

BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED

What God's Word teaches about

HEAVEN

Gordon Lyons

KJV Edition

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Heaven

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Part 1

Synopsis: Heaven

Heaven is the holy dwelling place of the Almighty, Sovereign and Eternal God, and the place of his majestic and glorious throne. It is also the realm of the holy angels, and of the souls of departed believers. It is the eternal inheritance promised to all those who belong to Christ, and for whom he has gone to prepare a place. In heaven, there is no sin, sorrow, suffering, pain or death; nor does anything impure or unclean ever enter in. There is no need of the sun to give light, for the Lamb of God is its eternal light and everlasting glory. There is no night there; for—in the blessed presence of God our heavenly Father, and of his Son—eternity is one never-ending 'day'. In our Father's house, we will share fellowship with God and with all our brothers and sisters in Christ. Those in Christ whom we have loved on earth will meet with us again in heaven. Following the Lord's second coming; the resurrection of the dead and the subsequent reunion of glorified body and soul, the children of God will worship the Lamb and will enjoy everlasting peace and happiness in the new heaven and the new earth. Over this new creation, we will reign with Christ in his glory, for ever and ever.

Note 1

The First, Second and Third Heavens

The Bible uses the term *heaven* in reference to three distinct spheres:

- The *first heaven* is the created aerial heavens: i.e., the area comprising the earth's atmosphere (troposphere to thermosphere), and including the clouds, etc., and the sky. (The sky is usually included as part of the first heaven, although it more properly belongs to the second.)
- The *second heaven* is the created area beyond the earth's atmosphere. This area of heaven includes the planets (together with their satellites), the constellations, and all other heavenly bodies. The second heaven extends outwards to the extreme limits of outer space.
- The *third heaven* is uncreated and eternal. It is the throne and dwelling place of God, and the realm of the holy angels. It lies beyond the utmost limits of outer space, and it is completely inaccessible to any created beings except the holy angels and those for whom a place has been prepared: i.e., the spirits (or souls) of just men made perfect—or the redeemed of the Lord. (Job 38:31-33; John 14:1-3; Acts 10:11; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 4:1 - 5:14)

Scripture References: Note 1

Job 38:31-33

⁽³¹⁾ Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?

⁽³²⁾ Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth [NIV, *constellations*] in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus [NIV, *the Bear*] with his sons?

⁽³³⁾ Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth?

John 14:2

⁽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. (See vv.1-4)

Acts 7:55-56

⁽⁵⁵⁾ But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, ⁽⁵⁶⁾ And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. (See vv.54-60)

Acts 10:11

⁽¹¹⁾ And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: (See vv.9-23)

2 Corinthians 12:2-4

⁽²⁾ 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 knoweth;) such a one caught up to the third heaven. ⁽³⁾ And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) ⁽⁴⁾ How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. (See vv.1-6)

Hebrews 12:22-23

⁽²²⁾ But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, ⁽²³⁾ To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, (See vv.18-24)

Revelation 4:1-2

⁽¹⁾ After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter. ⁽²⁾ And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and *one* sat on the throne. (See vv.3-11; see also Rev. 5:1ff)

Note 2

Heaven, where God Dwells

The heaven, which is the dwelling place of God, of the holy angels, and of the souls of the departed saints (believers), is described as a place of matchless splendour, unrivalled beauty and perfect purity and holiness. At the renewal of all things, this heaven will encompass the new heaven and earth: i.e., the renovated and purified universe. Only the redeemed of the Lord will enter this new creation; for only the redeemed—washed in the blood of the Lamb, and clothed with the garments of salvation and of Christ's perfect righteousness—could dwell in the presence of God and of his resplendent glory. Only the redeemed could enjoy fellowship with God and with his Son. To those who know nothing of God's redeeming grace, and who have never experienced sanctification and (future) glorification of life, heaven would be the most alien place imaginable. (Isa. 65:17; 2 Pet. 3:10-13; Rev. 21:1 - 22:5)

Scripture References: Note 2

Isaiah 65:17

⁽¹⁷⁾ For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. (See vv.18-25)

2 Peter 3:10-13

⁽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.

⁽¹¹⁾ *Seeing then that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of *persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, ⁽¹²⁾ Looking for and hasting 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? ⁽¹³⁾ Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. (See vv.3-9)

Revelation 21:1

⁽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.

Revelation 21:3-4

⁽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. (See vv.2-26; see also Rev. 22:1-5)

Revelation 21:27

⁽²⁷⁾ And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither *whatsoever* worketh abomination, or *maketh* a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Note 3

Chosen to a Glorious Inheritance

All those who, from eternity, have been given to the Son by the Father will inherit their place in heaven. The elect of every nation—and they alone—will share with Christ in ruling over the new heaven and the new earth. This is the end or fulfilment of their promised redemption. To this end, they have been chosen and called that they might know God—the only true God—and that they might glorify him forever. No believer can appreciate fully the joy and glory awaiting him in his Father's house. There is nothing on earth with which to compare this heavenly glory; and no words of earth can adequately describe our heavenly inheritance. This is one reason why—in the Bible—the glories of heaven are sometimes depicted in symbolic or figurative terms, rather than literal terms. (John 17:2-3,24; Rom. 8:17-25; Eph. 1:3-14)

Scripture References: Note 3

John 17:2-3

⁽²⁾ As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. ⁽³⁾ And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (See vv.1-23; see esp. vv.6,9,11-12)

John 17:24

⁽²⁴⁾ Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. (See vv.25-26)

Romans 8:17

⁽¹⁷⁾ And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together. (See vv.12-16)

Romans 8:18

⁽¹⁸⁾ For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (See vv.19-21)

Romans 8:22-23

⁽²²⁾ For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. ⁽²³⁾ And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body. (See vv.24-25)

