

What Exactly is Heaven?

08 February 2006

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Midweek Service

Revelation 21:3-8

Discipleship: Let's review our discipleship questions... (For our purposes you do not need to memorize the references.)

Q. What is the first commandment of God's moral Law?

A. *Thou shalt have no other gods before me (Exodus 20:3).*

Q. What is the second commandment?

A. *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image (Exodus 20:4).*

Q. What is the third commandment?

A. *Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain (Exodus 20:7).*

Q. What is the fourth commandment?

A. *Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (Exodus 20:8).*

And now this week's question...

Q. What is the fifth commandment?

A. *Honor thy father and thy mother (Exodus 20:12).*

Introduction: We are continuing in our evangelism series, and tonight we are going to find out what the Bible teaches about Heaven. The title of our message tonight is: "What Exactly is Heaven?." Along the way we are going to find out exactly what Heaven is in the Bible, and we will also come across many misconceptions that people have.

Our text tonight is in John's book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, chapter 21 and verses 3 through 8. This week I intend to cover the doctrine of Heaven, and next week, we will look at the doctrine of eternal punishment in Hell. Let's look at Revelation 21.

We read,

Revelation 21:3-8

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. 4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. 5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. 6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. 7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. 8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Heaven is truly a wonderful place. Everyone wants to go there. And you will find as many strange ideas about heaven as you will find people on the earth.

Heaven is a Doctrine that many have misunderstood.

Some believe Heaven is:

- A light at the end of the tunnel
- A personal fantasy realm of various carnal desires.

Some believe:

- Heaven will make up for their difficult life here on earth. They believe they deserve heaven because life has been so difficult.

An actor was interviewed and was asked about going to heaven. If he were to go to heaven what would he like to know about it? The actor answered, "that the food was really good!" Answers like these and conceptions like these are in grave error. What is heaven really like and what would someone expect to find there?

I. What Heaven is Not

- A. First of all, many people think that the only requirement there is to go to Heaven is simply to Die! It is impossible to forget the tragic circumstances of September 11th 2001 and the attack on the World Trade Towers by Islamic terrorists. When the towers were crumbling to the ground, one woman said, "Heaven is awfully busy today." *It seems that in our day and age the prerequisite for entering heaven is simply to die.* People are more apt to fill heaven when they encounter sad stories of loss and tragic circumstances because they are emotionally attached to the "victims" of the tragedy. They often think very little about justice, goodness, and how they relate to God. This is not the concept of heaven explained in the Bible. Usually when a mother or father dies, it is assumed that they went to heaven. It is just assumed because they died, that they are in a "better place." But Heaven is not the place where everyone goes when they die.

Hebrews 9:27

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

- B. Secondly, Heaven is not a Fantasy realm of hedonistic pleasures. For instance, there are many golfers who think that when they die they will go to "Golfer's Heaven." There they will play the perfect round of golf on the perfect green with the perfect conditions, and they will sip ice tea between strokes.

- Some religions take this same fantasy concept to extremes. Muslims think that heaven is a brothel or harem for men, or a warrior's paradise.
- Others think that heaven is going to be "whatever they want it to be" They think, if they wanted, they could create 17th century England and reign as a king in a castle, or create a tropical paradise in which they could catch up on their rest and relaxation. In the same way, people believe this world is so bad that in heaven they will have the ability to create whatever their carnal heart's desire is and enjoy it for all eternity. They believe heaven is a personal retribution on an unfulfilled life. They think because they "had a bad life here" that somehow, when they get to

heaven, they will be able to form a "good life" they missed out on. But this is not what heaven is about at all.

- Heaven is not "whatever we want it to be."
Heaven is "God's throne" (Matthew 5:34), so it's whatever God wants it to be!

- C. Thirdly, heaven is also not the place where Good people go. There are no good people in God's eyes because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. So the "good people go to heaven because they were "pretty good" and did "pretty good works" theory" is not a biblical concept at all. Men are wicked depraved sinners
- Romans 3:23, For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God
 - Romans 6:23, the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord
 - Genesis 6:5, GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually
 - Jeremiah 17:9, The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

Good people do not go to heaven because good people do not exist. What will fallen sinners do? How do fallen sinners get to heaven? We will explore this in a moment.

