



Teacher's Guide

A BIBLICAL LOOK AT HEAVEN

by Dr. Harley Ihm

Question – What do you think heaven will be like? Will you know people in heaven? Will you worry about your friends and family who have not accepted God's offer in Jesus?

John Eldredge points out that nearly every Christian he has spoken with has some idea that eternity is this never ending church service. He says we have settled on an image of the never ending sing along in the sky, one great hymn after another, forever and ever. That does not sound like good news. It can cause us to not look forward to heaven, but long to live forever on earth. If just there was a fountain of youth! I don't know if I can handle the song service that never ends!

Barna Research Group says that an overwhelming majority of Americans continue to believe that there is life after death and that heaven and hell exist, but what people actually believe about heaven and hell varies widely. Barna says that people are cutting and pasting religious views from ideas they hear on television, movies, conversations with friends and books. They hold on to what they like and ignore what they do not like.

Christians should be the most educated people in the world on what the afterlife is like, but that is not the case. We need to have a solid grasp of God's teaching on life and death and the afterlife, but it has to come from God's Word, not from emotionally moving movies, stories or ideas. Reality comes from the Word of God. Period. I highly recommend the book *Heaven* by Randy Alcorn. It is the most accurate book on heaven I have seen and unravels a lot of misconception and false ideas.

Alcorn points out in his book how Jonathan Edwards was a great Puritan preacher who often spoke 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 in life. Why should we labor for or set our hearts on anything else, but that which is our proper end and true happiness?" In his early 20's Edwards wrote down a set of resolutions to guide his life. One of them read, "Resolved, to endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness, in the other world, as I possibly can." He took seriously Jesus charge to store up treasure in heaven and not on earth.

So, we are going to begin a journey to see what God taught us about heaven in His holy word. We will test everything by His word and hold onto what He points out is good and trustworthy.

Old Testament – SHAMAYIN (sha'-mah-yin) = heaven, heavens, sky

1. Area high above ground and below the stars and planets
2. Area where frost, snow, fine dust, hail and rain reside (firmament)
3. Area where sun, moon, stars, and planets reside
4. Combined with the earth (heaven and earth) to mean all creation
5. Dwelling place of God (the heaven of the heavens) not a height but an absolute reality

New Testament – OURANOS (oo'-rah – noss) – heaven, heavens, sky

1. The air
2. The sky
3. The dwelling place of God

Note: All forms of heaven were created by God except the heaven that meant the dwelling place of God which has always existed. So, the context surrounding the word lets us know if the word refers to the sky, the universe or the dwelling place of God.

1. Deuteronomy 26:15 – Where is God's dwelling place? (*God dwells in heaven. His abode transcends time and space. God is omnipresent, everywhere at once, omniscient, all knowing, omnipotent, all powerful. We are in a particular times and space while God is before and beyond our time and space.*)
2. 1Kings 8:27-30 – How large is heaven? (*Heaven stretches beyond time and space. Heaven should be thought of as more than a place we go to. Instead we should realize that we enter into the realm of God which is without borders!*)
3. 2 Kings 2:11 – Where was Elijah taken? (*Elijah went to the dwelling place of the Almighty God. If we go to God's abode, then we go into a realm that is not contained by space and time, because that is where God dwells.*)
4. Nehemiah 9:13 – When God spoke on Mt. Sinai, where was He speaking from? (*Heaven. It does not appear that heaven has limits or borders. Heaven can intersect with earth when God so chooses.*)
5. Psalm 102:19-20 – Where is God's sanctuary? (*In heaven, God's home, He still sees and hears the groans of His people who are prisoners. God heard the cries rising up from the earth that was overwhelmed with evil in the days of the flood. God heard the cries of his people in Egypt and delivered them from slavery. God heard the cries of His people in captivity in Babylon and eventually worked for their release. Heaven is not secluded in such a way that God is unaware of our struggles and needs.*)
6. Psalm 123:1 – Where is God's throne? (*The prophet's eyes are lifted up to God's throne in heaven. God is above all but it does not mean higher than earth, somewhere out in space. It is likely a higher dimension. Remember that God lives outside of time, where time is no more. He rules the earth from His throne.*)
7. Matthew 3:1-2 – What did the Apostle John say about heaven? (*Heaven is near. The Kingdom of heaven John spoke of was the reign of God within us through Jesus Christ. God's Kingdom, His dwelling place arrived on earth when the Holy Spirit began to live in those who proclaim Jesus as Lord. We become the Holy of Holies, God's dwelling place. Heaven came to earth when the Gospel of Christ was delivered. There is a temporary heaven here on earth, a connection with God's dwelling through Christ and His Spirit living in us! How should that change the way I live daily?*)

