

IS HEAVEN REALLY OUR HOME?

Is Heaven the ultimate home of the righteous?

The prevailing belief of mainstream Christianity is that death is not really death in the actual definition of the word, but simply a separating of the spirit from the body. Odd isn't it, God said "...thou shalt *surely* die" (Gen. 2:17) but Satan said "...ye shall *not* surely die" (Gen. 3:4). But man much prefers to believe that death is not death and so Satan has succeeded in deceiving the whole world (Rev.12:9). So the lie continues, the spirit being released, fully conscious, will immediately go to its assigned place. The righteous go to Heaven and live in eternal bliss, but others go to a fiery hell or some place in between.

But that leaves a lot of unanswered questions. Of what necessity is a judgment in the last days? Wouldn't there have already been a judgment made? Why is a resurrection at Christ's return even necessary? Aren't they already in their assigned places? Are they to be subjected to a double jeopardy and judged again?

Why did Jesus come proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God? Is that the same as heaven? Who are those that will inherit the kingdom of God? How do you inherit something you already have? Where is the kingdom to be?

Is there something we need to understand about heaven and the kingdom of God before we make dogmatic assertions?

Multiple heavens?

There are at least three heavens mentioned in the Bible, are we sure which one a given scripture is referring to? Some are easily understood and identified. Others must be identified by context and intent.

One of the first heavens mentioned in the Bible is the vast expanse of the universe (Ps. 8:3, Gen. 1:15-17). Some estimates indicate it to be a thirty billion light-year expanse containing many and varied heavenly bodies.

Another heaven mentioned is described as where birds fly, where the dew of heaven drops down, etc. (Gen. 27:28, Deut. 33:28). It is that part of our atmosphere that supports life (biosphere).

Paul speaks of a vision of the third heaven (II Cor. 12:2-4), which he describes as paradise. We would assume this is at or near the inner or outer court of God's throne as represented by the earthly temple, which was a pattern of the heavenly temple (Heb. 8:1-5). Wouldn't this be the heaven that no man has ascended to (John 3:13)? This is logically the one most commonly spoken of.

There is only one kingdom of God and Jesus said it is within you, often taken to mean "in the heart." Nonetheless heaven is certainly a real place and so is the kingdom of God.

Jesus told Nicodemus that you must be born again or you can't even see the kingdom of God. He then explains that one must be born of water and of the spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus then explains the difference between being born of the flesh and born of the spirit.

Not to lessen the importance of baptism but, His description of those born of the spirit belies what we are typically taught about being born again at baptism (John 3:3-12). Jesus was describing a resurrected being, exactly like Paul explains will happen to us at the return of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15:50-54. From flesh to a glorified spiritual body in an instant (1 Thes. 4:15-17) truly born again as Jesus described!

Where the Lord is

We are to meet the Lord in the air and ever be with Him, but did He go back to heaven or continue on to earth?

Using the principle "the new is in the old concealed and the old is in the new revealed" let's go back to the Old Testament and review the promise given to Abraham and his progeny. Galatians 3:29 tell us, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Paul told Timothy that it was a promise of life and tied it to Christ. "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him" (II Tim. 2:11).

So, whatever Abraham was promised includes us too. What then, was the promise given to Abraham?

The promise

Genesis 12 tells us how God told Abram to leave his father's land and go where He would show him. And when he got to the land of Canaan the Lord said, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." Later, God changed his name to Abraham and made this proclamation in Genesis 17:8 "I will give unto thee and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

Later, as if it was a kind of preview of the Passover, God proved Abraham's obedience to Him by telling him to sacrifice his son, and as he proceeded to do so he was prevented at the last minute. Abraham's faith thus proven, God's promise was no longer conditional but absolute. It will be fulfilled!

The blessings of the promise

"By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son. "That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the Heaven and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." (Genesis 22:16-18). So, because of Abraham's obedience all of his progeny is eligible to receive the blessing, but what if you are not a direct descendent of Abraham?

Paul explains in Romans 4:13 that the promise to Abraham is given **not** by the law but by the righteousness of **faith** and that it now includes the **whole earth**.

Verse 16 explains that we don't have to be a physical descendant of Abraham to be included as an heir of the promise, but that it **comes by faith**. Therefore, if you are a faithful Christian you are considered a seed of Abraham.

