

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON VII : EXCURSUS — IN THE HEAVENLIES

Some years ago I was teaching through Romans using a commentary by Douglas Moo as one of my sources. In his commentary Bro. Moo had several “*excursuses*” where he would focus on a single topic pertinent to the text. I would like to follow his example for this week’s lesson.

excursus (ĭk-skŭr-səs) noun – (1) a lengthy, appended exposition of a topic or point; (2) a digression

In the previous studies I intentionally made no comment on the phrase ‘*in the heavenlies*’ in verse three. The reason for doing so was that I was dissatisfied with what I had written in my original notes concerning that phrase and wanted to give it more thought and prayer. Time being the enemy of every Bible teacher, I wish I could even now develop my thoughts to a fuller extent but I am at least more satisfied with my understanding of what Paul meant when he used that phrase.

Heaven

HEAVEN IN THE OT — There are several Hebrew words translated ‘*heaven*,’ several of which are of minor importance for our purposes this morning:

- *galgal* (literally a ‘wheel’) is translated ‘*heaven*’ in Ps 77:18 KJV; most other versions translates it as ‘*whirlwind*’ or something similar
- *shahak* is also translated ‘*sky*’ or in the plural ‘*clouds*’
- *marom* is also used with the sense of ‘*high places, heights*’ and is most equivalent to ‘*shamayim*,’ the usual word used for ‘*heaven*’ in the OT
- *rakia* is regarded as a solid expanse, as if beaten out, hammered out, as a stretched out piece of metal. It was translated ‘*firmamentum*’ in the Latin Vulgate and is where we get our word ‘*firmament*’. The word is used in Gen 1:6, ‘*And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.*’ Then in Gen 1:8, ‘*And God called the firmament (rakia) heaven (shamayim).*’

But the usual word used in the OT to refer to heaven is *shamayim*, a plural form meaning ‘*the heights above, the upper regions, elevations.*’ To the Hebrews the phrase ‘*heaven and earth*’ was what comprised the entire universe and all its constituents:

‘*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*’ (Gen 1:1 NKJV)

‘*And he blessed him and said: Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth*’ (Gen 14:19 NKJV)

‘*Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him? says the LORD; Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the LORD.*’ (Jer 23:24 NKJV)

‘*God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.*’ (Acts 17:24 NKJV)

HEAVEN IN THE NT — The only word used in the NT that is translated ‘*heaven*’ is οὐρανός [ouranos, the same word from which we get the name of the planet Uranus]. Ouranos refers to that which is ‘*raised up, lofty.*’ Thayer’s Lexicon says it comes from a root meaning ‘*to cover, encompass.*’

THERE IS MORE THAN ONE HEAVEN — This is evidenced by the following:

- the plural form of the word is used throughout scripture
- ‘*Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through (‘go or pass through; cross over; go or pass by’) the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.*’ (Heb 4:14 NKJV) If Jesus ‘*passed through*’ the heavens when He ascended to heaven, obviously that means there is more than one heaven. In like manner Paul says ‘*He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.*’ (Eph 4:10 NKJV)
- Paul speaks of the ‘*third heaven*’: ‘*I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago – whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows – such a one was caught up to the third heaven.*’ (2 Cor 12:2 NKJV)

It has been generally accepted by those who study the scripture that both Judaism and Christianity makes three distinctions when speaking of heaven.

HEAVEN = THE EARTH’S ATMOSPHERE, AIR, FIRMAMENT — Though most English versions often translates the word ‘*heaven*’ by ‘*air, sky*’, there is much evidence that one use of the word ‘*heaven*’ refers to our atmosphere:

'the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air [shamayim; Geneva, ESV, KJV, NIV, RSV = 'air', NASV = 'sky', ASV, YLT = 'heavens']' (Deut 4:17 NKJV)

'Even the stork in the heavens [shamayim; Geneva = 'air', NASV, NIV = 'sky'] Knows her appointed times; And the turtledove, the swift, and the swallow Observe the time of their coming. But My people do not know the judgment of the LORD.' (Jer 8:7 NKJV)

'Our pursuers were swifter Than the eagles of the heavens [shamayim; NASV, NIV = 'sky']. (Lam 4:19 NKJV)

'but the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven [shamayim]' (Deut 11:11 NKJV)

'For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven [shamayim], And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater' (Isa 55:10 NKJV)

