

HEAVEN

A Place Prepared

For Those

Who Are Prepared To Live There

by

Ed Mathews

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**Posted in the United States of America for everyone throughout
the world seeking to do the will of God.**

Glory, honor, and praise to Him now and forever more.

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INTRODUCTION

When did you last hear a sermon about “heaven?” Other than at a funeral, it is a subject we seldom discuss. I wonder why. The Bible frequently mentions our “apartment in the sky.” And, occasionally, we sing about the “sweet by and by.” But, rarely, do we engage in an extended study of our “eternal home.”

Well, all of that is about to change! We are beginning a series of lessons on the “land of cloudless day.” Most Bible studies deal with life on earth. And, though that is certainly worthwhile, I think it is equally beneficial to consider life in heaven. Is that not the ultimate destination we dream about?

Every Christian knows someone who has transitioned to their “final reward.” That raises some questions. What are they doing? What is heaven like? Do those who have gone on know what is happening back here on earth? Will they remember us when we enter the “pearly gates?” There are many inquiries that beg for clarification. The following lessons are structured to supply Scripture responses.

For decades, I have researched the “last stop on the Gospel train.” However, it was not till a few months ago that I put my findings into a logical sequence. The fruit of that labor now lies before us. It is not the last word on the subject. Still, it was an exciting journey. I learned much. I am confident you will, too. May these lessons fill you—as they filled me—with unspeakable joy regarding the “land that is fairer than day.”

See you on the other side,

Ed Mathews
February 22, 2018

LESSON ONE

Is Heaven Real?

Jesus said, *“In my Father’s house are many rooms,”* John 14:2. For centuries, the faithful have looked forward to their “mansion in the sky.” For them, heaven is just around the corner. It is the place every believer longs to go. Heaven is the “homeland of the soul.” It is our final address, the prize for running the race, the crown jewel for keeping the faith. Though we have never talked to anyone who has been there, though we do not have a photograph of the “golden streets,” we believe it is real.

Notwithstanding, there are many folks who disagree. To them, believing in the “blessed beyond” is nonsense. “Heaven,” they think, “is the delusion of an uneducated clergy, the figment of ignorant minds.” For, they contend, “There is no afterlife, no majestic splendor.” The present is all there is. “When we die,” they say, “nothing will remain.” No vastness, no glory, no crown, no celestial home—nothing.

Statements like that are common. Such denials are a wake up call. Modern society is abandoning the cherished gift of the Christian faith. Hence, a few questions are in order. Is heaven a stupid notion? Is it an outmoded concept, an idea science has proved to be silly? Is it a mere fantasy of simple minded people? Can heaven be brushed aside as a pipe dream, an empty wish that cannot be substantiated? Likely, these questions can be answered if we consider what the scoffers say compared to what anthropologists have discovered and what the Scriptures reveal.

I. WHAT SCOFFERS SAY

Christianity is rejected. The afterlife is ridiculed. Social theorists, contemporary humanists, and religious liberals debunk the doctrine of heaven. They pretend to know better. They are confident in their conclusions. “Religion,” they say, “helps the oppressed endure their wretched condition.” In other words, it consoles them with hope of a nicer place, a promise of “pie in the sky.”

A. Social Theorists

The powerful take advantage of the powerless. They encourage the weak to worship an unseen god, to hope for a happy home “beyond the sunset.” While, at the same time, the down trodden are taught to obey their masters. Therefore, according to the social theorists, “religion provides a cheap justification for the whole system of human exploitation.” It teaches those who toil in poverty to be patient, to resign themselves to wait for their reward in the distant “glory land.”

Admittedly, there have been occasions when the rich have taken advantage of the poor under the guise of Christian charity. But the position that believes heaven causes people to tolerate injustice is not supported by history. Actually, those who have done most to improve conditions in this life are those who believe most in the next life. As C. S. Lewis wrote, "Aim for heaven and you will get earth, too. Aim solely for earth and you will get neither."

Karl Marx, another social theorist, said, "Religion is the opium of the people." Certainly religion can help us get through the rough patches of life. Yet, Christianity, while rooted in this existence, looks for a better place. Such a future orientation is the soil in which dissatisfaction with the *status quo* grows. It is an unquenchable voice calling for change. Where there is faith, there is hope. Where there is hope, there is motivation. Where there is motivation, there is change. Atheists grope toward a hopeless end. Christians live with endless hope.

B. Contemporary Humanists

In 1973, a group of (so called) intellectuals published the "Humanist Manifesto." The central thrust of that document was anti Christian. The Manifesto said, "Promises of immortal salvation are both illusionary and harmful. They distract humans from present concerns, from self-actualization, and from social injustices." However, as we have already seen, that is an old, erroneous accusation. It was leveled against believers by the Romans in the first two centuries after Pentecost. Christians were blamed for abandoning reality while they sang hymns and said prayers.

The truth of the matter is quite different. The keynote of the Christian message is "*do unto to others as you would have others do unto you.*" Changed people change the society. They follow the One who "*went around doing good,*" [Acts 10:38](#). Jesus did not retreat into a fantasy world when the populace rejected Him. Rather, He instructed His disciples to roll up their sleeves and get busy! He did not want us to be so heavenly minded that we were of no earthly use.

C. Religious Liberals

We expect atheists and humanists to reject heaven. But it is surprising to realize that many occupants of the pulpit do, also. Liberal theologians reject the Bible, deride Jesus, and make fun of eternal life. Recently, a (so called) radio evangelist described heaven as a "ridiculous idea." He went on to say, "heaven is a false doctrine, an empty hope, a useless belief." Really?!? I think the facts say otherwise. And, it is to those facts that we now turn.

II. WHAT ANTHROPOLOGISTS DISCOVERED

Evidence for heaven is all around us. We are invited to open our eyes and see what is in plain view.

A. Humans Believe There Is A Heaven

Man was created with a longing for eternity, Ecclesiastes 3:11. Like migratory birds, we are drawn to “Immanuel’s land.” Every instinct in animals, every intuition in man corresponds to an actual truth. The impulse points to reality. God made us with eyes. So there is light. God made us with ears. So there is sound. We get hungry. He provides food. We feel lost. He rescues. Again, to quote C. S. Lewis, “Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exist. If, then, I have a desire which this world cannot fulfill, there must be another world!”

B. Humans Prepare For An Afterlife

Cultures around the world demonstrate a faith in immortality. The American Indians buried their dead with bow and arrow for the “happy hunting ground.” The ancient Egyptians put a map in every casket to help the deceased on their “journey to the unseen world.” The Gauls (in southern France) lent money to each other on the condition that it would be repaid “in the next life.” The Laplanders buried flint and tinder with their dead to furnish light for the “dark trip.” The Norsemen buried a horse and armor with their warriors for the “triumphant ride.” The Greenlanders entombed a dog with a dead child to “guide him to the next world.” Does not all of that indicate an innate human belief in an afterlife? Surely there must be something beyond this existence. A young boy was flying a kite. The kite was so high that it could not be seen. A stranger, walking by, asked the lad where his kite was. “In the sky,” the boy replied. “How do you know,” the stranger inquired, “you cannot see it?” “I know,” the youngster said, “because I can feel the tug!” Humans know heaven is out there because they can feel the tug.

C. Humans Need An Afterlife

Life on earth is incomplete. Everyone has ideals, dreams, yearnings, and aspirations which are never fulfilled here below. Surely there is another world. Surely there is a place where unrealized hopes can find completion. Therefore, Paul wrote, “*if only for this life we have hope..., we are to be pitied more than all men,*” 1 Corinthians 15:19. The soul needs another life in order to gain its ultimate goal. We were made for more than eating, drinking, and having fun. Immortality is necessary to finish what we started on earth. The present is merely the door to the future. We need eternity to complete what time leaves unfinished. Human intuition bears witness to the probability of heaven.

III. WHAT THE SCRIPTURES REVEAL

We need not guess. We need not wonder. We have the inspired word of God. There is no greater evidence, no truer witness. Beyond theory, beyond anthropology, beyond intuition, we have the truth. The Bible mentions heaven at least 400 times. Is that not sufficient for believing in the “place beyond the blue?” An elderly Christian was asked if she believed in heaven. “Yes,” she answered, “I have no doubt.” “But is not the “city four square” a myth?” “Absolutely not.” “Why not?” “Because,” she said, “My Lord is there!”

A. The Testimony Of Jesus

Before being born in a manger, Jesus lived “beyond the starry sky.” He came to earth from the realms above. As our Lord said, “*No one has ever gone into heaven except the One who came from heaven—the Son of Man,*” John 3:13. Christ was an eye witness of glory. He called heaven His “*Father’s house,*” John 14:2a. No speculation. No guessing. No theories. Just the truth. He stated what He had experienced. He never wondered if there was a place where the “soul never dies.” He knew there was. He was sure. From the cross, He told the dying thief, “*I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in paradise,*” Luke 23:43. What a cruel thing to say, if it was not true. Jesus was being completely honest. Heaven is an incontestable fact. Suppose for a moment there is no “golden glory?” Our faith would be based on a lie. Jesus would be an imposter. Christianity would be a hoax. The Scriptures would be a fraud. And Church would be a complete waste of time. If heaven is not out there, life is really not worth living. But we endure the struggle because we are sure He is preparing a place for those who want to live there. The Lord said, “*I am going to prepare a place for you.*” And, He continued, “*If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me, so that you may be where I am,*” John 14:2b,3.

B. The Experience Of Paul

The apostle Paul had been there, too. He had first hand knowledge. “*I know a man,*” he said, “*who was caught up to the third heaven.....* (This man) “*heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell,*” II Corinthians 12:2-4. Personal experience is a powerful teacher. Paul was not permitted to describe what he saw. Yet, without a shred of doubt, he saw heaven. Does that not lend credence to the belief that such a place exists?

C. The Words Of Peter

Peter began his first letter with a bracing thought. “(God) *has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade—kept in heaven.....,*” I Peter 1:3,4. These words are made sure by the resurrection. Since Jesus did not remain in the

tomb, neither will we. And, when He came forth from the grave, He *“gave many convincing proofs that He was alive,”* Acts 1:3a. These proofs were infallible arguments for life after death. Now He is in heaven. He invites us to join Him there. Let us not forget the next life while living in this one.

D. The Vision Of John

Finally, there is the testimony of John. He was given a peek into the “land where the gates never close.” *“And I looked,”* the apostle wrote, *“and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. A voice, speaking like a trumpet, said, ‘Come up here....,’”* Revelation 4:1. Regarding his glimpse into celestial glory, John was told twice that his vision of the “holy city” was *“trustworthy and true,”* Revelation 21:5b; 22:6. So why hesitate? Jesus, Paul, and John have seen it. In one voice, they proclaim that heaven is as real as the air we breath. Doubt is not a prudent option. Our eternal home is ready and waiting for occupancy.

The children of God live and die in hope. It is not wishful thinking but calm assurance. Heaven is real. We know where we are going. We know we will be there soon. Thus, in our next lesson, we investigate the benefit of hoping for heaven.

LESSON TWO

Why Hope For Heaven?

We are “*called to one hope,*” Ephesians 4:4b. It is imperative that our minds are “*enlightened*” concerning that hope, Ephesians 1:18b. For, according to Paul, that hope is the “*promise of eternal life,*” Titus 1:2b. If heaven is the expectation of those who respond to the Gospel, should we not understand where we are going? If heaven is the final destination of the saints, should we not sing the “*sweetest song of all.*” Heaven is the refuge of the sufferer, the anticipated reward of every child of God. It moves us beyond the trials of this life. It a magnet pulling us to that “*beautiful shore.*” A study of heaven is not a waste of time.

Heaven keeps us going when we are tempted to quit. It lifts our hearts when we are weary. The “*land of fadeless day*” is a lighthouse in the storm. It calms our fears. It banishes our doubts. It lightens our load. It restores our strength. Jesus endured Calvary because He knew He was going home. In Gethsemane, just before He was arrested, Jesus told His Father “*I am coming to You,*” John 17:13a. Because of the joy set before Him, “*He endured the cross, scorned the shame, and sat down on the right hand of the throne of God,*” Hebrews 12:2. The Lord longed to be in heaven. We should, too. It is what our heart desires. It beckons us to stay the course, to keep the faith. Our names are recorded there. Our treasures are stored there. The welcome mat is out. All things are ready.

I. HOPE OF HEAVEN GIVES JOY

Unfortunately, we are often more happy about our earthly blessings than we are about “*dwelling in the house of the Lord.*” The twelve thought it was cool when the demons submitted to them. But Jesus reprimanded their attitude, saying, “*Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you,*” instead, “*rejoice that your names are written in heaven,*” Luke 10:20. We rejoice at the purchase of a new car, the graduation of a child, and the anniversary of a marriage. We are delighted when the sick get well, when the weather is nice, and when the bills are paid. There are a multitude of things for which to be grateful. Yet nothing is greater than our name being in the Book of Life. What a joy knowing we are bound for glory.

In the end, the earth will pass away. Everything will be left behind. The Lord promised to “*create new heavens and a new earth. The former things,*” He said, “*will not be remembered,*” Isaiah 65:17,18. All bad things will be forgotten. No more hurricanes. No more terrorist bombings. No more wildfires. No more mass shootings. Only good things will fill the horizon.

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him,” 1 Corinthians 2:9. That truth encourages the faithful. Therefore, when disappointment comes, we need not let our hearts be troubled. There is ample room in the land that is “brighter than day.” Now we may have tears. But those tears will melt into permanent smiles. We hope for heaven because it brings us “joy without measure.”

II. HOPE OF HEAVEN BRINGS STRENGTH

The anticipation of heaven breathes renewed vigor into weary saints. The letter of Hebrews was written to those under persecution. They had been forced out of their houses. Nevertheless, they were “*greatly encouraged*” by the hope of a celestial home, Hebrews 6:17-19a. To be sure, the hope of heaven did not remove the hurt on earth. But, like an anchor, it secured the soul. It sustained the troubled through the raging storm. The night was dark. The waves were high. The wind was relentless. Still the promise of God did not fail. Believers were empowered to persevere beyond the restless tide. The storm passed. Hope remained.

God gave us the answer. It is an answer for the terminally ill. It is hope for the severely handicapped. It is a solution for the physically oppressed. It is solace to the elderly who feel forgotten. It is the greatest answer of all. Heaven is the cure for every misfortune. It is the place where all wrongs will be made right, where all disappointments will find satisfaction, where all hurts will be healed, where all hope will become reality. Heaven is our consolation in bereavement, our encouragement in adversity, our light in darkness.

Our confidence in heaven grows when we hope in the promise of God. Hope should increase in misery. For, as Paul said, we should rejoice in our suffering because we know that pain produces perseverance, perseverance yields character, and character begets hope, Romans 5:3. Best of all that hope will not “*disappoint*,” Romans 5:5. Hope in heaven, then, provides the muscle to endure the misery. It is the strength that helps the disciple move ahead.

However, hope, like faith, must be translated into action. As James wrote, “*faith by itself—without deeds—is dead*,” James 2:17. Likewise, hope that is not acknowledged, will wither away. If there is a land of “no tear dimmed eyes,” we must not be embarrassed to mention it. Avoiding the subject weakens our expectations. Hope needs exercise. It is our life vest in troubled waters. The author of Hebrews, referring again to the persecuted believers, said, they joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property. Why? They knew they had “*better and lasting possessions*,” Hebrews 10:34. They knew. They rejoiced. They were strengthened. That is how hope blesses the believer.

III. HOPE OF HEAVEN FOSTERS COMMITMENT

Like ancient Israel, Christians are marching toward their promised land. *“Let us, therefore, make very effort to enter that rest,”* Hebrews 4:11. Getting to heaven is not a cake walk. It requires effort. We must not dilly dally along the way. *“For this reason, make effort to add to your faith, goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self control; and to self control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. And, if you possess these qualities in increasing measure,...you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ,”* II Peter 1:5-8a,11. The prospect of heaven fosters commitment.

Eternal life becomes a priority. The believer *“stores up treasure in heaven,”* Matthew 6:20. The committed saint sacrifices everything to reach the throne room of God. He aims for the sky. Sports hold little interest. Pleasures are long forgotten. Possessions weight him down. His hope is in a better place. He uses his money to help others. As the Lord said, *“Use worldly wealth to gain friends...so that when it is gone you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings,”* Luke 16:9. In like manner, because of a single minded commitment, Paul suffered physical hardship. He wrote, in the sunset of his life, *“I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus,”* II Timothy 2:10.

