

Bible Study

Will the Saints Rule from Heaven or on Earth?

A Brief Discussion of Chiliasm



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Version 1.2



Will the Saints Rule from Heaven or on Earth?

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Our purpose and desire are to foster Biblical, historical and related studies that strengthen the Church of God's message & mission and provides further support to its traditional doctrinal positions.

“... and you have made them a kingdom and priests [ie king-priests] to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” (Rev 5:10, ESV)

Introductory Comments

NB: this is classified as a Bible Study, not an academic style paper.

There are various views concerning Christ's coming reign for 1,000 years. This period is known as *chiliasm* which is also equated with *millenarianism*¹ of which there is a spectrum of views and interpretations. A few pre-Millenarists hold to the view that the saints will rule from the third heaven during that period. It is this view that is chiefly addressed in this article.

A brief definition for chiliasm is found in the *etymonline website* (www.etymonline.com/word/chiliasm)

“chiliasm (n.)

"the doctrine of the millennium (suggested by Revelation xx), the theological opinion that Christ and the saints will reign visibly and corporeally on earth for 1,000 years before the final struggle between good and evil," c. 1600, from Latinized form of Greek *khiliasmos*, from *khilias*, from *khilioi* "a thousand, the number 1,000," which is probably from a PIE **gheslo-*, source also of Sanskrit *sahasra*- "thousand" and perhaps also Latin *mille*, but the exact original sense of the root is unclear. Related: *Chiliast*; *chiliastic*.

also from [c. 1600](#)

Entries linking to *chiliasm*

[chiliad \(n.\)](#)

"group of 1,000" (of the same sort), 1590s; "period of a thousand years" (1660s), from Latinized form of Greek *khiliados*, from *khilioi* "a thousand; the number 1,000" (see [chiliasm](#)). Related: *Chiliadal*, *chiliadic*."

Within chiliasm or Millenarianism, we can identify three broad categories:

Pre-Millennialists – the belief that Christ will return to rule on the earth for 1,000 years, followed by the final judgment and eternal Kingdom.

Post-Millennialists – this teaching is of the view that Christ returns to earth after the millennium of church rule. A time of peace and prosperity which will be ushered in by Christians. At the end of this period, the church will offer up the earth to Christ.

A-millennialists – the millennium is purely spiritual in nature with the pertinent Scriptures referred to as metaphorical and symbolic. In effect the saints, after they die, are in heavenly bliss which the 1,000 years symbolise. However, Christ will return for the final judgment and the eternal kingdom.²

More detailed and complete explanations can be found in many Bible Dictionaries and other works.³ And I also recommend Robert G. Clouse, *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, which assists in understanding the various eschatological stances with rebuttals of the other view.

¹ See Charles Hill, "Chiliasm," *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, Vol., III, pp. 1464-65.

² Some claim that many early Chiliasts were similar to A-millennialists. Refer to *A big difference between ancient Chiliasm and modern-day Premillennialism*, Puritan Board website, 28 Sept 2020.

³ One article of interest is "Four Views on the Millennium," <https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/mill.cfm> Also *Revelation in Late Antiquity and the Early Church* persweb.wabash.edu/facstaff/royaltyr/chiliaug.html

Many scholars have critiqued these three competing views. One example is by de Smidt "Chiliasm: An Escape from the Present into an Extra-Biblical Apocalyptic Imagination," *Scriptura*, Vol. 45 (1993), pp. 79-95.

Within each of these viewpoints we find a spectrum of understanding. For example Churches of God, Messianics, many Baptists and conservative Evangelicals subscribe to the view that Christ and the Christians will reign on earth; Jehovah's Witness believe similarly, but add the point that the 144,000 rule from heaven; and the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine is that the earth will be desolate during that period with the saints enjoying eternal life in heaven prior to returning to the earth at the end of the 1,000 years.⁴

A small number of pre-millenarists believe that Christ shall return to the earth for a short period to resurrect the saints, restore Israel and rebuild the temple. Then he and the saints will transfer to heaven and rule the earth from there.

Their argument is that the traditional view of pre-Millennialists (and Church of God) is an erroneous assumption which supposedly arises from interpreting the Bible through a contemporary Western lens, imposing excessive modern Western reasoning onto the ancient thought patterns of the Near East.

However, this is dismissed because no Biblical basis can be found for their view and historically, the Jews themselves and the early Sabbatarians, held to the view of a Messiah ruling on earth only. Living in heaven during this 1,000-year period was never taught by them.

Early Jewish Beliefs

The general Jewish belief at the time of Christ provides a backdrop to early Christian beliefs.

"Ideas about the millennium in Revelation and Christian tradition are dependent on earlier Jewish concepts of the peaceful future rule of Israel over all the nations of the earth, often involving a Davidic king or messiah and with lengths of time varying according to different interpretations. The related tradition of the Samaritan *ta'eb* was expected to restore Israel for a thousand-year period. A millenarian viewpoint continued to develop in the early centuries of Christianity, especially in the theologies of the early church fathers. For example, Irenaeus and Justin Martyr understood the idea as the physical or material return of Jesus to establish earthly political rule. Later writers, such as Origen and Augustine, rejected these more physical understandings." ("Millenarianism." In James Crossley and Alastair Lockhart (eds.) *Critical Dictionary of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements*. 15 January 2021.) [emphasis mine]

Premillennialism is deeply rooted in ancient Jewish traditions, highlighting a notable connection between the two. The traditional Jewish perspective on an external Messianic kingdom is fully represented in the Chiliastic notion of the millennium. As a result, premillennialism may be regarded as a remnant of Jewish philosophical ideas. Dr. Hodge offers valuable insights into this relationship:

⁴ See Peter van Bemmelen, "The Millennium and the Judgment," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, Vol. 8, Nos. 1-2, pp. 150-60.

“It is a Jewish doctrine. The principles adopted by its advocates in the interpretation of prophecy are the same as have been adopted by the Jews in the time of Christ; and have led substantially to the same conclusions. **The Jews expected that when the Messiah came He would establish a glorious earthly kingdom at Jerusalem; that those who had died in the faith should be raised from the dead to share the Messianic reign; that all nations and peoples on the face of the earth should be subject to them;** and that any nation that would not serve them should be destroyed. All the riches and honors of the world were to be at their disposal.” (Hodge, *Systematic Theology* – Eschatology, quoted in William Masselink, *Why Thousand Years?* p. 20) [emphasis mine]

Hodge is not exactly correct, but he is close.

From my readings, it is rather obvious that Chiliasm was quite prevalent during the second century; however, it began to lose popularity by the conclusion of the third century. The doctrine was indirectly criticized through the inclusion of the phrase “...whose kingdom shall have no end,” which was added to the Nicene Creed during the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD. Eusebius of Caesarea linked this doctrine to the rudimentary theology of Papias of Hierapolis at the dawn of the second century:

“there will be a period of some thousand years after the [first] resurrection of the dead, and that the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this very earth” (quoted by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, book 3, chapter 39).

