

FOUNDATION OF FAITH!
HEAVEN AND HELL
PART 2

This morning in our Foundation of Faith series we are in part 2 of our study of Heaven and Hell. Last week we looked at Hell and we saw that it was a real place and all those that reject Jesus Christ will go there until the Great White Throne Judgment and then they will be cast into the Lake of Fire for eternity! This is no joke and Jesus spent a lot of His teaching on this issue of Hell because it is that important. He gave us a very disturbing picture of what Hell is like and He meant it. And, as we saw, God does not send anyone to Hell; you go there because you choose to by your rejection of the life that God has given to you through Jesus Christ!

In fact, last week we closed our study with these words. No one who is ever in Hell will be able to say to God, “You put me here,” and no one who is in Heaven will ever be able to say, “I put myself here.” How true that is!

This morning we are going to finish up this study by looking at Heaven and seeing what that is all about, what the Scriptures have to say. Again, this is a difficult concept to grasp, Heaven, but maybe this will help. There was this young boy who stood on this hillside, a very windy hillside, flying his kite.

He continued to release the string attached to the kite and it kept going up higher and higher until it was completely out of site! One of his friends walked up and asked how he knew that there was still a kite on the other end of the string. He replied, “I know it’s there. I feel it tugging on the line.” How true that is for us. Just like the kite, we can’t see Heaven but we surely can feel it tugging at our souls!

Remember what Paul said in Philippians 3:20-21, **“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”**

If you did not get that listen to how this paraphrase reads this verse. It says, **“We have our home in heaven, and here on earth we are a colony of heaven’s citizens.”** May we never forget that fact, that this is not our home, we are aliens and strangers in this land, we are just passing through and one day we will be home with our Lord! Where will we go? We will go to Heaven, the place where God dwells!

Now before we talk about what Heaven is, we need to talk about what Heaven is not because there have been several books out there written by people who said that they have been to Heaven and returned. Lot’s of frequent flyer miles on that one I bet! Now I don’t want to make you mad at me if you feel that what they are saying in these books is true. But I don’t think that what they are saying is true and I will show you why. If you still don’t agree with me, that is between you and the Lord but look at what they have written and what the Scriptures have to say. That is the key!

Now please understand that I am not saying that they did not experience these things, what I am saying is that they are not of God. Make no mistake about it, Satan is a master deceiver and the only way we can tell the truth from a lie is from the Bible. Experiences, as real as they may be are just that and if they contradict what God’s Word has to say, the experience is wrong.

Think about being in a desert without water and you see a mirage of this beautiful lake in the middle of the desert. It is real to you, your mind tells you it is real, but it is not. And the same is true many times of these experiences of people who have claimed to have gone to Heaven. And as you will see, some of the things they say are amazing and then some of the things they say contradict the Word of God! Just because it is amazing, beyond human reason or understanding, does not mean it is of God. Remember that fact!

The first book is – *Have Heart: Bridging the Gulf Between Heaven and Earth*. This book was written by Steve and Sarah Berger, a couple who suffered the tragic loss of their 19-year-old son Josiah who was killed in 2009 in an auto accident. And the book deals with the things that God had shown them through this loss. I personally can't imagine what they have gone through and are going through. Now they do say often that their concern in writing this book is to proclaim God's truth. But . . .

. . . midway through *Take Heart*, the Bergers take leave of their statements regarding the objective Word of God and begin introducing their subjective experiences involving their deceased son, Josiah. Dreams become a vehicle of communication between Josiah and his family and friends: "And then one night, Josiah showed up in a dream" (p. 69). In that episode, Josiah cryptically communicated that he was "pickled," i.e., his term for his life being preserved in heaven. "He [God] used a dream in my life to further unfold the greatness of Heaven, to reinforce the supernatural preservation of my son . . ." (p. 71).

Communication through dreams featuring a deceased loved one quickly led to direct communication: “Only two weeks after Josiah went to Heaven, I (Sarah) made it a habit to talk to Josiah . . . I would then be in instant conversation with Jesus and Siah [Josiah]” (p. 82).

