

Where is Heaven?

Robert C. Newman

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Early in the space age -- back in the sixties -- when the Russians were ahead of us, one of the Russian astronauts came back from his suborbital mission and announced to the press that he was now sure that God did not exist -- after all, he had looked around carefully and not seen Him anywhere!

This incident illustrates an opinion on the location of heaven is that has been very common throughout history. It is often being used today by unbelievers against those who believe the Bible is true. We would like to deal with this question here, Where is heaven?

Which Heaven?

The first thing we ought to ask ourselves before we try to answer this question is, Which heaven are we talking about? Turn with me to Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12. I would like to look at a section there that shows us that the Bible makes a distinction, using the word "heaven" for three different objects. Paul is speaking here to one of the churches he started -- at Corinth. This particular church has been bothered by persons claiming to be great apostles and spiritual men on the basis of various visions and things of that sort that they have seen. As a result, Paul finds it necessary for himself to speak a little bit about the experience he has had, though he points out again and again that he is uncomfortable with doing this, and that such boasting is not a good thing. Well, he says then in 2 Corinthians 12:1 and following:

Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who 14 years ago, whether in the body I do not know or out of the body I do not know, God knows, such a man was caught up to the third heaven, and I know how such a man, whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows, was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words which a man is not permitted to speak. On behalf of such a man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, excepting in regard to my weakness.

We are not really clear whether Paul is talking about himself here or not, though it appears from his remarks in verse 7 of the same passage that he is. In any case, he is talking about someone who was carried up to the third heaven -- caught up into Paradise -- and this suggests that the Bible distinguishes at least three uses of the word "heaven". As I have studied the Bible over the years, I am quite satisfied that the Bible does not picture seven heavens, as some ancient texts do, with Paul only making it up to the third, but rather that the third heaven is what Paul means by the place where God especially is, the abode or dwelling place of God.

Paul calls this place "paradise". We see from elsewhere in Scripture that "Paradise" is the name given for the place where God is present with man. The Garden of Eden is called Paradise. The

word "paradise" is actually an old Persian word for garden. So the garden in Eden was called Paradise, and since God and man had direct communion with one another in the garden, the word comes to be extended to places like this. When Jesus was dying on the cross and the thief asks that Jesus might remember him, Jesus says, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." Jesus and the thief would be together with the Father that very day. Then we see that in the book of Revelation, when man is going to be brought into the new heavens and new earth, that this place, too, is called Paradise. Paradise is apparently the word the Bible uses for being where God is. So I think we can say that one of the uses of the word "heaven" -- and what Paul calls the "third heaven" -- is where God is, the abode of God. We hear again and again in Scripture the phrase "the God of heaven" or of "heaven, God's dwelling place."

Well, if that is the third heaven, there must be at least a first and a second heaven. What are these? As we look through Scripture, we do find two other uses of the word heaven that do not refer to God's dwelling place in this special sense. First, there is the use of the word heaven that occurs in phrases like "the birds of heaven." Basically the idea here is that there is a heaven in which the birds fly, what we today would call the atmosphere or the air. This, I think, is what the Bible would mean by the concept of the first heaven.

Besides this, there are other phrases like "the stars of heaven," "signs in the heavens," and so forth. These imply that the place we call outer space -- where the stars and planets are -- is also called heaven. We suggest this is the second heaven.

So I think, on the basis of 2 Corinthians 12:1-5, we have a rather definite picture of three heavens. And the third heaven is where God is. Other uses in Scripture then suggest that the first heaven is the atmosphere and the second is outer space. Our concern here is not where the atmosphere is -- that is not too hard to find -- nor where outer space is -- also not so hard to locate, though the boundary between atmosphere and space might be fuzzy -- but our concern is, where is the abode of God?

Where is the Third Heaven?

Where is this "heaven" that is the subject of most of the passages in Scripture that use the term? The Bible again and again tells us that heaven is "up." That theme is one of the commonest in Scripture -- going up to heaven, coming down from heaven, and so forth. As a result, it has been rather common to think of heaven as being up in the sky somewhere. As man has gone out into space further and further and has not seen any obvious evidence of God or the angels, there has been a tendency either to push heaven further and further away (as many Christians have done) or to deny the existence of such a heaven altogether, as the Russian astronaut did.

However, it might be helpful to ask ourselves, what does the word "up" mean? How far up, for instance, does the Bible represent heaven being? It is true that there are many Christian hymns that talk about "somewhere beyond the blue," "beyond the sunset," "I've got a home in glory land, way beyond the blue." But what does the Bible say about how far up heaven is?

If we look in the book of Genesis, chapter 28, we find a dream of Jacob. He has just left home,

leaving his father and mother to escape the anger of his jealous brother. He is traveling to live with a distant uncle, probably leaving home for the first time, and perhaps very concerned about his future. On the way he stops for the night near Bethel and sleeps out in the open. "s he sleeps he begins to dream, and in his dream he sees a ladder. Let me read you the passage from Genesis 28:12-13:

And he had a dream, and behold the ladder was set up on the earth with its top reaching to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it, and behold the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham, the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants."

