke 10:20).
    - Revelation chapters 4 and 5 describe the Throne Room of God in great detail – all of the things which are described in those chapters take place in the Third Heaven.
- ◇ **Going forward:** Throughout the rest of this course, we will just call the Third Heaven, 'Heaven,' since that's what most people think of anyway, when they hear the word 'heaven.'

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*stretched the line upon it?<sup>6</sup> On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone,<sup>7</sup> when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:1-7 ESV) There were no human beings watching and cheering when God created the earth – so the 'sons of God' in this passage has to refer to angels. The other OT passages are clear as well – Job 1:6; 2:1; Deut 32:8). Furthermore, the 'sons of God' in Genesis 6 cannot be referring to regular human beings, since their children were giants. That only makes sense if the 'sons of God' refers to angels . . . human beings have human babies, not giants.*

### C. Heaven is a CITY (not some vague 'realm').

- Most people, when they think about heaven think about heaven as this vague, infinite thing, this 'other realm,' this 'other dimension.' Nothing could be further from the truth – **Heaven is not a realm or a dimension, it is a city.** The Bible is very clear about this fact:

1. *For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the CITY that is to come.* – **Heb 13:14 (ESV)**

2. At the end of the book of Revelation the apostle John saw a picture of heaven, in the future, coming down to earth – and what did he see? A city descending to the earth; this city is huge, to be sure, but it has walls, clearly defined boundaries, and clearly defined measurements. It is not infinite in size – it does not go on forever and ever, nor does it have fuzzy borders, nor is it a 'spiritual' place as opposed to a physical place. It is a real, physical, and material city that exists somewhere in the universe today:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy CITY, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God [ie. heaven] is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." . . . Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." <sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy CITY Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup> having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup> It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— <sup>13</sup> on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. <sup>14</sup> And the wall of the CITY had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the CITY and its gates and walls. <sup>16</sup> The CITY lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the CITY with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. <sup>17</sup> He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. <sup>18</sup> The wall was built of jasper, while the CITY was pure gold, clear as glass. <sup>19</sup> The foundations of the wall of the CITY were adorned with every kind of jewel. . . . <sup>21</sup> And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the CITY was pure gold, transparent as glass. <sup>22</sup> And I saw no temple in the CITY, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. <sup>23</sup> And the CITY has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. . . . <sup>24</sup> By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, <sup>25</sup> and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. . . . <sup>22:1</sup> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb [notice that the Throne Room of God is in the city] <sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the CITY; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup> No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. – **Rev 21:1-4, 9-18, 21-26, 22:1-3 (ESV)***

◇ Two things to note about Heaven from this passage:

- a) **Heaven is NOT in another dimension!** If heaven was in another dimension, it couldn't come down to rest on the earth. The fact that John saw the heavenly city coming down to earth means that it is a part of our dimension; it is made out of the same stuff as our earth is made of, and it must exist within our universe somewhere.
- b) **Heaven is RELEVANT to your life (or should be)!** The vast majority of your existence will, ultimately, be spent in and around this city. We will only spend, at most, seven or eight decades in these frail bodies that we

currently live in – an amount of time that is like nothing compared to the eternity that you and I will spend living, working and worshiping God in eternity – much of that within *this city*. This means that 99.9999999999% of your existence in eternity will be spent in and around this city, which means that this city should be relevant to you! If you were planning to move to another country next year, wouldn't you want to know a little bit about it? Wouldn't you be excited to learn about its climate and culture and food and location and all that other sort of stuff? Of course!

- **The heavenly city (ie. the 'New Jerusalem') is ANCIENT.** Because John called the city he saw 'the New Jerusalem,' many Christians have mistakenly believed that it is 'new' in the sense that it will only be brought into existence in the future, when Jesus returns to earth, and that it isn't already in existence right now. Many Christians don't think of the New Jerusalem as existing somewhere in the universe *right now* – they don't think of the New Jerusalem as being heaven right now; most Christians tend to think of Heaven as one place (where God is right now), and the New Jerusalem as another place, a 'new' place that God will move into in the *future*, when He comes down to earth. This is false. The New Jerusalem John saw in Revelation 21-22 is nothing more nor less than Heaven itself. Heaven = the New Jerusalem; the New Jerusalem = Heaven. It's the same place God is living right now, it's the same place God created in the beginning, and it's the same place God has always lived in (see passages below). John does not call the New Jerusalem 'new,' because it's new time-wise, he only calls it 'new' in order to contrast it with the earthly Jerusalem which the heavenly Jerusalem will replace when God brings it down to earth. From the vantage point of a human being living on earth, the earthly Jerusalem is the 'old' Jerusalem because it's the only Jerusalem we've ever known; and the heavenly Jerusalem, when it comes down to replace the earthly Jerusalem, will seem like the 'new' Jerusalem since it will replace the earthly one we've always known. In actuality, however, the New Jerusalem is far more ancient than the 'old' earthly Jerusalem. Consider the following passages of Scripture:

1. *For he [Abraham] was looking forward to the CITY that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. – Heb 11:10 (ESV)*

◇ Three things to notice from this verse:

- a) First of all, Abraham wasn't looking forward to living in some vague 'realm' called 'heaven.' He was looking forward to living in a physical CITY that had been designed and built by God (the heavenly city).
- b) Secondly, if Abraham was already looking forward to the heavenly city in his day – approximately 4000 years ago – then the heavenly city is more ancient than the earthly Jerusalem, since the earthly Jerusalem wasn't founded in Abraham's day (there may have been a few people living there already, perhaps, but it wasn't yet named 'Jerusalem').
- c) Lastly, ***how did Abraham get it into his head that he should be looking forward to a CITY?!?*** We have the book of Revelation to tell us that we should be looking forward to living in a city with God in eternity. But there was no Bible in Abraham's day – not even an Old Testament. The Old Testament wouldn't come along for at least another 500 years after Abraham, and the book of Revelation was still 2000 years from being written in his time. And yet, this passage states that Abraham's whole life of faith was motivated by looking ahead to the fact that he wanted to, one day, get to live in the heavenly city. How did Abraham get this idea into his head? (Answer to this question to come later in the course.) And it wasn't just Abraham who was looking forward to, and longing for, life in the heavenly city; the book of Hebrews tells us that *all* the people of faith in the Old Testament were looking forward to life in the heavenly city . . .

2. *But as it is, they [the people of faith] desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he HAS prepared for them a CITY. – Heb 11:16 (ESV)*

◇ According to this passage, ALL the saints of the Old Testament were, like Abraham, looking forward to getting into the heavenly city.

◇ Furthermore, notice the past tense of the word ‘has.’ God ‘has’ (past tense) already prepared the heavenly city. He’s not going to do so at some point in the future, He has already done it. That’s because the New Jerusalem isn’t new – it’s ancient. It exists right now.

3. But you HAVE come to Mount Zion and to the CITY of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,<sup>23</sup> and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,<sup>24</sup> and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. – Heb 12:22-24 (ESV)

◇ Two things to note from this passage:

a) First, note the past tense ‘have come.’ According to this passage, the moment a person gets saved, that person *has* ‘come,’ past tense, to a number of things: Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant; the spirits of the righteous made perfect; *and* the city of the living God (see footnote below).<sup>21</sup> In other words, if we acknowledge that Jesus exists (of course!) and that the spirits of the righteous exist (of course!), then the heavenly city must already exist too.

b) Note also that the city is called ‘*the city OF the living God,*’ which is present-tense; it won’t just be His city at some point in the *future*, it’s already the city where He dwells *right now*. This means that the heavenly city is out in the universe, somewhere, at this very moment; and according to this passage, Jesus, the Father, innumerable angels, and all the spirits of the righteous men and women who have gone before us, are living in that city right now. And it’s a very festive atmosphere (v. 22b).

