



HEAVEN

BY DON BLACKWELL

INTRODUCTION

Merriam-webster.com defines “heaven” as “the place where God lives and where good people go after they die according to some religions.” Other definitions it offers include “a spiritual state of everlasting communion with God” and “a place or condition of utmost happiness.” A Harris poll found that 89% of Americans believe in heaven. Growing up in a Christian home, I have heard about heaven all of my life. When I was a child, we used to sing, “Heaven is a wonderful place, filled with glory and grace. I want to see my Savior’s face. Heaven is a wonderful place.” Heaven is a place that Christians like to **think** about. It’s a place that they **dream** about. Christians LOVE to talk about heaven. In fact, it’s one of the main motivating factors in their lives....They want to go to heaven!

Before we go any further in this lesson, I want to stop and address the question, “Is heaven a real place?” Maybe you’re watching this video, and you’re thinking, “I don’t believe in heaven. It’s nothing more than superstition!” Allow me state from the onset that “Yes, heaven is a real place.” How do I know this? Well, it’s not because of personal experience. I have never been there. A person’s belief in heaven is based first on the proof of the existence of God, and secondly on the infallibility of the Bible. Though it’s not the purpose of this video, the case can be solidly and logically made that God does exist. AND the proof for the infallibility of the Bible is abundant. If you doubt the existence of heaven, I would suggest that you start with these two points. You can find powerful material addressing these issues at ApologeticsPress.org.

For now we’re going to assume that you’re one who believes that God exists, that the Bible is reliable, that heaven is a real place, AND that you’re here to learn more about it. With that in mind, let’s begin with the question, “WHAT IS HEAVEN?” First, it is the

dwelling place of God. Lamentations 3:41 says, “Let us lift our hearts and hands To God in heaven.” In fact, it is the dwelling place of the godhead, God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. I John 5:7 says, “For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.” Secondly, heaven is the place where the righteous will spend their eternity. Matthew 25:34, “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...’” This verse also mentions that there is special preparation that has gone on in heaven to get it ready for the faithful children of God. In John 14:2, Jesus said, “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. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.” Thirdly, heaven is a place where the angels dwell (Matthew 22:30).

Though Christians love to talk about heaven, it’s a place about which there are a lot of questions. In John 12, Jesus had come to Bethany to Mary and Martha’s house, and the text mentions the fact that Lazarus was there, and then it adds, “who had been dead, but that Jesus raised from the dead.” And so there’s a group of people sitting around the table eating and Jesus is there, and Lazarus is there. Can you imagine sitting at the table with Jesus? And Lazarus, who had been dead? Don’t you know there would be a LOT of questions that you would want to ask. In fact, listen to verse 9, “Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead.” The people came to see Jesus, but also to see Lazarus. Wouldn’t you have liked to have asked Lazarus, “Lazarus, what was it like when you breathed your last breath? What happened then?” Did you go to heaven or paradise? That’s a point that some people debate. “Lazarus, tell us what it was like when you got there! Did you see old friends? Did you recognize them? What did you look like?”

In II Corinthians 12:2, the Apostle Paul writes, “I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell:

God knows;) such an one caught up to the **third heaven**. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knows;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” Most people believe that Paul is speaking about himself here. He’s the man who was caught up the third heaven. Many believe that he’s referring to an incident in Acts 14 when the Jews drug him out the city and stoned him. And he went to the third heaven. He says, “I don’t know if I went, or if it was a vision from God.” But he says, “I saw things that unlawful to be uttered.” Wow, doesn’t that get your curiosity up? David Lipscomb wrote, “The veil which conceals the mysteries and glories of heaven God has not permitted to be raised. It is enough that we know that in that world the saints shall be made perfectly happy and perfectly blessed in the full enjoyment of God forever.” Well suffice to say, there’s a LOT about heaven that we don’t know. But what we want to do for the next several minutes is to answer some questions about heaven, based on what the Bible DOES tell us about this place.

