

HEAVEN:
The Place of Everlasting Paradise!
Scripture: Genesis 2:8-17

INTRO: Last week, after the message, I got a ticket from my five year old grandson. I couldn't make out the writing, but apparently it said I had used some bad words during the message. So, my apologies. Today we must change that.

In this series of messages we have looked at hell, the place of everlasting punishment. We now have the great privilege of looking at the complete opposite; what I have called, "Heaven: The Place of Everlasting Paradise". We have seen already that not only does the teaching of hell exist in seed form in the law and the prophets and the Psalms, it exists in the first 3 chapters of the Bible! But we can go even further and say that the teaching of an everlasting paradise is taught in all three of these great sections of the OT.

In Genesis 2:17 God warned Adam that if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die the day they ate of it. That of course is spiritual death, the picture of hell in seed form. But in verse 16 the Lord said that of all the other trees they might freely eat and included in that is the tree of life. There is paradise in seed form. Check out what spiritual life refers to throughout the Bible and it leads to one conclusion: everlasting paradise!

But a problem entered after man sinned. Since Adam sinned, death came upon all mankind (Rom. 5:12-21). So, let us turn to Genesis three and read some of the saddest words ever recorded (3:22-24). What happened to the Garden of Eden, we do not know, but I have some of the very best news for you in this series of messages. Paradise will be restored!

It may be that in this series I will destroy your view of heaven almost entirely, and I trust you will thank me for it. And then I will replace that view, with what I think is a much more Biblical view. It has taken me years to become bold enough to express my findings over the years in messages like this. I trust in this series your view of heaven will be replaced by a new view of paradise, and that it will leave you much more satisfied than your former view.

I ask one thing of you. When you find me going beyond Scripture, would you please correct me with Scripture?

I. METHOD OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION

Now, before we get into a study of that which the believer experiences after death, we must settle something very important. It is this: What is the right method of Bible interpretation? You see, usually, when we refer to the experience of the believer after death, we simply refer to it as heaven. I think that is due to the fact that our forefathers held to an a-millennial view of prophecy.

By an a-millennial view we mean that they believed there would be no literal rule by Christ on earth for one thousand years. The most important passage of Scripture here is Revelation 20. Let us turn to it (read 1-6). The question is, is this a literal reign by Christ for one thousand years, or does it mean something figurative?

I hold to what is called the literal or normal method of interpreting the Bible. That means, wherever possible, one takes the text to mean what it say. Some times it is evident that something other than the literal is meant. Let me give you an example in Revelation 12 (read 12:1). Obviously something beyond the literal is meant here for it is not possible for a woman to wear the sun. When Jesus said, "I am the door", we know He was not speaking literally.

However, in the literal, or normal method, whenever possible, one interprets Scripture literally. We take John 3:16 literally, of course, and so we do with most of Scripture. So in Revelation 19, we take Christ's return to earth literally, why would we not take literally then the information that He will reign 1000 years?

In these messages, we will be talking about life after death for the believer, and since I hold to the literal or normal approach of interpreting Scripture, during the course of these messages you may well say numerous times, "I have never heard of that before." You see, because of our a-millennial past, often when

we talk about life after death for the believer, we simply refer to it as heaven.

But, to refer to all of the future experience of the believer after death as heaven, is a rather major error, as I see it. After death, the believer will experience much more than heaven! So, I would like to replace the word 'heaven' to include the whole of that experience. I tried to coin a new word, but failed until I considered one already in existence, and I believe it is the right word for this. So I have called the second of this two part series: Heaven: The Place of Everlasting Paradise!

Now, it may well be that in this series I will demolish your view of heaven almost entirely. If that happens, I trust it will be replaced with a more Biblical, and certainly a more informative view.

II. DEFINITION OF PARADISE

So, I want to now first define for you what I mean by Paradise. We get our English word 'paradise' from the Greek word, 'paradeisos'. The Greeks got this word from the Persians who called it 'pairidaeza' This word, according to the original Webster's dictionary, means, "a pleasure garden with parks and other appendages." Paradise came to be the word used for the Garden of Eden.

Some years ago I did a complete message on the Garden of Eden. How many here remember that? Let me quote from that message, "Now before the time of Christ the Greek language became a universal language something like English today. Seventy Jewish scholars were assigned to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. This translation, used by both Jesus and the apostles, is called the Septuagint. I checked the Septuagint in Genesis 2-3 to see how they had translated the word *garden*. Of the thirteen occurrences the Septuagint has translated it *paradeisos* all thirteen times. In other words in the Greek language it is the paradise of Eden."

Now in Hebrew, Eden means delight. So the Greek of the OT reads, 'paradeisos tees trupheis', or 'the paradise of delights.' I recommend to you that this

describes the experience of the believer after death. If you wish to have the evidence I give for this, you have to come for the rest of the messages.

Now the phrase 'eternal life' used to describe the believer's life falls into two clear sections and I want to deal with both of those, both in the OT and in the NT. These two sections are first, the life experienced in heaven after death, and second, the life experienced after the resurrection. May God bless our studies of this very great topic. So, let us look at those two areas as given in the OT.