It is interesting to see here that as Jacob dreams, he sees God standing at the top of the ladder and speaking to him. We might ask ourselves, How does God appear in something like this? We are not told, but elsewhere in the book of Genesis when God appears, he appears in human form, with human size. Here in this dream Jacob is able to see this human form at the top of the ladder. He is told that it is God, so I guess we don't have to wonder how he knew it was God, but at least he was able to see the form. If you ask yourself, how far off can I see a human form and recognize that it is a person, the answer is, not very far. So this dream pictures heaven as not being very far up. There is a ladder going up and Jacob can see someone standing at the top of the ladder, and he can hear someone talking to him.

Now of course this is a dream, and we've all had dreams in which unrealistic things happen. It might also be the case that something which in reality is quite strange is represented in a familiar way in the dream so that Jacob could understand it. But by making such an assumption we can avoid paying attention to almost anything the Bible says, so instead we will assume it means what it says, and see where that leads. Taking the dream picture as it stands, we get the idea that heaven is not so far away. We don't know how many rungs the ladder had, but it is apparently far less than a mile long.

There is likewise the passage describing Jesus' ascension in Acts 1:9. There we are told of Jesus, "*after he had said these things, he was lifted up as they were looking on and a cloud received him out of their sight.*" Some have supposed that as Jesus set off for heaven here, that heaven is many, many light years away, that he went out through the atmosphere, through outer space, until he finally reached heaven. But the picture itself is that he disappears into a cloud. Now, of course, when we send off our spaceships from Cape Kennedy, it is not unusual for the ship to disappear into a cloud; it would be even more common except that we don't often launch them when it is cloudy. One might argue that we are looking at travel to something a long way off when Jesus sets out for heaven, but I don't think so.

I think it is rather significant that this whole idea of clouds appears again and again in the biblical pictures of our interaction with heaven. Not only did Jesus disappear into a cloud at his ascension, but he is going to come on the clouds when he returns. A cloud overshadows him at his transfiguration. Moses and the Israelites were led by a cloud in the wilderness. We sometimes call this cloud the glory cloud, or the *Shekinah* glory. In this cloud phenomenon, I think, we see something that is apparently rather close down to the earth and yet seems in some

way to be heavenly. Heaven is apparently up, but not very far up.

The only passage I can think of which might suggest that heaven is way out there somewhere is in Isaiah 14. The king of Babylon speaks of himself as setting up his throne above the stars of God. This might imply that heaven is at a great distance, beyond the stars, but perhaps it is only claiming that the king's throne will be more glorious than the stars and planets. Whether or not this passage suggests that heaven is at an astronomical distance, there are a number of others that seem to indicate that (at least the closer) parts of heaven are very close by, and that sometimes the direction "up" is not even necessary. Let's have a look at a few of these.

Is the Third Heaven Necessarily Up?

In 2 Kings 6 the prophet Elisha has been defending the Northern Kingdom of Israel by telling its king what the king of Syria is planning in the way of military actions. The king of Syria has repeatedly tried to ambush the Israelites, but it has not worked because Elisha somehow knows what the Syrian forces are going to do in advance. The Syrian king decides to ambush Elisha. (Just why he thinks this will work -- when Elisha knows what he is thinking in his own bedroom -- is beyond me!) But in any case, the king sends troops and they successfully surround the town of Dothan, where Elisha and his servant are spending the night.

When the servant comes out on the wall the next morning and sees all these troops, he is terrified. There are doubtless many fearsome things about warfare, but one of these would be to see a lot of angry armed men awaiting you outside a city. Even knowing you have pretty good walls protecting the city wouldn't be much comfort if you suspect that the inhabitants would sooner throw you over the walls than let the army outside attack their city. So the servant runs in and tells Elisha what is going on. Elisha's answer is "Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Probably the servant wonders who "those who are with us" are. But Elisha prays in verse 17, "'O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see,' and the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he saw, and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

The mountain mentioned here is presumably the hill on which the city of Dothan was set. If so, then the hill, surrounded as it was by the Syrian forces, was filled with heavenly forces ready to defend Elisha. Elisha's servant could not normally see these forces, but by God's power he was made able to do so. Here he is seeing the armies of heaven. Now of course, one could argue that this doesn't tell us anything about where heaven is because they have come from heaven to earth to defend Elisha, just as the Syrian armies have come from Syria to attack him. This may be so, but one might equally well argue that heaven is in some sense all around us, and heaven's forces ever ready to defend us, but we can't see them unless our eyes are opened. Though this passage is no guarantee that heaven is all around us, it certainly is consistent with such a view.