The gradual deterioration of the doctrine from what we term pre-millenarianism to a-millenarianism has been discussed by scholars for many decades. One such useful work is by Mike Stallard, “The Shift from Jewish Chiliasm to Christian Chiliasm In the Early Church,” *Baptist Bible Seminary*:

“On the other side of the ledger is found a Christian chiliasm which emphasizes no Jewish elements such as national restoration or a rebuilt temple. This appears to be the main approach found in most of the extant material given in the early Church Fathers.” (p. 8)

In earlier writings, the phrase was repeatedly linked to "crass Jewish fables" and individuals who maintain a literal interpretation of a physical millennium, as depicted in the chapters of Isaiah 25 and 55. Furthermore, outside the Reformed tradition, Eastern Orthodoxy has criticized "chiliasm," which is somewhat ironic considering that many saints within their own tradition supported premillennial views.

“Premillennialism or Chiliasm, though it must be remembered that early Chiliasm must not be charged with all the views of later teachers of the same trend. Chiliasm is generally associated with a belief in the visible return of Christ for the setting up of an earthly theocracy as the middle point of a perfect world-rule which belongs to Christianity as such, and which is a preparatory step for the Other Life. It includes annihilation of godless world-powers, which must be ruled by the godly, and generally a double resurrection, that of the pious for the thousand-year Kingdom, and that of the rest of the dead at the end for general judgment.” (John Faulkner, “The Thousand Year Reign,” *The Review and Expositor*, Vol. 9, Issue 1, Jan 1912, p. 25)

Faulkner is an Amillennialist and tries to tie millennialism in with some pagan influences:

“Parseeism, the religion of Persia as reformed by Zoroaster, was the first to proclaim the thousand-year reign, when the evil kingdom would be overthrown.”
(p. 26)

Of course, there would always be some ancient truths that found their way into pagan religion. That is only to be expected, but there is no proof that any scattered truths found in other religions came into the ancient, original Hebrew religion.

He spends 11 pages wasting his scholarly abilities attempting to bend the Scriptures to ‘Christian’ church creeds.

Let us continue:

“The genesis of this doctrine may be found in these writings which are generally dated in the pre-Christian period. The Jews divided the future into two separate periods. The first era is considered to be of a temporal nature and is designated as the kingdom of the Messiah. The second era is of eternal duration and is called the kingdom of God. The transient Messianic kingdom prepares the way for the final setting up of the eternal kingdom of God.” (William Masselink, *Why Thousand Years?* p. 20)

Masselink explains the distinction is similarly observed in the Psalms of Solomon, where the initial Messianic kingdom is depicted as temporary. In Psalms 17 and 18, as well as in Psalm 3:12, references to resurrection and eternal life are present. Transitioning into the Christian era, this dual concept of the kingdom is evident in the *Slavic Enoch* and the *Apocalypses of Ezra and Baruch*. These texts specify the duration of the Messianic period with a defined number of years. For instance, 4 Ezra 7:28 states that Christ's reign will endure for four hundred years, after which both Christ and all earthly beings will come to an end. Subsequently, the dead will be resurrected, and the eternal judgment will commence. Likewise, Baruch 40:3, he shows, describes Christ's reign as continuing until the conclusion of the world.

He further explains that the Jews at that time expected an earthly Kingdom which significantly influenced Judas Iscariot. His allegiance to Jesus was largely driven by self-interest, as he aimed to gain substantial prestige and material benefits from the Lord. Upon realizing that his worldly aspirations would remain unfulfilled, he betrayed his Master for thirty pieces of silver. This desire for an earthly kingdom became especially evident during the crucifixion of Jesus. The authorities and onlookers derided Him, declaring, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” Their simplistic understanding of Jesus' kingship sharply contrasted with the deep anguish He endured at Golgotha. This disconnect stemmed from their expectation of a different kind of Messiah. To them, His crucifixion served as compelling evidence that Jesus was not the foretold king of the Jews.

“the Apocalyptic writings of Judaism as well as from the current expectations among the Jews that prevailed during the ministry of Jesus on earth. **Jesus' teaching in regard to the nature and development of His kingdom can only be understood in the light of this fact.**” (ibid, p. 4) [emphasis mine]

“The view of the Reformed church on this subject finds expression in the *Confession Helvetica*, — “We reject the Jewish fancy that there shall be before the day of judgment a golden age in which the pious shall take over the control

of the world after their enemies the ungodly have been subdued, because the Evangelists Matthew and Luke, as seen in Matt. 24-25 and in Luke 18, and also in the apostolic teachings as found in II Thess. 2, and in II Tim. 2, 4, give us quite a different representation,” (Art. on Judgment, translated from Dutch). So also in the “Nederlandsche Geloofsbelijdenis” no mention is made of a glorious reign of peace and prosperity of Christ and the believers and of a double resurrection after the coming of Christ. The last article of this confession explicitly states that the resurrection and final judgment shall both take place at the time of Christ’s coming.” (ibid, p. 30)

Many non-Sabbatarian chiliasts believed differently to what is generally accepted by pre-Millennialists:

“It may seem curious to us today, but the ancient Christian chiliasts defended a view of the afterlife in which the souls of the righteous did not go immediately to God's presence in heaven at the time of death, but went instead to a subterranean Hades. Here souls, in refreshment and joyful contemplation, waited for the resurrection and the earthly kingdom before they could enter the presence of God. The only ones exempted from Hades were men like Enoch and Elijah who, it was thought, had not experienced death but had been translated alive to paradise.” (Charles Hill, “Why the Early Church Finally Rejected Premillennialism,” *The Modern Reformation website*, Jan-Feb 1999, p. 5)

But Hill explains that, in his view, Chiliasm was the continuation of the Jewish belief of the Messiah’s future rule over the earth (p. 4)⁵

What Researchers Say

One work that should be referenced in this context is Frederick Grant’s “The Eschatology of the Second Century,” *The American Journal of Theology*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1917.

In his article, Grant delves into the progression and transformation of eschatological beliefs in early Christianity, particularly during the second century. Grant explores the evolution of these beliefs from their origins in apocalyptic Judaism and how they were influenced by the changing social and cultural landscape of the Roman Empire. The article also addresses important inquiries, including:

- Whether the eschatology of the second century was a continuation of early Christian eschatology or a new development influenced by Hellenistic thought.
- The significance of Chiliasm, the belief in a literal thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, and its implications.
- The impact of these eschatological beliefs on the interpretation of New Testament writings and their relevance to the broader history of Christianity.

Grant's work holds significance in understanding how early Christian thought adapted and evolved in response to its expanding context.

The fundamental issue of what we are discussing is raised by Frederick Grant:

⁵ See Rick Perhai, “Chiliasm in the Early Church until Nicea: Apologists,” *The Journal of Ministry & Theology*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2012, pp. 86-124.