8. Matthew 3:16-17 – Where did the voice and the Spirit of God come from? (*From heaven. It is interesting that heaven and earth connect in this powerful moment. God can intervene from heaven but we cannot see heaven, even if we are aware of His presence. In reality, it is much like another dimension that wraps itself around all of time and across all geography and even the universe. That is the definition of truly being omnipresent. The Psalmist affirms this in Psalm 46:1 – “God is our ever-present help...” Time cannot contain God.*)
9. Matthew 4:17 – What did Jesus begin preaching in Galilee? (*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near. Jesus has just pointed to Isaiah 9 and the prophecy of the coming of God’s messenger and Messiah. The ministry of the Savior of Man is now starting. The Kingdom of Heaven, where God wells with man is very near. That is an important truth because a part of Heaven is opened up to us through our relationship with God through Jesus. God is well-pleased with us and a taste of Heaven on earth is available.*)
10. Matthew 5:3, 10 - Did Jesus say, “Theirs will be...”? (*Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Just as Jesus preached, He is bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth.*)
11. (For this exercise have 7 groups look for the main idea presented about the kingdom of heaven. Just one thing should be presented from each group. You can also look together at each parable and decide as a class)
 Matthew 13 – What did Jesus teach about the kingdom of heaven in the 7 parables? (*Jesus presents the parable of the sower, the weeds, the mustard seed, yeast, the hidden treasure, the pearl, and finally the parable of the net. They are all presenting knowledge about the secrets of the kingdom of heaven (v.11,24,31,33,44,45,47). In the NT ‘secret’ means something unknown until it is revealed by God. The secret is proclaimed to all, but only those who have faith understand. In this context it seems to be that the kingdom of God has drawn near.*)
12. Matthew 16:17-19 – What keys are mentioned? (*The keys to the kingdom of heaven that Jesus would give Peter to unlock the door to opening the kingdom of heaven up to all men. The dwelling place of God would be open to mankind. This key that opened the door was used on the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended into Heaven. The key was the prophetic gospel of Christ’s death for our salvation. This brought heaven to earth. We live in heaven now and it is critical we realize we live in the presence of God, in His dwelling place.*)
13. Matthew 17:1-8 – What appeared with Jesus at the transfiguration? Did Peter, James and John recognize them? (*Moses and Elijah. They have been dead a long, long time and yet they are recognized by the three and Peter wants to build three shelters for them. That would indicate that the dead are recognized in their resurrected bodies. That is good news!*)
14. Matthew 18:10 – Who is in heaven besides God? (*The guardian angels. We don’t know a lot about how they work, but we know they do as Jesus points out. We are told the angels in heaven always see the face of God the Father. See Psalm 34:7; 91:11; Hebrews 1:14. Angels dwell with us but are unseen just as God dwells with us and is unseen.*)

15. Luke 16:19-31 – Let's outline the teaching from Jesus. (*This is not a parable but an illustrative story to teach about the importance of acting on faith while there is time.*)

