

## ***The Christian Life*** ***Heaven***

Lesson #9 for May 30, 2009

Scriptures: Ecclesiastes 9:5,6; Colossians 1:10-14; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 21:1-4,8.

1. This lesson is about heaven. What do you think of when someone says, "Heaven"? Why do you believe in heaven? What evidence do you have for your beliefs? Do you want to go there?
2. In our day there are many people who do not believe in any life after this life. Some believe that heaven is only a state of mind. On the other end of the spectrum, many believe that when we die, we go straight to heaven. They believe that their dead relatives are already in heaven and are looking down on them. So, what is the correct biblical teaching about heaven? Are there other places where people go when they die such as purgatory, paradise, or hell? What do we know about those other places? Purgatory is a Roman Catholic doctrine that was rejected by Martin Luther along with the apocryphal books that supported it. Paradise is another Roman Catholic doctrine. Paradise is supposed to be a temporary stopping place for good people on their way to heaven. (Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 12:4; Revelation 2:7; 1 Peter 3:19,20)
3. How much do you know about heaven? Do you wish you knew more? Are you inclined to believe that heaven is just "pie in the sky, bye and bye"?
4. Read John 17:3. What does it mean when Jesus suggested in His prayer that to know God is life eternal. He seemed to be suggesting that something is happening in the present. What is this new kind of existence? When a person is born again, how does his life change?
5. Read 1 John 3:2. What was implied when John said that we will be like Him for we will see Him "as He is"? How does that process of seeing Him as He is and being changed actually work? (2 Corinthians 3:18; GC 555)
6. Can we actually be citizens of God's kingdom here and now? Does that new "citizenship" began at baptism? How different is the life of someone who has experienced that new citizenship? (Philippians 3:20)
7. Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven at times as if they were/are already here. Matthew often used the expression, "kingdom of heaven." He did that because he was primarily writing to Jews who believed that the name of God was too sacred to pronounce. The other gospel writers were writing to other groups and did not use that expression so much. At times, Ellen White suggested that heaven can begin now.

**As through Jesus we enter into rest, heaven begins here.** We respond to His invitation, Come, learn of Me, and in thus coming we begin the life eternal. **Heaven is a ceaseless approaching to God through Christ.** The longer we are in the heaven of bliss, the more and still more of glory will be opened to us; and the more we know of God, the more intense will be our happiness. As we walk with Jesus in this life, we may be filled with His love, satisfied with His presence. All that human [332] nature can bear, we may receive here. But what is this compared with the hereafter? {DA 331.3}

**Heaven begins in the soul,** and as heavenly-mindedness increases, Christ

is more and more appreciated, and finally becomes the Chiefest among ten thousand, the One altogether lovely. . . .

**If we would see heaven, we must have heaven below. We must have a heaven to go to heaven in.** We must have heaven in our families, through Christ continually approaching unto God. Christ is the great center of attraction, and the child of God hid in Christ, meets with God, and is lost in the divine being. {*ST*, July 31, 1893 par. 2; *Heaven* 171.5}

8. Just before His crucifixion, Jesus Himself promised us that He was returning to heaven where He would prepare for each one of us a special room or place for us to live with Him. (John 14:1-3; 1Thessalonians 4:13-18)
9. Why did Paul say that without the hope of the resurrection and eternal life in heaven, Christians “deserve more pity than anyone else in all the world”? (1 Corinthians 15:19, *GNB*) Do you believe that your life would be just miserable without the hope of heaven? Why do you think Paul thought so? Do Christians living today have miserable lives? Some Christians are bold enough to say that if there were no heaven, they would continue to live lives just as they are living them now because that is the best way to live on this earth. Do you wish that you felt free to go to bars, smoke cigarettes, and visit brothels, etc.? Or do you recognize that those things do not bring any true happiness?
10. Read Luke 17:21. Compare different versions. Some versions suggest that Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is within you.” Other versions suggest the translation should be, “The kingdom of God is among you.” Is that a statement about some condition that exists within Christians? Or, is that a statement about the fact that Jesus was living at that time on earth among His disciples? The Greek meaning can go either way. Maybe Jesus meant both.
11. Read John 15:19. What was Jesus trying to suggest when He said that we are not to be “of this world”? Can we actually live as if we were in heaven right now?
12. Read 1 Corinthians 13:12. What was Paul implying when he said that we see things through a glass darkly? Does that imply that there is very little that we can know about heaven? Where can we turn to learn more about heaven?
13. Look at the definitions of heaven in the *Adult Teacher’s Bible Study Guide*, p. 107:

