

appropriate. It may be true that God looks into the inner man, but this does not cancel out the fact that the outer relays a message about the inner.

Dress is an issue which centres around moderation. Each of us needs to consider what is an appropriate amount of time and money to spend on new clothes. The basic principle is that focus-

ing too much attention on the outward man is essentially folly. It is alien to the Scriptural principle that God sees us as we really are—naked in our sins—and that He wants us to develop the hidden man of the heart. Just as the flimsiest fig leaves were inadequate to hide sin, the most expensive Armani suit will fare no better in His sight.

“In heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 2:6)

The exalted status of God’s children

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This article:

- examines the use of the phrase “the heavenlies” in the letter to the Ephesians
- introduces the reader to the rich Old Testament background that helps provide an appreciation of what is meant by “the heavenlies”
- underlines the privileged position, both now and in the future, of those who by God’s grace sit in “the heavenlies”
- highlights the responsibilities that such privilege brings.

IN EPHESIANS 1, after his salutation in verses 1 and 2, the Apostle Paul plunges into his message of exhortation and instruction with the words, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (v. 3). The word “places” is in italics in the AV, indicating that the translators have supplied it in order to convey the sense of the original. The word “heavenly” is a neuter plural adjective and is preceded by the definite article. J. B. Rotherham in his *Emphasised Bible* and B. Wilson in *The Emphatic Diaglott* give the translation, “God . . . has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies”. It is the purpose of this study to examine the significance of this phrase ‘the heavenlies’, and to marvel at God’s grace toward us in exalting us to sit in them.

The expression ‘the heavenlies’ is found five times in the letter to the Ephesians, and in this precise form it is found in no other place in Scripture.¹ It is worth listing the verses:

1:3. Here, as we have already noted, the saints are said to be “blessed . . . with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places [in the heavenlies] in Christ”.

1:20,21. “[God] raised [Jesus] from the dead, and set him at His own right hand in the heavenly places [in the heavenlies], far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come”.

2:4,6. “God . . . hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places [in the heavenlies] in Christ Jesus”.

3:9,10. “. . . and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, Who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places [in the heavenlies] might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God”.

6:12. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places [in the heavenlies]”.

1. J. Armitage Robinson, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 20.

Christadelphian writers,² following Brother John Thomas,³ have divided these references into two groups. References 1, 2 and 3 are said to refer to *ecclesial heavenlies*, whereas references 4 and 5 are held to refer to *worldly heavenlies*. However, to this writer it seems that for the apostle to employ this word in a form unique to the Ephesian letter, and on each occurrence to use the definite article, 'the heavenlies', suggests that on each occasion he is referring to the same thing. I therefore understand him to be saying in the verses referred to above that:

- 1:3—the saints are now, in some way, blessed in the heavenlies because of their relationship with Jesus;
 1:20,21—Jesus himself has been exalted into those heavenlies;
 2:6—we now sit with him in those heavenlies;
 3:9,10—in apostolic times an important aspect of “the manifold wisdom of God” was revealed to those same heavenlies.
 6:12—it is necessary for the saints to contend with spiritual wickedness in those heavenlies.

The Old Testament background

Nowhere is the need for an Old Testament basis for understanding New Testament language more apparent than here in Ephesians. Commentators generally, ignoring the Old Testament background, plunge from quicksand to quagmire as they seek to grapple with the apostle's references to 'the heavenlies'. For example: “The phrase speaks of an invisible spiritual environment, as contrasted with the visible, tangible environment. It is the realm of unseen forces, good and evil, which struggle to dominate the individual and corporate life of humanity”.⁴

In Deuteronomy 32 God speaks to Israel in the words of a remarkable psalm. He addresses them thus: “Give ear, O ye *heavens*, and I will speak; and hear, O *earth*, the words of My mouth” (v. 1). The prophet Isaiah is moved by God to address His people in similar vein: “Hear, O *heavens*, and give ear, O *earth*: for the LORD hath spoken” (1:2). Thus the nation of Israel is referred to as consisting of heavens and an earth.

