

Heaven and Its Eternal Blessings

by R. G. Lord

OUR information on this subject can only come from God through His Word, which gives us gleams of light on the subject such as we are capable of receiving in this present state, for we know but in part now (1 Cor. 13.12), and know nothing yet as we ought to know (1 Cor. 8.2); and mere idle curiosity remains, as always, ungratified. First, then, we ask the the question:

I. WHAT IS HEAVEN?

While many may regard it as a mere state of existence, it seems clear that, just as Hell is the place of the lost dead, to be later consigned to the Lake of Fire, Heaven is a *real place* also, for

1. It is the Habitation of God the Father.

"Look down from Heaven, and behold from the habitation of Thy holiness and of Thy glory" (Isa. 63.15). "Hear Thou in Heaven Thy dwelling place" (1 Kings 8.30,39,43,49). "If I ascend up into Heaven, Thou art there" (Psa. 139.8). "One is your Father, which is in Heaven" (Matt. 23.9).

2. It is the Home of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

"No man hath ascended up to Heaven, but He that came down from Heaven, even the Son of Man which is in Heaven" (John 3.13). Whether the Lord Jesus Himself spoke these words, or they form an explanation given by John, as some believe, in no wise affects the truth of our proposition; in either case, they are words of the Holy Ghost. Again, in John 6.38 the Lord Jesus states: "I came down from Heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me."

Whither He has returned. A host of Scriptures attest this fact. Perhaps the following will suffice as proof: "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into Heaven, and sat on the right hand of God" (Mark 16.19). "Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things" (Acts 3.21. See also Acts 2.34; Eph. 4.10; 1 Peter 3.22; John 20.17, etc.).

Whence He will come again. Paul appeals to the Philippian saints to walk as having him as an example, "For," says he, "our conversation is in Heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3.20), and the Thessalonian saints "turned to God from

idols to serve the living and true God, and wait for His Son from Heaven" (1 Thess. 1.10), for "the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, " etc. (1 Thess. 4.16).

3. It is the Home of God the Holy Ghost.

For John (the Baptist) bare record, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from Heaven like a dove" (John 1.32). And on that memorable Day of Pentecost, "there came a sound from Heaven...and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2.2,4) ; and "with the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven," was preached the Gospel to those whom Peter wrote in 1 Pet. 1.12.

4. It is the Home of the Living Creatures and of myriads of Holy, unfallen angels (Rev. 4.5).

"Beasts" is a somewhat unfortunate translation in the A.V., and the "living creatures" of the R. V., and other versions also, is preferable. They are possibly the same as the cherubim and seraphim. John tells us that the number of angels he beheld around the Throne in Heaven (Rev. 5.11) was one hundred million and millions besides! Blessed spirits, thus to be employed about the Throne, and still more blessed the ransomed Church of God to be on the Throne in union and association with its Risen Lord! And sad it is to think of the fallen angels revolted through and along with Satan, who ruined the third part of those created (Rev. 12.4,7,9), created for the glory of God, to be His ministers and do His pleasure (Psa. 103.21), which in eternal ages past they did, until corrupted by the fallen arch-enemy of God and man.

5. It Is the Eternal Home of the Redeemed of all ages.

We take it that from righteous Abel (Matt. 23.35) onwards, all along the line of faith, to the last soul saved by grace from this old sin-ruined world at the end of time will find their place in the glorious Heavenly Home above. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others all died in faith, having confessed themselves as strangers and pilgrims on the earth (Heb. 11.13), seeking a country, and desiring a better country, that is, a Heavenly, for God hath prepared for them a City (Heb. 11.16).

Just as there are thrones, dominions, principalities and powers among the angelic hosts, so will there be different ranks of redeemed saints, the Antediluvian saints, the Postdiluvian saints, the Church, the Tribulation saints, etc., and differing glories in each as one star differeth from another star in glory (1 Cor. 15.41). Transcendent beyond all, by grace alone, will all the ransomed Church of God, "from Him, for Him made," be one in and with Christ (John 17.21,22) sharing His acquired glory, and beholding His intrinsic eternal glory; no doubt, symbolised by the

crowned and throned four and twenty elders, sitting round about the Throne (Rev. 4.4).

II. WHERE, AND HOW FAR, IS HEAVEN?

Again many Scriptures from both Testaments give the situation of Heaven as "*above*." The children of Israel at the giving of the Law of Moses were forbidden to make any likeness of anything that is in Heaven *above* (Exod. 20.4). Rahab of Jericho confesses her belief: "The LORD your God, He is God in Heaven *above* and in earth beneath" (Josh. 2.11). Similarly the Lord Jesus says, "I am from *above*" (John 8.23). Paul speaks of the Jerusalem which is *above* (Gal. 4.26).

A little more precision as to the location of Heaven is given us in that remarkable passage in the prophecy of Isaiah (ch. 14.12-20), which deals with the fall of Lucifer, who is represented as saying (v.13): "I will ascend into Heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides *of the north*."

As to the interesting problem: How far is Heaven above, the abode of God over all, blessed for ever, it is impossible to estimate it in terms of distance. A Scripture bearing on the problem seems to be found in Daniel 9, where the prophet set his face to seek the Lord his God (vv. 3,4). Now, while he was speaking the angel Gabriel, being caused to fly swiftly, touched him and informed him at the beginning of his supplications, the commandment came forth and he was sent to show him, etc. (vv. 20-23), and then follows the celebrated prophecy of the seventy weeks. Now Daniel's prayer can be read through at a proper reading rate in about two and a half minutes, or 150 seconds. Hence an angel flying swiftly can come from Heaven to earth in that space of time.

