



My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

Lesson #8: "Views of Heaven"

John's View of Heaven

Our Lesson today is about the home of the saved. Millions of people have set their life's hope on being there. Many have sacrificed everything—even their lives—so that they would not lose the hope of eternal life with God in that home.

Is it worth it? What will it be like? Will it be an interesting place, or would a person be bored? Most of us would probably get tired of floating around on a cloud playing a harp forever, so certainly there must be something more to heaven than just that.

Let's look at the Bible description of the New Jerusalem, the capital city of heaven. This is also referred to as Mt. Zion, the City of God, and Paradise in the Bible.

The book of Revelation (sometimes called the "Apocalypse") begins with the disciple John a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos, a rocky, barren, political asylum. He must have been lonely. He was separated from his family, friends, and the churches that he had given his life to. Maybe he wondered why the Lord left him there. He must have longed for another opportunity to do more for his Lord instead of wasting his last days alone and cut off from service.

Then one day while still on those lonely island shores, in vision he visited with Jesus.

At first the Lord showed him the history of the earth, from his time to our time and onward. What he saw is all written in the book of Revelation. Then he was shown the redeemed inheriting their New Jerusalem home. Along with them, he was allowed, via vision, to travel through space and go right up to the pearly white gates of that city. The gates swung open and John was ushered in past the flaming guardian angels. He beheld with wonder! The streets seemed to be made of pure gold—or was it polished glass? It was hard to explain in human language the glories of heaven, but he described it the best that he could.

As John gazed at the dazzling scene, his eyes so used to the dark dreary home on Patmos gradually became accustomed to the brilliant light. Soon he could see more. "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." (Revelation 22:1, 2)

He then described how it is laid out in a perfect square. Maybe some of the streets were called the "Way of Life," the "Way of Righteousness," the "Boulevard of Life." The throne of God is the fountain from which the crystal clear River of Life springs forth and it flows down beside the main street of heaven.

Then John noticed that not just beside the river, but spanning it, was a tree the Tree of Life. He reports with wonder:

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"In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." (Revelation 22:2).

In India, there is an unusual tree called the Banyan tree. It is different from other trees in that it has multiple trunks. Sometimes these trees will have one trunk on one side of a road, and one on the other side, with traffic rushing between them. Large trees may have scores of trunks, spreading over great distances. One of these trees in India is reported to be able to easily shelter 20,000 people sitting beneath it! It must be something like the Tree of Life, for that is how it is pictured—spanning the River of Life with trunks on either side.

What a scene! The main street of heaven—the "Boulevard of Life"—with highway arteries on either side of the river, and somewhere close to the throne of God, the Tree of Life, spanning over the River of Life, with its one trunk rooted on either bank. How wonderful it would be to rest on the banks of that lovely, never-failing river and relax under that glorious Tree of Life.

Many people have tried to imagine what the different fruits on that tree might be, and how the leaves can heal the nations. The important part, however, is that we will come and eat the fruit of the Tree of Life, and the missing ingredient that will give eternal youth—the "elixir of life" that mankind for centuries has been searching for—will be supplied to those who partake of it. What a wonderful promise.

There are twelve gates to that city, with an angel at every gate. Why twelve gates and why twelve guards? They are guarding the city to make sure nothing that defiles will enter there. It will be a clean pure city. The Bible says that, "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Revelation 21:27).

Imagine a man coming up to the City, saying, "I'd like to come in. I've heard a lot about heaven. Can I please come in?" But the angel has to guard the City from anything that would defile it. We are talking in figurative language here, just a parable of course—we will study the judgment in a later lesson. But can you hear the angel who is guarding the city ask him:

"Just a moment. What is this in your pocket?"

"Oh, just a pack of tobacco."

"But certainly, you wouldn't want to bring that in here would you? We have such a clean city, and we have never needed ashtrays or spittoons before. There is not the slightest hint of air pollution or anything that defiles. There is nothing here that could cause a person to get cancer. You wouldn't want to bring that earthly enslavement into this city would you?"

Picture another man coming up to the City. He starts to go in but the angel stops him and asks?

"Wait, what is that in your hip pocket?"

"Just a flask of Whiskey," he answers.

"Do you mean," says the angel, "that after all the sorrow that stuff has caused on earth that you think it would be welcome here? Think of the many broken homes, ruined men and women and abused, hungry children on earth that testify to the bitterness that liquor brings. No one will lie drunk in the streets of gold. No one will stagger to the Tree of Life or sing praises to God with a slurred, drunken speech. Nothing that defiles will enter here."

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The Bible asks: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." (I Corinthians 6:9, 10).

No impure thoughts or vile habits will be admitted. No vile amusements, no impure videos, no suggestive magazines will find entrance there. Jesus delivers men, women, and young people, fully and completely, from those things, because He is determined to inhabit heaven with a pure, clean people who will not defile that pure city and destroy its perfect harmony.

One evening, a man called a visiting evangelist to his home. As the minister approached the little cottage at the edge of town, the sounds of suffering and sorrow could be heard inside. An elderly Gentleman ushered him in to a bedside. His wife lay dying.

After a visit and prayer, the two men stepped out into the moonlight and looked at the little place. Flowers scented the warm spring air and fruit trees were in beautiful blossom. The evening was lovely, but oh so sad for that poor husband.

As they walked to the gate, the gentleman pointed back and said, "All our lives we've looked forward to a little home of our own, and now we have it—it is paid for and we longed to enjoy it together. But now my wife is dying."