III. EXPECTATIONS OF LIFE AFTER DEATH IN THE OT

A. Experienced Before the Resurrection

As we begin, it must be understood that in order for conscious existence to continue after death, one must believe in the immortality of the soul. It comes as a surprise then, when you study the OT that no clear picture emerges of their view of life after death, but before the resurrection for the believer. From the fact that the OT says so little about the subject of the immortality of the soul and where the believer goes at death, some have concluded that the OT does not teach life after death. The Sadducees of Jesus' day were of this persuasion.

However, I want to say to that, just as the OT makes little effort to prove there is a God but simply takes this self evident fact for granted, so it is with heaven and hell and the immortality of the soul. For example, let us read Genesis 2:9. What does the tree of life imply, but life if you eat of it. But they were alive already. So we must see that more than physical life is implied. Again, we go to Genesis 5:18 (read to 24). God took Enoch, while he was alive. What does that imply, but life with God. Let us read 2 Kings 2:9-12. Elijah went up to heaven by a chariot.

When David's son, whom he had by Bathsheba, was sick he fasted until he died. Then he arose and ate and his servants said, "What is this. When your son was sick you fasted, but now that he is dead, you eat." And David said, "But now he is dead; why should I

fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Sam. 12:23). Now that could simply refer to the grave, but many scholars have felt it speaks of more than that.

That the body will be resurrected and reunited with the soul and spirit is also not taught much in the OT, though it too was so commonly understood as to need little more. However, Daniel plainly speaks of it when he says that many who sleep will be raised, some to everlasting life and some to everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

As I read the OT, the picture that emerges of Jewish expectations for the future, have more to do with the Messiah's coming to earth and ruling here on earth, expectations of going to heaven. The concentration among the people of the OT seems to be much more that of living under the One who will inhabit the throne of David and rule here on earth from Jerusalem.

However, a clear picture of what happens after death for the believer, and before the coming of the Messiah, does not seem to be the focus of the OT. The focus, rather, seems to be on the coming of the Messiah, and His rule here on earth. They expected an earthly king, and rightly so. What they did not see so clearly, but which was also prophesied, was the suffering and death of the king. What they did not see at all was that the Messiah would be put to death, but this was also prophesied. What they did not see at all, and which was also not prophesied, is that out of that, a time of long duration would elapse between the time Messiah was put to death and the time He would return to fulfill the promises of the OT. Therefore, they also never foresaw the Church age and the time God would call to Himself millions of believers from among the Gentiles. So, there is a time slot of about 2000 years they do not understand, even to this very day, nor do they yet understand Isaiah 53.

But their expectations of a future Messiah were absolutely correct. The very first promise to that was made as early as Genesis 3:15. In Deuteronomy 18:18 God said to Moses, 'I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will

put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him." Read the book of Matthew, believed to have been written especially to the Jews and how it says over and over, "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets..."

And so, though a clear picture of what happens to believers between death and the resurrection does not emerge from the OT, they clearly believed in the conscious existence of the righteous in heaven after death and in the resurrection after that. One day Jesus was in discussion with a sect of the Jews called the Sadducees. And the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. Look at their discussion (read Matt. 22:23-33).

In verse 29 Jesus faults their theology. If they had known the OT they would have known that there is life after death in heaven and that those same people will be resurrected some day. God did not say, "I was the God of Abraham..." He said, "I am the God of Abraham." Jesus is saying to the Sadducees that they should have known this!

I think that in the Church we have erred on our view of life after death for the believer, because we also erred not knowing the Scriptures; and thus we were amillennialists, and through this there was hidden from our eyes what will really happen. Read amillennial commentaries on the book of Revelation, and you will see that.

So, in these messages, when I refer to paradise, I will mean the whole experience of life after death for the believer. And that whole experience of life after death for the believer can be divided into these two great sections: life after death but before the resurrection, and life after death, but after the resurrection.

So, though a picture of what happens to the believer after death but before the resurrection does not clearly emerge, it does give a picture of what happens after the resurrection. Go with me to Isaiah 65:17 (read), then Isaiah 66:22 (read). Now I am well aware of some of the difficulties of interpreting

these passages, and I will not discuss that here. The NT will throw great light on these when we come to it.

But from this I propose that a picture of what God has in store for His people in the future is graphically given in Genesis 2. We will look at that now. I believe the picture given here reveals God's original plan for man.

B. Experienced After The Resurrection

God, in the beginning, placed man in a Garden in an area called Eden. I want to propose to you that the original place God put man, and the original state of that place, is what God wanted man to experience forever. That is why He put the tree of life in the Garden. Some years ago I did a message I called "The Garden of Eden" and in that message I dealt with Eden in the past, the present and the future. Eden will be part of our subject this morning, because Eden, I believe, speaks of that which man will experience forever, once sin and Satan have been fully dealt with.

