

There Is a Place Called Heaven?



Some general ideas that are held about Heaven are not found in the Word of God. Because Heaven is beyond the limits of our vision many people regard it as merely a sphere of life, or a state independent of locality. But Heaven is a place. It was the dwelling *place* of Christ before His Incarnation. He said: "I came down from Heaven" (John 6:38). Heaven was also the place to which He ascended after His resurrection. Luke says: "While He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven" (Luke 24:51). It is the place where the glory and power of God are set forth. Jesus is there now, "Set (or seated) on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Hebrews 8:1).

Our Lord said: "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). When Jesus went away He must have gone somewhere to a place. Therefore, we are not flattering ourselves with an unfounded hope that makes dying easier but that deceives us at the least. Some scientists have concluded that because Heaven could not be found, there is no such place. But the great expanse of the Almighty God is not within the measuring lines of man. True, the astronomer has located the North Star over 400,000,000,000 miles away, but neither is that far when one reckons distance with God. We believe in the Biblical idea of Heaven as a definite, tangible place.

Where is Heaven?

The Bible mentions three heavens: the **aerial**, the **sidereal**, and the **celestial**.

First there is the atmospheric or *aerial* heavens where the birds fly. This is visible to the naked eye and is mentioned by Jeremiah where he said: "The birds of the heavens have fled" (Jeremiah 4:25).

Next, there are the stellar or *sidereal* heavens from which shine the stars and constellations. Isaiah speaks of the Day of the Lord when "the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light" (Isaiah 13:10).

Finally, there is the third Heaven, the *celestial* or "the Heaven of heavens" (2 Chronicles 6:18). "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are figures of the true; but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Hebrews 9:24). Jesus said "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Here our Lord was referring to the third Heaven, and He says the Father is there. When the believer dies he is "absent from the body, and present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). He enters immediately into Heaven itself and is at home with the Lord.

But do we know the location of the third Heaven (called Paradise) where God, Christ, the unfallen angels, and the disembodied spirits of the believing dead are? In other words, exactly where is Heaven? If this question were asked of a small child, the answer doubtless would come back in the form of a finger pointing up, and perhaps the accompanying words, "Up there." Heaven to almost everyone is "up." Karl G. Sabiers asks: "Which way is 'up'? If we say it is in the direction at right angles with the earth's surface wherever we may happen to be, then it would be in a different direction from every point on earth. From North America and from China it would be in exactly the opposite directions. According to this, 'up' would be everywhere in general and nowhere in particular."

When Satan rebelled against God, he said: "I will ascend into Heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; and I will set upon the mount of congregation in the uttermost parts of *the north*" (Isaiah 14:13 R.V.). No matter on what part of the earth one is standing, north will always be "up." When the prophet Ezekiel got his vision from the Lord, he wrote: "And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north" (Ezekiel 1:4). It would seem reasonable to conclude that Heaven is somewhere in the northern heavens beyond the reach of the astronomer's powerful telescope.

Christians Are Citizens of Heaven

"For our citizenship is in Heaven, whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20 R.V.). When Paul wrote this Epistle, Philippi was a Greek city but a colony of Rome, her citizens possessing Roman citizenship. The commonwealth of which the saints in Philippi were citizens had its fixed location in Rome. The Apostle Paul used this fact to illustrate to the believers their heavenly citizenship with its privileges and responsibilities. They were a heavenly people with a heavenly citizenship. Though they dwelled on earth, the commonwealth and the Sovereign of which the saints were citizens and subjects had its fixed location in Heaven. What was true of the saints at Philippi then is true of all believers. We were born from above. Ours is a heavenly destiny, and we are to live heavenly lives while we sojourn in a foreign land. As a heavenly people it is our privilege and responsibility to live a heavenly life on earth.

The Apostle Peter wrote: "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). As strangers and pilgrims we are living in a temporary dwelling beside natives of a foreign land. Jesus Christ is our Sovereign. One day He will come back for us and take us to our native Home, changing our bodies of humiliation like to the body of His glory. The curse of sin has humiliated these physical bodies of ours, but we are to abstain from fleshly lusts and live the same holy life here that we would were we at home in our native land. The Christian has a temporary home in a territory ruled by Satan, but he is not to subject himself to the god of this world. We must remain true to our Sovereign, "considering the High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus," for we have become "partakers of the heavenly calling" (Hebrews 3:1).