So too are Jesus' post-resurrection appearances in Luke 24 and John 20. Here Jesus appears to his disciples while they are in a closed, probably locked room (the Greek is ambiguous). Basically the picture is that the disciples were afraid of being arrested, so they are in these rooms out of sight, probably with the door bolted to make sure that if the enemy arrived they couldn't

get in too quickly. But here is Jesus and he appears to them. Although it has been common to think that somehow Jesus came through the wall or the closed door, the passage doesn't really say. Jesus somehow appears in their midst. If we are to understand that Jesus is coming from heaven, then apparently heaven is near enough that he just shows up and disappears. I am going to suggest further on that this helps us understand something about the nature of heaven. But these passages are not conclusive either. One might perfectly well argue, "Well, heaven is still way out there somewhere, but there is this power of invisibility, and the armies of heaven are normally invisible, and a person's resurrection body can be invisible whenever he wants it to be. So Jesus came down from heaven first (or hadn't gone there yet), and he is moving around on earth, invisible most of the time, but he appears just when he wants to. The armies of heaven are down here on earth on assignment, but they are invisible except to those whose eyes God has opened."

However, there are three passages that speak of God's appearances at Mount Sinai that seem to indicate rather strongly that heaven is right around us in some important sense. Let's have a look at these. The first is found in Nehemiah 9:13, a psalm-type passage in which the Levites are praising God for what he has done. "*Thou didst come down on Mount Sinai and didst speak with them from heaven.*" If we take the natural understanding of this, it would suggest that when God was on Mt Sinai, there was heaven as well, so that he simultaneously spoke with them from heaven and was down on Sinai. It is true that this is not the only way the passage could be understood. For instance, I can say Walter Cronkite came into my TV set and spoke with me from New York. That would not be saying that my TV set and New York are the same place. Yes, it is possible that our passage could be understood this way, though it doesn't seem to me to be as natural as the former suggestion. In fact, my way of speaking about Walter being in my TV set would strike most English speakers as rather strange.

However, there are other passages that continue in the same vein, and I think (if anything) they press more strongly toward heaven being at Sinai, at least at that time. In Deuteronomy 4, where Moses is recounting what happened at Sinai, he says something of the same sort: He says in Deuteronomy 4:32-33, "*Indeed, ask now concerning the former days that were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, inquire from one end of the heavens to the other, has anything been done like this great thing? Or has anything be heard like it, has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you heard it and survived?*" Here we see a picture of God speaking from the midst of the fire, while the Nehemiah passage pictures him as speaking from heaven. Same incident. Deuteronomy represents him speaking from the midst of the fire, suggesting that in fact this fire was there on the mountain at Sinai, that God was speaking from that and yet he was speaking from heaven. One might still object, "Well, yes, but Walter Cronkite is speaking from New York and he is speaking from the TV set, so we are really not saying that they are the same place, but that some kind of transmission is going on."

Well, let's look at one more passage, and that is found in Exodus 20:21-22 -- the actual narration of the incident at Sinai. The people are afraid of God's appearance on Sinai, the thunder and the lightning, and the trumpet, and so they say to Moses, "You speak to us yourself, and we will listen. Don't let God speak to us lest we die!" Moses then responds, "Don't be afraid, for God has come in order to test you, so that the fear of God may be with you so that you may not sin."

In verses 21 and 22, we are told, "*so the people stood at a distance while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.*" Now here are the people at a distance, here is the mountain, here is Moses going up the mountain approaching the thick cloud on the mountain where God was (explicitly) there, and then verse 22, "*Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Thus shall you say to the sons of Israel, you yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven...'*" So here God is speaking from heaven, but the narrator of Exodus says Moses went to where God was, obviously on the mountain.

Various Views on the Location of Heaven

Well, we have looked rather quickly at the kind of data that the Bible gives us regarding where heaven is. What I would like to do now is look at some varied suggestions that have been made regarding the location of heaven and see how they fare in relation to what the Bible says about this.

The Attic Model. Let's look first at what we might call the attic model of heaven. This view was probably held by many believers at one time or another for many centuries back in history. Basically the idea was that the sky is some kind of a roof over our head, and that angels come down through holes, either flying down to the surface or lowering a ladder or something of that sort. I don't think there is too much question that people have held that view, and it certainly is common today to find liberal theologians saying that's what the Bible teaches, even though these liberal theologians don't believe that's what the actual case is.

I would say there are several serious problems with this view, although it perhaps has the advantage that there is a passage about a ladder between heaven and earth. One of the big problems is that it requires the roof to be awfully low! The roof must be low so that you can have a relatively short ladder to get up to it, and yet surely any of the ancients knew that there were mountains that were very high compared with the places where God was understood to have appeared. For instance, Jacob -- seeing the ladder at Bethel with God standing at the top -- must certainly have known that Mount Hermon, about 50 miles to the north, was a far higher mountain than Bethel, and yet here he sees this incident with no enormously long ladder. So I think even this one case suggests that what we are seeing is not quite what the liberals have suggested. Likewise, if this picture was really the view of the Bible writers, why is it presented so vaguely in the Bible? You can certainly find very many writings from antiquity that definitely speak about a hard, dome sky, that definitely speak about the sky resting on the mountains, about gates in the sky for the sun to come through so that it can go across the sky and out the other side, and other things of this sort. You don't have such material in the Bible, and that fact that it is not there may very well suggest that we have read something into the Bible that it does not really teach at all.