Ephesians 1:3-4

⁽³⁾ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: ⁽⁴⁾ According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: (See vv.1-10)

Ephesians 1:11-14

⁽¹¹⁾ In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ⁽¹²⁾ That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. ⁽¹³⁾ In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, ⁽¹⁴⁾ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Note 4

From Death to Glory

At the death of the body, the believer's soul enters immediately into heaven: For, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. To live is Christ, and to die is gain. To depart this life is better by far—for it is to be with Christ, and to see him as he is. On the other hand, those who die outside of Christ (the unbeliever or the wicked) are forever separated from God and from his love in the torments of an eternal hell. Those places that people vainly imagine as being intermediate between heaven and

hell (such as *purgatory*, *limbus patrum*, and *limbus infantum*), find no support from the teaching of the canonical Scriptures.¹ (Ps. 73:24; 2 Cor. 5:1-9; Phil. 1:21-23)

Scripture References: Note 4

Psalms 73:24

⁽²⁴⁾ Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.
(See vv.23-26)

2 Corinthians 5:6-8

⁽⁶⁾ Therefore *we are* always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: ⁽⁷⁾ (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) ⁽⁸⁾ We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (See vv.1-9)

Philippians 1:21-24

⁽²¹⁾ For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. ⁽²²⁾ But if I live in the flesh, this *is* the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. ⁽²³⁾ For I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: ⁽²⁴⁾ Nevertheless to abide in the flesh *is* more needful for you. (See vv.12-26)

Related Bible Doctrines

The doctrine of heaven is directly related to effectual calling and regeneration, faith, repentance, justification and adoption. By God's sovereign grace, all who are called to faith in Christ, and who are regenerated by the Spirit of God, are the children of God. As children, they are heirs of God and joint heirs with God's Son. The inheritance in which God's redeemed children share is eternal life, together with the promise of a place in their heavenly Father's dwelling where they will live and reign with Christ in the new heaven and the new earth.²

Preliminary Remarks

Intermediate States of the Soul

There is a commonly held belief that several intermediate states exist between heaven and hell, to which certain categories of people must enter before being admitted into heaven. It must be emphasised that these doctrines find no support from the Bible. However, since they are widely taught and believed, they will be mentioned briefly here.

Purgatory

According to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, those who have died without attaining perfection—and this is held to include most of the faithful—cannot immediately enter into heaven. They must first enter *purgatory*, where their remaining imperfections are said to be purged or purified by the purgatorial fires.

Supposedly, this purification process can be aided by the prayers of the saints in heaven (i.e., the canonised 'Saints' of the RC Church). Purification of the soul can also be aided (it is claimed), by the prayers of the faithful on earth (i.e., 'prayers for the dead'); and by an appropriate number of Masses

¹ See further below on *Intermediate States of the Soul*.

² See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Faith; Repentance; Regeneration; Justification; Adoption*, by Gordon Lyons.

for the dead. Only when this purification process has been completed, can the person's soul be transferred from the pains of purgatory to the bliss of heaven.

Concerning the nature of purgatory, Bellarmine said:

*The pains of purgatory are very severe, surpassing anything endured in this life.*³

Again, Thomas Aquinas wrote:

*It is the same fire that torments the reprobate in hell, and the just in purgatory. The least pain in purgatory surpasses the greatest suffering in this life.*⁴

The doctrine of purgatory contradicts the teaching of the Bible, and it must be rejected.

Those who—by the grace of God—have been regenerated and justified through faith in Christ, and who are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, are already prepared for immediate entry into heaven. There and then, they will be presented faultless and blameless—without spot or blemish—before God, with rejoicing.

Although believers live and die with many imperfections, yet they are admitted immediately into the presence of God. God receives them, however, not on the grounds of any righteousness of their own—but on the grounds of Christ's perfect righteousness, which has been imputed to the believer's account. By that righteousness, they have been totally vindicated or justified in the sight of God.⁵ Furthermore, when the Lord Jesus presents the redeemed children of God to his Father in heaven, they will have been glorified.

Limbus Patrum

Limbus Patrum was the supposed temporary abode of the Old Testament believers. *Limbus Patrum* was held to be the place where the Old Testament believers were sent after death, to await their entry into heaven. This entry could not be effected until after the first coming of Christ. These Old Testament believers remained (it is said) in this place, until Christ released them during the short period between his death and resurrection.

Again, this doctrine lacks clear Scriptural support, and therefore must be rejected.

Limbus Infantum

Limbus Infantum is the supposed abode of unbaptised infants. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that only those infants who have been baptised can enter heaven. This is because the RC Church believes and teaches that regeneration or the new birth is effected by the Holy Spirit during baptism. This is generally referred to as baptismal regeneration. (In Roman Catholic theology, however, this event is referred to as *justification* [i.e., the 'first justification'], rather than regeneration.) According to this view, therefore, those infants who have not been baptised have not been regenerated (or 'justified'). Moreover, if they have not been regenerated, then they must be excluded from heaven.

However, the RC Church also teaches that—although unbaptised infants cannot enter heaven—neither are they consigned to hell. Instead, they are sent to an intermediate state known as *Limbus Infantum*. In this state of 'limbo' they are supposed to remain eternally, neither in suffering, nor in happiness.

Again, this teaching is foreign to the teaching of God's Word. The Bible expressly declares that none of God's children can ever be lost. While baptism is commanded of believers, it is not an essential condi-

³ Bellarmine, quoted in Loraine Boettner's work, *Roman Catholicism* [Phillipsburg: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962], p.220.

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, quoted in Loraine Boettner's work, *op. cit.*, p.220.

