

1 The Biblical Doctrine of Heaven

Study #3

“The Present Heaven”

[Rev. 6:9-11]

2 Some important distinctions between the present and future heavens

- **The present heaven is the angelic realm; the future heaven will be in the human realm**
- There are some indications that the present heaven may exist nearby in an unseen realm, or another dimension
- **Acts 7:55-56** - The experience of Stephen seems to indicate that humans here on earth are sometimes allowed to see into heaven.
- **Wayne Grudem** says Stephen "... did not see mere symbols of a state of existence. It was rather that his eyes were opened to see a spiritual dimension of reality which God has hidden from us in this present age, a dimension which none the less really does exist in our space/time universe, and within which Jesus now lives in His physical resurrected body, waiting even now for a time when he will return to earth."

3

- **II Kings 6:17** - **The prophet Elisha** asked God to allow his servant Gehazi to have a glimpse of the invisible realm.
- **Randy Alcorn** says of this passage: "It could be argued that these horses and chariots (with angelic warriors) exist beside us in our universe, but we are normally blind to them. Or they may exist in a universe beside ours that opens up into ours so that the angelic beings - and horses, apparently - can move between universes."
- **Acts 9:3 & 7** - The conversion of the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus also seems likely to have been a similar invasion from the heavenly realm into this world.
- Randy Alcorn sites **reputable scientists from Yale, Princeton, and Stanford** who are among other scientists who embrace what is called "string theory." These scientists have postulated that there are ten unobservable dimensions and likely an infinite number of imperceptible universes.

4 The New Jerusalem provides some understanding in this distinction between the present heaven and the future heaven

- **Galatians 4:26** refers to "... **the Jerusalem that is above** ... [which, we are told] ... **is the mother of us all.**"
- **Revelation 21:1-5** Indicates that the New Jerusalem, which was in heaven, **will come down out of heaven from God!** - It will be permanently located on the New Earth!

5 Presently, what we know as "heaven" is separated and distinct from the earth. The future "heaven" will be on Earth!

- **Anthony Hoekema** says: "The 'new Jerusalem' ... does not remain in 'heaven' far off in space, but it comes down to the renewed earth; there the redeemed will spend eternity in resurrection bodies. **So heaven and earth, now separated, will then be merged: the new earth will also be heaven, since God will dwell there with his people.**"

6 Some biblical perspectives on the present heaven

7 It is "far better" than our present existence here on earth!

8 It is a place in which the redeemed will exist consciously!

- There are some cults which teach the doctrine of "**soul sleep**." - i.e. the idea that when we die, we enter into a long period of unconsciousness between life on earth and life in heaven.
- **Luke 16:22-31** - The Lord Jesus depicted **Lazarus** and the **rich man** as **conscious in heaven and hell**.
- **Rev. 6:9-11** - Those who had been martyred because of the Word of God are conscious in heaven; remembering what happened to them and asking the Lord, "how long" before their deaths and the deaths of all others like them would be vindicated.
- **Phil. 1:21 & 23** - How could Paul be referring to death as "**gain**" and "**departing to be with Christ, which is far better**," if he thought he would actually be "**unconscious**" when he died?

9 There is memory, recognition and continuity of personhood in heaven

- **Rev. 6:9-11** - If those martyrs in heaven remember their martyrdom, there's no reason to assume they would not remember other aspects of their earthly lives.
- **Lk. 16:22-23** - the account of Lazarus and the rich man clearly indicates that people who go on into the future existence recall their lives on earth.
- **II Cor. 5:10 & Matt. 12:36** teach that we will all give and account of the things we have done here on earth. How is this possible if we don't remember them anymore?
- "Memory is a basic element of personality. If we are truly ourselves in Heaven, there must be continuity of memory from Earth to Heaven." - **Randy Alcorn**

10 People in Heaven can see [at least to some extent] what is happening here on earth

11 The intermediate state of the redeemed in the present Heaven may include some sort of physical form

- "It appears that we are not essentially spirits who inhabit bodies, but we are essentially as much physical as we are spiritual. We cannot be fully human without both a spirit and a body."
- "The real question is whether people, being by nature both spiritual and physical, can dwell in a realm without physical properties." - Alcorn
- "Given the consistent physical descriptions of the present Heaven and those who dwell there, it seems possible - though this is certainly debatable - that between our earthly life and our bodily resurrection, **God may grant us some physical form that will allow us to function as human beings while in that unnatural state "between bodies," awaiting our resurrection.** Just as the intermediate state is a bridge between life on the old Earth and the New Earth, perhaps intermediate bodies, or at least a physical form of some sort, serve as bridges between our present bodies and our resurrected bodies." - Alcorn

12 The intermediate state of the redeemed in the present Heaven may include some sort of physical form