4. But the Jerusalem ABOVE is free, and she is our mother. – Gal 4:26 (ESV)

◇ In Galatians 4:21-31, Paul compares and contrasts the Old and New covenants. As part of his comparison he states that the Old Covenant (speaking of the animal sacrifices and ceremonial laws) corresponds to the earthly Jerusalem, while the New Covenant corresponds to the heavenly Jerusalem. For our purposes in this course, the point to notice is simply Paul’s use of the present tense ‘is’ when describing the heavenly Jerusalem: it ‘is’ free, and ‘she is our mother.’ In other words, the heavenly city is not some future reality, but a real-live city which exists right now.

- **Important point: Galatians and Hebrews were both written BEFORE the book of Revelation.** The dates for the writing of the three books are: (1) Galatians, sometime before AD 48;<sup>22</sup> (2) Hebrews, sometime before AD 70;<sup>23</sup> (3) Revelation, somewhere between AD 81 – 96.<sup>24</sup> This means that Revelation was written some 40 years after Galatians and at least a decade after Hebrews. This is an important fact because it means that the apostle Paul, and whoever wrote the book of Hebrews, wrote about the heavenly city *independent* of knowing about John’s vision of the New Jerusalem recorded in Revelation 21-22. Why is this important? It means that it was common knowledge among the Jews in New Testament times that heaven is a city. (Note, too, how in both Hebrews and Galatians, the authors of the New Testament mention the heavenly city without explanation – they simply assume that their readers know what they are talking about.) The fact that the apostle John saw a ‘city’ in his vision of heaven, recorded in Revelation 21 – 22, might be a brand new revelation for many modern Christians, but it was not a new

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<sup>21</sup> How can a believer who is still here on earth be said to already ‘have come’ to the heavenly city, past tense? In the sense that our names are already recorded in that city. In Luke 10:20, Jesus told His disciples exactly this: “Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (ESV). If you are a believer your name is already written in the heavenly city; if you stay the course and persevere (Mt 10:22; 24:13; Mk 13:13), your body will get to join your name there some day in the future! That this is the correct interpretation of ‘have come’ to the heavenly city is confirmed by verse 23 in the Hebrews 12 passage above, where the author states that believers on earth ‘have come’ to ‘*the assembly of the firstborn who are ENROLLED in heaven.*’ Our bodies have not made it to the heavenly city yet, but our names are already ‘enrolled’ there.

<sup>22</sup> James Montgomery Boice, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (ed. Frank E. Gaebelin) Volume 10, *Galatians*; (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1976), p. 420.

<sup>23</sup> Leon Morris, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (ed. Frank E. Gaebelin) Volume 12, *Hebrews*; (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1976), p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Alan F. Johnson, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (ed. Frank E. Gaebelin) Volume 12, *Revelation*; (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1976), p. 406.

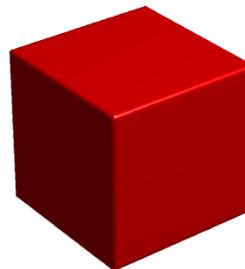
revelation for the Jews living in New Testament times. The idea of thinking of heaven as a physical city is new to modern Christians only because we are more influenced by Greek concepts of heaven than Jewish/Biblical concepts of heaven.

#### D. Heaven is a MOUNTAIN-city, NOT a CUBE.

- Many Christians have mistakenly imagined the New Jerusalem to be a cube because of the apostle John's statement that the length, width and height of the heavenly city are the same: *"And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. <sup>16</sup> The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia [1400-1500 miles]. Its length and width and HEIGHT are equal"* (Rev 21:15-16 ESV).
  - ◇ It is exactly sloppy thinking like this that has turned so many Christians off of heaven. Who is motivated to go live in a city that's a cube?!? Hideous. How would people in the middle of the cube ever see the light of day? Or the stars? Or feel the wind blowing on their faces?
  - ◇ Notice, however, that the passage does not say that the city is a cube, just that the length, width and height are equal; there are many geometric shapes that can have equal length, width and height without being a cube . . . for example, a PYRAMID, or any other triangular shape. And this is roughly what the New Jerusalem is, because it is a *mountain city*.
- That the New Jerusalem cannot be a cube becomes obvious in the very next verse in Revelation 21: *"He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. <sup>18</sup> The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass"* (Rev 21:17-18 ESV). How could a city that's a cube have a wall around it? It doesn't make sense; a city that is a cube wouldn't need a wall around it because its sides would be the walls. Not to mention, a city that is a cube would be *hideous* (as mentioned earlier) – something more akin to an ugly science fiction movie, than the surpassingly beautiful city of God.



pyramid



cube

- **The Bible is clear that God's city is on a mountain:**

1. *It shall come to pass in the latter days [after Jesus returns] that the MOUNTAIN of the house of the LORD [God's house is on a mountain] shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, <sup>3</sup> and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the MOUNTAIN of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob [God's house is on a mountain], *that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.*" For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. – **Isa 2:2-4 (ESV)***

◇ We know from the Scriptures already looked at, that God's house is in a city; but in this passage we see that God's house is on a mountain. Therefore, God's city must be on a mountain; the heavenly city is a *mountain-city*.

2. *On this MOUNTAIN the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. <sup>7</sup> And he will swallow up on this MOUNTAIN the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. <sup>8</sup> He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord*

GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. – **Isa 25:6-8 (ESV)**

- ◇ Compare verse eight of this passage to Revelation 21 when John saw the New Jerusalem: *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.* <sup>3</sup> *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. . . . He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away* (Revelation 21:2-4 ESV). Notice how both passages are describing the same thing: they both describe God wiping away His people’s tears, defeating death, etc. – but Isaiah calls what he sees the ‘mountain’ of God, while John calls it the ‘city’ of God. They’re both describing the same thing – heaven is BOTH a city and a mountain.
- 3. That heaven is a mountain-city is stated in Hebrews: *But you have come to MOUNT Zion and to the CITY of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,* <sup>23</sup> *and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,* <sup>24</sup> *and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.* – **Heb 12:22-24 (ESV)**
  - ◇ Mount Zion and the city of God are not two separate places as this passage makes clear – they are one place, known as ‘the heavenly Jerusalem.’
- 4. *On the holy MOUNT stands the CITY he founded;* <sup>2</sup> *the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob.* <sup>3</sup> *Glorious things of you are spoken, O CITY of God.* – **Psalms 87:1-3 (ESV)**
- 5. *Thus says the LORD: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, AND the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain.* – **Zech 8:3 (ESV)**
  - ◇ In this prophecy of what will happen after Jesus returns, God says that Jerusalem will be both a city AND a mountain.
- Many, many more Scriptures could be used – there are literally dozens of passages in Scripture which speak of God living on a mountain. Therefore, God’s city must be on a mountain.

## E. The Heavenly city is HUGE.

- “And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. <sup>16</sup> The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia [1400-1500 miles]. Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, 144 cubits [~216 feet] by human measurement, which is also an angel’s measurement. <sup>18</sup> The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass.” – **Rev 21:15-18 (ESV)**

1. The wall surrounding the heavenly city is 216 feet high – think of a twenty-one story building (the tallest apartment complex in Steinbach times 3.5). That is huge.
2. The dimensions of the city are staggering: 1500 miles by 1500 miles! It would cover an area stretching almost from Thunder Bay (Ontario) in the east, to Vancouver (BC) in the west, and from Calgary (Alberta) in the north, past San Diego (California) in the south. Just *one* city! And remember that this city has 216 foot high walls going all around it – that’s 6000 miles worth of 21-story walls! If the New Jerusalem had a perimeter highway (like Winnipeg) it would take you 100 hours of steady driving, at highway speeds, without stopping, to drive around the city . . . in other words, if you drove like crazy – 14 to 15 hours a day, no stopping – it would still take you a week to get around it.
3. Think about this: New York City has a very famous park in its center, called ‘Central Park,’ which takes up 843 acres of space – about 1/230<sup>th</sup> of the total area of New York city. By comparison, if the heavenly city has a park 1/230<sup>th</sup> of its total area in its center, that park would be 10,000 square miles – roughly the size of Banff + Jasper + Yellowstone national parks! Never mind park benches and a nice jogging trail, this city ‘park’ could have its own mountain chain, lakes, hundreds of miles of hiking trails, massive herds of roaming elk and bighorn sheep (not to mention grizzly bears and wolves).

