

Heaven #1

"There is less interest in heaven (today) than at almost any time in history. Few valuable modern books have been written on this topic. Berkhof's Systematic Theology devotes only one of 784 pages to the subject. It is not often preached about. Christians, when they meet together, rarely discuss it."
Donnelly

General thoughts:

The Puritans addressed heaven under the rubric: *The Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell*.

i.e. "the central, fixed points... the centre of gravity of the church's thinking." Helm

—Not a toybox of events standing at the end of the world, but those which bring men into the presence of God. Where moderns dote and dilate on vagaries, they dealt with verities.

The existential pressure of the eschatological

i.e. the future pressing upon the present

~man living at the brink of God's eternity

"living, dying, and being damned" Luther

"Before any other knowledge attainable by us in the compass of the universe, it is most essential for us to know what our Creator and Sovereign Lord intends to do with us after death." A.A. Hodge

To follow: 1) *Relative* information, 2) *Respective* information, 3) *Resident* information, and 4) *Requisite* information

1. *Relative* information (i.e. as compared to other themes)

1) widely dispersed

Only one 'chair' passage. >Revelation 21:1-22:5 (32 verses)
w/ John 14:1-6

—after these, only a glance here and there, often packaged (encased) with adjacent materials

2) cumulatively small

"Slender information, and in a manner which is fitted to restrain curiosity." Calvin

3) largely figurative

Note. Data must be teased from the *always abbreviated* and *often metaphorical* data.

"The nature of what we call 'heaven' is a subject which should often engage our thoughts. Few subjects are so likely to cheer and animate the mind of a true Christian." Ryle

"When thou art feeding on all those descriptions of heaven that are set before thee on the table of Scripture, do not swallow them altogether, but chew them severally, and thou mayest get much nourishment out of them."

Swinnock

[Like French food: you don't get much, but you are full when it is gone.]

2. *Respective* information (i.e. heaven & hell compared)

"The Bible has more to say about heaven than about hell. On the whole, indeed, it has little interest in the reprobate and their destiny." Macleod (Jesus Himself, however, spoke more of hell than heaven, and has been called 'the theologian of hell'.)

—Men think little of hell for obvious reasons.

—Men think little of heaven because they are enamoured w/ this earth.

i.e. the 'sweet by-and-by' eclipsed by the even sweeter here-and-now

Since the Fall, Hell populates itself. But to reach Heaven requires the whole apparatus of sovereign grace.

Note. The study of heaven need not reference hell.

"When Jonathan Edwards preached on hell, he did not make a single reference to heaven. When he later preached on heaven, he did not include a word about hell." Joel Beeke

("Literary critics have commented on the difference between John Milton's two great poems. *Paradise Lost* is a superior work, more vivid, colourful and gripping, while *Paradise Regained* is at times bland and rather lifeless. Milton seemed to find it easier to write about hell than about heaven."

Donnelly)

Pilgrim's Progress struggles to elaborate and ends abruptly.

Bunyan, when asked a question about heaven which he could not answer, advised the inquirer: "Go there and see for yourself."

3. *Resident* information

Cautioned by the narrowed perspective of *distance* and *dimness*.

Note the tendency to paint Heaven with *ethereals* and Hell with *literals*.

Raising a grocery-list of irrational questions. e.g.:

What is the life-expectancy of undying worms?

What fuel is burned in unquenchable fire? (fossil? nuclear?)

What will be the per-ounce price of celestial pavement?

What species of oysters produce gate-sized pearls?

Heavenly information re. geography, topography, demography &c. clothed in earthly dress.

"No natural knowledge can possibly be had of this heaven; neither any help by human arts, geometry, arithmetic, optics, hypothesis, philosophy, &c. to enlighten us thereunto." Bolton

"There are few detailed descriptions of the heavenly life in Scripture; and these are obviously, to a very large extent, figurative. The language of earth could not reveal the wonders of heaven; neither could our minds and hearts, at the present, bear a full revelation of them. But all the powers of human language are brought into play,—all the most suggestive images of the earth are employed,—to impress us with the conviction that these will perfectly satisfy all our capacities, ever expanding throughout eternity." Robert Johnstone

"Whatever symbols are used, they are employed so that we do not here with Mohammed invent a delirium of earthly and carnal happiness... Both on account of our weakness and on account of the sublimity of the things themselves, God borrows our words. As grace is designated by legal, so glory by terrestrial figures." Turretin

4. *Requisite* information

"The Bible does not set out to answer all our questions... The biblical writers do not try to fill in the gaps of our knowledge only to succeed in making a bad job of it." Helm

"It is no easy thing to put flesh on this. We certainly have no guarantee that we are nearer the truth when we reduce it to theological propositions."

