

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“Heaven: Our Eternal Home”

Hebrews 11:1-16

2006

Introduction

In the final hours of Jesus' earthly life, he gave his disciples something tangible to look forward to -- an actual place where they would go to be with him.

John 14:1-3 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And 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.”

As a result, the NT is filled with the early church's anticipation of Heaven:

1. Phil 1:21-24 “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.”
2. 2 Cor 5:6-9 “Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.”

The early church was sustained by the hope of Heaven through sufferings, persecutions, beatings, imprisonments and death. But if you asked the average Christian today, the answer to the question, “Where is Heaven and what will it be like?” is a mystery.

In the weeks ahead, I'm hoping to blow some more fog away so that you can see more clearly what the Bible actually teaches about Heaven: Where it is, who and what will be there, what life will be like, what it will be like to rule and reign with Christ, and what we will be doing for eternity.

But for our study today, I want to address the very simple and yet vital issue of Heaven's location.

I The Dimensions of Heaven

According to Jewish theology there were three dimensions to heaven. Paul alludes to this in 2 Cor 12:2, 4 when he testified to the church that “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven ... caught up to paradise.”

A. Earth's atmosphere

Heaven = Raqia` = "Firmament or expanse"

The pure and transparent expanse that envelops the globe our atmospheric sky, with its clouds and vapors and the whole visible expanse up to the region of the stars.

Gen 1:6-8 "And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the expanse [Firmament] and separated the water under the expanse [Firmament] from the water above it. And it was so. God called the expanse [Firmament] "sky."

B. The Starry Heaven

Heavens = Shamayim = "The home of the sun, moon, planets, and stars"

Jer 8:2 "... the sun and the moon and all the stars of the heavens ..."

C. The **dwelling** place of God

Heavens = Shemeey hashamayim = "The heavens of heavens or the 3rd Heaven"
The residence of God, of angels, and of the saints following the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Also known as:

1. Paradise

Paradise = Paradeisos = The Septuagint translation of "garden," a park and pleasure ground" (often associated with the Garden of Eden)

a. The thief on the cross

Luke 23:42-43 "Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

b. The place that Paul saw in his vision

2 Cor 12:3-4 "And I know that this man-whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows -- was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell."

c. The current location of the tree of life

Rev 2:7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

2. A high and holy place

Isa 57:15 "For this is what the high and lofty One says -- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite."

3. The place of God's throne

Acts 7:55-56 "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Rev 22:1-2 "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city."

II The Location of Heaven

People most often think of Heaven as the place where grandma and grandpa went when they died -- to a static, unchanging place. But the Bible indicates that Heaven is not static, but actually shifts location based on the presence of its primary residents -- God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The Bible teaches that Heaven had a past, it has a present (the intermediate state where believers are waiting for the return of Christ and the resurrection of the saints) and it will have a future (The eternal Heaven, or New Earth). The past, intermediate, and New Heaven can all be called Heaven, but they are not all the same.

A. The past Heaven

1. Abraham's Bosom

The expression occurs only in Luke 16:22-23, in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, to denote the place to which Lazarus was carried after his death.

The Jewish rabbis divided the state after death (Sheol) into a place for the righteous and a place for the wicked. Sheol was divided into two compartments. The righteous were held in a one half called paradise or Abraham's bosom. And the wicked were on the other side called Gehenna or hell awaiting final judgment.

Following the victorious resurrection of Christ from the dead, Jesus freed the captive believing saints of Abraham's Bosom and brought them into the glorious presence of the intermediate heaven. And since that time, NT believers who die in the faith are immediately translated into the presence of God's intermediate Heaven – the place that we think of as "up there somewhere".

B. The present Heavens:

1. The 3rd Heaven

This is usually what we think of when we think of Heaven. It is in the angelic realm, distinctly separate from earth, not our permanent home, but an Intermediate layover when we die until Christ's return to the earth, our bodily resurrection, the final judgment, and the creation of the New Heavens and the New Earth. It's not the place we'll live forever.

Illustration: Spiritual layover

Imagine that you lived in a homeless shelter in LA. One day you inherit a beautiful house overlooking Anini Beach on Kauai. You pack your bags and get on a plane in LA. On your flight to Lihue, you'll change planes in Honolulu, where you'll spend an afternoon. Some family members you haven't seen in years, will meet you at the Honolulu airport. You'll spend some time together, then board the plane together for Lihue.

Now, when the LA ticket agent asks you, "What's your destination?" would you say "Oahu"? No. You would say Kauai, because that's your final or ultimate destination. If you mentioned Honolulu at all, you would only say, "I'm going to Kauai *by way of* Honolulu."

Similarly, we are going to the New Earth, by way of the intermediate Heaven where we will have a brief layover on our way to the eternal Heaven prepared for us.

3. The **Millennial** Kingdom - Rev 20

This refers to a period of a thousand years foretold in Revelation 20 when Satan will be temporarily bound during the millennium, and those who have been faithful to Jesus, who have not worshiped the Antichrist and were martyred for their faith will rule and reign with Jesus on Earth.

After the 1,000 years is complete, Satan will be released to deceive the nations followed by the Battle of Armageddon against Christ and His people. But fire will devour them and Satan will be cast into the lake of fire forever, the earth will be purified by fire and then the final judgment will take place after which God will create a New Heaven and New Earth.

B. The **future** Heaven: The New Earth

Rev 21:1-3 "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I 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."

We will be with Him, resurrected people living with the resurrected Christ.

Physically resurrected people need a physical place to live. *That physical place will be the New Earth.* God will come down from His place in the 3rd Heaven to live with us on the New Earth. That's the place He's preparing for us.

We've heard it said, "This world is not our home." It's true, but it's a half truth. We should qualify it to say "This world—as it now is, under the curse—is not our home."

