

# **DEFENDING HEAVEN**

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**A Critique of the Attack on the Traditional Interpretation of John 14:1-6**

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# Defending Heaven

## A Critique of the Attack on the Traditional Interpretation of John 14:1-6

The Biblical doctrine of Heaven is under attack. It is not clear when the onslaught began, but in the Summer of 2022, Brother AK Richardson released a video on his YouTube channel titled '*John 14 Is Not About Heaven*'. AK's video has caused quite a stir and is in large part a restatement of Steve Gregg's material on the same passage. Some brethren have opposed AK's position while others have embraced and repeated them; the result has been escalating conflict. In response to some of the issues that have arisen, I have decided to publish this critique of AK's presentation. The purpose of this article is threefold:

1. To demonstrate there are serious objections to what AK and Steve Gregg are teaching.
2. To issue a word of caution to those who have embraced the teaching of AK and Steve Gregg.
3. To let brethren who disagree with AK and Steve Gregg know that they are not alone.

It is not the goal of this response to declare war with AK or to attack his person, but simply to address the content of his presentation. AK is a sincere brother and one whom I have counted as a friend. Throughout my response, I will refer to Brother AK as AK, not to show disrespect, but because it would seem awkward to call him anything else due to our friendship. I do not question AK's honesty; I simply believe he is mistaken. I have chosen to respond publicly because of the widespread and ongoing controversy his teachings have caused. It is not easy to take a public stand against one's friend, but I feel the moment necessitates this response. I will be firm in my writing just as AK is firm in his teaching.

### **Preliminary Matters:**

Before I begin my response to AK's video, I want to set the context for why John 14 has become a hot topic with AK and others.

At the very end of his video on John 14, AK states:

I want to know what the Bible means, I want to know what Jesus means, and I don't think it's about heaven here. Now, whatever else the Bible may say about going to heaven, and all this stuff, my only issue is what does it mean here.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>AK Richardson, *John 14 Is Not About Heaven*. YouTube video. June 2022.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_t4Tz2RrgLg&t=688s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_t4Tz2RrgLg&t=688s)

I appreciate AK's desire for truth, but the meaning of John 14:1-6 is no longer the only issue that is at stake. In a Facebook post dated December 22, AK wrote:

For many years I have believed that Christians (the saved) will live eternally in heaven after the resurrection. I have not been convinced of this for the better part of this year. I've said some things on this topic in passing in my material. It appears to me that the overall data of the Bible, particularly the NT, does not support this. The "new heaven and earth" spoken by Peter (2 Peter 3) is how I typically (anymore) speak of the "location" of our eternal abode. I certainly find no reason that this NHNE is equivalent to God's heaven. It seems to me that the best case for living eternally in heaven is John 14, but I do not believe that this passage is about that (I have a video on this passage).<sup>2</sup>

In other words, AK now uses his video on John 14 to promote his current belief in a "new heaven and new earth" – what is referred to commonly as the Refurbished Earth position – in order to attack what he views as the "best case" for believing that Christians will spend eternity in heaven. Though AK originally posted his video on John 14 with no regard for what the rest of the Bible says about where we will spend eternity, he currently uses it to attack John 14 as he promotes his view that Christians will NOT spend eternity in heaven.

It needs to be noted that AK is neither alone nor the first among our brethren in adopting a Refurbished Earth view. As I recall, Jim Crouch was the first preacher I ever heard advocate the Refurbished Earth position. Several other brethren, even preachers, share AK's view and no longer believe that we will spend eternity in heaven. I do not know who is responsible for all the influence that is turning people away from the concept of heaven (other than Steve Gregg and denominational writers in general), but I am aware that several have been influenced as a direct result of AK's videos.

I also want to note that I do appreciate AK for being open with his views and teaching them publicly rather than just privately. If a person is going to teach something, they need to be fully convinced of the matter and leave themselves open to criticism and correction. I can certainly respect AK for his openness and boldness even if I believe it is misdirected. I am sure he has received criticisms for what he has taught, and I am equally sure that I will receive such criticisms for this response. Be that as it may, I pray that truth prevails and God's Word is handled fairly.

The second preliminary issue that needs considered is whether a misunderstanding of John 14 is a "big deal" one way or the other. "Isn't it possible for some to disagree on a passage and still be saved?" is a question I have heard repeated regarding matters of the end times in general and the idea of the Refurbished Earth in particular. AK addresses this question in his Facebook post by stating:

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<sup>2</sup> AK Richardson. December 22, 2022. HEAVEN OR "NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH"? For many years I have believed that Christians (the saved) will live eternally in heaven...

Furthermore, this is not a huge issue concerning fellowship. Salvation is not based on where we think the location of our eternity will be.<sup>3</sup>

If where we will spend eternity is not a big deal, then why make a big deal about it? Why stir up turmoil and confusion about a minor issue? Aren't we supposed to be "peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9) and note those who "stirs up division" (Titus 3:10)? AK's willingness to stir the pot over what he considers to be a trivial matter is troubling.

Rather than dividing the Bible into "important" versus "non-important" texts (which is what "issues concerning fellowship" accomplishes), we should rather learn to "rightly divide the Word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). The fact is, beliefs have consequences. We may not always understand what the consequences of error are, but there are always consequences.

Michael Allen, author of *'Grounded in Heaven'* (a book that actually teaches the Refurbished Earth view), laments that those who hold a modern view of the Refurbished Earth have been largely affected by Neo-Calvinism and have grounded their hope in earth and naturalism rather than heaven. Allen states:

But when it comes to the climax of redemptive history, Neo-Calvinists have often turned from focus upon communion with Christ, the presence of God, or beatific vision to focus instead upon... the shalom of the city, and the renewal of the earth. Naturalism is no surprise in modernity, as Taylor explains, but eschatological naturalism ought to be a shock.<sup>4</sup>

Allen blames the naturalistic influence of Neo-Calvinism on the writings of Herman Bavinck, Richard Middleton, N. T. Wright, and Brian Walsh. You may not be familiar with any of those writers, but many of our brethren have read their books and been influence by them. AK will freely admit that N. T. Wright has had an influence on his views of the end times.

Allen goes on to state:

I do think, however, that the Neo-Calvinist emphases upon the new creation and the earthiness of our hope can and have morphed at times from being productive Reformed corrections to the catholic faith to being parasitic to the basic lineaments of the Christian gospel. Too often a desire to value the ordinary and the everyday, the mundane and the material, has not led to what ought to be common sense to any Bible-reader: that heaven and the spiritual realm matter most highly. Too rarely do we speak of heavenly-mindedness, spiritual-

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<sup>3</sup> AK Richardson. December 22, 2022. HEAVEN OR "NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH"? For many years I have believed that Christians (the saved) will live eternally in heaven...

<sup>4</sup> Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*, p. 8

mindedness, self-denial, or any of the terminology that has marked the ascetical tradition.<sup>5</sup>

Allen appears to be lamenting the fact that preaching a Refurbished Earth has grounded people in earth rather than heaven. Steve Gregg (of whom we will have more to say shortly), an advocate of the Refurbished Earth position, encourages the very thing Allen warns against:

Another reason for the Bible's omission of detail about the Eternal State may be to prevent our becoming so distracted by the reward at the finish line that we do not concentrate on the running of the race itself.<sup>6</sup>

Paul's inspired view does not seem to mesh with that of Gregg's:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 1:1-4)

I ask the following questions in all seriousness: Do we view ourselves as strangers and exiles on earth? Or, do we view earth as home where we long to dwell?

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were **strangers and exiles on the earth**. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, **a heavenly one**. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

Where all this view of a Refurbished Earth will lead if brethren keep espousing I do not know, but rest assured, beliefs have consequences.

Finally, it is important to note that AK has not produced an original or novel interpretation of John 14. It appears that AK learned his position from Steve Gregg and N. T. Wright who are also joined in thought to Robert Gundry. I do not know if AK's views go back to Gundry or beyond, but I do know that he has been influenced by N. T. Wright and Steve Gregg (the latter more than the former in my opinion). I mention Steve Gregg's name in particular because AK has been heavily influenced by Gregg's teaching and writings, to the point that if you listen to Gregg's views on John 14 you will realize where AK got his material. At times AK quotes Gregg word-for-word though he never references Gregg by name. I could actually write this response, nearly every bit

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<sup>5</sup> Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*, p. 8-9

<sup>6</sup> Steve Gregg, *Empire of the Risen Son*, Second edition. p. 225

of it, as a response to Steve Gregg, but since AK is my brother and is the one at this point who is directly influencing other brethren, I will address him.