**Heaven is the dwelling place of God, from where He reigns and acts** (*Deut. 26:15; 1 Sam. 2:10; Ps. 11:4; 53:2; 103:19; Isa. 6:1-4; 63:15; Matt. 5:16; Rev. 3:12; 11:13; 20:9*). Heaven is His throne, and earth is His footstool, with His rulership extending to all created order (*Isa. 66:1, Acts 7:49*). Heaven is the place where angels worship God continually and await to do His bidding (*Ps. 103:19, 20; Matt. 18:10; 22:30; Matt. 24:36; Rev. 3:5*). From heaven Jesus came (*John 3:13,31; 6:38,42*), and to heaven He ascended and functions as our Mediator (*Heb. 8:1; 9:24; 1 Pet. 3:22*). It is from there He will come again (*John 14:1-3*). Second, **heaven is the home of the redeemed** (*John 14:1-3, 1 Thess. 4:17*). The plan of salvation reaches its final stage when the redeemed enter into the joy of the new heaven and the new earth where God Himself “will dwell with them” (*Rev. 21:1-3*).

The ultimate definition of heaven, then, is where God dwells. At the end, the new

heaven and the new earth will become God's dwelling place (*Rev. 21:1-3*) and the inheritance of the redeemed. Wouldn't that be heaven, at last!

But isn't God omnipresent? So, is all of this earth and all of the universe actually heaven because God is here even if we cannot see Him?

14. Many Christians believe in the idea of an immortal "soul." What is implied by that idea? Ancient Greek philosophers suggested that the human body is something like a cage in which dwells a soul. They believed that the soul existed somewhere in the spirit world before we were born, and when we were born, it entered our bodies and lives there while we are on this earth. The body is some kind of cage which holds the soul captive until we die. When we die, it escapes and returns to its place. That is not an Old Testament idea nor a New Testament idea. What did God say about the nature of the soul? (*Genesis 2:7*) What did Satan say about the nature of the soul? (*Genesis 3:1-4*) What would you have done if you were in Eve's place? Heaven is not a place where disembodied spirits or souls float around. Heaven is a real place where we will have real bodies (although somewhat different than these sinful bodies).

But the Bible does suggest that there is a "hell." Could you go to it right now if you had the right kind of transportation? The words translated *hell* in both the Hebrew and the Greek simply mean "the grave." Are there people living "in hell" right now? Or is "hell" something that exists only for a short time at the end of this earth's history? Why does the Bible talk about everlasting punishment? (*Matthew 25:43,46*) Are Sodom and Gomorrah still burning? (*Jude 7*) How long can a servant serve his master even if he chooses to do so? (*Exodus 21:6*) So how long is the fire supposed to last? (See *Exodus 24:17*) If the fire at the end is God's glory, we had better hope that it does not go out! (Compare *Isaiah 33:10-16, GNB*)

15. If God says that the soul dies and Satan says, "That's not true; you will not die," who should we believe? What actually happens to a person when he dies? Of how much are dead people aware as time passes?
16. Notice that God stated clearly that a body plus the life-giving power of the Spirit produces a "living being" or "soul." (*Genesis 2:7*) When the spirit or life-giving power separates from the body, the soul ceases to exist.
17. The Bible clearly suggests that there are only two final destinations for human beings—either heaven or "hell." (*Matthew 25:46; John 5:28,29; Revelation 21:1-4,8*)
18. Read *1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*. Notice that these verses suggest that we will live forever with the Lord. Can we comprehend "forever"?
19. Think about some of the details that we know about heaven. Are you comfortable with the idea of living with God "forever"? Are you happy to know that there will be no death, no tears, no crying, no pain, and that all the old things will be gone? (*Revelation 21:1-4,8*) What things do you especially look forward to in heaven?
20. The Bible tells us that at the second coming, Christ will take His saints with Him back to heaven. There they will live with Him for 1000 years. (*Revelation 20*) Following that 1000 years, they will return to this earth, and God will make His "dwelling place" here on this earth. Does that mean that heaven will be moved from where it is now to this earth? If so, why would God do that?
21. How much do you know about "hell"? Where is hell? If we had the means to travel there, could we see it now? Or, is hell only a temporary phenomenon which will take place sometime in the

future?

