

ReGroup 2/5/23

Eternity: Heaven

After brushing up against the subject across the first couple of studies, our focus finally shifts entirely to Heaven. We've discussed how Heaven is God's dwelling place, predating the earth and our physical realm. **To get the conversation started, share what initially comes to mind when you hear about or think about Heaven.**

We've also talked about death and how Heaven is the destination for all who die in Christ. Of course, those who are alive and remain when He returns, will also be called to Heaven. However, there is reason to believe that Heaven as it is now *will change* at some point in the future, seeing that the Bible talks about a *New* Heaven, as well as a New Earth. When this age ends, Heaven will change, or rather, *expand*. At some future time, the divide between Heaven and Earth will be erased and a new, eternal realm will appear.

Our focus in *this* study will be on Heaven as it currently is (and has been forever). Next week, we will talk about the future, Eternal State and how it may be similar and different from Heaven now.

A Biblical Perspective

It may sound odd that we're prefacing this study with this note, but it's certainly necessary considering how many different opinions and alleged visions of Heaven that are out there in today's world. Our study on Heaven will be **entirely Biblical based**. While there are tons of accounts of professing Christians about seeing Heaven in dreams or near-death experiences, we cannot elevate those to the same level of Scripture and run with them as if they are accurate. As vivid as those descriptions are and as alluring as these accounts sound, we should not get too carried away from the Bible as our only source.

There are two major reasons for our taking this stance:

- 1) **Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-10** - The Apostle Paul tells us that the only revelation about the wonderful things that God has prepared for His people comes through the Holy Spirit. And we know that the Holy Spirit's revelation is *exclusively* given to us through the Scriptures (**See 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:19-21**).

- 2) **Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-4** - On one occasion, the Apostle Paul was stoned to death and was taken to Heaven (**See Acts 14:19-21**). Paul tells us that he could not share the things that he saw. So we should be weary of believing someone's report. The only reason we should trust someone's testimony is *if* it reflects what is *already revealed* in the Bible.

We probably have a lot of ideas and thoughts about Heaven, having combined things we've heard from the Bible, from culture and even pure speculation. It's easy for us to mix all of this together and develop a picture of Heaven that is only *somewhat* rooted in truth. Out of a desire to get a clear, pure, and true understanding of Heaven, we will be searching the Scriptures from front to back. We will seek to organize all the different verses and passages in a way that gives us the best and most inspired belief about our future home.

The Hope of Heaven

When Jesus talked about Heaven, He wanted to make sure that we knew that it was both **a real place** and **a reliable place**. While many of the Jews believed in Heaven, but they were skeptical if people would ever get to call it home. As we looked at a few weeks ago, before Jesus' death and resurrection, everyone who died was taken to Sheol, where there was a place for both righteous and unrighteous. The righteous' dwelling place was called Paradise or Abraham's Side (named after Abraham since he was the father of faith).¹

For this reason we don't read much about how the Jews looked forward to Heaven *or even expected to go to Heaven* in the Old Testament. In fact, the entire focus of the Law was that people would obey God and live as long as they could, because there was *much uncertainty and uneasiness* about what happened when you died. (**See Deuteronomy 11:8-9**)

We do, however, have a few passages where the saints of old expressed confidence that *one day* God's own would be brought to Heaven proper, and not some *holding place*. From Job's proclamation in **Job 19:25-26** to David's statement of faith in **Psalms 16:10** (*If your Bible uses "Hell" in this verse, it's really referring to Sheol where Paradise and Hell were adjacent to each other*). So there was a clear sense of longing for Heaven, but not a lot to lean on.

Maybe this helps you understand why there isn't much about Heaven in the Old Testament. **What comments do you have or thoughts to share on these points?**

¹ Refer back to our first study (1/15/23) in this series for more information on this subject

All of this changed when Jesus entered the world. An important verse that reveals how nobody had actually gotten to enter Heaven before is found in **John 3:13**. This previews how Jesus descending to earth will actually set in motion humanity's entrance into Heaven.

