

The Forgotten Heavens

THE
forgotten
HEAVENS

Six Essays on Cosmology

edited by **DOUGLAS WILSON**

TERRY MORIN | EVAN WILSON | GREG DICKISON

CHRISTOPHER SCHLECT | WESLEY CALLIHAN

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To our wives & children

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PREFACE

It is regrettable that evangelical Christians are not always to be trusted when it comes to handling the Scriptures. Those who should be the staunchest defenders of the Word of God against all comers are sometimes not. And why is this?

On some issues, the theological liberal is better able to state what the teaching of the Bible is. This is because he is able to say that, for example, the apostle Paul thought this way, and wasn't it quaint? The evangelical, on the other hand, is required to *believe* whatever Paul taught in the Scriptures; the conservative is stuck with the results of his exegesis. Therefore, if Paul taught anything that is extremely out of step with modern prejudices, that aspect of his teaching must be ignored, or at least reinterpreted.

For example: Evangelicals do believe in the spiritual realm, but they have divorced that realm from the world we actually live in. Angels, or spirits, are in another dimension somewhere. But the Bible teaches that "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire" (Heb. 1:7; Ps. 104:4).

But aren't winds just the motion of molecules in the air? This answer of the scientists is of course true, but it is not *exhaustive*. We have to be careful to avoid the fallacy of reductionism; what Donald Mackay calls "nothing buttery." The materialist can point out that a human being is made up of the following chemicals, and then list them all. Within this list, he does not find the constituent parts of a soul, or a spirit. Do they therefore not exist? The Christian answers clearly—the soul cannot be analyzed in that

way. Hamlet is “nothing but” paper and ink, and yet we rightly feel that such an account of it leaves out the most important part.

But why do we defend God’s creation from the materialist at only the point of man’s dignity? He says that we are “nothing but” certain chemicals, and we beg to differ. He then says that the winds are “nothing but” atoms in motion, and we, for some strange reason, agree. He says that stars are “nothing but” flaming balls of gas, and we agree with this as well.

Now the Bible does not teach that all winds are necessarily angels. We are not required to believe that there is no such thing as an inanimate object. But the Bible does teach that there is intelligence behind many things that the modern materialist dismisses as “processes,” “forces,” or just plain “matter.”

Man is not rattling around inside a big empty universe. The Creator of all is not an impersonal force, and the creation reflects that. The biblical view of the cosmos is not the one of modernity—infinite depths of lifeless space punctuated by dead rock, or chaotic fire. On the contrary, the universe is filled with intelligence and life.

The New Bible Dictionary confirms this observation:

[T]he implied angelology of C. S. Lewis’s novels (*Out of the Silent Planet*, etc.) would probably have commended itself with some force to the biblical writers. The Bible certainly suggests that angels of different ranks have charge of individuals and of nations; no doubt in the light of modern cosmology this concept, if retained, at all (as biblically it must be), ought properly to be extended, as the dual sense of the phrase “Host of Heaven” suggests, to the oversight of the elements of the physical universe—planets, stars, and nebulae.¹

In fact, the only difference between what we are doing here in this symposium, and what C. S. Lewis did—apart from his

1. J. D. Douglas, ed., *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 543.

talent—is found in the fact that he had the good sense to put his convictions on such subjects into his fiction.

Some of the examples of evangelical revisionism would be tragic if they were not so funny. In the book of Job, God is describing some of the great creatures He has made. About the Behemoth, He says this:

Look at the behemoth, which I made along with you and which feeds on grass like an ox. What strength he has in his loins, what power in the muscles of his belly! His tail sways like a cedar. (Job 40:15–17a)

The NIV provides us with an informative footnote which explains that this may possibly be the hippopotamus or elephant—with a tail like a cedar. Apparently the scholars who worked on the NIV were too busy with their studies as children, and never made it to the zoo, or the circus.

Examples could be multiplied, but that is the job undertaken in the following essays. The reader is encouraged to approach the biblical arguments presented here with an open mind, and with an open commitment to the inerrant Word of God.

The first essay is mine, and it addresses the broad subject of the heavens and the underworld. Terry Morin is the author of the second essay, in which he discusses the various manifestations of God's throne in the Bible, along with certain attendants to that throne.