“How are we to account for the phenomenon of Chiliasm? Did Chiliasm represent the primitive Christian eschatology?

The importance of the eschatological question for the interpretation of the New Testament writings, and especially the Gospels, is now generally recognized. A similar importance is to be attached to the bearing which it has on the writings of the period following that of the New Testament literature. Granted that **Christianity arose in the environment of apocalyptic Judaism, whose mental, moral, and spiritual atmosphere was charged with fervent messianic expectation ...**” (“The Eschatology of the Second Century,” *The American Journal of Theology*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1917, p. 193) [emphasis mine]

And

“Revelation in Late Antiquity and the Early Church.

Chiliasm. As Wainwright discusses, Chiliastic of Revelation interpretation predominated during the second and third centuries of this era. Chiliasts (from the Greek for "thousand," *chilioi*) took a literal interpretation of Rev 20:4-5 and looked forward to a thousand year reign with Christ on earth. The word "millenarian" (from the Latin for "thousand year," *mille annus*), is used today for people who take a literal view of this passage. Chiliastic readings in the second century ce tended towards materialistic interpretation of the millennium kingdom and the wealth described in the New Jerusalem. Wainwright mentions a number of important early church figures who were also Chiliasts; chief among these are Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian (others, such as Hippolytus and Lactanius, are not as important for the development of Christian doctrine and dogma)...

"John, therefore, did distinctly foresee the first "resurrection of the just,"(7) and the inheritance in the kingdom of the earth; and what the prophets have prophesied concerning it harmonize [with his vision]. For the Lord also taught these things, when He promised that He would have the mixed cup new with His disciples in the kingdom. The apostle, too, has confessed that the creation shall be free from the bondage of corruption, [so as to pass] into the liberty of the sons of God. (8) And in all these things, and by them all, the same God the Father is manifested, who fashioned man, and gave promise of the inheritance of the earth to the fathers, who brought it (the creature) forth [from bondage] at the resurrection of the just, and fulfils the promises for the kingdom of His Son..."
(<http://persweb.wabash.edu/facstaff/royaltyr/chiliaug.html>)

Arguments for Ruling from Heaven

This author argues that the resurrected saints will (with the aid of the angels), push aside Satan and the demons and occupy the various offices of power over the earth.

As spirit beings, they will dwell on this earth, but in the first heaven (the atmosphere. Refer to the table [The Three Heavens](#)). They will be invisible beings, but quite capable of appearing to physical humans. Morphing in and out of the spirit realm into the physical realm is what spirits can do.

Christians are being readied for this wonderful spirit life – trained by Christ for the immense purpose He has in store for us:

“... even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—
and raised us up with him and **seated us with him in the heavenly places** in Christ Jesus,
so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Eph 2:5-7)

“Even when we were dead (slain) by [our own] shortcomings and trespasses, He made us alive together in fellowship and in union with Christ; [He gave us the very life of Christ Himself, the same new life with which He quickened Him, for] it is by grace (His favor and mercy which you did not deserve) that you are saved (delivered from judgment and made partakers of Christ’s salvation).” (*Amplified Bible*)

“even being dead in the trespasses, did make us to live together with the Christ, (by grace ye are having been saved.” (*Young’s Literal Translation*)

We are “raised up” to represent Christ now, living as if we were already seated in the positions He has in mind for us. We are in training for these positions now. To be spiritually with Him, not having gone to Him – that is future at the resurrection. Refer to the **Appendix** for further details.

“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)

From the above we can deduce that Christians are deemed to be in the “heavenly places” where Satan and the demons reside – which is the first heaven, not the third.

In my book, *The Millennial Reign of the Messiah*, I wrote:

“Note that He, together with the saints, rule on earth (Rev 5: 10. Cf 1 Kings 8:27). This does not discount the possibility of Him appearing before God the Father in heaven as needed. But on the earth, as spirits, they dwell in the heavenlies – the spiritual sphere around the earth – the first heaven.” (p. 190)

Some take umbrage with this some because, it is argued “in the heavenly places” is a term only found in Ephesians. But this author fails to see how that impacts upon or disproves his stance.

Similar terms and words with the same meaning is used 20 times in the New Testament.

Here is an explanation from *Strong’s Lexicon*:

“epouranios: Heavenly, celestial

Original Word: ἐπουράνιος

Part of Speech: Adjective

Transliteration: epouranios

Pronunciation: ep-oo-ran'-ee-os

Phonetic Spelling: (ep-oo-ran'-ee-os)

Definition: Heavenly, celestial

Meaning: heavenly, celestial, in the heavenly sphere, the sphere of spiritual activities; met: divine, spiritual.

Word Origin: Derived from ἐπί (epi, meaning "upon" or "above") and οὐρανός (ouranos, meaning "heaven" or "sky").

Corresponding Greek / Hebrew Entries: The Hebrew equivalent often used in the Old Testament is שָׁמַיִם (shamayim), which also means "heavens" or "sky."

Usage: The term "epouranios" is used in the New Testament to describe things that pertain to or originate from heaven. It often refers to the divine realm or the spiritual realities that are associated with God's kingdom. This adjective is used to contrast earthly or temporal things with those that are eternal and divine.

Cultural and Historical Background: In the Greco-Roman world, the concept of the heavens was often associated with the divine and the abode of the gods. In Jewish thought, heaven was seen as the dwelling place of Yahweh and the angels. The New Testament writers, drawing from this background, use "epouranios" to emphasize the superiority and eternal nature of the spiritual realm over the physical world."

HELPS Word-studies throws further light on this:

“**2032** *epouránios* (an adjective, derived from 1909 /*epí*, "on, fitting," which intensifies 3772 /*ouranós*, "heaven") – properly, heavenly, referring to the impact of heaven's influence on the particular situation or person.
[The prefix (epi) shows this always "fits" – from the standpoint of *heaven*.]

