

The Absolute Beginning and the Heavenly Sabbath Rest of God in Genesis 1:1-2:2: Background to Hebrews' Theology of Heaven

Heaven in the Book of Hebrews: Introduction and Overview

The book of Hebrews has a wonderful theology of heaven. It is perhaps the most explicit book in the entire Bible about the central importance of heaven as a dwelling place of God's glory, set on display to be worshiped by his people and angels.

For instance, the author is explicit that Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven (Heb. 8:1-2; 9:23-24). Hebrews 8:6 presents the earthly tabernacle as a "copy and shadow" of heaven. And verse 1-2 make explicit that Jesus Christ, in his flesh, has ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God.

and, as such, he has entered into Sabbath Rest where he sits at God's right hand atop heavenly Mount Zion (Heb. 12:22-24; Heb. 4:9-11).

What I want to do in this lecture is help you understand the teaching of the Old Testament about heaven, the created but invisible heaven, as the realm of God's Sabbath Rest—the place where his glory abides forever so that he might be worshiped and glorified by men and angels.

The Creation and Filling of the Invisible Heaven-Temple

Genesis 1:1 is a foundational text that helps us begin to grasp that the highest heaven is the original temple dwelling of God, inhabited first by angels, and then to be inhabited by obedient Adam, who, for a while, is made lower than the angels during his probation testing in earthly Eden.

The "heavens" in Genesis 1:1 refers to a created realm that is dimensionally distinct (i.e., above and beyond) the visible heavens and earth. Genesis 1:1 is not merely a summary of the creation of the visible heavens and earth. It is more than that. Much more. M.G. Kline observes that Genesis 1:1 narrates the creation of created the upper (invisible) and lower (visible) spatial spheres. He says,

The heavens and the earth is not just a merismus, a pair of antonyms which as a set signifies totality. The phrase rather denotes concretely the actual two components that together comprehend all of creation. . . . More precisely, what Gen 1:1 affirms is that God created not just the spatial dimensions immediately accessible to man, but the heavens too, that is, the invisible realm of the divine Glory and angelic beings. This interpretation is reflected in the apostle Paul's Christological exposition of Gen 1:1, declaring that the Son created "all things that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible

and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers" (Col 1:16; cf. John 1:1–3). Similarly Nehemiah, reflecting on the Genesis creation account, finds a reference there to the invisible heaven of the angels (Neh 9:6), and the only possible referent is "the heavens" of Gen 1:1...." Kline, M. G., *God, Heaven and Har Magedon: A Covenantal Tale of Cosmos and Telos* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers), pp. 228–229.

Kline's point is that there is a distinct dimension of created reality, called the heavens, that is the realm of angels, who worship God in glory. There are a number of biblical texts that make this clear.

Regarding the distinction between the invisible heavens and the visible heavens and earth, the invisible heavens are created in the absolute beginning (Gen. 1:1), whereas the visible heavens are not created until day two of the creation week (Gen. 1:7). The "heavens" in view in Genesis 1:1 are the invisible heavens—a real, created, glorious dwelling place of God above and beyond the visible heavens and earth.

Neh. 9:6, reflecting on Genesis 1:1, amplifies: "You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you." The "heaven of heavens" is set in contrast to "the earth" and further clarifies the teaching of Genesis 1:1. As an inspired summary and commentary on Genesis 1:1, it is quite clear that the "the heaven of heavens" is a distinct dimension of created reality that is populated with an angelic host. The earth is populated with all that is on it. These are the two distinct dimensions of created reality—heaven and earth. This distinction is of enormous importance, because it supplies the creational vantage point that opens for us the telos of the covenant of works with Adam. Upon successful probation, Adam would enter into heaven to join the host of heaven.

The fundamental activity of the host of heaven is worship. The Lord is present in the heaven of heaven to receive worship. The heaven of heavens is the created place where the "host of heaven" gathers around to ascribe glory to the immutable and living triune God. Heaven, "the heaven of heaven," is the original, created, dwelling place of God in his glory. It is a holy place that is consecrated to the glory and adoration of God. It is a place that, by its very nature, is set ablaze by the glory and splendor of the tripersonal God—a place where, in the absolute beginning, God created angels, who are the "host of heaven," and they delight themselves in the worship of God.