4. Think of how massive the Great Lakes are: it takes 17 – 20 hours of continuous driving, at highway speeds, to get all the way around just *one* of the lakes, Lake Superior; it would take another 10 – 12 hours of continuous driving, at highway speeds, to get all the way around Lake Erie which is the *second smallest* of the Great Lakes . . . but you could fit all *five* of the Great lakes within the borders of the heavenly city and you’d hardly make a dent in it.
5. Remember, the New Jerusalem is a *city*. So you won’t have thousands of square miles of empty land, like you do in the area squared off on the map above – this city will be *filled*, wall-to-wall, with people and angels and houses and shops and businesses and magnificent buildings and architecture . . . the population of such a city could easily reach 12 or 13 billion people, based on a similar density of people as New York city – almost twice as many people as live on the entire earth right now.





# Heaven - Part 3

*Heaven on earth: past and future?*

## A. BACK to the BEGINNING.

- Many Christians have this idea that after Jesus returns, He is going to obliterate and destroy this present earth and then recreate everything from scratch; people have this idea like Heaven is going to be a totally new place, separate from the earth we currently live on, and totally unlike anything that's ever been – new laws of physics, no more time, no more sun and moon, etc., etc.. This is not, in fact, what the Bible teaches.

### 1. Jesus is NOT going to destroy this earth in order to start over – from scratch – with a brand new place called 'Heaven.'

a) Much of the misunderstanding about this point stems from a passage in 2 Peter: *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be DESTROYED with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.* <sup>11</sup> *Since all these things are to be DESTROYED in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,* <sup>12</sup> *looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be DESTROYED by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!* <sup>13</sup> *But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. – 2 Pet 3:10-13 (NASB)*

- When this passage is pulled out of its context and looked at in isolation, it definitely could be used to teach that when Jesus returns He is going to totally destroy this present earth we live on, in order to start over from scratch with a 'new' heaven and 'new' earth.

b) Passages of Scripture, however, should never be looked at in isolation. If we look at Peter's description of the Flood of Noah in the same chapter, just a few verses earlier, we will find that he uses the same language to describe the Flood as he does of Jesus' End Times judgments on the earth: *For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water,* <sup>6</sup> *through which the world at that time [the time of Noah] was DESTROYED, being flooded with water.* – 2 Pet 3:5-6 (NASB)

- Was the earth totally obliterated in the Flood of Noah? Are we living on a different planet, now, than the one that existed before the Flood? No! We are living on the same planet today that Adam and Eve and everyone else who lived before the Flood lived on. When God sent the Flood of Noah on the earth, he did not 'destroy' the world in the sense that He obliterated planet earth and had to start over again with a new planet; He 'destroyed' it in the sense that He carried out a catastrophic, world-wide judgment on the *surface* of the earth, which wiped out all the people and animals, resetting the human and animal populations to almost zero, so that Noah and the animals on the ark became a fresh starting point for the human and animal populations.

c) **Conclusion:** It will be the same in the End Times. At His Return, Jesus will not burn up and 'destroy' the earth in the sense of obliterating it entirely – He will use catastrophic *fiery* judgments this time, instead of water (see the Bowl Judgments, Revelation 15-16), to once again bring world-wide calamity to the *surface* of the earth and destroy all of the evil-doers. These judgments will probably include cataclysmic comet and/or meteor impacts which will devastate the *surface* of the earth, as well as the human and animal populations. But planet earth itself will not be completely obliterated, just as it was not obliterated in the Flood of Noah. This point becomes more clear, when other End Times passages are taken into consideration . . .

### 2. Jesus is planning to RESTORE things to the way they WERE, not inaugurate something completely new and different.

a) [This message was also preached by Peter] *Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out,* <sup>20</sup> *that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus,* <sup>21</sup> *whom heaven must receive until the time for RESTORING all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. – Acts 3:19-21 (ESV)*

- Peter is very clear in this passage that when Jesus returns, His purpose is not to inaugurate a brand new thing that's never been before – His purpose is to RESTORE things. Here's the thing about the word 'restore;' you can't 'restore' something that's never been. Restoration is all about the past – you 'restore' something back to the way it *once was*. If you make something brand new, from scratch, you haven't restored that thing, you've *created* it.

b) *And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the REGENERATION when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. – Matt 19:28 (NASB)*

- The Greek word translated 'regeneration' in this passage is the word *paliggenesia*, which the Strong's Concordance explicitly translates as the following two things:<sup>25</sup>

- 1) *"Renovation . . . The word often used to denote the restoration of a thing to its pristine state, its renovation, as a renewal or restoration of life after death."*
- 2) *"The renovation of the earth after the deluge."*

- Once again we see that God's plan for the end is not to destroy everything and start from scratch – He's going to take things BACK TO THE BEGINNING with restoration, renovation and re-generation.

c) This point is made even more clear in the book of Romans: *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

– **Rom 8:19-23 (ESV)**

- In this passage Paul makes it clear that instead of being destroyed, the creation is going to be 'set free from its bondage to corruption' (v. 21). In other words, creation is going to be HEALED. The parallel Paul makes throughout this passage is the Resurrection: in the same way that our bodies will be resurrected, so the creation will be restored and healed.

d) Furthermore, the apostle Paul is very clear that Jesus' plan is to RECONCILE all things in heaven and earth – for there to be a reconciliation between the things of heaven and the things of earth, the things of heaven and earth would first have had to have BEEN TOGETHER at some point. You can't have a reconciliation between things which have never been together. *For in him [Jesus] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to RECONCILE to himself ALL things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. – Col 1:19-20 (ESV)*

3. **Conclusion:** God is not planning to utterly destroy planet earth in the end; there will be cataclysmic and fiery, world-wide judgments upon the *surface* of the earth, yes – but we will remain on *this* earth forever, into eternity. In fact, God's plan is to *return* the earth *back* to the way it originally was.

◇ **Important point – though we will be living on the same earth, things will still be vastly improved!** Of course, death will be utterly defeated (1 Cor 15:26; 54-56), and things will be greatly changed (for the better!) when the Heavenly city comes down to earth. Things will be much different than they are now – no droughts, no famines, no disease, no pollution, no cancer, no war . . . the earth will be the same earth, and yet everything will still be radically improved. When God comes down to earth, things will be radically different in many ways than they are now! This is why John could describe things as 'new' in Revelation 21: *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her*

<sup>25</sup> Strong's Concordance Online: *paliggenesia*, <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G3824&t=KJV> (accessed Jan 10, 2012)

husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (v 1 – 3 ESV).

- ◇ Things will be radically ‘new’ and improved, over what they are now, when God returns to earth . . . BUT it will still be planet earth. This means none of the weird stuff that people seem to associate with heaven: no floating, no wings, no passing through stuff, no timelessness (how would that work, anyway?); but there will still be gravity and dirt and eating and working and time and all that physical, material, good stuff. But there won’t be death and disease and war and pollution and all that evil stuff. New and better, but still earth.