Thayer's Greek Lexicon provides additional information:

“**STRONGS NT 2032: ἐπουράνιος**

ἐπουράνιος, ἐπουράνιον (οὐρανός), properly, existing **in or above heaven, heavenly**;

1. existing in heaven: ὁ πατήρ ἐπουράνιος, i. e. God, Matthew 18:35 Rec. (Θεοί, Θεός, Homer, Odyssey 17, 484; Iliad 6, 131, etc.; 3Macc. 6:28 3Macc. 7:6); οἱ ἐπουράνιοι the heavenly beings, the inhabitants of heaven, (Lucian, dial. deor. 4, 3; of the gods, in Theocritus, 25, 5); of angels, in opposition to ἐπίγειοι and καταχθονιοι, Philippians 2:10; Ignat. ad Trall. 9 [ET], (cf. Polycarp, ad Philipp. 2 [ET]); σώματα, the bodies of the stars (which the apostle, according to the universal ancient conception, seems to have regarded as animate (cf. Lightfoot on Colossians, p. 376; Gfrorer, Philo etc. 2te Aufl., p. 349f; Siegfried, Philo von Alex., p. 306; yet cf. Meyer ed. Heinrici, at the passage), cf. Job 38:7; Enoch 18:14ff) and of the angels, 1 Corinthians 15:40; ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐπουράνιος (on which see p. 97), 2 Timothy 4:18; substantially the same as ἡ πατρίς ἡ ἐπουράνιος Hebrews 11:16 and Ἱερουσαλήμ ἐπουρανίω, Hebrews 12:22; κλήσις, a calling made (by God) in heaven, Hebrews 3:1 (others would include a reference to its end as well as to its origin; cf. Lunem. at the passage), cf. Philippians 3:14 (Lightfoot cites Philo, plant. Noe § 6). The neut. Τά ἐπουράνια denotes (cf. Winers Grammar, § 34, 2)

a. the things that take place in heaven, i. e. the purposes of God to grant salvation to men through the death of Christ: John 3:12 (see ἐπίγειος).

b. the heavenly regions, i. e. heaven itself, the abode of God and angels: Ephesians 1:3, 20 (where Lachmann text οὐρανοῖς); Ephesians 2:6; Ephesians 3:10; the lower heavens, or the heaven of the clouds, Ephesians 6:12 (cf. B. D. American edition, under the word).

c. the heavenly temple or sanctuary: Hebrews 8:5; Hebrews 9:23.

2. of heavenly origin and nature: 1 Corinthians 15:48f (opposite to χοϊκός); ἡ δωρεά ἡ ἐπουράνιος. Hebrews 6:4.

Englishman's Concordance:

John 3:12 Adj-ANP

GRK: ὑμῖν τὰ **ἐπουράνια** πιστεύσετε

NAS: if I tell you *heavenly things*?

KJV: I tell you [*of*] *heavenly things*?

INT: to you the things *heavenly* will you believe

1 Corinthians 15:40 Adj-NNP

GRK: καὶ σώματα **ἐπουράνια** καὶ σώματα

NAS: There are also *heavenly* bodies

KJV: [There are] also *celestial* bodies, and

INT: And bodies [there are] *heavenly* and bodies

1 Corinthians 15:40 Adj-GNP

GRK: ἡ τῶν **ἐπουρανίων** δόξα ἑτέρα

NAS: but the glory of the *heavenly* is one,

KJV: the glory of the *celestial* [is] one,

INT: the of the *heavenly* glory one

1 Corinthians 15:48 Adj-NMS

GRK: οἷος ὁ **ἐπουράνιος** τοιοῦτοι καὶ

NAS: who are earthy; and as is the *heavenly*, so

KJV: as [is] the *heavenly*, such

INT: such as the *heavenly* [one] such also

1 Corinthians 15:48 Adj-NMP

GRK: καὶ οἱ **ἐπουράνιοι**

NAS: also are those *who are heavenly*.

KJV: [are] they also *that are heavenly*.

INT: also the *heavenly* [ones]

1 Corinthians 15:49 Adj-GMS

GRK: εἰκόνα τοῦ **ἐπουρανίου**

NAS: bear the image of the *heavenly*.

KJV: bear the image of the *heavenly*.

INT: image of the [one] *heavenly*

Ephesians 1:3 Adj-DNP

GRK: ἐν τοῖς **ἐπουρανίοις** ἐν Χριστῷ

NAS: blessing in the *heavenly* [places] in Christ,

KJV: in *heavenly* [places] in

INT: in the *heavenly* places in Christ

Ephesians 1:20 Adj-DNP

GRK: ἐν τοῖς **ἐπουρανίοις**

NAS: Him at His right hand in the *heavenly* [places],

KJV: right hand in the *heavenly* [places],

INT: in the *heavenly* places

Ephesians 2:6 Adj-DNP

GRK: ἐν τοῖς **ἐπουρανίοις** ἐν Χριστῷ

NAS: us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the *heavenly* [places] in Christ

KJV: in *heavenly* [places] in

INT: in the *heavenly* places in Christ

Ephesians 3:10 Adj-DNP

GRK: ἐν τοῖς **ἐπουρανίοις** διὰ τῆς

NAS: and the authorities in the *heavenly* [places].

KJV: in *heavenly* [places] might be known

INT: in the *heavenly places* through the

Ephesians 6:12 Adj-DNP

GRK: ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις

NAS: [forces] of wickedness *in the heavenly* [places].

KJV: wickedness in *high* [places].

INT: in the *heavenly places*

Philippians 2:10 Adj-GMP

GRK: γόνυ κάμψη ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων

NAS: WILL BOW, *of those who are in heaven* and on earth

KJV: should bow, *of [things] in heaven*, and

INT: knee should bow *in heaven* and on earth

2 Timothy 4:18 Adj-AFS

GRK: αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐπουράνιον ὧ ἢ

NAS: and will bring me safely *to His heavenly* kingdom;

KJV: his *heavenly* kingdom:

INT: of him *heavenly* to whom [be] the

Hebrews 3:1 Adj-GFS

GRK: ἅγιοι κλήσεως ἐπουρανίου μέτοχοι κατανοήσατε

NAS: partakers *of a heavenly* calling,

KJV: partakers *of the heavenly* calling,

INT: holy of [the] calling *heavenly* partakers consider

Hebrews 6:4 Adj-GFS

GRK: δωρεὰς τῆς ἐπουρανίου καὶ μετόχους

NAS: and have tasted *of the heavenly* gift

KJV: have tasted *of the heavenly* gift,

INT: gift *heavenly* and partakers

Hebrews 8:5 Adj-GNP

GRK: λατρεύουσιν τῶν ἐπουρανίων καθὼς κεχηρημάτισται

NAS: and shadow *of the heavenly things*, just

KJV: shadow *of heavenly things*, as

INT: serve of the *heavenly places* as was divinely instructed

Hebrews 9:23 Adj-ANP

GRK: δὲ τὰ ἐπουράνια κρείττοσιν θυσίαις

NAS: with these, *but the heavenly things* themselves

KJV: *but the heavenly things* themselves

INT: moreover the *heavenly places* with better sacrifices

Hebrews 11:16 Adj-GFS

GRK: τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἐπουρανίου διὸ οὐκ

NAS: a better [country], *that is, a heavenly one*. Therefore

KJV: [country], *that is, an heavenly*: wherefore

INT: this is *a heavenly* therefore not

Hebrews 12:22 Adj-DFS

GRK: ζῶντος Ἱερουσαλήμ ἐπουρανίῳ καὶ μυριάσιν

NAS: God, *the heavenly* Jerusalem,

KJV: God, *the heavenly* Jerusalem,

INT: [the] living Jerusalem *heavenly* and to myriads

These demonstrate that context informs us of the meaning. In Ephesians, it is the atmosphere as brought out by *Thayer's Greek Lexicon* (above): “the lower heavens, or the heaven of the clouds, Ephesians 6:12 (cf. B. D. American edition, under the word).”