Stating that AK's material is actually Gregg's is not to say that AK has failed to think for himself or present his own views, but to explain where he has learned his position and illustrate the extent to which he has embraced Gregg's view. I do not believe that AK has yet become a heretic for what he has taught, but I am stating that Steve Gregg, who is a heretic, has had a major influence upon AK's thinking. I am greatly concerned that our brethren are being influenced by Gregg's writings and teachings on John 14 and many other passages. AK and several other brethren have freely recommended Gregg's book *Empire of the Risen Son*, and after my fifth or sixth recommendation to read it I complied. I can say unreservedly that *Empire of the Risen Son* is the single worst book I have read in years and would be in my Top 5 of all time.<sup>7</sup> Had I not been concerned with Gregg's influence, I never would have finished the book. It is because of that same concern that I write this response. I hope that my response will shake the confidence that AK and others have placed in Gregg and cause them to reconsider much of what he is teaching.

### **The Pillars of AK's View of John 14:**

As far as I can tell, AK's position on John 14 rests upon four major pillars:

1. "My Father's house" (John 14:2) is a term that always refers to the temple and never, without exception, refers to heaven.
2. Since "My Father's house" *never* refers to heaven, the Jews would not have understood Jesus reference to "My Father's house" as a reference to heaven. Since Jews could not understand "My Father's house" as a reference to heaven, we cannot interpret it as a reference to heaven.
3. John 14:2 must be understood in light of John 14:23 where Jesus states, "we will come to him and make our home with him." "Home" in verse 23 is the same word translated "dwellings" in vs. 2 and appears only in these two places in the New Testament. We must therefore understand John 14:2 and 14:23 as parallel statements. Since these are the only two occasions where the word is found in the New Testament, and since clearly the "home" of verse 23 refers to the individual Christian rather than heaven, verse 2 must be a reference to the Father and the Son dwelling in the Christian individually and the church collectively through the Spirit.
4. The "Where I am" statement of John 17:24 must be understood contextually as meaning here on earth, since Jesus was not in heaven at the time he made the statement. Furthermore, since Jesus had previously asked God not to take the disciples "out of the

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<sup>7</sup> See my full review: Nathan Battey, *A Toxic View of the Kingdom: A Review of Empire of the Risen Son*. April 11, 2023. <https://www.christianresearcher.com/articles/a-response-and-a-review>

world” (John 17:15), he could not be asking that the Father allow them to enter heaven in John 17:24.

If any of these pillars fall, let alone all of them, AK’s entire position crumbles. If it can be proven:

- that “My Father’s house” ever refers to heaven
- or, that the Jews did in fact view heaven as God’s house
- or, that verses 2 and 23 of John 14 do speak of different concepts,
- or, that John 17:24 can and does speak of heaven contextually

then AK’s argument is defeated. It will be the intent of this article moving forward to test these pillars with Scripture and see if they stand or fall.

### **Pillars #1-2: “My Father’s House” and Jewish Knowledge:**

The first two pillars of AK’s argument must be examined together due to their interrelated nature. But before they are examined, and to demonstrate that I am not attacking a straw man, I will allow AK to state his own position with the following quotes from his video presentation:

In the New Testament, and throughout the whole Bible, the “Father’s house” is the temple. It’s not heaven. It’s the temple.<sup>8</sup>

No Jew listening to him, and that’s the only people listening to this conversation at this point. What does it mean to them?<sup>9</sup>

The Jews would not have understood “my Father’s house” as heaven. That’s not the way they thought. That’s just not how the Bible uses that idea. It was the temple, the place, the building, where God would dwell with His people. That’s really what he would be referring to.<sup>10</sup>

Later, AK repeats himself and emphasizes:

Not in heaven. They (the Jews) would not have thought of heaven when he mentions the Father’s house. And if that’s the case, then we can’t say, “Well we think of heaven.” But that’s our idea. Not what he would have meant. We’re reading modern ideas back into the text, but that’s not what we are supposed to do. The temple is in their mind as he begins to speak. The moment he says, “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places, their mind is at the temple.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> AK Richardson, *John 14 Is Not About Heaven*. YouTube video.

<sup>9</sup> AK Richardson, *John 14 Is Not About Heaven*. YouTube video.

<sup>10</sup> AK Richardson, *John 14 Is Not About Heaven*. YouTube video.

<sup>11</sup> AK Richardson, *John 14 Is Not About Heaven*. YouTube video.



The context is not about him being in heaven. He didn't even say heaven. We think that, but nobody standing there would have thought that when he said "my Father's house." That's not how it is used in the Bible. That's not how they understood that idea.<sup>12</sup>

On another occasion AK emphatically states:

In the Bible, the Father's house is always the temple, without exception. It is never heaven – it is the temple.<sup>13</sup>

When making the same point, Steve Gregg states:

What is God's house? The same thing that it is in all the other passages of the Bible; Not heaven...the temple was the Father's house. Always. Never any exceptions. Throughout the Scriptures the "Father's house" is either the tabernacle, or the temple after the tabernacle was replaced... Whenever it is said that God has a house, it is always a reference to a house on earth. Which was first a tabernacle and then a temple. What is it now? The church.<sup>14</sup>

It is clear from the above quotes that AK rejects the view that "My Father's house" is a reference to heaven for three reasons:

1. The absence of the word heaven in John 14.
2. The lack of evidence that "My Father's House" refers to anything but the temple in Scripture.
3. The impossibility that Jews would have understood "My Father's house" as a reference to heaven.

## **The Short Answer:**

All three of AK's objections can be answered briefly by making two points:

The first objection is insignificant because AK contradicts the objection himself. You see, the word temple nowhere appears in John 14 either, yet AK assumes the passage speaks of the temple. AK assumes "My Father's house" is a reference to the temple, but such must be proven rather than asserted. The mere presence or absence of a specific word or phrase in a text does not determine whether or not the concept is present. AK himself seems to recognize this point when he advocates for his temple view in John 14-17. But when searching for the concept of heaven he requires that the word heaven be present.

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<sup>12</sup> AK Richardson, *John 14 Is Not About Heaven*. YouTube video.

<sup>13</sup> A personal audio recorded message.

<sup>14</sup> Steve Gregg's video on John 14 can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/ga75cldF3V0>

The second and third objections fail when the Greek translation (LXX) of Deuteronomy 26:15 is considered:

Look down from Your holy house (oikos), from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the land which You have given us, just as You swore to our fathers, “a land flowing with milk and honey.”

The word translated “house” in the LXX rendering of Deuteronomy 26:15 is the same Greek word used in John 2:16 when Jesus speaks of “My Father’s house.” The Jewish translators clearly equated heaven with God’s house and felt oikos was the best term to use in this passage to reference heaven. Since the request was directed to God and speaks of heaven as God’s house, the objection that “My Father’s house” never refers to heaven and could not have been understood as a reference to heaven by the Jews is simply false.

Though the first two pillars of AK’s argument are thus toppled, it is necessary to show the extent to which they crumble.

### **The Long Answer:**

Both of AK’s first two pillars are founded on logical fallacies, the first of which is the red herring fallacy. J. P. Moreland provides us with a good working definition of a red herring fallacy:

In logic, a red herring fallacy takes place when someone diverts the reader’s or listener’s attention by changing the subject to some different and irrelevant issue. The arguer finishes by either drawing a conclusion about this different issue or by simply presuming that a conclusion has been established.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, people’s arguments become illogical when they switch subjects and then base their conclusion on the wrong evidence. The switch is often subtle and unintentional, yet the conclusion is wrong because a change of subject has occurred.

Notice what AK does when arguing that we must understand “My Father’s house” as a reference to the temple. He begins by arguing that the phrase “My Father’s House” refers exclusively to the temple and then cites John 2:16 as a proof text within the Gospel of John. From there he moves to the writings of Paul to demonstrate that “house” and “temple” both refer to the church in 1 Timothy 3:15, Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:4, Hebrews 3:5-6, and 1 Corinthians 3:9-10. He concludes by arguing that “My Father’s house” must therefore be understood as a reference to Christians or the church, since Christians collectively are called the “house of God” but heaven is not.