Macleod

Heaven is always, in the original sense of the term, *exotic*. (ἑξωτικός)

(>1 John 3:2 οὐπω ἐφανερώθη τί ἐσόμεθα)

We, like Abraham, "greet these promises *from afar*". (Hebrews 11:13a)

"We lack the imagination necessary to grasp with any adequacy the richness and texture of the life to come." Venema

"Whoever attempts to speak of heaven while himself is on earth, his discourse must be like the dark dreams of a child concerning this world, while yet cradled in the womb." Thomas Woodcock (Cripplegate)

(C.S. Lewis compares earth and heaven to a schoolboy struggling to master basic grammar, and then confronted with poetry.)

>Pilgrim's Progress: "They addressed themselves to go up to the City. But the reflection of the Sun upon the City was so extremely glorious, that they could not as yet with open face behold it; but through an *instrument* made for that purpose."

(1 Corinthians 13:12 δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι)

[visitors taken to Paradise to view Mt. Rainier on a sunny day w/o *sunglasses*]

"God, in consideration of our weakness, is pleased to represent heaven's happiness under similitudes taken from earthly things; since discoveries of the heavenly glory, divested of earthly resemblances, would be too bright for our weak eyes." Boston

"In meditating upon what is revealed of the conditions of heavenly existence, two errors are to be avoided: (A.A. Hodge)

1st the extreme of regarding the mode of existence as too nearly analogous to that of earthly life, and

2nd the opposite extreme of regarding the conditions of heavenly life as too widely distinguished from our present experience."

Heaven —Sources of material:

1. Information drawn from biblical assertions.

—positive and negative

—direct and indirect

—literal and figurative

—explicit and exotic

Note. The oft-quoted 1 Corinthians 2:9 w/ the next verse (10) ignored.

2. Conclusions collected, compiled, and collimated from adjacent strands of thought.

"What is heaven? Heaven is a kingdom. Heaven is a city. Heaven is a wedding-feast." Spurgeon

"But the real felicity of heaven infinitely exceeds all those faint metaphors."
Bates

3. Deductions culled from 'the impossibility of the contrary'. (Aristotle)

e.g. Man cannot be *placeless, timeless, thoughtless, aimless* (listless).

"To not think is unthinkable." Descartes

Man, as created, cannot be placeless. He must be situated. Only God is not situated.

(John 14:3α τοπών, 2 Corinthians 5:1 οἰκία...οἰκίαν)

[Jayni's sleepy questions: Are we *there* yet? Are we *here* yet?]

4. Data sifted from: 1) the published character of God, and 2) the general character of grace.

i.e. Heaven must be *God-like* and *grace-like*. (orderly, thorough &c.)

[a man's garage, a reflection of himself]

5. Assumptions arising from man's original constitution, and extrapolated from the primeval creation.

That which was once "very good" (טֵב מְאֹד Genesis 1:31) will be made *good* once again.

"creation boosted to its highest glory" Bavinck

"where the original harmony between heaven and earth is restored...

all things new, but not all new things" Venema

i.e. 'normal' (prelapsarian) existence:

—unbowed by the burden of sin's devastation

—the influxive presence of God

—the original mandate re-instated (a new garden w/ work to do)

6. Hints extrapolated from our present enjoyment of union with Christ.

—albeit dim and distressed

"If we do not get to heaven before we die, we shall never get there afterwards." Spurgeon

(*Heaven on Earth* ~Thomas Brooks)

7. Surmisings collected and inferred from the above, aided by the borrowed deliberations, reflections, and imaginations (and even sanctified guesswork) of trusted men.