Evan Wilson addresses the government of princes, and shows how the nations of the Old Testament era were governed by spiritual princes. The next essay is on divination and witchcraft, and was written by Greg Dickison. This is followed by Chris Schlect's contribution, which is on the ever-popular subject of angels. Finally, Wes Callihan shows how materialistic assumptions can affect translation, and not just interpretation. His essay is on the Bible's references to satyrs.

All of the essays except the last one were presented at the Community Evangelical Fellowship (CEF) Symposium on Cosmology in the spring of 1989, in Moscow, Idaho. As you read this book, we hope our desire to be biblical is clear to you throughout; where it has not been obvious, we beg your pardon in advance. At the same time, we hope you enjoy learning some things you never learned in Sunday School.

DOUGLAS WILSON

1

THE HEAVENS, HADES, & MAN BETWEEN

Douglas Wilson

The task we have set for ourselves in this essay is to take a tour of the biblical cosmos—a sort of biblical cosmography, if you like. As we begin, we need to recognize that we will have to cover a great deal of territory, and that we must lighten our loads considerably. Perhaps the best things to leave behind, at least for the time being, are our prejudices. For, as C. S. Lewis pointed out in *The Allegory of Love*, the present must also be recognized as a “period.” When we consider that future scholars will one day be studying our quaint notions, it will perhaps supply us with necessary humility as we study the past. The need for such humility is even greater when we consider that, as Christians, we possess a divinely inspired book which contains in it many assumptions which are not shared by the natives of modernity.

As we proceed, it will become clear that we must rethink our assumptions about the universe around us.

But if we submit to the biblical cosmology, it will not be found necessary to submit to a caricature of it—we are not living in a universe built like a three-decker London bus, riding on the back of a turtle. Nothing said here conflicts with what modern scientists know scientifically to be true. It does conflict, however, with a good deal of modern pseudo-scientific speculation.

It is necessary to make this point because it is easy for modern men to dismiss the ancients as primitives and to reject as nonsense the idea of the heavens above, and Hades below. To that idea we now turn.

The Supremacy of Christ

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9–11, cf. Rev. 5:3)

Paul is telling us here that the supremacy of Jesus Christ will one day be acknowledged by all, everywhere. His authority extends to every nook and cranny of the universe; to the heavens above, to the earth we live on, and to the Underworld, or Hades. In the Greek, he is not referring to these three places, but, rather to the creatures inhabiting them, i.e., heavenly creatures, earthly creatures, and subterranean creatures.

As Jesus tells His disciples in the Great Commission, all authority is His, whether it is in heaven or on earth. The authority of Christ is completely universal, and includes all the forces of wickedness. The One who saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven has triumphed over all power and authority through His cross and resurrection (Lk. 10:17–20).

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority . . . And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Col. 2:9–10, 15)

The significance of this triumph was not lost on the early Christians. They knew that they were partakers of that triumph, and that Satan would soon be crushed under their feet (Rom. 16:20).

So Jesus did not die in order to set an ethical dualism in stone, with God and Satan forever opposed. He spoke of the condemnation of the prince of this world (Jn. 16:7–11); He appeared in order to destroy the devil’s work (1 Jn. 3:8); He died to destroy the devil himself (Heb. 2:14); and He stated that in His death the prince of the world would be driven out (Jn. 12:29–32).

As we examine the biblical cosmology, we should keep in mind that we are studying, because of the resurrection, the domain of Christ. Nothing is outside that domain. Let us begin with Heaven, or as the biblical writers frequently would have it, the heavens.¹

The Glory of God

Is not God in the heights of heaven? And see how lofty are the highest stars! (Job 22:12)

God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. (1 Tim. 6:15–16)

The Bible teaches that God’s glorious presence is manifested beyond the highest stars, and that He dwells in light that cannot be approached. This is not a limitation of God’s glory or presence, for He is omnipresent, i.e., everywhere. As the Scriptures so clearly declare, not even the heavens contain Him. “But will God really

1. The heavens. In Matthew, 76% of the references to heaven are plural in the original; in Mark only 29% are plural; in Luke, 12% are plural; in John, 100% are singular; in Acts, 9% are plural; in the epistles it is 50/50; and in Revelation, all the references are singular.

dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (1 Kgs. 8:27).

Nevertheless, God's glory is manifested beyond the stars, and it is a place where creatures are undone. He has set His glory above the heavens (Ps. 8:1; 113:4–6). He must stoop down to look at the heavens.

The Bible does not identify beyond question where this is. What direction is it? Surely it is not sufficient to simply point "up." With the information we have, we can only offer a suggestion, but it is worth considering as a possibility.