One quote sent to this author is:

"David captured Jebusite Jerusalem, the "fortress of Zion." Subsequently he established his capital there, renaming it the "city of David" (2 Sam 5:7-9). The move secured a neutral site for the capital city of David's kingdom and a fully operative administrative center (assuming that David merely appropriated the Jebusite bureaucratic machinery already in place [see Mendenhall, 160-63])" (Bill Arnold & Hugh Williamson, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*).

The Exodus from Israel and entry into the Promised Land, together with the conquest of the Land, setting up the Temple etc is typological of the coming Second Exodus of Israel and the spiritual Exodus of saints into the Kingdom of God.

This is correctly interpreted by them, but then they go the additional step and use quotes such as the following to bolster their viewpoint:

"... we frequently need to put the brakes on and ask whether we're reading the Bible in light of the original culture or in light of contemporary culture. While the Bible's values were very different from ancient cultures, it obviously communicated in the existing languages and within cultural customs of its days" (John Walton & Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority*, p. 13).

And:

"One of the greatest obstacles we face in trying to interpret the Bible is that we are inclined to think in our own cultural and linguistic categories. This is no surprise since our categories are often all that we have, but it is a problem because our own categories often do not suffice and sometimes mislead" (John Walton, *Genesis. NIV Application Commentary*, pp. 67-68).

"The prophetic charge [Ezekiel 43:10-11] **consists of a series of clauses whose sense is not always clear and whose arrangement is certainly not logical by Western standards**" (Daniel Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25-48. New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 587). [emphasis mine]

"... R. Bartelmus recognizes the problem of imposing modern Western standards of logic on ancient literature [Ez. 37, 1-14 ZAW 97 (1985) 368]" (Daniel Block, *Ezekiel 25-48. New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 371).

"... when we read a text written in another language and addressed to another culture, we must translate the culture as well as the language if we hope to understand the text fully" (John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*, p.9).

It should be added that this is common knowledge to serious Bible scholars, and this can be determined either by a mere casual reading of the Bible or due to serious research. Nothing new here! Yet necessary knowledge to keep in mind.

While the above is true, what one has to be careful of is adding to what one thinks is the original intent by the Biblical writer in both the immediate context and in linking with other Scriptures.

The Christadelphians, Church of God (Abrahamic Faith), Godward website etc all make this mistake. They all believe in Adoptionism/Socianism which, in effect, states that Christ did not exist prior to His human birth, but was in the mind of God and prophesied to come in the Old Testament. Because he represented God (like Moses), he can be called 'god' they claim.

They correctly take the view that we must take the Scriptures as originally intended, but then take it too far in terms of their Christology. The Christadelphians even believe that Satan and the demons are figures for evil, rather than real beings – like many or most Jews do. Anything can be stretched to fit a view.

For example they take Scriptures such as Prov 8:22 and Is 30:33 to 'prove' that this extends to every such case, including Christ. These are taking this too far and any one of us can.⁶

Now, let us see if we rule in the first heaven, not the third.

Below are some arguments and references that have been either read or received that, when woven together form part of the argument for the saints ruling with Christ from heaven.

“Indirect messianic prophecy refers to passages that can be literally and fully realized only through the person and work of the Messiah - e.g., passages that speak of a personal coming of God to his people, as in v. 10 and 9:9 (cf. Isa 40: 9-11; Mal 3: 1)... all passages that speak of a future rule of the Lord over Israel or to the earth, or that speak of a future rule of the Lord over Israel or over the whole earth, are ultimately messianic - indirectly or by extension - **for to be fully and literally true, they require a future, literal messianic kingdom on the earth.**”
(Kenneth Barker, *Zechariah. Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 619).
[emphasis mine]

Correctly, and, in accordance with general millenarian belief, it is noted that IISam 23:1-5 is evidently David being portrayed as a Messiah figure – pre-typing Christ and His reign (the root of Jesse).

Some take it too far and are convince by statements such as:

“If revelation is to recommence in the millennial kingdom, converted Israel must head humanity. Jews and Gentiles stand on an equal footing, as both alike needing mercy; but as regards God's instrumentalities for establishing His kingdom on earth, Israel is His chosen people. **The Israelite priest-kings on earth are what the transfigured priest-kings are in heaven...** Earthly and heavenly glories shall be united in the twofold election. Elect Israel in the flesh

⁶ Among the scholars they refer to is George Caird:

"There is all the difference in the world between a pre-existent personification and a pre-existent person. Wisdom, for example, was never the latter [a person]...In two places in the Babylonian Talmud we are told that seven things existed before the Creation, and in each case a biblical proof-text is provided [see below]...If we turn to Bereshith Rabbah...we are told that, of all the things which preceded the Creation, only the Torah and the throne of glory were actually created, while the rest had simply been decided on by God...It follows that all pre-existent things could be said to exist, in one mode or another, within the purpose of God. Neither the Fourth Gospel nor Hebrews ever speaks of the eternal logos or Wisdom in terms which compel us to regard it as a person." (*New Testament Theology*, p. 340-343)

shall stand at the head of the earthly; the elect spiritual church, the Bride, in the heavenly. These elections are not merely for the good of the elect, but for whom they minister. **The heavenly Church is elected, not merely to salvation, but to rule in love, and minister blessings over the earth, as king-priests**" (Robert Jamieson et al, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine, A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, p. 722). [emphasis mine]

This extract is overwhelmingly correct (refer to the paper [Study Notes on the Melchizedek Priesthood](#) which discusses Christ's role as a King-Priest and that of the saints who will reign as King-Priests under Him), however in error that the saints "are in heaven." Whether or not the Wedding Supper occurs there is one thing; but dwelling and ruling from there is another.

Israel can function as a nation of King-Priests through a descendant of David under Christ (of the line of Judah) and the Levites (which includes a subordinate leadership including Priests).

Another point to note in this argument is that some students of the Millennium and the Temple observe that the Prince referred to is not Christ but a descendant of David:

Who is the prince who is prominently mentioned in this chapter [Ezekiel 44] and in every one through the remainder of the prophecy with the exception of chapter 47? The rabbis understood this to be a prediction of the Messiah, but there are cogent reasons why we cannot make this identification. The prince cannot be the Messiah, first because he is distinguished throughout from a priest. He has no priestly rights, as some former kings exercised from a priest (see 1K. 8:22, 54; 9:25; 10:5; 2K. 16:12-13; 2Chr. 26:16). On the other hand, the Scriptures are clear that the Messiah has definite priestly prerogatives in the millennium (cf. Ps. 110:4; Zec. 6:12-13). Second, the prince needs to offer a sin offering for himself. There is no conceivable occasion upon which the stainless Messiah, Son of God, would need to offer a sin offering for Himself. Third, the prince has sons (Eze. 46:16), which is unthinkable in the light of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the Messiah is definitely ruled out as even a possibility for this role. . . . Some think it is David himself, pointing to such passages as Eze. 34:23-24 and 37:24. But, as we have seen, these Scriptures foretell the Son of David, the Messiah. Though not impossible, such an identification with David is not probably in view of the broad context of prophecy concerning the kingdom. The author believes it is a future scion of David's dynasty who will represent the Messiah, governmentally in the affairs of earth." (Charles Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord*, pp. 257-58).