In our youth, heaven seems a long way off. But, as we advance in age, it does not feel all that far away. Many friends and relatives have already gone there. Hence, when it is our turn to go, we will be welcomed by a host of familiar faces. What a glad reunion that will be. Happy shouts of celestial joy will fill the air. Hugs will be shared all around. Death separates us now. Everlasting life will reunite us forever. Just thinking about that grand homecoming will make us more diligent in getting there. Hope of heaven fosters commitment.

IV. HOPE OF HEAVEN SECURES VICTORY

There is another benefit in hoping for our “cottage in the sky.” The longing to be with God encourages us to persevere. The crown is ours if we carry our cross. John mentions this promised blessing for those who keep the faith. To him who *“overcomes,”* the apostle wrote, God will give *“the tree of life which is in the paradise of God,”* Revelation 2:7b. Furthermore, the name of the overcomer will never be *“erased”* from the book of life, Revelation 3:5. And, once the overcomer enters heaven, he will *“never leave,”* Revelation 3:12. Instead, he will set with the Lord on His throne, Revelation 3:21a. What a fantastic reward! It is called the *“inheritance”* of the faithful, Revelation 21:7.

The key is in overcoming. Hope keeps us going. It helps us rivet our eyes on the goal. It spurs us on to complete the race. If we sustain our hope, we can be clean in a dirty world, righteous in a sinful place, upright in a crooked generation. Though satan tries to

defeat us, we can resist him because we have the commitment to “*stand firm,*” I Corinthians 15:58. We overcome when we stick close to Him who overcame. He is the Lord of lords, the King of kings. “*His called, chosen, and faithful followers*” will be “*with Him*” days without end, Revelation 17:14. That is a promise. Hence, our present victory and our future triumph are assured.

A mother called her child to dinner. The child did not respond. A second call. Still no answer. Then a third call. Finally, a reply: “Please, Mom, I cannot come right now. I am reading a book. The hero is surrounded by the enemy. I have got to find out what happened.” The mother understood. But, almost immediately, the lad appeared. “That was quick! How did you get done so fast,” the mother asked? “Oh, I turned to the last chapter and saw that the hero was still alive!” We have read the last chapter. Jesus is on the throne. The devil lost the battle. The Lord encourages us to claim the victory. Our hope prods us toward the finish line.

V. HOPE OF HEAVEN PROVIDES ENDURANCE

After an old cowboy died, his friends reminisced about his life. “I hope he has gone to heaven,” one of his buddies said. “I am not too sure he has,” another remarked. “He never talked about it. Nor, as far as I know, he never made any preparations for the big rodeo.” Those are sobering words. They speak volumes. Most everyone wants to go to heaven. Yet few folks make the effort to get there.

Abraham, our father in the faith, was serious about his future. “*By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God,*” Hebrews 11:9,10. Abraham never considered Canaan his permanent home. He was just passing through on his way to his eternal destination. His hope was solidly on the “celestial city.” We, too, should have that same attitude. “*For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come,*” Hebrews 13:14; cf. Philippians 3:12-14.

All of the ancient patriarchs were outsiders in a foreign land. Again, as the Hebrew letter says, “*All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them,*” Hebrews 11:13-16.

Our spiritual forefathers were content to be pilgrims. Their hearts were set on heaven.

Their citizenship was above. They were able to endure the hardships of an immigrant lifestyle because they longed for a better country. That is the secret of faithfulness in suffering. We wait in patience because we walk by faith. We are content, happy, and satisfied because of what is ahead. We know where the “crystal river flows.” We know where “all is joy and love.” It is not here. It is not now. So we move on. We endure. Our hope remains focused on the place where there are “no sad farewells.” If we have the same hope as our spiritual predecessors, we will see the same “city in the sky.” We will hear the same “golden bells.” We will cling to the same “promise that will never fail.” The hope that made Abraham endure will also make us endure. We will be an unshakeable overcomer just like he was. And, best of all, God will not be ashamed to be called our God.

LESSON THREE

What Is Heaven?

Heaven is where the angels sing the praises of God. Yet heaven is a lot more than an angelic choir. Heaven is a place of unspeakable beauty. But heaven is much more than exquisite scenery. Heaven will be a grand reunion, a happy homecoming. Yet heaven is far more than a family gathering, a fun picnic.

So what is it? The Old Testament word for “heaven” is used in two ways. (1) It often refers to the sky and (2) it frequently means the abode of God. In the first instance, heaven gives rain, Genesis 7:11,12, sends wind, Psalm 135:7, as well as produces snow, Isaiah 55:10. The heavens, in the sense of the sky, are stretched out like a tent, spread out like a canopy, Isaiah 40:22. In the second usage, heaven is the “*dwelling place*” of God, Deuteronomy 26:15. Thus, it is no surprise that the Lord is described as living in a “*high place*,” Isaiah 57:15a, or that He “*looks down*” on earth, Isaiah 63:15a. The Scriptures say that the “*heavens are higher*” than the earth as the thoughts of God are higher than our thoughts, Isaiah 55:9.

Obviously, dictionary definitions hardly do justice to the word “heaven.” And figurative descriptions do not help either. This lesson will avoid both in order to focus on the real nature of eternity. Such an approach is deliberate. For unravelling the meaning of figurative language is laced with many hazards. It requires a heavy dose of speculation. Therefore, when we confine our study to the essence of heaven, we stand on firmer ground. With that in mind, then, we ask a second time: What is heaven?

I. HEAVEN IS GOD

When the prodigal son confessed his wickedness, he admitted he had sinned “*against heaven*,” Luke 15:18b. To sin against heaven means to disobey God. It is where God dwells. Heaven would no longer be heaven if God was not there. Albeit, in a sense, “*the heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain God*,” 1 Kings 8:27a. He actually dwells everywhere. But the Bible often speaks of heaven as the “*dwelling place*” of God, 1 Kings 8:30,39; Psalm 84:1, or as His “*house*,” Psalm 23:6; John 14:2. Since humans have difficulty wrapping their heads around someone being everywhere, we are inclined to think of heaven as His headquarters, His official residence. Hence, heaven and the throne of God are synonymous, Isaiah 66:1; Matthew 5:34; 23:22. So, when the Scriptures say, “*heaven decrees*,” they mean “*God says*.”

Heaven and God go together. When we speak of the one, we are including the other. That is to say, the terms “God” and “heaven” are used interchangeably, Genesis 49:25;

Daniel 4:26b. For this reason, the psalmist wrote, *“Whom do I have in heaven but You?”* Psalm 73:25 To be in heaven, is to be with God. To see the Lord, is the be where He is. John said, *“Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is,”* I John 3:2. Consequently, whether we die before the Lord comes or whether Jesus returns to take us home, we will be transported to heaven to *“see the King in all His beauty,”* Isaiah 33:17a. So what is heaven? It is God. It is where the banquet is ready, where the King rules, where the saints are preparing to go.

A young boy was born blind. A skilled surgeon repaired his eyes. However, after the operation, the head of the lad was covered in bandages. For six weeks, the boy anticipated the joy of seeing. Finally, the wait was over. A nurse asked him what he wanted to see first. Without hesitation, he said, “I want to see the doctor who gave me sight.” Similarly, we, no doubt, want to see the Great Physician who gave us spiritual sight. Fanny Crosby, a blind song writer, beautifully expressed the thought:

Oh, the dear ones in glory
How they beckon me to the banquet hall,
They sing the great welcome song,
But I long to meet my Savior first of all.

Heaven is where believers will see the Lord. It is where they will be with God. *“They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God,”* Revelation 21:3. He will not be in a cloud or pillar of fire. He will not be a passing wind or a still small voice. He will not be disguised as a burning bush, tongues of fire, or a hovering dove. No! We will see Him as He really is. The Bible says we will *“see His face,”* Revelation 22:4a. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus promised *“the pure in heart will see God,”* Matthew 5:8.

II. HEAVEN IS GLORY

The favorite synonym for heaven in the Scriptures is *“glory.”* And well it should be. For glory means splendor, brightness, magnificence, excellence, preeminence, and majesty. Stephen, before being stoned, mentioned the *“God of glory,”* Acts 7:2. Peter called the Lord the *“Majestic Glory,”* II Peter 1:17. Hence, as we noticed in the discussion of God and heaven, God and glory are also interchangeable terms.

Just before He was crucified, Christ prayed that believers would see His glory, the glory God had given Him, John 17:24. So, when He ascended, He was *“taken up in glory,”* I Timothy 3:16. Furthermore, we *“rejoice in the hope of glory,”* Romans 5:2b. Though we may be persecuted, *“our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us,”* Romans 8:18. Consequently, we *“share in His sufferings in order to share in His glory,”* Romans 8:17b. *“Our light and momentary troubles are*

achieving for us an eternal glory...,” II Corinthians 4:16,17. And, though our body “*is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory,*” I Corinthians 15:43a.

Repeatedly, we are reminded that Christ is our only “*hope of glory,*” Colossians 1:27. God called us through the Gospel so that we might “*share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ,*” II Thessalonians 2:14. We look forward to glory. Though we deserve shame, God “*will take us into glory,*” Psalms 73:24. He, to whom all glory belongs, invites us to share in His eternal splendor, I Peter 5:10a. What is this glory? The word sometimes refers to God Himself. At other times, it refers to heaven where God is.

Let us summarize. When the Son of Man “*comes in His glory,*” Luke 9:26, our bodies will be “*raised in glory,*” I Corinthians 15:43a, “*like His glorious body,*” Philippians 3:21b, “*to appear with Him in glory,*” Colossians 3:4b, indeed, to “*obtain eternal glory,*” II Timothy 2:10b. What is earthy, ugly, and sinful will pass away. Everything will be made new. What we now struggle to describe will be in plain view. It will be glorious—beyond anything we now experience. No more night. No more disease. No more pain. No more worry. No more violence. No more tears. That is the “glory land way.”

III. HEAVEN IS LIFE

On his death bed, a famous theologian dictated a letter. “I am soon to depart from the land of the living,” he said. Then, after a thoughtful pause, he corrected himself. “I am in the land of the dying, but hope to soon go to the land of the living.” How true! Heaven is synonymous with life. It is the place of eternal life. It is where the “*tree of life*” grows, Revelation 22:1,2. In the beginning, that tree was in the Garden of Eden, Genesis 2:8,9. It provided life for Adam and Eve. And, as long as they had access to that tree, they would “*live forever,*” Genesis 3:22b. However, because Adam ignored the instructions of the Lord, God “*banished*” him from the garden, Genesis 3:23. The tree of life was off limits. Adam eventually died, Genesis 5:5. And, without the fruit of that tree, we will, too, Romans 5:12. God gave mankind eternal life. Satan—meddling in human affairs—caused it to slip away.

Thankfully, after the mess Adam made, the Lord gave us hope. He sent His Son. And, “*in Him, was life,*” John 1:4. “*The life appeared,*” the apostle said. Jesus was seen. His disciples testified about Him. John described Him as “*eternal life,*” I John 1:1,2a. Obviously, in these passages, life and eternal life are used synonymously. The word of life was revealed so that eternal life might be proclaimed. The living bread has come down from heaven. If we partake of that bread, we will “*live forever,*” John 6:51. Eternal life is offered to those who put their faith in Him. For “*whoever believes in the Son has eternal life,*” John 3:36a. “*He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life,*” I John 5:12.

Though life is a present possession, there is something additional believers will receive

in the world to come. In other words, we are given life now and eternal life when Christ returns, Luke 18:30. At the conclusion of the judgment, *“the righteous”* (will go away) *“to eternal life,”* Matthew 25:46b. Something new will be given. Something extra will be received. Hence, we should keep ourselves in the love of God as we wait for the return of Christ who brings eternal life, Jude 21. In Him, we have life. Through Him, we will be given eternal life.

Our unending life in heaven is provided by the tree of life. What was lost in Eden is regained in glory. *“To him who overcomes,”* the Lord said, *“I will give the right to eat from the tree of life,”* Revelation 2:7b. The leaves from that tree will heal all diseases. In the meantime, while on earth, life can be dreadful. Humans suffer all kinds of illness. In his travels, Gulliver went to the island of Luggnagg. There he discovered a group of immortals. However, Gulliver was disappointed. The immortals had eternal infirmity. They lived forever in misery. They did not have the “healing leaves.”

The grace of God has restored everything that sin destroyed. Blessed are those who have the right to the tree of life, Revelation 22:14a. Access to that tree means *“there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain; for the old order of things has passed away,”* Revelation 21:4. Now we can have life and have it abundantly. Or, as Jesus said, *“I have come that you may have life and have it to the full,”* John 10:10.

When Jesus ascended, He *“did not enter a man made sanctuary..., He entered heaven itself,”* Hebrews 9:24. In other words, heaven is a place. The Lord promised to go and prepare a place for us, John 14:3. But, from what has already been said, the blessedness of that place is not the gem stones in the foundation, the pearls in the gate, or the gold in the streets, cf. Revelation 21:15-21. For C. S. Lewis wrote, “such imagery is merely symbolic, an attempt to express the inexpressible. We must not take it literally. In the same way, when Christ told us to be doves, He did not expect us to lay eggs!” The blessedness of heaven is the moral condition there, the purity of the place. Though it will likely be beautiful, magnificent, and awesome, its attraction will be God, glory, and life.

“Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known,” 1 Corinthians 13:12. Creation reveals the might and majesty of God. But a clearer vision of Him is just ahead. At present, we worship the God of glory. But, later, we will participate in that glory. Now we have life. But, later, we will experience eternal life.

Our perceptions of the hereafter are fuzzy at best. Eventually they will be clear. Ultimately we will see God, we will know the glory, and we will experience the life. These manifestations will not be occasional or intermittent. They will be regular and constant. They will be eternal and unchanging. Praise God! When that happens, we will be home at last.

LESSON FOUR

Where Is Heaven?

In 1961, the Russian cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin, was the first human to orbit the earth. After returning from space, he bragged that he did not see God or heaven. Atheists around the world celebrated. For Christians have always believed that God was “up there.” Actually, Major Gagarin was fortunate. Since, if he had seen God, he would not have lived to tell the story. The Bible says “*no one may see (God) and live,*” Exodus 33:20. So, whether he knew it or not, Gagarin was speaking the truth! God is “*invisible*” (to the human eye), I Timothy 1:17. That is why “*no one has ever seen (Him),*” I John 4:12. And, because we are unable to see God, we cannot see heaven either. Gagarin did not make a new discovery. He merely pointed out what believers already knew. Consequently, we are left with the same question: Where is heaven?

I. HEAVEN IS THERE

Some people argue that heaven is something but not somewhere. They think heaven is a state of mind rather than a place in the “sky.” Since God is everywhere and heaven is where God is, these folks suppose that heaven is also everywhere. To them, heaven is all around us. Or, more specifically, heaven is everywhere in general and nowhere in particular. So, these people say, heaven is here on earth. And, they point out, by the way we live, we make our earthly existence a heaven or a hell.

There is some truth to that conclusion (which means there is some error, too). Certainly, by the way we live, we make our life like heaven or hell. But that suggests WHAT heaven is more than it determines WHERE heaven is. When Solomon prayed, at the dedication of the temple, he asked God to “*hear from heaven, (His) dwelling place,*” I Kings 8:30b. In other words, heaven is a particular place—a spot on the celestial map. A “dwelling place” can be seen. It is tangible. Is that not what Jesus meant when He said, “*In My Father’s house are many rooms?*” John 14:2a. He was indicating that heaven was a real place somewhere. Our mansion above is as real as our house below. In other words, heaven is not a fluffy white cloud drifting through outer space. Though, come to think of it, a fluffy white cloud is still a tangible, locatable object!

Heaven is an actual reality. Jesus ascended back to heaven to “*prepare a place*” for us, John 14:2b. A “place” is more than galactic ether. It is more than interplanetary emptiness. When Jesus left earth, He went somewhere. He went to “*heaven itself,*” Hebrews 9:24. He did not wander around in a blank void. He went to an actual place. The ascension points to a tangible location.

Furthermore, Jesus said, *“If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am,”* John 14:3. In the 1800’s, when a man told his wife he was going west to homestead some land, did he not have a real parcel of property in mind? And, if he promised to return and take her to the homestead he had prepared, would not the woman think he was referring to a real place? I think so. And, I think that is what Jesus meant, too. Heaven is not a nebulous existence that has no reality. Heaven is not a mystical illusion. It is not a spiritual mirage. Jesus spoke of “house,” “rooms,” and “place.” Each of those words suggest a substantive, objective phenomenon. Heaven is a literal place. It is as real as those who will live there. It is a city *“whose architect and builder is God,”* Hebrews 11:10.