DISCUSSION

#1 - Where Is Heaven? Will the Heaven Simply be the Earth Be Renovated?

Well, of course, there are some who teach that heaven will be on this earth. The Jehovah’s Witnesses, along with many denominational writers, contend that with the Second Coming of Christ, the earth will be purified by fire, and this Earth will be the residence of the faithful throughout eternity. They speak of it as a “new earth.” And they like to go to passages such as Rev. 21:1, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away...” And they’ll argue that God is going to basically burn off this old earth and recreate it as a paradise. And they’ll use passages like Matthew 5:5, “Meek shall inherit the earth.” But they are mistaken about this. **Heaven WILL NOT be on this earth.** We could give a lot of passages, but for the brevity of time, notice: John 14:2, “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. 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.” Jesus described heaven as a place he went away to. It’s not here. And it’s a place that he will take us to. In Matthew 6:10 Jesus taught

his disciples to pray that God's will be done on earth, as in heaven. Clearly they are different places.

II Peter 3:10, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall **pass away** with a great noise, and the elements shall **melt** with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be **burned up**." Friends, this material universe will cease to exist. It's not getting a make-over. It's going to be gone. It's interesting that people who believe in this doctrine of a "rejuvenated earth" like to use this passage as a proof-text, but it's interesting, that it says NOTHING about a renovation. It only stresses that the earth WILL NOT **BE**. The Jehovah's Witnesses are wrong about this.

So, WHERE is Heaven? Well, heaven is a "place." Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you." But it's not a physical place. Acts 17:24 says that God does not dwell in temples made with hands. John 4:24 says that God is a spirit. I Corinthians 15:50 says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. You see, heaven is a not a physical place...it's a spiritual place...and so when we try to answer "Where is heaven's physical location?," we're going to come up empty.

#2 - Who will be in heaven?"

There are so many passages that we could go to answer this question. Let me choose just one for now. II Thes. 1:7-9, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that **obey not the gospel** of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power..." We learn from this passage that those who "obey the gospel" will go the comforts and rest of heaven. Those who do not obey the gospel will receive everlasting destruction. A person "obeys" the gospel by hearing it, believing it, repenting of his sins, confessing his faith in Christ and then being baptized into Christ for the remission of his sins. At this point God adds him to the church OF Christ (the church belonging to Christ), and if he lives faithfully in obedience to Christ for

the remainder of his days, he will find a home in heaven eternally. Those who have NOT obeyed the gospel and become members of Christ's church will be punished with everlasting destruction in Hell. *(For more on this question, I would direct you to the lesson, "What Must I Do To Be Saved?")*

#3 – Will we know one another in heaven?

I have been asked this many times over the years. I believe the answer to this question is "Absolutely yes." I've never had any doubts about it. I guess the reason people struggle with this question is they realize that we'll have a different body. The resurrected body will not be flesh and blood...not corruptible, and so in light of that they wonder, "How will we recognize each other?" I believe absolutely, positively that the Bible teaches that we will know one another in heaven. First, think about the IMPLICATIONS of this question. If we do not know each other in heaven, then that means #1 that Death is the final separation. The last time that you were with your dear loved one will truly be the last. When you stood at the graveside to lay to rest the body of your departed spouse, that it truly is the end. And that one day soon, you too will pass into that nameless land to join those anonymous who have gone on before you. Friends, our very souls shrink at the thought that that could be true.....that bonds so precious and so dear are in this life only. A second implication - On the Day of Judgment, I will stand among total strangers. Either that, or after the Invitation to inherit the kingdom, the Lord is going to wipe my memory so that I enter into heaven with strangers. You've got to admit that if that proved to be true, it would greatly alter our concept of what heaven will be like. We sing the song sometimes, "If we never meet again this side of heaven.....I'll meet you on that beautiful shore." We'd have to stop singing that song....because it's not going to happen.....if this be true.....if there is no future recognition. Thirdly, it's hard to even to visualize a place of perfect happiness as heaven will be when you strip away the sweet reunion. Heaven just doesn't seem as sweet when you take away my loved ones. That's one of the motivating factors to make me want to go there.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