"In light of NT use of the Psalm, Christian exegesis traditionally took the psalm as messianic prophecy that Jesus fulfills... One would never guess this interpretation from the psalm; it can only be read into it. **When Yhwh spoke the words in OT times, people could not have been expected to understand them as the NT does...** The relationship between NT and OT text is the one that regularly obtains. In light of Jesus' coming, the Holy Spirit inspires significance in the OT that was never there before" (John Goldingay, *Psalms: Psalms 90-150. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 299).⁷ [emphasis mine]

⁷ Correct exegesis is very important: "In all lexical study, it is imperative that the meaning in the present context be given precedence over all other considerations. The fact that a word may be used 99 percent of the time it is found in ancient writings to mean one thing is essentially irrelevant if in the context of the biblical passage under study it is used to mean something else. Any author may choose to use even a common word in an unusual way. Thus the final

“... the identification of the prince as a descendant of David is lacking... although it is hard to imagine that Ezekiel had a different dynasty in mind. Why is that? Because in Ezekiel's vision there is another central royal figure, the Lord himself reigning in the temple. The past abuses of the monarchy will be done away with, legislated out of existence by a rearrangement of the land and by specific commands to the future monarch; but the monarch himself remains as a representative of the people. He remains in place, but only as the vassal of the Great King, God himself” (Ian Duguid, *Ezekiel. NIV Application Commentary*, p. 523).

“34:23-24. The Messianic Shepherd. Every new paragraph of the chapter opens out the analogy still further. If the chapter is taken as a whole it will appear full of inconsistencies, but if each section is taken separately it will be obvious that new ideas are being added all along. **These verses seem to abandon the concept of God as the one good Shepherd, as he plans to install his own chosen nominee to act as shepherd of his people...** this Messianic figure is described not as king, but as *prince (nasi)*, and in this capacity he will be the righteous ruler of the saved community of Israel. Christian can see the fulfilment of this expectation in **the character of Christ's future Messianic rule of which the present Christian era is a mere foreshadowing...**” (John Taylor, *Ezekiel. Tyndale Old Testament Commentary*, pp. 217-18).

If this perspective is true, a contemporary Judaic descendant of David exists within his lineage that leads to this individual to rule under Christ. God will safeguard this lineage throughout the Tribulation and into the Millennium. This should not be unexpected, particularly when we recognize that a similar continuity is evident in the lineage from Zadok to the priests who will serve during the Millennium, as noted by Ezekiel (Ezek. 40:46; 43:19; Jer. 33:14-22).

Is the Wedding Supper only a Metaphor or Dual?

Strangely, some scholars do not seem to realise that the Hebraic can include duality or multi-layering – that is more than one application.

They can see that the “wedding supper” is figurative for the Kingdom (see Matt 22:2, 11; Rev 19:7-9; Is 25:6), but not willing to acknowledge that Hebrew can include multilayering (duality as some put it): both literal and metaphorical.

“The metaphor of Christ as the bridegroom and the people of God as the bride was quite widespread in early Christianity... The metaphor is developed further in Eph 5:23-32, where the archetype for the appropriate relationship between husbands and wives is the self-sacrificing love Christ had for the Church. By his death he could cleanse her so that eventually he could “present” her as a pure bride at his return...” (David Aune, *Revelation 17-22. World Bible Commentary*, pp. 1029-30).

question must always be “How is it used here?” [ie in its immediate context]” (Douglas Stuart, “Exegesis,” *Anchor Bible*)

“The “wedding supper” was a frequent figure for the coming messianic era (e.g., 1 En 62:14; 3 En 48A:10)” (Craig Keener, *Revelation. NIV Application Commentary*, p. 450)

“... the Bible employs a variety of metaphors to express the future intimacy of God with his people; different ones are used at 21:2-2, 22:3-5” (David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 838).

“Note that in vv. 7-9 the church is pictured both as the bride and as the guests who are invited to the wedding” (Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation. New International Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 348).

“The metaphor of the invitation to a *wedding banquet* (AT) is one that Jesus also draws on in his parable in Matthew 22... John’s use of this metaphor ... is a highly mixed metaphor since both the followers of the lamb constitute both bride and also the guests at the banquet. In Isaiah 25:6-8, it is at the banquet he has prepared on Mount Zion that God will “wipe every tear from their faces’ (AT) and ‘swallow up death for ever’, aspects that are made explicit in Revelation 21” (Ian Paul, *Revelation, Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, p. 309).

“In John’s framework of symbolism pictures overlap, so that we conclude: “the guests and the Bride are one and the same. That is, John’s images flow into each other and ought not to be interpreted separately. The symbolic portrayal of the Lamb’s wedding is not to be understood literally, for that results in absurdity” (Simon Kistemaker, *Revelation. New Testament Commentary*, pp. 513-14).

Trying to find some proof for the view that the wedding supper is only a metaphor is difficult. This view rules out duality in Hebrew thought. And most researchers certainly realise that this is also a metaphor.

Note that for many of the earliest orthodox (non-Sabbatarian) Chiliasts, the virtuous would go through a purgatory-style purifying period while they were disembodied in order to get ready for a future millennial kingdom in their new, incorruptible bodies. On the other hand, the vast majority of contemporary premillennialists maintain that the virtuous ascend to heaven after dying in order to await the Second Advent and the actual resurrection of the dead.

Other early chiliasts during the first 220–230 years following the crucifixion – ie A-millennialists - held to similar ground to that of modern A-millennialists which viewed the millennial world to be free from sin and corruption. Before the new earth and new heavens, they believed that the righteous will live in a flawless, spotless environment for a thousand years.

Taking so much metaphorically appears to have rubbed off on many modern theologians. The worst are those that view Christ’s resurrection as not real, but symbolic!

Also, according to ancient ‘Christianity’, the New Testament Church is the real Israel and is thus the heir to all of God's promises which are "in Christ Jesus." One could characterize their theological stance as either "Expansion Theology" or "Inclusion Theology." They saw that God's people in the Old and New Testaments were consistent. It was believed that faithful Israel (God's elect) had been grafted with the New Testament Church. This is also known as Replacement Theology.

Again, this is the result of metaphor emphasis in opposition to dual application of many

metaphors.