II. HEAVEN IS NEAR

It is not uncommon to think of heaven as “a land far, far away.” We often sing about “the beautiful isle of somewhere.” The Bible, however, speaks of heaven as near. For example, God reassured Jacob in a dream. A staircase, resting on earth and reaching to heaven, had angels ascending and descending on it, Genesis 28:10-12. The vision helped the patriarch see that God was *“in that place,”* i.e., the Lord was with Jacob, Genesis 28:15-17. Heaven was close. Similarly, when Jesus came to earth, He was called *“Immanuel,”* or *“God with us,”* Matthew 1:22,23; cf. John 1:14a. Thus, He was described as *“the man from heaven,”* 1 Corinthians 15:49. And, when He returned to heaven, God sent the Holy Spirit to be His presence among us, John 14:16-18. Heaven is not far away. God has always visited earth when He needed to. He continues to stay in constant contact through His angels. Children have “guardian” angels in heaven, Matthew 18:10. Adults also have ministering angels caring for them, Hebrews 1:14. Heaven is close—as close as the Lord in the dream of Jacob.

Our connection with God is facilitated in two ways. (1) God sent His representative to earth and (2) earth has a representative in heaven.

A. God Sent A Representative To Earth

Jesus was the representative of God, John 1:18. In the beginning, He was with God, John 1:1. He had the glory of God, John 17:5. Indeed, He was God. But, He was sent to earth. And, while on earth, He was the *“radiance of God’s glory, the exact representation of His being,”* Hebrews 1:3a. In other words, Jesus was God covered in human skin. Or, as Paul wrote, Christ was all the fulness of deity in human form, Colossians 2:9. Christ told Nicodemus, *“No one has ever gone into heaven except the One who came from heaven,”* John 3:13. Later, when proclaiming that He was the bread of life, He said, *“I have come down from heaven,”* John 6:38,51.

B. Humans Have A Representative In Heaven

During His time on earth, Jesus was eager to return home. The Lord knew from hence He had come and where He was going. John said, "*Jesus knew...that He had come from God and was returning to God,*" John 13:3. Shortly, after His resurrection, Christ went back to heaven, Acts 1:9-11. Now, while sitting at the right hand of the throne, He is our mediator, I Timothy 2:5. The curtain that once separated God and man has been torn in two, Matthew 27:51. The doors of heaven are unlocked. The gates of the celestial city are open. Our "paradise beyond compare" is ready. The Lord "*must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything,*" Acts 3:21a. That time is soon. The coming of the Lord is "*near,*" James 5:8. "*The Judge is standing at the door,*" James 5:9. Heaven is at hand.

III. HEAVEN IS HERE

Because of His promise, "*we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth,*" II Peter 3:13. Does that mean the present earth will be incinerated? Will our planet be burned up? Is earth only a temporary dwelling place? If so, after it has served its purpose, will it be annihilated? Many Christians think so. Others, however, think our planet will be renovated, will ultimately become our final, forever home. Though sin has defiled the earth, God will purify it. The new heaven and new earth will become a fresh glorious place where the righteous will dwell. Obviously, these are two vastly different views. Does the Bible give us some clues as to which position is correct? What do the Scriptures say?

A. Meaning Of "New"

The prophet Isaiah was first to break the news. He predicted that God would transform our sin weary planet. "*Behold,*" the Lord said, "*I will create new heavens and a new earth,*" Isaiah 65:17a. The new will be so grand that the old will not be remembered. Isaiah wrote, "*The former things will not...come to mind,*" Isaiah 65:17b. In other words, no one will wish to return to the first heaven and earth. The "new" ones will "*endure,*" Isaiah 66:22a. They will "*stand*" or "*remain.*" They will not be temporary. The new heavens and new earth will be our eternal home.

When the last item on the divine agenda is complete, the first heaven and the first earth will pass away, Revelation 21:1. All things will be made new, Revelation 21:5. A similar newness takes place at our conversion, II Corinthians 5:17. When we become a Christian, God does not create a brand new person. Rather He restores us to our former purity. A new man in Christ is actually a renewed individual, Romans 12:1,2. We are made new through regeneration, that is, being born again "*of water and the Spirit,*" John 3:5-7. God does not annihilate our body nor create another one. Instead, He drastically changes the one we already have. In the same way, God will not blot out the present cosmos. He will renovate it.

Our old, inner self is polluted by wickedness. We must *“put on a new self which is created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness,”* Ephesians 4:24. Our mortal body will be transformed into an immortal body in the resurrection, I Corinthians 15:42-44,51-54. In like fashion, the earth, which is defiled, will be renewed or will be made new. This renewal will result in a new heaven and a new earth.

B. Significance Of “Laid Bare”

Those who believe the earth will be burned up appeal primarily to verses 7 and 10 of II Peter 3. In verse 7, *“The present heavens and earth are reserved for fire.”* In verse 10, *“the elements will be destroyed by fire.”* Peter gives an example of what he meant by *“destroyed.”* In the days of Noah, he said, the world at that time was *“destroyed”* by water, II Peter 3:6. And, by the same word (of God), the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, II Peter 3:6,7. The flood did not annihilate the world in the days of Noah. Rather it *“destroyed ungodly men,”* II Peter 3:7. God has promised that the heavens and earth of today will also be *“destroyed,”* II Peter 3:11a. Does that not indicate a flood-like cleansing will take place? Does it not, then, suggest the *“kind of people we ought to be,”* II Peter 3:11b.

In the King James Version, II Peter 3:10 is translated *“the earth and everything in it will be burned up.”* In other versions, verse 10 says, *the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”* The King James rendering is based on later manuscript evidence. The words *“burned up”* are dubious at best. The oldest manuscripts say, *“laid bare.”* The Greek term *“laid bare”* can also be translated *“discovered,” “found out,” “uncovered,” “exposed,”* or *“manifested.”* This is the same meaning that Paul had in mind. He wrote, *“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames,”* I Corinthians 3:10-15. Our work will be laid bare, that is, *“revealed”* for what it is on the day of judgment. Paul gives no indication that the earth will be burned up. Rather, shoddy workmanship will be exposed.

“The earth is established forever,” Psalms 78:69. *“The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved,”* Psalms 93:1; 104:5. And, again, *“The earth remains forever,”* Ecclesiastes 1:4. This planet is permanent. That is why Jesus could say, *“The meek will inherit the earth,”* Matthew 5:5. It is not going to be incinerated. Heaven will be here. Our inheritance is the purified earth, Psalms 37:9-11,22,28b,29,34.

C. Idea Of “Liberated”

“The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed,” Romans 8:19. As the context shows, *“creation”* (in this passage) is everything God created—except human beings. That is made clear in verses 22 and 23 where the frustration of creation is contrasted with the frustration of humans. *“We know,”* Paul wrote, *“that the whole creation has been groaning..up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves...groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies,”* Romans 8:22,23. When will this happen? *“When Christ, who is our life, appears, then (we) also will appear with Him in glory,”* Colossians 3:4. What is creation waiting for? It is waiting *“to be liberated”* from its *“bondage to decay,”* Romans 8:21a. God inflicted creation with death when human beings disobeyed Him in the garden. Obviously, this was not the choice of creation. It was the choice of God. As Romans says, *“For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay,”* Romans 8:20,21a. The present earth produces *“thorns and thistles,”* Genesis 3:17b,18a. The future earth will serve humankind with an abundant crop of healing leaves. Its pristine purity will be reestablished. And so paradise lost will at last be paradise found again.

The present heaven and earth are reserved for fire. What we see now will disappear. *“The heavens will vanish like smoke. The earth will grow old like a garment,”* Isaiah 51:6. Everything *“will melt”* in the heat, II Peter 3:12b. Our planet will be thoroughly cleansed. A new heaven and a new earth will emerge—liberated, refreshed, and pure. God will keep His promise. So we look forward to this renewal—the eternal home of the righteous.

LESSON FIVE

Who Will Go To Heaven?

A young man was walking home late in the evening. He took a break, sat down, and leaned against a stone wall that surrounded a cemetery. Because he was exhausted, he fell asleep. Unbeknownst to him, two boys were in the cemetery gathering pecans. They had collected quite a stash of nuts. So, in the dwindling sunlight, the boys had set down on the other side of the same stone wall to divvy up their loot. The hiker was awakened by the voices of the boys. The man on the outside of the wall, heard the boys on the inside of the wall, saying, "One for you and one for me, one for you and one for me." Startled, the man jumped up and ran to town. He staggered into the general store and breathlessly exclaimed, "The Lord and the devil are in the cemetery dividing up the people buried there: "One for you, one for me, one for you, one for me!"

In this lesson, I will not be playing either the Lord or the devil. For Jesus will divide the righteous from the unrighteous at His second coming. *"When the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will gather before Him, and He will separate the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left,"* Matthew 25:31-33. That will be an awesome day. Yet, until He returns, the question of who will go to heaven will be bantered about as it has been for centuries. And, when He appears many will be disappointed. The Scriptures say that *"someone asked Him, 'Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?'"* He said to them, *"Make every effort to enter through the narrow gate, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to,"* Luke 13:23,24. The Bible clearly teaches that many who expect to go to heaven will not get there.

Why will so many be disappointed? One of the leading reasons has to do with the numerous conflicting views regarding "who will go to heaven." Certainly all human guesses cannot be right. Indeed, all of them are likely wrong. They represent finite speculations about infinite matters. People will also be disappointed because they fail to make appropriate preparation. Regardless of the cause for missing the greatest reward in history, we turn now to the various opinions of people about who will get to "the land of eternal day."

I. WHAT MEN SAY

There are many ideas on a subject about which we have few definitive answers. Yet humans like to assume. However, our best ideas are no more than "the blind leading the blind." We do not know who is going to heaven. The decision is in the hands of the

Lord. But, for the sake of clarity, we will briefly look at what various people have proposed.

A. Some Suggest “No One”

The late Herbert W. Armstrong, founder of the Worldwide Church of God and editor of Truth magazine, frequently ridiculed the words in the hymn: “Sing the Wondrous Love.” The chorus of that song says,

When we all get to heaven!
What a day of rejoicing that will be!
When we all see Jesus
We’ll sing and shout the victory.

Armstrong argued that the earth is going to be inhabited forever by the children of God. However, he failed to understand that the cleansed earth will be the kingdom of heaven. (See Lesson Four) The apostle John said, *“I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away. And (he) saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.... And (he) heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God,’ ”* Revelation 21:1-3. The dualism of “heaven and earth” is not mentioned again in the Bible after this passage. For, at the end of time, heaven and earth will be joined together into one. Since God will make the new earth His dwelling and since where God dwells is heaven, we shall be in heaven when we dwell with Him on the new earth.

Jesus ascended to heaven so that those who trust Him can go to heaven. *“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf,”* Hebrews 6:19,20a. This passage has two images: (1) the temple curtain and (2) a forerunner. The first image depicts the Lord going into the Holy of Holies where God is. The second image says Jesus went there as a forerunner, that is, a “reconnaissance scout.” The point is clear. We should follow Him. The Lord *“will bring us safely to His heavenly kingdom,”* II Timothy 4:18. Christ is there now. We will join Him soon. In spite of what Armstrong thought, the saints will go to heaven. Jesus will make sure of that.

B. Others Suppose “144,000”

Jehovah Witnesses believe all who faithfully follow the will of God will receive everlasting life. So far, so good. For *“the gift of God is eternal life,”* Romans 6:23. But the Jehovah Witnesses go a step further. They divide the righteous into two groups. In other words, they believe eternal life will NOT be the same for all the saved. According to their doctrine, 144,000 of the redeemed will go to heaven. The rest will

stay here on earth.

The 144,000 are mentioned in two places—both of them in Revelation. In the first instance, John wrote, *“Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel,”* Revelation 7:4. In the second instance, John said, *“Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion and with Him was the 144,000...No one could learn the (salvation) song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth,”* Revelation 14:1,3. The key to interpreting these passages is deciding whether the 144,000 is a literal or figurative number. I believe it is figurative for the following reasons:

. In Revelation 7:4, the 144,000 were *“from all the tribes of Israel.”* If taken literally, all of the redeemed would be Jews. But that is contrary to what Paul taught. *“Is God the God of the Jews only? Is He not the God of the Gentiles, too? Yes, of the Gentiles, too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through the same faith,”* Romans 3:29,30. Does this not, then, indicate that Revelation 7:4 is symbolic? I think so.

. In Revelation 14:1,3, the 144,000 are BOTH on earth AND in heaven. Again, if taken literally, it creates a dilemma for those who believe that the 144,000 will only be in heaven.

The Jehovah Witnesses “cannot have their cake and eat it too!” One must interpret these verses either figuratively or literally. If 144,000 is literal, than “the tribes of Israel” are literal. Again, if the 144,000 is literal, than being “on Mount Zion” is literal. Therefore, it seems to me that the passages cited in Revelation simply refer to the totality of the saved—both Jews and Gentiles. They will not be divided into two groups—one on earth and one in heaven. All of them will be with God in heaven.

B. Several Say “Everyone”

According to the Mormons, there are three heavens: the celestial, the terrestrial, and the telestial. Everyone who ever lived will go to one of these three heavens.

1. Celestial Heaven. The “straight and narrow way” leads to the highest of the three heavens. Those who remain faithful to God, keep the Mormon ordinances, and have a celestial marriage will go there. A celestial marriage is between a polygamous man and his first wife. The man will supposedly become a god in the next life. For, the Mormons believe, “as a man is, God once was; as God is, a man can become.” This couple will go off to an uninhabited planet and be the Adam and Eve of that world. However, this view has two major problems. (1) *“At the resurrection, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like angels in heaven,”* Matthew 22:30. And (2) no man will attain godhood. Rather, the faithful will be servants of God in heaven.

John said, *“The throne of God and of the Lamb will be (there), and His servants will serve Him,” Revelation 22:3b.* These verses rule out both celestial marriage and becoming God.

2. Terrestrial Heaven. The “broad way” leads to the middle level of heaven. This is the heaven inhabited by those who accept Mormonism after death. Since there is no baptism in heaven, those living on earth are encouraged to be baptized for them. However, the Mormon view has problems. (1) According to Jesus, “wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction,” Matthew 7:13. (2) The distinction between the celestial and the terrestrial is mentioned in reference to the body of the righteous at the second coming rather than different levels of heaven. *“With what kind of body will (the resurrected ones have)?.... There are...heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another.... So it will be in be resurrection of the dead,”* I Corinthians 15:35,40,42a. And, (3) the idea of baptism by proxy is based on another Corinthian passage: *“Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?”* I Corinthians 15:29. Paul is arguing that the saints will be raised because Christ was raised from the dead. The Corinthians had demonstrated their faith in that proposition by being baptized. For, why would a person be immersed in water, if there was no resurrection? Baptism under such circumstances would be meaningless. We are not baptized on behalf of the death but “because” the dead are raised.

3. Telestial Heaven. The “low way” leads to the telestial kingdom where most people will go. The Mormons think these folks rejected the Lord. They will endure a period of probation. After their temporary suffering, they will go to the lowest heaven. Those in the celestial realm will have fellowship with God and Christ. Those in the terrestrial level will only be with Christ. While those in the telestial kingdom will have neither the presence God or Christ. This teaching is rife with error. (1) It makes hell a purgatory where sin is “burned away” in temporary suffering. And (2) it gives sinners a second chance. Neither teaching is found in the Bible. Though a clever idea, the three layered heaven is purely a human fabrication.

II. WHAT GOD SAYS

If we were to ask folks on main street—how does a person get to heaven—the answers will be varied and confusing. Some people will say, “Live a good life.” Others will suggest, “Keep the ten commandments.” Several will probably propose, “Join a Church.” And, likely, a few will say, “It is impossible to get there.” But Jesus gave an unequivocal response. He said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me,”* John 14:6. Christ is not A way but THE way to heaven. There are no other possibilities. *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved,”* Acts 4:12.

Therefore, we say without apology, *“God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life,”* 1 John 5:11b,12. This, then, may be the most important part of this book. It is the foundation for all hope of getting to the “promised land.” It is good news for everyone who wants to go to “the sweet home of the saints.”

A. Christ Is The Door

Jesus is the way to heaven. He did for man what man could not do for himself. Many are trying to earn salvation. They will fail. Humans cannot save themselves. We are sinners, Romans 3:10-18. For, *“When we were powerless (to save ourselves), Christ died for the ungodly,”* Romans 5:6. Therefore, the Lord said, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep,”* John 10:11. Or, as Paul wrote, Jesus *“qualified”* us to *“share in the inheritance of the saints,”* Colossians 1:12. How can the sacrifice of Christ save us? The prophet Ezekiel said, *“The soul who sins is the one who will die,”* Ezekiel 18:4. Sin brings death. Blood brings life. It atones for sin, Leviticus 17:11. One sinner cannot pay for the sin of another sinner. But Christ was without sin, Hebrews 4:15. Therefore, as a lamb without blemish, He died for us, Romans 5:8. He took our place. He is our gateway to heaven, John 10:7. He is the door to eternal life.