- a. Rich man – (*had lived a life of luxury*)
- b. Lazarus – (*beggar covered with sores who lays at the rich man's gate covered with sores and begging for food*)
- c. Death of rich man – (*died and was buried and goes to hades, the unseen world of the dead, the dwelling place of the spirit without its body. It is a temporary hell, a place of torment. It does not mean he gets another chance. Hebrews plainly declares it is appointed man once to die and then comes the judgment. His fate is permanent. He is just in a temporary place of torment and suffering until the final judgment scene at the return of Christ. The rich man in hades is suffering and can look up and see Abraham and the old beggar from his gate lying at Abraham's side. He expects that he should still be waited on like he was in life. He wants Abraham to send Lazarus down to him with some water to comfort him. Notice that he still retains his earthly memories. It appears we are granted some identifiable temporary body when we die and before the final judgment.*)
- d. Death of Lazarus – (*upon his death, apparently the beggar was a worshiper of God unlike the rich man. The angels carry the beggar to Abraham's side. The last has become first, but the first does not even get to be last due to his lack of faith. It is ironic that he recognizes Abraham and thinks he can get some attention from him. Lazarus is in Paradise. It is important to understand what that meant. Paradise is from the Persian word, paridaeza, meaning "a walled park" or "enclosed garden." It was used to describe the great walled gardens of the Persian King Cyrus's royal palaces. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Greek word for paradise is used to describe the Garden of Eden. Paradise is a temporary Garden of Eden, a place beautiful and lush with vegetation.*)
- e. Abraham's response to the rich man – (*He made his choice in his lifetime. He chose wrong. The beggar chose correctly. He will be blessed for eternity while the rich man is without hope. There is a great chasm between Paradise and the Place of Torment that cannot be crossed. You have already received your reward in life. There is no reward for you in the afterlife. Some people find the temporary heaven and hell hard to believe. However, scientists at Yale, Princeton and Harvard among others believe there are as many as 10 invisible dimensions. We are only looking at one invisible dimension that contains the angels, heaven and hell.*)
- f. Rich man's pain for his lost brothers – (*5 brothers are without hope and heading into Tartarus. "Please send someone to warn them and share the truth so they will not end us here."*)
- g. Abraham's response – (*If they do not believe Moses and the prophets, they will not believe even if someone rises from the dead. Notice that there is no other way to go into Paradise with God except for the one who rose from the dead that is foretold in Moses and the Prophets. That was a phrase used to represent the entire Old Testament.*)

16. John 14:1-4 - Where did Jesus go and what was His mission there? (*Jesus is getting the apostles ready for His crucifixion and departure from this world He has shared with them. He is moving to the next part of His mission after being the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World. In His Father's house (oikia = residence) are many mansions, dwelling places, rooms. He is going to prepare all the rooms and will come back to bring all who belong to Him to dwell in the Father's residence forever. Just as there is a temporary heaven, there is an eternal heaven beyond what we now can understand. Jesus promises that where God has always been, we will be also.*)

17. 1 Corinthians 15:35-55 – What are we told about the resurrection changes, our metamorphosis after physical death? – (*Not like the earthly body. It is not perishable but a body that is unlike the mortal bodies we now live in. When we are changed it will be instantaneous. We will be like Christ. Some people will still be alive on earth. It will happen in a flash, the twinkling of an eye. Death will have no more effect on us.*)

18. 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 – What is the difference between clothing on earth and clothing in heaven? (*This body is a tent but the heavenly body is a building. This was temporary while the other is designed for permanent dwelling in heaven rather than on the old earth.*)

19. 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 – Where was Paul caught up to? (*3rd heaven which he then declares was paradise, where the thief on the cross went with Jesus.*)

20. God has used Paul to declare the Gospel and to build the Lord's church. The details of heaven could have fired up our faith. So, why didn't Paul fill in the details of heaven? (*v. 4 says that what he saw there, man is not permitted to tell. We are called upon to trust God. Jesus is preparing a mansion for us in His Father's house. That is all God wants us to know. This passage is a clear teaching that needs to be listened to before we buy into all the near death stories and movies out there. God is not moved when His people demand a sign. The virgin birth was the sign, the Savior coming into the world to be the sign that removes all doubt.*)

21. Philippians 1:21-23 – Paul helps us gain perspective on life. What does he say? (*To for Christ, that is great! To die in Christ, that is far greater! Being forever with Christ in heaven is what we long for and hopefully what we live for.*)

22. Philippians 3:20-21 – What will our bodies be like? (*No longer lowly, but glorious like Jesus' body. Imagine the transfiguration where Jesus' glory was revealed and Peter, James and John could not look upon the brilliance of His body. It was like Moses saw at the burning bush. Whatever that means for us, we know that it is glorious beyond our understanding at this time in our lives.*)

23. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 – Describe graduation day. (*Some will still be alive on earth; There will be a loud command instantaneously from the voice of Michael the archangel; then the trumpet call of God; the dead who died in a relationship with Jesus will rise first; all who are alive and living in a relationship with Jesus then raise up with them; together we all meet Jesus in the clouds and go to be with Him forever. Notice that we are to share these words of encouragement to keep our eyes on heaven and the glory that is coming.*)

24. 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 – What awaits our eyes on the Day of the Lord? (*Jesus appearing from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He is coming to bring everlasting justice. Our lives have sealed our fate according to what we did with God's offer of grace and salvation through Jesus Christ. Notice that those who have no belief in Jesus' offer and His truth are punished with everlasting destruction and shut out of the presence of the Lord. Now is all we have to secure our home in heaven with Jesus and those we love.*)

25. Hebrews 8:5 – What was the purpose of the Old Testament Sanctuary? (*The sanctuary where the priest offered sacrifices for the sins of the people was only a shadow of what was to come. The Holy Spirit in us makes us the sanctuary of God. Yet, even our faith is but a shadow of what awaits in heaven when we are in the last sanctuary of God. My heart should live for that moment, the final reward, to share God's heaven, His dwelling place.*)

26. 1 Peter 1:3-5 – How long will heaven last? (*It will never perish. Greek = APHTHARTOS, with means without corruption and implies immortality. Some people cannot accept the concept of forever. It even freaks out some people because they cannot grasp something never ending. It isn't natural in our eyes. However, we will once again be who we were created to be, the image of God. There will be no death once we cross over to our new life.*)

27. 2 Peter 3:1-13 – What will happen when the Kingdom of Heaven comes forever? (*The old heaven and earth are reserved for fire. They are a place for the judgment and destruction of ungodly men. Fire represents judgment so it may be this world they so love becomes their place of judgment and suffering, their hell on earth. When the Day of the Lord does come it will be as unpredictable as a thief who empties your house. You have no idea it will happen today. The heavens, the ouronias will disappear with a roar. The world as we know it now will be no more. The elements, the components of this world will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. NOTE in verse 11 that he says everything will be destroyed in this way. But the good news is that we are told to look forward to a new heaven and a new earth that will be the home of righteousness. Nothing impure or unholy will ever be able to enter the new heaven.*)

28. 2 Kings 6:17 – Could there be another space/time universe that would explain why we don't see heaven or hell? (*Wayne Grudem points that at the moment of his death Stephen's eyes were open and he saw into the spiritual dimension. It could very well be like a universe next door that's normally hidden from us. The prophet Elisha prays for god to give his servant, Gehazi, a glimpse into the invisible realm to see what Elisha knows is there fighting alongside him. God opened his servant's eyes and he saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. It appears God sent an angel army to give Elisha victory over the king of Aram. This would explain the reality of the existence of Paradise and Tartarus, the temporary heaven and hell that exist now in Hades (Greek) or Sheol (Hebrew), the unseen world of the dead.*)

29. Revelation 2:7 – What awaits us in the new heaven if we overcome this world through Jesus? (*The right to eat of the tree of life in the paradise of God. We will be forever in Paradise.*)

30. Revelation 2:10 – From what will heaven set us free? (*From the devil's temptations and suffering. No more persecution.*)

31. Revelation 2:17 – What did manna mean to the Israelites? (*It meant life. It was food from heaven that was completely provided by God. This hidden manna is associated with those who receive a new name. This hidden manna is life for all those who wear the new name, the name of Jesus. This manna doesn't feed us for a while but gives us immortality.*)

32. Revelation 2:26-28 – What will those who inherit heaven have? (*We will have authority over the nations. Jesus will judge all mankind by what they have done with His Word. We will have authority in the sense of reigning with Jesus forever because of His word we embraced. Jesus will give them the Morning Star. Jesus calls Himself the Bright and Morning Star. We will fully be one with Jesus, the bride finally joined to her true love.*)