Sarah declared to her son that she needed “to be involved with your life even now . . . and I want to be involved in what you are doing” (p. 82). She then pleads with God to allow that to take place. Supposedly, God answered Sarah through the dream of an unbeliever, a Muslim friend of the family. Others supplied details of Josiah’s “job” in heaven through their own dreams.

The authors introduce many things that are allegedly taking place in heaven that are not specifically taught in the Bible. “Are our loved ones in Heaven able to occasionally see things that are happening on earth? . . . Do the saints intercede for people who are going through hard times? Yes - they know what is happening, as much as God allows, and they are praying for us!” (p. 76). Although the authors intend to comfort people with their insights, they don’t seem to be thinking the process through. Knowing what loved ones are doing on earth - perhaps in rebellion and sin - would certainly bring grief to those in heaven, a place of consummate [complete] joy. They seem to recognize that problem yet address it with another extra-biblical assessment: “It’s not all the time; they don’t get to see everything. But every once in a while the Lord grants them permission to look on this earth, and based on what they see, they intercede on our behalf.” Where is that found in Scripture? . . .

One of the dangers of this book for a person who doesn't study the Word of God for himself (which is epidemic today) is that he is disarmed by the multiple claims of biblical veracity, which give way to human speculations - which are then accepted as biblical truth. With no scriptural support, the Bergers write, "We know that [Josiah] can see us, hear us, and even be involved, not only in our lives but also in the lives of his friends. We are continually hearing of Siah coming to friends in dreams. . . . The dreams are incredibly profound and always prove God's Word, point to the glory of God, and compel us to get closer to Jesus" (p. 104). They add, "We mean no disrespect to the prophets, but the idea of Siah being able to observe the choices we make here on earth is *way more motivating* as we seek to live for God moment-by-moment. The cloud of witnesses [of "Christian loved ones in Heaven"] is personal, and we believe it is part of their work in the spiritual realm to cheer on their loved ones still on earth. . ." (p. 107; italics added). . . . [See Hebrews 1:1-3. God spoke through them and He speaks to us today through Jesus, the Word of God.]

In contradiction to the biblical counsel the authors give at the beginning of their book, in the end they not only capitulate to a view that disagrees with the Bible but they promote it enthusiastically: "Our loved ones may show up in dreams or visits or other ways (who can limit God's imagination?), but the fact is that we're connected. . . . There is a thin veil, and we're connected to them, forever, in Christ" (p. 110). They conclude, "You don't father or mother a child for nineteen years and then hear God say, 'Oh, now you can't talk to him. You no longer have a relationship with him until you see him face to face in Heaven. . . .' We still talk to Josiah, and it's going to be so great when we're together again" (p. 125).

Again, I can't imagine the pain and hurt that they are going through but we cannot let that move us away from the truths of God found in the Word of God. In Deuteronomy 18:10-14 we are told about speaking to the dead, "**There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God. For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not appointed such for you.**"

And in Isaiah 8:19-20 we are told, "**And when they say to you, 'Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,' should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.**"

I think that is pretty clear and yet, it does seem like this family has had contact with Josiah. So how can that be? It is very simple, Paul reminds us in II Corinthians 11:13-15, **“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”** And thus, the only way not to be deceived is to place everything in the light of God’s Word!

If I haven’t offended you yet, hang on, this one should do it. There is just one more book I want to look at and show you how this person, or should I say young child’s visit to Heaven is not Scriptural! And there are many more out there today, but let’s focus on this one. The book is called – Heaven is for Real and it is an account of a three-year-old boy who believes he went to Heaven. The story is told by the boy’s father who is an evangelical pastor and it was written in 2010 and made the New York Times Best-Sellers list. Many Christians have read this book and feel it is great, encouraging, it blessed them. I find that interesting, I wonder if they feel the same way about the Word of God?

Again, I am not saying that this boy did not experience something, but what I am saying is that this is just a false experience; it is not of God because it contradicts the Word of God! That has to be our key, our plume line you might say to determine what is right and what is wrong! We are told . . .