The Bible emphasizes the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus. We are told that, *“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness,”* Hebrews 9:22. Paul agrees. *“Christ died for our sins,”* 1 Corinthians 15:3, that is, *“Gave Himself up for our sins,”* Galatians 1:4; 2:20. Peter makes the same claim when he says, *“(Christ) bore our sins in His body on the tree,”* 1 Peter 2:24. It is no surprise, then, to hear John say, *“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins,”* 1 John 2:2; 4:10. The scripture is consistent: Jesus is the *“Savior of the world,”* 1 John 4:14.

We were sinners—destined for hell. God stepped in. He sent His Son. And, while we were sinners, Christ died for us. Paul told the Corinthians that they were washed, they were sanctified, they were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, 1 Corinthians 6:11. The blood has not lost its power. It still cleanses the sin stained soul. Jesus is the door. We must enter through Him.

B. Sin Is The Lock

Sadly, most people will not accept Christ. Few are going to heaven. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few will find it,”* Matthew 7:13,14. Why is that so. Sin is the culprit. It closes the gates of heaven. It locks the doors of paradise. It keeps people from eternal life. *“Nothing impure will enter (heaven), nor will*

anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life," Revelation 21:27.

Sinners will not sneak in. Bad apples will not get into the barrel. Evil will not be found in the holy city. Nothing will be allowed to tarnish the golden glory of heaven. No goats. No weeds. Nothing rotten nor corrupt. The Bible makes this quite clear. *"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God," I Corinthians 6:9,10; cf. Galatians 5:19-21.* Make no mistake about it. Sin does not have a place in heaven. And, what is worse, it will keep the sinful out of "the land of eternal happiness."

There are no good sins. All of them—whether little or big, whether intended or unintended—will exclude the perpetrator from heaven. Sin brings "*punishment*," Proverbs 10:16. It is a fact of life. The pleasures of the moment lead to the regrets of eternity. As a man sows, so shall he reap, Galatians 6:7. *"Sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death," James 1:15b.* The obvious is obvious. Sin must be dealt with. Jesus begs all sinners to trust in Him.

C. Faith Is The Key

Jesus is the door. Sin is a padlock prohibiting humans to pass through the door. Thank God, there is a key. Faith unlocks the door. *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand," Romans 5:1.* Faith is the key. Our trust in the atonement of Christ must be expressed in obedience. As James said, *"a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone," James 2:24.* In his conversion, Paul was told to be baptized in order to wash away his sins, Acts 22:16. At the end of his sermon on Pentecost, Peter told his audience to *"repent and be baptized...for the forgiveness of sins," Acts 2:38.*

Baptism sets our feet on a new path. We walk in newness of life. In other words, *"We were...buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life," Romans 6:4.* Having been forgiven, we pursue purity. Sin no more rules in our hearts. So we walk in the light as He is in the light, I John 1:7.

Faith is the key. We live in confident trust in the One who will be coming soon to take us to glory. We aspire to fight the good fight, to finish the race, to keep the faith so that a crown of righteousness will be given to us on that day, II Timothy 4:7,8. *"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him," James 1:12; cf.*

Revelation 2:10c. Human theories do not checkmate divine revelation. We do not know how many are going to heaven. But we do know that those who are faithful will get there. The number is immaterial. The truth is all that matters. Jesus is the way. He purchased our redemption. Faith in Him—expressed through unrelenting obedience—will guarantee our completing the journey to the chambers of paradise.

LESSON SIX

Are There Degrees Of Reward In Heaven?

When people die, it is common to say “they have gone to their reward.” Yet, to call heaven a “reward” is jarring to those who see it as a “gift” of grace. So what is heaven: a “reward” or a “gift?” Well, in truth, it is both. The following study will make that quite clear. As we analyze the Scriptures, attention will be drawn to the theme of reward. For, if there are any degrees of reward in heaven, it will be couched in the discussion of those passages.

The English word reward means “something given for a service rendered.” Thus, it is often understood as a wage, a payment, a prize, a remuneration, or a compensation. It signals the completion of a contract or promise. The Lord will be “*coming soon*.” He will be bringing a reward to everyone—according to what each person has done, Revelation 22:12. How are we to understand this passage (and others like it)? Will everyone who goes to heaven enjoy it the same? Will everybody who is ushered into their “ivory palace” experience an equal degree of glory? Or will the faithful get different rewards? A careful examination of pertinent texts may provide an answer.

I. EMPHASIS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament, reward was based on the fundamental premise that life is predictable. The world is not governed by blind fate or fickle gods. Rather a God of justice rules the universe. Therefore, humans are encouraged to discover the moral norms by which actions are rewarded. For instance, Israel was told, “*If you fully obey your God and carefully follow all His commands..., all of these blessings will come upon you.... However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all His commands...all these curses will come upon you...,*” Deuteronomy 28:1,2,15. In other words, life is a boomerang. “*An evil man is snared by his own sin, but a righteous one can sing and be glad,*” Proverbs 29:6. “*The Lord is a God of retribution; He will repay in full,*” Jeremiah 51:56b. By the time of Christ, the law of recompense was clearly the backbone of human behavior in Israel. Humans will reap what they sow.

II. STATEMENTS OF JESUS

Jesus often mentioned heaven. He recognized the principle of retribution. He also understood heaven to be a gift. Hence, in His teachings and in His parables these two views are skillfully mixed together. Humans are left knowing there is something they must do to inherit eternal life. They also learn there is something which God must do to make it happen. In short, then, “reward” and “grace” are both woven into the same

inspired tapestry.

A. Teachings Of Jesus

The Lord is unique in His view of reward. (1) On some occasions, it is a recompense for what one does. *“Do not judge or you will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you,”* Matthew 7:1,2. But, (2) at other times, Jesus calls for service without reference to reward. *“When you have done everything you are told to do, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty,’”* Luke 17:10.

Because Christ lived in a society entrenched in the principle of compensation, He often spoke of rewards. *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven,”* Matthew 5:11,12a. *“If anyone gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is My disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward,”* Matthew 10:41,42. As the writer of Hebrews said, *“God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them,”* Hebrews 6:10. *“The Son of Man is going to come in His Father’s glory with His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what he has done,”* Matthew 16:27. So, Jesus said, *“When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous,”* Luke 14:12-14. Reward is laced through the teaching of Jesus (though the goal is not self-seeking remuneration but self-sacrificing service). In other words, the notion of reward is mentioned mainly in the sense that conduct has its recompense. Or, to say it differently, reward is not the motive for right conduct, but right conduct results in reward.

B. Parables Of Jesus

There are some interesting twists regarding rewards in the parables of Jesus. For example, in the story of the laborers in the vineyard, everyone received the same pay no matter how long they worked. *“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ The workers who were hired the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So, when those came who were hired first, they expect to receive more. But each received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Did you not agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Do not I have the right to do what I*

want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

Matthew 20:8-15. From this parable, it is apparent all faithful believers will receive a home in heaven—whether they believed for a day or a decade, whether they had it easy or whether they suffered great difficulty.

However, the parable of the ten minas approaches rewards from a different angle. It seems to strongly support the notion that there will be different rewards. *"A man of noble birth (which refers to Jesus) went to a distant country (likely meaning heaven) to have himself appointed king and then return (in the second coming). So he called ten of his servants (or followers) and gave them ten minas,"* namely, each servant received the same amount. *'Put this money to work,'* he said *'until I come back.'* This is where the parable of the minas differs from the parable of the talents. In the "talents" parable, each servant received an amount "equal to his ability," Matthew 25:15. In the "minas" story, the rewards are the same. Hence, when we were saved, we receive the same measure of the Holy Spirit, the same amount of grace, the same salvation. *"When the king returns (in the second coming), he called his servants to find out what they gained with their minas."* One servant, like Paul, worked harder than the others, I Corinthians 15:10. Therefore, that servant received a greater reward than the others. The second servant came and indicated that he had also increased his money—though not as much as the first servant. Consequently, his reward was less than what the first servant received. Apparently, the rewards in heaven are not going to be the same.

What exactly are the differences in the rewards? That is not clear. I do not think a more venerable saint will get a penthouse while a lesser accomplished believer will receive a tiny shack. The differences in reward will not be measured in degrees of glory, value of the prize, or extent of the compensation. Such distinctions apply to life on earth. Rather, it seems to me, the differences will center around the capacity to enjoy the "pearly portals." The person who served the Lord under considerable hardship for many years will have more reason for rejoicing in heaven than the person who only served a few days in a tranquil environment. Though there may be more to it than merely an enlarged capacity for appreciation, the depth of rejoicing is surely a significant part of it.

III. Letters Of Paul

The apostle to the Gentiles taught that all the saved will enter heaven. Yet he appears to suggest that the redeemed will receive different rewards.

A. Free Grace

According to Paul, Christ gives justification to every believer as a "gift." For, *"all have sinned,"* yet *"all are justified freely by His grace,"* Romans 3:24. *"He who did not spare His own Son, but gave up Him for us all, how will He not also along with Him graciously give us all things?"* Romans 8:32. But, at the same time, Paul frequently speaks of our

“reward.” For instance, he mentions an accountability for our conduct. We will *“all stand before the judgment seat of God,”* Romans 14:10. *“He will render to every man according to his works,”* Romans 2:6-8. Therefore, we are encouraged to *“serve wholeheartedly... (because)... the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does,”* Ephesians 6:8. *“Each will be rewarded according to his own labor,”* II Corinthians 3:8.

B. Good Works

Paul suffered much for the cause of Christ. His struggles were worth it. *“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all,”* II Corinthians 4:17. His pain will be rewarded. *“Each person,”* Paul said, *“will receive what is due him for the things done while in the body,”* I Corinthians 5:10. However, like a runner, we are not rewarded during the race. We wait for the prize. It will be given in the next life. *“Therefore,”* Paul insisted, *“judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive his praise from God,”* I Corinthians 4:5. The Lord will take into account the motives behind all actions. This will make the judgment day an interesting event. Plaques and trophies will not count. Hidden motives will. So, in the pastoral letters, there are frequent references to good works and righteous intentions. For example, Paul encouraged Timothy to command (his congregation) to do good deeds, to be generous, and (be) willing to share. In this way, they would lay up treasure for themselves..., I Timothy 6:18,19; cf. II Timothy 4:6-8. These verses leave the impression that the more we lay in store the greater the prize will be. And, the less generous we are, the smaller the accumulated treasure will be. In some fashion, then, there seems to be different rewards because there are different amounts of treasure and different motives for accumulating it.

IV. SUGGESTIONS OF OTHERS

The remainder of the New Testament echoes what has already been said. We are encouraged to diligently strive to reach the prize. Each of us should endure *“to the very end in order to make our hope sure,”* Hebrews 6:11. Christ has offered the perfect sacrifice. We are redeemed. Yet we can fall away. *“See to it that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God,”* Hebrews 3:12; cf. Hebrews 10:26-31. Should we remain faithful, there will be a reward. *“Do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded,”* Hebrews 10:35. Moses *“looked ahead to his reward,”* Hebrews 11:26. Jesus did, too, Hebrews 12:2. James said, *“the man”* who does what is right *“will be blessed in what he does,”* James 1:25.

What we do will be measured on the judgment day. Our behavior will be a determining factor in the reward we receive. Thus, it appears, there will be degrees of punishment in hell. Hypocrites *“will be punished most severely,”* Mark 12:40. And, certain cities that refuse to repent, will find eternity much worse than those cities which never had a

chance to repent, Matthew 11:22-24. Every disobedience will receive a just punishment. Opportunities to repent will be taken into consideration. It is not revealed how the degrees of punishment will differ (though there is ample indication that they will differ).

There is a similar teaching in the Scriptures regarding degrees of glory. As best I can tell, there will be different capacities for enjoying heaven (like there are different levels of remorse for not getting there). In this life, no two people enjoy everything to the same degree. Whether we refer to cooking a meal, climbing a mountain, exploring a cavern, or quilting a blanket, enjoyment varies. So those who carry the heaviest cross will more happily wear the crown. Likewise, it seems, the degrees of reward in eternity will be determined by the sacrifices made in time.

* * * *

As we close this lesson, a caution or two is in order. (1) We must be careful how we interpret passages dealing with our final reward. Too often people talk about divine recompense as if it is doled out like “Christmas presents.” This is unfortunate. God does more than “see who is naughty or nice.” He does not count good deeds and bad deeds to see which is more numerous. Grace is part of the equation. Our reward is not earned like an “olympic medal.” It is the generous “gift” of heaven.

(2) Notwithstanding, right and wrong must be taken seriously. Morals matter. The universe is not an impersonal machine. People do not share a common destiny: the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who obey and those who disobey, Ecclesiastes 9:2. No! Our behavior does count. Only an age bewitched by the “scientific method” thinks otherwise. Science is equipped to calculate speed, measure energy, and analyze matter. It does not take God into consideration. The Lord holds the key to heaven. In eternity, everybody will not be like everybody else. Our present existence is not meaningless. What we do now determines (in part) what we will experience later. Right and wrong are not convenient labels for the time being. They have eternal implications. For, be assured, no one escapes the judgment of God, Romans 2:3.

LESSON SEVEN

What Will We Know In Heaven?

Everyone has deceased relatives. Their departure raises questions. Do they know what is happening to us? Do they care to know? Do the departed observe what we do? These questions have been asked since time began. Do we have any answers? Do we have any clues concerning what those in heaven know about affairs on earth? I believe we do. Scripture supplies some hints. The answer makes heaven more real. It makes our journey more exciting. It makes our struggles more bearable.

However, when we affirm that folks in heaven know what we are doing on earth, some people object. “How can those in heaven be happy if they know what is happening on earth?” “How can parents have joy above when they see their children make bad choices below?” “How can people there be cheerful when they observe the wickedness here?” Truly, that seems impossible. When viewed from a human standpoint, it is very distressing. Yet how can Jesus be happy? He cares more than anyone else. Still He knows what is going on everywhere! The Scripture says, Jesus endured the cross because of *“the joy that was set before Him,”* Hebrews 12:2. The Lord is happy in heaven (though He is well aware of all the evil shenanigans on earth). The angels are, too.

I. WHAT THE ANGELS KNOW

When speaking of believers who have died, the Bible says, *“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes,”* Revelation 7:17b. The hurts of earth will be laid aside. The redeemed will cry no more. What a fabulous promise! Those who live in glory will weep no more (though they know what is transpiring on earth). How? Because they also know the angels are being sent to deal with the situations facing the saints. The prophet Daniel mentions these *“messengers”* coming down from heaven. Actually, the Hebrew word for those angels is *“watchmen,”* Daniel 4:13,17,23. Yes, the angels are watching over us. God sends them for our protection. *“Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”* Hebrews 1:14. They regularly report back to God what they have observed on earth, Job 1:6; 2:1. The Lord *“commands His angels...to guard (His followers) in all (their) ways,”* Psalms 91:11. Our deceased relatives trust God. And so should we. He can handle things in His world.

A. Angels Know When A Sinner Repents

There is more *“rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine persons who do not need to repent,”* Luke 15:7. If there is rejoicing “where the gates

swing wide” when a sinner repents, then those above are obviously aware of what is happening below. Jesus repeated His statement: *“there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels when a sinner repents,”* Luke 15:10. Who is in the presence of the angels? The Father is. The Son is. The Holy Spirit is. And the saints who have passed away are. *“They (deceased believers) are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple,* Revelation 7:15. The saints are there. They hear the rejoicing. Surely they know that the Father has recorded another name in the Book of Life.

Why such celebration? Why such joy when a sinner turns to the Lord? The effort of an evangelist has resulted in the saving of a soul. And, when the messenger passes away, it is a doubly joyous time. *“Blessed are those who die in the Lord. ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them,’”* Revelation 14:13. What we do for the Lord on earth will accompany us to heaven. When our work in the kingdom comes to fruition, we will delight in the outcome. *“Those who lead many to righteousness (will shine) like the stars for ever and ever,”* Daniel 12:3b. Indeed, everyone involved in the effort will be glad. When referring to evangelism, Jesus said, *“the sower and the reaper will be glad together,”* John 4:36.