(ca. 50 are quoted here!)

No one has gone there. (>John 3:13)

No one need go there. (>Romans 10:6)

"No need to search the universe." Lucas

(Miss Watson to Huckleberry Finn) "...she told me all about the bad place, and I said I wished I was there. She got mad then, but I didn't mean no harm. All I wanted was to go somewheres; all I wanted was a change, I warn't particular. She said it was wicked to say what I said; said she wouldn't say it for the whole world; she was going to live so as to go to the good place. Well, I couldn't see no advantage in going where she was going, so I made up my mind I wouldn't try for it. But I never said so, because it would only make trouble, and wouldn't do no good.

Now she had got a start, and she went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it. But I never said so. I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together."

Heaven #2

- 'heaven'⁵³³ (+heavens²⁰³, heavenly²⁵) =761x ASV
 (not all of which referring to the subject of this study)
 doubtful etymology, prob. 'whatever is seen when one looks up'
 (>F. 'ceiling', whence *ceiling*)
 "up teaches nothing; for what is above us, is beneath to our antipodes,
 in whose places we shall be in twelve hours." Dabney
- Prob. drawn from 'haven' ~*harbor*
 ~metonym for 'God'
 ~hyperbolic superlative ~"heavenly"
- οὐρανός, 273x
 (58th most common word in the NT and 12th most common substantive)
 'to encompass' (?)
 >the element *uranium*, the planet *Uranus*
 [Note. one planet named for heaven, and one for hell: >Pluto/Charon]
 (bombs are made of uranium and plutonium)
- The Greeks distinguished 3 'heavens':
1. the *meteorological* heaven (the residence of birds and clouds)
 ['meteors' were thought to be atmospheric phenomena.]
 2. the *astronomical* heavens (the residence of sun, moon, and stars)
 >Psalm 19:1a
 3. the *theological* heaven (the residence of God)
 >Matthew 6:9 (Ecclesiastes 5:2)
- Not localized (situated), but *at home*.
 "Home is where we can be ourselves. If you want to know a person,
 you must see them at home. You will not learn so much about a person
 at work, or out in society. But at home you see the person as he really
 is." Donnelly
 "The reason why God is said to be in heaven is, not because his essence
 is included in a certain place so called, but because of the more eminent
 manifestation of his glory there." Owen
 'high ground' (>Psalm 2:4)
- παράδεισος, 3x
 'paradise' (Luke 23:43b) >παρά + τεῖχος, *a walled enclosure* (garden),
 [the Indians' ~'happy hunting-ground']
- יְרוּשָׁלַיִם (Zion), OT 108x / NT 7x (6 of which are OT quotes)
 'the city of God' (>Psalm 87:2-3)
 i.e. the assembled commonwealth of the people of God
 (>Hebrews 12:22-23)

To follow: 1) The *reality* of Heaven, 2) The *location* of Heaven, 3) The *amenities* of Heaven, 4) The *residents* of Heaven, and 5) The *key* to Heaven

1. The *reality* of Heaven

1) Not a state of mind: not an imaginary place, but a *real* place.

(τόπον, John 14:2b-3a)

Man, as created, cannot be placeless. He must be somewhere. He must be situated. (Only God is un-situated.)

Popular misconstructions:

—vacuous slogans

utopia <οὐ (not εὖ) + τοπία lit. *no place*

~'happily ever after' ...*Never Never Land*

~old hymns: 'the beautiful isle of somewhere' / 'the sweet by and by'

"...a dim, airy immensity; an unlimited ether; a shadowy realm in which ghosts pale and silent shall flit to and fro, like bats in twilight... a dreamy existence diffused through a vague and indefinite, fluctuating and unfixd mode of being." Shedd

—idealisms

preferences extrapolated to infinity

viz. everything imaginably 'good' (imagined by whom?)

"a concurrence of all positive excellencies" Bates

*Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.*

—caricatures (harps & halos)

"For some, the life to come is so radically other than the concreteness of life in the creation that is now, that heaven takes on a surreal, even dreamlike, quality." Venema

2) Not a new place, but a place within that place already there.