**B. Was the heavenly city on earth in the beginning, when God created the world? (This next section is speculative, and by no means certain – yet it may yield new insights into the Scriptures (particularly early Genesis), into the Garden of Eden, and into Heaven.)**

- Objection: “It’s just too weird to think that the Heavenly city was on earth, and then was taken off the earth and went up into the sky.”

Reply: If it can come DOWN (Rev 21), it isn’t any different to think that at some point it could have gone up!

- 3 points to consider:

**1. We know that the Tree of Life is in the Heavenly city (Rev 22:2); we also know that the Tree of Life was on earth in the beginning (Gen 2:9) – was the Heavenly city therefore also on earth, in the beginning?**

a) The Genesis account is clear that the Tree of Life was in the Garden of Eden: *And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. – Gen 2:9 (ESV)*

- Also, in Genesis 3: *Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—”<sup>23</sup> therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.<sup>24</sup> He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. – Gen 3:22-24 (ESV)*

b) But in Revelation we find that the tree of life is also in the Heavenly city (ie. the New Jerusalem): *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb<sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. – Rev 22:1-2 (ESV)*

- ◇ **Conclusion:** If we know that the tree of life is inside the heavenly city, and if we also know that the tree of life used to be on earth, then it makes sense that the Heavenly city could once have been on the earth as well. The alternative would be that God zapped the Tree of Life up to heaven, by itself, and transplanted it inside the Heavenly city after Adam and Eve sinned. But why believe that? Especially when you consider the fact that the Bible explicitly teaches that the Garden of Eden *also still exists* – inside the Heavenly city as well.

**2. The Bible teaches that the Garden of Eden STILL EXISTS and that it is inside the Heavenly city. If the Garden of Eden is inside the Heavenly city today, and if the Garden of Eden was once on the earth (in the beginning), then it makes sense that the Heavenly city must have been on earth in the beginning too.**

a) *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I [Jesus] will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is IN the paradise of God.’ – Rev 2:7 (ESV)*

- In this wonderful passage, Jesus promises overcoming Christians in Ephesus that they will one day get to eat of the Tree of Life, which is IN the ‘paradise of God.’ What most modern readers don’t realize is that the phrase ‘paradise of God’ was specifically used by the Greek-speaking Jews and Christians living in New Testament times to speak of the *Garden of Eden* (see below for more details). But this means that the

Garden of Eden still exists! It also means that the Garden of Eden is inside the Heavenly city. How do we know that?

- 1) We know that the Tree of Life is in the Heavenly city (Rev 22:2, see above);
  - 2) We know that the Tree of Life is also in the Garden of Eden (Rev 2:7, see above);
  - 3) Therefore, the Garden of Eden must be in the Heavenly city.
- Furthermore, if we know that the Garden of Eden is inside the Heavenly city, and if we know that the Garden of Eden was once on earth (Genesis 2 – 3), then it only makes sense that the whole Heavenly city was once on earth too. The only alternative is to believe that God zapped the whole Garden of Eden, by itself, up to Heaven and transplanted it inside the Heavenly city after Adam and Eve sinned – which is just as weird, or more, than believing that the whole city was once on the earth.

**b) Proof that the phrase ‘paradise of God’ in Revelation 2:7 = the Garden of Eden.**

- Most Christians today are conditioned to think ‘heaven’ whenever they hear the word ‘paradise.’ But that’s not what the word ‘paradise’ means. The Greek word *paradeisos* (paradise) comes from the Persian word simply meaning a ‘park’ or ‘garden’<sup>26</sup> – not ‘garden’ in the sense of a vegetable garden, but more like a park; a beautiful place with carefully trimmed hedges and flowers and trees and pathways. Central Park in New York, for example, would have been called ‘Central Paradise’ by the Greeks. Therefore, the phrase ‘paradise of God,’ found in Revelation 2:7, literally means ‘garden-park of God.’
- Important point: Jesus promises overcoming Christians that they will get to eat from ‘*THE*’ Tree of Life in ‘*THE*’ garden of God. In other words, there is only *one* Tree of Life and it is in a very specific garden – *the* garden of God.

Q: What is ‘*the*’ garden of God? A: The Garden of Eden! The phrase ‘garden of God,’ or it’s alternate, the ‘garden of the Lord,’ only appear four other times in Scripture – and in every case, the phrase explicitly refers to the Garden of Eden.

- 1) *For the LORD comforts Zion; he comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like EDEN, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. – Isa 51:3 (ESV)*
  - 2) *You were in EDEN, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. – Ez 28:13 (ESV)*
  - 3) *The cedars in the garden of God could not rival it, nor the fir trees equal its boughs; neither were the plane trees like its branches; no tree in the garden of God was its equal in beauty. <sup>9</sup> I made it beautiful in the mass of its branches, and all the trees of EDEN envied it, that were in the garden of God. – Ez 31:8-9 (ESV)*
  - 4) *And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) – Genesis 13:10 (ESV)*
    - This is the only one of the Old Testament references to the ‘garden of the Lord’ which does not explicitly state the name ‘Eden’ in correlation to it. Nonetheless, it is clear from the context of the passage that it is alluding to the Garden of Eden – and the vast majority of commentators all agree that this is so.<sup>27</sup>
- The reason the Old Testament writers all referred to Eden as ‘*the* garden of God’ can be found in Genesis 2:8: *And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had*

<sup>26</sup> Alan F. Johnson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelin) Volume 12, *Revelation*; (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1976), p. 436.

<sup>27</sup> For example, see the notes on Genesis 13:10 in Adam Clarke’s famous commentary, the Geneva Study Bible, John Wesley’s Commentary (*Wesley’s Notes*, 1765), John Gill’s Commentary of the Bible (*John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*), Keil and Delitzsch’s Commentary (*Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament*), etc..

formed (ESV). Since Eden is the garden that God, Himself, personally planted, the biblical writers thought of it as ‘the garden of God.’

c) Over time, Jewish use of the phrase ‘*paradise (garden) of God*’ to describe the Garden of Eden evolved, and got shortened to just ‘*paradise*,’ so that by New Testament times the Jews and early Christians simply used the word ‘paradise’ when referring to the Garden of Eden and ceased to use the word for other gardens and parks.<sup>28</sup> This is why, in the New Testament, the word *kēpos* is always used, instead of *paradeisos* (paradise), whenever a regular garden, not Eden, is referred to (eg. Lk 13:19; Jn 18:1; 18:26; 19:41).

**Pre-New Testament times**

*paradise* = a regular garden or park

*the paradise of God* = the Garden of Eden

**New Testament times**

*paradise* = the Garden of Eden

*the paradise of God* = the Garden of Eden

*kēpos* = a regular garden or park

d) There are only three passages, including Revelation 2:7, in the New Testament where the word ‘paradise’ is used; once it is understood to be the Garden of Eden the passages make much more sense.

1) *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. <sup>3</sup>And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— <sup>4</sup>and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. – 2 Cor 12:2-4 (ESV)*

- Most Christians today simply read ‘paradise’ in the passage above as meaning ‘heaven,’ and keep reading. But remember, ‘paradise’ doesn’t mean heaven, it means ‘garden.’ Furthermore, the English translations all take out the word ‘the,’ which is in the original Greek.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Paul is not saying in this sentence that he knows a man who was caught up into heaven (he already said that in verse 2); he is saying that the man who went to heaven (v. 2) was caught up into ‘*the garden*.’ Which garden? There is only one he could be talking about – the Garden of Eden. No other interpretation makes sense.

2) The thief on the cross: *And he [the criminal] said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” <sup>43</sup>And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” – Lk 23:42-43 (ESV)*

- Jesus’ promise to the thief on the cross: ‘Today you will be with me in the garden of Eden’ – which we now know is in the Heavenly city.