Further, this heavenly dwelling place is a holy temple realm with a royal throne at its center. Heaven, "the heaven of heaven," is a temple dwelling and royal throne-room, where the triune God is seated in heavenly glory. It is this that Isaiah sees in Is. 6:1-3:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of

hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

Isaiah did not encounter the created earthly replica of heaven in the form of the first temple that was made in the Solomonic era. Rather, he is given a prophetic insight into the unseen heavenly temple itself—the created archetype after which the earthly realities of tabernacle and temple are patterned (Ex. 25:40; Heb. 8:6; I Chron. 28:11). The Lord sits enthroned in the midst of those who behold his glory and splendor. And Isaiah says that he saw the “train of his robe” that filled the heaven-temple with glory. What does the “train of God’s robe” bring into view? One concrete biblical image is found in Psalm 104:2: “he wraps himself in light as with a garment.” The train of God’s robe appeared to Isaiah as a “garment of light” in the heavenly throne room. Isaiah saw this flowing garment of translucent glory—a light of the glory of God—that filled the temple.

God’s glory is everywhere expressed by His Spirit in that heavenly temple dwelling place—the heavens of Genesis 1:1—the heaven of heavens of Neh. 9:6. Just as the glory of God descended to fill the tabernacle with Moses or the temple with Solomon, so there is an original “filling” of the heavenly temple with the glory of the triune God. It is *there* that you find life and light, truth and beauty, glory and power. It is there that you find the paradise of God in God himself. The fundamental activity of the angels in that realm is worship!

The Seraphim, part of that heavenly host, encircle the throne of the Lord with ceaseless praise. They cover their eyes and their feet, because they are creatures in his presence and they sing to him in antiphonal response, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts!” The “holy” reference does not simply mean that God has no sin, but that he is wholly exalted above the creature—he has life in himself, glory in himself, fullness in himself, love in himself, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is he who has given life to all other things in heaven and on earth, and because of this He is worthy of worship. It is this heavenly temple, this heavenly throne-room, that comprises the heavens that God created in the absolute beginning. In light of this, it is absolutely critical to observe that the location of God’s Sabbath Rest in Genesis 2:2 is *heaven*.

The History of the Heaven-Temple: Alpha Creation and Omega Enthronement

Before the history of Eden is completed, there is a history of the heaven temple that is found in the primal movement from the alpha-creation of the heaven temple in Genesis 1:1 to omega-enthronement in the heaven temple. Genesis 2:2 makes quite explicit that the Creator-King sits on his royal throne in heaven, resting from his very good works of creation. Thus, the logic internal to Genesis 1:1-2 is that, having created a holy temple and royal dwelling place in the absolute beginning—the alpha of creation—the Creator-King enters into that temple-palace and sits on his throne, resting from his very good works of creation.

The Spirit, who hovers over the primal waters of the formless void (Gen. 1:2), forms earthly realms (days 1-3) and earthly rulers (days 4-6) and then, pronouncing the works of creation “very good” (1:31), enters into his heavenly resting place, surrounded by the angels

who looked on God's mighty works of creation in worship and adoration (Gen. 2:2; Neh. 9:6). The royal rest of God is thus the occasion for jubilant worship in heaven. The glory of the triune God is made known in that heavenly temple dwelling as he sits enthroned above the visible heavens and visible earth in a heavenly temple, filled with the host of heaven.

This is why the prophets identify the throne of God in heaven with his resting place. Is. 66:1 "Thus says the LORD, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may *rest*?" The point of the prophet is that heaven is specifically the place of God's royal rest as the Creator-King. In the biblical presentation, God enters into his heavenly throne room, sits down, and there he "rests" from all his works in the creation week. Acts 7:47-50, which quotes with commentary from Is. 66:1:

"47 But it was Solomon who built a house for him. 48 Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, 49 "'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? 50 Did not my hand make all these things?"

The point is that heaven has always been the dwelling place of God. Heaven is God's permanent dwelling place—the site of his everlasting throne (Jer. 17:12 "A glorious throne set on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary"). God's rest, God's enthronement in rest and glory, is permanently associated with heaven. The earth, and all in it, is a footstool—a place where the foot of God rests while enthroned in heaven, the heaven of heavens.

This, in summary form, is the history of heaven before the fall. The Spirit of the divine glory, who created the highest heaven in the absolute beginning (Genesis 1:1), then moves on to hover over the formless void (Genesis 1:2), and then creates the visible heavens and earth days 1-6 (1:2:-31). And, having created the visible heavens and earth in the space of six days, he, emblematic of the triune glory, sits enthroned in heavenly Sabbath Rest (Gen. 2:2).