'I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens [shamayim; NASV, NIV = 'sky'] like iron and your earth like bronze. (Lev 26:19 NKJV)

'Look at the birds of the air [ouranos; Geneva, ASV, YLT = 'heaven'] for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?' (Matt 6:26 NKJV)

'And Jesus said to him, Foxes have holes and birds of the air [ouranos; Geneva, ASV, YLT = 'heaven'] have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.' (Matt 8:20 NKJV)

'But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven [ouranos; NASV, NIV = 'sky'] was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land' (Luke 4:25 NKJV)

'Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven [ouranos; NASV, NIV = 'sky'] with power and great glory.' (Matt 24:30 NKJV)

HEAVEN = OUTER SPACE — The second distinction to our word 'heaven' refers to the cosmos above our atmosphere:

'And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven [shamayim; NIV 'sky'], and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven [shamayim], you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven [shamayim] as a heritage.' (Deut 4:19 NKJV)

'For the stars of heaven [shamayim] and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine.' (Isa 13:10 NKJV)

'Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven [ouranos; NASV, NIV = 'sky'], and the powers of the heavens [ouranos; NIV 'heavenly bodies'] will be shaken.' (Matt 24:29 NKJV)

HEAVEN = THE ETERNAL DWELLING PLACE OF GOD — The third distinction is what the average believer understands to be 'heaven':

'Indeed heaven [shamayim] and the highest heavens [shamayim 2x; lit: 'heaven of heavens', and so Geneva, KJV, ASV, ESV, RSV, YLT] belong to the LORD your God, also the earth with all that is in it.' (Deut 10:14 NKJV) 'The heaven of heavens' is a Hebraism for the 'highest heavens'.

'But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven [shamayim; Geneva, NIV = 'heavens'] and the heaven of heavens [shamayim 2x; ESV, NASV, NIV, RSV = 'highest heaven'] cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!' (1 King 8:27 NKJV)

'He who sits in the heavens [shamayim; Geneva, NIV = 'heaven'] shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision.' (Ps 2:4 NKJV)

'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven [ouranos]. (Matt 5:16 NKJV)

'But he [Stephen], being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven [ouranos] and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God' (Acts 7:55 NKJV)

'Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens' [ouranos; ESV, NIV, RSV = 'heaven'] (Heb 8:1 NKJV)

'For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven [ouranos] itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us' (Heb 9:24 NKJV)

THE 'HEAVEN OF HEAVENS' WILL REMAIN — Heb 12:26-28 implies the earth and cosmic heaven will be renewed but God's celestial heaven is in no need of renewal and therefore remains as is.

"whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also

heaven.’ (note ‘heaven’ is singular, and some of the other versions emphasize the definite article, ‘the heaven’; see ASV, NASV, ESV, NIV, RSV, YLT) *Now this, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.*” (Heb 12:26-28 NKJV)

“This shaking, in its reference to heaven as well as to earth, signifies a removal of the things shaken. But from the things thus shaken and removed (including heaven), the writer distinguishes ‘those things which are not shaken,’ which are destined to remain, and these are identified with the kingdom of God... [T]he true construction and correct paraphrase [of the things not shaken] are: *‘as of things that were made with the thought in the mind of God that those things which cannot be shaken may remain,’ i.e. already at creation God contemplated an unchangeable universe as the ultimate, higher state of things.*” [ISBE, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids MI, 1956; reprinted 1980; vol 2 p1353f, article: HEAVENS, NEW]

THE COSMIC HEAVENS WILL BE REGENERATED AND RENEWED — But while the ‘heaven of heavens’ will remain, scripture speaks in various places of a new heavens and a new earth. This ‘regeneration, renewal’ teaches that around the center of God’s heaven, which is not subject to deterioration or renewal, a new cosmic heaven and a new earth will be established to be the dwelling place for the new humanity.

“So Jesus said to them, Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matt 19:28 NKJV)

THE NEW CREATION WILL NOT BE ‘EX NIHILO’ BUT RATHER THE EXISTING UNIVERSE WILL BE PURIFIED — When the Lord ‘regenerates’ the cosmos, He will not *create* a new universe but rather will *purify* the existing universe:

“But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” (2 Pet 3:7-13 NKJV)

As another Bible student has summarized: the days will come when heaven is no more (Job 14:12; Isa 51:6). As God once spread out the heavenly tent, so He will wrap up the heavens like a scroll (Isa 34:4). A new heaven and new earth will appear (Isa 65:17; 66:22).