It's probably hard for us to imagine a reality where we didn't have Heaven to look forward to upon death, which is a testament to how great an impact Jesus has had on our world. **Hebrews 10:19** promises us that *by His blood*, we can now enter into God's presence. Heaven is *a real place* that we can expect to call home one day. **Because Jesus came to earth to die, we get to go to Heaven when we die - how great a promise is this?!**

Our Heavenly Home

One of Jesus' most cherished messages touches on this very subject, where He not only stresses that Heaven is real, but that we can reliably look forward to it. Read **John 14:1-3** and **share your thoughts** on what Jesus says about Heaven. In light of how His audience had previously understood Heaven and their eternal home, *imagine* the hope that this gave them!

With this passage, our eyes mostly fixate on "*many mansions*", but we first should focus on "***In My Father's House***". Jesus wants us to understand that Heaven is *God's House*. The reality of Heaven is not a vast landscape where we all take to our own corner and live in seclusion. Heaven, according to Jesus, is huge home which God has built for all of His children.

This is consistent with every parable and teaching that Jesus gave on Heaven. He repeatedly talked about Heaven in tandem with alluding to a great party that God is throwing for His children. Read **Matthew 22:1-11** for the clearest picture. Now, compare this to **Revelation 19:6-9**. This emphasis on fellowshiping with God and taking part in this great feast with one another, suggests that Heaven is going to be a lot more social and communal than we may realize.

You may wonder, what about "the mansions"? Much can be made about how the translation for mansion actually speaks of rooms or dwelling place. It *is* true that the Greek word doesn't bring to mind a big and fancy house like the English word does in our day - *however*, that Jesus prefaces this promise by talking about His "Father's House" should remove any idea that this verse refers to our own individual homes. Jesus says that we all have plenty of space, just for us, *inside of our Father's House*. **Taking Jesus' literally, He is telling us that our room in our Father's House is a mansion compared to any dwelling place we've ever had here on earth - isn't that amazing to think about?**

This may beg the question - But what will we do there? We'll tackle that next, but before we move on - **Hear and discuss any questions your group may have about this reality of Heaven.**

Worthy Is The Lamb

While Jesus emphasized how the Father is interested in celebrating with His family and enjoying the company of His children, there's no doubt that our response to this attention will be deflect it and to give it all back to God. In Heaven, we will have a pressing reminder that we are in the presence of a Holy and Awesome God. In response, we will be all about worship.

Every vision of Heaven that we find in the Bible involves worship. Everyone in Heaven clearly understands and feels the weight of being near the Lord. **From Isaiah 6:1-5 to Revelation 4:1-11 to Revelation 5:11-14, check out all of these passages to get an idea of just how central worship will be in Heaven.**

Does this mean that all we will ever do in Heaven is attend one endless church service after another? This shouldn't be our take away. Rather, we should understand that in Heaven *everything* that takes place will be for the honor and glory of God - and nothing will transpire that *doesn't* exalt and magnify Jesus.

On earth, we are commanded in **1 Corinthians 10:31** and **Colossians 3:17** to always seek to glorify God with our words and deeds. In Heaven, everything will *automatically and naturally* be all about God. So the point is, the scenes from Isaiah and Revelation don't only reflect gatherings around God's Throne, but activities that take place anywhere in Heaven.

Never Been Better

Hebrews 8:5 and **9:24** tell us that earth and all that is in it is based on the preexisting reality and design of Heaven. Think about how when the prophets saw visions of angelic creatures they always compare them to earthly things, like in **Ezekiel 1:10** and **Revelation 4:7**. These creatures existed *before* God made the earth and all that's here, so it backs up the idea that earth is based on Heaven. We often think of Heaven as a lesser version of life when compared to our time on earth. We can't imagine Heaven being anything but a shadow or copy of Earth, but it's really **the other way around**.

Therefore, there is reason to believe that in Heaven there will be better and more complete versions of things we've enjoyed here on Earth - from activities we take part in to settings we visit. We should compare Earth to Heaven like we compare raw carbon to diamonds. Diamonds form from raw carbon and turn something ordinary into something beautiful and extraordinary.

In the same way, all that we've seen and experienced on Earth merely points to a superior version in Heaven to come, where everything will serve to lift up and make much of Jesus.

Before you close, share any comments you may have and any questions you have. Hopefully we all have a more clear and full understanding of what Heaven will be all about!

Next week look forward to a deep-dive on the Millennial Kingdom, the New Heaven and New Earth, and much more!