Notice also that this attic model does not fit the Sinai narrative very well either -- where you have God coming down on the mountain, you have these clouds, and so forth. With the attic model, one must also add the idea of invisibility, because you still have the angelic army around Elisha that couldn't be seen. He doesn't say, "Now Lord, let down the ladders and send your troops down here so that my servant won't be worried." Instead he asks that the servant's eyes be

opened so that he can see these forces that are there already. Thus, to hold an attic model, one must add as a separate category this idea of invisibility -- that the heavenly army climbed down ladders or descended by flying, but they were invisible, so no one saw them. This model, I say, has been held by liberals rather regularly and firmly, yet when the Scripture is examined in detail, it has some very severe difficulties. I have prepared another talk on the whole area of the Biblical firmament -- is it a dome or something else? -- where I deal with some of these problems, so I am not going to go further in that direction in this talk on the location of heaven.

The Way-Out Model. Let's look at a second model. This model, I would say, has come to be one of the standard Bible-believing reactions to the Biblical material as we have come to see in recent centuries that the universe is quite a bit larger than most people had thought in earlier times. As men have begun to build telescopes and see that the stars are really much further away than the ancients had thought, the Evangelical has often tended to adopt what we might call a "way-out" model for heaven. In this view, heaven is beyond the stars, beyond the galaxies, perhaps beyond the universe, or perhaps hidden away inside some dark gas cloud a bit closer. Some of the features of this model arise by using passages about God dwelling in thick darkness or such, which I think probably refers to the darkness of the Holy of Holies, rather than a dark gas cloud. In any case, the idea is that heaven is way out there somewhere. I have heard various speakers and writers trying to suggest which direction heaven might be, how far away, and even suggesting particular locations. Others say, "No, it is beyond the universe, millions or billions of light years away."

This model certainly has some problems in handling the Sinai narratives. One must say, "Well, God was at Sinai in some sense, but heaven was not there in any sense." And yet the narratives speak again and again of God speaking from heaven, so that one must resort to the Walter Cronkite type explanation to handle them. I believe a couple of models I am going to suggest in a bit really do explain how the concept of heaven and the omnipresence of God (that he is present everywhere) are closely related, and how God can simultaneously be speaking from heaven and yet be speaking from Sinai, but the distant heaven model really doesn't fit this material. Like the attic model, the way-out model must add the factor of invisibility as a separate factor. In both cases one must deal with the army at Dothan and angelic visibility as some separate category. The angels not only have to travel all this long distance from heaven, but they travel down invisibly and then they turn off their invisibility and show up at the right place. In the two other models I would like to mention, we don't have to add invisibility as a separate category.

This way-out model likewise has what we might call a transport problem. From the biblical accounts in general, it appears that (by and large) the contact between heaven and earth is quite rapid. It doesn't seem to be something that takes a long time -- "today, you will be with me in Paradise." We could say, "Oh, well, God has no problem with instantaneous transport -- like Star Trek or such you get into a warp and 'zap' you are right where you want to be." I don't have time to explain all of that, if you haven't seen any of the numerous Star Trek episodes. I can think of only one passage that speaks of some delay in someone coming from heaven to earth, and that delay was occasioned not so much by the distance as by angelic interference. I am speaking of the incident in Daniel chapter 10, where the angel coming to speak to Daniel is

resisted for 21 days by the Prince of Persia, apparently a fallen angel of some sort. So the Bible does not suggest that there is any time lapse regarding transport from heaven to earth, nor even any great distance involved.

Well, there are two other models which avoid, I think, some of the problems we have seen with the attic model and the way-out model. Let's take a look at these other two. I did not invent these views, but I think they make good sense of the biblical material on the location of heaven. I can't tell you for sure which of these two is really the better view, or which is the correct view, if either of them is, but I think that both of these show us that the biblical picture of heaven is more sophisticated than unbelievers would like us to think it is.

The Interaction Model. Let's call the first of these the interaction model. It was suggested by Dr. Irwin Moon, who was then head of the Moody Institute of Science, a professional physicist who devoted his life to preparing Moody Science films. His view is based on the fact that the only way in which we see, hear, feel, or experience our universe around us is by means of the interaction of forces. We see each other and objects around us because these objects either emit or reflect light. And we see them because that light not only interacts with them by bouncing off or being sent out from them, but also because the light interacts with our eyes, causing signals to be sent to our brains. Just what happens in the brain scientists don't know, and though theologians may have a few extra hints, we don't know either, but that's how we see -- by interaction.

Likewise we also hear by interaction of forces, but a different set of interactions. It is an electromagnetic interaction that we see by. Light and several other shorter-wave things like x-rays and such are electromagnetic waves; so too are longer-wave things like radio waves. We see by means of these forces, but we hear by a fairly similar set of forces, also basically electromagnetic, which occur between the molecules in the air. You see, most of our hearing is done through the air, and in that case one object is sending the sound -- whether it be a fire siren or automobile or someone speaking -- the sender includes a device that vibrates rapidly and sets the air into wave motion. These waves spread out like ripples on a pond when you throw a pebble into it, and they come over to where you are, go into your ear, and set some machinery vibrating inside your ear that sends signals to your brain so that you hear. So there are interactions. The interactions are largely the bumping or other forces between molecules causing them to vibrate and spread a vibrating wave through the air, so we also hear by interactions.