But according to some, the original Chiliasts were somewhat different:

“They believe that Christ fulfilled the whole old covenant arrangement and perfectly satisfied every demand of the old covenant law, thus removing its usefulness and temporal status. The shadow, the type, the deficient and the temporal have now been replaced by the substance, the fulfilment, the perfect and the eternal. Early Chiliasm was totally devoid of all the Judaistic features that mark the modern Premillennial hope for the age to come. It is notable that not one of the orthodox Chiliasts promoted the elevation of national Israel in a future millennium, any parallel path between the Church and Israel, the rebuilding of the Jewish temple, the full restoration of all the old covenant feasts and festivals, the universal observance of Jewish customs, the return of blood sin offerings in a future temple (whether real or memorial) or the restarting of the old covenant priesthood in the future.

While these are beliefs that are widely held within a large swage of modern-day Historic Premillennialism and throughout Dispensational Premillennialism, they are unknown to the early Church Chiliasts. Along with the reintroduction of all the bondage of corruption on a future earth (including sin, death and decay) and the rising up of Satan after 1000 to influence billions of millennial inhabitants against Christ and the glorified saints, this advocacy for the return of all the old covenant apparatus is probably the most unsavory aspect of modern Premil.

The early orthodox Chiliasts believed that the Church was the legitimate heir to the promises made by God in times past to the Jewish nation. They held that the new covenant Church was the only people of God.

It is therefore wrong to say the early Church was Premillennialist, because it wasn't.” (<https://www.puritanboard.com/threads/a-big-difference-between-ancient-chiliasm-and-modern-day-premillennialism.103875/>)⁸

He is sadly mistaken, because the eastern churches were originally Sabbatarian and gradually began to tolerate Sunday observance. Eventually both days were observed equally until Sunday eclipsed the Sabbath. Eastern Orthodoxy actually denounced "chiliasm," which is somewhat ironic considering that several of their saints adhered to premillennialist beliefs.

In the meantime, various Sabbatarian groups continued alongside this.

To understand the Jewish belief of the Messiah's reign, have a read of *Psalm 110 - A Jewish Perspective* by Bentzion Kravitz at <https://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/psalm-110-a-jewish-perspective>

Pertinent Scriptures

Following are some Scriptures pertinent to this subject:

“And they sang a new song, saying,

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and

⁸ See Robert Wilken, “Early Christian Chiliasm, Jewish Messianism, and the Idea of the Holy Land,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 79, No. 1/3, Jan – Jul.

people and nation,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and **they shall reign on the earth.**" (Rev 5:9-10)

"From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,
and **before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass**, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind...

And I saw what appeared to be **a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass** with harps of God in their hands.

And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!" (Rev 4:5-6; 15:2-3. Cp Rev 21:21)

Of this, the eminent *The Interpreter's Bible* states:

"According to the song, they are to become **a kingdom and priests** to God, reigning on the earth, a promise previously made in 1:6, which is to find glorious fulfillment in the millennium (20:6)." (Vol. 12, p. 409).

While the scholarly *Expositor's Bible Commentary* has this to say:

"Christians "will reign on the earth" with Christ because they have been given "kingly authority" through his death (1:6; 20:4-6). While not excluding the present reign of believers, the reference to "the earth" is best taken to refer to the future eschatological kingdom reign of Christ." (Vol. 12, p. 469)

There is nothing in the above to suggest that the saints rule from heaven for 1,000 years.

Other Scriptures:

"If we endure, **we will also reign with him**; if we deny him, he also will deny us..." (II Tim 2:12)

"And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of **the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints** of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." (Dan 7:27)

"Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, **but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.**" (Rev 20:6)

"The one who conquers, **I will grant him to sit with me on my throne**, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne." (Rev 3:21)

"But the saints of the Most High **shall receive the kingdom** and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever." (Dan 7:18)

“Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle.

On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward.” (Zech 14:3-4)

“And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,

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.**”

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.” (Acts 1:9-12)

The above all demonstrate that Christians rule with Christ Who will reign upon the earth.

Concluding Remarks

There has always embodied within the belief system of Sabbatarians and other minority groups the belief that the saints will rule on earth with Christ.

Over the centuries this doctrine declined and became a minority view.

But it began to gradually grow and take hold⁹ and to expand with the arise of the Millerites in the mid-nineteenth century. Though most theologians do not subscribe to it or are demonstrating resistance to this truth, based upon their religious traditions.¹⁰

The Sabbatarian Churches of God and others (such as many conservative protestants etc) are of the view that Christ will rule on earth with the saints – not from heaven. This is, after all, what the earliest Chiliasts taught and similar to what the Jews believed at that time.

Raymond McNair’s article “Where Will Christians Rule?” *Plain Truth*, Dec 1979, pp. 19-21 is an example of the Church of God’s traditional stance.

In the final analysis, there is no hint of Christ returning to heaven with the saints and ruling from there after a short period on earth.

⁹ See Willem Asselt, “Chiliasm and Reformed Eschatology in The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” in: A. van Egmond & D. van Keulen (eds.), *Christian Hope in Context [Studies in Reformed Theology]*, Vol. 4 (2001), pp. 11-29.

¹⁰ For example, Michael Pomazansky, *The Error of Chiliasm*, <https://orthochristian.com/86555.html> 8 Oct.

Appendix

Church of the Eternal God Newsletter, no. 1140, 1 Jan 2025

Q&A

What does it mean to be in heavenly places?

Many think that we will go to heaven when we die, and that biblical references to “heavenly places” support this assumption. But this is a false conclusion.

Just to reiterate what we have explained so many times: David, a man after God’s own heart, did not ascend into the heavens, nor is he in heaven (Acts 2:29, 34); Elijah and Enoch are not in God’s third heaven either, as Christ said in John 3:13 that no one has ascended to God’s heaven (in fact, the *Luther Bible 1912* says that no one *ascends* to heaven except for Jesus Christ who came down from heaven).

The concept of “heavenly places” does not teach something differently. Actually, as we will explain, the words “heavenly *places*” are not even in the Greek. The word “places” has been added. In the Greek, the word for “heavenly,” “*epouranios*,” is used several times in the New Testament. According to *Strong’s*, this word (Number 2032) means “*above the sky*:-celestial (in) heaven (-ly), high.”

The *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary* says:

“... in heavenly places—a phrase five times found in this Epistle (of Paul to the Ephesians), and not elsewhere.”

In these five passages, the Greek word for “heavenlies” is used as a noun.

Let us note these five places in detail. We will see that the translator added the word “*places*” after the word “heavenly.” This does not necessarily reflect the best choice. Literally, the rendering would be, “heavenlies.”

Ephesians 1:3:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the **heavenly places** in Christ...”

We are being blessed in heaven by God, both by the Father and Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:20:

“... which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the **heavenly places**...”

Christ is in fact seated in the heavenly realm with God the Father.

Ephesians 2:6 (where it is sometimes, in other Bible renditions, translated “in high (places)”:

“... and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the **heavenly places** in Christ Jesus...”