Did you catch the switch? It was subtle but important. After noting that “My Father’s house” refers to the physical temple in Jerusalem (John 2:16), he then switched subjects from a

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<sup>15</sup> J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. P. 141.

discussion of the *physical temple* to the *temple concept* that is found later in the New Testament. AK also had to adapt the terminology from “My Father’s house” to “house of God” in order to reach his conclusion.<sup>16</sup> We will note later that such a connection is not grammatically possible,<sup>17</sup> but even if it were, to argue that the Jews would have understood “My Father’s house” as a reference to the physical temple is a radically different claim than arguing that the Jews would have understood “My Father’s house” as a reference to the church. The fact is, AK does not believe that John 14:2-3 is a reference to the Jerusalem temple; he believes it is a reference to the temple concept of the church. AK’s argument is borrowed from Steve Gregg, and he has failed to recognize the fault in Gregg’s logic. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, AK and Gregg both begin arguing about one subject and conclude arguing about something totally different.

We must now question what exactly AK means when he says:

In the Bible, the Father’s house is always the temple, without exception. It is never heaven – it is the temple.<sup>18</sup>

And again:

The Jew would not have understood “my Father’s house” as heaven. That’s not the way they thought. That’s just not how the Bible uses that idea. It was the temple, the place, the building, where God would dwell with His people. That’s really what he would be referring to.<sup>19</sup>

Is “My Father’s house” or the “house of God” always a reference to the temple or not? How can it be an exclusive reference to the temple when it is also a reference to the church? Not only that, but AK goes on to argue that the term “House of God” sometimes refers to the Christian (we will address this issue later when we discuss John 14:23). If the “Father’s house” always “without exception” refers to the temple, how can it also refer to the church and the Christian?

AK no more thinks “My Father’s House” is a reference to the physical temple in John 14:2-3 than I do. Neither he nor I would argue that Jesus was going away to prepare the physical temple for the disciples. It is not only the physical temple connection to the phrase “My Father’s house” that must be proved, but the connection between “My Father’s house” and the concept of the church that must also be established.

Not only does AK shift the discussion from a focus on the temple to the church, he also switches the audience from the Jews to Christians. Whenever Paul wrote 1 Timothy 3:1, Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:4, Hebrews 3:5-6, and 1 Corinthians 3:9-10, he wrote to Christians, not Jews. To

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<sup>16</sup> The reason for this switch is because Jesus is the only person who ever referred to the temple as “My Father’s house”.

<sup>17</sup> See the discussion of James McCaffrey’s quotation when we discuss John 14:2.

<sup>18</sup> A personal audio recorded message.

<sup>19</sup> AK Richardson, John 14 Is Not About Heaven. YouTube video.

argue that Jews would have understood the temple connection to the church because later Christians so understood it is pure assertion and “anachronistic” (as AK would say). Though AK has accused those of us who believe that John 14:2-3 speaks of heaven of “reading modern ideas back into the text,” maybe he should stop mixing the Christian view of the church with a Jewish understanding of the temple.

I do not deny that either Jesus or the apostles used temple imagery when speaking of the church. What I do deny is:

- that Jews **would** have understood “My Father’s house” as a reference to the church,
- that Jews **would not** have understood “My Father’s house” as a reference to heaven,
- that John 14:2-3 **must** be understood as a reference to the church,
- or that we **must** be concerned with what the Jews could or could not understand.

The fact is, the Jews frequently did not understand the teaching of Jesus. John 2:19 is not an isolated event of misunderstanding (see also John 3:1-21; 4:1-26; 6:32-71; 8:27; 10:6; 11:12-13; 12:16; 16:25-33; 20:9; Matthew 16:5-7 and many more). In fact, sometimes Jesus intentionally spoke in cryptic language so that people would not understand Him (Matthew 13:10-17; Luke 19:11)!

Though I do believe that Jews could understand “My Father’s house” as a reference to heaven on the basis of Deuteronomy 26:15<sup>20</sup>, even if they could not, such would not prove that Jesus could not have so meant it. The fact is, there were several things about Jesus life and teaching that could not be fully understood until after He had died, resurrected, and ascended back to heaven (Matthew 11:11; 2 Corinthians 2:8).

The irony is that when AK goes to John 2:16 to prove his point about Jewish understanding, the next few verses defeat the very point he is trying to make. In John 2:19, Jesus challenged the Jews to “tear down this temple and in three days I will build it up!”, yet no one understood what he meant until after he had risen from the dead! If Jesus must speak only in terms that people could understand, why did He make statements that the disciples did not understand (John 13:36-37; 14:5, 8)?

Yet the red herring fallacy and the requirement of Jewish understanding are not the only problems with AK’s argument. Another logical fallacy AK commits is the word study fallacy. A word study fallacy is when a person studies a word to the exclusion of other terms that share the same conceptual meaning. John Barclay illustrates and explains the problem well:

Paul's theology of grace is not confined to his use of a single term, *charis*. It embraces a range of vocabulary and is patterned by a distinctive use of these terms to convey the notion of an incongruous gift. *We should not confuse the study of a **concept** with the study of a **word**: a concept can be conveyed by a range*

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<sup>20</sup> And many other passages as will be noted shortly.

*of different terms, and their meaning is given not in isolation but in their context of use.*<sup>21</sup>

Even if we were to allow AK's switch from "My Father's house" to "house of God,"<sup>22</sup> he has limited the discussion of heaven to texts where heaven is explicitly called the "house of God," while at the same time broadening the discussion to include all terms associated with the temple concept when looking for connections between the temple and the church. He therefore commits the word study fallacy when he is searching for a concept he has rejected, but not when looking to prove his point. I do not believe he does this intentionally; I believe he makes this mistake because he is following Gregg's error.

When we recognize that the terms temple, tabernacle, house of God, sanctuary, and dwelling place are all within the conceptual family of temple terms, and then broaden our search for a direct connection between these terms and heaven, the findings are overwhelming.

The first time "house of God" appears in the Bible it is not used in connection to the physical building of the temple (as has been argued extensively by AK and Gregg). The first usage is found in Genesis 28 when Jacob passed through Bethel. As Jacob slept, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and he saw "a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven." God stood at the top of the ladder and Jacob watched as angels ascended and descended upon the latter. When he awoke from his dream he was terrified and declared:

Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. (Genesis 28:16)

Why would Jacob be terrified that God had been "in this place" since God was depicted as standing at the top of the ladder in heaven rather than down on the earth with Jacob? The reason for Jacob's fright is explained in Genesis 28:17 where the Bible states:

How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

Jacob believed that since he had encountered God, God must dwell there and thus he changed the name of the location to "house of God" (Bethel), and declared that it was the "gates of heaven."

The significance of this passage for understanding the term "house of God" is tremendous. Here in the first usage of the term "house of God" and it is directly connected to heaven. "House of God" is also defined by this text as the place where God is found immediately present. To name the place Bethel was a declaration that earth and heaven had been joined in that location.

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<sup>21</sup> This is from John Barclay's book *Paul and the Power of Grace*. p. 114

<sup>22</sup> Again, we will discuss the grammatical problem with making such a switch when we discuss John 14:2.

It is of note that there was not a physical temple or tabernacle present, yet the location functioned in much the same way as both the tabernacle and temple in that it was a place where heaven connected with earth.

Jesus picked up the scene of Jacob's ladder and said of Himself:

Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. (John 1:51)

The reference to heaven being opened and angels of God ascending and descending on the "Son of Man" is a loaded statement that connects John 1:51 to both Genesis 28:16-17 and Daniel 7:14. Jesus is both the way to the Father and the gateway to heaven. No wonder He said:

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (John 14:6)

It is critical to understand that God's presence or place on earth always connects earth to heaven. Jesus came to tabernacle among men (John 1:14) so that earth could be connected with heaven (John 1:51). The tabernacle, temple, and church were all designed to connect people of earth with God in heaven. To deny such a concept is to miss the entire reason the tabernacle and temple were created and how they anticipated the arrival of the church.

Consider carefully the lengthy list of passages provided below that demonstrate earth's connection to heaven through the tabernacle and temple of the Old Testament, as well as passages that refer to heaven as the temple, tabernacle, or house of God.