II. Where is Heaven?

We cannot glean the realities of heaven by looking at nature. Nature is inadequate to gain us a proper understanding of heaven.

We cannot gather a helpful concept of heaven from jokes about Peter at the entrance of heaven.

The Bible alone teaches the true doctrine surrounding the concept of heaven because it is God's revealed will concerning the truth of that place. And since it is God's Word, the Bible is able to give Christians an adequate tour of what heaven will be like. God has given Christians a clear picture of what heaven will be like in His Word.

Heaven: Gr. Ouranov (*oo-ran-os'*)

- A. Heaven in the Bible sometimes refers to the Created heavens.
"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).
And Jesus speaks of "heaven and earth" passing away (Matthew 5:18; Luke 16:17).

In Matthew 11:25, Christ refers to the Father as the "Lord of heaven and earth."

1. Heaven is the Sky where the stars are set, and will one day fall from. Matthew 24:29 says that when God shakes the earth on the Last Day, "the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."
2. Heaven is sometimes referred to as the Air where the birds fly. "Behold, the fowls of the air (Ouranov)" (Matthew 6:26).

3. It is the place where Lightning and Rain originate
 - Luke 17:24 For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one *part* under *heaven*, shineth unto the other *part* under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day.
 - Luke 4:24 says the "heavens" were shut up for 3 and a half years during the days of Elijah.
- B. Heaven is also a virtual synonym for God.
- The prodigal son confessed to his father, "Father, I have sinned against *heaven*, and before thee" (Luke 15:18, 21).
 - Jesus' question to the Pharisees, "The baptism of John, whence was it? from *heaven*, or of men?" (Matthew 21:25).
 - John the Baptist said, "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from *heaven*" (John 3:27).
 - The entire Gospel of Matthew is filled, much more than the other Gospels with the phrase "kingdom of *heaven*." Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience, who would not pronounce the name Yahweh, Jehovah, so Matthew *heaven* as a synonym for God.
- C. Thirdly, the most important meaning of heaven in the Bible is the Abode of God. It is where God lives. You may have heard the phrase, "Heaven on earth." This is not true. Heaven is not here. It is not here on earth. Heaven is where God dwells.
- The Lord's prayer, "Our Father, which art in *heaven*" (Matthew 6:9).
 - Revelation 21:3-8, "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God."

The tabernacle is where God dwelled—it's where He manifested Himself to the people. It is God's will to forever dwell with men. He showed this first by creating the world and walking with Adam. Then after the Fall, He walked with men like Enoch and Noah. Later He manifested His presence with Moses in the burning bush, and then in the Tabernacle and the Temple. Then Christ was incarnated, and Christ was Immanuel, God with us. But finally God will take His elect people to heaven with Him. Christ will return for His people, judge the world in flaming fire, and then we will forever be with the Lord.

1. Heaven is Up. This may seem like a strange way to describe heaven; "up". The Bible, however, teaches this on a very basic level. Heaven is up. Genesis 28:12 says that Jacob's ladder reached "up" to heaven. 1 Samuel 5:12 states that the cry of the sick went "up" to heaven. 2 Kings 2:1 gives the account of when Elijah is taken "up" to heaven. When Jesus prays in Matthew 14:19, He looks "up" to heaven. In Mark 16:19 Jesus is received "up" to heaven. When Peter has a vision of the animals on the sheet in Acts 16:10, the linen is

taken “up” to heaven. When John hears the voice of Christ in Revelation 4:1, Jesus calls John to “come up” to heaven. Heaven implies going up, not down.

2. Heaven is another Realm. Biblically heaven is more than a physical location, it is another realm entirely.

Now, if Heaven is where God dwells, it must be seen that God is *omnipresent*. So, Heaven in one sense is not confined to a geographic location. So though Heaven is mostly up, it is sometimes “down!”