That experience took place when three-year-old Colton was undergoing emergency surgery for a ruptured appendix. Not too long afterward, he told his parents that he saw them praying for him outside the operating room. When they asked how he knew what they had been doing he said, “Cause I could see you. . . . I went up out of my body and I was looking down and I could see the doctor working on my body. [Scripture tells us that death takes place when the spirit vacates the body. Yet there was no medical report of a clinical death during Colton’s surgery.] And I saw you and Mommy. You were in a little room by yourself, praying; and Mommy was in a different room, and she was praying and talking on the phone” (pp. xx-xxi). The accuracy of Colton’s disclosure rocked his parents to the core. But that was just the beginning of revelations that far and away defy natural explanations.

Colton’s other revelations included: angels singing “Jesus Loves Me” to him; his sitting on Jesus’ lap; meeting John the Baptist and the angel Gabriel; petting Jesus’ rainbow-colored horse; his descriptions of Jesus’ wounds and attire, including a crown with a pink diamond that Jesus wore; the prevalence of kids in Heaven; his description of everyone there having wings like the angels - all except Jesus, that is; his being recognized by his great grandfather, who died decades before Colton was born; and the description of God as “really, really big.”

Although most of Colton's observations in Heaven are not outside the realm of possibility of what *could* take place there, they are nevertheless extra-biblical insights and information, some being more problematic than others. For example, Colton explains that "Everyone kind of looks like angels in heaven," sporting wings (the size of which are dependent on the individual's size) and a halo. Since the resurrection of believers' transformed physical bodies has yet to take place, their form now in Heaven must lack physical attributes. Hence the need for wings of whatever size makes no sense. Moreover, other than the descriptive visions of the heavenly creatures known as cherubim and seraphim and the decorative designs in the Temple and upon the Mercy Seat, angels that appear to humanity are never described as having wings.

Many supporters of the book claim that any and all objections pale in the face of the supernatural knowledge that Colton reveals - things that were humanly impossible for him to know. For example, he said that he had met his other sister in Heaven. When told by his mother that Cassie was his only sister, his shocking response was, "No. . . . I have two sisters. You had a baby die in your tummy, didn't you?" (p. 94). Colton had never been told of the "painful episode" of the miscarriage, and his parents never knew the gender of the fetus. Colton added, "In heaven, this little girl ran up to me, and she wouldn't stop hugging me. . . . She said she just can't wait for you and Daddy to get to heaven" (p. 96). That revelation seemed to be the most convincing for Colton's parents that their son had indeed visited Heaven: "We had wanted to believe that our unborn child had gone to heaven. Even though the Bible is largely silent on this point, we had accepted it on faith. But now, we had an eyewitness: a daughter we had never met was waiting eagerly for us in eternity" (p. 97).

Was Colton truly an *eyewitness* in Heaven to everything he described? Much of it is quite mindboggling, notwithstanding the fact that *all of it* is extra-biblical. Yet it provides alleged insights about Heaven; e.g., a girl dies as a fetus, grows into a little girl in heaven, and then is eagerly awaiting her parents' arrival. What if one or both parents reject the gospel? Would there then be disappointment in a place of perfect bliss? . . .

At the time and in the years following Colton's experience, his dad was very interested in having him describe Jesus. He wrote that "as a pastor, I wound up spending a lot of time at hospitals, in Christian bookstores, and at other churches - all places where there are lots of drawings and paintings of Christ. . . . When we came across a picture of Jesus we'd ask Colton, 'What about this one? Is that what Jesus looks like?'" (p. 93).

Time after time, Colton would reject the dozens of misrepresentations. Then, nearly three years after Colton's surgery, he was shown a portrait of Jesus painted by a young girl named Akiane, who also claims to have visited Heaven beginning at the age of four. Colton's reaction was, "Dad, that one's right." His confirmation convinced his father: "Knowing how many pictures Colton had rejected, Sonja [his mother] and I finally felt that in Akiane's portrait, we'd seen the face of Jesus. Or at least a startling likeness" (p. 145).