I wonder how many of you wish you could experience the original Garden of Eden? I want to propose to you that if you are a Christian, and you remain faithful, that is precisely what you will experience! Oh, may God be merciful to us and let me give to you a little taste of what it will really be like!

And so, this morning we want to first look at this Garden of Eden, that place which, in its description, gives us a foretaste of what is to come for the believer. Let us begin by reading Genesis 2:8-17. Now let me share with you what I believe will be different in the future Garden of Eden and this one before we move on. In this Garden, there was one tree of which man was not to eat. In the future Garden, man will be allowed to freely eat of every tree in that garden! All who are there will have experienced good and evil and have been redeemed from evil. Evil will never again have any power on them at all!

So, listen to a quote from the message I did on Eden some years ago as given in the NBD: "The actual word

(Hebrew pardes) is thus nowhere used in the OT in an eschatological (end time) sense, which meaning developed in the later Jewish world. The following trends can be discerned. The word paradise ... was used to give expression to the meaning of primeval times and then expanded to include fantastic speculations of the glory and bliss of those times. This was connected with the expectations of a wonderful Messianic time in the future. This coming age of glory would be identical with the garden of Eden of ancient times. The Jews believed also that paradise was present in their own time, but concealed. This concealed paradise was the place to which the souls of the Patriarchs, the chosen and the righteous people, were taken. The ancient, future and present paradise were regarded as being identical" (NBD 879-880). Well, we will see more of that later.

Now, I want to go on a little rabbit trail and raise a question: Where do you think the Garden of Eden originally was? Was it in Canada? Was it in Australia? Was it in Hawaii? The clues are given can be found in seven verses in Genesis 2. These are 8-14. The first clues we are given (v. 8) is that this Garden was eastward in Eden. The next clues are in verse 10, which says that a river went out of Eden and from there it parted and became four river heads. Then we are given the names of the four rivers various clues as to where those rivers were.

Of these four rivers it is thought that two exist today. So that should give some clues. These are the Hiddekel and the Euphrates Rivers. The Hiddekel apparently is the River today called the Tigris. The Euphrates still carries that name. This would indicate that we are looking for an area in modern Iraq somewhere. But there is a problem with trying to place the Garden of Eden by these rivers. First, we do not know that these two rivers are actually two of the original four. And second, we know nothing of the other two.

I propose that it is very likely that the flood of Noah's time changed the lay of the land all over the world considerably. So I propose that the original Garden of Eden was the land around Jerusalem, the land that became known as Israel. Do I have any

evidence for that? Well, not very much. I would give first a theological argument, and that is that God later called this His land. And He gave this land to His people. And then, God said Jerusalem is the apple of apple of His eye. Nine times in Deuteronomy He said that Jerusalem was where He chose to place His name. That makes me think that this was the original Garden of Eden.

With regard to the rivers, we have no four rivers that correspond to the ones given in Genesis. I propose that the flood changed the topography of the land. It is well possible that the modern Euphrates and Tigris could have flowed through this land, and down into the Red Sea. When we drove along by the Dead Sea, our guide told us that they had found sea shells way up in the hills above, in layers of the limestone. This was most likely caused by the flood. It is also well possible that the flood caused the Dead sea when the fountains of the deep were broken up.

Furthermore, Genesis 2:8 says this Garden was eastward in Eden. The name 'Eden' means 'delight'. From that I have pondered this question: Could Eden have been the area known today as the 'fertile crescent'? If so, most of this is the area God gave to Israel, even as far as the modern Euphrates River in Iraq. This would have in favor the fact that Israel is 'eastward' in this area, as Eden was eastward in Eden. There is one more reason we will look at later in these messages.

Now that is a bit of a rabbit trail, but I couldn't resist taking it. All that aside, no doubt this garden must have been a choice spot in the land of delight, and here, I have no doubt, is a picture of what God wanted man to experience forever, and I believe it describes ultimately that which we call heaven. This was God's original plan for man, and this, I believe, is what God ultimately has for man to enjoy for all eternity!

But, we are familiar with Genesis 3, how sin entered the human race, and a fierce battle began between God and Satan. Here we are told how death entered human experience. Then we are told how man was driven from

Eden and how mankind from then on experienced, birth, and life and then death. But man received something in Eden before he was driven out. Adam and Eve were saved. We know this because God made clothes for them from skins of animals, and they accepted those. And, in this Garden they received the very first promise of a Redeemer. Through this Redeemer, Paradise will be restored. It is that teaching which we usually refer to as heaven. This teaching we want to explore further, as God's revelation progresses.

CONCL: So, let me say in conclusion what is most important of all to a study of this subject. To do justice to this topic, one must use the right system of Bible interpretation. And that system is the very same system of Bible interpretation that brings us to a right understanding of salvation. It is the system that is called very simply the literal, normal method used of interpreting any other kind of literature.

Second, I will be seeking to deal with our subject in looking at what both the Old and New Testaments teach with regard to what happens to the righteous after they die, both before the resurrection and after. We have briefly looked at that in the OT. We will now be looking at it in the new, for there lies the bulk of our