- Psalm 139:8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there*.

The realm of God’s authority is even over evil. All those evil beings will give an account! They are right now.

- Jude 1:6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

But there are some who are not chained up, and we wrestle against them daily! And these beings are in the heavenly realm!

- Ephesians 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.

We learned in our study of Ephesians that our blessings in Christ are in “heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). This is the spiritual realm. This is outside the physical realm that we live in.

In heaven, hell can be seen. Now remember, God is perfectly happy, and He sees hell. But look at the rich man and Lazarus.

Luke 16:19-26

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: 20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, 21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; 23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. 25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. 26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that *would come* from thence.

- Stephen saw the heavens open and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. It was as if the earthly realm was peeled

back. He was *inside* a synagogue (Acts 6:9), and we read in Acts,

Acts 7:55-56

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, 56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

If heaven is "up," can men reach it with a spaceship? Will a spaceship enable men to reach heaven? Never. Because Heaven is in another *realm*.

Though heaven is "up," it is also "everywhere." For instance, when the Apostle John was on the island of Patmos, he saw heaven. Revelation 19:11 says, "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse."

Jesus is *outside* on a mountain when He ascended to the Father.

So, we have Stephen inside a building in Jerusalem, Jesus on the Mount, and John the Apostle on an island exiled in a foreign country. Heaven was opened to each of them in each place and none of them has "spaceships".

This suggests that heaven is in some other realm or dimension altogether. It is outside our own universe and the limitations of the dimension in which we live.

The Bible says that when Jesus returns, that heaven will envelop this realm, and all realms will be Heaven.

Revelation 21:1

I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

This passage describes the "new heaven" and "new earth" which become one, and the place where God dwells after the consummation of all things. Heaven is not located simply "up" but is also accessible everywhere since it is a spiritual dwelling place of God who is OMNI-PRESENT, and not materially bound.

III. Names for Heaven in the Bible

A. A Kingdom:

Matthew 25:34 Heaven is said to be a kingdom, "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the *kingdom* prepared for you from the foundation of the world"

A kingdom is a place where a King resides and his subjects live.

Though we will eventually inherit the kingdom—we are citizens of the kingdom now! We are to live in that Kingdom now:

Matthew 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Philippians 3:20 For our conversation [*citizenship*] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:

B. Paradise

The criminal on the cross said unto Jesus, in Luke 23:42 "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. 43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in *paradise*."

There is no greater place to "be" than in the paradise of God with Jesus Christ beholding Him for all eternity. Paradise is something everyone longs for.

∅ Beer commercials attempt to define paradise as a place with a barbeque, lots of beer, and licentious women, or a party-like atmosphere. Paradise, though, as defined biblically, is the "divine abode of God." It is centered around God. It is a place of blessedness and uninterrupted bliss before the face of God.

Psalm 1 "Blessed is the man"

∅ Psalm 16:11 Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore.

C. Abraham's Bosom

Heaven is called Abraham's Bosom in Luke 16:22 where Jesus says, "*And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.*" This refers to the place of the fullness of the covenant promises. Heaven can be called "Abraham's bosom" because all of God's promises given to Abraham are fulfilled in heaven. God promised to be a God to Abraham and his offspring in the everlasting covenant made with him in Genesis 15 and ratified in chapter 17. Abraham was not simply looking for a physical land, he was looking for heaven! Look at—

Hebrews 11:8-10

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. 9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as *in* a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: 10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

Abraham was longing for "a city not made with hands," and so heaven is called Abraham's "bosom." A bosom is the place where the heart is. We speak of a bosom buddy. Lazarus is found to be the place that Abraham was seeking after.

We are all "children of Abraham" by faith, because our heart's desire is God!

Galatians 3:7

Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

And we, having the same faith as Abraham will be in heaven with him!

Matthew 8:11

And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

D. Heaven is described as having Mansions. In John 14:2 Jesus comforts His disciples by a description of heaven.

John 14:2

"In My Father's house are many mansions."

This mansion is not like any earthly mansion, but has the idea of a place that God is preparing.

