

THE HABITATION OF GOD

The testimonies that God dwells in heaven are numerous. Here are a few:

Ps. 123:1 - A Song of degrees. Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens.

1 Kings 8:27 - But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?

1 Kings 8:30 - And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive.

Luke 11:2 - And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven.

1 Tim. 6:16 - Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

However, one of the most explicit revelations of God's abode is in Ps. 33:13-14.

Ps. 33:13-14 - The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth.

“place” – *makon* - properly a *fixture*, that is, a *basis*; generally a *place*, especially as an *abode*.

“habitation” – *yashab* - to dwell, remain, sit, abide. (Qal) sit down, to be set, to remain, stay; have one's abode.

This strongly suggests that Yahweh has a fixed abode in “the heaven of heavens”, i.e. a system like the solar system which is called “heaven” in Gen. 1. The ‘sun’ of this system is too bright for human beings to survive (1 Tim. 6:16), as is the brightness of the Deity Himself (Ex. 33:20) in that habitation.

The graphic scene of a discussion in God's abode about what to do to induce Ahab to go up to Ramoth-Gilead and be killed is also helpful in appreciating that Yahweh operates out of a fixed abode.

2 Chron. 18:18 - Again he said, Therefore hear the word of the LORD; I saw the LORD sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right

hand and on his left. And the LORD said, Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead? And one spake saying after this manner, and another saying after that manner. Then there came out a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will entice him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go out, and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the LORD said, Thou shalt entice him, and thou shalt also prevail: go out, and do even so.

Would any dare to suggest that this scene is fictional or allegorical and not real? We know Yahweh sits in a throne (Ps. 47:8; Heb. 12:2; Rev. 3:21; 22:1) and that Christ now sits next to Him. The scene depicts the angels gathering before Yahweh who consults with them as to how the task might be undertaken. This also provides an insight into the way Christ will deal with the Saints in the future Age. The immortal Saints, like the angels, will not be automatons but intelligent beings who will be asked to use their much improved intellect to suggest ways of achieving Divine goals. It is evident in this scene that there is a place from which Yahweh operates that has firm foundations.

Ps. 11:4 takes this a step further and suggests the throne is in a Temple in heaven as indeed the throne of Christ will be in the Temple of the Age to come.

Ps. 11:4 - The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD'S throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men.

“HEAVEN” IN SCRIPTURE

Before proceeding further, it is essential to spend a little time to understand how the terms “heaven”, “heavens” and “heaven of heavens” are used in Scripture.

The following selection from the book “The Deception of Theistic Evolution” by Bro. Matt Davies and Bro. Mark Allfree is very helpful in understanding the various meanings of the term “heaven” in Scripture.

God dwells in heaven

We begin from first principles. The scriptures teach us that God Himself dwells in heaven:

- “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: *for God is in heaven*, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few” (Ecc. 5:2).
- “Hear thou in *heaven thy dwelling place*, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as do thy people Israel; and that they may know that this house, which I have builded, is called by thy name” (1 Kings 8:43).
- “The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD’s throne is *in heaven*: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men” (Ps. 11:4).
- “He that sitteth *in the heavens* shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision” (Ps. 2:4).

The scriptures also teach us that God is “from everlasting to everlasting” (Ps. 90:2). He is “immortal, invisible, the only wise God” (1 Timothy 1:17). This being so, we may reasonably conclude that the heaven in which God dwells *must also have always been*. When, therefore, we read in Genesis 1:1 that “*in the beginning* God created *the heaven* and the earth”, it follows that the heaven referred to that had a beginning is a different heaven from the heaven in which God dwells.

That this is so is confirmed by the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple, in which he says, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens *cannot contain thee*; how much less this house that I have builded?” (1 Kings 8:27). We further conclude from Solomon’s words that there is not only a “heaven” which cannot contain God, but also “the heaven of heavens” which cannot contain God. This point is of great significance, and is confirmed by other scriptures:

- “Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD’s thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is” (Deut. 10:14).
- “Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee” (Neh. 9:6).

In Hebrew “the heaven of heavens” is in the construct state and therefore a string of nouns (in this case only two) used to describe one single thing. “The heaven of heavens” is separate from the “heaven”. This is a similar style of language to:

- “The holy of holies” (Ex. 26:34).
- “Servant of servants” (Gen. 9:25).
- “Sabbath of sabbaths” (Ex. 31:15).
- “God of gods” (Deut. 10:17).
- “Vanity of vanities” (Ecc. 1:2).
- “Song of songs” (Song of Solomon 1:1).
- “King of kings” (Ezra 7:12).