MYSTERIES OF HEAVEN BEYOND OUR UNDERSTANDING — I was confronted with some questions while gathering material for this lesson of which I have no answers. Was there always a heaven? Is heaven a place or a state? These questions, while simplistic answers may be given, are not as straight-forward as one may think and time would not allow me to pursue each of these mysteries as I would have liked. Some quotes worth thinking upon:

“There are the heavens God made, and there is the heaven which is God’s presence. We must not confuse the two.” [Gilmore, John, Probing Heaven; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids MI, 1989; p79]

God does not need heaven in which to exist. He is self-existent and infinite. Place is an accommodation of God to his finite creatures. God transcends not only earth, but heaven as well. (I did not record where I got this exact verbiage but this is a generally held belief and while the words may have been different, the same teaching was found by several as I studied)

“Is heaven a place, as well as a state? We answer that this is probable, for the reason that the presence of Christ’s human body is essential to heaven, and that this body must be confined to place. Since deity and humanity are indissolubly united in Christ’s single person, we cannot regard Christ’s human soul as limit to place without vacating his person of its divinity. But we cannot conceive of his human body as thus omnipresent. As the new bodies of the saints are confined to place, so, it would seem, must be the body of their Lord. But, though heaven be the place where Christ manifests his glory through the human body which he assumed in the incarnation, our ruling conception of heaven must be something higher even than this, namely, that of a state of holy communion with God.” [Strong, Systematic Theology, p1032]

“[Heaven] is undoubtedly a place proper, and not merely a state. For there are now, the material bodies of Christ, and of Enoch and Elijah, if not of others.... But it is not place, but character, which confers essential happiness. We are taught indeed that occasion for this spiritual blessedness will be secured to the saints by their perfect exemption from all natural evils, such as unsatisfied wants, pain, grief, sickness, violence, and death. But the most important fact is, that the blessedness of the life everlasting is simply the perfection of that state which is begun here by the new birth and sanctification. As saith M. Henry, ‘Grace is glory begun, and glory is but grace consummated.’ On entering heaven, the soul is made perfectly holy; and thus every root of misery is removed. When we inquire for the objective

sources of the saints' bliss, we find them subordinately in the society of fellow-saints, but chiefly in God Himself, and especially in the Redeemer." [Dabney, Robert L., Systematic and Polemic Theology; Banner of Truth, Carlisle, PA; 1871; reprinted 1996; p849f]

GOOD SUMMATION QUOTE — Robert L. Dabney sums it all up in this extended quote:

"The answer to the question, where shall be the place of the saints' final abode, is not vital. Where holiness, rest and Christ are, is heaven. But the doctrine that this earth is to be reconstructed after its purgation by fire, and is to become the dwelling place of redeemed men and the God-Man, in their resurrection bodies, is beautifully illustrative of some other truths; and it seems strongly supported by the Scriptures.

"First, that destruction which awaits the world by fire (2 Peter 3:7; 2 Thess 1:8) is not to be an annihilation. There is no evidence that any atom of substance is annihilated; and we know that combustion annihilates no part of the fuel we burn. Words equally as strong (Gen 6:13; Heb 2:14; 2 Peter 3:6) are used concerning the flood, and the judgment of Satan and the wicked, where there was no annihilation.

"But if the earth is to exist after the final consummation, for what end will God use it? Second: many Scriptures speak of this earth as a permanent structure, and as given to man for his home. See Ps 78:69; 90:2; 115:16; 37:29; 8:5,6; Matt 5:5. The promise of the last three can scarcely be understood of any other than the renovated earth, because, as long as the Church is in its militant state, the righteous and the meek are forewarned that 'in this world they shall have tribulation.'

"Third; the striking analogy between our bodies' resurrection, and this [regeneration, renewing] of our earth, gives probability to the doctrine. Man was created an incorporate, but holy and immortal creature. By his sin he corrupted his body with death. Redemption does not propose to cast off this polluted body and save him as a new species of disembodied spirit: No, redemption proposes to restore both parts of man's nature, spirit and body, and in spite of sin and Satan, to realize in eternal perfection God's original conception of a holy, glorious and immortal, incorporate creature. So, by analogy, we naturally expect that when the earth, man's heritage and home, is cursed for his sin and usurped by Satan, it is not to be surrendered to the usurpation, but to be redeemed and purged for its original destination, the eternal home of a glorified human race.