M.G. Kline, in *God Heaven and Har-Magedon*, says
Heaven is very much the focus of the seventh day. For it is concerned with God's Sabbath, his royal rest as the one who has finished the work of creation, his enthronement in the supernal realm. Indeed, what is signified by the divine Sabbath, the everlasting royal session of the King of Glory, is the essential reality of heaven. That was the nature of heaven from its original creation, but the seventh day is marked by a distinctive stage in the history of heaven, the Creator-Author henceforth the additional title of Finisher of heaven and earth and all their host (GHH, 12).

Kline's point is a critical one to grasp and reflect upon. There is an eschatology to heaven—a dynamic historical development to heaven. The Alpha-Creator is the Omega-Consummator. The sign of the consummation of the mighty deeds of the Creator-King is enthronement in heaven, taking a royal rest from his six days of creation.

The History of Heaven and the History of the Covenant of Works

The earth history of the covenant of works is ordered to the history of heaven. Regarding the way that the history of the covenant of works relates to the history of the covenant of works, Kline says, “there is yet another stage in the history of heaven and earth. The King of heaven will at the hour appointed consummate his cosmic temple” (GHH, 12). That stage brings into view the way that Adam, the image of God, under the covenant of works, was to offer perfect and personal obedience to God under the covenant of works, pass probation, and then enter into heavenly Sabbath Rest in confirmed communion with God. The telos for Adam and his posterity under the covenant of works was entrance into the heaven temple in Sabbath rest beyond earthly probation.

The Holy Spirit, hovering above the formless void in Genesis 1:2, forms the unique referent after which Adam is patterned as the image of God and in covenant with God. The Spirit of Glory is both the Creator and Indweller of the Heavenly temple and royal resting place of God. The “history of heaven” to which Kline alludes is the Alpha and Omega of the Spirit’s work of creation (Genesis 1:1-1:31) and Sabbath Rest (Genesis 2:2). The Spirit, according to Kline, indwells the heavenly temple, and lights it ablaze with glory. The glory of the heavenly temple is a shining forth of the Spirit.

The person and work of the Spirit in the creation week supplies the archetype for Adam’s “very good” work in Eden and his promised rest once his work is finished. The creation in Genesis 1:1, the absolute beginning, marks the alpha point of the history of heaven. The Spirit forms and fills the highest heaven with his glory. He forms the heavenly temple, filling that place with the angelic host, who behold the filling of the highest heaven with the glory of God. This is what Kline in his work on Genesis 1:1 calls the “indoxation” of the Spirit—the Spirit fills the heavenly temple with glory and then displays that glory to the angelic host (GHH, 13). The glory of the Spirit is the permanent embodiment of God’s glory in a created temple realm—a heavenly holy place designed to display the glory of God for the purpose of worship.

The Sabbath Rest of Genesis 2:2 is the climax of the work of the Spirit, whose glory now fills the heavenly temple in terms of enthronement in Sabbath rest (Gen. 2:2), which is a *bona fide* historical development that climactically advances beyond the absolute beginning (Gen. 1:1). God’s glory in the Spirit fills the heaven temple from the absolute beginning, but that original glory that filled the heaven temple comes to fill it as the Creator-King rests from his creation fiat. Having pronounced all his work “very good” he comes to rest from his labors in the heavenly temple, enthroned in glory and Sabbath rest.

How does this inform our understanding of Adam, created as the image and likeness of God, under the covenant of works? There is to be yet another stage in the history of heaven. If Adam, formed in the image and likeness of God, renders perfect obedience to God under the covenant of works, he too will enter into Sabbath Rest amidst the angelic host to worship the glory of the enthroned Creator-King. Adam, if he remains upright, will see the Spirit’s glory that sets ablaze the heavenly temple.

The two stage movement of the history of heaven, viewed from the divine side as Alpha creation (indwelling the heavenly temple in the absolute beginning) followed by omega

consummation (enthronement in Sabbath Rest in the heavenly temple at the end of the creation week) forms the archetype that image bearing Adam will follow as obedient to the terms of the covenant of works. If he remains upright under probation, Adam would traverse from dwelling in the earthly probation temple where he works (the estate of innocency) into heavenly temple beyond probation where he will join the angels and enter into Sabbath Rest (estate of glory).

To relate the history of heaven in the work of the Spirit to the history of earth in the work of Adam, the two stage work of the Spirit provides the explanatory model for the two-estate movement of Adam. Adam is to move from work-testing in Eden to Sabbath-resting in heaven. As he does this, he images God, the Creator and Consummator.

