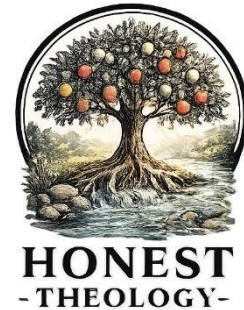


Where Should We Look To Know Anything About 'Heaven'?



I've been writing a lot about 'Heaven' because I'm going to be [researching and writing](#) about it for the next year of my life. [My last post](#) presented the rather confusing reality that within our Bible there are *four* different terms that are regularly translated as "heaven" and yet *none of them automatically mean "the place people go when they die."*

I purposefully left you hanging, hoping that perhaps questions would ruminate in your heads rather annoyingly. (That's the kind of teacher I am!) I would think that perhaps one of the most common questions everyone would eventually arrive at is, "Well then, *how* do we know anything about the place people go when they die?" And *that's* the question that I'm going to focus on here.

The clearest picture of Christians hope comes first and foremost through Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God. It was Jesus' key Mission and Message to "sew together" (if you will) all the rather confusing, vague, and various understandings of life after death that were most certainly present during that time. The Hebrew people had a complicated understanding of life after death as a result of their Scriptures – and probably struggled as much as we do now as to the whole "how/what/when, etc." of it all. Here are some examples:

- There was a place called "[Sheol](#)" (aka the Underworld) where *everyone* went at death.
- Sheol was a place of inactivity and waiting and almost like a "[half-life](#)."
- God was believed [present](#) even in Sheol and would eventually [rescue](#) individuals.
- In later Hebrew writings, prophets wrote about [bodily resurrection](#) of the dead. In Jesus' time this was still hotly debated among religious leaders.
- There were actually a few exceptions regarding death, too. There were some precious individuals who actually escaped death and were taken directly into the presence of God like [Enoch](#) and [Elijah](#).

Jesus's central focus was The *Kingdom* of Heaven/God. We call the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John "The Gospels" (which means "The Good News.") Over 100 times, Jesus shared to all who would listen the "Gospel of the Kingdom." He taught:

- [Using Parables](#). Parables were stories/analogies to help illustrate these new, strange, difficult concepts. Their purpose was to be real-life applicable and therefore easy to understand and remember. Some of them were long, some of them were just one verse (more like analogies, I guess). Some Jesus explained in detail afterwards, and some he just left for us to think about for centuries. "The Parable about the Sower" is recorded in [Matthew](#), [Mark](#), and [Luke](#) and Jesus took the time to explain it, too.

- Using Visual Examples: Many, many of Jesus' miracles were illustrations regarding the Kingdom of Heaven. [Healing the blind](#) illustrated spiritual awakening, [casting out demons](#) proved the Kingdom's great power, [curing physical illnesses](#) showed the renewal and restoration that was to come. Even the [healing of leprosy](#) – a disease that kept those individuals ostracized - showed the Kingdom's love and inclusion of all.
- Speaking Plainly: In his [Sermon on the Mount](#) he describes a place of peace, love, justice, and fairness for all – especially the last and the least.

If I want to know what God's future looks like, I find myself returning again and again to Jesus. Rather than beginning with symbolic visions or difficult prophetic passages, I begin with [the One](#) Christians confess is the fullest revelation of God. While I am not dismissing any other Scriptural references to “life after death,” I will utilize Jesus Christ's Gospel Message to better understand/interpret the topic.

MY ACKNOWLEDGED BIAS: Miriam Webster defines bias as “an inclination of temperament or outlook, a bent or tendency, a sometimes-unreasoned judgment or prejudice.” Through prayer, study, and thought I interpret the rest of Scripture through the fullest revelation of God given in Jesus Christ. I acknowledge that this is my personal bias regarding all things relating to my faith. I understand that not all will agree, but welcome discussions to learn and grow in my spiritual journey nonetheless. This primary foundation is from where I will work to understand this complex topic.

So, my simplest answer to the question “Where should we look to know anything about ‘heaven’?” is *Jesus' teachings regarding the Kingdom of Heaven/God*.

I would like you to think about something before my next post on life after death. (Yes, I'm giving you homework!)

- Imagine a young child asking you about death. “Where do we go when we die?” (Maybe you've already been asked that question.)
- Think of the answer you would give in its simplest, most comforting terms.
- Mull over your response. I suspect you will have some deep down “cushy” idea that you cling to when you yourself struggle with this concept. You will also have a myriad of questions, doubts, and confusions that you often start to struggle with and then, for peace of mind, you “stuff away” in your subconscious. (“I'll worry about that some other time...”)
- Focus on that deep down “cushy” idea you might have ... as small (and perhaps “silly”) as you might admit to just yourself.
- Mentally draw that picture in your head. Imagine you there with your loved ones, your beloved pets... Anything that you miss, mourn, and want to be with again someday.

As detailed or as vague as your ‘heaven idea’ is, it is important to know how it fits within what Jesus' Kingdom of Heaven/God in Scripture. Please don't think I'm going to give you all the answers to this in my next post (or posts)! Scholars have been trying to do this for centuries without agreement, lol. But **I** want to do this for *myself*. (No, I can't do it to my satisfaction yet.) Maybe you do, too?

See you next post!

Scripture to maybe check out:

- [2 Kings 2](#): Elijah goes to heaven – in a chariot of fire no less!

Bibliography notes:

1. For this post I used New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.. Feel free to research your own translation or look up the many translations that are available on [Bible Gateway](#).
2. I used the [Merriam-Webster](#) online dictionary for my definition of “bias.”
3. Lynn Japinga in her book *Feminism and Christianity: An Essential Guide* published by Abingdon Press out of Nashville, TN states, “Jesus and Paul contradicted the Old Testament even though they valued it as God’s word. They established a new set of criteria, which made faith and grace the center of Christianity...Scholars call this approach the “canon within the canon,” which means that within the accepted canon, or list of writings finally gathered into the Bible, there is a subset of texts that serve as the central theme by which all others must be measured” (p. 51). This I believe.

What are your thoughts about this post? Email me and let me know!

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