But we should also say, “This world—as it once was, before sin and curse—was our home.” And we should add, “This world—as it one day will be, delivered from the curse—will be our home.”

This New Earth is also known in the scriptures as:

1. The "eternal kingdom" - 2 Pet. 1:11
2. The place Jesus is preparing for us - Jn 14:2-3
3. The "eternal inheritance" of the saints - 1 Pet. 1:4; Heb. 9:15
4. The "better country" - Heb. 11:14, 16
5. The city whose architect and builder is God - Heb 11:10

1. The objections to a renewed New Earth

Most of us picture Heaven as completely immaterial -- floating on clouds as disembodied spirits. Why?

a. **Misconceptions**: From the world, false religions, and media

b. Platonism

Plato, the Greek philosopher who lived from 427-347 B.C., taught that material things, including the human body and the earth, are inherently evil, while immaterial things such as the soul and Heaven are inherently good.

Plato concluded, therefore, that it was absurd to think of Heaven as having physical properties.

c. Gnosticism: 1st-3rd Century Church

The early church was infiltrated the destructive hearsay of Platonism via a false teaching called Gnosticism – coming from the Greek word Gnosis, which means knowledge. The Gnostics were immersed in a Plato’s Greek philosophy (also called dualism) with a resulting belief that anything physical was evil and incompatible with anything spiritual. As a result, they argued against:

1. The incarnation of Jesus Christ
2. The idea of a physical Heaven, and therefore, unknowable.

Because of this influence, many Christians resist the biblical picture of a bodily resurrection of the dead and life on the new Earth; of eating and drinking in heaven; of walking and talking, living in dwelling places, traveling down streets, and going through gates from one place to another, and of ruling, working, playing, and engaging in earthly culture.

2. The evidence for a **renewed** New Earth

Question: Will the present earth and the entire universe be utterly destroyed, and recreated from scratch? Or will the original universe be renewed and

transformed into the new one? At first glance, some Scriptures seem to answer "utterly destroyed."

Ps 102:25-26 "In the beginning 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. Like clothing you will **change** them and they will be **discarded**."

Luke 21:33 "Heaven and earth will **pass away**, but my words will never pass away."

2 Peter 3:10 "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will **disappear** with a roar; the elements will be **destroyed** by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be **laid bare**."

These phrases appear to indicate total destruction. But upon close examination in the Greek, all these words indicate temporary destruction that is reversed through resurrection and restoration. Even as the flood appeared to destroy the earth, but led to its revitalization, the fire will also purify the earth for its glorious renewal and resurrection.

a. The "**Bookend**" plan of God

Gen 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Rev 21:1 "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away ..."

Eden, was a temporary nursery for the human family: from there people, if they had remained innocent, would have spread out in every direction until the whole earth became "the garden of the Lord." God's purpose, though deferred, will, in His own time, be realized by the Second Adam, the Lord Jesus from heaven.

b. The biblical principle of continuity

Continuity = "The uninterrupted succession or flow"

Gen 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Isa 65:17 "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth."

2 Peter 3:13 "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

Rev 21:1 "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away ..."

c. The pattern of Biblical **redemption**

1. Noah and the flood - Gen 6-9

2 Peter 3:3-7 "First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of

creation." But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men."

2. God's dealings with Israel - Rom 11
3. The first and second Adam - 1 Cor 15:44-49

d. The Bible's **all**-inclusive language

Matt 19:28-29 "Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the **renewal of all things**, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Acts 3:21 "He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to **restore everything**, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets."

Col 1:19-20 "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to **reconcile to himself all things**, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

Eph 1:9-10 "And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment -- **to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.**"

Usually when we think of the resurrection, we think only in terms of our physical bodies. But when Christ returns, God's agenda is not only to resurrect our bodies, but also to resurrect the Heavens and the Earth.

e. The Bible's choice of adjectives

1. The New Earth in the Old Testament:

a. Beriy'ah = "To **create** new" - Num 16:30

b. Chadash = "To rebuild, **renew**, or repair"

Isa 65:17 "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind."

2. The New Earth in the New Testament:

a. Neos = "New **chronologically**" - Heb12:4

b. Kainos = "New **freshness**"

2 Cor 5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new [Kainos] creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Rev 21:1 "Then I saw a new heaven and a new [Kainos] earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away ..."

Quote: Swete

“Fresh life rising from the decay and wreck of the old world”

The new earth will be righteous, and that’s the heart of its newness— no more sin and curse and death. It will be earth as God meant it to be. It will be this same earth, but this same earth transformed into something new and far more wonderful than we could ever imagine.

f. The refusal of God to give Satan ground

Col 2:15 “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

If our existing world had to be utterly destroyed, then Satan would have permanently defeated God's original intention, design and creation.

g. The eager **expectation** of the Creation

Rom 8:18-24 “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 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 and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Expectation = Elpis = “To anticipate with pleasure, expectation and confidence”

The power of Christ's resurrection is enough not only to redeem and restore our bodies, but also to remake every inch of the universe— mountains, rivers, plants, animals, stars, nebulae, quasars, and galaxies. Christ's redemptive work extends resurrection to the far reaches of the universe.

h. The Lamb’s claim to Earth’s Title **Deed** - Rev 5:1-2

Rev 5:1-2 “Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?”

The occupation of the land was an important part of God's plan for man. Abraham and his descendants were promised a land, and Israel enjoyed the partial blessings of that land. The land of Israel was also designed to foreshadow God’s final plan to restore mankind to a renovated planet earth.

Conclusion

Heb 11:13-16 “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 ... 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.”

Are you longing for a better country? If you love Jesus, and you long for God’s country, Heaven, then God is not ashamed to be called your God...and he has prepared a city for you.

2 Peter 3:8-14 “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.”

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