Here's the thing, if God is silent on something, we must be careful not to add to God's Word or take away from God's Word. Satan is a master deceiver as I have said and if something does not line up with God's Word, then it is not of God. In one part of this book Colton describes Jesus helping him with his homework in Heaven. I hope we don't have homework in Heaven, I thought I was done with that! Heaven is a place of worship, the worship of God not a place of homework.

And I hate to be blunt, but if what someone is saying is not true, then what is it? It is a lie! Folk's, no matter how real an experience may seem to us, no matter how much information is given to us, no matter how detailed it may be, if it does not come in line with God's Word then it is an illegitimate experience. God's Word has to be our final authority. And I don't believe that these people are malicious in their motives but if they are not speaking the truth, then they are leading people into deceptive thinking about God, about Heaven and-so-on. So with the rest of our time this morning, we are going to be looking at what Heaven is, what the Bible has to say about Heaven!

And that really is the key to all of this. It is not "What does my church say about Heaven?" or "What does this person say about Heaven?" it truly is "What does the Bible say about Heaven?" that really matters!

First of all Heaven is a real place and not just a state of mind. Let me explain. We are told in Isaiah 66:1, “**Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?’**” God dwells in a literal place called Heaven!

Remember as Jesus was teaching us how to pray in Matthew 6:9 and He said, “**In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.**”

Where is the Father? He is in Heaven, again, a literal place!

And listen to what Peter tells us of Jesus, where He is at in I Peter 3:22, “**who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.**” God’s dwelling place is in Heaven even though His presence fills the universe!

Now where is Heaven located? That is a great question and there are many views, but the Bible speaks of three heavens. Again, let me explain. The first heaven is the atmosphere where birds fly. We see this illustrated for us in Matthew 6:26, “**Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?**” Again, we might call this the first heaven or expanse.

The second heaven is the stellar heaven where the planets, moons, and stars are. In Matthew 24:29 Jesus tells us, “**Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.**” We can call this the second heaven or the realm of space!

And the third heaven is the place where God dwells! We see this spoken of by Paul in II Corinthians 12:2-6, **“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago - whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows - such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man - whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows - how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.”** This third Heaven is the place where God dwells and the destiny of the righteous!

Now let me just make a few points here on what Paul has said here in II Corinthians chapter 12. First of all why does Paul speak in the third person here when he is speaking of himself? I believe it is that Paul did not want to bring himself glory. Can we know for certain that Paul is speaking of himself here? I believe we can because in II Corinthians 12:7 Paul speaks in the first person and it relates back to these verses we have just read.

Now what in the world is Paul speaking of here? Paul could be speaking of the time he was stoned and left for dead in Lystra, (Acts 14:19), we don't know for sure. Here's the thing, when Paul was **“caught up”** or HARPAZO in the Greek, he wasn't sure if he had died and gone to Heaven or was alive and went to Heaven. In either case, he was in the third Heaven, the place where God dwells as we have seen!

God did allow Paul to experience this and thus, why doesn't it happen today or does it happen? Again, you have to take what the person is saying and put it alongside the Word of God.

The problem today as you listen to some who have these so-called "near-death-experiences" is they have no problem speaking of what they saw, boasting about it, writing books, being on television shows and-so-on. But not Paul, what he heard could not be expressed in human words; it would take away from the beauty.

Think of it like this, how do you explain the beauty of a sunset to someone who is blind? You can try but words can't express the beauty of what is seen with the eyes. The "super-apostles" or false teachers had no problem boasting in what they saw, but Paul could not boast for it would bring him glory and take the glory away from God! You see, Paul is saying, "Don't judge me by the revelation I have received but the life I live for Christ. Let my actions speak louder than my words!"