We touch also, we feel, by interaction. When you feel a solid object, what you are doing is trying to make your fingers press against it, and it is resisting the pressure. The reason the object resists, and your fingers resist, and they don't pass through one another, is that the electromagnetic forces that hold solids together (including your fingers) do not allow the material either to be stretched or squeezed more than a certain amount -- unless you apply enough force to break the thing.

So all our ways of observing -- seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, etc. -- and all our ways of experimenting are based on the interaction of forces. Now in our universe we know of four different types of forces with which we interact and have been able to detect and study. We call

these forces electromagnetism, gravity, the strong nuclear force, and the weak force. We have already spoken about electromagnetism a bit; nearly all of our bodily senses operate through interaction with this force. Gravity is also very important to us, though it is not the major way we learn about our surroundings (it is significant in regard to detecting up and down, and thus in balancing). But it does keep us on our planet, and air on our planet so we can breathe. It keeps our planet near enough to the sun so that we get enough heat to survive. The strong nuclear force holds the nucleus of each atom together. The fourth force, the weak interaction, we don't know quite as much about; let's just say it holds the neutron together.

Now we could perfectly well have another universe right where we are, a universe that didn't have the same set of interactions that we have, and that didn't interact with us at all. It would have its own interactions and we would have ours, but there might be no cross-interaction at all. That could mean that you might be sitting here reading this article and in this other universe a motorcycle rider might be driving right through you and you wouldn't hear or feel a thing! You couldn't hear him, see him, smell him, feel him, etc. Thus, it is possible in principle to have a number of universes occupying the same space, one right on top of the other, mixed in with one another, but have no way of detecting the others because the forces between our universe and the other universe do not interact.

Well, Irwin Moon's suggestion is this. Heaven is right around us, but it has a different set of forces that don't interact with our forces, or at least with any of our sensory apparatus. In addition, the beings who live in this other universe (heaven) have an ability to turn on or turn off their interaction with the forces in our universe. So by turning on the interaction they become visible to us, and by turning it off they become invisible.

Notice how this interaction model handles Sinai. Here is heaven and it is around our earth in some way. Parts of it, in fact, most of it, may be up relative to us, so that travel from heaven to earth is often down. But some of it may be on the same level as we are. So when God comes to Sinai, he basically turns on an interaction and then he, or some manifestation of him, is visible to the people. Though he is equally present on mountains in the United States and elsewhere, there is nothing to be seen in those places because he has not manifested himself there. But he manifests himself on Sinai, and yet he speaks from heaven on Sinai because heaven is there at Sinai and he is in heaven as well. Heaven is this other sphere, this other universe, and we are not in it because we don't interact with it. But when God has this interaction turned on, he interacts with us and we with him, and there is then some sense in which the person interacting with him might be said to be in heaven. Perhaps this is one reason Paul is so vague on whether he was bodily in heaven in 2 Corinthians 12. He didn't know what his state was, just that he had been carried into this other sphere. We can see how this interaction model would explain the incident with Elisha's servant as well. Here are these angelic beings with horses and chariots all around the hill on which Dothan is located. They are not going to turn on a general interaction, so the Assyrians never see them, but Elisha's servant is given the ability to interact with them temporarily. Then he is able to see this army all around.

Notice, then, that the interaction model has a built-in invisibility. You don't have to tack it on to the model, as you do in the attic model and the way-out model. It also has got what one might

call permeability built in. Jesus, in coming to appear to his disciples in a closed room, could perfectly well have walked through a wall (door, floor, ceiling, etc.) and then turned on his interaction with our universe when he gets inside. So, all of these features will fit what we see in the biblical picture regarding heaven.

Likewise this model will explain the rather fuzzy cloudiness we often see in connection with appearances of God and angels (Sinai, the transfiguration, ascension, second coming, etc.). It may be that while the interaction is turned on, that illumination from the "other side" now seeps into our side. This illumination would look rather strange to us, since it is coming into our world from an unseen source, and it may appear either to block a light that would be beyond it in our world (producing a darkening) or to produce a light where there wasn't any before. So during the daytime, it looks like a cloud blocking light, but at night it looks like a glowing cloud, just the sort of phenomenon we see described in connection with the guiding pillar in the wilderness.

Now there is a problem with this model we should mention, perhaps not a real problem. I would call it a simplicity problem. With this model, one needs to have some sort of switch, some way of turning the interaction between our world and the other on and off. Thus, at first Elisha's servant can see nothing of the other world; then a switch is turned on in his head, and now he can see the heavenly army. At first Jesus cannot be seen when he comes into the room, but then he turns on the switch and he is visible. So that would be about the only problem that I see with this model. I think it has less problems in fitting the data than either of the two previous models we have suggested, the attic model and the way-out model.

