

Heaven: The Life Beyond

"Keep seeking the things above where Christ is seated...Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth" - Paul 60 A.D.

Part 6 "What Happens When We Die?"

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4.13-17

Survey: Understanding and imagining Heaven is part of God's eternal plan for our spiritual growth (Ephesians 2.6,7; Colossians 3.1-2). The facts from the Bible, coupled with a healthy imagination will allow the believer to visualize the future. Once a clear understanding of the facts about Heaven is established, one will both appreciate and anticipate our future home. Myths and misunderstandings should be deleted from our minds if we are to accurately understand Heaven.

Subject: The term *intermediary* is used simply to describe the Heaven where all believers will reside after death and until the New Heaven and New Earth appear (Revelation 21.1). The Bible is less descriptive of the intermediary place where the believer goes when he dies than it is about the final New Heaven, New Earth, and New Jerusalem (Revelation 21, 22). However, the word *heaven* is used between 550 times and 625 depending on which version of the Bible is used. The intermediary heaven is a real place and one where people have full awareness of their surroundings. The question remains, "What is this temporary place like?" In this lesson we will answer that question.

Substance:

1. What happens when a person dies?

- A. Most people assume that when a person dies that they go to their final destination. The physical part of man remains in the grave until the resurrection (Daniel 12.2,3).
- B. The location of Heaven is undetermined, but it seems that it is in the universe beyond any human sight--whether invisible because of distance or invisible because of concealment (Acts 7.55,56; 2 Kings 6.17).
- C. However, both Heaven and Hades (Hell) are only temporary places until each is swallowed up by something greater (Revelation 20.14; 21.1). Still others presume that the soul goes to sleep. The word "*sleep*" is sometimes used to refer to the state of the body of the believer, but is never used to suggest that the spirit of man goes into an unconscious sleeplike state (See also lesson 7; 1 Thessalonians 4.13). It is used only euphemistically to soften the idea of a person being dead.

2. The Chronological View of Death & Beyond:

- A. When an individual dies, the spirit and the body separate. When the human spirit vacates the body, this human life is over. Paul said, "to be absent from the body," meaning that he as a person would no longer reside in this human flesh (Ecclesiastes 12.7).
- B. The spirit leaves the body and goes either to a place for the redeemed or a place for the unredeemed. A good example of the two places can be found in Luke 16.22-23 stating, "Now the poor man (Lazarus) died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's presence; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes being in torment." Clearly there are two places, one for the believer and the other for the unbeliever.
- C. Hades is the temporary place for the departed spirits of all unbelievers. Hades will give up its inhabitants. "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them and they were judged every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the Second Death, the Lake of Fire" (Revelation 20.13; 21.8).
- D. Heaven is the immediate destination of the true believer. Jesus said to the dying and repentant thief on the cross, "*Today you will be with me in Paradise*" (Luke 23.43). This place is referred to by several names and descriptions. It is called Paradise (2 Corinthians 12.4; Revelation 2.7). It is called Heaven and is the dwelling place of God (Matthew 6.20; 10.33; 12.50; 18.14; Acts 1.11; 1 Corinthians 15.47; 2 Corinthians 5.2; Philippians 3.20). Paul referred to Heaven simply as "present with the Lord" (John 14.3; 2 Corinthians 5.8; Philippians 1.23; 1 Thessalonians 4.14). In one place Paul referred to Heaven as the "Third Heaven," meaning the actual place where God dwells rather than the atmosphere, which is sometimes referred to as the heavens (2 Corinthians 12.2). Finally,

eternal life refers to Heaven (John 3.16,36; 10.28-29; 11.25-26). Throughout Scripture the words that give the believer the greatest comfort and hope for the future are the words eternal and everlasting life.

E. The following is a summary of what we know:

1. It is evident that those who have gone on to Heaven are aware to some extent of what is going on upon Earth (Hebrews 12.1; Revelation 6.10). This idea should not be pressed to the point that our loved ones are watching over us. Remember they are enjoying the pleasures of Heaven. The context of Revelation 6.10 refers to those who were martyred for their testimony during the Great Tribulation (More details of this to come). Because they are in the presence of the Lord, they are comforted (Luke 16.22,25).
2. Jesus is clearly visible in Heaven. It will be Him Who is visible for all to see and enjoy. "Stephen gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7.55,56).
3. All believers will enjoy and remain in the presence of the Lord until the resurrection of believers during the Church age. This is the resurrection of believers only! Paul explained, "But each in his own order; Christ the first fruits (first resurrected never to die again), after that those who are Christ's at His coming" (1 Corinthians 15.23; see also 1 Thessalonians 4.14, 17; Revelation 19.14).
4. At the resurrection of all believers will rise. The sequence of events is given to us in First Thessalonians 4.15-17, which states, "*For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.*"

3. Here is the sequence of events:

- A. The Lord descends from Heaven. It is the same Lord Jesus who ascended into Heaven (Acts 1.11). He will come physically and literally. He will come to get those whom He redeemed and fulfill His promise to them (John 14.1-6).
 - The shout is that of a commanding officer for a charge or advancement. It is the Lord who will give this shout--this command!
 - The voice of the archangel will be heard announcing His coming, as would a herald. The angel is not identified, but most probably it is Gabriel or Michael.
 - The trumpet will sound announcing this great event to assemble the people together, deliver them from the world, and initiate the beginning of the tribulation.
 - The dead will rise from the grave. Their bodies will be quickened or made alive by the reuniting or joining together their glorified souls with their new glorified body. The spirit or soul has been with the Lord in Heaven. In this resurrection the spirit will take on his or her new body.
- B. The catching away (Gk. *harpazo*), often referred to as the Rapture, of those that are living, is the taking of the kingdom citizens. The idea is a forceful and irresistible taking. They will receive their new glorified bodies immediately (Philippians 3.21; 1 Corinthians 15.52).

4. The Rapture:

- A. Though the word rapture is not found in the Scripture, it is however, a word that has been adapted to clearly and accurately identify the taking or catching away of the body of believers also referred to as His Church.
- B. Every living Christian or believer anticipates the Rapture. Paul certainly set this example when he stated, "we who are alive and remain shall be caught up." He anticipated being part of the group of believers who would be caught up. In fact all of us would rather be changed in the twinkling of an eye than to have to face death (1 Corinthians 15.51-52).
- C. The Rapture will spare all of God's people from the impending tribulation that is facing the world. (More of this in the next lesson).