

## THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF HEAVEN

When one reads both the Old Testament and the New Testament, one cannot help but see that many passages of Scripture reveal to us that **our physical life is very brief**.

When Jacob was talking to Pharaoh near the end of his life, he said, “**few**...have been the years of my life” (Genesis 47:9).

Job believed that his days on earth were “**swift**” (Job 7:6) and that his life was like a “**breath**,” here for a short time and then gone (Job 7:7).

When Job was speaking to God, he classified the time that he would actually live on this earth as being a “**few days**” (Job 10:20).

When Job was speaking to his friends, he said, “man who is born of woman is **short-lived**...like a flower he comes forth and withers. He also flees like a shadow and does not remain...his days are determined, the number of his months is with Thee and his limits Thou hast set so that he cannot pass” (Job 14:1-5).

Again when Job was speaking to his friends, he said, “for when a **few years** are past, I shall go the way of no return” (Job 16:22).

David said that his days were like “**handbreadths**” and his “**lifetime as nothing**” and that at best every man was a mere “**breath**” and was nothing more than a “**phantom**” (Psalm 39:5-6).

David also said, “Man is like a mere breath; His days are like a **passing shadow**” (Psalm 144:4).

James, in the N.T., reinforces the same idea when he says concerning life that “you are just a **vapor** that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (James 4:14).

**What all of these passages say to us is that our physical life will fly by fast and we are not going to be on this earth very long. The logical question for us to ask, in view of this, is just where are we going after our brief existence on earth? If our existence is forever and just a few of the forever years are spent on earth, then where are we heading?** For the believer in Jesus Christ, the exciting Biblical answer to that question is we are heading to “heaven.”

In the next several studies, I would like to take us on a Biblical and doctrinal trip to heaven. Since we will spend a whole lot more time there than we did here, it would be well for us to glean as much as we possibly can about this very special place.

All of our conclusions for what we believe and think about heaven will be based upon a careful analysis of what is actually revealed in the Bible. As is our habit with all our doctrinal studies, we will approach this study in a question answer format.

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**QUESTION #1** – Why study the doctrine of heaven?

There are five reasons we present as to why we need to study this doctrine.

**Reason #1** - Because the subject of heaven is a major Biblical subject.

When God reveals data about any subject in the Bible, it is very important because He is the One who chose to reveal it and it is inspired by Him. God inspired a lot of information about heaven.

In the O.T., the noun “heaven” is used some 320 times and in the N.T. the noun “heaven” is used some 284 times for a total of 604 times. This does not include the number of uses of the adverb “heavenly” or other related words (Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 5, p. 513; Robert Young, *Young’s Analytical Concordance of the Bible*, pp. 470-472).

When we stop to consider that the first verse of the Bible actually contains the word “heaven” (Genesis 1:1) and the first chapter mentions it no less than six times and the last two chapters of the Bible (Revelation 21-22) contain a discussion about a “new heaven,” it is quite clear that this subject of heaven is a major subject of the inspired Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation; from the first chapter of the Bible to the last chapter of the Bible.

In the Old Testament, heaven is mentioned in 32 of the 39 books (all books except Numbers, Ruth, Esther, Song of Solomon, Joel, Obadiah, Micah, Habakkuk). The most uses occur in Deuteronomy (37), Psalms (35), Daniel (32), Genesis (28), II Chronicles (25) and Jeremiah (24).

In the New Testament, heaven is mentioned in 20 of the 27 books (all books except Titus, Philemon, I Timothy, II Timothy, II John, III John, Jude). The most uses occur in Matthew (84), Revelation (54), Luke (37), Acts (26), John (19) and Mark (19).

From just an observation of word usage, we conclude the subject of heaven is a critical Biblical subject and theme.

**Reason #2** - Because the subject of heaven is a very neglected subject.

Most of God’s people are not very knowledgeable when it comes to their knowledge of heaven. One person estimated that most Christians going to churches today have not heard one single complete sermon on heaven and have never studied it as a developed doctrine.

Dr. N. A. Woychuk, who wrote a series of articles about heaven for Dallas Seminary back in the 1950’s, said that he ran into people who insisted that there wasn’t much said about heaven in the Bible and therefore we shouldn’t even study the subject. Dr. Woychuk said if people actually looked at this topic in the Bible carefully, they would “discover that the Word of God has a lot to say of which the average person is ignorant”(What Will We Do In Heaven?, Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 108, p. 488, 1951).