Out of the north he comes in golden splendor; God comes in awesome majesty. (Job 37:22; cf. Job 26:7)

Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain. It is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth. Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King. (Ps. 48:1–2)

In this second quotation, Mount Zion is compared favorably to Zaphon, the "Olympus" of Baal. Zaphon's connection with the north can be clearly seen when you consider the kjv translation of this—is Mt. Zion on the sides of the north." Zaphon *means* north.

This term "Zaphon" shows up again in Isaiah 14, in the boast of the king of Babylon: "I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the north" (v. 13b).

Another passage, this one in the Psalms, shows the connection between God and the north. "No one from the east or the west or from the desert [south] can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: He brings one down, He exalts another" (Ps. 75:6–7).

The implication here is clear. No one from east, west or south can determine who is exalted and who not. That can only be done by the one from the north.

In Ezekiel 1:4, the vision of God that comes to Ezekiel, comes to him out of the north.

As we consider these passages, we can see that if any direction is associated in Scripture with the majesty of God, it is the north.

The Heavens

God is the Creator of all things and this includes the stars—the starry host were made by the breath of His mouth (Ps. 33:6). As Creator, God’s knowledge of the stars is detailed—for example, He calls them each by name (Is. 40:26; Ps. 147:4). Among the greatest of creatures, the multitudes of heaven worship God as their Creator (Neh. 9:6; Ps. 148:3).

To say that stars worship God is not just a figure of speech—the stones crying out and so forth. We can see clearly that the heavenly host, what we call stars, are personal. They have intelligence. For example, when Micaiah sees his vision of the throne of God, the host of heaven are the heavenly courtiers.

Micaiah continued, “Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left.” (1 Kgs. 22:19; cf. 2 Chr. 18:18)

We may also see the intelligence of the heavenly host in a very familiar story—perhaps too familiar. The night Jesus was born, the shepherds who came to see Jesus were guarding their flocks by night. They were informed of the Messiah’s birth by a choir of stars, which are also identified as angels (v. 15).

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” (Lk. 2:13–14)

Done with their song, the stars receded back into their usual station in the heavens.

When the eastern wise men came to find Jesus, they were guided to a particular house by a star (Mt. 2:9). Either the star came down into our atmosphere the same way the choir of stars had, or the Magi were profound astrologers indeed. I prefer the former explanation, but in either case it is clear that stars are not just flaming balls of gas. It is also clear that the intelligence associated with a star can transform its body, or separate from it, in order to do things like this. A star which came down without such a separation would fry our planet to a cinder.

At the same time, we need to remember that this truth about the stars cannot be used as a justification for pagan or superstitious astrology. The Bible is clear, and severe, in its condemnation of such astrological practices. We may also exclude as unbiblical the tomfoolery printed in modern newspaper horoscopes.

Still, the Magi were probably astrologers, and Daniel was the chief of all the astrologers in Babylon (Dan. 5:11).

The heavenly host are described as being servants of God, who do His will (Ps. 103:21). They are capable of praising God, just like the angels (Ps. 148:2). But even with all their greatness, they do not compare with the Lord (Ps. 89:6). God is described as their Father (Jas. 1:17). They can be compared with man, and for the time being anyway, they are a little greater (Ps. 8:5).

The apostle Paul clearly refers to the stars as beings. He says: "There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another" (1 Cor. 15:40).

In defining the word Paul uses here, Thayer says that it refers to "the bodies of the stars (which the apostle, according to the universal ancient conception, seems to have regarded as animate."²

2. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Company, 1886), 247.

The New Jerusalem

The New Jerusalem is not the same thing as heaven, but it necessary to say a few things about it here.

This is because much of the imagery we have of heaven comes, not from the biblical descriptions of heaven, but from the descriptions of the New Jerusalem—pearly gates, streets of gold, and so forth. This confusion is perpetuated principally through hymns and cartoons.

The New Jerusalem is a biblical metaphor for the Christian church—both on earth and in heaven. This identification is not speculation—it is explicitly made in Scripture.

For example, John is told by one of the seven angels that he will be shown “the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:9), which is of course the Christian church (Eph. 5:25–27). And what is John shown? “The Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev. 21:10).

In the Book of Hebrews, the saints are told that they have not come to a physical city—to one that can be touched.

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.” The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling with fear.”

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Heb. 12:18–24)