⁵ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Justification*, by Gordon Lyons.

tion of salvation and eternal life. If, therefore, any child of God dies—of whatever age or of whatever stage of development—that child will enter immediately into the presence of God, and to eternal happiness, peace and joy.

Part 2

Doctrine of Heaven

Heaven is not a mental state, or a condition of the mind or soul. It is a literal and specific place. Its precise physical location is not revealed to us; but, since it is the eternal dwelling place of God, it must lie beyond or outside God's created universe. We know that it constitutes what is sometimes termed the *third heaven*. We may understand this to mean that, in this present age, heaven is located beyond the furthest reaches of outer space. In fact, it is probably better to think of heaven as being *not a part of this creation* (Heb. 9:11). This is because heaven existed before the creation of the material or physical universe. Again, heaven will continue to exist after the present universe has been dissolved.

Different Meanings of the Word 'Heaven'

In the Bible, the word *heaven* is used in several different senses. One of these senses refers to heaven as a **state** or **position** into which the believer enters at regeneration (the kingdom of heaven). But, in this instance, the word is invariably used in connection with that phrase. The other senses in which the word *heaven* is used refer to a specific location or place.

The various senses in which the word *heaven* is used in the Bible may be summarised as follows:

1. Firstly, in the phrase, 'the kingdom of heaven,' the word 'heaven' refers to that **state** into which God places every regenerated and justified sinner. Thus, except a person be converted, he can never enter the *kingdom of heaven* (or the kingdom of God). However, all those whom the Holy Spirit convicts and effectually draws to Christ are then enabled by the Spirit to exercise true repentance and saving faith in God's Son. By the grace of God, they are converted and born again. And those who are thus born of God enter God's kingdom—the kingdom of heaven. Thus, the believer is said to be delivered from the power of darkness or the realm of Satan, and translated into the *kingdom of the Son he [God] loves*. Again, the believer is said to be raised with Christ to *the heavenly realms*. In addition, each believer receives the promise that, one day, he will enter into the unsurpassed glories of God's literal and physical heaven. (Matt. 18:3-4; Eph. 2:6-7; Col. 1:13)

Scripture References (1)

Matthew 18:2-4

- ⁽²⁾ And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,
⁽³⁾ 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. ⁽⁴⁾ Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (See vv.1-9)

Ephesians 2:6

- ⁽⁶⁾ And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: (See vv.1-10)

Colossians 1:13

⁽¹³⁾ Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: (See vv.9-14)

2. Secondly, and when referring to a place, the word 'heaven' can sometimes mean the **atmospheric regions**. For example, the Bible speaks of the birds of the air, or of heaven; and it speaks of the rain descending from heaven (i.e., from the clouds of heaven). When used in this sense, it is the lower region of heaven that is intended: i.e., the atmospheric regions surrounding the earth, but sometimes also taken to include the sky. (Ps. 135:6-7; Matt. 6:26; 16:1-4)

Scripture References (2)

Psalms 135:6-7

⁽⁶⁾ Whatsoever the LORD pleased, *that* did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.

⁽⁷⁾ He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasures. (See v.5)

Matthew 6:26

⁽²⁶⁾ Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? (See vv.25-27)

Matthew 16:1-3

⁽¹⁾ The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would show them a sign from heaven.

⁽²⁾ He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, *It will be fair weather*: for the sky is red. ⁽³⁾ And in the morning, *It will be foul weather* today: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not *discern* the signs of the times? (See v.4)

3. Thirdly, the word 'heaven' can sometimes mean the **region of the stars** (which the Bible often calls *the host of heaven*). When used in this sense, heaven is generally understood to include all the planets, together with all the stars and other heavenly bodies that make up the various constellations. Again, when used in this sense, heaven may be thought of as extending beyond earth's atmosphere to the furthest reaches of outer space, and incorporating every galaxy in the universe. On the Day of the Lord (i.e., the day of judgment and of the renovation of the universe), the existing heaven and earth will melt in a fire of catastrophic dimensions. This conflagration will be followed by the emergence of the new (or rejuvenated) heaven and earth. (Neh. 9:6; Isa. 34:4; 40:26; 2 Pet. 3:10-13)

Scripture References (3)

Nehemiah 9:6

⁽⁶⁾ Thou, *even* thou, *art* LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all *things* that *are* therein, the seas, and all that *is* therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee. (See vv.1-5)

Isaiah 34:4

⁽⁴⁾ 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. (See vv.1-7)

Isaiah 40:26

⁽²⁶⁾ Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these *things*, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that *he is* strong in power; not one faileth. (See vv.21-25)

2 Peter 3:10-13

⁽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.

⁽¹¹⁾ *Seeing* then *that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, ⁽¹²⁾ Looking for and hasting 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? ⁽¹³⁾ Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. (See vv.3-9)

4. Fourthly, the word 'heaven' is sometimes used in a more comprehensive sense to mean the **whole heavenly creation**, as when God is said to be the Maker and Preserver of heaven and earth: i.e., the entire universe. When used in this sense, the word 'heaven' is generally understood to include the following:

a) The lower heavens, including the clouds, atmosphere and sky. (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 19:1-6; 146:6)

Scripture References (4a)

(Lower Heavens)

Genesis 1:2

⁽²⁾ And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. (See vv.2-21)

Psalms 19:1

⁽¹⁾ To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. (See vv.2-6)

Psalms 146:6

⁽⁶⁾ Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein *is*: which keepeth truth forever: (See vv.5-9)

- b)** The upper (sidereal) heavens, including outer space together with all the constellations and other heavenly bodies in all galaxies throughout the universe. (Job 9:7-9; Ps. 148:1-6; Isa. 13:10-13)

Scripture References (4b)

(Upper (Sidereal) Heavens)

Job 9:7-9

⁽⁷⁾ Which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not; and seaeth up the stars.

