

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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THE WORD "HEAVEN"

The study of the Word of God is very much a study of the words that God has used. The way a word is used is a positive indication of all its meanings. Certain comments which I made concerning the word *heaven* in Issue No. 28 (*The Kingdom-Why Two Names?*) has generated requests for more information concerning this term. I trust the following will be of help.

The word *heaven* is one that can be applied to anything or anyone that is over and above, whether used of space or position. We do not use it too much this way in English since it has settled down and become somewhat fixed as signifying that place in space where the omnipresent God is more manifest than any other, the place where Jesus Christ is now seated at God's right hand (Mark 16:19). This is the place that because of its glory and inhabitants is over and above all other places in the universe. It is the place where God has established His throne, the seat of His government (Psa. 103:19), and is, therefore, rightly called *heaven*. However, this is not its sole meaning and usage, either in the Bible or in common English.

Consider the following illustration. The word *motor* is one that can be applied to anything that imparts motion, to any source of mechanical power. This meaning is inherent in the word *motor*. A squirrel inside a wheel causing it to spin could properly be called a motor. If in the future someone comes up with a new device for imparting motion, he will not need to search far and wide for a word to describe it. There is a word available that fits all such things, the word *motor*. Even so, the word *heaven* can be properly applied to anything or anyone that is over and above, even to the One Who is over and above all, God.

In the Hebrew word *shamayim*, the Greek word *ouranos*, and the English

word *heaven* we have three words that are as equal as four quarters are to one dollar in American currency. Our word *heaven* will always properly translate either of the other two. But in order to understand these three words, their basic value must be clearly understood.

In the first eight verses of Genesis we find that *shamayim* is used of two different things. It is used first of that which God created in the beginning (1:1), and then of that which He made on the second day (1:8). Thus, it is clear that there is some basic meaning in this word that allows it to be used in two different ways, and the things of which it is used must have certain definite characteristics or this word will not properly represent them.

In considering all the uses of *shamayim* in the Old Testament and the uses of *ouranos* in the New Testament, along with many usages in profane Greek literature, and our own usage of the word *heaven*, the conviction is inescapable that the basic idea in all these words is *height*, in the sense of being *over and above*. These words, therefore, can be properly applied to any being, place, or thing that is Over and above, whether in space or position. In other words, if it is elevated, if it is over and above, the Holy Spirit may see fit to use the word *shamayim* or *ouranos* to designate it. And we who speak English may use the word *heaven* to describe such things if we see fit to do so.

In the occurrence of *shamayim* in Genesis 1:1 it is not possible for anyone to say dogmatically what was created; but since the word is plural and we know its basic meaning, we can say that it has to do with things that are over and above the earth. In Psalm 19 we learn that in the heavens, God has set a tabernacle for the sun. A tabernacle, in Scripture, being a center of activity, we have good reason to think that "the heavens" of Gen. 1:1 refers to the planets in our solar system with one planet, the earth being singled out for special attention. In relationship to the earth, all other planets are over and above us and, thus, could be called *shamayim* (the heavens). Could it be that when God speaks of "planting the heavens" (Isa. 51: 16), He refers to a time when these planets will be inhabited? I do not believe that they are fit for any life as we know it today, but I do not think they will be forever in this condition. Remember that the planet earth was once "waste and empty" (Gen. 1:2).

In the second occurrence of *shamayim* (Gen. 1: 8), we learn that God made the firmament (or expanse) and that this firmament or expanse being over

and above the earth is properly called *heaven*.

A reading of the portion that includes Daniel 4:17, 25, 26 and 32 will show that the words "the Most High" and "the heavens" are used interchangeably in reference to the same exalted Being. Both of these terms are descriptive titles of God, He being the One Who is higher than all and, thus, is over and above all. That the word *heaven* in numerous places in the Old Testament means God is a fact that must be acknowledged by all who have honestly considered the matter.

At this point it may be well to note that it is a mistake to think that a word can mean only one thing, that it has only one application and can have no other. In fact there is scarcely a leading word in any language, especially descriptive words, that can be held to a single meaning. The English word *give* has more than twenty applications or meanings. A man would make himself ridiculous if he argues that *give* cannot mean "to bestow without receiving a return," since it cannot mean this in the sentence, "I will give you ten dollars for a day's work."