"This, fourth: agrees exactly with Rom 8:19-23; and with Eph 1:14. The material creation is here represented, by a vivid impersonation, as interested in our redemption, and destined to share it: and there is no other idea which answers so well to that of a purchased possession to be redeemed for us hereafter, as this.

Fifth: when we pass to the New Testament prophecies, the evidence is clearer. Rev 5:10, the representatives of the ransomed Church sing to the Lamb: 'Thou hast made us to our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth!' This is a privilege which is to follow their present state of expectant glory. So 2 Peter 3:13 tells us that believers are entitled to 'look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.' This promise is given in connection with the pervious renovation of the earth by fire. In Rev 21:1,2 the apostle sees 'a new heaven and a new earth' ... 'and the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven.' In verse 3d he hears a great voice out of heaven, saying: 'Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them.' The crowning formula of the Covenant of Grace then follows, showing that this descent of God's tabernacle to earth is the final consummation of the redemption of men.

"This conclusion gives us a noble view of the immutability of God's purpose of grace, and the glory of His victory over sin and Satan. This planet was fashioned to be man's heritage; and a part of it, at least, adorned with the beauties of a paradise, for his home. Satan sought to mar the divine plan, by the seduction of our first parents. For long ages he has seemed to triumph, and has filled His usurped dominion with crime and misery. But his insolent invasion is not to be destined to obstruct the Almighty's beneficent design. The intrusion will be in vain. God's purpose shall be executed. Messiah will come and re-establish His throne in the midst of His scarred and ravaged realm; He will cleanse away every stain of sin and death, and make this earth bloom forever with more than its pristine splendour; so that the very plan which was initiated when 'the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy,' will stand to everlasting ages." [Dabney, Robert L., Systematic and Polemic Theology; Banner of Truth, Carlisle, PA; 1871; reprinted 1996; p849f]

In the Heavens

This brings us to the purpose of this excursion. In Ephesians 1:3 Paul said the following:

'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' (Eph 1:3 NKJV)

in the heavens, in the heavenly realms — ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις [en tois epouraniois] This phrase further elaborates on the sources of the spiritual blessings which are not only from the Spirit of God but from the heavens. *Although the word could be masculine ('among heavenly beings') it better suits the context to be understood as neuter ('in the heavenly places / realms'). This phrase might be understood here and the other times it is used (or most of the other times it is used) as a mere reference to heaven, the highest heaven, the dwelling place of God and where Christ is seated in majesty. I believe there is more to this phrase than a simple reference to heaven.*

THE WORD USED HERE IS NOT OUR TYPICAL WORD FOR 'HEAVEN' — As we saw earlier, the Greek word for 'heaven' is οὐρανός [ouranos] but Paul uses a compound word, ἐπουρανίοις [epouraniois]. It is our typical word for heaven with a prepositional prefix, ἐπ- [ep-]; the preposition itself being ἐπ [epi] meaning 'upon, on, at.' Thayer's Greek Lexicon states this

has the sense of 'existing in or above heaven, heavenly.' Kittel's TDNT states this does not denote 'upon' but rather 'at,' as in the sense of 'at or in heaven.' Kittel's dictionary goes on to say it is used in Classical usage to refer to something either 'in heaven' or 'belonging to heaven.' Vine's Expository Dictionary defines it as 'heavenly, what pertains to, or is in, heaven.'

THE USE OF OUR UNUSUAL WORD FOR HEAVEN IN THE NT — This same unusual word is used elsewhere in the New Testament, typically in contrast with that which is earthy:

*'If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you **heavenly things?**'* [ἐπουράνια, epourania] (John 3:12 NKJV)

³⁵ *'But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?'* ³⁶ *Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies.* ³⁷ *And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain — perhaps wheat or some other grain.* ³⁸ *But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.* ³⁹ *All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds.* ⁴⁰ *There are also **celestial** [ἐπουράνια, epourania] bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the **celestial** [ἐπουράνιων, epouraniōn] is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.* ⁴¹ *There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory.* ⁴² *So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.* ⁴³ *It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.* ⁴⁴ *It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.* ⁴⁵ *And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.* ⁴⁶ *However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.* ⁴⁷ *The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven.* ⁴⁸ *As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the **heavenly** [ἐπουράνιος, epouranios] Man, so also are those who are heavenly.* ⁴⁹ *And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the **heavenly** [ἐπουράνιου, epouraniou] Man.'* (1 Cor 15:35-49 NKJV)