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All most people know about heaven is something about a “mansion over the hilltop” that they sing about. However, you cannot blame this ignorance on the average Christian. Most churches do not have ministers who systematically study or teach Bible doctrine anymore. Therefore a doctrinal subject like heaven is totally neglected. Most churches would rather entertain an audience or talk about contemporary or social issues that in some cases have no relevance at all.

When some people discuss heaven, even those who write books, often the information is not sound and true. For example, one person who wrote a book about heaven said it isn't a real spatial place, like an actual material place of existence (J. Oswald Sanders, *Heaven Better By Far*, pp. 49-50). Well we believe heaven is a very real spatial place, but if you are an average person listening to this and you have never carefully studied the Scriptures, how would you know? It is no wonder that some believe heaven is nothing more than some fairytale land of Oz. They don't know what to believe because they have never been taught.

You can go to most Christian bookstores and find all kinds of books about counseling people who have all kinds of moral and psychological problems, but I challenge you to find serious doctrinal books or systematic theologies that focus on a careful study of the doctrine of heaven.

Dr. Chafer used to talk about the neglect of theological subjects by theologians. He used to say that when Charles Hodge begins his section on eschatology, he says that he doesn't know much about it. Then Chafer would say, “He spends the next forty pages proving it.” A doctrine like Heaven is like that. It is neglected even by most theologians (Cited from S. L. Johnson, *Physical Death*, p. 3).

Randy Alcorn, who wrote a book on heaven, said that a pastor he knew told him that when he thinks about heaven he gets depressed. Randy asked him why and the minister said, “I can't stand the thought of that endless tedium. To float around in the clouds with nothing to do but strum a harp.” Randy Alcorn thought where in the world did this Bible-believing, seminary educated pastor get such a view of heaven? Certainly not from the Bible (*Heaven*, pp. 5-6).

In fact, this is probably the biggest fallacy when it comes to heaven in that it will be one long, boring church service. Obviously, if you are the average person sitting in this man's church, you are not going to learn truth.

When I began research for this study, I discovered that serious biblical books about heaven were far and few between. Fortunately, I was able to track down some old critical works and theological articles of those who took doctrinal study seriously. It is no wonder that God's people are in a fog about the subject of heaven; they have never been taught.

Randy Alcorn made a good observation when he said that very little attention is given in seminaries and churches to the study of the very place where we will live forever (*Ibid.*, p. xiii). So because this subject has been neglected, we will study it.

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**Reason #3** - Because the subject of heaven is a comforting and stabilizing faith subject.

Since the subject of heaven is a Biblical subject, we must assume that God wants us to have knowledge of it and we also may assume that it will bring strength, stability and comfort to us and to our faith. Faith comes by hearing the Word.

I want you to picture for a moment a hospital scene that perhaps you have already seen. You are in a room with a loved one who is dying. A nurse is in the room taking the temperature and looking at the cardio monitor. A doctor comes into the room. The monitor flat lines—a doctor takes a small pen light and shines it into the eyes of the patient and there is no response. The doctor turns to you and says, “Your loved one has died” or “Your loved one is gone.” Your first response is probably emotional. This is a real loss and you do emotionally hurt.

However, **the thing that will give you comfort is not what is emotional, but what is Biblical.** When the emotions calm down you begin to think, “What just happened here and where did my loved one just go?” Science and philosophy cannot give you answers here, but the Bible can. Medical science can tell you what just physically happened, but beyond that they have no answer.

One of the most comforting doctrines for a believer to study is the doctrine of heaven. The more we understand about this place, the stronger our faith will be. Not only will we be happy for our loved one who got to go there, but we ourselves may look forward one day to our own journey.

**Reason #4** - Because the subject of heaven is a godliness promoting subject.

Without some perspective of heaven, most will live life with an Epicurean philosophy that says “let us eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.” However, the more we know about heaven the more we begin to think differently. We begin to realize that “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20), and that will prompt us to likely set our minds “on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Col. 3:2).

When Jesus was here, He taught that we should not lay-up treasures on earth, but lay-up treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:19-23). Clear thinking about heaven is something God wants in our minds and hearts.

Thinking about heaven is purifying. Jonathan Edwards often spoke of the subject of heaven. He said, “It becomes us to spend this life only as a journey toward heaven...to which we should subordinate all other concerns of life. Why should we labor for or set our hearts on anything else, but that which is our proper end and true happiness” (cited from Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, p. 5).