The Dimensional Model. There is a fourth model, which we might call the dimensional model. This, I think, fits the biblical data about as well as the interaction model and does not have to have the switch. How does this model differ from the interaction model? The interaction model postulates another world or universe that is in the same three-dimensional space as our is, but that has a different set of forces that do not normally interact with ours. The dimensional model suggests the existence of at least one more spatial dimension than the three we know about, and that heaven is in this fourth dimension. Now it is rather hard to explain this without diagrams, but we will give it a try. This works best by trying to imagine that we live in two dimensions and see what the difference of adding a third dimension would be.

There is a nice little book that you should read sometime to help you visualize this. It is fictional, but not exactly a novel -- sort of a short story -- and somewhat humorous. The title is *Flatland* and it was written by a mathematician-theologian Edwin A. Abbott late in the nineteenth century. But last I heard it was still in print. It tells a story about a group of beings who live in Flatland, a world of only two spatial dimensions. Imagine living in a sheet of paper, since that has two dimensions. You have to stay in the sheet (it can be quite large, or even infinitely extended, in those two dimensions, though). You can't see out of it, or think out of it. That's what you grew up in, that's the only thing you have ever known. But of course we are outside of it, so we know what three dimensions are. Now imagine a visitor coming from three dimensions to visit this Flatland. That's what Abbott has happen in his story. He has all these different sorts of people who live in two dimensions and one day one of them is visited by a being from three dimensions. Well, of course, a three dimensional being can't make himself two

dimensional and so get into the smaller space. But such a being can come down and interact with the two-dimensional beings. For example, our floor is a two-dimensional object, but we step on it and so the sole of our shoe is now in this two-dimensional space. The rest of us just sticks up in the three-dimensional space above it. Well, Abbott had these two-dimensional beings all shaped like triangles, squares, hexagons, and such, all flat objects, but the visitor was a sphere. When this sphere came down into the two-dimensional space, he first appeared as a dot. Then as he comes down a little further, he appears to be a small circle. The circle then gets bigger and bigger until it is the same size across as the sphere. If the sphere keeps moving downward through the space, then it now gets smaller until it is a dot again, and then disappears.

The story Abbott tells is really a lot of fun, and the writer draws some spiritual applications from it. I'm sure I got some of my ideas from this dimensional model of his. Basically the picture here is that heaven is in a four (or higher) dimensional space of which our world is only a three-dimensional part. We cannot point or look or even think very well in this fourth dimension. Some mathematicians, though, can think about four dimensions. Some can even think about twenty dimensions, and they can work out all sorts of geometry problems somewhat like the things we struggled with in plane geometry -- except that their problems are in 4, 5, 15 or 20 dimensions, but I am not one of them! Some of them even claim to be able to visualize in four dimensions. Not me. Whatever, the picture here is, heaven is a space of larger dimensions of which we are just three dimensions. Heaven has got 4 or 5 or 10 or who knows how many dimensions, so a visitor from heaven will just come over to where our space is located. Then the visitor will step into our space and suddenly he appears. He steps out of our space and just as suddenly disappears.

Now we can easily visualize this for a visitor from three dimensions visiting a space of two dimensions. Just take a piece of paper, if you like, and hold it flat, and that will be the two-dimensional space. If you like, you can draw a little house there, say a rectangle. Now imagine some two-dimensional person living in that house. You are going to enter their house without going through the doors or walls or such. Well, since it is a two-dimensional house, all the doors and walls and windows are in the surface of the paper. When you enter, you can come in from above it, and they won't have any roof or such on that side since it is outside their space and they don't know anything about that direction. So you can come inside, and appear suddenly inside the house just by touching the paper with your finger. And you can make your finger disappear from their space just by moving it upward a very tiny bit from the surface of the paper. You can move over to another location above this space and enter it by touching the paper again. What you have done is moved from one spot in the two-dimensional space to another without passing through any of the intervening locations in that two-dimensional space. So, for instance, you move from outside the house to inside the house without passing through any of the walls, doors, or windows.

So at least in two dimensions, we can easily visualize a way in which the resurrected Jesus might have done the same thing when he appeared to the disciples in the closed room. He had appeared to the disciples in Emmaus a couple of hours earlier and then just disappeared. Now he just appears in the room in Jerusalem. He does this by coming in from the fourth (spatial) dimension.

In our houses, no matter how well they are built, they are not constructed so as to have walls blocking the fourth direction or dimension, because we can't see it, point at it, or even (very easily) visualize it.

This particular model, the dimensional model, handles the Sinai situation in a similar way to that of the interaction model. God causes some manifestation of himself to appear in our space – and therefore we can see it – by moving it "down" from the fourth direction until it intersects our space. By moving it back "up" in this fourth direction just an infinitesimal distance, it is out of our space and so disappears. We can see something here that might very well fit with the picture of the last judgment given in the book of Revelation, chapter 20, where it tells us that the heavens (probably sky) will roll up like a scroll, that heaven and earth will flee away and no place will be found for them. We can imagine that all of us are moved just a quarter of an inch in this fourth direction, and suddenly we are out of our universe. It has just disappeared, just like turning off a TV set, when the picture shrinks down to a dot and disappears. So the whole world around us, all that we have ever known, just disappears. We are moved over a bit and out of our space.