Is the Present Heaven the Final Abode of the Saints?

There are several verses of Scripture that have confused not a few students of the Bible on this question. The following verses have led some to believe that the earth and the heavens that now are will one day be annihilated.

Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed (Psalm 102:25, 26).

And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree (Isaiah 34:4).

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Peter 3:10-13).

And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1 John 2:17). And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them (Revelation 20:11). And 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 (Revelation 21:1).

From these inspired statements of Peter and John, some have adopted the view that the present abode of the righteous dead is to be burned up, reduced to ashes, and an entirely new dwelling place created for all of the saved. The writer finds difficulty in reconciling this teaching with other Scriptures. The Psalmist testified: "Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth" (Psalm 119:90). It is written: "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever" (Ecclesiastes 1:4). Here the teaching appears to be that the creation of God will not be annihilated, for He has said that it abides forever. How, then, are we to understand this seeming contradiction? How can Heaven and earth be destroyed and yet abide forever?

After the Millennium and the final judgment of Satan the heavens and the earth will be thoroughly purged by fire. This does not mean that the old heavens and the old earth are to be completely consumed and reduced to ashes. Neither is there any indication that the new heaven and the new earth are to be entirely new planets. The old world probably will be destroyed by fire in the same sense that God

destroyed it with water in Noah's day. "Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished" (2 Peter 3:6). The world of Noah's day was not annihilated.

Geologists agree to the fact that the present world shows evidence of being visited by a flood between five and six thousand years ago. When we read in Scripture that unbelievers shall "perish" (Luke 13:3, 5, 35), and be "destroyed" (Leviticus 23:30; Matthew 10:28), there is no thought of their being annihilated; for we have seen in two previous chapters how that both soul and body will exist in endless consciousness. But we do see an instructive parallel between the judgment of earth by fire and the judgment of the lost by fire. Both are said to be "destroyed." Yet neither will be annihilated. We encounter no problem here when we think how the primitive earth which was made void by Satan (Genesis 1:2) was restored again by God and made new in the time of Adam and Eve.

It appears that the great conflagration, the flames and the melting, suggest the idea of purifying. There will be a new creation just as each believer who is born again is said to be a new creation. "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature (or a new creation): the old things are passed away: behold, they are becoming new" (2 Corinthians 5:17 R.V.). He is "created in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:10). The new birth does not render inactive or annihilate the old nature.

The child of God becomes a partaker of the New Nature which is divine, and all stain is purged by the Blood of Christ. Just exactly how God will bring to pass the purifying of the old heavens and the earth and make them new we do not know. But we are certain that they will pass through a molten ball of fire, and will come forth from that baptism of judicial fire clean and holy. Every strain of sin, every evidence of evil will be wiped out in that day.

We question the idea of the third Heaven being burned, for no purging or purifying is needed there. However, at the end of the day of the Lord, the earth and the heavens that surround it along with all the works of man, will be consumed even as fire purifies gold. Then shall we have "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1)--not new in the sense of just coming into existence, but new in its renovation, transformation, and fixtures.

Our Home Over There

When our Lord was here upon earth, He said to His disciples: "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). He was thinking of His Death, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven itself in the presence of the Father. The dwelling of God always has been a stately abode. Jesus describes it as a place of "many mansions," one Heaven divided into many rooms.

The desire of the heavenly Bridegroom is to make a room for each of His redeemed ones. This He has been doing, and it was the unique privilege of the Apostle John to get a glimpse of the final abode of the righteous. Since we have a divine revelation of our heavenly home presented to us by the Holy Spirit, we are assured of the accuracy of every description that He has given.

John says: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . . the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:1, 2). We are being introduced here to a place of absolute perfection and of eternal immutability, the home of the saved of all ages. It is called "the holy city" (Revelation 21:2; 22:19), for in it every person and every thing will echo the glory and the holiness of God. All powers of evil and all unbelievers will have been cast into the lake of fire forever. This means that every possibility of sin will have been expelled.

When Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for us, it would be just such a place as this that one would expect the holy Son of God the divine Architect, to build. No mere mortal hands could be employed in the construction of the Holy City. It must be of heavenly origin and construction.