We will address the meaning of this passage later in this Q&A.

Ephesians 3:10:

“... to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the **heavenly places**...”

Here, the principalities and powers in the “heavenlies” seem to refer to God’s holy angels; it could perhaps also include the demonic world, when considering the next passage, quoted below.

Ephesians 6:12:

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the **heavenly places**.”

The *Pulpit Commentary* writes:

“When it is said (in Ephesians 2:6) that ‘we have been seated with Christ in heavenly places,’ the allusion is to the spiritual experience of his people... where their hearts are full of heavenly thoughts and feelings; the statement now before us is that, even in such places, amid their most fervent experiences..., they are subject to the attacks of the spirits of wickedness.”

Got Questions gives a good summary of the foregoing five passages in Ephesians, and in particular to Ephesians 6:12:

“The phrase ‘heavenly places’ or ‘heavenly realms’ is used several times in the book of Ephesians (1:3, 20;

2:6; 3:10; 6:12). This phrase is translated from the Greek word *epouranios*, meaning ‘the sphere of spiritual activities.’ ‘Heavenly realms’ can refer to both angelic and demonic activity. Ephesians 1:20 says that God ‘raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.’ But Ephesians 6:12 speaks of evil forces in the same realm: ‘Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against . . . the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.’...

“... there is fierce warfare taking place at all times. Satan and his demons are actively working to thwart the plans of God and destroy whatever they can... If a mighty angel on a mission from God could be detained by demonic forces, then demons must have great power... God does not leave His children defenseless against this evil army. In ourselves, we are no match for Satan’s devices. We need [God’s] spiritual armor to fight spiritual battles... There are forces unknown to us that may interfere with God’s desire to aid us, and we must continue to persevere in prayer until the answer comes...”

“When we live our earthly lives in recognition of the unseen battles that rage all around us, we will be more careful about what we say and do... We will be faithful to utilize our weapons of prayer and the armor of God, knowing that the real battles are fought and won in the heavenly realms.”

In addition, similar or related Greek words are also used and should be understood correctly.

According to *Young’s*, the words “*ta epourania*,” (as used as adjectives), defined or rendered as **heavenly things**, are used as follows:

John 3:12:

“If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you **heavenly things**?”

Hebrews 8:4-5:

“For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the **heavenly things**, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, ‘See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’”

Hebrews 9:23:

“Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the **heavenly things** themselves with better sacrifices than these.”

These passages tell us that there are indeed things in heaven—heavenly things—just as God’s Throne, God’s Temple, God’s Tabernacle, heavenly books, a heavenly mountain, and so much more.

Furthermore, the Greek word “*epouranios*” is also used as follows, but not as a noun, and is normally rendered as “**heavenly**”:

Matthew 18:35:

“So My **heavenly** Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

The word “*epouranios*”, for “heavenly,” is also used twice in 1 Corinthians 15:40 (where it is inconsistently translated as “celestial”).

“There are also **celestial** bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the **celestial** is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.”

In 1 Corinthians 15:48 and the following passages, the word “*epouranios*” is translated consistently as “heavenly”:

“As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the **heavenly** Man, so also are those who are **heavenly**.”

1 Corinthians 15:49:

“And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the **heavenly** Man.”

2 Timothy 4:18:

“And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His **heavenly** kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!”

Hebrews 3:1:

“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the **heavenly** calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus...”

Hebrews 6:4-6:

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the **heavenly** gift, and have

become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.”

Hebrews 11:16:

“But now they desire a better, that is, a **heavenly** country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

In this regard, we need to realize that God will send His heavenly city down to a new earth (Revelation 3:12). But it exists already in heaven. Note also the next passage.

Hebrews 12:22-24:

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the **heavenly** Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.”

We see that in all these passages, the word “heavenly” does refer to something or someone in God’s third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:3), including spiritual gifts and blessings bestowed on us from heaven. But this does not mean, and nowhere is it stated in these passages, that we will go to heaven when we die. Rather, His heavenly kingdom (2 Timothy 4:18)—our heavenly country (Hebrews 11:16)—will be restored on earth, and some of the heavenly things will come down later to a new earth. The heavenly Man, Jesus Christ, will also come to this earth, and we will be like Him, seeing Him as He is. We will indeed bear His image. We will reign and rule with and under Him on the earth—not in heaven (Revelation 5:10).

We see that in all these passages, the word “heavenly” does refer to something or someone in God’s third heaven, including spiritual gifts and blessings bestowed on us from heaven. But this does not mean, and nowhere it is stated in these passages, that we will go to heaven when we die. Rather, His heavenly kingdom—our heavenly country—will be restored on earth, and some of the heavenly things will come down later to a new earth. The heavenly Man, Jesus Christ, will also come to this earth, and we will be like Him, seeing Him as He is. We will indeed bear His image. We will reign and rule with and under Him on the earth—not in heaven (Revelation 5:10).

The word “*epouranios*” is also used in Philippians 2:9-10 (where it is translated “in heaven”):

“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those **in heaven**, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,”

The Berean Study Bible makes the following comments in this regard:

“‘In heaven’ refers to the celestial beings, angels, and the heavenly realm, acknowledging Christ’s authority over the spiritual domain.”

Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible adds:

“... and things under the earth; or ‘in the abyss’, as the Ethiopic version renders it; meaning either the devils in the bottomless pit; or rather the dead bodies of men in the grave, which shall come forth and stand before the judgment seat of Christ...”

In concentrating on the passage in **Ephesians 2:6**, we will recall that it states that we are sitting together in the heavenly places or in the “heavenlies” in or with Jesus Christ. This obviously does not mean that we are quite literally sitting in heaven, as we are clearly on this earth. But it is something we need to visualize, spiritually speaking. We should, in our mind, think of God’s throne in heaven, with all the angels around Him and all the heavenly things which are mentioned in the Bible. That is, when we pray, we are coming in the presence of God in heaven and His beautiful heavenly realm (Hebrews 4:16).

But it should not be limited to just the moment when we pray. Rather, we should be aware and keep in mind, at all times, that:

We are no longer part of this world (Ephesians 2:1-3; Galatians 1:3-4; 1 Peter 2:11-12).

We are no longer under Satan’s rule and dominion (James 4:7; Luke 10:19; Acts 26:18; Hebrews 2:14-15). Ultimately, this is what we have been promised: Romans 16:20.).

We belong to God’s Family and His Kingdom (Colossians 1:13-14). We are tasting the powers of the world to come (Hebrews 6:5). We seek the things which are above where Christ is (Colossians 3:1).

Our hope is laid up for us in heaven (Colossians 1:5).

Our reward is in heaven (Matthew 5:12), which Christ will bring with Him when He comes (Revelation 22:12).

Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

Our inheritance is in heaven (1 Peter 1:4).

And there is so much more. Having all of this continuously in mind, we are sitting indeed in the heavenlies in and with Christ Jesus.

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