And many times with these "near-death-experiences" you have even the unsaved talking about the beauty, the warmth, the light. But apart from Christ the Bible says that they will die in their sins, they will not enter into Heaven. And why would they want to when they rejected the One who is on the throne, the One who is to be worshiped there! Also, many times they never speak of Jesus or if they do it contradicts what the Scriptures have to say! Thus, this third Heaven is the place where God dwells!

So where is Heaven? We cannot say exactly where Heaven is but it is above us, and we can say that with certainty! Jesus ascended up into Heaven. In Acts 1:9-11 we are told, **“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.’”**

Two important points we see here. The first point is that Jesus was taken up into Heaven and thus, Heaven is above. Secondly, He is coming again from Heaven. Just as He went up He is coming down for His Bride, the Church, and then He will come in Judgment at the end of the Tribulation Period!

Now in saying all that, how do we know that Heaven is real? Because we believe it by faith, because the Bible tells us it is a real place and not just a state of mind. It is not located here on earth as some like to think!

Heaven is the place where God dwells, where the angels dwell and where all believers dwell! It is the place where God’s throne is located and the Father and the Son sit upon these thrones and are worshiped day and night! The Holy Spirit is there also!

Now we see this in Revelation chapter 4, starting in verse 1 as John tells us, **“After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.’ Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!’ Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: ‘You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.’”** Revelation 4:1-11.

God the Father's throne is in Heaven and Jesus is seated at the right and of the Father! I think that is very clear! Now John does not give to us a description of the Father but he gives to us a picture of His glory, that which radiates from His life. John describes the brilliant colors that emanate from Him. In Psalm 104:1-2 we are told, "**Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty, Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment, Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain.**" You see, this represents the glory of the invisible God for light is used figuratively as it speaks of the holiness and purity of God, that there is no darkness in Him at all!

Now this emerald or green rainbow around the throne of God is not just a half circle. You see, that word for "**around**" is the Greek word IRIS and it literally means halo. So this emerald rainbow makes a complete circle around the throne of God. What does that mean? Again, look at the Scriptures and see where a rainbow is first mentioned because that is the definition of the word, biblically speaking, it is called the law of first mention.

The first time we see a rainbow mentioned in the Bible is when the Lord put one in the sky after the flood as a sign or covenant that He will never destroy the world by a flood. The green emerald is also seen in the breastplate of the high priest representing the tribe of Judah, which means praise. What tribe was Jesus from? He is called the lion from the tribe of Judah! Thus, this emerald rainbow encircled around the throne of God speaks of His eternal covenant with us. You see, as we believe Jesus to be our Lord and Savior God's judgment passes us by and God's mercy is poured out upon us, which causes us to praise Him!

Not only do we see God the Father sitting on this throne but we also see the Holy Spirit represented by the seven lamps of fire. I see here a picture of the seven-branched oil-burning lamp that stood to the left side of the tabernacle, in the Holy Place just outside the Holy of Holies. This lighted the way to the presence of God and it is the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes and brings us to Jesus. The seven spirits represent the manifold working or the complete working of the Holy Spirit. Thus, we see God the Father sitting on the throne, the Holy Spirit around the throne, but where is Jesus? He is revealed to us in Revelation chapter 5, but He is in Heaven, seated now, but He will come and take the scroll out of the Fathers hand!

Now the lightning and thundering and voices could represent the judgment of God that is about to be poured out upon a Christ rejecting world described here in the book of Revelation!

And we see that Heaven is filled with the worship of God, from the four living creatures, to the angels, to the saints that are in Heaven! Make no mistake about it; Heaven is a place of worship, the worship of the true and living God. In Psalm 29:1-2 we are told, **“Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones, Give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.”**

And here in Revelation we see these angelic beings worship the Lord by saying **“Holy, holy, holy”** which speaks of the Triune God. You see, these creatures are totally overwhelmed by the beauty of His holiness and their worshiping Him, their action, represents it. They not only declare the holiness of God in their worship of Him but His power. In Jeremiah 51:15 we are told, **“He has made the earth by His power; He has established the world by His wisdom, And stretched out the heaven by His understanding.”** And they sing of His eternal existence, as Psalm 90:2 tells us, **“Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.”** That is our God and He deserves our worship and thus, Heaven is filled with the worship of Him!