In the material world of God's creation the heavens bear rule over the earth, so that seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, day and night, and many other things that happen on the earth, are all controlled by the relationship of the heavenly bodies to the earth. The words of Scripture take hold of this relationship of the heavenly bodies to the earth and apply it to the political

world of man, especially to the political arrangement of Israel. The people of the nation are referred to as 'the earth'; 'the heavens' (in the Hebrew derived from a root that signifies 'to be high') is used of those who are exalted above the people, that is, the rulers.

The creation of Israel's heavens

The bringing into existence of the nation of Israel at Sinai, when God entered into a covenant relationship with them, is referred to as a creation of heavens and earth. So we read in Psalm 102: “Of old hast Thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed” (vv. 25,26).

That this creation of heavens and earth, and their subsequent perishing, waxing old and changing, does refer to Israel is seen by the way the psalm is quoted in the letter to the Hebrews.⁵ There, in order to show that the exalted Jesus is “better than” the angels, the apostle contrasts the kingdom established by the angels at Sinai with the Kingdom committed to the Son of God. The throne of Jesus is to be “for ever and ever” (1:8), but the heavens and the earth arrangement of which the psalmist spoke were to “perish”, “wax old as doth a garment”, “be changed” (vv. 11,12).

This reference to Israel under the Law covenant as heavens and an earth that would “wax old” is taken up later by the apostle. In chapter 8, referring to Jeremiah 31, he contrasts the new covenant in Christ with the old covenant arrangement that the angels introduced at Sinai. He comments: “In that He saith, A new covenant, He

2. John Carter, *Letter to the Ephesians*, p. 19; E. M. Spongberg, *Notes on Ephesians*, p. 13.
3. *Eureka*, vol. 3, pp. 282,464.
4. G. B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison*, New Century Bible, as quoted by F. Foulkes in *Ephesians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, IVP, Leicester, 1989.
5. Clearly it does not refer to the material creation, for “the earth abideth for ever” (Eccl. 1:4). Also, the continuation of the material heavens is guaranteed: “Thus saith the LORD, Which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, Which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: If those ordinances depart from before Me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me for ever” (Jer. 31:35,36).

hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away [literally, nigh to vanishing]" (v. 13). The arrangement of Israel under the Law covenant was about to be dissolved.

One more reference to this passing away of the heavens and earth of the Mosaic arrangement (an event that was near as the Hebrews letter was penned) will prepare the way for an appreciation of "the heavenlies" in Ephesians.

The heavens in Isaiah 51

In Isaiah 51:4 God refers to a time when He would again send forth "a law", but this time it would bring light to the Gentiles: "I will make My judgment to rest for a light of the people[s] [Heb. *goyim*]" . Here we have another of Isaiah's references to the work of God's servant who would "bring forth judgment to the Gentiles . . . [and be 'given' sacrificially] for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles" (42:1,6).

In this context of the work of Jesus, when God would bring His righteousness near and send forth His salvation, the message continues: "Lift up your eyes to *the heavens*, and look upon the earth beneath: for the *heavens* shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment" (51:5,6). But God had established Israel's heavens at Sinai; why, then, were they to pass away? Because "thou [Israel] . . . forgettest the LORD thy maker, That hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth" (vv. 12,13). As they had rejected the Sinai covenant, so they would reject God's gracious offer of the new covenant in Christ.

But God's promise to Abraham to make of him a great nation could not be frustrated by Israel's sin. God would "turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46) and from them develop "a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Mt. 21:43). Jerusalem would be "trodden down of the Gentiles [nations]" and her people scattered for centuries (Lk. 21:24). Through it all, however, Israel would be preserved, so that at last the time would come when the 'new covenant' promises, secured by the sacrifice of Jesus, would be brought to a grand fulfilment, and God would "plant *the heavens*, and lay the foundations of *the earth*, and say unto Zion, Thou art My people" (Isa. 51:16).