⁽⁸⁾ Which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea.

⁽⁹⁾ Which maketh Arcturus [the Bear], Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south. (See vv.1-13)

Psalms 148:1-6

⁽¹⁾ Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights.

⁽²⁾ Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts.

⁽³⁾ Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light.

⁽⁴⁾ Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that *be* above the heavens.

⁽⁵⁾ Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created.

⁽⁶⁾ He hath also established them forever and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not pass. (See vv.7-14)

Isaiah 13:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.

Isaiah 13:13

⁽¹³⁾ Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. (See vv.9-12)

- c) The heaven of heaven; the highest heaven; the third heaven, or paradise. Each of these terms refers specifically to the dwelling place of God. It is this meaning of the word 'heaven' with which we will be primarily concerned in the pages of these doctrinal notes. (See also on Note 5 below.) (Ps. 115:15-16; Luke 23:42-43; 2 Cor. 12:2-4)

Scripture References (4c)

(Highest (or Third) Heaven)

Psalms 115:15-16

⁽¹⁵⁾ Ye *are* blessed of the LORD which made heaven and earth.

⁽¹⁶⁾ The heaven, *even* the heavens, *are* the LORD'S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men. (See vv.12-18)

Luke 23:42-43

⁽⁴²⁾ And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

⁽⁴³⁾ And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. (See vv.32-41)

2 Corinthians 12:2-4

⁽²⁾ 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 knoweth;) such a one caught up to the third heaven. ⁽³⁾ And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) ⁽⁴⁾ How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. (See vv.1-6)

5. Fifthly, as intimated in Note 4c above, the word 'heaven' is sometimes used to refer to that majestic, glorious and transparently pure and holy place **where God dwells and reigns**. When used in this sense, the word 'heaven' refers to God's throne and sanctuary: i.e., the place of absolute or sovereign dominion (God's heavenly 'throne'). Additionally, in this sense, it is the place of eternal, pure and holy praise and worship (God's heavenly sanctuary or 'temple'). When used with this meaning, the word 'heaven' refers to the following:

- a) The 'highest heaven,' which is the dwelling place of God, and the place where the glory of God is manifested in all its fullness. It is also the place where the prayers of God's redeemed people are heard and answered according to the will of God. (2 Chron. 6:18; 7:13-14; Ps. 103:19-22; Isa. 6:1-5)

Scripture References (5a)

(Highest Heaven is the Dwelling Place of God)

2 Chronicles 6:18

⁽¹⁸⁾ But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built! (See vv.12-21)

2 Chronicles 7:13-14

⁽¹³⁾ If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; ⁽¹⁴⁾ If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (See vv.11-16)

Psalms 103:19

⁽¹⁹⁾ The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. (See vv.20-22)

Isaiah 6:1-5

⁽¹⁾ In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. ⁽²⁾ Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

⁽³⁾ And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, *is* the LORD of hosts: the whole earth *is* full of his glory.

⁽⁴⁾ And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

⁽⁵⁾ Then said I, Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

b) The 'highest heaven' is also the place from where Christ came; to which he ascended in glory, and to which he has been exalted and seated at his Father's right hand. Again, the highest heaven is the place where Christ mediates and intercedes with his Father on behalf of the saints. It is the place where Christ reigns as absolute sovereign over the entire creation, and it is the place from where he will one day come in his glory to judge the world in righteousness. (Eph. 1:20-23; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; 1 Tim. 2:1-6; Heb. 7:25-26)

Scripture References (5b)

(Highest Heaven is the Place where Christ Mediates and Reigns)

Ephesians 1:19-21

⁽¹⁹⁾ And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, ⁽²⁰⁾ Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*, ⁽²¹⁾ Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: (See vv.15-23)

2 Thessalonians 2:6-10

⁽⁶⁾ And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.
⁽⁷⁾ For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth

will let, until he be taken out of the way. ⁽⁸⁾ And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: ⁽⁹⁾ *Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, ⁽¹⁰⁾ And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. (See vv.1-12)

1 Timothy 2:1

⁽¹⁾ I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men;

1 Timothy 2:5-6

⁽⁵⁾ For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; ⁽⁶⁾ Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. (See vv.2-8)

Hebrews 7:24-26

⁽²⁴⁾ But this *man*, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. ⁽²⁵⁾ Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. ⁽²⁶⁾ For such a high priest became us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; (See vv.11-28)

- c) The 'highest heaven' is also the place where myriads of holy angels congregate; and where—in holy array—they worship God and the Lamb. Again, it is the place from which the holy angels are sent forth to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation, and to keep watch over those who are God's children and heirs of eternal life. (Ps. 91:11; Matt. 18:10; Heb. 1:14; Rev. 5:11-14)

Scripture References (5c)

(Highest Heaven is the Place where Angels Worship and Serve God)

Psalms 91:9-12

⁽⁹⁾ Because thou hast made the LORD, *which is* my refuge, *even* the most High, thy habitation;

⁽¹⁰⁾ There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

⁽¹¹⁾ For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

⁽¹²⁾ They shall bear thee up in *their* hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. (See vv.1-16)

Matthew 18:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. (See vv.1-14)

Hebrews 1:14

⁽¹⁴⁾ Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? (See vv.6-13)

Revelation 5:11-12

⁽¹¹⁾ And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; ⁽¹²⁾ Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. (See vv.13-14)

- d) The 'highest heaven' is also the place where the souls of all departed believers have been taken. Again, it is the place from where the souls of these saints will come with the Lord at his second advent to be forever reunited with their resurrected bodies. On that day, all the saints of God will dwell and reign with Christ throughout the endless ages of eternity in the new heaven and the new earth. (2 Cor. 5:1,6-8; 1 Thess. 3:13; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 22:5)

Scripture References (5d)