>Psalm 23:6b (הַבַּיִתְהִיכָנֶסֶה), John 14:2 (ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου)

Constructed by the Maker of the original paradise

>Hebrews 11:10 τεχνίτης καὶ δημιουργὸς ὁ θεός

"God who made the world will pull it apart. In its place He will call into being a new universe." Macleod

The universe was *created*, but heaven (and hell) were *prepared*.

~Heaven (John 14:3a ἐτοιμάσω, future or subjunctive)

~Hell (Matthew 25:41 ἠτοιμασμένον, perf. pass. ptc.)

Thus (note the tenses), hell is older than heaven. Perhaps ongoing construction?

"The price paid for it speaketh the excellency of it." Swinnock
 "Never was a house purchased at so great a rate as this." Boston

2. The *place* of Heaven (the place of the place) [location, location, location]

—not far

"Between earth and heaven there is but a thin partition. Heaven is by no means the far country. Can that be a far-off country which we can reach so soon?" Spurgeon (>Luke 23:43 σήμερον...)

—not depicted as a destination, but an arrival.

(>Revelation 21:2 καταβαίνουσιν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ)

n.b. The essence of heaven and hell are encapsulated in two words: "come" and "depart".

(Matthew 25:34 Δεῦτε and 25:41 Πορεύεσθε)

"The future state of every man is to be an open and unavoidable vision of God. If he delights in the view, he will be blessed; if he loathes it, he will be miserable. This is the substance of heaven and hell." Shedd

1) Where the premium attributes of God are prominently displayed: viz. sovereignty, holiness, immutability

(>Isaiah 6:1-4 and Revelation 4:2-8)

"*Ipse Deus sufficit ad præmium.*" Augustine

"The human mind, in eternity, will have a distinct and unvarying perception of the most luminous quality of God i.e. holiness... The immaculateness of the Deity will penetrate the consciousness of every rational creature." Shedd

"the influxive declarative presence of God" Bates

2) Where Christ is (wherever that might be)

ἔπου εἰμὶ John 14:3b / John 17:24a

"The NT nowhere speaks of believers going 'to heaven', when they die. Instead, they go to be 'with Christ'." Donnelly (Philippians 1:23b)

"Christ is the heart of heaven, both its focal point and its axis." Helm

Measured in nearly every way, death is a loss. Yet in one all-important respect, it is a gain. This is certain: we will be σὺν Χριστῷ.

(>Philippians 1:23)

"It is a one-sided idea, and it is almost a one-worded description of it."
 Spurgeon

Heaven #3

3. The *amenities* of Heaven

"Heaven does not exist primarily for our sake. Its main purpose is not to make us happy, to offer us a selection of pleasures and an eternity of well-being. Heaven exists for God's own glory. It is essential this be absolutely clear. If it is not, our whole concept of heaven will be poisoned by self-centredness. We will have a degraded perspective, interested in heaven only for what we hope to get out of it. We will be sane and safe and biblical in our studies only if right at the forefront is this concept: heaven is for God." Donnelly

re. Revelation 21:1-22:5

[map of a great sea: focusing upon Micronesia and failing to see the words *P A C I F I C O C E A N* strewn across the page]

Whereas the language is symbolic, a reality stands behind the symbol.

When John reviews "the bride", he is shown a city. (21:9-10)

~one metaphor to illustrate another

"The description John gives of that Jerusalem should not be taken literally any more than his preceding visions. By this description John does not intend to give a sketch of the city; rather, since he cannot bring the glory home to us in any other way, he offers his ideas, interpreting them in images. But these ideas are not illusions or fabrications, but this-worldly depictions of other-worldly realities —*creation boosted to its highest glory.*" Bavinck

John is at a loss for words to describe it, and can only borrow the superlatives of *geometry* and *gemology*.

~Walls and Gates: *security, accessibility*

~Dimensions: *reality, symmetry, immensity, capacity*

~Materials: *stability, clarity, rarity, diversity*

More telling is what is not found there:

1) no shortage

—both supply & shade (7:16)

—both wood and water (22:1-2)

2) no *delay* (10:6b χρόνος οὐκέτι ἔσται i.e. *no more delay*)

3) no *tear* (21:4a, 7:17b)

Note. tears at first, but soon "wiped away"

et al. no sea (division? unrest?), no *death*, no *temple*, no *sun* nor *night* (no interruption?), no *restricted entrance*, no *interloper*, no *curse*

viz. psychological and ecological well-being (Heaven will be 'green'.)