All of these phrases denote the highest order of the particular things being described. Other, lesser, things of the same description are not excluded as being in existence at the same time. For example the phrase “holy of holies” (translated as “Most Holy Place”) does not exclude the existence of a “holy place” - in fact it requires it. Therefore “heaven of heavens” is a phrase used to describe the highest and greatest heaven, whilst “heaven” is something lesser. Artaxerxes was a king, but he is described in Ezra 7:12 not merely as a king, but a “king of kings” - the ultimate king. Again, that he is thus described necessitates the existence of other, lesser, kings. Bringing this same logic to “the heaven of heavens” we would expect there to exist a lower realm called simply “heaven”.

In the passage quoted from Nehemiah 9:6 we have been provided with the further insight that “the heaven of heavens” is where “all their host” reside - that is, the sun, moon and stars (See also Deuteronomy 4:19 - “thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven”. This proves that Nehemiah’s “all their host” denotes the heavenly bodies).

These scriptures thus clearly demonstrate that, in addition to the heaven in which God dwells, there are two different heavens, styled in Nehemiah “the heaven”, and “the heaven of heavens”.

The firmament in Genesis

We are now in a position to apply this understanding of the heavens to Genesis 1. Careful reading reveals that the same hierarchy of heavens are present in the text, thus:

1. In verses 6-8 we read of a specific "firmament" which was created to divide the waters above from the waters below. This is called "heaven".
2. In verses 14-19 we read of the "firmament of heaven" (v.14 and v.17) into which God placed the sun, moon and stars. Genesis 1:20 informs us that God created the fowls of the air, to fly "in the face" (NKJV), or in front, of the "firmament of heaven".

The firmament of heaven

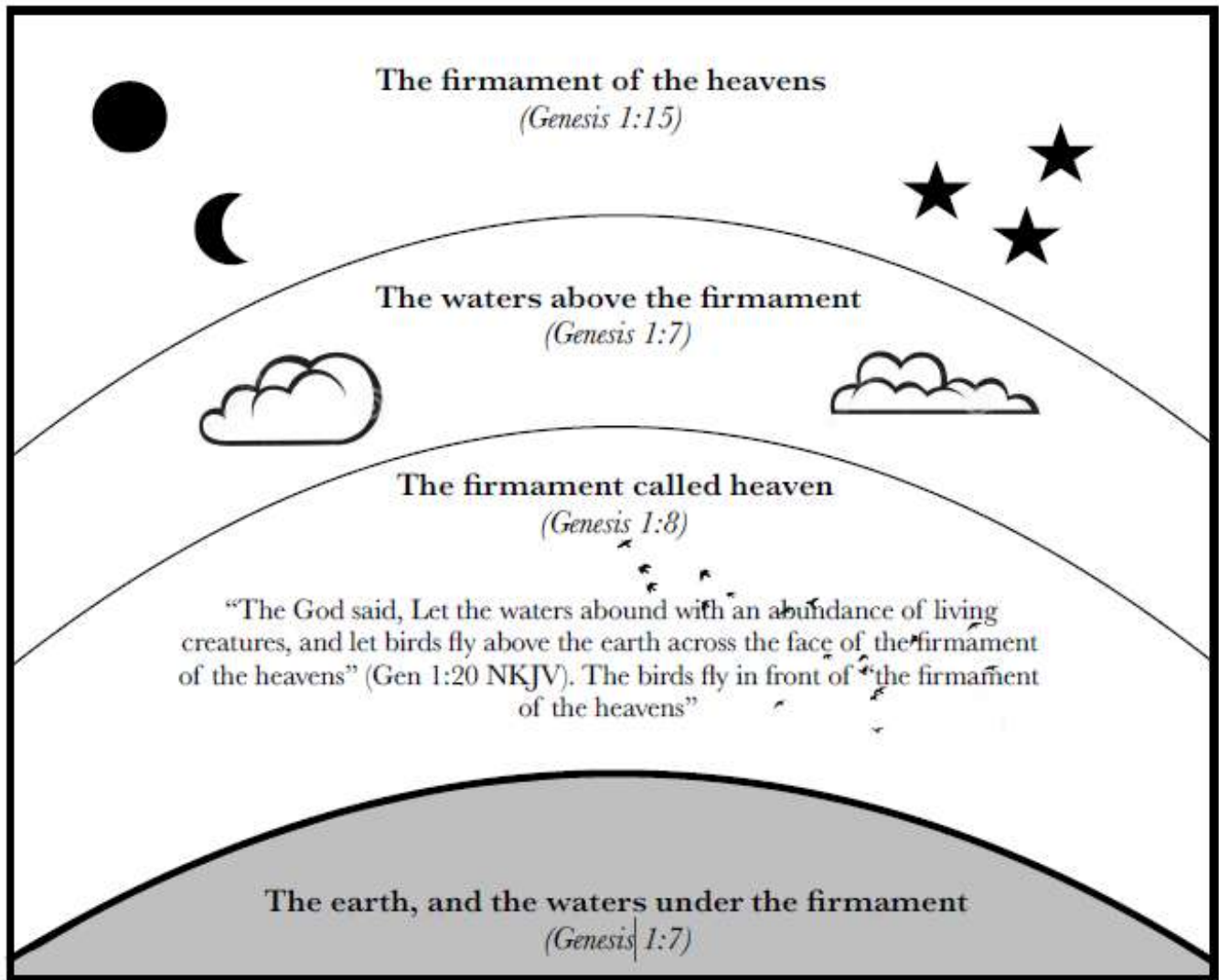
On the fourth creative day, God made the sun, moon and stars, and in connection with the creation of these heavenly bodies, the narrative introduces us to the "firmament of heaven": "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day" (Genesis 1:14-19). We note that these heavenly bodies are said to reside, not within the heaven, but "the firmament of the heaven". This is in keeping with Nehemiah's testimony that the sun, moon and stars dwell within "the heaven of heavens". This is that region beyond our atmosphere (Neh. 9:6), we know as outer space.