At the funeral a few days later, how precious seemed the promises in Isaiah 65: "For behold I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.... For behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.... And they shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards., and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

The people of God go forth to inhabit this new earth and make it their home. It is a very real place. Not just a retirement center where the angels come along at regular and convenient intervals and fan them to sleep under a palm tree. No, it is a land of activity. It says they will build houses and inhabit them; they will plant vineyards and eat the fruit from them.

I want to go there, don't you? There is nothing permanent here. I heard of a couple, who just built a rich home in the country. They were a young couple. They had two lovely daughter, perfect health, and lots of money. Just before the home was finished and they were ready to move in, he was driving down a road when a semi-truck started to pass another semi-truck not seeing that he was coming the other way. There was no place to turn at that juncture of the road as there was an embankment right beside him. He was killed instantly. He never got to enjoy his dream home. I hope he was ready for the home above, don't you?

The best of homes here are but temporary and filled with sorrow and tears. I want to go to a place where there will be no more tears. The promise is that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes and there shall be no more pain, for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4). God wipes away even the sad memories of the past with the handkerchief of His love.

Many people have tried to make themselves a little heaven here on earth. Some have been lured to the beautiful islands with their graceful palm trees, green hills, bubbling fountains, fragrant flowers, and mild weather the year around, fanned by gentle breezes.

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The story has been told of a couple who had finally reached the time when they could look forward to retiring and enjoying life together. They began looking for the perfect place—a little haven of rest—where they could enjoy peace. They began looking for a peaceful island that would not be of interest to the greedy nations or have any strategic importance in time of war. They looked for an island that had never been the scene of warfare and had no warring tribes on it. After a thorough search, they found just the right place and set up their dream home on an island in the South Atlantic. It was Falkland Islands!

There is no place on earth that is free from the problems and troubles that sin brings. Our only escape is to look for that city "whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10).

Some years before World War II, another couple decided that they wanted to find security in this world. That had lived through World War I, and they could see that there was increasing tension in the world. They wanted to locate as far away from Europe and war as possible. Yet they wanted to remain in the British commonwealth, with the British laws of protection. So they settled on an estate on Guadalcanal—the scene of some of the bloodiest battles during World War II!

Nearly 2,000 years ago, our Saviour promised to go prepare a place for us in heaven. He said there are many mansions there for us. It has been a long time since he left with the promise to return. And the signs all foretell that it is time for Him to come again. Yet, who is preparing? Who is really wanting to go there?

Daydream with me for a moment. Imagine that you are in heaven at evening time and you happen to come upon two figures. The one you quickly recognize is Jesus and the other is Gabriel, the highest angel in heaven. You walk behind them, unobserved, through heavenly beauty that is beyond description, for "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (I Corinthians 2:9).

But the beauty tonight seems marred by the strange silence of the two. They have come now into that vast uninhabited part of the city. The homes that line its winding streets are lovely beyond words. The terraces, the lawns of living green, the rose gardens in bloom, would bring tears of joy to any child of God who, looking upon such beauty, could cherish even the faintest hope of one day possessing it. At last Gabriel breaks the silence.

"Master," he says, "all that has come from your hand is good. These homes are no exception. They are exquisite—as only you could make them."

"They would be beautiful," is the Master's reply, "if they were not empty."

Again there is silence. Again Gabriel speaks.

Master, when do You plan to bring them home?"

"Not yet," He replies. Then softly, with a look of yearning sadness, "No, not yet."

"But isn't it time to go for them?"

"Yes." And His sadness seems to deepen.

There is another moment of silence, and then--

"Master, You know, there is a housing shortage down there. Many have no homes. There is a continual clamor to find them. But the strange thing is that those that do have them seem to be satisfied with the old earth. They seem to feel no need of heaven. But Master, the loveliest homes down there are only shacks compared to those that You have built."

"I know," the Saviour says. There is more silence, and this time the Master is the one to break it.

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"Gabriel, do you see those groups of people in all lands—the ones that are praying?"

"Yes, Master."

"They are My people, Gabriel. They are faithful to Me. They keep My commandments. They love My words. They tell others about Me. They pray, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus.'" The Master hesitates. Then He continues, "But, Gabriel, sometimes when My people feel that I am about to come for them, I detect a worried look on their faces, as if..."

The Master cannot say what is on His heart. Gabriel knows, and turns his face for he has no answer for his Lord.

A few moments pass and the angel turns again, his face expressing the love and admiration that are in his heart.

"Jesus," he says. The Saviour's face lights up as Gabriel addresses Him. He loves to be called by the name that in a special way, expresses His mission to a fallen world. "And thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Gabriel pauses an instant, and as he looks at the nail-prints in His hands, clasping both wounded hands in his own, and continues, repeating again that matchless name.

"Jesus, you gave so much for them." He says no more, for even an angel cannot find words adequate to express such infinite love.

The tears, that a moment ago were stealing down the Master's cheek, now flow unchecked. His disappointment is so great that its intensity cannot be described. At last, motioning toward the empty mansions about Him, He finds words:

"Gabriel, don't they want to come home?"

Friend, there is nothing imaginary about the disappointment that cuts at the Saviour's heart. It is more real and intense than I have pictured it. Mansions are waiting, for you and for me. They are standing empty, waiting to be filled with people—joyful, loving, active people. Smiles and laughter, peace and adventure will fill those homes and streets someday.

Friend of mine, don't you want to go home?