◇ **Conclusion:** The Garden of Eden still exists, and it exists within the Heavenly city. If it exists within the Heavenly city now, we can assume that it always did. The only alternative is that God zapped the whole Garden of Eden up to heaven after Adam and Eve sinned, which is also nowhere found in Scripture. Therefore, since the Garden of Eden was on the earth in the beginning it is quite possible that the Heavenly city was as well.

### 3. **Point 3: The Bible says that the Mountain of God was inside the area called Eden.**

a) *You were in EDEN, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the HOLY MOUNTAIN of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked.– Ez 28:13-14 (ESV)*

- There is some debate as to who the ‘you’ is that is referred to in this passage: some say Satan, others say Adam. Whatever the case, it is clear that the person referred to in this passage was BOTH *in Eden AND on*

<sup>28</sup> Steven Venable, *Foundations of Worship* course, IHOP university, unit 7, pp. 4-5, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Check it out for yourself in the Greek Interlinear New Testament online, *2 Corinthians 12:4*, <http://www.scripture4all.org/OnlineInterlinear/NTpdf/2co12.pdf> (accessed Jan 12, 2012).

the Holy Mountain of God just after the Creation. In other words, either Adam/Satan could be in two places at once OR the Holy Mountain of God was in Eden in the beginning.

- This is a fascinating passage of Scripture because the ‘holy mountain of God’ referred to in the passage above is not just some random mountain – it is none other than the very dwelling place of God itself; the heavenly mountain-city known as the New Jerusalem, on the top of which is God’s Temple and Throne Room . . . could this mean that the Heavenly city itself was also on earth in the beginning?

b) Consider the following five passages of Scripture, which tie together the mountain of God and the heavenly city (others could be cited as well):

- 1) *But you have come to MOUNT Zion and to the CITY of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,<sup>23</sup> and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,<sup>24</sup> and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. – Heb 12:22-24 (ESV)*
  - In this New Testament passage the Mountain of God and the heavenly city are treated as synonymous. Does that mean, then, that the heavenly city was on earth in the beginning, since Ezekiel states that either Adam or Satan was in the Garden of Eden and on the Mountain of God?
- 2) Isaiah’s famous prophecy about the wolf and the lamb one day grazing together: *The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,*” says the LORD. – Isa 65:25 (ESV)
  - No one denies that this is a prophecy about the future, about the time after God returns to earth (with the New Jerusalem in tow, see Rev 21:1-4), after which all of God’s people will live with Him joyfully forever and ever. At that time there will be peace everywhere on earth, even among the animals.
  - Notice what God calls His dwelling place in this passage – ‘my holy mountain.’ But we know from Revelation 21-22 that God’s dwelling place is also a city and that it is called the ‘New Jerusalem.’
- 3) *Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain,<sup>2</sup> beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King. – Psalm 48:1-2 (ESV)*
  - Notice in this passage that the terms ‘city of God’ and God’s ‘holy mountain’ are interchangeable; that is because they are the same place – God’s city is built on God’s mountain.<sup>30</sup>
  - Thus, the fact that Ezekiel 28:13-14 tells us the ‘mountain of God’ was in Eden is significant – was the heavenly city itself on earth at that time? In some very real way God’s dwelling place seems to have been on the earth at that time.

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<sup>30</sup> Some people may try to argue that the Psalmist was just speaking in poetic language about the earthly Jerusalem. This may, indeed, be true . . . to an extent. But the only reason the Psalmist *could* speak of the earthly Jerusalem in such sacred terms is because the writers of Scripture all viewed the earthly Jerusalem to be a shadow of the heavenly Jerusalem (see Gal 4:25-26). It’s no accident that both cities are called ‘Jerusalem’ – the earthly one is a shadow, or type, of the Heavenly one. Thus, whenever Scripture talks about the earthly Jerusalem in sacred terms as ‘mount Zion,’ or the ‘mountain of God,’ or the ‘city of God,’ the terms ultimately point to the *heavenly* Jerusalem, of which the earthly Jerusalem is just a copy. Because the earthly Jerusalem is a copy of the heavenly one, there are many physical parallels between the two cities, but the earthly Jerusalem is always the lesser: as just one example, earthly Jerusalem is built on a small mountain (Mt. Moriah), but the heavenly Jerusalem is built on a huge mountain (Isa 2:2). Below are two more reasons why Psalm 48 must ultimately be speaking of the heavenly Jerusalem and not the earthly one:

- (1) In verse 2, the psalmist explicitly states that the holy mountain is the ‘joy of all the earth.’ This could only be a future prophecy referring to the Heavenly Jerusalem, since the earthly Jerusalem has never been the joy of all the earth – and never will be. Indeed, for much of its history it has been the center of controversy and fighting on the earth, rather than joy. But when the New Jerusalem comes down to earth (Rev 21:1-4), *that* Jerusalem will indeed be the joy of all the earth.
- (2) In verse 8, the psalmist states categorically that the foundations of the city on the holy mountain will be established by God ‘forever.’ This can only be speaking of the New Jerusalem and not the earthly Jerusalem, since the heavenly Jerusalem will replace the earthly Jerusalem, and only the heavenly one will last forever.

4) *Thus says the LORD: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, AND the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the HOLY MOUNTAIN. – Zech 8:3 (ESV)*

- In this prophecy of what will happen after Jesus' return, God says that He is going to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem (ie. the New Jerusalem), and that the city will be called 'the mountain of the Lord of hosts,' and 'the holy mountain.'

5) *On the holy MOUNT stands the CITY he founded; <sup>2</sup> the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. <sup>3</sup> Glorious things of you are spoken, O CITY of God. – Psalm 87:1-3 (ESV)*

- This passage is explicit: on the holy mountain of God stands the city God founded. Which is the city God founded? There is only one – the New Jerusalem: "For he [Abraham] was looking forward to the city [the New Jerusalem] that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God" (Heb 11:10 ESV).
- Here we have yet another passage which explicitly states that the Heavenly city of Jerusalem is on the holy mountain of God, which means that at the Creation, the Heavenly Jerusalem was in Eden according to Ezekiel 28:13-14.

c) When all of this is understood, Revelation 21:10 takes on a whole new meaning: *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup> having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. – Rev 21:10-11 (ESV)*

- The way this passage is traditionally translated makes it seem like the great high mountain John went up on was separate from the holy city Jerusalem. But the Greek syntax in this passage is very difficult to translate; it could just as accurately be translated that John was carried away in the Spirit and shown 'a great, high mountain, the holy city Jerusalem.' In other words, there is nothing in the Greek which prevents this passage from being translated in such a way that the holy city Jerusalem and the great, high mountain are the same place.<sup>31</sup>
- In fact this seems more reasonable when you consider the fact that 6 verses later John tells us that the city is 1500 miles high. If the city was flat, it would make sense that John would have to go up on a mountain in order to get a better view of it. But if the city is a mind-boggling 1500 miles wide by 1500 miles high, why would John have to go up on a mountain to see it? The city itself is the mountain!

◇ **Conclusion:** When Ezekiel 28:13-14 states that the 'holy mountain of God' was in Eden, does that mean that the heavenly city itself was on the earth in the beginning, at creation?

### C. This is not just eccentric speculation, unique to Southland.

- Some of you may think, 'This has got to be crazy, because nobody else in the world thinks this is a possibility.'