Future heavens

So we are introduced to a new creation—new heavens and a new earth, referred to as "Zion

. . . My people". This was very much in the mind of Peter as he appealed to the erring Jewish brethren who wanted to return to a keeping of the Law of Moses as a means of salvation. How foolish to go back to a system that was about to "vanish away"! The Romans were about to come against Israel (they came in A.D. 69-70), and the apostle, referring to "the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets" (2 Pet. 3:2), warned the believers in verse 10 that the fulfilment of these scriptures would see:

- 1 "the heavens . . . pass away with a great noise"—the exalted ones removed from power;
- 2 "the elements . . . melt with fervent heat"—the elements of the Law (see Gal. 4:3,9,10) rendered obsolete with the destruction of the temple and the abolition of the priesthood;⁶
- 3 "the earth also and the works that are therein . . . burned up"—the whole fabric of the nation destroyed by the unquenchable fire (see Jer. 7:20) of God's wrath.

In contrast to the impending destruction of the Mosaic system, the apostle adds: "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (v. 13).

In these words of Peter there is a reference to Isaiah 65 that confirms the teaching with respect to a new creation seen already in Isaiah 51. The time in view in Isaiah 65 is the time when "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, saith the LORD" (v. 25). This is the Kingdom established according to the everlasting covenant made with Abraham, elaborated to David and confirmed by the sacrifice of Jesus. Of this time God says: "behold, I create new heavens and a new earth . . . But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy" (vv. 17,18).

"In the heavenlies"

This new creation, the Kingdom arrangement yet to be revealed, is a process that has already

6. The suggestion that these words refer to a literal melting of the elements by atomic weapons is arrived at by a careless application of the apostle's words. The context and background of his remarks, beyond the scope of this article, agrees with the application to the removal of the Law covenant. It is incumbent on those who apply these words literally to explain, in the light of Jeremiah 31:35,36, how the heavens will literally pass away.

started. Jesus is “the beginning of the creation of God” (Rev. 3:14), and, “if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17, RSV), that is, a part of the new creation of which Jesus is the beginning. This new creation, like the one destroyed in A.D. 70, will, as we have seen from Isaiah, consist of heavens (rulers) and an earth (the people who are ruled).

According to Ephesians, Jesus has already been raised from the dead and “set . . . at [God’s] right hand in the [heavenlies], far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (1:20,21). This is not referring to his physical location in heaven but to his exalted status. Jesus has been given the position of supreme ruler of the coming Kingdom. He is the “Sun of righteousness” which, at the appointed time, will shine forth in the new heavens of the Kingdom age, bringing healing to mankind (Mal. 4:2).

Those who have embraced the truth “were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1), but belief of the gospel and baptism into Christ has brought regeneration, forgiveness and hope of Kingdom blessings. Their hope is to be “kings and priests” in the Kingdom (Rev. 5:10), rulers with Jesus in the age to come. It is for this reason that they are said even now to be “in the heavenlies” (Eph. 1:3), because “God, Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: *that in the ages to come* He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (2:4-7).

The faithful “sit in the heavenlies” now in the same sense as they have now been “translated . . . into the kingdom of [God’s] dear Son” (Col. 1:13). No one with accurate knowledge of the nature of the Kingdom covenanted to David over which Jesus will reign as King in Jerusalem could see in these words from Colossians anything more than a present change of allegiance in the lives of God’s children in anticipation of future glory. They have been separated from the world of darkness, and journey now through the wilderness of life to the Kingdom of God’s dear Son. The full realisation of their present blessed status will only be achieved “in the ages to come” (Eph. 2:7) when “mortality [has been] swallowed up of life” (2 Cor. 5:4) and God’s new creation,

with its new heavens and new earth, is made manifest at the appearing of Jesus. Then “they that be wise shall *shine as the brightness of the firmament*; and they that turn many to righteousness as *the stars* for ever and ever” (Dan. 12:3; cf. Mt. 13:43).

