

HEAVEN

Lesson 2 w/Answers

Understanding the Present Heaven

In this lesson, we continue our study of heaven with a look at what author Randy Alcorn refers to as the "present heaven", or the "intermediate" heaven. As he points out, if our final home is the New Earth and New Heaven in our resurrected bodies with God and our resurrected Savior, Jesus; then what we think of as heaven today is only an intermediate destination.

What does the heaven look like where followers of Christ go today when they die? Is it a physical place with physical people? Will we have a physical body there before we get our resurrected body? These and other related questions are addressed in Section 2 (Chapters 5 - 7) of Alcorn's book, which we will be examining in this lesson. In addition to looking at the questions below, we will be discussing two specific questions from the Study Guide, specifically, Question 7 from Chapter 6 and Question 4 from Chapter 7.

As we study heaven, we need to remember that only God knows all about heaven. Our knowledge is limited to only what He reveals. This lesson's material can have several meanings, as Randy is quick to point out. One of these views is that there is a physical realm outside of earth; a diametrically-opposed view is that there is not a physical realm, and that any physical references to such a realm found in the Bible are purely symbolic. After our study in this lesson, I am sure you will be able to decide for yourself which is true; but before you make up your mind, let's look at evidence which suggests that the present heaven is a very real place where both physical and spiritual beings abide together as they wait on Christ's return to earth and the coming resurrection.

Explore the scripture passages and verses referenced below and answer the following:

1. What is the difference between Hell (or Hades) and "The Lake of Fire"? (see Luke 16:19-31 and Rev 21:1)
 - a. ANSWER: Hell, or Hades, is the current place that those who are not followers of Christ go when they die to await the final day of judgment, when the Books will be open. Because their names will not be found written in the Lamb's Book of Life, they will be judged for their sins and, once found guilty, will be cast into "The Lake of Fire" for an eternity. So, just as there is today a "present heaven", or "paradise" (as Christ referred to it from the cross), where the dead in Christ go when they die to rest and wait for the resurrection; similarly, Hades, or Hell, is the place where the lost go upon death to wait in torment for their final judgment. Both are physical places. More on this below.
2. What happens when Christians die? Are we conscious, or do we fall into a sleep-like state? Read the following verses, and list what each tells you:
 - a. Luke 23:43
 - i. ANSWER: We go to paradise the moment we die.
 - b. Philippians 1:23
 - i. ANSWER: We are with Christ the moment we die.
 - c. 2 Corinthians 5:8
 - i. ANSWER 1: When we are not alive on earth, we are present with the Lord.
 - ii. ANSWER 2: How would we know any of these things were actually happening if we were not conscious of them? Also, just look at the scenes around the throne in the book of Revelation: All of the saints in heaven are obviously very much alive, rejoicing, singing, praising God, and praying.

3. Is the heaven that exists today a physical place? What do the following verses tell you?

a. 2 Kings 2:11

- i. ANSWER: Elijah was taken up physically to heaven, just as Jesus was.

b. Acts 7:55-56

- i. ANSWER: Stephen looked up, saw heaven, and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

c. Hebrews 8:5

- i. ANSWER: There is a tabernacle in heaven that was used as the model for the one Moses was instructed to build on the earth.

d. Revelation 7:9

- i. ANSWER: "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands." This is clearly a picture of physical beings in heaven doing physical things.

e. Revelation 8:6

- i. ANSWER: "Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them." Again, angels (spirit beings) "sounding" "trumpets"; once again, something physical: the horn, and the horn making a "sound".

f. Revelation 8:13

- i. ANSWER: "As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: 'Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!';" once again, a very specific picture of both the physical and the spirit co-existing in the same space.

g. Revelation 19:14

- i. ANSWER: "The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean." Again, this last passage clearly describes a physical army, dressed in linen, on horses following after Christ and coming out of heaven headed for earth -- all very much physical and all very much coming from some other physical location not apart of our current universe.

4. Are physical bodies present today in heaven? What do the verses below indicate?

a. Genesis 5:24

- i. ANSWER: "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away."; this describes a physical body being taken up to heaven.

b. 2 Kings 2:11-12

- i. ANSWER: "As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out, 'My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!' And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them apart."; once again, a physical human being taken directly to heaven.

c. Luke 9:28-36

- i. ANSWER 1: "About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, 'Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters — one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' (He did not know what he was saying.) While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.' When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen."

- ii. ANSWER 2: You will note several things in this passage:

1. Even though Peter and John had never met Moses and Elijah, they recognized them immediately. I believe that this indicates to us that in heaven we will know and/or recognize everyone there. We won't simply be a person or family who knows our relatives, we will know everyone; and

2. The bodies that Moses and Elijah had were recognizable bodies, not mists or clouds, or some indefinable form. They were both human, and human-looking in appearance and in function. Just as Christ will return to the earth in human form, Moses and Elijah came to the Mount of Transfiguration from heaven as human beings, not spirits or angels.

d. Acts 1:11

- i. ANSWER: "'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'"

e. Hebrews 11:5

- i. ANSWER: "By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God."

5. Do people in heaven see or know what is happening on earth?

a. Luke 15:7

- i. ANSWER: "I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." How could heaven be rejoicing about someone who repented, unless they could view events occurring on earth?

b. Luke 15:10

- i. ANSWER: "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

c. Hebrews 12:1

- i. ANSWER: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

d. Revelation 6:9-11

- i. ANSWER: "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?' Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed." How could any of this scene happen if those in heaven were not aware of what was happening on earth, or for that matter why they had died and suddenly found themselves in heaven?

e. Revelation 19:1-5

- i. ANSWER: "After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.' And again they shouted: 'Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.' The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: 'Amen, Hallelujah!' Then a voice came from the throne, saying: 'Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!'" Again, how could the twenty-four elders know what had happened and why unless they can see and know what is happening on earth?

In this lesson, we have tackled some of the real "meat" in God's Holy Word, and it is difficult. We have been challenged on many levels, yet we are encouraged and comforted as well, as we learn more about the heaven that today is the home for loved ones who have already gone before us, and where someday we will be reunited with them and with the God who saved us through the great gift of His Son Jesus.

Have a great week everyone, and thanks for studying with us.

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