*'And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His **heavenly** [ἐπουράνιον, epouranion] kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!'* (2 Tim 4:18 NKJV)

*'Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the **heavenly** [ἐπουρανίου, epouraniou] calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus'* (Heb 3:1 NKJV)

*'For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the **heavenly** [ἐπουρανίου, epouraniou] gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit'* (Heb 6:4 NKJV)

*'who serve the copy and shadow of the **heavenly things** [ἐπουράνιων, epouraniōn], 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.'* (Heb 8:5 NKJV)

*'Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the **heavens** [οὐρανοῖς, ouranois; our normal word for heaven] should be purified with these, but the **heavenly things** [ἐπουράνια, epourania] things themselves with better sacrifices than these.'* (Heb 9:23 NKJV)

*'But now they desire a better, that is, a **heavenly** [ἐπουρανίου, epouraniou] country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.'* (Heb 11:16 NKJV)

*'But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the **heavenly** [ἐπουρανίῳ, epouraniōi] Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels'* (Heb 12:22 NKJV)

One usage of this word particularly stands out:

*'that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in **heaven** [ἐπουράνιων, epouraniōn], and of those on earth, and of those under the earth'* (Phil 2:10 NKJV)

Note this is similar to what is said in Ephesians yet the Greek phrase is not the same. This infers even more strongly that Paul is making a special reference when he uses the phrase in Ephesians.

THE USUAL WORD FOR HEAVEN (OURANOS) IS ALSO USED IN EPHESIANS ALONGSIDE OUR UNUSUAL WORD FOR HEAVEN (EPOURANIOIS) — It is important to note that while Paul uses this form of the word for heaven in Ephesians, he also uses our normal word for heaven four times:

*'that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in **heaven** [οὐρανοῖς, ouranois] and which are on earth — in Him.'* (Eph 1:10 NKJV)

*'He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the **heavens** [οὐρανῶν, ouranōn], that He might fill all things.'* (Eph 4:10 NKJV)

Two of those four times deserve our special attention:

*'And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in **heaven** [οὐρανοῖς, ouranois], and there is no partiality with Him.'* (Eph 6:9 NKJV)

'from whom the whole family in heaven [οὐρανοῖς, ouranois] and earth is named' (Eph 3:15 NKJV)

Here Paul refers to our 'Master' and the 'family of God' as being in heaven, yet he does not use the same phrase we are evaluating. If 'in the heavenlies' is merely a reference to heaven where God dwells, why would Paul not use that phrase in these two verses?

THE CONSTRUCTION IS UNUSUAL — Typically when a location is given, the word used is a noun: 'Let's meet at church', 'I was in the car', 'The ball hit me in the knee', and so forth. And we see above that Paul does speak of things or people in heaven using a normal noun phrase. If Paul was merely making a reference to heaven then we would have expected him to use the usual word in its normal sense: 'God has blessed us with spiritual blessings in heaven'.

I tried to come up with a good example of how Paul uses this phrase and nothing I thought of made sense. Maybe that in itself says something about our phrase.

'IN THE HEAVENLIES' — Used 5x in the book of Ephesians (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) and is unique to this book. Translated *'in the heavenly places'* [exactly the same Greek phrase in all five usages: ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις, en tois epouraniois] in most of our versions: ESV, KJV, NKJV, NASV, YLT. Note some versions translates the first usage as *'in heavenly things'* (e.g., Geneva Bible), the KJV translates the phrase as *'in high places'* in 6:12 and the NIV translates it as *'in the heavenly realms'* (NIV). It is used as follows:

'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' (Eph 1:3 NKJV; Geneva *'in heavenly things'*; NIV *'in the heavenly realms'*)

'which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places' (Eph 1:20 NKJV; NIV *"in the heavenly realms"*)

'and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (Eph 2:6 NKJV; NIV *'in the heavenly realms'*)

'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' (Eph 3:10 NKJV; NIV *'in the heavenly realms'*)