### **God's Earthly and Heavenly House:**

References to God's "house" that are not referents to the physical tabernacle or temple of Israel include:

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" (Genesis 28:16-17)

Look down from Your holy house, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the land which You have given us, just as You swore to our fathers, "a land flowing with milk and honey." (Deuteronomy 26:15 – LXX)

**God's Heavenly Temple:**

References to heaven as God's "temple" include:

The Lord is in His holy **temple**,  
 The Lord's throne is in **heaven**;  
 His eyes behold,  
 His eyelids test the sons of men. (Psalm 11:4)

In my distress I called upon the Lord,  
 And cried out to my God;  
 He heard my voice from His **temple**,  
 And my cry came before Him, even to His ears. (Psalm 18:6)

In my distress I called upon the Lord,  
 And cried out to my God;  
 He heard my voice from His **temple**,  
 And my cry entered His ears. (2 Samuel 22:7)

The voice of the Lord makes the deer give birth  
 and strips the forests bare,  
 and in his **temple** all cry, "Glory!" (Psalm 29:9)

It should be noted that all of the psalms listed were penned by David before the temple was built by Solomon and could not therefore be a reference to the earthly temple.

Hear, you peoples, all of you;  
 pay attention, O earth, and all that is in it,  
 and let the Lord God be a witness against you,  
 the Lord from his holy **temple**.  
 For behold, the Lord is coming out of his place,  
 and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. (Micah 1:2-3)

But the Lord is in His holy **temple**.  
 Let all the earth keep silence before Him. (Habakkuk 2:20)

If the physical temple on earth can be referred to as God's house because he dwelt there in some sense, I do not see why God's ultimate heavenly temple where He dwells should not also be understood as "My Father's house." Jewish translators of the LXX apparently had no problem making such a connection.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See comment on Deuteronomy 26:15.

**God's Earthly and Heavenly Sanctuary:**

In Exodus 25:8, when God commissioned Moses to build the tabernacle, He referred to it as a "sanctuary" so that "I may dwell among them." (Exodus 25:8) Yet, God also refers to heaven as His sanctuary:

Hear the voice of my supplications  
When I cry to You,  
When I lift up my hands toward Your holy *sanctuary*. (Psalm 28:2)<sup>24</sup>

Just as his father had raised his hands toward God's heavenly sanctuary in Psalm 28:2, so Solomon raises his hands toward heaven in worship on the day the temple was dedicated:

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward *heaven*. (1 Kings 8:22)

David would again write:

May he send you help from the *sanctuary*  
and give you support from Zion! (Psalm 20:2)

The apostle John would also utilize "sanctuary" as a description of God's heavenly realm:

After this I looked, and the *sanctuary* of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, and out of the *sanctuary* came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. (Revelation 15:5-6)

If the tabernacle was God's sanctuary where He dwelt on earth (Exodus 25:8), and if heaven is His ultimate temple sanctuary where He dwells eternally, should we not understand the earthly sanctuary as typifying the ultimate reality of heaven? When we think of the temple on earth, are we not meant to ultimately think of God in heaven?

**Solomon's Temple and Heaven:**

After the ark of the covenant was taken into the Most Holy Place of Solomon's temple on the day of dedication, the glory of God appeared:

And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.  
Then Solomon spoke:  
"The Lord said He would dwell in the dark cloud.  
I have surely built You an exalted house,

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<sup>24</sup> Note again that Psalm 28 is a psalm of David and was therefore written before the temple was built.



And a place for You to dwell in forever.” (1 Kings 8:10-13)

In verse 12, Solomon references God’s promise to dwell in the dark cloud, like He had dwelt in the tabernacle:

Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat. (Leviticus 16:2)

The Hebrew writer drew on passages such as 1 Kings 8:10-13 and Leviticus 16:2 in Hebrews 8:2 to make the point that the Most Holy of the temple and tabernacle represented God’s heavenly realm. When heaven is declared God’s throne and earth is called His footstool, (Isaiah 66:1) such imagery depicts God reigning from his heavenly throne with his feet resting on His footstool in the temple (Psalm 132:7-8; 1 Chronicles 28:2, 1 Sam 4:4, Ps 99:1, Is 37:16).<sup>25</sup>

In the vision of Isaiah 6, the throne and temple of God are joined together as Isaiah saw God seated on His throne surrounded by the Seraphim, in the temple. The vision is meant to teach that the earthly temple was connected to the throne of God in heaven where God dwells with his angels. The point of Isaiah 6 is that heaven and earth are joined through the temple. The house of God on earth represented His heavenly dwelling.

1 Kings 8:13 speaks of the temple as an “exalted house” and defines that title as meaning “a place where you will dwell forever.” Yet Solomon understood that the temple was not the ultimate dwelling place of God, for in the same passage he later stated:

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built! Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O Lord my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You today: that Your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which You said, My name shall be there,’ that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place. And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. **Hear in heaven Your dwelling place**; and when You hear, forgive. (1 Kings 8:27-30)

Solomon believed that prayer needed to be directed toward the temple so that the prayers of the people might reach God’s throne in heaven, His true dwelling place. Solomon understood that God’s dwelling in the temple was a symbolic dwelling that indicated God’s special relationship with Israel and thereby connected the earth with heaven. This point is repeated and emphasized in verses 41-43 where prayer towards the temple was extended to Gentiles who would hear of God’s great name and come to worship him at the temple.

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<sup>25</sup> 2 Chronicles 9:17-18 seems to indicate that Solomon added a footstool to his throne to mirror the throne of God.

Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name's sake (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, **hear in heaven your dwelling place** and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name. (1 Kings 8:41-43)

AK and Gregg both acknowledge that when God stopped dwelling in the physical temple that it was no longer considered His house (Mathew 23:38), but he does not seem to grasp that God's continued dwelling in heaven is what also makes heaven God's temple, sanctuary, and house. If God ceased to dwell in heaven, then heaven would no longer be God's house. But since God remains there, a refusal to call Heaven His house is hard to understand, unless one has already made up their mind before taking a careful look at the evidence.

### **The Holy Places and True Tent**

Just as Israel was connected through the temple to the throne room of heaven, so the people of God are connected through Christ and his body (the church) to the full reality of God's dwelling in heaven. The Hebrew writer made this very point when he declared:

Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the **sanctuary** and in the **true tabernacle**, which the Lord pitched, not man. (Hebrews 8:1-2 NASB)

They serve a copy and shadow **of the heavenly things**. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." (Hebrews 8:5)

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and **more perfect tent** (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the **holy places**, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:11-12)

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the **holy place** by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the **house of God**, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22)

Commenting on "house of God" in Hebrews 9:21, Robert Milligan states:

Like Melchisedec, he sits as a priest upon his throne, while he presides over the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. iii. 15). The house of God may, however, in this instance, denote the church in heaven as well as the church on earth, for Christ is a minister of both the heavenly Sanctuary and the true Tabernacle (ch. viii. 2).<sup>26</sup>

I pose the following questions to AK and those who hold his position: What is it about the church that makes it the house of God? Is it not the dwelling presence of God and the access that it provides to His throne? If God ceases to dwell in the church, does the church remain the house of God (Revelation 2:5)?

#### **A Sidebar on the Refurbished Earth:**

I want to take a second to address a major point that relates to what we have seen about the connection between heaven and earth in the temple imagery. Since the Hebrew writer referred to heaven as the “sanctuary” meaning that the Most Holy of both the physical tabernacle and the church (the “true Tabernacle”) are meant to depict the ultimate reality of heaven, by what grounds do we turn around and declare that the ultimate reality of heaven is merely a foreshadowing of the Refurbished Earth that is yet to be created. Has God’s eternal dwelling place become dilapidated and in need of a replacement? In what sense could the Refurbished Earth be grander than God’s current abode? And if our firstfruits (1 Corinthians 15:20), the Man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5), can dwell bodily in heaven, why can’t the rest of mankind?

#### **God’s Heavenly House in the Gospels:**

In the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), when the Lord returned with his bride, the Bible says that “those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut.” The natural question that arises is: The door to what? Was it not the door to the Father’s house where the marriage of the Lamb would be celebrated at the end of the world? Does the passage not echo the story of Noah wherein the Lord shut the door and those outside were left to perish in judgement due to rebellion and neglect? How could Christ tell such a story if the Jews had no understanding that heaven is “My Father’s house”?