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**Reason #5** - Because heaven is an amazing, spectacular place that we are going to see.

In the course of my lifetime, I have seen some majestic things and so have you. I have stood on tops of various mountains and seen breathtaking splendor. I have driven to tops of mountains, hiked to tops of mountains and rode horses to tops of mountains and literally stood in awe of what I was seeing. I have been so moved, I have bowed my head before the living God who made it. I have stood on shores by the Ocean, feeling the gentle breezes and looked at beautiful and powerful white capped waves and ripples. I have been to Alaska and gazed at the glory of the glaciers and the vastness of the wilderness. If I were to leave this world right now, it has been a pleasure to have seen these spectacular displays of the glory of God.

But there is one place I long to see. There is one place that will surpass anything we have ever seen and that place is HEAVEN. In the next weeks, I would like to go see it through Biblical eyes and would like to take you with me. We will look at it through Scripture and hopefully glean as much as we can. When we have completed our study, may God cause all of us to say “Come Lord Jesus” and take us to heaven.

**QUESTION #2** – Why have there been so many misconceptions and faulty beliefs about Heaven?

**There is primarily one answer for this and that answer is Satan.** Satan was forcibly removed from heaven (Isaiah 14:12-15), and he has been doing what he can as the “father of lies” (John 8:44), to keep believers from knowing truth about heaven. In fact, during the Tribulation when Satan, the Antichrist and False prophet are dominating the world, they will lash out against heaven (Revelation 13:6). Satan’s work includes 1) trying to convince some people there is no such thing as heaven; 2) not necessarily trying to convince God’s people that heaven is nonexistent; rather, he tries to keep them from understanding the truth about heaven so they view it as some eternal place of boredom, thus robbing God’s people of great potential joy and anticipation.

**QUESTION #3** – Can we logically and rationally conclude that there is a real place known as heaven?

As we mentioned, some don’t think heaven is a real spatial and material place. We believe the Bible teaches it is and we also think this can be proved. We believe that heaven may be logically and rationally proved based on six key realities:

**Reality #1** - There are two heavens that we can literally see right now.

Based on Paul’s statement in II Corinthians 12:2, he said there are three heavens, which is supported by both the O.T. and the N.T.. **Two of those heavens we can actually physically see right now:**

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**(Area #1)** - There is the first heaven, which is the atmospheric heaven, where the birds fly and clouds form (Ps. 104:12; Hos. 2:18; Dan. 7:13; Acts 14:17).

A real, visible, tangible place.

**(Area #2)** - There is the second heaven, the stellar heaven, where the stars and planets are located, including the sun and moon (Gen. 1:14-18). A real, visible, tangible place.

**(Area #3)** - There is the third heaven, the throne of God heaven, which is the place of God's residency and presence, where God the Son and Father now are (Acts 1:9-11). There is solid evidence that heaven is a very real material place. Stephen certainly indicated he saw some very real place when he was being executed. In fact, he said he saw heaven, the glory of God and Jesus Christ standing at His right hand (Acts 7:55-56). Also the writer of Hebrews said that Jesus finished the work and went back into heaven and "sat down" (Heb. 10:12). You don't sit down unless you are in a real place to sit down.

We must logically assume this third heaven is as real as the first two.

**Reality #2** - Jesus Christ, who was a real Person in history, actually said He came from heaven, which He identified as His father's house. John 6:28, 42; 14:2

Now those who deny heaven is a real place say that Jesus was just using anthropomorphic language—which is just using language and terms that humans can understand. But when we track things Jesus said, we must conclude that Jesus treated heaven as being a very real place. As we said, 1) He taught He came from heaven; 2) He taught it was His Father's house; 3) He taught his disciples to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven," which churches still pray today. Now why would Jesus say these things about some place that does not really materially exist? Jesus obviously knew of this place, heaven, as a very real place.

Since Jesus Christ said He would prove He was telling the truth about Himself by His resurrection, which He literally did, we logically conclude He is telling the factual truth about heaven. Based on what Jesus said, it is better to view heaven as a real, tangible place.

**Reality #3** - The Apostle Paul said he actually was caught up to the third heaven. **II Cor.12:2-4**

Paul was one of the most logical thinkers in history, which his letters and epistles prove. He is still celebrated in Turkey for some of the places he visited, such as Ephesus. When he says he actually saw heaven, he is not the kind of man to make up some delusional story. Since he specifies it is the third heaven, we conclude it is as real as the first two which we can actually see now.