Now, suppose the sun were Heaven, scientists estimate its distance from the earth to be roughly 93,000,000 miles, and the speed of light to be 186,000 miles per second. Hence a little simple division shows that the ray of light takes 500 seconds to reach the earth. But Gabriel accomplished the distance—remember our assumption of the sun being Heaven—in 150 seconds, hence he would have travelled at three and one-third times the speed of light, namely, 620,000 *miles per second*, a speed which staggers the human imagination! *But the sun is not Heaven*, it is far below it, for the light of the nearest fixed star takes seven *years* to reach the earth! Hence the distance of Heaven is entirely beyond human computation, and it appears as if time and space have barely existence in the realm of spirits. Does not Paul speak of "absent from the body, present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5.8), as if not a second's time separated the two spheres of the believer's existence?

III. WHAT ARE THE BLESSINGS OF HEAVEN?

Numbers of great and wondrous blessings are recorded in the pages of God's Word, but it would seem that God will delight in continually unfolding and bestowing fresh blessings upon the redeemed throughout all eternity, in the light of Eph. 2.7, "that in the Ages to Come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus." But we feel that every loyal and true-hearted believer in Christ will put at the head of the list:

1. Being with the Lord Jesus and Made Like unto Him.

"Where Jesus is, 'tis Heaven," and to be out of His presence would be no Heaven at all to the redeemed saint of God. But He has gone to prepare a Place in the many mansions for us, and He is Coming again to receive us unto Himself, that where He is, there we may be also (John 14.1-3). God in His gracious calling has pre-destinated the believer to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8.29), and we shall be made like Him *bodily*, "for He shall change our body of humiliation that it may be fashioned like to the body of His glory" (Phil. 3.21, R.V.), and *morally*, for "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3.2). The believer will every way be made capable of enjoying the company and presence of His blessed and glorified Lord, and His surroundings in eternity.

2. In Sharing His acquired Glory, and seeing His personal Inherent Glory.

Peter speaks of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow (1 Peter 1.11, R.V.). There are glories the Lord Jesus acquired as the result of His perfect obedience unto death on the Cross; these, through grace alone, He bestows on His people (John 17.22). But His inherent glory as Son of God, the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, can never be bestowed on saved sinners, but we shall be with Him where He is that we may behold it (John 17.24). Blessed be God, when Christ who is our life, shall be manifested, we also shall be manifested with Him—and in glory (Col. 3.4). Many other Scriptures bearing on this section of our subject, and indeed of all its sections, will readily occur to the minds of our readers.

3. Eternal Life and Eternal Inheritance there will be the believers' Portion.

For he is called unto an inheritance incorruptible, for it cannot be ruined or lost by death; undefiled, for it cannot be marred by sin; that fadeth not away—as all earthly things do sooner or later; for it is reserved in Heaven for him who is kept by the power of God unto salvation, ready

to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1.4,5. See also Acts 26.18; Col. 1.12; Rev. 1.7).

4. Freedom from Sin.

Sin will be a thing of the past in Heaven; yet the memory of redemption from it, eternally the source of praise (Rev. 1.5; 5.9, etc.). And hence there will be in Heaven what there cannot be now on earth, viz.,

5. We Shall have Reached Perfection.

Spiritually (Rom. 8.29; Rev. 22.4) ; bodily (1 John 3.2; Phil. 3.21; 1 Cor. 15.42-44), and intellectually (1 Cor. 13.12). Grand it is to contemplate that we, who know nothing yet as we ought to know, shall then know even as we are known, and shall then be so constituted that perfect knowledge will be accompanied by perfect humility, in contrast with this present earthly state, where our little knowledge tends to puff us up. And undoubtedly with perfect knowledge there will be perfect worship, perfect love, perfect holiness, and perfect service (Rev. 4.5; 22.3; 1 John 4.17; Eph. 5.27).

6. Freedom from All that Mars Earthly Life.

There shall be no more tears, no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying, no more pain, no more curse, no more night, no more sea (Rev. 21,22). When God wishes to give us poor mortals with all our earthly troubles, some idea of Heaven, He does so by telling us of a condition of things where all is removed that spoiled and blighted our life in this "valley of the shadow of death. "

7. There will be Reunion with, and Recognition of Our Loved Ones of Earth.

Aye, and not of them only, but of all God's own. The possession of perfect knowledge, too, would seem to indicate this. For Peter knew Moses and Elias "in the holy mount," though they had left this scene centuries before. Paul reminds bereaved saints of Thessalonica that sleeping saints would be raised, living ones changed, and both caught up together to be for ever with the Lord (1 Thess. 4). Wherefore, comfort one another (v. 18). Surely the essence of the comfort of reunion would be recognition of one another. Sower and reaper in the Lord's service shall rejoice together (John 4.36), and Paul describes his converts in Thessalonica as his hope, his joy, his crown in the presence of the Lord Jesus at His Coming (1 Thess. 2.19,20; See also Phil. 2.15,16; 2 Cor. 1.14). Mutual recognition, evidently.

In closing, may one remind readers that in that Home above, of life,

light, love, peace, joy, and glory beyond all human thought, shall enter the redeemed (Rev. 1.5,6; 5.9; 14.4), the undefiled (Rev. 21.27), and the enrolled (Luke 10.20; Phil. 4.1; Heb. 12.23); but not the unrighteous (1 Cor. 6.9,10), the fearful, and, above all, the unbelieving (Rev. 21.8). And does one ask, "What must I do to be in Heaven and share these things?" God's Word replies; "Believe in Christ" (John 3.16,17,36; 5.24; Acts 16.31, etc.). "Come," "Take," (Rev. 21.6; 22.17).

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