The point of Matthew 25:1-13 is paralleled in Luke 13:

Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the ***Master of the house has risen up and shut the door***, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, I do not know you, where you are from,’ then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’ But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’ There will be weeping and

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Milligan. The New Testament Commentary Epistle to the Hebrews. Gospel Light Publishing. Delight, AR. P. 280

gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last. (Luke 13:24-30)

It is inescapable that Luke here describes the consummation of the Kingdom as the ingathering of all God's saved people into God's house when the Master shuts the door on the final day of Judgement – unless you are willing to take the path of the Hyper-Preterist.<sup>27</sup> It seems more than coincidental that the Master's house is entered through a gate. Is that not what Jacob saw back in Genesis 28:16-17?

### **Jewish Understanding:**

Before moving on to the next major pillar in AK's argument, I want to note some references to heaven as God's house and tabernacle in non-biblical Jewish writing to demonstrate further that Jews could have understood "My Father's house" as a reference to heaven. The following comment from Andrew Lincoln regarding 1 Enoch (an apocryphal Jewish writing from around the second century B.C.) is informative:

Despite 'my Father's house' serving as a reference to the Jerusalem temple in 2:16, there is little warrant for finding here either a reference to rooms in the heavenly temple or to the believing community as a spiritual temple. The imagery is more general and taken from apocalyptic writings about the afterlife, cf. especially 1 Enoch 39:4-8, which speaks of 'the dwelling-places of the holy, and the resting-places of the righteous' in heaven, which was pictured as God's house.<sup>28</sup>

Though I do not agree with Lincoln about John 14:2 being "taken from... 1 Enoch 39:4-8", it is clear from reading 1 Enoch 39:4-8 that John does utilize the same imagery and that such imagery was understood by Jews as a reference to heaven.

**4** And there I saw another vision, the *dwelling-places* of the holy, And the resting-places of the righteous. **5** Here mine eyes saw their *dwelling-places* with His righteous angels, And their resting-places with the holy. And they petitioned and interceded and prayed for the children of men, And righteousness flowed before them as water, And mercy like dew upon the earth: Thus it is amongst them for ever and ever. **6** And in that place mine eyes saw the Elect One of righteousness and of faith, **7** And righteousness shall prevail in his days, And the righteous and elect shall be without number before Him for ever and ever. **8** And I saw his *dwelling-place* under the wings of the Lord of Spirits. (1 Enoch 39:4-8)

<sup>27</sup> Hyper-Preterists are those who believe that all Bible prophecy, including the second coming of the Lord and the final resurrection occurred at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Lincoln commentary on the Gospel of John p. 389

While discussing “My Father’s house” in John 14:2, James McCaffrey quotes extensively from the book of Enoch to demonstrate that the concept of heaven as the house of God was understood by the Jews. I will quote McCaffrey at length:

However, it is only in the Book of Enoch that the heavenly temple becomes designated explicitly as the goal of eschatological bliss. Here we have the fullest description of the heavenly temple in Jewish literature. It is a magnificent crystal building, and contains an inner house (i.e. holy of holies) in which God is enthroned in great majesty:

“In every respect it so excelled in splendor and magnificence and extent that I cannot describe to you its splendor and its extent. And its floor was of fire, and above it were lightings and the path of the stars, and its ceiling also was flaming fire. And I looked and saw therein a lofty throne: its appearance was a crystal... And the Great Glory sat thereon, and His raiment shone more brightly than the sun and was whiter than any snow” (I En, 14,16-18.20)

The cult in this heavenly temple is also described. The author tells how Levi travels through the heavens to the “highest of them all” where he sees the temple and its priesthood and cult:

“For in the Highest of all dwelleth the Great Glory, in the holy of holies, far above all holiness. And in (the heaven next to) it are the angels of the presence of the Lord, who minister and make propitiation to the Lord for all the sins of ignorance of the righteous. They offer to the Lord a sweet-smelling savour, a reasonable and bloodless offering” (I En 3,4-6; comp. 5,1-2)

This “house” is the eschatological goal of the just. Israel is depicted as a flock of sheep, which in the time of Solomon is represented as grazing peacefully around the temple, “a tower lofty and great... (which) was built on the house for the Lord of the sheep” (89,50). The old temple is torn down and in its place a magnificent new one is erected:

“And I stood up to see till they folded up that old house; and carried off all the pillars, and all the beams and ornaments of the house were at the same time folded up with it, and they carried it off and laid it in a place in the south of the land. And I saw till the Lord of the sheep brought a new house greater and loftier than the first, and set it up in the place of the first which had been folded up; all its pillars new, and its ornaments were new and larger than those of the first, the old one which He had taken away, and all the sheep were within it” (90,28-9).

Besides, the peace and repose of the just in this heavenly temple is often evoked:

“In those days a whirlwind carried me off from the face of the earth and placed me at the extremity of the heavens. And there I saw another vision: the dwellings of the saved and the places of repose of the just. There my eyes saw their dwelling-places with the saints... The just and the elect will be innumerable before him for an eternity of eternities... The just and the elect will shine before him as the lights of fire...” (I En 39,3-8; cf. also 51; 58; 62,13-16).

McCaffrey concludes:

Finally, the abode reserved for the just is none other than the place where the patriarch Enoch has been placed after his transference (I En 39,3-8ff). Enoch associates himself with the angelic liturgy in this heavenly temple of bliss. There the essence of his joy is a life-with-God beyond description, except in symbols.<sup>29</sup>

Another Jewish author wrote the following in the apocryphal book, *The Wisdom of Solomon*:

<sup>8</sup> And hast commanded me to build a temple on thy holy mount, and an altar in the city of thy dwelling place, a resemblance of thy holy tabernacle, which thou hast prepared from the beginning:

<sup>9</sup> And thy wisdom with thee, which knoweth thy works, which then also was present when thou madest the world, and knew what was agreeable to thy eyes, and what was right in thy commandments.

<sup>10</sup> Send her out of thy holy heaven, and from the throne of thy majesty, that she may be with me, and may labour with me, that I may know what is acceptable with thee: (Wisdom 9:8-10)

Commenting on Wisdom 9:8-10, Craig Koester states:

The author understood the “pattern” of the tabernacle, mentioned in Exodus 25:9, to be an actual heavenly tabernacle that had been erected by God.<sup>30</sup>

More evidence from Jewish writings could be mounted to demonstrate that the viewed heaven as the ultimate temple, house, and dwelling place of God, but these are sufficient to prove the point.

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<sup>29</sup> Emphasis mine. James McCaffrey, *The House With Many Rooms: The Temple Theme of John 14,2-3*, p. 60-62.

<sup>30</sup> Craig R. Koester, *The Dwelling of God*, p. 63-64.

## **Conclusion to the Long Answer:**

From both a biblical and non-biblical Jewish standpoint, AK is completely wrong when he asserts “The Jew would not have understood ‘my Father’s house’ as heaven. That’s not the way they thought.”<sup>31</sup> I do not want to imply that AK has been dishonest regarding the witness of both Biblical and non-biblical writers; I simply believe he has not fully researched the claims he has made and has chosen rather to follow Steve Gregg’s lead. I pray that AK will quit placing so much trust in Gregg’s fanciful interpretations and return to the teaching of Scripture.

Without a doubt, both the temple and the church are earthly manifestations of the heavenly reality and both were intended to ground believer in heaven rather than earth. The words of Hebrews 11 are worth repeating:

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having ***acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth***. For people who speak thus make it clear that ***they are seeking a homeland***. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ***But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one***. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

Though more could be said, we will move on from demonstrating that “My Father’s house” in John 14:2 ***can*** refer to heaven, and attempt to demonstrate that it ***must*** refer to heaven.

## **The Contextual Meaning of John 14:1-4**

In order to properly understand the meaning of John 14:1-4, we must begin at the beginning of the Farewell Discourse in 13:31.<sup>32</sup> The break that is inserted at the beginning of chapter 14 is an instance where chapter divisions hurt rather than help. In order to properly understand “My Father’s house” in John 14:2, we must consider what has been stated previously in the conversation. The second problem is that Jesus’ discussion of “Where I am going...” in John 13:33 through 14:4 does not begin in chapter 13 or 14, but in chapter 7. The whole conversation must be heard before conclusions can be drawn about what was said.

### **“Where I Am Going”**

In John 7, while involved in a dispute with some Pharisees who sought to kill Him the Lord said:

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<sup>31</sup> For further reading on the Jewish and Near Eastern conception of heaven see Pekka Pitkanen’s article “From Tent of Meeting to Temple” in the book *Heaven on Earth* edited by T. Desmond Alexander and Simon Gathercole.

<sup>32</sup> Many commentators have noted this.

Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple, saying, “You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me.” (John 7:28-29)

When people questioned where Jesus was from, Jesus did not play along with their feigned ignorance, but chided them for refusing to admit that he was sent from the Father. Jesus’ response caused quite a stir and forced the Jews to dispatch officers to arrest him, yet Jesus did not slow down:

“I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me. You will seek Me and not find Me, and **where I am you cannot come.**”  
Then the Jews said among themselves, “Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What is this thing that He said, ‘You will seek Me and not find Me, and **where I am you cannot come?**’” (John 7:33-36)

Because the Jews refused to acknowledge that Jesus was sent from the Father they could not understand where He was going. Yet Jesus did not change His statement simply because they refused to understand. The double repetition of “where I am you cannot come” emphasizes the importance the author placed upon it. Jesus did not hint at the coming of the Kingdom (as AK alleges in John 14), but stated that the Jews could not come where He was going.

After a brief interlude, the same discussion about Jesus’ departure occurs again:

So he said to them again, “I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. **Where I am going, you cannot come.**” He said to them, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am He you will die in your sins.” (John 8:21-24)

Because they have rejected Jesus as the way to the Father, they will die in their sins. They are from their father the devil (John 8:44), and thus they will go to hell when they die. Jesus is from His Father in heaven, and to heaven He will go when He dies. Though Jesus has twice declared who He is, where He is from, and where He is going, the Pharisees still do not understand.

“Where I am going...” surfaces again in John 12, but on this occasion, there is a positive pronouncement attached to it as Jesus speaks to His disciples:

And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves



me, he must follow me; and **where I am, there will my servant be also**. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. (John 12:23-26)

When speaking of His impending death (and by necessary implication His return to the Father), Jesus stated that He must die in order that those who die in him might have eternal life, or to put it differently, that “where I am, there will my servant be also.” The passage does not speak of Jesus joining His servants in the church age, but rather them joining Him in the resurrection (see Paul’s use of the same seed metaphor in 1 Corinthians 15:20, 35-58). The positive pronouncement of John 12:25 balances out the negative statement of John 8:24. Wherever Jesus is, there the resurrected saints will be also.

Having addressed the previous four usages of the “Where I am...” statements, we are now prepared to consider the Farewell Discourse.

### **The Farewell Discourse**

It is important to note that the Farewell Discourse begins in chapter 13 rather than chapter 14. Beginning in John 13:31 the Bible states:

When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.

Once night had come and the betrayer had departed, Jesus began speaking about His glorification that was now at hand. The glorification that Jesus speaks of in John 13:31-32 is the same death that He spoke of in John 12:23-26, where He went on to say:

Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name. (John 12:27-28)

The agony of the cross was upon him and yet it was through His death that He would glorify God. He continued,

“This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show by what kind of death He was going to die. (John 12:30-33)

As Jesus returned to the subject of His death in John 13:31-32, knowing the time was nigh for Him to glorify the Father, He comforted His disciples with these words:

Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' (John 13:33)

Why does Jesus now tell them that they are not able to come where He is going, when in John 12 He assured them that they would? The difference between John 13:33 and John 12:25 is that there must be a period of separation between the departure of the Lord and the coming of the apostles. There are two reasons why the disciples cannot go to glory with Jesus at this time: First, they are not yet themselves prepared to die. Peter thinks he is (John 13:37), but Jesus knows better (John 13:38). Second, Christ's death must be a solitary death (Isaiah 63:3), whereby He would triumph over the Devil (John 12:31) and open up the way to heaven for the disciples to follow afterward (Hebrews 10:20-21).

When Peter asked Jesus where He was going, Jesus modified his previous statement to indicate that Peter could indeed follow, just not now:

**Where I am going** you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward. (John 13:36)

There is a double meaning to the Lord's words: Peter will one day follow Jesus to both the cross and to heaven. After His resurrection Jesus explained to Peter:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "**Follow me.**" (John 21:18-19)

D. A. Carson helps us understand the connection between John 13:36-38 and 21:18-19 when he states:

Lest that irony be missed, they are repeated in Jesus' answering rhetorical question: Will you really lay down your life for me? Who, after all, is laying down his life for whom (cf. 10:15; 11:50-52)? Yet in another sense, Peter spoke better than he knew. He could not lay down his life for Jesus then; he would lay it down three decades later, and thereby glorify God (cf. notes on 21:18-19). In so doing he followed the example of the Master and displayed his love for his brothers and sisters in Christ (cf. 12:25-26; 15:13).<sup>33</sup>

As Christ predicted, Peter did follow Christ's glorious death, and we should rest assured that Peter is now where Jesus is (John 13:36). As comforting as that thought is for us, Peter and the rest of

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<sup>33</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids, MI. 1990. p. 386

the disciples could not see the glory that awaited Christ on the other side of death. Their hearts were heavy, and they needed reassurance, so the Lord comforted them:

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. (John 14:1)

The disciples needed to trust the promise of the Father to glorify His Son, and they also needed to trust the promise of the Son that this was not the end (John 12:26; 13:36).

In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going. (John 14:2-4, NASB)

Having heard the message of the Lord in John 13:31-38, it is difficult to un-hear it when you read John 14:1-4. Carson again captures the thought well:

But although Jesus' followers must come to grips with his departure, the tone of this announcement to them is vastly different from the two passages where 'the Jews' are informed that they will not be able to find him (7:34); rather, they are told he is going to prepare a place for them (14:1-3). They are not told that they will die in their sin (8:21); rather, because he lives, they too will live (14:19).<sup>34</sup>

When pressed about the "where I am..." statements throughout John's Gospel, AK responded to one inquirer:

Jesus goes to the Father (and hence to heaven) to send the Spirit and establish the church which is the house of God during the Christian Era. The "Father's house" is not heaven. It is the temple. The "dwelling places" are the believers (verse 23). Jesus went to the Father in order that the temple made without hands – the church – would be established. In thus doing, Jesus enables His people to "draw near" to the Father without the ceremonies and mediators of the old temple/tabernacle (Heb. 10), because they (we) are the dwelling places in God's temple. The point is that we have emphasized the location as the point of it all – Jesus is taking us to heaven, Jesus' emphasis was on going to the Father, not the place where the Father is. The unity spoken of throughout the farewell discourse is about bringing God's people to Himself in unity and fellowship like Jesus had.<sup>35</sup>

AK both admits that the "where I am..." statements imply that Jesus was returning to the Father in heaven, and yet simultaneously denies that the location of where Jesus is going is relative to the conversation. In other words, Jesus begins speaking of returning to the Father in heaven and

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<sup>34</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. p. 483

<sup>35</sup> AK Richardson. Facebook. March 1, 2023. The Father's House (John 14) W/ AK Richardson.

concludes by promising to bring the disciples into the church. The problem with AK's position is that it contradicts John 13:36: "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later."

In order to maintain his position, AK has to introduce another red herring argument. AK **must** understand the beginning of John 13:36 as a reference to heaven and the end of it as begin a reference to the church. Such an understanding of John 13:36 is completely illogical. Either both parts of the verse must be about heaven, or both must be about the church. If both parts of the verse are about the church, then why would Jesus make the statement of verse 33 without a qualifier? John 13:36 presents a conundrum to AK's logical inconsistencies that he cannot overcome.

It is illogical to argue that where a person is has nothing to do with their location. The word "where" requires a location. Though there are different types of locations (physical versus conceptual) where someone goes **must always** necessitate a location. AK has simply chosen to reject the "where" of heaven for the "where" of the church, and has chosen an illogical path in order to do so.

Another problem with AK's idea that Jesus must go away in order that the disciples could enter into fellowship with the Father through the church is that it presupposes that the disciples were not currently in fellowship with the Father. How could the disciples not be in fellowship with the Father if the Son was in fellowship with the Father (John 14:10) and the disciples were in fellowship with the Son (John 14:25; 15:1-11)? If Jesus is the vine and they are the branches, why must Jesus go away to establish unity between the Father and the disciples?