Consider some of the following quotes:<sup>32</sup>

1. Consider Stephen G. Dempster's take (published by Inter Varsity Press!) on the Garden of Eden: "*The presence of the cherubim later in the narrative (Gen 3:24), and the description of the garden as the place where the Lord God walks (Gen 3:8), all contribute to understanding it [the Garden of Eden] as a cosmic mountain where heaven and earth are UNITED and from which the divine rule is exercised.*"<sup>33</sup>
2. Joachim Jeremias in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*: "*That we do not have three distinct entities in the Paradise of the first, the last, and the intervening time, but one and the same garden of God, may be seen quite indubitably from both the terminology and the content of the relevant statements. As regards the*

<sup>31</sup> Steven Venable, *Foundations of Worship* course, IHOP university, unit 3, pp. 16-17, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Huge thanks to Steven Venable who tracked down most of these quotes.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, Illinois, Inter Varsity Press: 2003), p 62.

terms, Paradise in all three ages is παράδεισος in the Greek, יְדֵן יָא in the Hebrew, ܝܕܢܝܟܢܝܢܝܢ in Aramaic. As regards the content, identity is proved especially by the common mention of the tree of life in statements about the intervening and the eschatological Paradise.”<sup>34</sup>

- ◇ In other words, Jeremias is arguing that the Paradise in Genesis 1-2 (the Garden of Eden) is the same as the one Paul visited in 2 Corinthians 12, which is the same as the one that John prophesies will come back to earth in Revelation 22.
- 3. James Charlesworth writing in the Anchor Bible Dictionary says, “Jews did not think about diverse places, but only one and the same Paradise.”<sup>35</sup>
  - ◇ In other words, the Jews in New Testament times did not think of paradise and the Garden of Eden like we do now – as two separate places; one in the past and one in the future; one earthly and one heavenly. Unlike us, the Jews assumed that the paradise where God lives now, and where godly people all hope to go after they die, is the very same paradise – the Garden of Eden – that Adam and Eve once lived in, way back in the beginning. They believed that the Garden of Eden *continued* to exist, in heaven, after Adam and Eve left it, and their hope for the future was that the Messiah would one day welcome them back into that same Garden. This is important to realize because ALL of the New Testament writers were Jews, and many of the people they were writing to were coming out of a Jewish mindset.
- 4. The Testament of Levi, a Jewish writing from around the first century BC confirms that this was how the Jews thought:<sup>36</sup> *And he [Messiah] shall open the gates of paradise, and shall remove the threatening sword against Adam, and he shall give to the saints to eat from the tree of life, and the spirit of holiness shall be on them.* – The Testament of Levi, chapter 18 (some have it as chapter 18, others divide it differently so it ends up as chapter 5:26)<sup>37</sup>
  - ◇ The Testament of Levi does not have the authority of Scripture obviously, but it proves that Jewish thought in Jesus’ day held that the future paradise which Messiah would open to the people of God was none other than the Garden of Eden itself (hence the line ‘he shall remove the threatening sword against Adam,’ referring to the guardian angel God put at the entrance to Eden in order to keep human beings out (Gen 3:24); notice also the reference to the Tree of Life).
- 5. Another Jewish book, *Second Baruch* (written during or before the first century AD<sup>38</sup>), directly links the Garden of Eden to the Heavenly city: “Dost you think that this [the earthly Jerusalem] is that city [the heavenly Jerusalem] of which I [God] said: “On the palms of My hands have I graven you”? <sup>3</sup> This building now built in your midst [the earthly temple] is not that [the heavenly temple] which is revealed with Me, that which prepared beforehand here from the time when I took counsel to make Paradise, and showed Adam before he sinned, but when he transgressed the commandment it was removed from him, as also Paradise. <sup>4</sup> And after these things I showed it [the Heavenly city/temple] to My servant Abraham by night among the portions of the victims. <sup>5</sup> And again also I showed it [the Heavenly city/temple] to Moses on Mount Sinai when I showed to the likeness of the tabernacle and all its vessels. <sup>6</sup> And NOW, behold, it is preserved with Me, as Paradise. <sup>7</sup> Go, therefore, and do as I command you.” – 2 Baruch 4:2-7<sup>39</sup>
  - ◇ As with the book of Levi, Second Baruch does not have the authority of Scripture; however it does give us another example of a Jewish writing which explicitly states that the paradise which all of God’s people are

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<sup>34</sup> Joachim Jeremias writing in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vols. 5-9 Edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 Compiled by Ronald Pitkin., ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 5:768.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted by Steven Venable in the *Foundations of Worship* course, IHOP university, unit 7, p. 6 in the footnotes, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Rutherford H. Platt, Jr., *The Forgotten Books of Eden*, [1926] accessed online: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/fbe/fbe266.htm> (Jan 12, 2012).

<sup>37</sup> Christian Classics Ethereal Library: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf08.iii.v.html> (accessed Jan 12, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> The Jewish Encyclopedia online: <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2565-baruch-book-of#anchor3> (accessed Jan 12, 2012).

<sup>39</sup> Pseudepigrapha online library: <http://www.pseudepigrapha.com/pseudepigrapha/2Baruch.html> (accessed Jan 12, 2012).

headed towards in the end, is none other than the Garden of Eden itself. In this passage, the author of Second Baruch explicitly states that the Heavenly Temple where God dwells was seen by Adam before he sinned; then, after he sinned, the Heavenly Temple and 'Paradise' (the Garden of Eden) were both 'removed from Adam' (v. 3b). The passage goes on to say that the Heavenly city and temple are preserved with God 'as Paradise,' by which the author clearly means the Garden of Eden, since he earlier says that Paradise was 'removed from [Adam],' in verse 3.

6. And there are many other Jewish writings which teach the same: for example the Apocalypse of Moses and Second Enoch 8 both place the Garden of Eden in heaven.<sup>40</sup>

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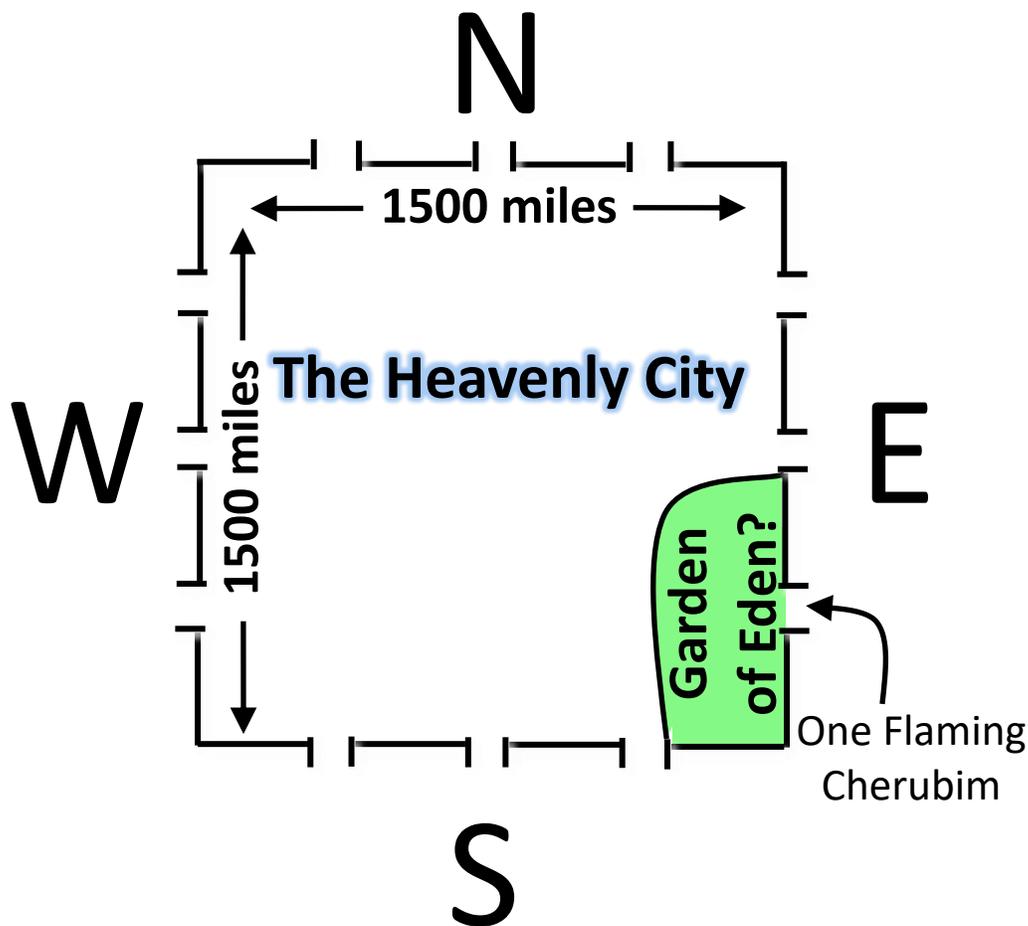
<sup>40</sup> For example, see Apocalypse of Moses 40:2 (<http://www.ccel.org/c/charles/otpseudepig/apcmose.htm> accessed Jan 12, 2012) and 2 Enoch 8:1 (<http://www.pseudepigrapha.com/pseudepigrapha/enochs2.htm#Ch8> accessed Jan 12, 2012).

