

In "Heavenly Places" or *Among the Celestials*

By John H. Essex

In Ephesians 1, verse 3, the King James (Authorized) Version presents us with the phrase, "In heavenly places." The full quotation reads, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." The word 'places' is in italics, indicating it is not in the original Greek.

The Greek expression occurs five times in Ephesians, and in the Authorized Version is translated in three different ways. When referring to the ecclesia, it is "in heavenly places." When used of Christ, it is "in *the* heavenly places." When used of spiritual forces of wickedness, in Eph. 6:12, it is, "in high places." Now the phrase is the same in each case, but the translators of the Authorized Version were evidently in some difficulty, for having, in Eph. 1:28, set Christ at God's right hand "in the heavenly places," they were obviously loathe to locate the spiritual forces of wickedness there, too.

The Concordant Version solves the difficulty, and accurately translates the phrase, "Among the celestials." In so doing, it preserves uniformity, and at the same time presents us with a valuable and awe-inspiring thought. For one may go to a *place* for a holiday or a rest (and the popular idea of heaven seems to be a place where one can rest from labor), but one goes *among a people* for a *purpose*. Either to gain something from them, as a businessman, or to impart something to them, as a missionary. In our case, we are being placed among the celestials in order that we may impart something to them. Eph. 2:6 (this time from the Concordant Version). "... and seats us together among the celestials in Christ Jesus, that, in the oncoming eons He should be displaying the transcendent riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus," and Eph. 3:10. "That now may be made known to the sovereignties and authorities among the celestials, through the ecclesia, the multifarious wisdom of God."

Yes, God intends to instruct the vast multitudes of the inhabitants of the celestial realms through the ecclesia, which is the body of Christ. O! that we might appreciate the greatness and the glory of the work which God purposes to accomplish through the ecclesia.

It is a complete fallacy to imagine that all in heaven is at present in happy relationship with God. True, the Hebrew Scriptures speak of heavenly hosts, who harken to the voice of the Lord, and do His pleasure. (Psalm 103:21) But Ephesians 6 speaks of "spiritual forces of wickedness among the celestials." Colossians 1:20 makes it quite clear that the reconciling work of Christ covers those in the heavens as well as those on earth.

The work of reconciling the universe to God will take a long time, but there is no force even among the celestials that can prevent it, for Christ is exalted above the very highest powers that exist. He is graced with a Name that is above every name (Phil. 2:9), that in His Name -- Jesus -- every knee should be bowing, celestial and terrestrial and subterranean, and every tongue should be acclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord, for the glory of God, the Father. It is in this One that our lot is cast, and it is this supreme One, Who is given to us as *Head over all*. (Eph. 1:11 and 22).

Think of this Gift, and rejoice in it to the full, and then reflect -- that with this wonderful Gift, God has graciously granted us all the antagonism and opposition, all the envy and jealousy, of those same sovereignties and authorities among the celestials. For what excites envy and jealousy and antagonism so much as to see someone much lower in status raised to a higher position than oneself, especially if the one thus exalted is given the right to exercise power and authority. In giving Christ to us, as Head over all, God has by-passed these sovereignties and authorities in our favour, and doubtless many of them resent it. It is not as though we have ever been chosen from the lofty ones of earth. Those whom God has chosen for His ecclesia come from the ignoble and contemptible, the stupid and the weak, by all fleshly standards. (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

Paul recognised that the ecclesia would have to face this antagonism, for in Eph. 6, he writes, "It is not ours to wrestle with blood and flesh, but with the sovereignties, with the authorities, with the world-mights of this darkness, with the spiritual forces of wickedness among the celestials." But while graciously granting us this opposition, occasioned by His gift of Christ as Head over all, God also provides all the panoply necessary to ward off every attack.

Let us then have our loins girded about with truth, as the apostle advised. Let us put on the cuirass of righteousness; have our feet sandaled with the readiness of the evangel of peace; take up the large shield of faith; receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit – all these are ours to enable us to withstand in the wicked day, and having done all to stand.

The opposition of these sovereignties and authorities among the celestials is mainly directed against the Headship of Christ, and it is because Christ is given to us as Head over all that we are prone to attack. Further, scriptural history reveals that, whenever a fresh development in God's purpose is disclosed, the Adversary is poised to strike. Satan does all he can to destroy God's efforts, but invariably fails, though he may wreak much havoc in his failures. When man first appeared on the scene, Satan was soon in evidence, and his machinations in Eden caused sin and death to pass through to all mankind. What a havoc this has caused, but Satan has not succeeded in destroying humanity because He could not prevent the work of the Cross, in which, ironically, he thought he had achieved his greatest victory, but which will prove to have been his greatest defeat.

When the Lord came to earth as a babe, Satan attempted to destroy Him by causing Herod to slay all the male children born about that time. When the Lord appeared at Jordan, and was proclaimed by John as the "Lamb of God, which is taking away the sin of the world," the Adversary was there again to try Him over a period of forty days. When the Cross was erected, Satan sought to entice the Great Sacrifice to come down. (Matt. 27:40). When the disciples were chosen, Satan entered into one of them to betray the Lord and induced another to deny Him three times. And when the nature of celestial glories of Christ are revealed, and the secret concerning the ecclesia is made known (as in Ephesians 3), then we may expect the Adversary Himself to be again specially active, and this is, in fact, the case. It is his stratagems that we have to stand up to at this time (Eph. 6:11). It is for this that we need the panoply of God. This is no occasion for rest and relaxation, but for constant vigilance and constant prayer.

"©Grace and Truth" granted permission
to Martin Lee (GoodNewsGospel.info)
to copy and distribute this document.