

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

HARRY BOWERS, EDITOR

7844 GRIMSBY CIRCLE, HARRISBURG, N.C. 28075

NOVEMBER 2011

THE HEAVEN THERE IS

When Jesus ascended, He “ascended far above all the heavens...” (Eph. 4:10), and the book of Hebrews states that when Jesus ascended he “passed through the heavens” (Heb. 4:14). Does this mean there is more than one “heaven”? The Apostle Paul wrote “I know a man in Christ who (from the context we know he was speaking of himself) was caught up to the third heaven” (II Cor. 12:2). We are accustomed to thinking of the “heavens” being the atmosphere around us and outer space where the planets are, and “heaven” being the city where God dwells, described by John in Revelation 21, the city where the righteous dead have gone and where we will dwell in eternity. However Revelation 21 does not say the city shown to John was heaven, rather it was “the holy city, new Jerusalem *coming down out of heaven* from God” which the angel tells John is “the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:9, 10). Furthermore, Paul said when he was caught up into the third heaven he “heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak” (II Cor. 12:4). John, then, was not describing what Paul saw in the third heaven if it was not permitted man to speak. The book of Revelation is a book of symbols and we cannot know for certain their meaning unless John tells us what the symbol means. In this case we are told the city is the bride, the wife of the lamb. The word “heaven” is the Greek word *ouranos*. In the New Testament it is translated “heaven” 218 times, “heavens” 24 times, “sky” 22 times and “air” 9 times.

As a general rule translators have translated *ouranos* in the plural (heavens) when it refers to the atmosphere around us or the realm of the planets, anything beyond that (such as the “third heaven”) they translate the word in the singular (heaven). However the word is many times translated “heaven” when it is actually in the plural “heavens”. The incalculable difference this makes is it limits heaven to a place in distant or outer space, or beyond space. Of course God is everywhere, but to put Him in a city “beyond the sky’s” is to alienate Him from being close at hand and not view God as being always present with us, as Jesus shows Him to be. We invariably take them to be located far away and at a much later time, not here and now—in the “third heaven” perhaps, but not in the “first” heaven, that is the atmosphere around us. An example of this is seen in the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6. Verse 9 is always translated “Our Father which art in heaven” (singular). It reads in the original language “The Father of us, the one in the heavens” (plural). In verse 10 it is always translated correctly in the singular, “Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven”. God’s will is not always done in the “heavens” (the heaven around us), although God is there. Satan is referred to as “the prince of the power of the air, and the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). Paul further speaks of “rulers, powers, world forces of this darkness, and spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenlies” (Eph. 6:12). However, His will is always done in the real “holy place not made with hands, that is heaven itself” (Heb. 9:24). The difference in the use of the singular (heaven) and the plural (heavens) is seen in the following comparison. Matthew 6:20: “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven (singular) where neither moth nor rust destroys...” and Matthew 16:19 Jesus tells

Peter, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (plural—“heavens” in the original). We lay up treasures in “heaven” which will be our rewards at His coming: “Behold I come quickly and my reward is with me” (Rev. 22:12). Peter was given the keys to the kingdom of the “heavens” because the kingdom has “come near” (Luke 10:9, 11), and “the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:21).

An example of how the word “heaven” is translated is Acts 11:5-9: In the span of five verses the same word is translated three different ways in the NASV; “the sky” verse 5, “the air” verse 6. And “heaven” verse 9 and two different ways in the KJV: “heaven” verse 5; “air” verse 6, and “heaven” verse 9. God spoke to Peter from the atmosphere or air around him. The record shows God speaking from the atmosphere many times in the Scriptures. Genesis 21:17-18: Hagar in the wilderness: “And God heard the lad crying and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven. And said to her, ‘What is the matter with you, Hagar? do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand for I will make a great nation of him.’” In Genesis 22:11-18 the angel of the Lord speaks to Abraham out of heaven, and God promises to make of him a great nation.” God speaks to Jacob when he was fleeing from Esau and declares: “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham, and the God of Isaac” then He renews the promise to Jacob. Jacob’s response was, “How awesome is this placed! This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28: 12-18). The voice of God came from heaven at Jesus’ baptism and transfiguration. The above reference to God speaking to Peter and later to Paul shows that God is near and Christ is near because He had said, “If anyone loves Me he will keep my sword and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23). These and the many examples of God speaking from heaven refers to the spiritual realm around us, including all the heavens referred to by Paul as “the heavenlies” or a some versions read, “heavenly places”. These interactions of “heaven” with the people of God show that God and his spiritual agents are actually here and available to us. God dwells in His people. We should not think of Him as being beyond space and far removed from us.

Nowhere does the Bible say we “go to heaven when we die”.