(Highest Heaven is the Place where Souls of Departed Believers are Taken)

2 Corinthians 5:1

⁽¹⁾ For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 Corinthians 5:6-8

⁽⁶⁾ Therefore *we are* always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: ⁽⁷⁾ (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) ⁽⁸⁾ We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (See vv.2-10)

1 Thessalonians 3:13

⁽¹³⁾ To the end he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints. (See vv.11-12)

Hebrews 12:23

⁽²³⁾ To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, (See vv.18-27)

Revelation 22:3-5

⁽³⁾ And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: ⁽⁴⁾ And they shall see his face; and his name *shall be* in their foreheads. ⁽⁵⁾ And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign forever and ever. (See vv.1-6)

Reasons for Christ's Ascension to Heaven

Summary

There are several reasons why Christ had to ascend to heaven after his resurrection, and why he must remain there during the present age. These reasons may be summarised as follows:

In the first place, the Lord came from heaven. Heaven is his home, and the appropriate sphere of his existence. His presence makes heaven what it is. Therefore, until this earth is purified from all evil, and has undergone its great process of regeneration—thus becoming a new heaven and a new earth—this world is not suited for the Redeemer's abode in his state of exaltation.

As our Great High Priest, it was necessary that the Lord Jesus should pass through the heavens to appear before God on our behalf. He did this, having first offered himself as a substitutionary and atoning sacrifice for the sins of his people. An essential and permanent part of our Lord's priestly office was to be exercised in heaven. As our High Priest, he there makes constant intercession for his people. As he died for our sins, so he arose for our justification. All this was typified under the old dispensation. The victim was slain outside the holy place—in the courts of the temple. The high priest bore the blood—together with much incense—behind the veil, and sprinkled the blood upon the mercy seat (the blood representing sacrificial and substitutionary atonement). What the high priest did in the earthly temple, it was necessary for the High Priest of our profession to do in the temple made without hands, eternal in the heavens. This he did once-for-all when he offered up himself; but now in heaven he continues his ministry of mediation and intercession for all the people of God. All these matters are set forth very clearly in the letter to the Hebrews.

Our Lord said to his disciples that it was expedient that he should go away: *"...For if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."* (John 16:7b KJV) it was necessary that redemption should not only be acquired, but also applied. If left to themselves, men would have remained in their sins and Christ would have died in vain. Again, the great blessings that the prophets predicted as characteristic of the Lord's first advent, was the effusion or outpouring of the Holy Spirit. To secure this blessing for the Church, Christ's ascension was necessary. He was exalted to give repentance and remission of sins, to gather his people from among all nations, during all ages, until the work was accomplished and the full number had been gathered in. His throne in heaven was (and is) the proper place from where the work of saving men—through the merits of his death—was to be carried on.

Again, our Lord explicitly told his sorrowing disciples. *"...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."* (John 14:2c-3 KJV) The Lord's ascension, therefore, was necessary for the completion of his work

Will We Recognise One Another in Heaven?

Will the people of God recognise one another in heaven? Clearly, the answer to this must be **Yes!** We will recognise all those whom we have known on earth, and who have died in Christ. We will be forever reunited with our loved ones: both those who are now in glory, and those whom God will yet call to himself through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Not one of God's elect will be missing from their heavenly Father's home. However, not only will we recognise those we have known, we will also recognise those whom we have not known personally, but whom we have heard about from the Scriptures. The first person we will see and recognise is, of course, the glorified Lord Jesus himself.

The Scriptures indicate that we will also recognise people like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, when we see them in glory. And, presumably, we will recognise many others of the saints of God of both the Old and the New Testaments. From the New Testament, this will include people like Peter, James and John, and all the other disciples, including Paul. It will also include those faithful followers of the Lord such as Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Dorcas, and many more.

Events Preceding the New Heaven and New Earth

According to the teaching of the Bible, and the teaching of all the major Church confessions throughout the ages, a number of events must occur before the end of all things in this present age. These events may be listed as follows:

- The revealing of Antichrist or the man of sin; the great tribulation, and the great apostasy.
- The second coming of the Lord.
- The general resurrection.
- The final judgment.

The End of the World

Neither Total Nor Final

In the Scriptures, the end of the world means the end of the present age, together with the end of the heaven and earth, as we now know it. The end, however, will not be total; nor will it be final. It will not be total, for neither God nor his holy dwelling place in the highest heaven will be affected by the end of the heaven and the earth. It will not be final, for the end of the present heaven and earth will herald the inauguration of the new creation: i.e., the restitution, restoration or regeneration of all things. (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21)

The end of all things is a theme that is frequently mentioned or alluded to in the Word of God. The manner in which that end will be brought about is also revealed to us.

The End Clearly Foretold in Scripture

Some of the passages of God's Word that speak about the end of the world are quoted below. It should be noted that several of these passages are cited from the pages of the Old Testament; indicating that this doctrine was held and believed by God's people of old. Thus, in the Psalms, it is written:

Psalms 102:25-27

⁽²⁵⁾ Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens *are* the work of thy hands.

⁽²⁶⁾ 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:

⁽²⁷⁾ But thou *art* the same, and thy years shall have no end. (See vv.23-28)

Similarly, the prophet Isaiah says:

Isaiah 51:6

⁽⁶⁾ Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished. (See vv.4-5)

And the Lord himself said:

Luke 21:33

⁽³³⁾ Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. (See vv.29-36)

Again, the writer to the Hebrews says:

Hebrews 1:10-12

⁽¹⁰⁾ And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: ⁽¹¹⁾ They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; ⁽¹²⁾ And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail. {*Psalm 102:25-27*} (See Heb. 1:8-9)

Clearly, then, the Bible speaks of a definite, but unspecified, time when the present heaven and earth will pass away. As we shall see, this will be accomplished by a vast fire or conflagration. Out of the flames of this inferno, God will establish a new heaven and a new earth.