In view of this it is just as foolish to say that *shamayim* (heaven) cannot mean "God" in Dan. 4:26 since it cannot possibly mean "God" in Gen. 1: 1. Yet this was the fallacious argument used against me when I set forth the fact that *ouranos* in the plural meant "the celestials," (that is, heavenly beings) in certain occurrences. It was argued that it could not mean this since this meaning will not fit in 2 Peter 3:12 which speaks of "the heavens being on fire."

The Greek word *ouranos* follows the same pattern as the Hebrew word. It is derived from the verb *ora* which means *to raise*, and *ana* which means *above* or *up*. In it we have the idea of raised up, with the meaning of *over and above* being basic in it. This is seen in its use in Classical as well as New Testament Greek.

In the New Testament *ouranos* is used as a designation for God in Luke 15:18. This is to be expected since God is the One Who is over and above all. This, I believe, is also its meaning in Luke 10:18. Satan fell from God, not from the place called *heaven*; and the Lord Jesus was a witness to his fall. And if this truth is realized in John 3:13, it clears up a difficulty that has long bothered students of the Word.

In the plural the word *ouranos* is used of celestial beings in Eph. 4:10 where the Greek reads, "**He ascends up over all the heavens.**" If this refers to places, it would put Christ beyond and out of these places altogether. But this cannot be as Eph. 6:9 and Col. 4:1 clearly show. However, if it speaks of those beings who are over and above in their exalted position, it makes sense and speaks a great truth.

The word *ouranos* is used of the place to which the Lord Jesus ascended and where He is now located. (See Mark 16:19). It is also used of supreme monarchs such as the Caesars, of whom there was none higher in the Roman Empire. Note this in Acts 2:5 and Col. 1:23. These passages leave us with insoluble problems unless this is recognized. It is expected that this will be denied by some who have no solutions for any problems, but who have many problems for every solution. The use of the word *heaven* (*shamayim*) of earthly rulers should also be noted in Jeremiah 14:22, where the parallelism indicates that "the heavens" spoken of there were the rulers of the nations.

From ancient sources outside of the New Testament we find that *ouraniskos* (diminutive of *ouranos*, meaning a little heaven) is used of the vaulted ceiling of a room, the top of a tent, and a canopy, all of which are over and above. An interesting use of *ouranos* is seen in the fact that it is used of the hard palate, what we commonly call the roof of the mouth. This is certainly a proper use since the hard palate is over and above in the mouth. The same usage is found also in the Dutch and German language, which all who are familiar with these will know.

While in English the word *heaven* has become quite restricted by usage to indicate the special place where the good are supposed to go at death, this is not entirely so. The meaning of "God" is found in such common sayings as "Heaven help us," and "Heaven only knows." A reference to the dictionary will show that one meaning of *heaven* is "the sovereign of heaven, God."

In the figurative use of the word *heaven* it often has reference to that which is exalted, and the idea of exaltation is found in the word. Remember that the chief element in this word is *heave* which means to lift up. We should keep in mind the words of Solomon: "The heavens for height, and the earth for depth." Provo 25:3.

In English the word *heaven* is turned into an adjective by the addition of the suffix *-ly*. This gives us the word *heavenly*. This is also done in Greek

where *ouranos* becomes *ouranios*. This adjective is then intensified by adding an accelerative prefix which gives us *epouranios*. Like all adjectives this one gets its nuances or shades of meaning from the word or words which it qualifies, even as in the words "dark day" and "dark night," we find different ideas in the word *dark*.

After much consideration I am convinced that the idea of exaltation is the one the Spirit of God intended in this adjective, and the intensified character can best be expressed by the words "most exalted." **Thus, the Lord said to Nicodemus; "If I have told you the most basic things and you are not believing, how shall you be believing if I should be telling you the most exalted things."** John 3:12.

There is much more that could be said about this word but space does not permit, so take what I have said, go to your Bible with it and have yourself a good time.

END ISSUE NO. SB034