

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

IN CHRIST JESUS.

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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IN CHRIST, A NEW CREATION #1

We could sum up God's purpose for the eons with two little, but mighty words: **all** and **new**. The purpose of God is that He become **all in all in all new**. In other words, He will become all in all things, which means His entire creation, both visible and invisible, and He will do this through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. But there is much more, for, *in* Christ, He intends to make all new. In other words, all the former things will pass away and there will be all new things. Thus, we read of a new heaven and a new earth; the holy city, New Jerusalem; and the new creation *in* Christ.

If you have been reading my previous issues on this subject, perhaps you are getting tired of hearing about God's purpose summed up in the word *all*. As for me, it is a glorious subject that seems to be ignored in our day, so the least I can do is keep it in the forefront for any who have an ear to hear.

Others might think that this is all so futuristic that it has little bearing on our lives in the here and now; but, I have good news for any that think this way. If you are *in* Christ, you are already a part of the all new, for, according to Paul, *in* Christ is *a new creation*.

Therefore, if anyone [is] in Christ, [he is] a new creation; the old [things] passed away, look!, all [things] have become new. (2 Corinthians 5.17 ALT)

For in Christ Jesus neither does circumcision have any power [or, avail anything] nor uncircumcision, but a new creation! (Galatians 6.15 ALT)

In a sense, Paul was not declaring something that was obscure, for through Isaiah the prophet, the Lord made very similar declarations. In fact, given Paul's background, it is safe to state that he was quoting the ancient prophet.

"Behold, the former things have come to pass, now I declare new things; before they spring forth I proclaim them to you." (Isaiah 42.9 NASB)

"Behold, I will do something new, now it will spring forth; will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, rivers in the desert." (Isaiah 43.19 NASB)

"You have heard; look at all this. And you, will you not declare it? I proclaim to you new things from this time, even hidden things which you have not known." (Isaiah 48.6 NASB)

"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind. (Isaiah 65.17 NASB)

However, Paul was not merely issuing a prophetic word but a word based on his own experience, for like John, he saw the new heaven and the new earth. John heard the Lord declaring that He is making all new, and he saw it as well.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first [former] heaven and the first [former] earth passed away. And the sea is not [any] more [fig., the sea no longer exists]. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having been prepared like a bride having been adorned [for] her husband. And the One sitting on the throne said, "Look! I am making all things new!" And He says to me, "Write, because these words are true and trustworthy." (Revelation 21.1-2; 5 ALT [CV])

According to his testimony to the Corinthians, Paul was snatched away to the third heaven and paradise to hear declarations that were not allowed to be spoken.

If boasting must be, though it is not expedient, indeed, yet I shall also be coming to apparitions and revelations of the Lord. I am acquainted with a man in Christ, fourteen years before this, (whether in a body I am not aware, or outside of the body, I am not aware—God is aware) such a one was snatched away to the third heaven. And I am acquainted with such a man (whether in a body or outside of the body I am not aware—God is aware) that he was snatched away into paradise and hears ineffable declarations, which it is not allowed a man to speak. (2 Corinthians 12.1-4 CV)

It seems clear that, along with Isaiah, both John and Paul were given the same vision, and both were given the word that all would be new. **Look, all have become new! Look, I am making all things new!** As John came to be *in* spirit to perceive the Lord's day, as recorded in Revelation 21-22, so was Paul snatched away *in* spirit to see the Lord's day. In other words, Paul saw beyond the coming millennial kingdom to the eon of the eons (God's day) in which there is a new heaven and new earth, and New Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven, having the glory of God. I believe that when he proclaimed all things have become new, Paul was testifying to what he saw.

It is most probable that Paul was snatched away to the third heaven, and it was there that he saw paradise, which is New Jerusalem. However, we are presented with a challenge in his use of the words *third heaven*. Paul was the only one of all the inspired writers to refer to the third heaven. Most commentators view the third heaven spatially, as if it is merely a third level or place in the heavens that currently exists. It is seen as the place where the throne of God is today. However, where in Scripture are we told this supposed fact? If this is true, then it should be and, in fact, must be explained by Scripture. The fact of the matter is that it is not found in Scripture, other than in this one epistle. How are we to answer this dilemma?

It has been proposed by others that the use of the word *third* indicates third in sequence, rather than in place; thus, it is the third heaven, chronologically speaking. In other words, throughout the eons (time), there will have been three heavens, and the third heaven refers to the new heaven that is to come when our current heavens and earth pass away with a roar, and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat. Peter gives us the answer to this question as recorded in 2 Peter 3.10: **But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away.** Notice that he refers to heavens in the plural. If the third heaven exists today, then it too would have to pass away; so it must not be included in the present heavens. But we are also given more information, for, in the same passage, Peter wrote that there were heavens: **It escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed [a disruption], being flooded with water (2 Peter 3.5-6 NASB [added by writer]).** One might be tempted to think that this refers to the flood of Noah's day, but the thing that escapes their notice is that the earth had been destroyed by water and was in waste and ruin (see Genesis 1.2) prior to Adam being formed from the soil of the earth. Elohim had to restore the earth that was in disruption (waste and ruin) prior to creating man.

Thus, there was a *first* heavens (of old, long ago) and earth before the disruption. A *second* heavens and earth came into view with the restoration of the ruined earth, as recorded in Genesis 1.2b ff. We are living in the realm of the second heavens and earth that are reserved for purging by fire following the millennial kingdom. There will yet be a *third* heaven and earth in which righteousness dwells, after the present ones pass away (or, are cleansed and purged) (2 Peter 3.10-13). [Note: Most translations of Revelation 21.1 refer to the *first* heaven and earth, but it also could be translated as *former*, meaning "the one that preceded the new one."]

Since Paul was snatched away to the third heaven, the paradise that he was caught away to must be in relation to the time of the third heaven as well, for this coincides with John's vision on the isle of Patmos. While he was snatched away to the third heaven, he saw the paradise, and this, I believe, is the revelation that Paul described as *in Christ, a new creation*.

Like the other prophets, he had to proclaim: **Look, all have become new!**