Part 3

The Renovation of the Universe

The Present Earth Filled with Wickedness

In Noah's day, people were eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. They were living their ordinary everyday lives. But, in Noah's day, the earth was filled with violence, corruption, greed, immorality and every other kind of wickedness.

As a direct result of their unbridled wickedness, and of their stubborn refusal to repent and accept God's way of salvation (by means of the ark), God acted in judgment. Apart from those in the ark, every air-breathing creature, and all mankind, was destroyed by the waters of the deluge.

Similarly, today, people are eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. They are living their ordinary everyday lives. But, once again, the earth is filled with violence, corruption, greed, immorality and every other kind of wickedness. Thus, the Scripture says:

Matthew 24:37

⁽³⁷⁾ But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. (See vv.36-42)

Today, as in Noah's day, mankind is stubbornly refusing to repent of their evil behaviour and to seek God's mercy and salvation. The day of grace, however, will one day run its course. When that time comes, God will act in judgment—final judgment. Part of that judgment will include the destruction of the world, and the individual judgment and condemnation of all unrepentant mankind.

This World Reserved for Judgment

Concerning the folly of those who disbelieve that God will destroy the world, and who dispute the second coming of Christ in judgment, the Scripture declares:

2 Peter 3:5-7

⁽⁵⁾ For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:
⁽⁶⁾ Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished. ⁽⁷⁾ But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. (See vv.3-10)

Repent or Perish

As in Noah's day, God waits patiently, until the full number of his elect are gathered in. Thus, he gives to sinful mankind an opportunity to hear his warning voice, to acknowledge and repent of their evil deeds and to seek God's mercy.

Left to their own devices, however, sinful mankind will not abandon their evil ways—just as, in Noah's day, sinful mankind refused to abandon their sin and seek repentance and mercy. Only those whom God's Holy Spirit convicted, convinced of the truth of the message of salvation, and effectually called, sought refuge in the safety of the ark. So, likewise, only those whom God's Holy Spirit convicts, convinces of the truth of the message of salvation, and effectually calls, seek refuge through repentance and faith in Christ.

As in Noah's day, however, God's Holy Spirit will not always strive with man. At God's appointed time, judgment will surely come—and impenitent mankind will just as surely perish. Thus, God's Word warns:

2 Peter 3:8-10a

⁽⁸⁾ But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁽⁹⁾ The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

^(10a) But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night... (See vv.10b-13; cf. v.10a with 1 Thess. 5:2)

Destroyed by Fire

As we have said already, the present heaven and earth will be completely purged by a conflagration or vast consuming fire. This consuming fire, however, will not destroy absolutely everything that exists: For example, God's dwelling place in the highest heaven will not be affected by the inferno that will melt the elements with a fervent heat. Regarding this vast consuming fire, the Scripture says:

2 Peter 3:10-12

⁽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.

⁽¹¹⁾ *Seeing then that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, ⁽¹²⁾ Looking for and hasting 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? (See vv.14-15)

What Will Cause the Fire?

The exact nature of the fire has not been revealed to us, nor has the manner in which it will be initiated. Suffice it to say that the conflagration will be initiated by God himself, perhaps operating providentially through 'natural causes'. If so, this will result in cosmic events and phenomena of catastrophic magnitude: catastrophic, that is, in their devastating effects upon this planet and the surrounding heavens. Similarly, the destruction of the heavens and the earth by fire will not be initiated until the arrival of the precise time that God has already ordained for the end of all things in this present age.

From this, it follows that the conflagration of the heavens and the earth cannot be initiated accidentally or incidentally. Nor can it be initiated by man or by any of man's devices; or by any other contingent event occurring anywhere else in the universe, independently of the express will of God. For nothing in all creation can occur independently of the express will of its Creator. God is in total control of all events bringing about the end of the world [age]. Man, and natural occurrences, can become involved in this process only insofar as God ordains or permits it.

Destroyed by Fire, but Not Annihilated

It should be noted that the word, *destroy* does not mean 'to annihilate'. In the Bible, 'to destroy' means 'to bring to utter ruin', 'to completely devastate', or 'to lay waste'.

In Noah's day, God *destroyed* the material world by a flood—but he did not *annihilate* the world. The same world reappeared after the floodwaters had subsided.

Again, by means of the flood, God destroyed the world of sinful and impenitent mankind. Apart from those in the ark, all mankind died physically. However, they did not die eternally. Each and every one of those bodies which perished in the flood will yet be raised to face God at the final judgment. Then, God will condemn them publicly and finally, and will consign them to their just punishment in the sufferings of an eternal hell. Thus, their destruction by the flood did not result in their complete annihilation.

Just as God did not annihilate or exterminate entirely the material world of Noah's day, so, it is likely that—although the heavens and the earth will be destroyed by fire—they will not be annihilated or reduced to non-existence. Out of the inferno, God will establish the new heavens and the new earth. We may understand this to mean that the conflagration will purge and purify the existing created universe insofar as that universe has been accessible to fallen and sinful mankind, or to fallen and sinful angels. That is, the great conflagration may affect only that part of the created heavens and earth upon which God placed his judicial curse after the fall of man.

The Redemption of Creation

Just as the believer has been redeemed from sin and its debilitating effects on his life, so the earth will be redeemed from the curse and from its debilitating effects on the ground. In both instances, redemption is effected through Christ, who died and was raised to reconcile all things to God the Father by means of his atoning blood.