I want you to listen to some of the Biblical descriptions of death. Genesis 25:8 - I want you to listen how the Bible describes the death of Abraham. Verse 8, "Then Abraham

gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; **and was gathered unto his people.**” That phrase, “and was gathered unto his people” (or one very similar to it) is used also to describe Ishmael’s death (Gen. 35:29). Jacob’s death (Gen. 49:29, 33). Moses and Aaron (Deuteronomy 32:50). Now, that phrase can’t be referring to the burial of their bodies, because Moses was buried in a secret place in the valley in the land of Moab far from the sepulchers of his ancestors (his people). Then what’s it talking about? It has to be a reference to his.....his spirit was “gathered unto his people.” It’s a clear reference to the fact that he went to be with “his people” after death. And listen to this passage. Listen to the HOPE that David expresses. 2 Samuel 12:23 - David is grieving over the death of his child with Bathsheba. Verse 23, he asks, “Can I bring him back again? **I will go to him**, but he will not return to me?” Now, what did David have in mind when he said, “I can’t bring him back, but I will go to him?” I think what we’re seeing is David’s hope for the future....he anticipated a time in the future after his death, when he would be with his child. He understood that he would recognize, and would take joy in being with him. A few years ago, a friend of mine lost his daughter to cancer. Later I heard him make the statement, “This is going to be the best thing that ever happened to me.” He said, “Because it’s going to motivate me to be stay faithful, because I want to see my daughter again.” Isn’t that a beautiful thought?

Many references of the Apostle Paul could be given to make this point. 1 Thes. 2:19, Paul asks the Thessalonian Christians, “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ? For ye are our glory and joy.” Explain to me how the Thessalonian Christians were going to bring Paul joy on the Day of Judgment if he wasn’t going to know them. But listen to this one. I think this really settles the question - 1 Thes. 4. Some of the Christians in Thessalonica were concerned about their brethren.....their loved ones who had died. Listen to what Paul wrote to the them (vs. 13), “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep (dead), that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord will not

precede them which are asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ will rise first: 17 Then we which are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so will we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” Friends, if these words don’t teach future recognition, then I don’t what does. Paul tells them, “Don’t worry about your loved ones who have died, you will see them again, and you’ll ever be with the Lord.....so take comfort in this fact.” Will we know one another when this life is over? The scriptures teach absolutely “We will!”

OBJECTIONS MADE.

Some will argue, “**BUT WE WILL HAVE LOST OUR PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS.**” You’re not going to look the same. So-n-so won’t be bald. We’ll have new resurrected bodies that will be completely different....I won’t know what you look like. Sometimes people have even asked me “What about a baby who died at birth (or even an aborted baby), what will he look like in heaven? How would we recognize him?” Friends, here’s the answer – I have no idea. I don’t know the answer to that question. I know that David anticipated knowing his child with Bathsheba. Maybe it will be super-natural knowledge that will come along with the new spiritual body....I don’t know. I don’t think this is a question that we have an answer for. 1 John 3:2 says, “ Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it **doth not yet appear what we shall be**: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” We just don’t know yet. But I know it will be ME. Listen to this passage from Job. Job 19:25-27, Job said, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he will stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh will I see God: whom I will see for myself, and mine eyes will behold, and not another.” Job had the idea that he (as Job) would see God. And that he would be in his flesh (with the change implied - in his incorruptible body). But he was still Job.....that he would see it with his eyes..... “not another” he says.

A Second objection is that “**WE WILL BE AS THE ANGELS.**” They have reference to what the Lord said in Matthew 22:30 that “in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven.” But this argument actually lends heed to the point we’re making. Angels have memory, and know one another. This statement of Jesus was made to show that in the next life, the marriage relation will not exist.....the point is that marriage ends at death.....NOT THAT WE WON'T KNOW EACH OTHER IN THE NEXT LIFE.