33. Revelation 3:4-5 – Will sin stain anyone in heaven? (*No, we will be dressed in white and free from the stain of sin forever.*)

34. Revelation 3:11-12 – Will our new home simply be earth restored? (*It does not appear so. The New Jerusalem is always seen as coming down out of heaven prepared and ready for us to live in.*)

35. Revelation 4:1-11 – What will it be like in Jesus' presence? (*We will be in awe of the reigning King along with all the Prophets and Apostles, the angels at the throne of God proclaiming His glory and honor and power and singing of His worthiness and holiness! This is not heavenly worship 24/7 with nothing else to do. This is a scene of the throne room of God depicting the excitement when everything is once again as God created it to be. This will be unlike anything we have ever experience on earth when holiness and righteousness saturate all people from all nations who belong to Jesus.*)

36. Revelation 21:1 – What will happen to the sky, planets, seas and earth? (*The new heaven and earth will not be like the old world. The old expires, passes away, even the sea will be no more, at least as we know the sea to exist. It may well be reborn as the new terrarium that God first created that was not supposed to be corrupted. It may very well be a new Paradise like Adam walked in with God in the cool of the evening. That Paradise was corrupted by man. It has to be destroyed and replaced.*)

37. Revelation 21:2 – Describe the beauty of the New Jerusalem. (*It is compared to the breath-taking scene of the bride being clothed in the gown beautifully for her wedding. The New Jerusalem where God dwells forever with His people will cause us to be breathless.*)

38. Revelation 21:3-5 – What changes will God make? (*God will no longer be in heaven and us on earth. The heaven, the dwelling place of God will be with His people like we were first created to be. God will comfort us forever. God will be our comfort and our peace. There will be no pain or suffering because the old order, the fallen universe will be no more.*)

39. If everything is new, can we totally understand heaven in this lifetime? (*No. We have to realize that we cannot fully comprehend what has not yet been created. That should not be a problem. In the days of bloodletting to save lives, no one could understand penicillin and antibiotics that cure what used to kill people. Today, we embrace them. No one wants to go back to bloodletting. We trust that more new things we do not understand will happen, maybe with a growing understanding of DNA processes we will one day just have a sample sent off and a new gene injected to change our system and heal us. Would I say that I will never accept that because I cannot see it or understand it. No, I pray it happens in my lifetime. God's promises are always beyond anything we can hope or imagine. The new heaven and earth with God will be far beyond our wildest dreams.*)

40. Revelation 21:6-8 – Who will NOT be in heaven? (*Cowardly, those too afraid to look for truth and embrace it; unbelieving meaning those without faith; vile meaning those who stink [prayers of the faithful are the incense and sweet smell of God while without faith all that is done rises as an obnoxious odor to God; murderers; the sexually immoral, those who refuse to embrace God's definition of morality; people who practice all forms of magic; idolaters, those who put anything above the Creator; all liars.*)

41. Revelation 21:9-11 – What is our home with God going to be like? (*All these metals and precious stones are used to help us comprehend what we cannot yet understand. This of the most beautiful precious materials in the world and they will not hold a candle to heaven. We will see the glory of God radiating everywhere.*)

42. Revelation 21:12-14 - How many angels? (12) Gates? (12) Whose names? (12 tribes) How many foundations? (12) Whose names are on the foundations? (apostles) Note: The same numerals show a completeness to the plan of God and a unity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. God's plan to save man has always been the same. It was simply implemented in stages or covenants.

43. Revelation 21:15-17 – How wide, long, high and thick is the city? (12,000 stadia long, wide, high = 1400 miles; thick – 144 cubits 12X12 = 200')

44. Revelation 21:18-21 – How perfect is heaven? (*It is like the measure of perfection.*)

45. Revelation 21:22-27 – List some of the details given about heaven. (*No temple; needs no sun or moon due to the glory of God illuminating everything; Gates never shut; no night; 100% pure; only those who Jesus found to have a relationship that was real with Him.*)

46. Revelation 22:1-6 – What blessings come from the Throne? (*All creation is what it was meant to be forever.*)

47. Revelation 22:19 – How can one lose the right to heaven? (*Taking away anything from this book of prophecy.*)