D. If the heavenly city was really on earth in the beginning . . . some passages in Genesis make more sense (or at least come under a very different light).

1. **Stuff that makes more sense, part 1: *The angel guarding the way to the tree of life and the Garden of Eden.***

a) *Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" <sup>23</sup> therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup> He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. – Gen 3:22-24 (ESV)*

- Most Christians if you would ask them to describe the Garden of Eden they would describe this big garden that just kind of goes on and on. Kind of like a farmer's orchard. But if that's what Eden was like, how would placing *one* cherubim (with a flaming sword) in the *east* keep Adam and Eve and all their descendants out? Why wouldn't people be able to sneak in from the west, north or south sides?
- This passage only makes sense when you realize that the Garden of Eden *must* have had a wall around it, with an *entrance* in the east. Only then would it make sense that a single cherubim would have been able to guard the way back into the Garden of Eden, from the east.
- When you consider that the Heavenly Jerusalem has 12 gates through which people and angels may enter – three on each side (Rev 21:12-13) – did/does the Garden of Eden occupy one 'corner' of the city? Of course, in a city as large as the Heavenly city, a 'corner' could still very easily be hundreds of square miles!



b) **Note: the *Garden of Eden* was *inside* a much larger area called *Eden*.**

- Many Christians don't realize that the Garden of Eden was just one small part of the much larger territory called 'Eden,' which in Hebrew means 'delight.'<sup>41</sup> Consider the following two verses:

1) *And the LORD God planted a garden IN Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. – Gen 2:8 (ESV)*

- Notice: God planted the Garden of Eden INSIDE a bigger area called Eden.

2) *A river flowed OUT of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. – Gen 2:10 (ESV)*

- You can only have a river flowing *out* of Eden *into* the *Garden* of Eden if the Garden is one small piece of a bigger whole called Eden.
- Did the territory of Eden consist of all the land occupied by the gargantuan Heavenly city? Of course, other explanations are possible as well: perhaps the territory of Eden was even bigger than the heavenly city and the city itself was just one part of that territory.

2. **Stuff that makes more sense, part 2: *Cain's exile*.** Years after Adam and Eve were sent out of the *Garden of Eden*, their son Cain was dismayed to be sent away from the land of Eden: *And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. . . . You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."*<sup>13</sup> *Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. <sup>14</sup> Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and FROM YOUR FACE I SHALL BE HIDDEN. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."*<sup>15</sup> *Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. <sup>16</sup> Then Cain WENT AWAY FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. – Gen 4:10-16 (ESV)*

◇ Several interesting things to note from this passage:

a) Cain was not being driven away from the *Garden* of Eden, since his parents had been exiled from there years before, with no return possible (Gen 3:22-24). Thus, in this passage, God was driving Cain away from the *land* of Eden.

b) Two very strange statements are made in this passage concerning the presence of God. In the first, Cain is surprisingly distressed about God sending him away, and he complains to God that in exile he will be 'hidden' from God's 'face' (v. 14). A similar statement is then made two verses later, when Cain leaves the land of Eden, and the passage says that he "went away from the presence of the Lord" (v. 16). Neither of these statements make any sense according to modern Christian thinking about God (which is very Greek), because we think of God as being everywhere at once – so how could Cain leave the presence of the Lord, and be 'hidden' from His 'face,' simply by moving to another country?

- This passage only makes sense if God was *physically* living in *one* specific place *on* the earth, in the days of Cain. In that case, when God sent Cain away from Eden, He literally *was* sending Cain away from His physical presence, since Eden is where He physically lived.
- Potential Background Story: After Cain's parents (Adam and Eve) were driven from the Garden of Eden did they settle in the vicinity of the walls of the Heavenly city? Is that why God had to put a cherubim with a flaming sword at the gate, to keep them from coming back in? In that scenario, although they no longer lived inside the Heavenly city, they lived within its shadow and protection. Every day they could look at its incredible beauty and majesty, and enjoy the safety and fruitfulness of the land all around it. And God would still physically come out of the city and talk to them from time to time (see Gen 4:9-16; 5:24). But when God exiled Cain to the land of Nod, He was sending him away from the Heavenly city

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<sup>41</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelin) Volume 2, *Genesis*; (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1976), p. 41.

entirely – far away, to a place where Cain would neither be able to see His city, nor enjoy its protection, nor walk and talk with God. And this is why Cain was afraid for his life (v. 14). It is also why he said that he would be ‘hidden’ from God’s face; he would no longer be in sight of the city where God was living (and still lives).

c) **Question:** People often wonder – if Adam and Eve were the first people on earth, and Cain was their son, who were the other people on earth that Cain was afraid of? A: Maybe it wasn’t *people* Cain was afraid of! The Bible doesn’t explicitly say that Cain was afraid of other *people*, it just says he was afraid that ‘whoever’ (v. 14b) would find him would kill him. And we know that there were other beings roaming the earth in those days; for example Satan, who met with Adam and Eve and tempted them to eat the fruit they weren’t supposed to eat (Gen 3:1-5); we also know that other powerful angelic beings roamed the earth in those days (Gen 6:1-6). It could very well have been these angelic beings that Cain was afraid of.

### 3. Stuff that makes more sense, part 3: *Cain built a city.*

◇ Q: What was one of the first things Cain did after God sent him away to the land of Nod?

A: He built a city!

*Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. – Gen 4:17 (ESV)*

◇ But, according to traditional notions of the Garden of Eden and Creation, this makes no sense. Where did Cain get the idea to build a city? He was the son of Adam and Eve, the first people to ever walk the earth. There were hardly any other people on the earth, and the ones that did exist were all his family members. So where did he get the idea to build a *city*? How would such an idea cross his mind? How would he know what a city should look like? It is hard to make sense of this, until we realize that Cain perhaps *had* seen a city. Had he lived all his life in the shadow of God’s Heavenly city?

### 4. Stuff that makes more sense, part 4: *Adam and Eve walking with God in the Garden.*

◇ *And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. – Gen 3:8 (ESV)*

◇ Because of our Greek mindset most Christians today think of this passage in weird ways: ‘In the beginning, before Adam and Eve sinned, God would zap down from heaven every once in a while in order to take a walk in the Garden of Eden in the “cool of the day.”’ What – was it too hot up in ‘spiritual’ heaven? According to traditional Greek thinking about Heaven (ie. spiritual) and earth (ie. physical) this passage is weird – but it comes alive when you realize that Heaven is a physical place and the Garden of Eden is inside the Heavenly city itself. In other words, God was physically living *there*, close to Adam and Eve, in Genesis 3. He didn’t have to ‘zap’ down out of heaven somewhere, because His Throne Room and Dwelling Place were physically present there in the land of Eden. Of course, God’s Throne Room is at the top of His holy mountain, not in the Garden; but whenever He wants, God comes down into the Garden of Eden to walk. And when the Heavenly city was on the earth and Adam and Eve lived in the Garden itself, those walks would have included fellowship between the three.