22. Read Isaiah 66:22-24. What does this tell us about hell? Will God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit along with all the angels who have remained loyal to them and all human beings who are saved be looking out at hell on a regular basis? Notice that Isaiah tells us that what is burned in hell is “dead bodies.” Is heaven surrounded by “hell”? And what about the parable of the rich man and Lazarus? (Luke 16:19-31) And what about the third angel’s message? (Revelation 14:9-11) Isn’t that supposed to be the special message for the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Or is all memory of sin and evil wiped out when we get to heaven? These verses were Billy Graham’s favorite verses for hell. One cannot understand these verses correctly until he has learned about God’s glory—“fire”—from the rest of the Bible and also about God’s “wrath”—God sadly letting the sinner go when the sinner persistently rejects God (Romans 1:18,24,26,28; 4:25; Matthew 27:46; Hosea 11:1-8)—from the rest of the Bible. The fires of hell will consume all traces of sin and evil. Those fires follow the panorama in the sky that will tell the story of sin and the great controversy. When it is over, even the Devil will be down on his knees saying that God has done what is right. (Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10,11) After that, sinners will die the second, or final, death. It is the same death that Jesus died on the cross! Did Jesus burn? No! He died and sinners will die of the results of sin. The fire merely cleans up the mess. Sinners will experience nuclear fire. (1 Peter 3:10)
23. Will there be any kind of torture in hell? Read John 5:24-29. These verses suggest that all human beings who have lived on this earth will arise in one or the other of two resurrections. (Ellen White suggested that there may be a few exceptions to that. See *Early Writings* 276) Matthew 25 suggests that God will at some time judge all people, and those who have done His will are to be saved while those who have refused to do His will and have chosen their own selfish ways are to be condemned.
24. There have generally been three different approaches to what happens to us after death:
  - 1) Nothing! Many people today and many in the past have believed that when one dies, it’s all over.
  - 2) Reincarnation. Nearly one-third of the world’s population today believe that when one dies, he is reincarnated into a different creature. He may come back as an insect, an animal, or possibly, eventually, another human being. They believe that a person will continually “recycle.”
  - 3) Resurrection. Christians believe that after death, there is a resurrection, either immediately or at some future time at the second coming of Christ.
25. In order to understand some of the stories in the New Testament, we need to recognize that the Pharisees believed in life after death, resurrection, and angels while the Sadducees did not believe in any of those.
26. In biblical times there were groups of people who believed that there were three different heavens: 1) The atmosphere around us and what it contains. 2) The area containing stars, sun, moon, etc., and 3) The place where God lives. There were others who believed in seven heavens.
27. How do you understand the expression “new heavens and a new earth”? (Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-4)
28. Read Romans 14:17 and Colossians 1:10-14. Clearly, there is a distinction between the

lifestyle of those who are sinners and those who are true Christians. Does every Christian you know experience “the righteousness, peace, and joy which the Holy Spirit gives”? (Romans 14:17, *GNB*) What did Paul mean when he talked about bringing us into the kingdom of His Son?

29. Better than all the friendship of the world is the friendship of Christ’s redeemed. Better than a title to the noblest palace on earth is a title to the mansions our Lord has gone to prepare. And better than all the words of earthly praise will be the Savior’s words to His faithful servants, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Matt. 25:34.—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 374.
30. Review the benefits of living in heaven!
- 1) God Himself will dwell with us (Revelation 21:3, 4). There, we will experience one-on-one fellowship and relationships with all three Members of the Godhead.
  - 2) All that is associated with sin—death, crying, tears, wickedness, greed, etc.—will pass away. (Revelation 22:5; Isaiah 65:17)
  - 3) Harmony and righteousness will characterize the land and life in the new heaven, etc.
- The sinners who die with Satan do so because they are not willing to give up their selfish ways. There is no room for selfishness in heaven.
31. Will we be able to recognize our old friends—even our family members and our spouses—when we get to heaven? How will we recognize Jesus? What is implied by Revelation 21:22,23?
32. How long will it take you to ask God all the questions you have from the Bible and from your experience here on earth? After asking a single question, will one have to go to the back of the line? Jesus will probably often ask us to go and research the matter for ourselves.
33. As we come to understand more fully and see all the details of the history from the Old Testament and especially the life and experience of Jesus here on this earth, what will be our natural reaction? Won’t we have even more respect, honor, and worship for our Creator-God?
34. So, what does heaven mean to you? Are you looking forward to it with intense excitement? Why? Or, why not?
35. God is really excited about the possibility of living forever with you and me! He loves us that much. But, He cannot put heaven in jeopardy again. He can only take to heaven those who really want to live in His kind of righteous kingdom. But, He has promised the most fantastic rewards for those who do. We may not fully understand what sin does to people. But, we do know that the same power of God that gives eternal life to the righteous consumes the wicked.

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