What a glorious place heaven is and John gives to us a glimpse of what it is. Now keep in mind that with all the beauty of Heaven, Heaven is nothing apart from the Lord! Never lose sight of that fact!

And Heaven is the place for believers, as I have said. Jesus points this out to us in John 14:2-3, **“In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”** That must have comforted them and it should bring us great comfort also!

Jesus is saying that He has gone back to Heaven and He is preparing for us a mansion, not a literal building to dwell in, but a new body. Why in the world do we need new bodies?

Paul put it this way when he said in II Corinthians 5:1-8, **“For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”**

First of all flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, Heaven, because these bodies of flesh need to be redeemed! Right now our spirit and our soul reside in this body of flesh. We might call it a tent or a temporary dwelling place, but one day, when this body goes back to the dust of the earth, our spirit and our soul will inhabit a mansion, a new body, a body that will never fade away, it will never fall apart or get sick, it is an eternal body! And we will receive these bodies when the Lord comes back for His Bride, the Church in the Rapture.

Right now, to be absent from the body, when we die or as the Scriptures speak of believers, they go to sleep, we are present with the Lord. Our spirit and soul is with the Lord awaiting our new glorified bodies!

Now, after the Tribulation Period, after the thousand-year reign of Christ or the Millennial reign of Christ on this earth, there will be a short rebellion as Satan is loosed for a season and then all those who rebelled with him, and all those who have rejected Jesus will be judged in the Great White Throne Judgment and then we come to the eternal state!

All believers will enter into this eternal state with the Lord and we will always be with Him. And what I find interesting is that in Revelation 21:1-5 we see Heaven descend upon the earth and the Lord creates a new Heaven and a new earth with a New Jerusalem and we are told; **“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.’ Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ And He said to me, ‘Write, for these words are true and faithful.’”**

Now please understand that God is not going to refurbish the Heavens and the earth, but He is going to create a new one! The Hebrew word for “**created**” is BARA and it means to call into existence from nothing or to make something out of nothing. Folks, only God can do that! What man can do is take existing materials and assemble them together. Thus, the Hebrew word ASAH means “to make” and YATSAR means “to form.”

Now, does the Bible speak of this taking place? You bet it does! Keep in mind that the Greek word that John used for “**new**” here in Revelation 21:1 is KAINOS and it speaks of being new in a qualitative sense. This is something that is brand new, completely new! Now, let me give you some Old Testament scriptures to show you what I mean, that this will take place.

In Isaiah 65:17-18 we are told, “**For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, And her people a joy.**” Also, we are told in Isaiah 66:22, “**For as the new heavens and the new earth Which I will make shall remain before Me,’ says the LORD, ‘So shall your descendants and your name remain.’**” What I want you to notice is that the word “**create**” in Isaiah chapter 65 is the same Hebrew word found in Genesis 1:1, BARA or God will create a new Heavens and a new earth from nothing, or He will not use any existing materials!

Then what happens to the present heaven and earth? Poof! I guess that is not an exact quote, but Peter tells us in II Peter 3:10-13, **“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”** You see, God will burn up this earth, you might say a thermal nuclear explosion as God lets go and all the energy in the universe goes up in smoke – *POOF* like I said!

Also, this is not the old city of Jerusalem, nor is it the city of Jerusalem where the Lord will reign in the Millennial Kingdom. This is a New Jerusalem, prepared by God and to be the center of the new heavens and the new earth. Paul, in Hebrews 12:22-24, **“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.”**

Thus, it would seem that this New Jerusalem may be in heaven today waiting to come down into the new heavens and the new earth. And some believe, as I do, that this is God's dwelling place right now, and it will come down and be joined with the New Heaven and New Earth! In fact, Paul said in Galatians 4:26, "**but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.**"

As we look at our lives on this earth, our failures, it is easy to become discouraged. Will we take that with us to heaven? When we look at family and friends who have rejected Jesus as their Lord and Savior, it is sad. Will we take that with us to heaven? Not at all, can you imagine entering eternity with tears, sadness, remorse and-soon? That would be horrible, but it will never happen. It is as we are told in Isaiah 65:17, "**For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.**" You see, the things of the past will be gone as we live in the present with our Lord in the New Jerusalem. This is the eternal state where there will be no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying, no more pain, no more tears – what a glorious time that will be!