The Pattern of Replicated: Moving from Earthly Eden to Heavenly Sabbath Rest

The Spirit of Glory moves from creating earthly Eden as a provisional dwelling place to enthronement in heaven as the permanent dwelling place of the divine glory in Sabbath Rest. This provides a model, a pattern, that is to be replicated by Adam under the covenant of works. Eden, as Kline has argued convincingly,¹ is a holy temple realm, with Adam's guardianship likened to the guardianship of Aaron and his sons (Numbers 18:1 applies the language of Aaron and his sons guarding the tabernacle as Adam was to guard Eden). Adam is a holy priest tasked to guard a holy realm (Eden). Aaron is a holy priest tasked to guard a holy realm (tabernacle). And the prospect held out to Adam's service in the earthly Edenic temple, as he battles the serpent, is Sabbath Rest.

Just as the tabernacle is a redemptive and typological copy and shadow of the heavenly temple (Ex. 25:40; Heb. 8:5), so Eden is a created and protological copy and shadow of the heavenly temple dwelling of God. Both Eden and the tabernacle-temple are projections in provisional earthly forms of the heaven-temple created in the absolute beginning. Eden shadows that great heavenly temple in a manner parallel to the earthly tabernacle and temple. It is in the heavenly original that you find Sabbath rest in a realm beyond the earthly and the provisional.

Adam's life in Eden under the covenant of works is ordered to Sabbath rest in heaven, following the pattern of the Spirit of Glory. The rest entered into by the Spirit of Glory provides the archetypal reality that Adam is to image as he traverses through Eden in obedience unto Sabbath rest in heaven. Hebrews 4:4, interpreting Genesis 2:2, makes clear that Sabbath Rest is not only descriptive of something into which God enters as Creator-King, but it is something that his covenant people are commanded to enter. Before the fall, Sabbath rest is to be inaugurated by Adam's perfect, personal, exact and entire obedience by Adam under the covenant of works (Adam). The point is that Eden, like the tabernacle with Moses, is an earthly copy of the heavenly temple, and, as a copy of heaven, has a unique function that shadows or images the heavenly original.

¹See Kline's penetrating discussion of this in *Kingdom Prologue*, 42-61.

The earthly temple realm of Eden is for probation-testing. The heavenly temple realm is for Sabbath-resting. Worship in the former is the means to the end for worship in the latter. Adam's movement is from worship on earth to worship in heaven. Just as the work of creation is followed by Sabbath rest on the divine side (Genesis 1:1-2:2), so Adam's obedient work of guarding and tending the Eden temple is to be followed by Sabbath rest in a heavenly temple on the creaturely side. If Adam guards the earthly temple realm, if he slays the serpent, and eats from the tree of life, he will be advanced by the Spirit's agency to worship with the angels in the heavenly temple, beholding the God of Sabbath Rest, enthroned in glory in a realm set ablaze by the Spirit's radiance. Adam's potential advancement in obedience from the earthly temple to the heavenly temple mirrors the movement of the Creator-King, who passes from six days of work, forming the visible heavens and earth, to an eternal Sabbath Rest in heavenly glory.

The realm of the Spirit's glory, the supernal realm where that glory dwells permanently, is not in earthly Eden (the probation temple) but in heaven (the Sabbath Resting temple). Sabbath Rest in the temple above and beyond Eden is associated with the temple dwelling of God in heaven. That realm, as we have seen, is created in the absolute beginning and populated with an angelic host. The Spirit's glory never departs from that heavenly temple realm. The Spirit's glory dwells there in a permanent way.

The point about Eden, and, by extension, the tabernacle and the temple under the law and during the time of the prophets, is that these temple dwellings (protological and typological) are in the nature of the case impermanent earthly dwelling places—places that can become *ichabod*—the glory of the Spirit can and does depart from them.

But this is not true of the heavenly temple dwelling of God (the eschatological dwelling of God). The eschatological temple dwelling of God is from the outset heavenly, and not earthly, whether we think in terms of protology (earthly Eden) or typology (earthly tabernacle or earthly temple). Whether we think about the temple dwelling in Eden before the fall or the tabernacle and temple dwelling of God after the fall, the point of similarity is that neither are permanent places where the glory of God dwells.

The history of Eden is thus a microcosm of a larger history of heaven. Eden relates to the history of heaven in that Eden is a unique, earthly projection of the holiness of the heavenly temple that exists beyond probation testing in the Eden temple realm. The Spirit dwells permanently in that heavenly temple dwelling. But as long as Eden or the earthly tabernacle-temple stands, the way into the heavenly temple, the way into the place where the glory of God permanently and irrevocably resides, has not yet been opened.