One interpretation is that the Lord has blessed us spiritually in heaven or the source of our spiritual blessings is from heaven (1:3) where the risen Savior is seated in glory (1:20). Seated together with Him are believers who was raised with Christ since we are identified with Him in His death and resurrection (2:6). These believers are presently being used to glorify God as they assemble together to fulfill the work of God, displaying the wisdom of God to spiritual beings (3:10). But a problem arises when we consider the final use of this phrase:

'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.' (Eph 6:12 NKJV; Geneva, KJV *'in high places'*; NIV *'in the heavenly realms'*; almost without exception the commentators take this in a local sense)

This disrupts our assumption that 'in the heavenly places' is equivalent to heaven since it is the abode of evil powers and the place for spiritual warfare (note many commentators believe the powers in 3:10 to be evil as well as 6:12). To avoid this difficulty, some consider the first four usages of the phrase to refer to heaven while the final phrase is used in another sense; e.g., Wuest, quoting Thayer, states the final use of the phrase is applied to the "lower heavens or the heaven of the clouds." [Wuest, 28] This is probably the reason behind the KJV translating the phrase in 6:12 as *'in high places'* rather than *'in the heavenly places.'* I'm not sure that is the course we should take however; the phrase is unique to Ephesians and is used only five times. Why would Paul use in one way four of those times but then something different in the final usage?

HOW DOES PAUL THEREFORE USE THE PHRASE? — Based upon the reasons above I believe Paul not to be referring merely to 'heaven' in the verses but is emphasizing the fact that **believers live in two worlds: our present evil world or age, and the future eternal world. It is in this position we have the power of Christ but it is also where we do battle with the forces of evil. We are 'in the heavenlies' while our feet are on earth.** This is nothing new since this same teaching is found throughout the New Testament but we should realize that this is Paul's emphasis here.

"This adjective ἐπουρανίους [epouraniois] is **used in the New Testament to represent the spirit realm**, which is the location of God's throne and the place where all spiritual beings and forces (whether good or evil) exist. The New Testament also teaches that believers are positioned in the ἐπουρανίους [epouraniois] or spirit realm" [from <http://www.studylight.org/ls/gt/index.cgi?a=131>; Aug 5 2013]

MacArthur considers 'the heavenly places' to **'encompass the entire supernatural realm of God, His complete domain, the full extent of His divine operation'** and is thus more than just heaven itself. "Because we are members of God's dominion, unlike the 'sons of this age' (Luke 16:8), we are able to understand the supernatural things of God, things which the 'natural man does not accept' and 'cannot understand ... because they are spiritually appraised' (1 Cor 2:14). When an American citizen travels to another country, he is every bit as much an American citizen as when he is in the United States. Whether he is in Africa, the Near East, Europe, Antarctica, or anywhere else outside his homeland, he is still completely an American citizen, with all the rights and privileges that citizenship holds. As citizens of God's heavenly dominion, Christians hold all the rights and privileges that citizenship grants, even while they are living in the 'foreign' and sometimes hostile land of earth. Our true life is in the supernatural, the heavenly places. Our Father is there, our Savior is there, our family and loved ones are there, our name is there,

and our eternal dwelling place and throne are there. But we are presently trapped in the tension between the earthly and the heavenly.” [MacArthur, p9]

Harold Hoehner: **“To put it another way, the believer’s life is ‘conditioned by transcendence.’** Later this epistle mentions evil hosts in the heavenlies (3:10) and the believer’s struggle with them in the present day (6:12). This is in keeping with the OT portrayal of God and Satan conversing with one another in heaven (Job 1:6-12) and the struggle between the good and evil angels in heaven and on earth (Dan 10:13, 20)... Thus, in receiving the spiritual benefit from the heavenly places it is in the midst of satanic attack and interference. The spiritual benefits for the believers are from the heavenlies and the unbelievers’ opposition to the believers find their source in wicked spiritual leaders who also reside in the heavenlies (6:12). In other words, the struggles in the heavenlies are also played out here on earth.” [Hoehner, 169f]