This "firmament of heaven" is clearly a different "firmament" to the one created on day two. This becomes especially apparent when we consider the creation of the fowls of the air on the fifth creative day - fowl in the open firmament of heaven. Those who believe the solid dome theory of Genesis 1 lay great store by the fact that Genesis 1:20 describes the birds as flying in front of the *raqia*. Enns, for example, states that "according to Genesis 1:20, the birds fly in front of the *raqia* (in the air), not in the *raqia*". But this confusion has arisen because of a failure to differentiate between the heaven, and the firmament of heaven. Note what the text says: "Then God said, Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens" (Genesis 1:20 NKJV). The birds are consistently described in scripture as "the fowl of heaven" (Gen. 7:23) and they fly "in the midst of heaven" (Rev. 19:17), but here in Genesis 1:20 they are said to fly across the face of, or in front of, "the firmament of the heavens". The Hebrew *mynp* - '*paniyim*' - does indeed convey the idea of 'before', or 'in the face of', and this is how it appears to an observer standing upon the earth - when the birds fly in the midst of heaven, they appear to be flying in front of the heavenly bodies which are set in the firmament of the heavens. The careful Bible reader will conclude that the birds fly in the firmament created on day two called "heaven", but in front of the "firmament of the heavens". Neither the firmament, nor the firmament of the heavens, are solid and the text does not give us any reason to believe this.

Summary

We are now in a position to summarise our findings, illustrated in the table below. The illustration following will help to visualise the various "heavens" referred to above.

Genesis 1	Interpretation
God	Dwells in heaven (Ecc 5:2; 1 Kings 8:43)
The firmament of the heaven	The heaven of heavens (Deut 10:14) Heavenly bodies reside here (Neh 9:6)
The waters above the firmament	The clouds (Prov 8:27-30; Psa 78:23; 108:4)
The firmament	The sky/atmosphere Birds fly here (Gen 7:23; Rev 19:17)
The waters below the firmament	Seas (Prov 8:27-30)



WHAT WOULD GOD'S ABODE LOOK LIKE?

In this consideration we have no clear Scriptural testimony, only some passages that suggest possibilities. However, there are some logical conclusions that can be drawn from established facts.

God made man in His own image and likeness – Gen. 1:26; 1 Cor. 11:7; James 3:9 (see the document titled “Is God a physical being?” for more detail). If the Almighty made man in His own image and likeness for the purpose of being manifested by man, then perhaps it would not be too much to suggest that He placed man in a similar environment as His own.

The beauty of the earth as created by God through the angels (though now marred by man) is exquisite in its variety, grandeur and colour. Where did this pattern come from? If man was made in God's image and likeness, why would he not be placed in a similar environment to have the opportunity to exercise dominion over that environment and manifest the attributes of his Maker therein. Are the continents and their mountains and plains with rivers running into the vast oceans a new thing in the universe, or are they a reflection of an even superior place where the Deity Himself resides?

We know that when death and mortality have been eradicated from the earth and God is all and in all (1 Cor. 15:28), He will have no diffidence in dwelling among men. This is the testimony of Rev. 21:3 – **“And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”**

We learn from this declaration that God Himself will come to the earth (at least for a time). That is when the promise of Matt. 5:8 will be fulfilled. Christ's promise to the 'pure in heart' (who will be fully occupied on earth with him for a thousand years to eradicate sin and death) will finally be granted to them – **“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”**

The 'tabernacle' or habitation of God will then be with men. Why might that not mean that the habitation of men created after the pattern of God's own abode has then been perfected like the latter?

These final considerations may be in part hypothetical but are not without some basis in the suggestions made by Scripture. Picturing in our mind both the glorious physical being of Yahweh our God and those associated with Him in heaven dwelling in a glorious abode after which the earth is patterned can only enhance our faith and the quality of our communication in prayer with Him.

Author – Jim Cowie