AK believes that a radical shift that takes place between John 13:31-38 and John 14:2-4, as he asserts that the conversation turns from Jesus' departure to be with the Father, to a promise that He must go to prepare the church for the arrival of the disciples. AK makes this tie by arguing that "My Father's house" must be a reference to the temple. To establish this connection, AK claims that the Greek word *oikia* (house) of John 14:2 is merely a synonym of *oikos* (house) in John 2:16, and that the two words can be interchanged. James McCaffrey disagrees with AK's argument and raises grammatical evidence to the contrary:

In the LXX *oikia* and *oikos* are not distinguished in certain cases. The literal meaning is "house" or "dwelling". However, the use of *oikos* is much more frequent than *oikia*. The former is a favourite LXX term. Both terms *oikos* and *oikia* are found in a transferred sense. So, it is perfectly intelligible that the term *oikos* should be used in a metaphorical sense to designate the house of God: his temple. The use of *oikia* to designate an ordinary house-building does occur. **But it is never used to designate the temple.** On the other hand, the phrase *oikos tou Theou* becomes a fixed term for the sanctuary temple.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Emphasis mine. James McCaffrey, *The House With Many Rooms: The Temple Theme of John 14,2-3*, p. 49

Not only does AK's argument not deal with McCaffrey's argument, it also misses the allusion of the text as noted by Andreas Kostenberger:

Jesus' provision of a place seems to be patterned after Deuteronomy, where God is said to have gone ahead and to have prepared a place for his people in the Promised Land (e.g. 1:29-33). Elsewhere in the NT, in the book of Hebrews, Jesus is depicted as our 'forerunner' (NASB), who has finished the course and entered heaven (6:20; 12:2). In the same book, mention is made of a 'heavenly country's or 'city' prepared for the saints (11:16).<sup>37</sup>

The Hebrews 6 passage that Kostenberger cites is worth noting in full:

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 6:19-20)

Jesus, our forerunner, has gone before us into heaven ("behind the veil"). Strong's defines a forerunner as "one who comes in advance to a place where the rest are to follow."<sup>38</sup> It is impossible to read Hebrews 6:19-20 and walk away with the idea that we will not in fact go to heaven one day. When John 14:2-3 is read in parallel with Hebrews 6:19-20, we find an immediate connection between the temple imagery and heaven, as well as a promise that heaven awaits those who die in the Lord, AK notwithstanding.

Kostenberger also notes:

In keeping with Jewish patriarchal culture, Jesus, the Son of the Father, establishes his followers "as members of the Father's household" and "makes his home accessible to them as a final place of residence."<sup>39</sup>

We will have more to say about John 14:3 when we discuss AK's interpretation of John 14:23, but for now it must be noted that Jesus promised both to "come" and "take" the disciples in verse 3.

I will **come** again and will **take** you to myself, that where I am you may be also.  
(John 14:3)

Where will He take them? Should we not understand the "Where I am..." statement of verse 3 in connection with its six previous usages (John 7:33-36; 8:21-24; 12:23-26; 13:33, 36)? Since Jesus was returning to the Father (8:14,23) and promised to return and take them to Himself so that

<sup>37</sup> Andreas Kostenberger, *Gospel of John*, p. 427

<sup>38</sup> Strong's. Give citation.

<sup>39</sup> Kostenberger, *Gospel of John*, p. 427 commenting and quoting Schreiner, TDNT 5:997)

“where I am there you may be also,” why MUST we reject the contextual view that Jesus is promising that the disciples will one day be with him in heaven (John 13:36)?

AK claims the reason we must understand John 14:3 as a reference to the church is because John 14:23 provides the key to understanding Jesus’ words. This brings us now to the third pillar of AK’s argument.

### **Pillar #3: Reverse Engineering with John 14:23:**

To review, the third pillar of AK’s argument teaches that John 14:2 must be understood in light of John 14:23 where Jesus states, “we will come to him and make our home with him.” “Home” in verse 23 is the same word translated “dwellings” in verse 2, and appears only in these two places in the New Testament. We must therefore understand John 14:2 and 14:23 as parallel statements. Since these are the only two occasions where the word is found in the New Testament, and since clearly the “home” of verse 23 refers to the individual Christian rather than heaven, verse 2 must be a reference to the Father and the Son dwelling in the church or the Christian through the Spirit.

To state it differently, AK contends that in order to understand verse 2, we must wait until we get to verse 23 which provides the key to the entire sermon. AK does not allow for transition of topics between verse 2 and verse 23, but instead chooses to equate the sending of the Spirit with the coming that Jesus promised in verse 3.

In an attempt to make verses 2-3 parallel with verse 23, AK highlights the Greek word *mone* (home) that is shared between the two passages. He then argues that since *mone* is only used twice in Scripture, and since both occurrences are found in the same chapter, we must realize that verse 2 and verse 23 share the same thought.

There are two challenges to AK’s assertion that we must understand verse 2 in light of verse 23. The first problem is that it either forces John 14:2 to contradict Scripture or else renders it nonsensical. If Jesus went to prepare the church, how do we reconcile John 14:2 with Matthew 25:34 where the Bible says the kingdom (which would include the church) has been prepared since the foundation of the world? If Jesus went to prepare a dwelling place in the church rather than the church itself, and if dwelling places refers to Christians as AK has argued in verse 23, what does it mean that Jesus went to prepare Christians in the church? I must confess that the idea of Jesus going to prepare Christians for the church makes no sense to me.

The second problem with AK’s argument is that it is not a legitimate grammatical argument. D. A. Carson, while responding to Robert Gundry (who made the same argument that AK has made regarding the usage of *mone* in verse 23), wrote the following:

The Greek word *mone*, cognate with the verb *meno*, (‘to remain’, ‘to stay’, ‘to dwell’), properly signifies a ‘dwelling place’... It is by reading the referent of the word in v. 23 back into v. 2 that Gundry finds warrant for his view that the coming

of Jesus in vv. 2-3 is a bestowal of the Spirit. The fact remains that the word *mone* simply means 'dwelling-place'; there is no more reason to read the referent of that word (i.e. to what dwelling-place the word refers) in v. 23 back into v. 2 than the reverse: in both instances the context must decide... Nor does *my Father's house* here (v.2) refer to the church as the spiritual house or temple of God (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16-17; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Pet. 2:5): that metaphor is not found in the Fourth Gospel. Moreover, even in passages where the metaphor is teased out, the church is referred to as the house of God, but never 'the Father's house' or 'my Father's house.'<sup>40</sup>

Carson is correct in his assessment of the text and is confirmed by James McCaffrey's observation that "My Father's house" is not a reference to the temple. On another occasion, Carson makes a statement that rings true of the argument AK and Gregg make based regarding the dual usage of *mone* in John 14:

Bible readers should exercise special pains not to succumb either to unjustified reductionism, in which one particular usage is read into every occurrence, or to "illegitimate totality transfer," in which the entire semantic range of the expression is read into every occurrence. Context must decide.<sup>41</sup>

Not only does AK's grammatical argument about *mone* fail, but he also dismisses a major difference between verse 2-3 and verse 23. The distinction is easy to see when the passages are laid side by side:

In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will **come** again and will **take** you to myself, that where I am you may be also. (John 14:2-3)

If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will **come** to him and make our home with him. (John 14:23)

In verse 3, Jesus speaks of both "coming" and "taking", but in verse 23 He speaks of "coming" only. What AK fails to recognize is that verses 2-3 speak of a personal coming whereas verse 23 speaks of a representative coming. When Jesus speaks of taking the disciples to "where I am," the disciples are the ones who must leave their location to be with Christ. This point can be seen clearly in John 16:32-33:

Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with

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<sup>40</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. p. 488-89.

<sup>41</sup> D. A. Carson, *Jesus The Son of God: A Christological Title Often Overlooked, Sometimes Misunderstood, and Currently Disputed*. Crossway. Wheaton, IL. 2012. P. 63. Kindle Edition.

me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

When Jesus was left alone, it was because the disciples were no longer with Him where He was. Yet Jesus was not totally abandoned when on the cross, for the Father was with Him. How can Jesus speak of the Father being with Him on the cross (John 16:32), yet still having to go to be with the Father where neither the Jews nor disciples could come? (John 8:21-23) The only way to reconcile these two passages is to understand that there was a difference between God being with Jesus on earth and Christ being with the Father in heaven.

John 8:21-23 and John 16:32 provide the key for understanding the two separate comings that Jesus referenced in John 14:2-3 and John 14:23. John 14:2-3 speaks of Jesus coming back to take the disciples to be with Him and the Father, while John 14:23 speaks of God and Jesus coming to dwell with the disciples through the Word. To put it another way, John 14:2-3 speaks of the disciples dwelling in God’s immediate presence in heaven, whereas John 14:23 speaks of the Father and the Son dwelling through a mediated presence of the Word

Not only does AK’s position combine the mediated dwelling of the Spirit with the eternal dwelling with the Father, he also turns “My Father’s house” in to a reference to the individual Christian and then seems to make every Christian a recipient of the Spirit Jesus has just promised to the Apostles.