This model, as I said, handles Sinai. God is actually in heaven (a four-dimensional space), but yet he is also on earth, so to speak, because the two are touching. In this way, they touch at all points in our space. It handles the matter of Elisha's servant, though you have to turn on the effect in a rather strange way. Here is Elisha's servant, and Elisha prays to God to open his eyes. God "opens his eyes" by moving them a millionth of an inch in this fourth direction, and now he can see things that he could not see so long as he was confined to our three-dimensional space. Whether God actually did it this way I do not know. But this is a way we may suggest how these things could have been done. Moving in and out of the three-dimensional space makes an object first visible and then invisible to beings who are confined in the space. Moving out and then back into the three-dimensional space makes a traveller able and then unable to see the larger four-dimensional space outside. Notice then that this model has invisibility built in. It also has permeability built in, so to speak, in the sense that there is always this fourth direction into which we cannot see, move, or barely think. So we cannot build anything to protect against movement from this fourth direction. Thus God and any being who is free to move in this fourth dimension (angels, Satan, demons) can see inside our heads, so to speak. He can be inside us without having to look in from outside. Rather scary, frankly! Yet comforting, when we realize that the Lord is in control of all this, and we are accepted by him if we are resting in what Jesus has done. If we are in right relation to him, he is there to protect us, and nothing that occurs (no matter how disastrous it seems) is out of the category of all things working together for good to those who love God.

So this model has built in invisibility and built in permeability. Jesus can appear inside a closed room without having to come through the doors, windows, walls, ceiling or floor. This is not a matter of coming in through some such route and then turning on the interaction, as in the interaction model. Rather Jesus comes in from the fourth direction, and can appear at any point in the room without having come through any other point in the room..

The clouds likewise follow very naturally in this model. These "clouds" are places where light

from this other dimension is allowed to come into our three-dimensional space, which it would otherwise not normally do. God has moved us over a little bit or moved the other dimension a little bit so that there is an interaction taking place. I think this dimensional model does all the same things that the interaction model does. It has a slight advantage that the transition from the unseen realm to the seen, from heaven to earth, is automatic for a being who can travel in all four directions, but impossible for a being who cannot travel in this fourth direction. The model has the disadvantage of being somewhat harder to visualize than the interaction model.

Conclusions

Well, we have discussed where heaven is. I would have to say that I think our universe is a rather complicated place, and we don't know for sure where heaven is. The Bible is very explicit that heaven is a real place. It is the place where God dwells in the sense of manifesting himself, appearing to the angels and apparently to those who have died trusting in the Lord and have gone to be with him. It is not the same thing as our atmosphere nor outer space. It is once called the "third heaven," apparently to distinguish it from these other two. It does not appear to be very far up, though the preposition "up" is frequently used with it. Of course, whatever place it would be that could contain God in some sense would have to be infinitely large, and therefore all but a minute part of it is going to be up from where we are (i.e., further from the center of Earth than we are). So we can see how the preposition "up" might come into play. But travel to the closest part of it might not be up at all, and to nearby parts might not be very far up. I would suggest that the interaction and dimensional models have the least problems in fitting the biblical data, and both of these suggest that the Russian astronaut's trip into space is of no value for finding out where God is. The astronaut has in fact misunderstood the biblical picture.

I think we can also see an answer to the liberal theologians who somehow always manage to picture the ancients as very primitive, even stupid, much of the time. Doubtless the ancients had some superstitions we do not, though we may have some they did not. But it seems to me that the Bible does not share in the cosmological mistakes of the ancients. Rather, the biblical picture of the location of heaven is very sophisticated, and it is consistent with the discoveries in physics during the last century or so as we have begun to discover what types of forces there are, how the basic forces interact with one another, and that we can have situations in which one type of object does not interact with another because they are not subject to the same forces. I really didn't discuss this matter much.

In mathematics we have begun to think through the implications of having spaces of various numbers of dimensions, with different sorts of curvature, and so forth. Besides mathematical theorizing, we have begun to see that some of this may be applicable to the actual universe we live in, as Albert Einstein suggested nearly a century ago in his General Theory of Relativity. Einstein suggested that the presence of matter causes space to bend. When you have a little bit of matter, you get a little bit of bending, but when you have a lot of matter in a small volume, the bending can be very great, even to the extent of bending space back on itself to form a sort of closed sack, a black hole. Einstein's model suggested the existence of at least four dimensions, and his theory has been well supported by observations since he first propounded it. Other cosmologists are now suggesting as many as ten spatial dimensions.

Where is heaven? I think the Bible suggests that heaven is a place at least as complicated as the world we know about, maybe far more complicated. It is big, and it is around us very close. But being around us doesn't mean that we can automatically get there, because we do not have the ability, the power, or the knowledge to be able to travel in this fourth direction, or to be able to turn on the right interactions. Only God has got that power, and he will give it to those he judges are fit to go to heaven.