The redemption of creation corresponds with *the liberation from bondage to decay* spoken of by the apostle Paul. (Rom. 8:21) With the rejuvenation of the universe, the curse on the earth will be removed, and the effects of the curse will no longer apply. Thus, Paul says:

Romans 8:19-22

- ⁽¹⁹⁾ For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. ⁽²⁰⁾ For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected *the same* in hope,
⁽²¹⁾ Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.
- ⁽²²⁾ For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. (See vv.18-25)

Again, concerning the new heaven and earth, the Scripture says:

Revelation 22:3

- ⁽³⁾ And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: (See vv.1-5)

The new creation will be dominated by the presence of the throne of God and of Christ, representing the reigning presence of God and of his Son from the centre of the renewed universe.

New Earth Filled with the Knowledge of God

In marked contrast to this present evil world (or age), the new heaven and earth will be filled with the knowledge of God. This knowledge will govern the thoughts and actions of all who dwell there. There will be no more sin, of course, nor any temptation to sin. All such evils will have been completely removed. Also removed forever will be all sorrow, suffering, tears, pain and death. In their place, there will be eternal love, peace, joy, tranquillity and happiness, together with the uninterrupted harmony that will prevail in a world released from the curse and its resultant tendency to cause decay throughout the entire natural creation. The new creation will be heaven indeed.

A further idea of what this glorious new creation will be like can be gained by considering a few of the illustrations given of it in the pages of the Old Testament. Thus, the prophet Isaiah says:

Isaiah 11:6-9

- ⁽⁶⁾ The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.
- ⁽⁷⁾ And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
- ⁽⁸⁾ And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den.
- ⁽⁹⁾ They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. (See vv.1-5)

Or, as the prophet Habakkuk expresses this last verse:

Habakkuk 2:14

- ⁽¹⁴⁾ For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. (See vv.12-13)

In the above passage from Isaiah chapter 11, it cannot be determined with certainty how much of the prophet's language is intended to be understood literally, and how much may be figurative or symbolic. However, although we cannot be certain of the precise nature of life on the new earth, we can be certain that this new earth will be filled with the knowledge of God's glory. All who dwell there will be governed freely and willingly by the laws of the Lord. All will joyfully submit to these laws: for they will impose no heavy burden on the redeemed of the Lord. Rather, it will be their greatest happiness to live, serve, worship and praise the Lord God and his well-beloved Son—their Sovereign Redeemer.

The Lord, who once was crowned with thorns, is crowned with glory now. As yet, we are unable to see the glory of the Lord. But it will be revealed to all the people of God in the new heaven and the new earth, in which righteousness dwells. All this will take place at the culmination of *the day of the Lord*.

Part 4

The New Heaven and Earth

The Day of the Lord

Old Testament Examples

In the Bible, the expression *the day of the Lord* can refer to any outstanding visitation (or manifestation) of God's presence in power and glory. This may be a visitation in blessing, and/or a visitation in judgment. For example, the Scripture says:

Joel 1:15

⁽¹⁵⁾ Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD *is* at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come. (See vv.13-14)

In this passage, *the day of the Lord* refers to God's visitation in judgment. This was to be an outstanding visitation of temporal judgment that would result in the devastation of the land of Judah by a great plague of locusts, and by a severe drought. All such temporal judgments, however, are intended to serve as a reminder or forewarning of the greater and eternal judgment to come—i.e., the Last or Final Judgment.

Again, concerning the visitation of God's blessings in salvation before the day of the Lord, Joel says:

Joel 2:28-32

⁽²⁸⁾ And it shall come to pass afterward, *that* I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:

⁽²⁹⁾ And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.

⁽³⁰⁾ And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.

⁽³¹⁾ The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.

⁽³²⁾ And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call. (See vv.18-27; see also Matt. 24:29-31; Acts 2:16-21)

Again, concerning God's visitation in blessing and in judgment, Joel says:

Joel 3:1-2

⁽¹⁾ For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem,

⁽²⁾ I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and *for* my heri-

tage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land.

Joel 3:14

⁽¹⁴⁾ Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD *is* near in the valley of decision.

Joel 3:16

⁽¹⁶⁾ The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD *will be* the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. (See vv.3-21)

In the Old Testament, the phrase *the day of the LORD* is invariably used in reference to Yahweh. Yahweh (Jehovah) is God's personal name. In our translations of the Bible, the term *LORD* (spelled with capital letters) usually replaces the sacred name *Yahweh* [YHWH].

New Testament Examples

In the New Testament, the day of the Lord—or the day of Christ and other similar expressions—refers to that coming 'day' or period of time which will include the Lord's second advent. This period will also include the general resurrection, the Last Judgment, and the passing away and renewal of the present heaven and earth. Thus, the Scripture says:

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3

⁽¹⁾ Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by* our gathering together unto him, ⁽²⁾ That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. ⁽³⁾ Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; (See vv.4-12)

Again, the apostle Peter says:

2 Peter 3:10

⁽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. (See vv.3-13; cf. Rom. 2:5; 1 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thess. 5:2; Jude 1:6)

The Dissolution of the Physical Heavens

Again, concerning this day, God's Word says:

Revelation 20:11

⁽¹¹⁾ 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. (See vv.12-15)

From the above passage, we are told that heaven and earth will flee from the presence of God's Son. The concept of the present heaven and earth 'disappearing' is paralleled elsewhere in the Scriptures by other similar expressions that indicate the complete dissolution of the physical heavens, and the renewal or renovation of the heavens and the earth.