The fellowship in Heaven will surpass anything that we have known on earth. Up there "God is with men; He will dwell with them, and God Himself shall be with them." We shall enter into a fellowship with the triune God that is utterly unknown on earth. Men dwelling with "God Himself!" Could anything be higher and more glorious? Then we will know the blessed reality of the words of Christ, where He said: "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). In addition to having fellowship with "God Himself," Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we will commune with the "innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and church of the firstborn, and to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Hebrews 12:22-24). What a fellowship! What a joy divine!

Heaven will bring permanent relief from all of the ills of earth. It is written of the redeemed that in Heaven "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." I have dried the tears of my own children many times, but I have discovered my inability to stop the tears. When I feel that I have succeeded, I find that more tears begin to flow. The fountain of grief has been flowing perennially on earth since the dawn of the human race, and every earthly power has been limited in binding up broken hearts and assuaging the sorrows of man. But God is able. And how our hearts yearn for that glad occasion when the loving and almighty hand of our heavenly Father shall wipe away, once for all, every tear. The tears that flow from "sorrow," "crying," and "pain" shall be dried forever, for these things are not known in the land of pure delight. Earth's grief is forever gone and along with it is the extirpation of every cause. In Heaven there will be "no more death."

One cannot read the newspaper at home or walk the city streets without seeing our common enemy death. The hearse, the crepe, the undertaker, the graveyard, and the stonemason all seek to remind us that we are on the waiting list for death and the grave. But believe along with me the divine record that God has arranged a time when death itself shall die. Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory."

Heaven is revealed as a place of activity. John saw how that in the New Jerusalem "His servants shall serve Him" (Revelation 22:3). While it is true that Heaven is a place of rest, "a rest for the people of God," it will not be the rest of inactivity or idleness. We will not merely lounge within the pearly gates to gaze forever on the eternal beauty of our heavenly home. It is not the unwarranted view inscribed on a grave: "Don't weep for me now, don't weep for me ever; For I'm going to do nothing forever and ever."

Heaven would soon become monotonous if such were true. The saints "shall serve Him day and night in His temple" (Revelation 7:15), says John. When the Bible records the work of God in creation, it says: "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all the work which He had made" (Genesis 2:2). Does this mean that God has been inactive and idle since creation? Most assuredly not! Jesus said: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). By no means does the "rest" of the redeemed mean idleness.

In Heaven we shall serve Him unhampered by earth's enemies and limitations, without painful stress and strain and sweat. "And what will we be doing?" someone asks. David said: "In Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11). For one thing, we will enjoy to the full our blessed relationship with God. On earth we are hampered by so many things. The Apostle John realized that believers were enjoying merely a measure of that which God had for them. He wrote: "These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:4). In Heaven the joys and pleasures of our union with Jesus Christ will be appreciated and apprehended to the full, unhindered by the disturbing and distracting things on earth.

In Revelation 4:10-11 we are clearly shown that in Heaven, we will worship our Lord and cast our crowns before His throne. On earth He is not worshipped and adored as He should be. Our so-called worship is sometimes no worship at all. How often we have gone through the motions when our hearts were not right! We enthroned self and steal the crowns to the boast of what we have done. But yonder in the land of pure delight, in our glorified state, we shall give Him our all. How these thoughts of our future home and its varied spheres of activity should encourage us to more zealous and diligent service during earth's pilgrimage!

There is much about our heavenly activity that we do not know in detail now, but in that day we shall know even as we are known. But we know that we shall be engaged with Him who has redeemed us and brought us to our eternal dwelling place.

Babies in Heaven?

Jesus said:

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:1-4).

Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish (Matthew 18:14).

But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for such is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:14).

Many able and well-known Bible scholars have held the view that in Heaven there will be more occupants than in Hell. They base their belief on the fact that so many countless millions of children have died before reaching the age of accountability. It seems hardly possible that one of these little ones should ever be lost. Certainly they are not saved, that is, by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 16:31). But it seems Scriptural and reasonable to conclude that all children who are not able to decide this issue for themselves are divinely safe.

Christian parents should, by daily prayer, the reading of the Scriptures, church attendance, and an exemplary life seek to lead their children who have arrived at an age of accountability to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. The thought of my being in Heaven while my children are lost in Hell would make me tremble. Let us make our first aim and duty the salvation of our children so that in Heaven the family circle will be unbroken.