We should say a word about this here, as we don't want to leave this as merely an academic exercise. The Bible says only a certain type of people are going to heaven -- the righteous. The wicked will not be there. You might well ask, "How righteous do you need to be to go to heaven? If you are more righteous than average, will you go to heaven? If you are more righteous than the person next door, will you go to heaven? If you have done more good deeds than bad deeds will you go to heaven? What is it?"

Well, the Bible says some scary things about this. The Bible says God looked down from heaven to see if there was anyone that was seeking him, and found that none were seeking him, they had all gone astray. You will find this developed in some detail in Psalm 14. When God looks at what we are really like (remember, he can see inside us, behind the masks and facades we put up to hide ourselves from others), he sees that we are not as good as we would often like to think. The Bible says again and again that there is no one righteous, not one. We are all like our ancestor who turned away from God at the beginning. Now, we may be righteous by our own standards, if we fudge them a little bit. We may say, "Well, I'm better than he is," or "I'm upstanding, and not like the scum who does this or that sin which I don't do." But God looks inside us, and he can see all our motivations. He sees that, again and again, with every action we take, there are things about why we do it that are not what they ought to be. God has set us a standard for righteousness that is pleasing to him, not because it is arbitrary, but because it is how we ought to be. He commanded us to love God with all our heart, all our mind, all our soul. That is, we ought to love God with 100% of what we are. He doesn't say we should love God as much as we can, because we might not be able to do something because we don't want to do it. As we look honestly at our own lives, we see that we don't love God with all our heart, mind, and soul. Otherwise we would certainly be thinking about him a lot more than we do. Otherwise every decision we make would put him in the central place in that choice. We certainly don't do that.

The other commandment that summarizes our duty to God is that we must love our neighbor as we love ourselves. This sounds like it is a lot easier, since we only have to love them on a lower level, like we love ourselves, not with all our heart. But when we look at our actions in this light, we again see that we don't do it. When we are hurting, when we've got a headache, when we are short of money, when something disastrous has happened to us, we really feel bad, we're really concerned until this gets straightened out, we really put a lot of time and effort into resolving the problem. But when someone else is hurting, we may be somewhat sympathetic, but not like when we are the ones hurting.

So, basically all those promises of the Bible that speak about the righteous inheriting eternal life,

going to heaven, they don't apply to us. If we are depending on our own righteousness, we don't qualify. It is all those passages about the wicked that apply to us. If we are depending on our own righteousness, we are in bad shape. God is a God of justice, a God who cannot lie, a God who cannot pretend that wickedness is righteousness.

But he is also a God of mercy! He has made a way by which he can be perfectly righteous and still forgive those who don't measure up to his commandments. He made it possible for him to count them as though they were righteous, and one day to make them completely righteous so that they would be fit to go to heaven and live with him. How could he do this? Well, you see, there are the sins that we have done, and those that we are still going to do before we die. They have to be paid for. Then there is the righteousness that we owe to God as those who have been made by him, that we have not provided, and won't provide before we die. That has to be provided. Now God is a God of truth and righteousness. He cannot forget these things, nor ignore them, nor say that they don't matter. So God himself, the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, became a human. As a human, he lived a life of complete obedience to all his own laws. He loved God with all his heart, mind and soul. He loved his neighbor as himself. If we trust in Jesus as our savior, our rescuer, our deliverer, then his righteousness will be counted as though it were our righteousness. When we stand before God in judgment, he will see the righteousness of Jesus as having paid the debt of righteousness that we owe. And then Christ died on the cross, suffering in several hours a punishment that would take us forever to suffer. In doing this, he made it possible for us, when we trust in him, to have his punishment count as though it were ours.

But God does not intend to leave us to continue sinning forever, though our sins have been paid for and our righteousness supplied by Jesus. If we are trusting in Jesus as our savior, God has begun already to change us on the inside. He has sent the Holy Spirit to work within us, so that we are already beginning to want to do what Jesus would have us do, what God has commanded us to do. One day, when we go to stand before God, we will be entirely changed, and we will ourselves be righteous, as God intended. We look forward to that day, when he will change us, when he will not only give us a body that is able to enter heaven, that will be able to leave this sphere we now live in, but he will give us a soul and spirit that will be fit to live with God in the new heavens and new earth, where we will have great joy, the joy that we were designed to have, and that we can only vaguely imagine in the greatest joys we ever have here on earth.

So. We have tried to discuss here where heaven is, for which we do not have a complete answer, but we have some suggestions. Certainly this world is a very complicated place, but it is not necessary for us to understand it completely in order to live in it. Likewise heaven. We don't need to know exactly where it is in order to get there, because it will not be up to us to find it or to conduct ourselves there. It is far more important that we know how to get there than it is to know just where it is. Jesus says, "I am the way." How do we get to heaven? He is the way. Whoever trusts in him will have eternal life, will be in heaven with God.

Let's pray. Our Father, we pray that you will use these words and use our study of your Word that we might come to trust you more and more. We pray that if there be anyone hearing (or reading) this who is not trusting in Jesus alone for salvation that you might give them no peace

until they come to find the Prince of Peace, until they come to find peace with you through forgiveness in Jesus Christ, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We ask these things in his name, Amen.