Here, in verse 5, from the throne of God we see God speaking to John. And this announcement is in the present tense, "**I make all things new.**" It is as Paul said in II Corinthians, "**Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. . . . Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.**" II Corinthians 4:16, 5:17.

And we need to understand that when God says this He means it, not that it will be new, but that it will stay new. What does that mean? It is as Henry Morris tells us, “Presumably this means not only that everything will be made new, but also that everything will stay then new. The entropy law will be ‘replaced’ nothing will wear out or decay, and no one will age or atrophy anymore.” Once again I long for that day and I bet you do too! And John is told to write these words down, they are faithful, this will all come to pass as God will dwell with His people in the New Jerusalem, on this New Heaven and Earth for eternity!

And you can read in Revelation chapter 22 of some of the description of this place, but it will be wonderful, it will be beautiful, our Lord will be there and there is nothing more that we will need and yet, He makes all things beautiful for us to enjoy!

As I bring this study to a close, we have seen that Heaven is a real place and last week we saw that Hell is a real place. Once we die or our spirit separates from our body, we step through that eternal doorway and our fate is sealed! It is appointed only once for man to die and then comes the judgment. There is no reincarnation, no purgatory, no total annihilation, there is only Heaven and Hell and the choice you make today will determine your eternity, where it will be spent! And folk’s, none of us know when we will die, all we can say is the death rate is one per person and we are 100% sure of that!

Jesus came to give to us life, abundant life here and now and we can know where we are going when we die. I know that may shock some of you but it is exactly what the Bible teaches us. In John 5:24 Jesus said, **“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”** And the writer of the Gospel of John, in his epistle, tells us the very same thing, **“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”** I John 5:13.

People want to know what they have to do to have eternal life, and the answer is simple. Jesus tells us to “Pay attention” to “Listen carefully and get this straight!” If you want everlasting life you must not only hear the Words of God, but believe them and what they teach, that Jesus is the Messiah, our Savior. You must receive Him into your life to obtain this everlasting life, that abundant life that is only found in Him!

And the wonderful thing is that we can know that we have eternal life, we don't have to guess, we don't have to hope! If we believe that Jesus is Lord and Savior, if we receive Him into our lives, we can be assured that we have eternal life! What peace that brings. And the reason we can have assurance of our salvation is because it is not dependent upon us, we can't work our way into Heaven. It is based on the finished work of Jesus on the cross of Calvary for us and we can rest in that. He is faithful and He completed the work, we only must receive that by faith!

It is so simple, if you are in Christ, if you are saved, you will have that abundant life, that everlasting life, that eternal life. But, apart from Him, if Jesus is not your Lord and Savior, you will not have that abundant life but your eternity will be in the Lake of Fire enduring the punishment of God for your sins because you refused the pardon for your sins that is only found in Christ!

These are real places, Heaven and Hell and it is your choice where you will spend eternity! It is as this story illustrates for us,

One day, when Vice President Calvin Coolidge was presiding over the Senate, one Senator angrily told another to go “straight to hell.” The offended Senator complained to Coolidge as presiding officer, and Cal looked up from the book he had been leafing through while listening to the debate. “I’ve been looking through the rule book,” he said. “you don’t have to go.”

- Crossroads, Issue No. 7, p. 16

We may not be able to see Heaven but God has given us a glimpse in His Word and we feel the tugging on our soul, we know it is there! Let me close with these words for you to think about. We closed our last study with them and I think it is important that we hear them again! No one who is ever in Hell will be able to say to God, “You put me here,” and no one who is in Heaven will ever be able to say, “I put myself here.”