B. Angels See The Church Persecuted

The martyrs in the early Church were in heaven. In a vision, the apostle John saw them. *“I saw under the altar,”* John wrote, *“the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they maintained. They called out in a loud voice, ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until You judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’”* Revelation 6:9,10. Apparently, the martyrs in heaven knew what was happening on earth. They were conscious of their immediate surroundings. And they had not forgotten about the persecutions that were troubling those they left behind. *“Each of them was given a white robe. They were told to wait a little longer—until the number of their fellow servants who were to be killed was complete,”* Revelation 6:11. The white robe symbolized victory. It was a pledge to the martyrs that their death was not in vain, that their testimony would be vindicated. Moreover, the persecutors would be punished. The faithful would be rewarded. So when God judged Rome, earth knew and heaven rejoiced. *“Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you,”* Revelation 18:20. Surely, what was true then is true now. The angels know. The redeemed are aware. Both of them rejoice. And we should, too.

C. Angels Watch Believers Run The Race

In the Book of Hebrews, the Old Testament heroes of the faith are mentioned. They are superlative examples of how to live. They are described as *“a great cloud of witnesses,”* Hebrews 12:1. In other words, they observe our spiritual journey. They are spectators of our efforts to secure the prize, to win the race.

There are two ways in which it can be said *“we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.”* (1) The heroes of faith bear testimony to the value of believing, to the power of faithfulness. They know what perseverance costs. They also know what perseverance gains. They have been there and done that. They conquered kingdoms. They administered justice. They gained what was promised. They shut the mouths of lions. They quenched the fiery flames and escaped the edge of the sword. They were weak but became strong. They became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies, Hebrews 11:33,34. In short, they know the drill. Their lives bear witness to the rigors of the faith.

(2) The “great cloud of witnesses” give us “home field advantage.” The enthusiasm of those who have “gone on to their reward” is a tremendous encouragement to us who are still here below. These “witnesses” have walked in our shoes. They have shed their own blood, sweat, and tears. The roar of this crowd of spectators is especially meaningful. It gives us hope. We are not in this struggle alone. The multitude of sympathetic witnesses cheer us on. They know what it is like. They are pulling for us. This “cloud of witnesses” includes our loved ones who are already there. Our mother or dad, our spouse or children, our friends or fellow Christians are waving us on to the finish line. We hear their shouts. We envision their faces. They are ready to welcome us home.

II. WHAT THE REDEEMED KNOW

The saints in heaven know what is happening on earth. But do they recognize one another in “the land where there is no night?” The Bible never raises that question. Therefore, in Scripture, there are no direct statements for answering that query. Yet, I believe, there are some hints (here and there) that shed light on the subject. For example, Paul expected to recognize his converts (as well as be recognized by his converts) at the second coming. *“What is our hope, our joy, and our crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when He comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy,”* 1 Thessalonians 2:19,20. How could the apostle rejoice over the souls he had won when he stands before Christ if he does not remember them in the next life?

A. What Is Implied

There is a longing in the human heart to know (and be known) in the hereafter. Cicero, a Roman orator, who lived a half century before Christ, said, upon the death of a friend, “If I seem to bear his passing with fortitude, it is by no means because I feel glad he is gone. Rather I am supported by the consoling belief that we will see each other soon.” The idea that people will recognize each other beyond the grave is common in human cultures. It is unthinkable that God would allow such a hope if it were not true.

Surely the Lord will not let all friendship memories be removed from our minds when we die. Surely God has not planned for us to meet deceased relatives in heaven as if they were strangers. Surely we will not enter eternity as aliens in a land of unknowns. Surely not! For such a place is not attractive. Who would want to go there? The parable of Lazarus and the rich man implies that we will know each other. The story says they both died. And, in the parable, the rich man remembered Lazarus. They called each other by name, Luke 16:19-31. Their existence after death was a natural continuation of their life before death.

Jehovah is a personal God. He made us in His image. Each of us are persons who relate to other persons (just like God does). We are told that (after the resurrection) we *“will be like the angels in heaven,”* Matthew 22:30b. What does that imply? It seems to say that in heaven Michael is not Gabriel and Gabriel is not Michael. They remain who they are, cf. Revelation 12:7. If this is true of angels, is it not true of us, too? Moreover, Jesus said, *“God is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”* And, then, He added, *(God) is not the God of the dead but of the living,”* Matthew 22:32. What does that imply? At least two things. (1) Though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had long before died (physically), they were alive in heaven. And (2) Abraham was still Abraham, Isaac was still Isaac, and Jacob was still Jacob. Hence, though we die, we will be alive in heaven. Plus, you will be you and I will be me.

On earth, we know a lot of people. When we enter the next life, we will retain that knowledge. Heaven is not starting over. It is continuing on. When we get to the “land of eternal day,” we will know more (not less) than what we know during our short stay here. The redeemed soul will have a better existence in heaven than it had here on earth. As the knowledge of God is above our knowledge, so our understanding there will be superior to our understanding here, Isaiah 55:8,9. Heaven is a *“better”* place, Hebrews 11:16.

B. What Is Suggested

When Abraham died, he was *“gathered to his people,”* Genesis 25:8; cf. Genesis 25:17; Judges 2:10; II Kings 22:20. The expression denotes a reunion with loved ones in the afterlife. It does not refer to his being buried in the same cemetery as his relatives. For Abraham was immediately *“gathered to his fathers”* but was not entombed until several days later. Moreover, why say he was *“gathered to his fathers”* if he was unable to recognize them? The phrase *“gathered to his fathers”* suggests he was welcomed home by those he knew. Isaac was *“gathered to his people,”* Genesis 35:29. Jacob was, too, Genesis 49:33. In both cases, the gathering preceded the burial. What is the point of mentioning this reunion if the gathered are total strangers. Moses and Aaron were also gathered to their people, Deuteronomy 32:48-50. They died on different mountains at different times. Obviously their bodies were not buried in the same family plot. All of these passages suggest a reuniting of relatives in the next life.

When King David lost his newborn son, he was heartbroken. He tearfully cried, *“Can I bring him back?”* He knew that was impossible. So he said, *“I will go to him for he will not return to me,”* II Samuel 12:23b. David was comforted in the knowledge that he could be reunited with his deceased son. There would be little consolation in that knowledge if David would not recognize his son when he meet him. Does this not suggest that we will know each other when our “toil on earth is done?”

Finally, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus recognized those who had already died, Matthew 17:1-4. Moses was still Moses. Elijah was still Elijah. Centuries had passed since their funerals. Yet they were still recognized. If that was possible before the resurrection, will it not be possible after the second coming? Since Peter, James, and John were introduced to Moses and Elijah, does this not suggest we will be introduced to famous, biblical characters once we get “up yonder?” Yes! It is possible because in heaven everybody will continue to be who they were while on the earth.

C. What Is Asserted

Jesus urges us to make allies with our riches. *“Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves,”* He said, *“so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings,”* Luke 16:9. The Lord indicates that the friends we make on earth will welcome us into eternity. That sounds like recognition in heaven. Those we befriend here will know us there.

The word of God plainly asserts that soul winners and souls won will be reunited when the Lord returns. *“We know,”* Paul wrote, *“that the one who raised the Lord from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in His presence,”* II Corinthians 4:14. Therefore, converts will know the one who converted them just as the soul winner will know those he converted when Christ returns, II Corinthians 1:14. In other words, Paul expected a mutual recognition in heaven between him and those he brought to the Lord.

Christ says, in the day of judgment, the righteous will remember when they helped the needy, provided hospitality for the stranger, and gave clothes to the naked, Matthew 25:37-40. The gift of memory is not taken away in heaven. The body of the deceased is changed but the mind is still in tact. We will understand. We will recognize. We will know. Does this not suggest that we will remember one another in the “day of endless joy?”

However, as before, there are those who raise objections. How could we be happy in heaven when we realize some of our loved ones are not there? I know that *“God will wipe away every tear,”* Revelation 7:17; 21:4. He has the solution for the parent of an unsaved child, for the one with an unconverted friend. Jesus is happy in heaven (though the majority of human beings have rejected Him). If He can be happy, surely

I can, too. Perhaps, the unsaved will be like the unborn. We do not miss those that never lived. The lost never experienced the new birth (by water and the Spirit, cf. John 3:5). They are unborn. In the kingdom of heaven, they are as if they never lived.

God Himself has the unique ability to blot our sins out of His mind. He said, *"I will remember their sins no more,"* Hebrews 8:12b; cf. Psalm 103:12. Maybe, in the next life, He will enable us to do what He already does. He will erase from our memory the unpleasanties that would keep us from being happy. Cannot God do that? Jesus said, *"With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God,"* Mark 10:27.

In heaven, will we still think of our parents as our parents and our children as our children? I do not know. The Scriptures teach that human relationships—which are essential on earth—only belong to this world. They are temporal, natural, and physical. Jesus treated them as inferior to spiritual relationships. When His family was worried about Him, the crowd told Him, *"Your mother and brothers are looking for You."* He responded by asking, *"Who are my mother and my brothers?"* Then, looking at those seated in a circle around Him, He said, *"Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother,"* Mark 3:31-34. The earthly relationship is temporary. The spiritual relationship is eternal. Hence, the Lord said, *"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me,"* Matthew 10:37; cf. Luke 14:26. Through Jesus, the natural is lost in the spiritual, the human in the divine. I suggest that our mother, wife, or daughter will be our sister in heaven and our father, husband, or son will be our brother in the next world. One thing is certain: Whatever our relationships are in heaven, it will be a wonderful life.

LESSON EIGHT

What Will We Do In Heaven?

There are many ideas about life in heaven. Most of them envision the hereafter as a prolonged vacation, an idlers holiday. Is “the abode of God” a gathering of do-nothing, unemployed loafers? Will the redeemed pass the time sitting on a cloud strumming a golden harp? The Psalmist believed God would “*fill him with joy in His presence,*” Psalm 16:11a. So what will fill the saints with joy in heaven? If we did not sleep well last night, bed rest might sound good—for a little while. But lounging around forever is not very inviting. Surely there is more to eternity than an extended afternoon nap. This lesson will consider (1) what the saved will do for God and (2) what they will do among themselves.

I. FOR GOD

Heaven is called a “rest.” “*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...they will rest from their labor,*” Revelation 14:13. Consequently, for those who have not died, there “*remains a sabbath rest,*” Hebrews 4:9. The Jewish sabbath foreshadows our heavenly rest. Did the Jews do nothing on the sabbath? No! They were busy (though their busyness was different from their weekday activity). In what way? They still fed their livestock but they did not plant their fields. They still cooked their meals but they did not serve any banquets. As God rested, after creating the world, so we will rest in the hereafter. “*Anyone who enters the rest of God will rest from his labor, just as God did from His,*” Hebrews 4:10. Yet, when the Lord finished creating the universe, He did not begin drawing social security. Jesus said, “*My Father is always at His work to this very day,*” John 5:17. He ceased creating but began maintaining what He had made. When we rest, we will cease from winning souls and doing benevolence, but we will remain busy. There will be work to do , errands to run, and service to perform. The apostle John described the redeemed as those who “*are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple,*” Revelation 7:15a.

A. We Will Serve

Those who have nothing to do are bored. So where have we gotten the idea that eternity is perpetual leisure, unending relaxation, or everlasting ease? Such is wishful thinking. Scripture indicates heaven is a place where people will be meaningfully occupied. The saints will “*serve*” God, Revelation 22:3. What work will need to be done? From the beginning, the angels have been busy. “*Praise the Lord, you His angels, you mighty ones who do His bidding, who obey His word. Praise the Lord, all His heavenly hosts, you His servants, who do His will,*” Psalm 103:20,21. God

constantly sends His servants on assignment. Would He have created the angels if He did not need them? Will He take us to heaven if there was nothing for us to do? Somehow I do not think so.

B. We Will Worship

The thrill of worship will be the centerpiece of heaven. On earth our adoration is often mechanical, humdrum, and empty. No wonder the little boy bristled, when his parents told him “good boys go to heaven.” “I do not want to go to heaven,” he said. “Church is boring.” Our worship on earth need not be but often is a yawner. Yet, I am sure, our worship “beyond this land of waiting” will be anything but monotonous. In the Book of Revelation, John depicted our worship as endless excitement. *“I heard,”* he said, *“what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven: ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God....’ And, again, they shouted: ‘Hallelujah!’ ” And those around the throne fell down and worshipped God.... And they cried, ‘Amen, Hallelujah!’ Then a voice came from the throne, saying: ‘Praise our God, all you His servants, you who fear Him, both small and great!’ Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing water and like peals of thunder, shouting: ‘Hallelujah! For our God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory!’ ”*

Revelation 19:1,3a,4-7a. There are grand worship assemblies here on earth. But none of them will come close to the celebration in heaven. I cannot wait to get “beyond the rolling river.” Like the sinner prayed: “Lord, if you save me, You will never hear the end of it.”

C. We Will Sing

Life in heaven will be a happy song. The singing there defies description. *“Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man, the things that God has prepared for those that love Him,”* 1 Corinthians 2:9. While listening to the birds in a nearby meadow, a famous composer said, “If God provides such grand music for sinners on earth, what does He have in store for us in heaven?”

When we’ve been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise,
Than when we first begun.

“And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy...because...You purchased men for God...You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve God....’ Then I heard every creature in heaven...singing. ‘To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever!’ ” Revelation 5:9,10,13.
Imagine countless angels and saints with perfect pitch singing the Hallelujah Chorus!

Such singing will we hear
 Never heard by mortal ear—
 Twill be glorious beyond compare
 The celestial choir up there.

So what will the righteous do in heaven? What do they do on earth? We serve. We worship. We sing. In other words, what we do here is (in some measure) what we will do there. And, if that is not attractive to us now, there is no need to look forward to doing it “above the bright blue!”

D. We Will Rule

There is still another thing we will do in heaven. Beside serving God, we will “*reign forever*” with Him, Revelation 22:3b,5b. For the Lord promised, “*to him who overcomes and does His will to the end, I will give authority over the nations,*” Revelation 2:26. Jesus made a similar promise in the parable of the talents. The good and faithful servants were told, “*I will put you in charge of many things,*” Matthew 25:21,23. Does this not suggest that our faithfulness on earth will prepare us to reign in heaven? I think so. Our obedience now has a bearing on our activity later. “*Who then is the faithful and wise servant?*” Jesus asked. “*That servant who was put in charge and remains faithful till the master returns.*” Consequently, Christ said, “*I tell you the truth, he will be put in charge of all (the master’s) possessions,*” Matthew 24:45-47. Again, the Lord said, “*To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne,*” Revelation 3:21. Our present faithfulness is getting us ready to reign with Him in eternity.

II. AMONG THEMSELVES

Will heaven be a static, unchanging existence? Many people think so. Certainly there are things about the hereafter that will remain the same. In contrast to here, things will be permanent there. The prophet Isaiah said, “*The new heaven and new earth...will endure,*” Isaiah 66:22. Satan will not invade. Corruption will not occur. Decay will not happen. Consequently, the redeemed rejoice. “*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His great mercy He gave us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that will never perish, spoil, or fade...,*” 1 Peter 1:3,4. Heaven will be perfect. So was Adam and Eve before their fall. Still they needed to grow, to learn, and to develop. In heaven, I believe we, too, will grow—not toward perfection but in perfection.

A. We Will Grow

The saved will have eternal life, John 3:36a. When Christ returns, the righteous “*will rise to live,*” John 5:28,29. For, “*he who believes in (Jesus) will live, even though he*

dies,” John 11:25. In heaven, we will have life. That life, as all life, will not be a robotic, preprogrammed existence. It will be a time of discovery. It will be an occasion of new experiences. It will be a continuous increase in understanding. The essence of life is growth. Only dead things stop growing. In eternity, we will be alive. Change will be inevitable. Sin is the chief obstacle to development in this world. In the next life, lust will not “*war against the soul,*” I Peter 2:11. We will be free to become more like Jesus in every way. New truths will be found. New lessons will be learned. New wonders will be seen. New knowledge will be gained. Eternal life will not be stagnant. Heaven will be full of challenges. A life without growth, without change, without newness is not life. We who reflect the glory of the Lord now “*are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory,*” II Corinthians 3:18. It seems to me that that transformation will not be completed in this life. Hence, it will continue in the next. Christians are committed to ongoing growth.

B. We Will Learn

Growth involves learning. We learn in digestible increments. As the prophet Isaiah said, “*A little here, a little there,*” Isaiah 28:10. Or, as Jesus indicated, “*first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel,*” Mark 4:28. The idea that suddenly in heaven we will know everything and grasp the implications of every fact seems unrealistic. When Jesus was about to return to heaven, He said to His disciples, “*I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear,*” John 16:12. Eternity does not bring learning to a halt. As the song says:

I’ll ask the reason,
He’ll tell me why,
When we talk it over by and by.