Thus, the prophet Isaiah says:

Isaiah 34:4

- ⁽⁴⁾ 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. (See vv.1-10)

Similarly, in the book of Revelation, the apostle John says:

Revelation 6:12-14

- ⁽¹²⁾ And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; ⁽¹³⁾ And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. ⁽¹⁴⁾ And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. (See vv.1-11; see also Matt. 24:29-30)

Revelation 6:15-17

- ⁽¹⁵⁾ And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; ⁽¹⁶⁾ And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: ⁽¹⁷⁾ For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

The day of God's wrath against sin will also be the day when God's justice is fully satisfied in respect of sin and impenitent sinners. It will be the day when sin itself is forever destroyed, and the existing heavens and earth will be totally renovated—purified by fire. Following this period of judgment, purification and renewal, Christ—who is presently reigning over the existing creation—will extend his everlasting dominion over the new heaven and the new earth. The saints (i.e., the redeemed people of God) will share with Christ in reigning over this new creation.

We will now look briefly at this future age of Christ's universal sovereignty.

The Kingdom of Heaven

The kingdom of heaven commences in this world (in its spiritual sense). It is consummated in the world or age to come (in its full physical and glorious sense). Everyone who is born again of God's Holy Spirit enters the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. This is the *spiritual* sense of the kingdom. At the renewal of the present heaven and earth, every child of God will enter into the fullest blessings of this heavenly kingdom in the new creation. This is the *physical* and *glorious* sense of the kingdom.

The New Heaven and the New Earth

Out of the purged and purified universe will emerge the new heaven and the new earth. The glories of heaven will transcend heaven itself, and will include the new earth. To this end, the prophet Isaiah says:

Isaiah 65:17

- ⁽¹⁷⁾ For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. (See vv.18-25)

Isaiah 66:22

- ⁽²²⁾ For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain. (See vv.19-24)

The apostle Peter says:

2 Peter 3:13

- ⁽¹³⁾ Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. (See vv.10-12)

'...*His promise*' includes the promises God made in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22 (quoted above). On the same theme, the apostle John records in Revelation:

Revelation 21:1-4

- ⁽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. (See vv.6-26; see also Rev. 22:1-5)

Revelation 21:5a

- ^(5a) And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new...

The King Shall Reign in Righteousness

At the present time, the exalted Lord Jesus is seated with his Father on his heavenly throne, from where he exercises sovereign dominion over all nations and over all creation. In the coming age, Christ the King will continue to reign over the kingdom of heaven—in an age of everlasting righteousness and peace. This was a truth foretold by the Old Testament prophets. Thus, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 32:1-2

- ⁽¹⁾ Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. {*Cf. Hosea 3:5; Zech. 9:9*}
- ⁽²⁾ And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. (See vv.3-8; see also Isa. 11:3-5)

Again, concerning the Messianic King and his kingdom, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 33:17

- ⁽¹⁷⁾ Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off. (See vv.18-19)

Isaiah 35:8-10

- ⁽⁸⁾ And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it *shall be* for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err *therein*.
- ⁽⁹⁾ No lion shall be there, nor *any* ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk *there*:

- (10) And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (See vv.1-7; see esp. vv.1-3)

In these prophetic Scriptures, an overlaid or foreshortened picture is being presented. In relation to near future events, the prophet is foretelling the deliverance of God's people from Assyrian captivity, and their return to their own land with joy and great gladness. However, under divine inspiration, the prophet's mind is being projected into the much more distant future. He is foretelling the coming of the King of kings, the setting up of the Messianic kingdom, and the nature of that everlasting kingdom. This is the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of righteousness that is reserved exclusively for the redeemed of the Lord.

The Saints will Rule the World

All those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and who have patiently endured suffering for his sake, will share with Christ in his glory and will rule with him in his everlasting heavenly kingdom. Thus, the Scripture says:

Matthew 19:28

- (28) And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (See vv.27-30; see also Luke 22:29-30)

From this and other related passages of God's Word, it would seem that the twelve apostles of the Lamb will be granted particular responsibilities in the administration of Christ's everlasting kingdom. However, that this administration will not be confined exclusively to the apostles is shown by the following Scriptures:

1 Corinthians 6:1-2

- (1) Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? (2) Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? (See vv.1-8; cf. v.2 with Ps. 49:14; Dan. 7:22,27)

The above words were written in a letter designed to be read publicly to the whole Corinthian church—not just to the leadership. From this, it is clear that the apostle Paul was indicating that all of God's faithful people would share in ruling over Christ's kingdom.

Nothing Impure will Ever Enter Heaven

All unrepentant mankind will be excluded from the new creation. As God's Word says:

Revelation 21:27

- (27) And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither *whatsoever* worketh abomination, or *maketh* a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. (See vv.22-26; cf. v.8)

Revelation 22:15

- (15) For without *are* dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. (See v.14)

God is absolutely pure, just and holy. Consequently, only those who have been redeemed from their sinful manner of life and who have been clothed with the garments of salvation—or the robe of Christ's

righteousness—and who are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, can enter the kingdom of heaven. Redemption (including regeneration and justification) is a work of God's sovereign grace. It cannot be merited by rich or poor or by the influential or the despised. But it is freely given to all those who turn to the Lord Jesus Christ in repentance and faith, and who are washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Nothing impure will ever enter it... (Rev. 21:27a) But none who come to Christ will ever be turned away. For all who come to Christ, there is a place prepared in the kingdom of heaven. And that place will certainly not remain unoccupied. Thus, the Lord of glory says:

John 14:2-3

⁽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. ⁽³⁾ 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. (See vv.1-4)

John 14:6

⁽⁶⁾ Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (See vv.5-7)

Epilogue

Here, then, we have had a bare and very inadequate foretaste of the glorious inheritance awaiting the believer on high. No human being, least of all this author, can even begin to imagine or describe adequately the glories that are held in reserve for the children of God. One day, however, we will need no one to describe to us the wonders and beauties of God's eternal home above; for, we will be there in our glorified bodies, and we will be worshipping, praising and serving our Redeemer and King for ever and ever. Amen.