Without getting into a full-blown discussion of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, two things need to be noted: First, though the church is referred to as the temple of God, the individual Christian is not so referenced in Scripture. Though 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 is used frequently to teach that the Christian’s body is a temple of God, upon closer examination the argument fails. The “you” of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 is plural while the body is singular. Allow me to translate the 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 in both a literal and Southern way:

Or do y’all not know that y’all’s body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within y’all, whom y’all have from God? Y’all are not your own, for y’all were bought with a price. So glorify God in y’all’s body.

The singular body made up of many members is the church. First Corinthians 6:19-20 does not teach that the body of the individual Christian is a temple of God, but rather parallels 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 in establishing that the church is the temple where God dwells. Christians are a stone within the temple (Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:4), but the body of an individual Christian does not constitute a temple.

The second point that must be noted about the indwelling of the Spirit is that it is very problematic to take the Helper who was promised to the disciples in John 14:16 and John 14:26 and make that promise universally applicable to all Christians, because of what Christ said the Spirit would do for the apostles:



- He will dwell with you and be in you (John 14:17)
- Teach you (John 14:26)
- Bring all things to remembrance (John 14:26)
- Testify of me (John 15:26)
- Convict world of sin (John 16:8)
- Convict world of righteousness (John 16:8)
- Convict world of judgment (John 16:8)
- Guide you into all truth (John 16:13)
- Show things to come (John 16:13)
- Receive of mine and give to you (John 16:14)

I am not sure AK has fully thought through the implications of teaching that the individual Christian is a temple of God, and that what Christ promised to do for the apostles through the Spirit is likewise available to all Christians in the same manner. Does the Christian receive direct teaching, guidance, and knowledge of the future from the Holy Spirit? Are we to understand that the Spirit illuminates the mind of all Christians and gives them special revelation as He did the apostles? Are all Christians supernaturally empowered to convict the world of righteousness, judgement, and truth? I'm not sure AK is willing to go there, but Steve Gregg does so without hesitation.

Earlier I noted that Steve Gregg has heavily influenced AK, and it is in regard to the Holy Spirit that I have particular concerns about Gregg's influence. When Gregg makes the same argument as AK out of John 14:23, he advocates that each Christian is an individual temple of God, and that the Spirit operates directly and miraculously on the Christian, just as He did with the apostles.<sup>42</sup> He freely embraces the direct operation of the Spirit on the Christian and affirms that they receive miraculous power. Furthermore, when Gregg argues that the individual Christian is a temple, he does so in order to bypass the necessity of the local church which he disdains.<sup>43</sup> Repeatedly throughout his book *Empire of the Risen Son*, Gregg disparages the congregational church concept while glorifying the life of the Spirit empowered individual and universal church.<sup>44</sup> Gregg's view of the direct operation of the Spirit on the heart of a Christian is tied directly to his view of total depravity and spiritual regeneration. I do not know how much of Gregg's position on the Holy Spirit AK has embraced, but I am very concerned based on his general embracing of Gregg's teaching on the Farwell Discourse, and John 14:23 in particular. At the very least AK has left the door wide open for others to continue down Gregg's path.

The necessity of embracing the view that the individual Christian is the temple of God and then reverse engineering that understanding back into John 14:2-3 is without biblical warrant. John 14:23-24 does not speak of the Father and Son dwelling in every individual Christian through the

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<sup>42</sup> See Gregg, *Empire of the Risen Son*, p. 98-99, 101-102, 121-124, 144-148, 152-154, 244-245, 247-48, 276.

<sup>43</sup> See Gregg, *Empire of the Risen Son*, p. 276.

<sup>44</sup> See Gregg, *Empire of the Risen Son*, p. 71, 112-113, 123, 178, 276.

Spirit, but rather conditions the dwelling of the Father and Son upon the Christian's reception of the Word of God. If we abide in the Word, the Father and Son who have authored the Word will abide in us through the Word (see also John 15:7; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 4:6; Philippians 2:13; Colossians 1:27; Galatians 2:20).

The result is an interpretation of John 14:2-3 that reads like this:

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In the Church are many Spirit filled Christians. If it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare the church for you. If I go and prepare the church for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself in the church, that where I am (in the church), there you may be also.

Such an interpretation must be proven, and AK has not yet made his case.

This brings us to the final pillar of AK's argument:

### **The Final Pillar:**

The fourth pillar of AK's argument is his belief that the "Where I am" statement of John 17:24 must be understood contextually as meaning here on earth, since Jesus was not in heaven at the time he made the statement. Furthermore, since Jesus had previously asked God not to take the disciples "out of the world" (John 17:15), he could not be asking that the Father allow them to enter heaven in John 17:24.

To be fair with AK and allow him to state his own case in his own words, I will share his assessment of John 17:24:

"Where I am." Notice that. What? Does Jesus want us to be in heaven? No. This is the context here of unity... It's not about heaven, it's about unity with the Father, a unity that will be shared NOW in the Christian age on earth, by the church, who is dwelt in by the Father through the Spirit... He says, "I desire that they also, whom you have given me, be with me where I am, so that they may see my glory which you have given me, for you loved me before the foundation of the world. Where he is now is not in heaven. He is still on earth. But he's saying "I want them to be where I am" in this unity and love and glory with the Father. That's where he wants us."

AK's confusion is based on a persistent failure to recognize the connection between the "where I am..." statements of John 7, 8, 12, 13, 14 and now 17.

The conflict AK sees between the idea of Jesus united with the disciples in heaven (John 17:24) and His refusal to ask that they be taken out of the world (John 17:15) disappears when the statement of John 13:36 is remembered.

Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; **but you will follow later.** (John 13:36)

Jesus is not asking that the disciples be taken out of the world right now (John 17:15), but He is most certainly asking the Father to reunite them in the resurrection (John 12:23; 13:36). Jesus' prayer in John 17:10-19 consists of a prayer for the preservation of the disciples who must remain in the world though they are not of the world. The "in the world, not of the world" terminology Jesus uses regarding the disciples (John 17:14,16) is the same wording He used to speak of Himself (John 17:14 and 8:23). Just as Jesus did not pray that he would be saved from the hour of His glorification (John 12:27), so He does not ask the Father to save the disciples from the hour of their glorification (John 17:15; 13:36-38; 21:18-19). The hour is not yet for the disciples to glorify God, but the hour is coming, (John 15:20-21, 26-16:4) and so Christ prays on their behalf.

In the closing verses of His prayer (John 17:20-26), Jesus broadens his plea to include "those who will believe in me," so that they "be with Me where I am" (John 17:24). The power of this plea is only realized when understood in light of the beginning of the prayer:

Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:1-3)

To argue that eternal life in heaven with the glorified Savior is not under consideration in John 17:24, but rather a bestowal of the Spirit during the current Christian age, is a result of following Steve Gregg through the Farewell Discourse rather than Christ. I pray that my brother and friend will reconsider what he has been teaching and give it up.

### **In Conclusion:**

I find it interesting that very few people who believe in a Refurbished Earth have embraced the conclusions AK has reached regarding John 14-17. Yet be that as it may, AK certainly sees the Farewell Discourse as a major roadblock that he must overcome in order to convince people of a Refurbished Earth. In his own words:

I certainly find no reason that this NHNE (New Heavens and New Earth) is equivalent to God's heaven. It seems to me that the best case for living eternally in heaven is John 14, but I do not believe that this passage is about that.<sup>45</sup>

How sad when brethren allow their doctrinal presuppositions to reinterpret vast chunks of God's Word.

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<sup>45</sup> AK Richardson. December 22, 2022. HEAVEN OR "NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH"? For many years I have believed that Christians (the saved) will live eternally in heaven...

The purpose of this response is not to take a full swipe at the doctrine of a Refurbished Earth, but to defend the Biblical doctrine of Heaven as taught in the Farewell Discourse. To this point, AK has merely stated that he holds to the view of a Refurbished Earth but has not provided any evidence for such a conclusion (at least not that I am aware of). Rather than building a straw man to tear down, I will content myself for the moment with defending the biblical view of heaven as taught in John 14.

I close with the admonition of the apostle Paul:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)