Would not heaven be boring if we had nothing to learn? We are motivated by the unknown, inspired by the unexplored, and animated by the uncharted. Now we are “*darkened*” in our “*understanding*” because of the “*ignorance*” cause by the “*hardening*” of our hearts, Ephesians 4:18. But those learning barriers will vanish. In heaven, we will catch on better, faster, and deeper. In the “*land of endless day,*” God will give us fresh insights and glorious revelations of His grand scheme for all things. Do we have our questions ready? He is eager to enlighten our minds, to free us from perplexing unknowns. The Lord will patiently reveal His previously hidden mysteries. We will finally learn what we have not understood.

C. We Will Love

Paul said, “*Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love,*” I Corinthians 13:13. Why is love the greatest of the three? Faith will be replaced by sight. Hope will be absorbed in reality. But love will go on. Indeed, it will become

bigger and stronger. Humans have faith and hope. *“God is love,”* 1 John 4:16b. Heaven will be a place of boundless giving, endless care, and infinite goodwill. The glad reunion will go on and on. Fellowship will have no limits. The prayer of Paul will finally be answered: *I pray,* he wrote, *“that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God,”* Ephesians 3:17b-19. That prayer will not be fully realized in this lifetime. Only eternity can complete what was begun in time regarding the complete comprehension of God’s love. We will learn to be truly compassionate as He is compassionate, to be genuinely merciful as He is merciful when we see Him face to face.

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And very man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above,
Would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.

We will have eternity to comprehend His goodness. For now, such is beyond our grandest imagination. But He will eventually show us. That will be a wonderful development. Certainly heaven will be a place of growth, of learning, and of love.

D. We Will Be Holy

Conversion is a dramatic turning point in life. Heaven will be, too. It will be an unparalleled experience to lay eyes on the “pearly gates” for the first time. It will take our breath away when we walk on the “golden streets.” Indeed, it will truly be awesome to finally behold the throne of God. Nothing will compare to the thrill of being in His presence, of hearing His voice, of seeing His majesty. We will be home at last! In our new surroundings, we will still endeavor to be holy. The angel told John, in his final glimpse of heaven, *“Let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy,”* Revelation 22:11b. In the next life our capacity to obey God will expand. It will be part of our growth and maturation in the “after while.” To walk the paths Jesus walked on earth is life changing. Will not standing in His very presence be greater? I absolutely think so. We have had sweet hours of pray, new insights of divine truth, and growth in the grace of Christ, but none of those will be like seeing Him face to face. As David said, *“You will fill me...with eternal pleasures at Your right hand,”* Psalms 16:11b. Confronting the Lord requires appropriate preparation. We must *“call on Him out of a pure heart,”* 1 Timothy 2:22. Then we can be *“blameless and holy in His presence,”* 1 Thessalonians 3:13. And, when that happens, we will *“share in His*

holiness,” Hebrews 12:10. We know there are spiritual dimensions beyond our present grasp. We long to reach new levels of purity. For now, however, let us be patient. That day of final transformation is just around the corner.

LESSON NINE

What Kind Of Body Will We Have In Heaven?

It is appropriate to be concerned about our physical body. The angel Michael was. He disputed with the devil over the body of Moses, Jude 9. Jesus also thought the mortal body was important. He healed the sick. Paul was concerned, too. He said, *“No one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it,”* Ephesians 5:29. So, if we care about our bodies in this life, how much more should we be interested in the bodies we will have throughout eternity? Will we be ghosts forever floating through space? Will we be formless, featureless spirits, clouds of mist in some far off galaxy? Paul asked a couple of questions. *“How are the dead raised?”* And *“with what kind of body will they come”* (forth from the grave)? 1 Corinthians 15:35b. These are our questions, too.

There were folks in the first century that denied the notion of a resurrected body. These nay sayers believed at death a person was released from the “prison of his flesh.” They looked forward to a bodiless existence in the next life. Paul confronted their position head on. *“How foolish!”* he wrote, 1 Corinthians 15:36a. The “resurrection of the dead” is not the rejection of the body. Quite to the contrary. The resurrection is a transformation of what was buried—a transformation into a new and glorious body. Our frail tent will be changed into a splendid house—free from illness, aging, and decay. What, then, will happen in the “resurrection of the dead?” The apostle Paul provides some answers in his correspondence with the Church at Corinth. This lesson will follow his discussion of a new, better, and spiritual body.

I. A NEW BODY

Paul believed there is a resurrection. For *“why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?”* Acts 26:8. Does the Lord have sufficient power? Absolutely! The difficulty of a task should always be measured by the capacity of the one performing it. *“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”* Genesis 18:14; cf. Job 42:2; Jeremiah 32:17,27; Matthew 19:26. Humans are often tentative about the resurrection: *“If a man dies, will he live again?”* Job 14:14a. But the Christian does not give it a second thought. Of course we will be raised. The Almighty will lift the dead to life. That being so, what kind of body will we have in the next world?

A. It Will Not Be Identical With What Was Buried

The apostle begins his discussion of the resurrected body with a comparison to nature. *“What you sow does not come to life unless it dies,”* he said. But, *“when you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed,”* 1 Corinthians 15:37. Our present

body is like a seed of corn or cabbage, of pine or pecan. In other words, the plant that emerges from the ground will not be exactly like the seed that was put into the ground. Think of it! The deaf will hear. The crippled will be whole. The sick will be healthy. So the eternal body will far excel the temporary body that was buried. At the present time, we do not comprehend either the transformation in seeds or in our resurrection body. *“A man scatters seed on the ground,”* Jesus said. *“Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how,”* Mark 4:26b,27. Fortunately, the resurrection does not depend on our comprehension. It is miracle of God. We must wait till the Lord returns. The analogy of seeds enabled Paul to walk a fine line. He asserted that our bodies will be radically transformed but remain organically connected with our original body. *“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,”* I Corinthians 15:50a. We will have a body—just not the one we are living in now.

B. But It Will Be Connected To What Was Buried

The plant grows from the seed. It is different from but connected to the seed. There is an unbroken continuity. If the resurrection of the body from the grave means anything, it must mean that something from the grave will rise to take a new form. What that form is is impossible to say at this time. But death is not extinction. Life will continue. We have a body now. We will have a body later. There is a connection between the two bodies. Otherwise, the resurrection of our present body makes no sense. Moreover, without a connection between the two, the argument of Paul about buried seeds and emerging plants is meaningless. All the analogies of verses 36-41 lead up to the pivot point: *“The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body,”* I Corinthians 15:42b-44.

C. It Will Be A Body That God Determines

We will not decide the nature of our resurrection body. God will. Regarding a plant, *“God gives it a body as He has determined, and to each kind of seed He gives its own body,”* I Corinthians 15:38. So it will be in regard to our heavenly body. God clothes everything with the body that is needed. Will He not do the same for us in the resurrection? Of this much, we can be sure: *“There is one glory of the sun, another of the moon, and still another of the stars,”* I Corinthians 15:41. *“So it will be in the resurrection of the dead,”* I Corinthians 15:42a. God will give us a body that is specifically designed for living in heaven. It will have a different glory than our present body.

II. A BETTER BODY

Paul was working toward a crucial conclusion: *“If there is a natural body, there is also a*

spiritual body,” I Corinthians 15:44b. This is the nub of his argument. The contrast is difficult to grasp. We have been taught that a spirit is like a ghost. It does not have a body. Yet, Paul says, in the resurrection, the saints will have a “spiritual body.” What does he mean? Our resurrection body is not made out of spirit but is determined by the Spirit. In other words, our eternal body will give the Spirit a place to live and work. Now our body is an imperfect workshop for the Spirit. Later our body will be a made-to-order dwelling for Him. This indicates at least four things, cf. I Corinthians 15:42-44.

A. Incorruptible

Our present body is physical. It comes from the dust and will return to dust. It is earthy and will go the way of all earthly things. Now our bodies are corruptible. They tend toward decay. The resurrection body will have no such tendencies. It will be incorruptible. Our permanent body will not break down, fall apart, nor wear out. The Bible says, *“the dead will rise imperishable,”* I Corinthians 15:52b.

B. Glorious

Our present body carries the curse of sin. Paul calls it *“our lowly body,”* Philippians 3:21. In the grave, it decays. In the resurrection, it is transformed. For *“if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who lives in you,”* Romans 8:11.

C. Strong

Our fleshly body is weak. It is subject to imperfection, disease, and limitation. It is unequipped to live in heaven. But, later, it will be altered, refashioned, and made ready for its eternal abode. *“For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality,”* I Corinthians 15:53. The spiritual body will be a striking contrast to our physical body. It will possess a fulness of strength, an abundance of energy, and an overflowing measure of life.

D. Spiritual

The spiritual does not come first. Instead, the order is *“the natural and after that the spiritual,”* I Corinthians 15:46. Presently, “flesh and blood” works fairly well in this world. Our body is natural, earthy, and physical—suited to life below. In the future, our body will be animated by the Spirit. It will be an organism adapted for the realms above. Perhaps, we will have a body like Jesus during His post-resurrection appearances. Certainly it will be new, better, and spiritual.

III. A TRANSFORMED BODY

Paul realized his discussion was getting heavy. So he summarized his argument: *“The perishable cannot inherit the imperishable,”* I Corinthians 15:50b. A drastic change is required. This transformation can be characterized in three ways.

A. Necessary

We cannot go to heaven in our present body. For *“flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,”* I Corinthians 15:50a. The apostle does not explain why that is so. Is it because heaven has a different atmosphere, another type of food, the lack of gravity, a new way of seeing, a different means of communicating, or a new mode of mobility—each of which requires a new body? We do not know. We do not need to know. Suffice it to say that “flesh and blood” cannot exist in heaven (any more than a fish can live out of water). The change is a “mystery,” I Corinthian 15:51a. It is an element of the divine plan that will remain hidden until the Lord returns.

B. Certain

We can be assured that what is hidden will be made known. The day of transformation is coming as surely as the flood in the days of Noah. Whether we are dead or alive, we will undergo the great metamorphosis. Paul said, *“we will all be changed,”* I Corinthians 15:51b. *“While we are in this tent (or present body), we groan and are burdened because we do not wish to be unclothed (bodiless) but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up in life (or immortality),”* II Corinthians 5:4. Christ *“will change our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body,”* Philippians 3:21. Personally, I cannot wait!

C. Quick

In the shortest conceivable duration, the change will occur. Paul wrote, *“in a flash,”* I Corinthians 15:52a. We would say “in the blink of an eye.” That which believers have longed for ages to experience will happen quicker than quick. Not only will it be unexpected—like a thief in the night—it will be breathtakingly fast. In the future, the body of the saints will be new and better and transformed. Are we ready?

* * * * *

What has been said is in many ways familiar. Its familiarity can numb the mind to the underlying truth in Scripture. Two such teachings stand out.

1. Our general comprehension of the word “body” is challenged. Unless we make a conscious effort, we automatically think of a material form. After all, we have

physical bodies. And so do animals, birds, reptiles, and fish. In other words, physical bodies are all we have seen. However, the Corinthian correspondence requires an enlarged conception of the word “body.” Paul says we will have a “spiritual body, that is, a non-physical form. To grasp the significance of his reference, we must reformulate our understanding of “body.” We must think of what we have never known. Whenever a spirit—an angel or a demon—desires to interact in the material world it must take on or occupy a physical body for the duration of that interaction. Why? Because we live in a physical sphere. When we move on to the spiritual realm, it will be necessary for us to take on a spiritual form (or a spiritual body). Therefore, life in heaven obviously demands a heavenly body.

2. The resurrection of the dead is necessary in order to keep creation and redemption together. If there is no resurrection, the bodies God gave us will remain in the grave, abandoned in the cemetery. The promise of the resurrection of the body confirms the love of God for the created order. The Lord will not forsake creation. We are not spiritual souls imprisoned in fleshly bodies. Rather, our identity is bound up with our bodily existence. If we are to be saved, we must be saved as embodied persons. That is to say, our resurrection is a prediction of our corporeal life in eternity. *“We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time,”* Paul wrote. And, *“Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies,”* [Romans 8:22,23](#). To affirm the resurrection of the dead, is to confess that God who made us will finally make us whole—*“spirit, soul, and body,”* [I Thessalonians 5:23](#). Please, Lord, come soon!

LESSON TEN

Tying Up The Loose Ends

For the most part, heaven is a big unknown. We understand a little of its glory. But we fail to grasp most of its grandeur. We stand at a distance in awe of its unexplored landscape. *“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him,”* 1 Corinthians 2:9. We are on the outside looking in. We imagine. We wish. We dream. But we have not been there (though we look forward to going there soon).

The human mind has tried to fill in the blanks. Theories abound. Guesses are “a dime a dozen.” We do not know but we continue to ask. There are more questions than there are answers. God has seen fit to tell us enough to “whet our appetite.” He demands that we walk by faith, that we trust Him who holds the secrets of heaven in His hands.

This final lesson will try to “tie up the loose ends.” It will attempt to briefly entertain some of the remaining questions about “the city up there.” The ice gets thinner the further we go. Caution is required. Curiosity must not lead to reckless speculation. Our mind should remain glued to the Scriptures. We must not “*add to*” or “*take from*” the inspired word, Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18,19.

Let me hold with zeal
To what you reveal;
May I not stray,
From what you say.

Let me be skeptical
Of what is theoretical;
Lord, help me be content,
With the word You sent!

With that prayer on our heart, we launch into a series of short discussions about His greatest promise, about our highest hope. We rely on Him to tell us all we need to know.

I. How Should Passages About Heaven Be Interpreted?

The apostle John called heaven a “city.” Specifically, he saw the *“Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...,”* Revelation 21:2. A voice from

the throne said, *“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God,”*

Revelation 21:3. An angel measured the city, its gates, and its walls. *“The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city...and found it to be 12,000 stadia (which is about 1,400 miles or 2,200 kilometers) in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its walls and it was 144 cubits (or 200 feet) thick.... The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass,”*

Revelation 21:16-18. Is this a literal or a figurative description of our eternal home?

A. Symbolic

All of our mundane ideas of time and space do not apply to the new heaven and new earth. Therefore, many literal conclusions drawn from passages about heaven are unsatisfactory. How, then, shall we visualize the *“new Jerusalem, the city of God?”* It is beyond human understanding. Even the symbols boggle our puny minds. In reality, the symbolism points toward what is greater than the grand ideas they try to create.

B. Literal

Yet, it is not appropriate to conclude that everything John wrote was mere decorative imagery. Hidden in the symbols are literal truths. The reader must be careful (like one who gathers berries). For example, the measurements of the *“holy city”* are figurative. They do not signify spatial size and linear proportion (so that we can draw a blueprint like an architect maps out a suburban housing development). Rather, these measurements symbolize completeness and perfection. The actual is communicated by the fictional. In this passage, then, God is real. Heaven is real. But the stuff out of which heaven is made (the gold and the gem stones) are symbolic. The literal and the figurative work together to draw a picture of the unseen, the unknown, and the unimaginable glory of heaven. In some ways, eternity corresponds with time. But, when it does not, symbolic language helps hurdle the barrier between the two. The realm above is not a world of myth and shadow. It is more than dreams and visions. It is real. Yet is far beyond our mortal, sensory perceptions. Therefore, earth bound symbols are employed to communicate heaven bound realities.

II. Why Must Heaven Be Made New?

Some time in the past, likely before creation, there was *“war in heaven,”* Revelation 12:7. Evil (that eventually came to earth) started in heaven. This sordid mess spread everywhere. *“The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and the very inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time,”* Genesis 6:5. The universe became a battlefield between right and wrong. God had an agenda. Satan did, too. Humans were caught in the cross fire. Jesus came to the rescue. He conquered the devil on the cross, Colossians 2:15. Though the

war continues, the victory is assured.

A. The Battle With Satan

The evil one lost the first skirmish. But the war is not over. Therefore, we should *“be self-controlled and alert.”* For *“the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know the your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering,”* I Peter 5:8,9. His initial defeat has intensified the conflict. *“He is filled with fury because he knows that his time is short,”* Revelation 12:12b. He is frantically trying to turn the tide. In the end, his efforts will come to nothing. When Christ returns, the battle will be over. Satan, and his crew, will be thrown into the lake of fire, Revelation 20:10; cf. Matthew 25:41. Hence, due to the corruption of sin, the present heaven and earth will be destroyed, II Peter 3:11,12. *“But, in keeping with His promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and new earth, the home of the righteous,”* II Peter 3:13. *“In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and Your years will never end,”* Hebrews 1:10-12; cf. Hebrews 12:26-29.

