

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Heaven

By Mark Mayberry

In the final scene of the movie classic, “The Wizard of Oz,” Dorothy came to realize that “There’s no place like home!” How true! After a long day at work, we look forward to the rest and relaxation of home. Soldiers stationed on foreign soil long for the time when they can go home to family, friends and sweethearts. The most commonly asked question in a hospital is, “Doctor, when can I go home?”

The Bible speaks of heaven as the enduring home of the soul. Abraham sojourned in a strange land, but *“looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God”* (Heb. 11:10). Jesus told his disciples to *“rejoice because your names are written in heaven”* (Lk. 10:17-20). The Christian’s greatest hope is finding a home with God. What a joy it is to know that, if we are faithful, one day heaven will be our home. In the words of the chorus of that old gospel song: “When the saved get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be! When the saved see Jesus, they will sing and shout the victory.”

The Various Uses of the Word “Heaven”

What is heaven? Of the several words translated **“heaven,”** the most important are the Hebrew *shamayim* and the Greek *ouranos*. This Greek word appears 284 times in the New Testament. The word **“heaven”** is used in three distinct ways in the Scriptures: First, it refers to the atmospheric heavens, i.e., the sky. It describes the region where the birds fly and where the clouds and tempests gather (Gen. 1:20; Lk. 4:25).

Secondly, it refers to the celestial heavens, i.e., outer space, It describes the firmament in which the sun, moon and stars are located (Gen. 1:14-18). The Old Testament had no word for “universe,” so the concept was expressed in the words **“heaven and earth.”**

Finally, the word heaven refers to the perfect and eternal abode of God (Deut. 26:15; Matt. 7:21; etc.). Heaven is the present dwelling place of God and his angels, and the ultimate destination of men and women who love him. Paul described this paradise of the soul as “the third heaven” (2 Cor. 12:2-4). In other words, the **“third heaven”** refers to a place distinct from the atmospheric and the celestial heavens. Both the Old and New Testaments recognize that this present physical universe is not eternal. When the Lord returns, this old earth will be destroyed and it will be replaced by **“a new heaven and a new earth”** (2 Pet. 3:10-13; Rev. 21:1).

What Is Heaven Like?

Let us examine the description of heaven that appears in the New Testament with a special focus on Revelation 21-22. Remember that heaven is a spiritual place, but it is described in human terms so that we might comprehend its lofty greatness.

First, let us understand that heaven is not just a mood or a state of mind. It is a place, a place as real as these United States! Jesus said, **“I go to prepare a place for you”** (Jn. 14:3). Those who inhabit heaven will have an undeniable existence. Our bodies will be different, but they nevertheless will be real (1 Cor. 15:42-44, 50; 1 Jn. 3:2).

Secondly, heaven is described as a city (Heb. 11:16; 13:14). Not a village or a small town or a hamlet, heaven is a magnificent and spacious metropolis. This great city, the New Jerusalem, is described from the outside. Heaven is surrounded by a wall of solid jasper which sits upon a great foundation, composed of twelve beautiful stones. Twelve gates line the wall, each made of a solid pearl (Rev. 21:18-21). The city lies foursquare, i.e., its length, height and breadth are all the same. It measures 12,000 furlongs, or stadia, in each direction (Rev. 21:16). In other words, it is 1,500 miles long, 1,500 miles wide, and 1,500 miles high. Obviously, these figures are symbolic. The number 12,000 is a combination of the numbers 12 and 1000, both of which are used in the book of Revelation to represent perfection or completeness.

To enter the city, one must pass through the pearly gates. The pearl is the only gem that is conceived by suffering. Pearls are formed within the shells of certain mollusks as mineral layers are deposited as a protective coating around an irritating and painful foreign object, such as a grain of sand. The symbolism is obvious: The suffering and sacrifice of Christ provided access to heaven. Furthermore, there is a cross that we each must bear. Those who are faithful to God will suffer persecution as they travel the path to heaven.