Luke 16:9 speaks of heaven as "everlasting habitations."

OUR ETERNAL HOME

Illustration: When I was young I moved around a lot with my mother and my twin sister. We would go to a new place about every year or year and a half. But heaven is an eternal home! Heaven is not a temporary place that is ultimately torn down or built up again because it becomes old or unsafe to live in. There's nothing better to move to. No, it is a place of everlasting habitation, or an eternal dwelling. Those who are given the right to move in never, ever, move out!

E. A rich Inheritance

Heaven is also described in terms of richness.

We are "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" Colossians 1:12.

1. In Christ. An inheritance is gained after someone dies. Jesus Christ has died for His people and has promised them a rich inheritance in Heaven. Ephesians 1:3 says that we have inherited "all spiritual blessings in Christ." We have the "earnest of our inheritance" right now (Eph. 1:13) which is the Spirit of God.
2. Only for Family members. What would an inheritance given by God be like? How glorious would it be? How rich would it appear? Heaven is only a rich and glorious inheritance to those who are born again and who are disciples of Jesus Christ. Inheritances are given to sons and daughters, or to family members. Heaven, the rich and glorious inheritance, is restricted to the sons and daughters of God who love their heavenly Father and demonstrate their love in this world to Him, and to one another.

- F. An Enduring Substance In Hebrews 10: 34, the text mentioned previously, heaven is called an enduring substance because it is not a transitory place. There is nothing temporary about heaven. Heaven is the final stop for the saints of God. It is the last move they will make. Many people live transient lives here on earth. Every few years they move from place to place. This could be the result of a job flying them all over the world for work, or for family difficulties, or medical problems, or maybe because they are simply restless because they have no real direction in life. In heaven there will be perfect rest and permanency. It is not a substance that fades, rusts or corrupts. It is enduring.
- G. Heaven is also called the "Joy of the Lord" in Matthew 25:21, "Enter into the joy of your Lord." What would it be like to constantly live in a state of perfect joy forever? The old Baptist catechism's first question asks, "What is the chief end of man?" Do you know it? "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever." And we will do just that. We will enter into the joy of the Lord!

One day he will have every tear wiped from his eye and every pain removed by the hand of Christ's healing power. He will live in heaven in a state of perfection for all eternity only to be enraptured in the joy of the Lord that will become sweeter with each passing eon.

Revelation 21:4

God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

God will be our joy. In Him we will have never ending pleasures.

Psalm 16:11

Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence *is* fulness of joy; at thy right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore.

Forevermore! We are right now blessed because our "delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law" we "meditate day and night" Psalm 1: 2). That is not only our delight now, but forevermore!!

H. A City

Heaven is described as a city. Let me have you turn to Revelation 21:21. John is describing the city of the New Jerusalem. He says there are gates made of pearl. Look there in verse 21.

Revelation 21:21 -27

And the twelve gates *were* twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city *was* pure gold, as it were transparent glass. 22 And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. 23 And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb *is* the light thereof. 24 And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. 25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. 26 And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. 27 And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, nei-

ther *whatsoever* worketh abomination, or *maketh* a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Revelation 22:1-5

1 And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, *was there* the tree of life, which bare twelve *manner of* fruits, *and* yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations. 3 And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: 4 And they shall see his face; and his name *shall be* in their foreheads. 5 And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Conclusion: That is all for tonight. Next week we will look at:

Who will be in Heaven?

What will Heaven be like for these beings?

What Activities Will Be Performed in Heaven?

What Makes Heaven So Heavenly?

So do you know a bit more about heaven? You can't be good enough to go to Heaven. No good people exist on earth. If you died today, would you like that thief on the cross, would you hear Jesus say, "This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise"? Look to Jesus and live—live with Him for ever. There is coming a day when there will be a new heaven and earth and as our text in Revelation 21:3 says, "The tabernacle of God" will be "with men."

Revelation 21:3-8

"...and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. 4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Look to Jesus tonight and that will be a reality for you!

Closing Hymn: 352 Look and Live