The promise yet to come

Did Abraham ever receive the promise? Hebrews 11 sheds some light on that question. Starting in verse 8, “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. “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.” And in verse 13 “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

Have any of the patriarchs mentioned in Hebrews 11 received the promise? “And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise” (Heb. 11:39).

Even Stephen when speaking of Abraham in Acts 7:5 said, “And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him

for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child” (Acts 7:5).

As we look around at the nations of the world and particularly the Middle East, we can quickly determine that Abraham’s descendants have not inherited the promise as yet.

When the promise will come

Jesus gives us a glimpse into the Kingdom after the resurrection of the saints.

“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**” (Matt. 8:11). So, they are **in the Kingdom of Heaven**, but is the Kingdom **in Heaven**?

And in Luke 13:28-29, “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, **in the kingdom of God**, and you yourselves thrust out. “And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down **in the kingdom of God**.”

Again, they are **in the Kingdom**, but **where** is the Kingdom? One could assume that it is in Heaven but it doesn’t say that.

Jesus advises us in Matthew 6:33 that the very first thing we should do is to seek the **Kingdom of Heaven** and then all the things we need will be added. So, the Kingdom is to be greatly desired wherever it is. And in Matthew 7:21 He

cautioned that only those who do the will of His Father will enter the Kingdom. So, it behooves us to know and do the Father's will.

Notice that Jesus has not said that the Kingdom was **in** Heaven, but that it was **of** Heaven, indicating ownership but not location.

A vision of the Kingdom

“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. “And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14).

“And Jesus said, ‘--- ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven’” (Mark 14:62). The promise will be fulfilled when Jesus returns, which is also the time of the resurrection of the saints.

Heirs to the Kingdom?

“And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the **saints** of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him” (Daniel 7: 27).

What does Jesus say the poor in spirit will inherit? “Blessed are the **poor in spirit**: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3).

What do the meek inherit? “Blessed are **the meek**: for they shall inherit the **earth**” (Matt. 5:5).

What do the blessed of the Lord inherit? “For such as be **blessed** of him shall inherit the **earth**; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off” (Ps. 37:22).

What do those that wait upon the Lord inherit? “For evildoers shall be cut off, but those that **wait** upon the LORD, they shall inherit the **earth**.” “For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be” (Ps. 37:9-11).

And, for those who keep His way we read: “Wait on the LORD, and **keep his way**, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the **land**: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it” (Ps. 37:34). Obviously, this is after the earth has been cleansed.

From what the scriptures have shown us so far, the righteous, the meek, the poor in spirit, the blessed and those that wait upon the Lord *inherit the earth* and *the Kingdom*. Jesus tells us where and when the heirs are given their inheritance in Matthew 25:34.

“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,” verse 31 us when.

Some will reign, where will that be?

Revelation 5:10 tells us that He (the Lamb) “hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the **earth**.” John makes it very clear; we will be given ruler-ship on earth, not in heaven.

The New Jerusalem

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name” (Rev. 3:12).

Heaven and earth made new

1 “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.

2 “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, *coming down* from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 “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” (Rev. 21:1-3).

When rewards are given

Let’s read Revelation 22:12, “Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his

work shall be.” Notice, He brings His rewards *with* Him, we don’t go there to get them.

The inheritors

Let’s read it again, “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” (Matthew 25:34). It’s too good to read just once.

The mansions

“In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. Where does He go? Obviously to Heaven, but He does not stay there. “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John14:2-3). Notice, He did not say He would take them back to Heaven. He comes to earth and He stays on earth.

Where our rewards are stored

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, “To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, *reserved* in heaven for you” (I Peter 1:3-4).

“Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:12).

“Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven” (Luke 6:23).

We will reign on earth

“Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness” (II Peter 3:13).

Let’s read again of the fulfillment of Peter’s words as John tells us in Revelation 21:1-7.

1 “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.

2 “And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 “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 overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.”

In verse 10 we read how John was given a view of the Holy City descending from Heaven, “And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.”

Then, in verse 24 we read about nations that are here on earth, “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 honor into it.”

Remember what Paul told Timothy,
 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16). Paul said that to timothy before there ever was a New Testament.

And so -- as it was spoken, so it shall be.

“The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be His people” (Rev. 21:3).

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