This heavenly city is also described from the inside as a place of overwhelming beauty. Its inhabitants will not face the multitude of problems that are encountered here on earth. Many urban areas face decline and decay. However, heaven will have no burned out warehouses or dilapidated slum districts. Empty buildings will not dot the landscape. Heaven has a beautiful street made of pure, transparent gold (Rev. 21:21). This boulevard is lined by fair mansions (Jn. 14:1-3).

Heaven is a spacious city. Earthly municipalities suffer with problems of overpopulation and congestion, but in heaven there will be room for all. Jesus said, ***“In my father’s house are many mansions.”*** According to the measurements given in Revelation 21:16, the city is 1,500 miles long and wide. This equals about 2,250,000 square miles. What a spacious city!

Heaven contains a beautiful, luxuriant and fruitful garden (Rev. 22:1-2). James Montgomery once said, “If God hath made this world so fair where sin and death abound, how beautiful beyond compare will paradise be found.” Paradise was lost because of sin, but in heaven Eden is restored. The river of life flows through the midst of the city, and on either side of the river is the tree of life. This tree yields twelve kinds of fruits, and ***“the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”*** Think of that! The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will walk, and the sick will be made well! In heaven, there will be no more tears, sadness, pain or death (Rev. 21:4). The sorrow and tragedy of this life will no longer trouble us. Death will no longer curse mankind. Pain will be a thing of the past. Heaven is a place of perfect and eternal happiness.

Heaven is a place of total security, with no danger from without or within. Although surrounded by great and high walls (Rev. 21:12), heaven is so secure that its gates will never be shut (Rev. 21:25). All threat of evil will then be gone because Satan and his followers will have been cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10; 21:8). What a contrast with the perilous cities of men! Our inner cities are crime-ridden cesspools of violence. However, the citizens of heaven will not have to fight the scourge of drugs, gambling, alcoholism, vice, etc. We will have nothing to fear in heaven. It is a place of light, with no night or darkness (Rev. 21:23-25). Heaven will be a city of righteousness, and evil will not enter therein (Rev. 21:27). God Almighty will serve as our Protector.

It is a place of newness (Rev. 21:5). Earthly treasures are subject to decay, but not heavenly treasures (Matt. 6:19-21). They are incorruptible, undefiled, and will not fade away (1 Pet. 1:4). In heaven we have a better and an enduring substance (Heb. 10:32-34).

In heaven the saints will enjoy complete fellowship with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit (Rev. 21:23). The redeemed of all ages will delight in the immediate presence of God, forever gazing upon the splendor of his majesty. We will see him even as he is (1 Jn. 3:2).

Heaven is a place of rest from our earthly labors (Rev. 14:13). Yet, there will be activities in heaven to engage man’s energies and highest faculties (Lk. 19:17; Matt. 25:20-21), Whatever their form, these activities will be the glory of God, and will therefore be a form of worship.

Conclusion

In summary, let it be said that heaven is a delightful place (Jn. 14:1-3), a place of beauty (Rev. 21:1-22:7), of life (1 Tim. 4:8), of service (Rev. 22:3), of worship (Rev. 19:1-3) and of glory (2 Cor. 4:17). However, is it easy to go there? Many people seem to think so. They ignore God’s will, rebel against his commandments, and yet think that somehow they will be able to slip through the pearly gates. The Bible does not support this view! No one will get to heaven by accident. It is not easy to go to heaven (Lk. 13:24; Matt. 7:21-23; Rev. 22:14-15). Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people. Obedience and faithfulness are required. Yet, the rewards are worth every effort. It has been said, “If the way to heaven be narrow, it is not long; and if the gate be straight, it opens into endless life.” As C. S. Lewis once said, “If you seek heaven, you will get earth thrown in; if you seek this earth you will miss both heaven and earth.” Are you laying up for yourself treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21)? – ***Guardian of Truth***, October 19, 1989. ■

Service Times — Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM — Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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