

Locating Heaven

Automobiles can now be equipped with instant locators. That sounds great for a person like me who becomes lost so easily and stops to ask directions only as a last resort. I could also use one to help me locate heaven. I have spent a career trying to get people to go there but feel that just pointing overhead may not locate it clearly enough or mark the route to it.

It might help if I knew what I am looking for. "Heaven" probably has its root in the word meaning "to lift; to heave"; hence, one is lifted up or heaved/heaven up there. In a brief scan, I find no passage encouraging us to "go to heaven" or speaking of our "going to heaven." Persons were "taken up" or "lifted up" ("raptured") into heaven. So we are looking for the destination of those lifted up.

Several concepts of heaven were derived from the same word. First there is the aerial heaven, like where birds fly and clouds float (Matt. 6:26; 8:20; 24:30). The depth of the atmosphere in comparison to the size of the earth is about as thick as a sheet of writing paper wrapped around your globe. If we are to meet the Lord in the clouds and ever be with him in the air, heaven will be no more than five miles above the earth.

Next there is the sidereal heaven, the realm of the stars, of which the common man had very little scientific knowledge (Matt. 24:29, 35). Then there is the eternal dwelling place of God (Matt. 5:16; 12:50), above which Jesus ascended (Eph. 4:10), from which the Holy Spirit descended (1 Peter 1:12), where angels dwell (Matt. 18:10; 22:30), and probably the Paradise into which Paul was caught up (2 Cor. 12:1-4). Many other references speak to these different areas; yet the distinctions and borders are not defined clearly. In fact, there seems to be a mixture of literal and figurative and of physical and spiritual meanings. For instance, we must look for a less physical meaning when noting that Jesus "ascended far above all the heavens."

Let us think of some physical possibilities. Can you visualize eternal enjoyment on a celestial body of matter streaking through a vast emptiness of space at an incredible speed with constant variations of heat and cold and light and darkness? That is the fond hope of many believers who look for eternal habitation on this earth after a renewing of it by the power of God. Paul writes of a renewal in Romans 8, and Peter writes of a time when the heavens will pass away, the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. He then told his readers to wait for new heavens and a new earth (2 Peter 3). There are a number of questions we would raise about the literal nature of these apocalyptic descriptions which we will not address at this moment.

Today I have not moved about much. A mile walk and a trip to get groceries and to mail packages amounted to about ten miles. However, if I were at the equator, I would have traveled about 24,900 miles riding a complete rotation of the earth. As I rode this planet rotating clockwise in its counter-clockwise circuit around the sun which is 93,100,000

miles away, I traveled another 1,440,000 miles. Since our entire solar system is moving as a unit in the direction of Vega at a rate of 12 miles per second, I added about 1,501,152 more frequent flyer miles. So my day's logging will be about 2,966,152 miles. My calculator will not multiply that large number by the 365 days in a year and by the 86 years of my ride on this whirling celestial bullet.

Do you really think that the "heaved up" redeemed will make that circuit unendingly, being controlled by the laws of physics and chemistry? Will God "uncreate" this infinite physical universe only to recreate it? Will he nullify the laws of physics and chemistry so that elements can be burned up? The countless super-heated suns of the universe have not consumed those elements. If the earth were suddenly annihilated, the moon would streak out on a tangent probably plunging into the sun, and the course of other celestial bodies affected by the gravity of the earth and moon would be altered. May we expect God to recreate a universe with different laws of physics, chemistry, physiology, etc. so that we will breath fresh air but not need it to sustain life, that we will eat food but not be dependent upon it, that we sustain no harm due to gravity, electricity, radiation, heat, or cold, and cannot harm ourselves by carelessness, ignorance, or choice?

You may protest that I am questioning the power of God. We agree that nothing is impossible with God. Except! It is impossible for God to lie. That means he cannot act inconsistent to truth. The universe has operated according to the harmonious principles of truth which he has set in order. When we interpret a teaching so as to demand a alteration of one of those principles, it is wise to look for a symbolic or spiritual meaning.

As early as 640 B.C., Thales, a Greek, believed the earth was a sphere, but the general population of the world was not so enlightened. Ptolmey in the Second Century A.D. advanced the theory that the earth was the center of the universe. That was the common belief until Copernicus in the Sixteenth Century set forth the concept that our part of the universe revolves around the sun. Since inspired teachers and writers were not instructing in physical science, they used physical, though inaccurate, terms accepted by the common person, such as the sun rising and setting, the sun standing still, of stars falling from the sky, and of God and spirit beings inhabiting the sky overhead.

Science has shown that the sun does not move but we move around it. Ancient man had no concept of the immensity of stars. Thinking the earth was the center of the universe, they thought a star would fall to the earth. Since the moon is earth's encircling planet, if it were to fall, it would hit the earth. That would be adios, goodbye, farewell!

Indeed, all stars are "falling" for the universe is expanding rapidly in all directions; however, when we move away from the earth, there is no such thing as up and down or north, south, east, or west, or our measurement of time. Whereas, the ancients thought in terms of a few hundreds or thousands of tiny stars like the meteorites, they had no concept of their immensity like that of the sun being 1,300,000 times as large as the earth.

There is one sun in our solar system. Astronomers tell us that our sun is only one of the millions in our galaxy. With better equipment with which to probe, they now tell us that there are 150 billion galaxies. Don't try to comprehend that. Even your computer can't handle it! We are told that the tail of the great red dragon swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth (Rev. 12:3-4). Talk about "Big Red"! He has/had an economy sized tail! As big as my ego! That would be a multi-billion mile sweep of the tail bringing billions of stars and entire galaxies on to our speck in the universe. And John wrote that it was about to happen nearly two thousand years ago!

You see my point. The most enlightened astronomer or the most uninformed shepherd would recognize that John was using symbolic language. It was veiled language to give disciples inside information of then current developments that would shake up their religious and political world. The person today who claims to accept all the apocalyptic language of the Bible as literal is whistling in the dark.

The Bible definitely speaks of God being up in heaven. That settles that. Every person on earth may be pointing upward toward God. But think of the earth as it rotates continuously while orbiting the sun each year. To what location do they all point? They point in every conceivable direction from points millions of miles apart in our solar system, yet none can point to the same location twice. But they do not point to the earth itself.

Perhaps, after all, that gives us the most conceivable answer as to where heaven is. Every finger pointed focuses on the Omnipresent Spirit. He is the attraction of our spiritual compass. Since heaven (redemption) is a reunion with God, that perfected reunion is heaven itself. We can comprehend it in physical terms or a location in space no sooner than we can comprehend God's "I AM" nature, or that of Jesus when he declared, "Before Abraham was, I AM."

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