A thousand questions not answered:

Will there be animals in heaven?

Will there be weather in heaven?

[California does not enjoy 'good' weather, but 'no' weather.]

"Whatever is desired will be present there, nor will anything be desired which is not becoming." Turretin

To follow: 1) Stability, 2) Clarity, 3) Activity & Variety, 4) Fraternity

1) Stability (and Indefectibility)

An inviolable deposit, untouched by *the fret of life* or *the threat of death*.

Undisturbed by the dreary past or the dreamy future.

(1) *physical* stability

w/ unshakable foundations (>Hebrews 12:28a)

(2) *economic* stability

—not succumbing to *animal*, *chemical*, or *human* counter-agents
(>Matthew 6:20)

—not susceptible to *corrosion*, *intrusion*, *erosion* (inflation?)
(>1 Peter 1:4)

In heaven thou may'st fear no thief,

No rankling rust or moth;

Thy treasure and thy heart are safe;

Where one is, there is both." Hart

(3) *item* stability

—everything in its place, and a place for everything
[*mise en place*']

(4) *temporal* stability

"Heaven shall be without intermission or expiration." Watson

"Heaven is cubed for perpetuity" Woodcock (>Revelation 21:16b)

"Heaven with the prospect of losing it is misery." Augustine

On earth, we grow weary of even the best of things... but not there.

There we shall realize our chief end, and "enjoy him *forever*"

"Where we for ever sun ourselves in the smiles of God." Hopkins

"He will hug us close, enfolding us in the embrace of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit... He holds us and hugs us and whispers,

This is for ever." Macleod

Solid joys and lasting treasure

None but Zion's children know Newton

"It is nowhere affirmed to the life of man (in heaven), no more duration, no more divisibility in time-units shall exist. Life so conceived is plainly the prerogative by nature of the Creator: to eternalize the inhabitants (of heaven) in this sense would be equivalent to deifying man, a pagan speculation." Vos

"We will remain finite and limited beings and cannot exist in any other way than in space and time. Souls that dwell there will not become eternal like God... They are not raised above every form of time, that is, above time in the sense of a succession of moments."

Bavinck

2) Clarity (and Perspective)

Heaven will be an elevated and impregnable reference point from which reality may be surveyed. (epistemological high-ground)

Finally, a ποῦ στῶ! (Archimedes)

Here, we paddle in the shallows: there, we shall dive to the depths.

"There we shall be able to read every truth in the original." Woodcock

—the end of all equivocations and evasions

—history unwrapped, riddles unfolded, antinomies resolved

—doubts dispelled

Then shall I see, and hear, and know

All I desired or wished to below;

And every power find sweet employ

In that eternal world of Joy. Watts

1. What ought to have been known here, will be known fully there.

2. What could only be known in part here, will be known more fully there.

(>1 Corinthians 13:12 ἐν αἰνίγματι ... ἐκ μέρους)

3. What was beyond knowing here, will become known (in part) there.

4. What could never have been known here, will remain largely unknown there.

There will always be a range of knowledge beyond human apprehension and comprehension.

"Every glorified eye shall be enlarged, enabled, and ennobled to behold and enjoy in a kindly and comfortable manner." Bolton

"The enlargement of all their faculties, fellowship with the high intelligences of heaven, constant increase in knowledge and in the useful exercise of all their powers." Hodge

"There, the meanest understanding shall confute a whole sanhedrin of rabbis, and look down upon all the grandeur of human policies and reasons with as scornful an eye as we now look upon the meanest cobweb in our windows." Woodcock

"They may touch the mountain, but cannot grasp it in their arms. They cannot, with one glance of their eye, behold what grows on every side. But, they may bring their vessels to this ocean every moment, and fill them with new waters... As when bottles of different sizes are filled, some contain more, others less; yet all of them have what they can contain." Boston

"The devil carrieth men hoodwinked to hell; but God will never carry thee blindfolded to heaven." Swinnock