

## *HEAVEN*

### I. Definition:

- A. Pagan: The realm of pure idea, pure mind or spirit, disembodied spirits.
- B. Islamic: A place of male sensual delights. Beautiful women, food, water, etc.
- C. Current misconceptions:
  - 1. New Age: A warm friendly beam of light, renewed relationships with departed loved ones.
  - 2. The Media: Heaven is somewhere off in space where inhabitants wear white robes, play harps, sing, and flit from cloud to cloud all day.
- D. The Biblical Words: OT. *samayim*. NT. *ouranos*. Both have physical and spiritual meanings. The word occurs over 500 times in the Bible.
  - 1. Physical: The most common is translated *sky*, *air*, or the abode of the heavenly bodies. In the OT when used with the hebrew word for "*earth*" it means *the universe*" and is equivalent to the Greek word *cosmos*. The ancients thought of heaven as an inverted bowl.
  - 2. Spiritual: The abode of the triune God (*Our Father who art in heaven...*), angels, and ultimately the redeemed. It is the total fulfillment of *Immanuel*, *God with us*. Just as evil is the absence of good. Heaven is a place and state of only that which is good. It is the answer to the Lord's prayer, *your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*, i.e., a final condition in which only the complete will of God is expressed.

### II. Questions and Problems

(questions of existence and description)

- A. Isn't heaven the invention of the medieval mind? A result of psychological need?

There are definitely many misconceptions as a result of medieval speculation. Our source is Biblical revelation.

- B. Is heaven a literal place or a state of mind?

Both. In the Bible the essence of heaven is the presence of God. Where God is, there is heaven.

C. Is heaven a place of physical pleasure? e.g. sex and eating.

The emphasis is not on the sensual. The Bible does suggest, however, that the experiences of heaven will far surpass anything experienced on earth. I Cor. 2: 9-10.

D. Won't a place of eternal perfection be a boring place? Not if Jesus is the example. See Lk. 2:52.

E. What is existence like in heaven? Will we recognize others? Will we have continuity of memory?

1. Christ's resurrection body is the model. The firstfruits. Christ's resurrection body was somehow different ( He was not always recognized), but there was also a continuity with his pre-resurrection body (His body bore the wounds of crucifixion). Likewise, there will be continuity and discontinuity with our pre-redeemed bodies.

2. Some exceptions: Rev. 21:4. Not all of our memory will be intact.

F. Will there be rewards in heaven?

1. Lk. 19:11-27; ICor. 3:14-15.

2. Two views:

a. Spiritual

Some say the rewards are entirely spiritual in the sense that there will be varying states of ecstasy or enjoyment of the environment of heaven. For example, there are varying levels of enjoyment of a musical concert. Those who know music enjoy the presentation more than those who do not. In heaven those who enjoyed worship here will enjoy it more in heaven.

b. material.

Others say the rewards will be physical in that some will have mansions or greater positions of responsibility. (More jewels in their crowns!).

G. What kind of activity will there be? What do the inhabitants do for all eternity?

1. Worship. All activities will be carried out to the glory of God.
2. Judging, governing. Lk. 19:17. Matt. 25:20-21.
3. Fellowship. First and foremost there will be fellowship with God.
4. Service. There will be work to do but it will not be against opposing forces. The curse will be removed, and there will no longer be a world system in opposition to God, no fleshly desires, and no devil. Believers will serve as vice-regents, carrying out God's work. In Rev. 22 the redeemed are called *servants*.
5. Living. For the first time since Eden life will be lived as it was really meant to be lived.

H. Will the inhabitants be conscious of time?

Yes, because man does not become God. But time consciousness may be different in the redeemed state.

I. What is the third heaven? Only mention is IICor. 12:2. Two views:

1. First is the atmospheric heavens, second is the celestial heavens, third is the abode of God and the angels.
2. First is Eden, second is the intermediate state, or heaven as it now is. Third is the renovated heavens and earth of Rev. 21.

III. Description of Heaven

Paul saw the third heaven but was not permitted to describe it. IICor 12:3ff. We see a glimpse of it described in highly symbolic language in Rev. 21.

Beauty, absence of evil and pain, permanence, no sorrow, no night, perfect knowledge, perfect communication, joy, peace, rest, no curse (law of entropy negated)

IV. Conclusion

A. Believers are to make preparations for heaven. Matt. 6:19ff.

B. The essence of heaven: We shall see God! A full manifestation of God in all His

glory.

Job 19: 26b ff. *yet in my flesh I will see God. ...*

Matt. 5:8. *...for they shall see God.*

Rev. 22:4 *They shall see his face.*

- C. Why do we want to go to Heaven? is an important question to ask ourselves. Is it because we find ourselves so in love with Christ that we want to be forever in His presence? Sadly enough, most of us cannot honestly say yes to that question. We want heaven because we dread the alternative, or we long for heaven to be relieved of whatever it is we wish to escape (debts, disease, etc.). Oh that our desire might be as the Psalmist, who said *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.* Ps. 42:1.

*On the one level, we do not long for heaven because we do not really believe it exists. But on another level, we ignore the heavenly possibility because we fear death. Only when we are under extreme suffering or have lost all meaning and hope in life do we long to die and be with our God. Even then, it is not the attractive-ness of heaven and the joy of being with God that motivates us, but the despair of soul and the longing to be released from pain and suffering.*

*For the most part, however, we do not yearn to be near God because we do not find sin utterly repugnant or goodness rapturously attractive. (from *Afraid of Heaven*, by Kenneth S. Kantzer in *Christianity Today*, May 27, 1991.)*

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