B. The Victory Of God

The final confrontation between God and Satan will be decisive. The wrath of God will be *“poured out on the earth,”* Revelation 16:1. Then the Lord will announce: *“It is done!”* Revelation 16:17. We who believe have nothing to fear. Jesus will shield us *“from the coming wrath,”* I Thessalonians 1:10. But *“He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ,”* II Thessalonians 1:8. When the smoke clears, the Lord will be seated on His throne. Heaven will be quiet (except for the joy of the saints). Earth will be renewed. God will be in control. All will be well. The faithful will reign forever,” Revelation 22:5b. For Jesus said, *“to him who overcomes and does His will to the end, I will give authority over the nations,”* Revelation 2:26; cf. Revelation 3:21. In other words, *“if we endure, we will...reign with Him,* II Timothy 2:12a. Consequently,

I will fight, in order to reign;
Eager to run the race;
I will endure the pain,
In order to see His face.

III. Can People In Heaven Communicate With Us On Earth?

The possibilities of communicating with the dead is believed by many. They think the deceased talk to them. Those left behind long for a word from those who have gone

ahead. Those who want the dead to communicate with the living become easy prey for the beguiling tricks of the clever spiritist. Large sums of money are spent wishing to hear the voice of the departed.

The spiritist supposedly makes contact with the deceased. They “call” (or channel) them in seances. Pagan priests promote the practice. Inspired prophets condemn it. *“Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them,”* Leviticus 19:31. Again, God said, *“I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them,”* Leviticus 20:6. In Israel, those who practiced spiritism were *“put to death,”* Leviticus 20:27. God was adamant in His stance against such practices: *“Let no one...engage in witchcraft, casting spells, or consulting the dead,”* Deuteronomy 18:10,11. Though, it is true, Saul did. The king visited the witch of Endor, I Samuel 28:3-25. But, shortly thereafter, he committed suicide, I Samuel 31:4.

The way to Endor is infamous,
Indeed, the deadliest road of all!
Straight it runs to the witch's den
As it did in the days of Saul,
And many are the sorrows in store
For those who go to Endor.

Communicating with the dead is not dead. In fact, it is a growing phenomenon in our time. The priests and priestesses in spiritism speak about Jesus. They claim He is the purest spirit (an excellent medium through which to call the dead). Yet they do not believe Christ is the Savior of the world. John cautions against such tom foolery. *“Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the anti-christ, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world,”* I John 4:1-3.

When someone ceases believing in the Lord, he is open to “shallowing” most anything. Sadly, he eventually turns away from the inspired word.

Hear the judge from the skies,
He who hates truth will accept lies;
And those who do will fall at last,
Delusions strong will bind him fast.

Spiritism is a tragic lie, a deceptive pretense. The medium thinks he is helpful. The gullible believe they are helped. Both are tragically mistaken. For the spiritist thrives on

the ignorance of the naive. The messages they receive are merely empty sentimentalities. God is our Guide. The way of the cross leads home (where our faithful loved ones wait). Let us not be fooled by the hoax of unbelievers, flim flammed by an error disguised as truth. Let us listen to the word of God!

IV. When Will We Go To Heaven?

Where will the righteous go when they die? Will they proceed to paradise in order to wait for the Judgment Day? Or will they go straight to heaven? The answer lies in the pages of the New Testament. There are two groups of passages which must be considered. (1) Some verses seem to indicate that when we die we will go to hades (the place of the departed spirits). And (2) there are other verses which show that we will go immediately to heaven.

The confusion is similar to the problem with the thief on the cross. Jesus told the thief, *"Today you will be with Me in paradise,"* Luke 23:43. Thus, it appears, the righteous will wait in paradise (which is part of hades) for their court appearance. However, there are also verses that suggest that the saints who have passed away are already in the presence of God. For example, the martyrs were in heaven asking God *"how long"* until their death would be avenged, Revelation 6:9-11. What seems confusing is really consistent. The difficulty lies in failing to recognize the time frame of each passage under consideration.

A. Before The Death Of Jesus

Prior to the cross, the animal sacrifices under the Law of Moses could not take away sin, Hebrews 10:1-4. Only the death of Jesus could. His crucifixion retroactively cleansed those who lived during the Old Testament, Romans 3:25,26. Indeed, He died as a ransom for those *"under the first covenant,"* Hebrews 9:15. In other words, *"God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect,"* Hebrews 11:40. Those that died under the Old Covenant—including the thief on the cross—had to wait for the perfect sacrifice. He freed those who for ages had waited in hades for forgiveness. As Paul said, *"When He ascended on high, He led captives in His train,"* Ephesians 4:8-10.

B. After The Ascension Of Jesus

Because the cross takes away sin, there is nothing to keep us from going straight to heaven when we die. While Stephen was being stoned, he prayed: *"Lord, Jesus, receive my spirit,"* Acts 7:59. One could infer from his prayer that he expected to go immediately to heaven. Paul preferred to be away from the body (that is, to die) and be at home with the Lord, II Corinthians 5:8. Perhaps, for the righteous, there is no longer an intermediate place of waiting. For, we are promised, if we overcome, we *"will be*

given the right to the tree of life" which is in heaven, Revelation 2:7; cf. Revelation 22:1,2a. Every time the deceased believers are mentioned in the last book of the Bible they are with God (not in hades), Revelation 6:9-11; 14:1-5; 15: 2-4. Consequently, it appears that the moment we take our last breath here, we will take our first breath there. If some prefer to go to hades, let them believe that that is where they are headed. As for me, I join Paul in preferring to be with the Lord in heaven! Either way, by the direct route or by the detour through paradise, we will eventually be with the Lord in the "land of victory." I am not much for detours. I am ready to "join the angel band." Are you?

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STUDY GUIDE

Lesson One

1. When (or under what circumstances) is heaven most real to you? When is it least real?
2. Does religion provide a “cheap justification” for the exploitation of human beings? EXPLAIN YOUR REPLY.
3. Are there limitations to the statement: “If I have a desire which this world cannot fulfill, there must be another world which can fulfill it?” What are the limitations?
4. The apostle Paul said he was taken up into “*the third heaven*,” II Corinthians 12:2. What did he mean by “*the third heaven*?”
5. What is your favorite description of heaven in divine Scripture or human literature? Why is it your favorite?

STUDY GUIDE

Lesson Two

1. Believers long for heaven. Atheists laugh at eternal life. Why are unbelievers turned off by the prospect of a home on high?
2. Hope should increase in misery. Can you cite an example when you (or someone else) experienced greater hope during misery. DESCRIBE THE SITUATION.
3. Our fathers in the faith looked forward to a city, Hebrew 11:10,16; 13:14, To us, “city” speaks of crowds, crime, and pollution. What does the Bible have in mind when it promises a city?
4. We spend a lifetime building a retirement “egg nest.” How can an over emphasis on a retirement nest egg effect our “hope for heaven?”
5. This lesson suggests that hope for heaven gives joy, strength, commitment, victory, and endurance. During our life, one of these will likely rise to the top of our list of benefits in hoping for heaven. Which one takes first place in your life? Why?

STUDY GUIDE

Lesson Three

1. In speaking of heaven, why do we think it is “up” (rather than “down”)?
2. The Bible describes heaven as a tent or canopy, Psalm 104:2; Isaiah 40:22. What is the significance of that metaphor?
3. Heaven is God, that is, these two words are used interchangeably, Daniel 4:26. What phrase in the New Testament indicates “heaven is God?”
4. The “glory of God” was His presence among men in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the “glory of God” increasingly has an end-of-time emphasis. Why?
5. If heaven is life, than hell is death. Actually, it is called the “second death,” Revelation 20:14; 21:8. What does the phrase “second death” mean?

STUDY GUIDE

Lesson Four

1. The Bible indicates that heaven is somewhere. It is a particular place. What passages support that conclusion?
2. Some people believe “heaven is everywhere in general and nowhere in particular.” What does that view do to the Christian understanding of heaven?
3. Based on Isaiah 14:13,14, some folks believe the throne of God is on the “*sacred mountain*,” namely, Mount Zaphon, Psalm 48:1,2. Do you agree? Why (or why not)?
4. In trying to locate heaven, some people assume it is in the north. The prophet Ezekiel saw God coming out of the north, Ezekiel 1:1,4a,28b. And “no one from the east or west or the desert (which would be south) can exalt a man,” Psalm 75:6. Rather “*it is God who judges*,” Psalm 75:7. Why does the psalmist leave out the “north?” Could it be because God is in the north? EXPLAIN YOUR ANSWER.
5. For some people, the new heaven and new earth is the purified old heaven and old earth. This is a very different idea. What do you think about it?

STUDY GUIDE

Lesson Five

1. What is the difference between a speculative question and a practical question?
2. Why did Jesus sidestep the speculative question in Luke 13:22-24?
3. How do you think Jesus would respond to the three human speculations mentioned in Lesson Five?
4. What do the words "*make every effort*" imply, Luke 13:24a?
5. What is Jesus referring to in Luke 13:25-27? And how does it apply to us today?

STUDY GUIDE

Lesson Six

1. The Greek word for “reward” means “pay for work,” Luke 10:7; I Timothy 5:18. Why, then, did Paul say his reward for preaching the Gospel was to work “free of charge?” I Corinthians 9:18.
2. The Greek philosophers rejected “rewards” as a motive for behavior. Does Paul agree? CITE APPROPRIATE PASSAGES TO SUPPORT YOUR REPLY.
3. In the Roman cults, the worshippers sacrificed as a way of reminding the gods of their goodness. The gods were expected to respond with rewards. Is that what the New Testament teaches? Why (or why not)?
4. In the writings of John, reward for obedience is mentioned, John 9:31. Is that the consistent teaching of John? What chapters and verses support your answer?
5. How does the Book of Hebrews offer grace to those who are falling away from the faith?

STUDY GUIDE

Lesson Seven

1. This lesson assumes that the deceased are conscious after they die. Does Isaiah 14:9,10 confirm that assumption? Why (or why not)?
2. Several Old Testament verses seem to indicate that there is life after death, II Samuel 12:23; Job 19:25,26; Psalm 16:10,11; 17:15; 23:4-6; 49:15; 73:23,24; Isaiah 25:8; 26:19; 66:22-24; Daniel 12:2,13; Hosea 6:2; 13:14. Do any of these passages support consciousness between death and the resurrection? If so, which one (or ones)?
3. Some people believe the deceased lapse into a dreamless sleep (or coma) at death. To them, the departed have a Rip Van Winkle existence until Christ returns. What passage(s) in the Old Testament might be used to support “soul sleeping?”
4. How would you show that these passages do not teach “soul sleeping?”
5. What New Testament passages would indicate that there is consciousness after death?

STUDY GUIDE

Lesson Eight

1. Mark Twain thought a vacation in Bermuda would be more interesting than heaven. What do you suppose caused him to say such a thing?
2. Will everyone who goes to heaven do the same thing? Why do you think so?
3. The saints will rule with God when they get to heaven, Revelation 2:26,27. What do these verses suggest?
4. Likely, the saints will spent most of their time in heaven growing, learning, loving, and living holy lives. Given we are free to choose among these activities, in what might you decide to investment a major portion of your energy in heaven doing? Why?
5. Satan made bad choices in heaven, Revelation 12:7-9. If he could sin while living there, is it possible we could, too? How does your answer effect your vision of heaven?

STUDY GUIDE

Lesson Nine

1. *Life After Life* is a best selling book. It mentions various clinically dead people returning to life. The book records their so called out-of-body experiences. The descriptions are at best bazaar. At worst, they are contrived. Why, then, are clairvoyant experiences so popular?
2. To understand the error of out-of-body experiences, one must start with an understanding of death. Those who believe in clairvoyance say death occurs when a person stops breathing. This allows for an out-of-body experience. Then, according to these practitioners of the occult, breathing begins again. Hence, a person can die repeatedly! Is the cessation of breathing a biblical definition of death? SUPPLY BOOK, CHAPTER, AND VERSE FOR YOUR POSITION.
3. In the Bible, several people were brought back to life through the power of God, I Kings 17:21,22; II Kings 4:35; Luke 8:54,55a; John 11:43,44a; Acts 9:40-42; 20:9-12. In these cases, after the dead were restored to life, what did they say about their out-of-body experience?
4. Why, then, should we be skeptical of messages from those who claim to have died —had an out-of-body experience— and returned to life?
5. Where does interest in out-of-body experiences lead?

STUDY GUIDE

Lesson Ten

1. In this concluding study guide, we will deal with issues that are not discussed in any of the preceding lessons. For example, some people think Isaiah 63:16 suggests that the dead are unaware of what the living are up to. Is that what the passage in Isaiah means? EXPLAIN YOUR ANSWER.
2. Will the world end in an atomic explosion?
3. Will the redeemed wear royal crowns in heaven?
4. Will our pets go to heaven? SUPPORT YOUR REPLY WITH BOOK, CHAPTER, AND VERSE.
5. Will there be “time” in eternity? Why (or why not)?

ANSWER SHEET

Lesson One

1. When is heaven most real to you? When is it least real?

This is a matter of personal opinion. Therefore, answers will (and should) differ from person to person. Many people feel closer to heaven when reading the Bible, praying, or attending Church. We are usually least conscious of heaven when we are occupied in earthly activities—sporting events, shopping trips, and secular music venues.

2. Does religion provide a cheap justification for the exploitation of human beings?

It certainly can. And, for those looking for an excuse to “lord it over others,” religion is a perfect vehicle for accomplishing their goal (given they are not serious about what Christianity is really all about). If, however, one is a genuine disciple of Christ, exploitation is not an option.

3. Are there limitations to the statement “if I have a desire this world cannot fulfill, there must be another world which can fulfill it?” What are some of the limitations?

This whole idea is based on the belief that a fulfillment is necessary if a desire exists in the human heart. Hence, heaven exists because we want (or hope) it exists. However, that does not prove heaven is real. Desires in the human heart are not the measure of eternal reality. That said, if heaven is not real, than our hearts have tricked us into believing what does not exist. In the end, we are left believing what our hearts will not allow us to deny. Either way, than, there are limitations!

4. What did Paul mean by “the third heaven?”

The Jews believed there were seven levels of heaven. The Greeks believed there were three. Since Paul was writing to Greeks, he mentioned the “third heaven” or the abode of God. The number of levels in heaven are purely human fabrications. Paul was simply trying to communicate that he was snatched up into the presence of God.

5. What is your favorite description of heaven in divine Scripture or human literature? Why?

Again opinions will vary. My favorite descriptions of heaven are found in the Parables of Jesus. These parables stress the communal aspect of heaven—a banquet, a wedding feast, a city. Heaven will not be inhabited by isolated individuals but by a community of redeemed believers sharing in the joy, the blessings, and the love of God. Peaceful coexistence is at the heart of heaven.

ANSWER SHEET

Lesson Two

1. Why are unbelievers turned off by the thought of a home on high?

Without a love for God, non-Christians think heaven will be boring. And they are probably right. If we are not happy in Church, we will not likely be happy in heaven. Unbelievers cannot imagine life without material possessions, without self centered ambition, without physical gratification. Since they have not served God on earth, they cannot fathom serving Him throughout eternity. The habit of living in darkness does not give them an appetite for the sunshine of divine grace.

2. Cite an example when miserable circumstances resulted in greater hope. DESCRIBE THE SITUATION.

Many responses are possible. I had a neighbor who suffered more than a decade with bone cancer. She could not get out of bed. Instead of focusing on her plight, she called everyone in the phone book to tell them about her joy in the Lord. Her happiness was contagious. In letting her light shine, she brought many to the Lord.

3. What does the Bible have in mind when it promises us a city?

The idea of a “city” in Scripture suggests permanence (instead of a nomadic lifestyle), protection (rather than an illegal migrant status), and provision (with a well stocked marketplace).

4. How might an overemphasis on a retirement nest egg effect our “hope for heaven?”

If we put too much into providing for this life, we will have less energy to focus on the next life. Maintaining our temporary existence robs us of time and resources to prepare for our eternal home. It is a constant tug-of-war to find a balance between the two.

5. Which benefit in hoping for heaven—joy, strength, commitment, victory, or endurance—takes first place in your life? Why?

Again answers will (and should) vary. As for me, endurance speaks the loudest. The promise of heaven has given me the desire to “keep on keeping on.” Life is not easy. But, when the burden gets heavy, the thought of heaven provides a “second wind” to finish the race.

ANSWER SHEET

Lesson Three

1. In referring to heaven, why do we think the dwelling of God is “up” (rather than down)?

I think there are several reasons. (1) The sky is far more majestic than dirt. (2) Worship is an act of respect for what is above of us. (3) Outer space is more mysterious, awesome, and unlimited. And, (4) the power of hail, lightening, tornado, and hurricane reside in the sky. It seems natural to think of heaven (or the heavens) as that which is high or up, Genesis 11:4; 28:12; Deuteronomy 1:28; 9:1; II Kings 2:11; Psalm 107:23-26.