Andrew Lincoln: “[In the OT and Jewish conception of heaven], heaven was depicted as the upper part of the cosmos but at the same time stood analogically for the spiritual world above, which the firmament concealed, and beyond that referred also to the realm of divine transcendence.... In this perspective heaven in its created aspect was involved in God’s plan for the ages. The heavens as well as the earth are to be shaken and removed in the judgement of the end-time (cf. Isa 51:6; Hag 2:6), while Isa 65:17 and 66:22 speak of the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. In apocalyptic Judaism also the evil powers in heaven are judged (cf. 1 Enoch 16:1-4; 21:1-16; 89:59, 60) before the commencement of the coming new age with its new heaven. A similar eschatological framework can be found in Paul’s thinking.... **“In [Paul’s thinking] both heaven and earth are incorporated in each age, but now heaven and earth take on new significance as they are related to God’s acts in Christ. In particular, the heavenly realms in Ephesians are to be seen in the perspective of the age to come, which has been inaugurated by God raising Christ from the dead and exalting him to his right hand. Yet, since heaven is also still involved in the present evil age, there remain hostile powers in the heavenly realms (cf. 3:10; 6:12) until the consummation of the age to come. Here in 1:3, against a background of cosmological concerns on the part of the letter’s recipients, there is the indication that the blessings of salvation they have received from God link the recipients to the heavenly realm. The blessings can be said to be in the heavenly realms, yet they are not viewed as treasure stored up for future appropriation, but as benefits belonging to believers now. In apocalyptic writings, aspects of future salvation were sometimes seen as present in heaven. In Ephesians, through what God has done in Christ, the benefits of the age to come have become a present heavenly reality for believers, and for this reason can also be closely linked with the Spirit of that age.”** [Lincoln, 20f] It is important to see what Lincoln says here and is worth repeating: **most of Biblical prophecy directs our thoughts to a future heavenly relationship; Paul in Ephesians brings this home to us here and now!**

Joseph Lightfoot: “The believer, in the language of this Epistle, has been already seated in heaven with Christ (ii. 6). He is an alien upon earth, but a citizen of God’s kingdom (ii. 19). There is his [citizenship] (Phil iii. 20). There consequently he enjoys his privileges and receives his blessings. **The heaven, of which the Apostle here speaks, is not some remote locality, some future abode. It is the heaven which lies within and about the true Christian.**” [Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, p312]

Gordon Clark (quote in Gilmore): “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers in high (Greek: heavenly) places. But our adversary is no material or corporeal foe. Hence, **‘in the heavenlies’ is an immaterial, unseen world that lies behind, above, outside the world of sense. Even the words ‘behind, outside’ are incorrect. It is a world of minds or spirits, not bodies. Nor does the phrase mean ‘heaven’ in the commonly accepted usage. Heaven as we think of it, does not contain evil spirits. These ‘heavenlies’ do. Nor must we think of this spiritual world as up toward the moon or Saturn. It is right here on earth also. The descent into and the valley of the shadow of death, where the goblins whisper in our ears, is our mind itself. We too are members of the supra-sensory world of spirits.**” [Clark, Gordon H.; Ephesians; The Trinity Foundation, Jefferson MD; 1985; q.v. Gilmore, John, *Probing Heaven*; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids MI, 1989; p80]

Note John Gilmore agrees with our understanding of the phrase in the latter part of Ephesians but makes a distinction for the first three times the phrase is used: “God created the starry heavens, where the planets are and all galaxies farther out. And there are texts that say Christians dwell with Christ in heavenly realms where their inheritance is (Eph 1:3, 20; 2:6). This is separate from earth, a place less noted for its geography than for its stability and authority. Sandwiched somewhere in the spirit world is another heavenly realm invaded, controlled, and filled with destructive spiritual ‘squatters.’ In this section of the heavenly realms are the foes of Christ and of Christians. Satan occupies this area and from it he oversees his opposition to the mission of Christ on earth. It is a realm of heaven charged with hatred against God and His Christ. It is a realm from which assaults are made on the church on earth. The rulers of darkness reside in this divisive, negative heavenly realm (Eph 6:12).” [Gilmore, John, *Probing Heaven*; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids MI, 1989; p80]

THEREFORE in Ephesians Paul will deal with believers as those living in two worlds and give us the understanding and weapons to be pleasing to our Lord and Master while still on this earth.