The History of Heaven, the Indoxation of the Spirit, and the Incarnation of the Son

As we now move toward the second main section of this volume—Christ the life-giving Spirit and last Adam (I Cor. 15:45)—we will seek to expand on the climactic movement in the history of heaven intensively in his ascension. To do this, we need to appreciate the relation between the indoxation of the Spirit of God in the heavenly temple and the incarnation of the

eternal Son of God to redeem a people out of sin so that he might bring them into that heavenly temple.

We can frame the issue with this question: prior to the fall into sin and the consequent need for the incarnation and exaltation of Christ as the last Adam, where do we find a permanent dwelling of the glory of God? We find such in the “indoxation” of the Spirit, the permanent dwelling of the Spirit’s glory in the heavenly glory-temple, and we find it after the fall the incarnation and ascension of Jesus Christ.

First, as Kline points out, the primary point of similarity between indoxation and incarnation resides in the fact that a Trinitarian person permanently relates to a created entity. Kline says, “The Glory-Manifestation of the Spirit and the incarnation of the Son are alike in that each is a permanent embodiment of a person of the Godhead in a created entity, the epiphanic glory (the heaven temple) and the human nature, respectively” (GHH, 13). The point to note is the permanency of the dwelling of God in relation to a created reality. The glory of the Spirit dwells permanently first in the heavenly temple, the dwelling of God’s glory prior to the fall. Just as the Spirit dwells permanently within the created reality of the heaven-temple, so the Son has personally united to himself permanently a true human nature. The point is that, notwithstanding significant differences, the permanent relation of a Trinitarian person to a created entity needs to be appreciated.

However, and pointing out three primary differences between indoxation and incarnation, we must note first that the indoxation of the Holy Spirit in the heavenly temple is not a hypostatic union, by which a true body and reasonable soul are united permanently and personally to the eternal person of the Son. While indoxation is a permanent dwelling of the person of the Spirit in the created heaven-temple realm, it is not a hypostatic union—a personal union between the person of the Spirit and an assumed human nature. Second, indoxation is a non-redemptive reality. The Spirit dwelling in the heaven temple precedes Adam’s fall into sin and does not in any way bring into view a remedial and redemptive reality. Indoxation (eschatology) precedes soteriology (incarnation). The incarnation is a remedial and redemptive means to the original creational end of entering into the glory temple to see the indoxate revelation of God’s glory. Third, while the hypostatic union is a permanent dwelling of the person of the Son in relation to his assumed humanity, that assumed humanity is not brought into the heaven-temple until the time-point of the ascension of the Messiah.

In the incarnation, the human nature is permanently united to the eternal person of the Son, so that the Immanuel principle finds its ground in the incarnation of the Son of God. It is to Christ that you must look to find the dwelling of God with his people, whether you think of him as promised in the Old Covenant or climactically revealed in the New Covenant.

However, and this is what we will address in the next chapter, while it is true that in the incarnation that we find the permanent dwelling of God’s Spirit-forged glory in the midst of his people in the person of his Son, there a redemptive-historical point that the history of heaven helps us grasp. It is especially in the climactic event of Christ’s endowment with the Spirit and bodily ascension into heaven that we find this permanent dwelling of God with his people brought to fulfillment in heaven. The incarnation, *per se*, is a means to the end of

ascension into the heavenly temple. The incarnation, in itself, apart from ascension, supplies the condition for the possibility of the advancement of heaven, but it does not, in itself, advance that history. The incarnate Christ, endowed with the Spirit who raised him from the dead, enters in his ascension into the temple realm created in the absolute beginning and sits enthroned as the Lord of Sabbath Rest. In his Spirit-endowment and ascension, then, the Immanuel Principle reaches its eschatological climax in the incarnate Christ.

In his intercession at the right hand of God (Heb. 8:1-2), Christ as the last Adam and Life-giving Spirit (I Cor. 15:45), is permanently beyond probation and enthroned in heavenly rest and glory. The church, united to the exalted Christ by the Spirit and through Spirit wrought faith, enters into the glory of the heaven-temple in a two age movement of resurrection (Eph. 2:5; I Cor. 15:50-54). It is the Spirit's agency in raising Christ from the dead, and in uniting a people to the ascended Christ, that the covenantal purpose of God and the history of heaven reaches its climax.