The work of the future heavenlies

In the Kingdom, the saints, the faithful of all past time redeemed from Jew and Gentile, who sit in the heavenlies now in anticipation, will occupy that exalted status in reality. The earth over which they will rule will be the repentant and restored remnant of Israel. The members of that nation who are privileged to be in Messiah’s Kingdom will be there on the basis of accepting with true faith and repentance the Messiahship of Jesus “whom they . . . pierced” (Zech. 12:10). As a result of this they will be brought “into the bond of the covenant” (Ezek. 20:37), the “new covenant” of Jeremiah 31:31.

Peter, in the words previously referred to, in reminding the brethren that “we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth” (a clear reference to Isaiah 65, as we have seen), adds: “wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13). In this he appears to be alluding to the wonderful message of Isaiah 45: “Drop down, ye *heavens*, from above, and let the skies *pour down righteousness*: let *the earth* open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let *righteousness spring up* together; I the LORD have created it” (v. 8). Thus, in this new order “created” by the Lord, the heavens (the rulers of the age to come) will be instrumental in teaching the remnant of Israel the Truth. They will pour down righteousness upon a dry and thirsty “earth” (the people of Israel), which will open wide its mouth in eagerness to receive the life-giving teaching. The “earth” will then bring forth “salvation” and reflect the “righteousness” of its new-found Saviour.

Thus we see the wonder of the work that awaits the saints in Christ. This will see the realisation of that of which the apostle speaks when he says: “in the dispensation of the fulness of times [God will] gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are *in heaven* [RV, the heavens], and which are *on earth*; even in him” (Eph. 1:10). In this we see the glorious unity in Christ of the immortal saints, occupying the heavenlies, and the remnant of Israel, “the earth”, that will form the focal centre of the Kingdom age.⁷

Present responsibilities

We who were “in time past Gentiles in the flesh”, but who have now become associated with “the commonwealth of Israel” through acceptance of “the covenants of promise” (Eph. 2:11,12), stand in a privileged position. One of the difficult tasks laid upon the Apostle Paul was to convince the Jewish brethren of “the mystery . . . which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men . . . that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs . . . and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel” (3:4-6). So it was necessary that “the principalities and powers in the heavenlies” (the brethren in charge of ecclesial organisation and who will share in the organisation of the affairs of the Kingdom) should be made aware, through the medium of a Spirit-endowed ecclesia, that the wisdom of God, declared through the prophets in past ages but not then understood, necessitated that “all men” (that is, Gentiles as well as Jews) should be called to salvation (vv. 9,10).

As we Gentiles wait for the coming of the Lord, this privileged position imposes on us responsibilities that the apostle lays before his readers in chapters 4-6, aspects of which are considered in other articles in this issue. The good fight of faith, for which the faithful must equip themselves (see “[The whole armour of God](#)”, on page 205), is not a literal war, but is said to be a fight “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (6:12).

Most translators and commentators, their minds befuddled by “doctrines of demons”, only shed confusion on this most important verse. J. B. Rotherham’s translation, although not entirely free of orthodox bias, is nevertheless very helpful:

“Because our struggle is not against blood and flesh, But

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| Against the principalities | of this darkness |
| Against the authorities | |
| Against the world-holders | |

Against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenlies”.

From the way this is arranged we can see that our warfare is to be conducted on two fronts. The first conflict is against the world of darkness. The whole system of human government is dominated by sin, and, as the end of the age

draws near, sin manifests itself with increasing intensity in governments, legislation and leaders of society. We must prepare ourselves to withstand the crafty influence of sin, which, by legislation in a humanistic society, is made to appear less sinful, and seeks to insinuate itself into family and ecclesial life.