A Third objection is “**WHAT ABOUT LOVED ONES WHO ARE NOT THERE?**” Some people have rejected the idea that we will know each other in the next life, because they believe that if we know each other, then we would recognize that some of our loved ones are not there, and recognizing their absence would detract from the joy of heaven. But I want us to remember that Revelation 21:4 says that God will wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there will be no more sorrow, nor crying, neither will there be any more pain.” Now, how the Lord will accomplish that, I don’t know, but I believe it. You know, God will not force anyone to go to heaven. He lovingly allows each person to make his own choice. Now, he hopes that all will go to heaven. He hopes it so much that he sent Jesus Christ to die so that it could happen, but still he doesn’t force it. Each man has freedom....freedom to choose heaven, and freedom to chose Hell. And I believe that when we stand with God for eternity, and all misconceptions are gone, and we can see perfect love and perfect justice for they really are, that we will be able to fully stand in agreement with God and his perfect judgment. Friends, I believe absolutely the Bible teaches that those who go to heaven will know each other.

#4 - Will there be degrees of reward and punish in Heaven and Hell?

Somebody says, “You know Hell sounds really bad. Will it be worse for some people than for others?” I believe the Bible absolutely answers yes to this question. 2 Peter 2:20 says about a Christian who departs from the truth, “For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is **worse** for them than the beginning.” In the beginning they were lost, but now they are in a state worse than

lost. What could that possibly mean? I think it HAS to mean that there are degrees of punishment. In Matthew 11:22 – Jesus says to Chorazin and Bethsaida, “It will be **more tolerable** for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.” What are the implications of “more tolerable?” You’ve heard people say, “I think there’s an especially hot spot in Hell for a person like that!” Well, I don’t know if it relates to temperature, but I believe ABSOLUTELY the Bible teaches that there will be degrees of punishment in Hell.

Somebody says, “Well, what about degrees of reward? Will heaven be better for some than others?” While I don’t think this one is obviously taught, I believe there will be levels of reward. Daniel 12:3 says “they that turn **many** to righteousness” shall shine “as the stars for ever” (Dan. 12:3). What about those who turn only a few or none at all to righteousness, are they going to shine just as brightly as those who turn many? If they’ll shine just as brightly, then what’s the point of the verse?

In the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 3, Paul has a discussion about Christians converting people to Christ. Listen to verses 14-15, “If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” What’s the point? The point is there seems to be reward tied to converts who endure. There seems to be loss associated with converts who fall away. Is that similar to the thought being expressed in Daniel 12:3? Paul said in 1 Thes. 2:19, “For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?” Paul views faithful brethren as a “crown of rejoicing” at the Day of Judgment. Once again, there appears to be greater joy (greater reward) associated with this.

#5 – When we die, do we go straight to heaven or do we go to an intermediate place called Paradise?

First, let me say that I know good and knowledgeable people who disagree about this, and I don’t think this is a matter of fellowship. Secondly, whether I go to Paradise or Heaven when I die, I’ll be happy with that. With that said, “I believe that the Bible

teaches when we die the righteous go to paradise, and the wicked go to torment” and that heaven and hell do not come until after the Day of Judgment. Let me share with you some of the reasons why I believe that:

#1 – Hebrews 11:39-40 indicates that **all** of the righteous will go to heaven at the same time. Listen to the text, “And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, **did not receive the promise**, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect **apart from us**.” That means that all of Saved who have died before me didn’t go to heaven before me.

#2 – I John 4:12 – The Apostle John said, “No man has seen God at any time.” Now, that was written near the end of the first century, and yet John says, “No man has seen God.” If we go straight to heaven when we die, how could that statement possibly be true?

#3 – In John 3:13 – Jesus affirmed that only Christ had ascended to into Heaven, except Christ. Well, that pretty much answers the question in my mind.