2. What is the significance of heaven being called a “tent” or “canopy?”

The power of God over nature is being celebrated. He moves the clouds like a potter fashions clay, Job 9:8; Jeremiah 10:12; Zechariah 12:1. He forms the heavens into a canopy—which royalty used for protection against the glaring sun, Psalm 19:4.

3. What phrase in the New Testament suggests that “heaven is God?”

The “kingdom of heaven,” Matthew 5:3, expresses the same idea as the “kingdom of God,” Luke 6:20.

4. Why did the “glory of God” become an increasingly end-of-time emphasis in the New Testament?

The glory (or presence) of God was originally connected with the Holy of Holies in the sanctuary of the tabernacle and the temple. When the temple was destroyed, God left, Ezekiel 11:23. From then on, He resided in heaven. That thought was solidified in 70 AD (when the last temple was destroyed). Now we wait to join Him in glory, that is, in heaven.

5. What does the phrase “second death” mean?

The expression—which is limited to the Book of Revelation—is described by John in symbolic terms as the “lake that burns with fire and brimstone.” The opposite of the second death is the “crown of life,” Revelation 2:10,11. Those who are faithful will experience the “first resurrection” (or newness of spiritual life in Christ through baptism), Revelation 20:6. The “second death” is the opposite of life in heaven. It is life without Christ where “the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched,” Mark 9:42-48. The imagery likens hell to a garbage dump—a detestable, impure, disgusting place.

ANSWER SHEET

Lesson Four

1. What passages support the idea that heaven is somewhere, that is, a particular place?

The throne of God is in heaven, Psalm 2:4; 11:4. Though from time to time, He visits the earth, Matthew 3:16,17. Therefore, He dwells above as well as with the humble below, Isaiah 57:15. In reality, He is bigger than heaven, I Kings 8:27. He is greater than the earth. Still, for the sake of our limited mental capacity, we are told He dwells in heaven, I Kings 8:30.

2. If heaven is “everywhere in general and nowhere in particular,” what does that view do to the Christian understanding of heaven?

Such an understanding of heaven damages the Christian view. (1) It makes Jesus a liar. For the Lord said He was preparing a place for us. (2) It ignores Scripture. The Bible constantly describes heaven as a tangible reality. And (3) it turns eternity into a mirage. Heaven becomes a hope without fact, an illusion without reality, a wish without fulfillment.

3. Is the throne of God on Mount Zaphon, Psalm 48:1,2. Why (or why not)?

No. Mount Zaphon is located in northern Syria. The Canaanites considered it the meeting place of the gods (like Mount Olympus was for the Greeks). I do not believe the inspired writers incorporated pagan myths as truth into Scripture. Psalm 48:2 merely says Mount Zion was “*like*” Mount Zaphon.

4. Is heaven in the north, Ezekiel 75:6,7? EXPLAIN YOUR ANSWER.

In Ezekiel, “the north” specified the direction from which the judgment of Judah would come, namely, Babylon would crush the Jews in 586 BC, cf. Ezekiel 26:7. Likewise, Psalm 75 is speaking of the enemies who threaten Israel. The upshot of the passage is that God alone will judge. Neither passage is discussing the location of heaven.

5. Is the new heaven and new earth the purified old heaven and old earth? Why (or why not)?

From the material presented, it seems to be a solid, biblical teaching based on several inspired sources. The Jehovah Witnesses hold a similar view. Does that make heaven on (the cleansed) earth a false doctrine? No! The Baptists baptize by immersion. Does that make immersion a false practice? No! They come to the same conclusion I do because they are reading the same Bible I am reading. God will decide who is right in the areas of disagreement.

ANSWER SHEET

Lesson Five

1. What is the difference between a speculative question and a practical question?

A speculative question is hypothetical while a practical question is useful. The former can be employed to spark conversation, dodge responsibility, and fake interest in order to gain attention. The latter is a sincere inquiry, an earnest search for an answer, an investigation that results in personal application. “How many are going to be saved?” is speculative. “What must I do to be saved?” is practical.

2. Why did Jesus sidestep the speculative question in Luke 18:22,23?

Speculation regarding the number of the saved was common in Jesus’ day. A book written before the birth of Christ says, “The Most High has made the world for many but the world to come for few,” II Esdras 8:1. The Jews believed they were the “few.” The questioner seemed to want the Lord to approve of this narrow exclusivism. Jesus did not dilly dally in speculation. Instead, He offered a practical answer: *“Strive to enter through the narrow door!”*

3. How do you think Jesus would respond to the three speculations mentioned in Lesson Five?

When the man in Luke 13:23 proposed such an idea, Jesus answered by not directly answering. The Lord redirected the discussion. In effect, He discouraged speculative guesses. How many will go to heaven is a “hidden thing” belonging to God, Deuteronomy 29:29. What, then, should we do regarding how many will be saved? Trust God. Live in such a way that we can ask Him in person when we get to heaven.

4. What do the words “*make every effort*” imply, Luke 13:24a?

The Greek word actually means “*agonize*” or “*struggle*,” cf. Colossians 1:29. The word suggests concentrating our energy as well as focusing our mind on a particular goal, II Timothy 4:7. The Lord turned an abstract question into a personal challenge. He turned an academic inquiry into an urgent invitation.

5. What is Jesus referring to in Luke 13:25-27? How does that apply to us today?

The Lord was referring to the door of a first century, middle eastern home. It was customary to close the door at sunset and open it at sunrise (to protect against robbers). The Lord was indicating that there was a limited time in which to enter the kingdom. It was a warning against procrastination. Without delay, we should drop questions of curiosity and struggle to fulfill the requirements of entrance before the sun sets on our opportunity to go to heaven, II Corinthians 6:2b.

ANSWER SHEET

Lesson Six

1. Why did Paul say his reward for preaching was to work “free of charge?” I Corinthians 9:18.

Certainly Paul had every right to expect pay. Soldiers are paid. Vinedressers receive recompense. Even those who worked in the temple sanctuary received remuneration, I Corinthians 9:7-10. Hence, Paul concluded he is subject to the same consideration, I Corinthians 9:11,12a. But, he did not want to hinder the Gospel, I Corinthians 9:12b. He was a slave of Christ. He was obligated to obey his master, I Corinthians 9:16-18. That was his right, his privilege, and his boast.

2. Does Paul reject “rewards” as a motive for behavior? CITE APPROPRIATE PASSAGES.

Plato and Aristotle believed retribution for disobedience made reward unnecessary. To them, goodness was sought for its own sake. Paul disagrees. He lived in order to gain the prize, I Corinthians 9:24-27. He said we are judged according to our works, I Corinthians 3:13,14.

3. Does the New Testament teach that our goodness reminds God to reward us? Why (or why not)?

No. God is not obligated to pay us anything. Everything we receive from Him is a gift of grace. In Romans 4:4, Paul is stating how humans conduct their affairs. In verse 5, he reveals how God operates, cf. Romans 4:16. The Lord simply “credits our account” with righteousness because we trust in what Jesus did for us, Romans 4:23,24.

4. Does the apostle John teach “reward” for obedience? What passages support your conclusion?

An echo of “reward” is heard in John 9:31. But, in general, John teaches that what the saints receive comes through grace, John 1:12,16. Sin and death are overcome through rebirth, John 3:3,6; cf. I John 3:9. Certainly good works are involved, Revelation 14:13; 20:11-13. Yet, faith in God, who sent Jesus Christ, is the means of eternal life, John 5:24.

5. How does the Book of Hebrews offer grace to those who are falling away from the faith?

Hebrews warns against falling away. Apostasy brings punishment. Faithfulness is rewarded with rest, Hebrews 4:3, salvation, Hebrews 9:28, and the kingdom, Hebrews 12:28. The idea of reward is based on faithfulness to the Lord. However, it is not good works but grace that guarantees the reward, Hebrews 4:16. Indeed, grace is what helps the persecuted persevere. The death of Christ makes us confident to approach the throne of God, Hebrews 10:19-23.

ANSWER SHEET

Lesson Seven

1. Does Isaiah 14:9,10 teach that we are conscious after we die?

Because Isaiah 14:9,10 is in the middle of a poetic section, one must be careful making a literal conclusion from a figurative passage. Isaiah (through poetry) was taunting the king of Babylon who had oppressed Israel, Isaiah 14:3. Babylon was defeated, Isaiah 14:4-8. Hades was ready to receive the vanquished ruler, Isaiah 14:9. The inhabitants of sheol joined in the taunt, Isaiah 14:10,11. Though this suggests the deceased are conscious, it will take literal passages to substantiate that assumption.

2. Do any Old Testament passages support consciousness between death and the resurrection?

Psalms 23:4-6 likely refers to rescue from earthly danger. Isaiah 26:19; Hosea 6:2 and 13:14 probably refer to the revival of Israel after the exile. All of the remaining passages suggest that there is life beyond death (especially Daniel 12:2,3), but none of them prove for sure that there is consciousness between death and the resurrection.

3. What passage(s) in the Old Testament might be used to support “soul sleeping?”

Those who believe in “soul sleeping” usually turn to Job 14:12; Psalms 6:5; 31:17; 39:13; 88:10-12; 94:17; 115:17; 146:4; Ecclesiastes 9:4,5,10.

4. How would you show that these passages do not teach “soul sleeping?”

All of these passages are found in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. Though inspired, these texts focus on human understandings of earthly existence. For example, Job believed he would see God on earth before he died, Job 19:25-27. The Psalms are poetry. Poetry speaks to the emotions. They do not play well when subjected to literal analysis. And, finally, Ecclesiastes applies to life “under the sun” (a phrase that occurs 29 times in the book). Life after this life is not under discussion, cf. Ecclesiastes 9:2; cf. 12:1-7. “Soul sleeping” is not in the purview of the Wisdom Literature.

5. What New Testament verses would indicate that there is consciousness after death?

There are many New Testament passages that show “soul sleeping” is a misunderstanding (though death is often called “*sleep*”, John 11:11; I Thessalonians 4:13-15). Sleep is a metaphor for death, Luke 8:52b; Acts 7:60; 13:36; I Corinthians 7:39b; 15:6b,18b,20b,51b; II Peter 3:4b. Sleep in these verses refer to the bodies (not the souls) of the deceased, Matthew 27:52; cf. Daniel 12:2a. “Sleep” points to the appearance of the body in the same way we speak of the “sunrise” or “sunset.” The sun does not actually rise or set. It only appears to do so. Hence, death does not stop consciousness anymore than the sun moves around the earth.

ANSWER SHEET

Lesson Eight

1. What caused Mark Twain to say that a vacation in Bermuda would be better than going to heaven?

Mark Twain was not attracted to “singing forever and ever.” Beside being a poor singer, he felt doing the same thing perpetually sounded downright boring.

2. Will everyone who goes to heaven be doing the same things?

We do not know for sure. However, the angels have different assignments. The seraphim sing around the throne of God, Isaiah 6:1-4. The cherubim do various tasks on earth, Genesis 3:23,24; Psalms 18:10; Ezekiel 28:16. If the angels do different things, perhaps the saints will, too.

3. What is the meaning of “the saints will rule with God when they get to heaven?”

Those that overcome on earth will be given authority to judge in heaven, Revelation 3:21; 20:4; cf. 1 Corinthians 6:3. Actually what that means is beyond our present ability to comprehend. It appears that as we pass from this life we will rule with Christ in kingly authority over nations until His second coming. After that time, we (along with Christ) will become subject to God, 1 Corinthians 15:24-28.

4. In heaven, we will grow, learn, love, and live holy lives. Given we are free to select among these activities, what would be your first choice to do in your home above?

This may be the area in which one saint will be differentiated from another saint. Some will pursue learning more vigorously. Others may grow in loving more earnestly. In other words, all of us will change over time but none of us will advance equally in all things. Heaven may allow us the freedom to grow as the Spirit leads us.

5. If Satan could sin while living in heaven, is it possible we could, too? How does your answer affect your view of heaven?

Somehow the action of the devil raises the possibility that getting to heaven does not preclude the chance that we could sin while in heaven. Will we be forced to be righteous in eternity? Will we be robots in our celestial home? Are the redeemed preprogrammed to obey in the new heaven and new earth? If we are required to choose between right and wrong, then making proper choices here becomes serious preparation for making such choices there!

ANSWER SHEET

Lesson Nine

1. Why are descriptions of “out-of-body experiences” are so popular today?

Out-of-body experiences are popular because they play into human imagination. They stroke our curiosity about the future. They allow the mind to probe the mysteries of the of the occult (that is, supernatural realms). It is dangerous to dabble in such matters.

2. Is the cessation of breathing a biblical definition of death? SUPPLY BOOK, CHAPTER, AND VERSE FOR YOUR POSITION.

Death is the departure of the spirit from the body, Psalm 146:3,4; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 8:55; James 2:26. A person can be clinically dead but not be biologically dead. In other words, one might stop breathing (temporarily) but still be alive (because the spirit has not left for “the land of no return,” Job 7:9,10; 10:20,21a; 16:22).

3. In the Bible, after the dead were restored to life, what did they say about their out-of-body experience?

Nothing! The Scriptures do not mention one word of what these people experienced. No clairvoyant perceptions are recorded (though there was plenty of opportunity to do so). For instance, when Paul had his supernatural adventure, he was not “permitted to tell,” II Corinthians 12:2-4.

4. Why should we be skeptical of messages from those who claim out-of-body experiences?

The occult destroys faith in Christ. It rejects Scripture. It plays on the gullible by supposedly delivering messages from supernatural realms. Those who claim to communicate with the world beyond have abandoned the faith, I Timothy 4:1,2. Indeed, if anyone teaches anything that is contrary to what is in the inspired word, he should be condemned, Galatians 1:8.

5. Where does interest in out-of-body experiences lead?

An interest in clairvoyance can go in many directions. The world of the occult is found everywhere in modern society: ESP (or extra sensory perception), Kirlian photography (or the pseudo-scientific technique of reproducing psychic auras photographically), Tarot cards (fortune telling), white magic, astrology (or horoscopes), palmistry, ouija boards, parapsychology, etc. The media (books, newspapers, movies, and television) are crawling with open depictions of these (and other) occult practices. The Bible repeatedly warns against such things, II Chronicles 33:6; Micah 5:12; Galatians 5:19 (witchcraft).

ANSWER SHEET

Lesson Ten

1. Does Isaiah 63:16 say the dead are unaware of what the living are up to? Why do you think so?

In the past, the Jews had relied on Abraham and the nation of Israel for help. But, now that Abraham had died and Israel was in exile, there was no one but God to deliver them. But the exiles were between a rock and a hard place. For, though they were calling on God to deliver them, they felt like the Lord had let them down, Isaiah 63:17. The passage is not talking about what the deceased know.

2. Will the world end in an atomic explosion?

There are folks who think Peter was predicting nuclear destruction, II Peter 3:7,10,12b. Actually, Peter said the “*heavens*” would be “*destroyed*” and “*earth*” would be “*laid bare*,” II Peter 3:7. The earth will be cleansed “*like it was in the days of Noah*,” Matthew 24:37-39. God will purify rather than annihilate the world.

3. Will the redeemed receive literal crowns in heaven?

In the ancient world, there were victory garlands and royal crowns. In the New Testament (except for the Book of Revelation) the “*crown*” was invariably the victory garland—the prize for patient endurance, I Corinthians 9:25; II Timothy 2:5; 4:8; I Peter 5:4. In Revelation, the royal crown is worn by the elders, 4:10, the rider on the white horse, 6:2, the woman clothed with the sun, 12:1, and the Son of Man, 14:14. Likely, in the Book of Revelation, the crown is symbolic. We will know for sure once we enter “the land of cloudless day.”

4. Will our pets go to heaven? SUPPORT YOUR ANSWER WITH BOOK, CHAPTER, AND VERSE.

Many people hope their beloved pets will be in heaven. There are no passages that say so. Hence, some folks say, “No!” They refer to Ecclesiastes 3:21 (which is actually a question rather than a statement). But Romans 8:19-21 seems to suggest that pets will be in heaven. That seems likely. Who knows for sure? God will do what is best.

5. Will there be “time” in eternity? Why (or why not) do you think so?

Some people say, “No!” For, in Revelation 10:6, the King James Version says, “*there will be no more time*.” The verse really means “*there will be no more delay*.” The martyrs were told to wait (for the avenging of their deaths), Revelation 6:9-11. Chapter 10 verse 6 indicates vengeance was ready to begin. Rome would fall. Moreover, eternity is timeless. There will be no need for clocks and watches in “the land of endless day.” The saints will be free from the tyranny of time, the pressure of deadlines. Praise God.