We are also required to fight “spiritual wickedness” in the heavenlies. The heavenlies should give out light. Psalm 19 speaks of the work of the heavenlies: “The *heavens* declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (vv. 1-4). It is interesting to see that, without perceiving any need to explain, the apostle sees these words as referring to the preaching of the gospel by the brethren: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? *Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world*” (Rom. 10:17,18). “The light of the glorious gospel of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4) thus shone out into nations of every language.

However, from earliest times there have always been those within the community of the saints who have been attracted to the teaching and works of darkness and have compromised the Truth. So Paul warned the elders of the Ephesian ecclesia: “grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29,30, RV). His last message to Timothy, overseer of the work of the Truth in the ecclesia at Ephesus, was that “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they

7. This approach explains what is otherwise a very difficult scripture. Writing to the Philippians the apostle, referring to the Lord Jesus, says that because of his faithfulness he has been exalted and given the name that is above every name, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things *in heaven*, and things *in earth*, and things *under the earth*” (2:10). If the *heavens* and *earth* represent the saints and Israel in the Kingdom arrangement, then the “things under the earth” refers to the nations who come to accept the headship of Israel and to acknowledge her kings and priests.

shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:3,4). As we come to the consummation of this age of probation it is likely that this will be our experience too. Sadly there are signs that it is so.

If we aspire to be part of "the heavenlies in Christ" in "the ages to come" (Eph. 2:6,7) we shall faithfully seek to prosecute this war of faith. We shall hold forth the Word of life in the world of darkness and, when necessary, we shall without fear "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude v. 3) in the heavenlies themselves. Thus with faith and patience we shall hold fast, in prayerful anticipation of the coming of the Sun of righteousness.

Points for thought and discussion

- In the light of Paul's use of Psalm 19 discussed in the article, in what way can the saints (the heavens) fulfil the words of verse 1: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament [shows forth] His handywork"?
- How did "spiritual wickedness" enter the Jewish and Gentile ecclesias in the first century?
- What practical steps can we take to try to prevent history repeating itself in this respect?

Fellowcitizens: their city and country

Nigel Bernard

PAUL SAYS in Ephesians 2:19: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God". The Greek word translated "fellowcitizens", *sumpolitēs*, is made up of two Greek words which have the sense of 'together' and 'townsman' or 'citizen'. The word for 'citizen' is related to the word *polis*, the usual word for city in the New Testament. The words for 'citizen' and 'city' are used by Paul in Acts 21: "But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a *citizen* of no mean *city*: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people" (v. 39).

A person could also be a citizen of a country, as in the case of the lost son: "And he went and joined himself to a *citizen* of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine" (Lk. 15:15). Earlier in Ephesians 2 another related Greek word (*politeia*) is found, where it is translated 'commonwealth': "at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the *commonwealth* of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (vv. 12,13). To be a fellowcitizen is to be somebody who is one of a community of people who belong to a city or country. For the fellowcitizen in Christ, his country is Israel and his city is Jerusalem.

If we are fellowcitizens of Israel and Jerusalem, should we emigrate to Israel and acquire an Israeli passport? We are citizens "in Christ", and this citizenship will only require us to go to Jerusalem when the city has been brought into the new covenant. Paul wrote, when speaking about Sarah and Hagar and what they typified: "For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children" (Gal. 4:25). Paul considered himself to be a citizen of Jerusalem, but he did not consider himself to be a fellowcitizen with those who ruled Jerusalem at that time. Indeed, the Lord Jesus had commanded his followers to flee Jerusalem when they saw the Roman armies gathering against the city (Lk. 21:20,21). From our perspective, when we look at Jerusalem as it is now, we see that the spirit of Christ is still not present there. We long for the time when Christ will reign in that city. When he does, then our citizenship which we have now, if we remain faithful, will enable us to reign with him in Jerusalem.

In Ephesians the fellowcitizens are said to be "of the household of God". This conveys the sense of a close-knit family. In 1 Timothy 5 the same Greek word, translated 'house', is used in this sense: "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own *house*, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (v. 8). In Galatians 6:10 the household is referred to