◇ The only reason this interpretation seems strange to our minds is because of the Greek thinking we have imbibed – nothing in the Scripture would rule out this interpretation; and only the Greeks would have thought it more likely that God would rather ‘zap’ down from a ‘spiritual’ heaven, than actually physically live on the earth with His creatures.

## 5. Stuff that makes more sense, part 5: *Enoch walking with God and then being 'no more.'*

◇ *Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. – Gen 5:24 (ESV)*

- a) Because of our Greek mindset most Christians today think of the phrase 'walked with God,' as a devotional phrase. In other words, we think of this passage in spiritual terms, and not in physical terms; we don't think of Enoch physically walking with a physical God, we think of Enoch spending much time praying and reading his Bible (of course, he wouldn't have had a Bible in those days). But the Hebrew word in this passage *halak*,<sup>42</sup> is the exact same word used to describe what God did with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:8 – and nobody denies that in that passage, Adam and Eve *physically* walked and talked with God.
- b) Once this is understood, the part about Enoch's disappearance also makes more sense; in the modern Christian (ie. ancient Greek) way of thinking, Enoch walked with God *spiritually*, and then one day God zapped him up to 'spiritual' heaven, somewhere way up in the sky. But is it possible that the city of God was still physically on the earth in Enoch's day? Then, when Enoch 'walked with God,' He was doing exactly what Adam and Eve had once done with God – with the only difference being that Enoch and God were walking together outside the city instead of inside, in the Garden of Eden. Then, when God took Enoch, it wasn't a matter of 'zapping' him up to 'spiritual' Heaven; on one of their walks together God will have simply waved the guarding cherubim aside (Gen 3:22-24) and walked Enoch through the gate and into the Heavenly city.

## 6. Stuff that makes more sense, part 6: *Angels seeing human women and lusting after them (Gen 6).*

◇ *When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, <sup>2</sup> the sons of God [angels] saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. . . . <sup>4</sup> The Nephilim [giants] were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown. – Gen 6:1-8 (ESV)*

- a) This passage has stymied Greek-thinking theologians for over 1500 years. Because Greek thinkers think of angels as 'spiritual' beings 'up in heaven somewhere' they cannot accept that the 'sons of God' spoken of in this passage refers to angels, since angels would have to be physical beings in order to lust after human women, have sex with them, and have babies as this passage describes. But the Scriptures are consistent; the phrase 'sons of God' always clearly refers to angels everywhere else in the Old Testament (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; see also Dt 32:8; Ps 82:6). Unlike modern theologians who are tainted by much Greek thought, Jewish theologians and writers had no problem interpreting Genesis 6 as referring to angels and women producing children – for just one example, the book of Enoch goes into great detail about Genesis 6, even naming the angels that were involved in this transgression. Though the book of Enoch is not Scripture, it is quoted several times in the Bible (eg. 2 Pet 2:4; 3:13; Jude 14-15), thus at least proving that the authors of Scripture were familiar with the book and considered it to be a 'good' book.<sup>43</sup>
  - Furthermore, no other interpretation makes any sense: if the 'sons of God' refers to regular human men, how did these regular human men conceive of GIANTS when they had sex with women? (For example, Goliath was over 9 feet tall (1 Sam 17:4); Og was well over 10 feet tall, possibly even 13 feet tall (Deut 3:11); see also the Anakites who so towered over the Israelite spies that they felt like 'grasshoppers' (Num 13:33).) It would be impossible for regular human men to conceive of *an entire race* of monstrously evil giants of superhuman size and strength.

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<sup>42</sup> Strong's Concordance online: <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=H1980&t=KJV> (accessed Jan 15, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> In fact the book of Enoch almost made it into our Bible: Tertullian, an early church Father and Barnabas both considered it to be Scripture. The Ethiopian Orthodox church today includes the book of Enoch in their Bible.

- Secondly, if the ‘sons of God’ are regular human men, why does the passage contrast them with the women, calling the men ‘sons of *God*,’ but the women ‘daughters of *men*?’ Clearly the passage is attempting to draw a contrast here between different types of beings – one human and one angelic.
  - Lastly, a number of New Testament passages only make sense when you realize that the ‘sons of God’ referred to in the Genesis 6 passage above, is talking about angels . . .
    - 1) *And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day. – Jude 1:6 (ESV)*
      - Who are these angels that Jude says are locked up in chains already? There shouldn’t be any angels or demons locked up yet – they aren’t supposed to be sent to Hell until the Day of Judgment, and the demons know this (see Mt 8:29). And we know that Satan won’t be locked up until Jesus comes back (Rev 20); much of Jesus’ ministry consisted of casting out demons, though even the ones He cast out He didn’t lock up in Hell (they could come back – see Mt 12:45); and of course, we as the church, a big part of our job is to fight against the Devil and his minions (Ephesians 6:11-12). So then, who is this group of angels who are already locked up, so that they can’t cause problems anymore? This passage only makes sense in light of the ‘sons of God’ in Genesis 6 being angels who had conceived of children with women; angels who ‘left their proper dwelling’ and ‘did not stay within their own position of authority.’ In other words they went way outside of the bounds of what angels are supposed to do – the only story in the Bible that describes anything like this is Genesis 6, angels having sex with humans.
    - 2) *For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment;<sup>5</sup> if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly . . . – 2 Pet 2:4-5 (ESV)*
      - In this passage we see the same thing as in Jude 1:6, there is a group of angels who are already locked up and in chains, awaiting judgment. This passage goes even further, however, linking these angels with the story of Noah.
    - 3) *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,<sup>19</sup> in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison,<sup>20</sup> because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. – 1 Pet 3:18-20 (ESV)*
      - This passage is a complete puzzle unless one understands Genesis 6 as being angels having sex with women. This passage specifically says that Jesus went and preached to spirits who are in prison ‘because’ they did not obey ‘in the days of Noah.’ Could these ‘spirits’ be the spirits of people, not angels, as some say? It doesn’t make sense! Why would Jesus only preach to the spirits of people who disobeyed in the days of Noah, rather than to all the spirits of people who had disobeyed from all time periods throughout history up to that point in time? What is so special about the days of Noah? And if the ‘spirits’ spoken of in this passage is speaking of dead people, not angels, we need to build a whole new theology of Hades, because then this passage is teaching that the people who disobeyed in the time of Noah are kept in a totally separate place than the people who disobeyed God in other time periods. Why? No, this passage only makes sense when the ‘sons of God’ in Genesis 6 are understood to be demonic beings.
- b) Once a person accepts that Genesis 6 is talking about angels, then the fact that the Heavenly city was on the earth makes *even* more sense. If the Heavenly city is a *physical* city that was *physically* on the earth, inhabited by *physical* angels, then it is not far-fetched to believe that some of those fallen angels, who were

roaming the earth anyway, looked on the daughters of men with lust and carried out their evil plan.

**E. If the Heavenly City was on earth in the beginning, at creation – what happened to it? When did it leave?**

- The Bible doesn't tell us. And, of course, we cannot say with certainty that it actually was here on the earth in the beginning. Here's what we do know: God's heavenly city exists right now and God will bring it down to the earth again some day. Believing that the Heavenly city once went *up* from the earth is no more weird than believing it will one day come *down* to the earth (Rev 21:1-4); if it can come down, it could certainly have gone up at some point.
- If it did go up at some point, we have only guesses as to when that may have been: a good guess, and there are ancient Jewish writings which also attest to this, is that God may have taken the Heavenly city up from the earth during the Flood of Noah.