Postscript

The events of this week have reminded us once again what is truly important. I love to study the scriptures, a love I believe that has been put in my heart and enabled by the Lord. But when the analysis is all over and the differing points-of-views have all been critically examined, at the end of the day what is important are the promises of our heavenly Father as to our future. When someone departs this earth to be at home with our Lord, ‘ouranus’ and ‘epouraniois’ and all the other things discussed this morning fades into the background in relative unimportance. **What is important at that time is that the one we love is at peace, secure in the arms of Christ, at home with the one Who saved them and Who loves them in a greater way than they were ever loved on earth. What comfort the thoughts of heaven brings to our hearts at that time.** What does heaven really mean to us at

that time? —

- Christ calls it his 'Father's house' (John 14:2)
- It is called 'paradise' (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor 12:4; Rev 2:7)
- the 'heavenly Jerusalem' (Gal 4:26; Heb 12:22; Rev 3:12)
- the 'kingdom of heaven' (Matt 25:1; James 2:5)
- the 'eternal kingdom' (2 Peter 1:11)
- the 'eternal inheritance' (1 Peter 1:4; Heb 9:15)
- the 'better country' (Hebrews 11:14, 16)
- the 'hope of glory' (Col 1:27)
- the blessed are said to 'sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob' and to be 'in Abraham's bosom' (Luke 16:22; Matt 8:11)
- the blessed are said to 'reign with Christ' (2 Tim 2:12)
- the blessed are said to enjoy 'rest' (Heb 4:10, 11)
- the blessed will possess 'life everlasting,' 'an eternal weight of glory' (2 Cor 4:17)
- the blessed will be exempt from all sufferings for ever, a deliverance from all evils (2 Cor 5:1,2)
- the blessed will be removed from the society of the wicked (2 Tim 4:18)
- the blessed will enjoy without termination the 'fulness of joy' for ever (Luke 20:36; 4:16, 18; 1 Pet 1:4; 5:10; 1 John 3:2)
- the blessed is at home, a place 'prepared for them' (John 14:2,3)

THE KINGDOM OF GOD — This was copied probably from the web but I neglected to notate from whence it came. So while I do not know the original author, I did not want to plagiarize by taking credit for another's work. I thought this was apropos to our discussion:

“The kingdom of the heavens' in Matthew, for 'the kingdom of God' in Mark and Luke, is drawn from Daniel 4:26 , 'the heavens do rule,' (Daniel 2:44) 'the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.' It consists of many stages and phases, issuing at last in heaven being brought down fully to earth, and the tabernacle of God being with men (Revelation 21:2-3 ; Revelation 21:10 , etc.). The plurality of the phases is expressed by 'the kingdom of the heavens.' The Bible is distinguished from the sacred books of false religions in not having minute details of heavenly bliss such as men's curiosity would crave. The grand feature of its blessedness is represented as consisting in holy personal union and immediate face to face communion with God and the Lamb; secondarily, that the saints are led by the Lamb to living fountains of water, and fed with the fruit of the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God, the antitype of the former Adamic paradise.

“It is no longer merely a garden as Eden, but a heavenly 'city' and garden combined, nature and art no longer mutually destructive, but enhancing each the charm of the other, individuality and society realized perfectly (Revelation 2-3,7, 21-22). No separate temple, but the whole forming one vast 'temple,' finding its center in the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb, who are the temple to each and all the king-priests reigning and serving there. This was the model Moses was shown on Sinai (Hebrews 7:1-6). The earthly tabernacle was its pattern and figure (Hebrews 9:23-24). The 'altar' (Revelation 6:9) and the 'censer,' etc. (Revelation 8:3), the 'temple' in heaven (Revelation 11:19 ; Revelation 14:17 ; Revelation 15:5 ; Revelation 15:8), are preliminary to the final state when there shall be 'no temple therein' (Revelation 21:22), for the whole shall be perfectly consecrated to God.

“Negatives of present provisional conditions and evils form a large part of the subordinate description of heaven's bliss: no marriage (Luke 20:34-36), no meats for the belly (1 Corinthians 6:13), no death, no sorrow, crying, pain; no defilement, no curse, no night, no candle, no light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light (Revelation 21:4 ; Revelation 21:27 ; Revelation 22:3 ; Revelation 22:5). Heaven is not merely a state but a place. For it is the place where Christ's glorified body now is; 'the heaven must receive Him until the times of restitution of all things' (Acts 3:21).

Thither He will 'receive His people to Himself' after He hath 'prepared a place for them' (John 14:2-4), that where He is there His servants may be (John 12:26). From heaven, which is God's court, angels are sent down to this earth, as the multitude of the heavenly host (distinct from the host of heaven," Acts 7:42), and to which they return (Luke 2:13-15 ; Luke 22:43). God Himself is addressed 'Our Father who art in heaven.' His home is the parent home, the sacred hearth of the universe." [copied]