#4 – If we do go straight to heaven when we die, the implication is that on the Day of Judgment, then we would come back out of heaven to the Judgment, and then Christ would say, “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” That would be strange language if they had already received once already.

#5 – Christ’s parables teach rewards coming at the Judgment Day.

We could cite several, but here’s one – the Parable of the Talents (Mt. 25). It’s not until the lord returns that the servants hear the words, “Enter into the joys of your lord.” Same thing about the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins. It’s not until the bridegroom comes do the wise get to go into the feast.

#6 – Many passages teach that the righteous will receive their reward on the last day. Luke 14:13-14, “But when you give a feast, invite *the* poor, *the* maimed, *the* lame, *the* blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid **at the resurrection of the just**.” I Peter 5:4, “and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”

Someone asks, “Well, If we don’t go straight to heaven when we die, then how do you explain 2 Corinthians 5:8? It says that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” The argument goes like this, “God is in heaven, and if when we are absent from the body, then we are present with the Lord, then we must be in heaven when we die.” Sometimes people will also use Phil. 1:23 where Paul describes that he’s in a dilemma. He wants to remain living for the sake of the brethren, but to depart and be with the Lord is far better. Again, same thought – The Lord is in heaven, and Paul says he was going to be with the Lord when he died, therefore it implies that he went to heaven. How do you answer that? Well, first I would point out that Paul did not expect to receive his eternal reward immediately when he died. 2 Tim. 4:8, “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” Paul was not expecting to receive his final reward until the Day of Judgment. Secondly I would point out all of the passages that we’ve already looked at that teach that we don’t go straight to heaven when we die. Somebody says, “Then WHAT does it mean to depart and be with the Lord?” It simply means to be in the comfort of the Lord. You know, many of the people who believe that we go straight to Heaven when we die, believe that the it did not USED TO be that way. They believe that prior to Christ’s resurrection and ascension into Heaven, that people were held in Hades, but after Christ ascended into heaven, now all the righteous can go. But Jesus had to first defeat death....and He had to be first. But here’s the point I’m getting to: In the OT they believe the righteous went to Hades/Paradise. But in the OT, Solomon wrote that when we die, the spirit returns to God who gave it (Eccles. 12:7). The souls went to Hades, and yet the Bible says it returned to God. The Psalmist wrote, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me” (Psalm 23:4). David refers to death, and God being with him, though he would be in Paradise, not heaven. Psalm 139:8, “If I make my bed in Sheol [**Hebrew word for Hades**], behold, You *are there*.” Even though some people believe there was a holding place in the OT, but not today, the Bible indicates that in that holding place (Hades), the Lord was with them. So, the fact that Paul says that he would be with the Lord when he

dies, I do not believe is any proof that he went straight to heaven. Again, no one has ascended to the heaven, but Jesus (John 3:13).

LAST QUESTION: SO WHAT WILL HEAVEN BE LIKE?

2 Thes. 1:7 says that there will be “rest” there.

Revelation 21:4 says that there will be “no tears.” “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

1 Thes. 4:17 – It will be a place of sweet reunion, where we will see our faithful friends and family who have gone on before us.

2 Sam. 12:23 – David said he would see his baby again....the one that had died shortly after birth.

Hebrews 11 informs us that all of the great faithful Bible heroes will be there.

Matthew 25:46 calls it “life eternal.”

Revelation 22:1 describes a “pure river of water of life, proceeding out of the throne of God.....and in the midst of the street was there the tree of life.”

And so, we’ll be forever in the presence of God, Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit. We’ll have a no pain, only happiness and sweet reunion for all eternity.”

CONCLUSION.

I began with 2 Cor. 12 and I want to conclude with the same verse. – Paul said he saw things that were unlawful to utter. Friends, there’s a lot of things about heaven that we don’t know. But I do know this...Like the song says, “Heaven will surely be worth it all.”

Credits:

Guy N. Woods “Shall We Know One Another in Heaven?”