

# Major Bible Themes

BY

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## CHAPTER XLIX

### THE ETERNAL ESTATE OF THE REDEEMED

Probably no Bible theme is more agreeable to the mind of man than that of Heaven. This is especially true of those who through advancing years of physical limitations are drawing near to the end of the realities of earth.

In their writings, various religions, other than the Christian, present their conceptions of an eternal estate; but in every instance they offer that which is evidently the invention of the human imagination. In contrast to this, the Bible presents the facts of eternity past, the issues of the present, and the realities of eternity to come with never a descent to the plane of human conception, but always evidencing the high and holy distinguishing qualities of a divine revelation.

Human proof relative to divine revelation cannot proceed beyond the range of human life and experience; therefore that portion of the Bible revelation which transcends the limitations of this sphere is not subject to human verification; but, within the limited human sphere, every teaching of the Scriptures is found to be perfectly true. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that all divine

revelation is equally true, and that both the eternal estate of the redeemed and the eternal estate of the lost are as accurately stated in the Scriptures as are the present things of time.

Though it is not the divine purpose that those who go out of this life shall return; yet the unseen worlds have not been left without a witness. On the statement of the Son of God whose veracity is unquestionable and who is Himself the Truth, we know that a certain rich man when he died went to a place of torment, and that a certain beggar when he died went to a place of bliss (Luke 16:19-31). We observe, also, that Christ was as familiar with the unseen as He was with the seen. This was true in His teachings concerning God (John 4:24; 5:36, 37, 45; 10:15, 18), concerning the fallen and unfallen angels (Matt. 22:30; Mark 1:32-34), and concerning the destinies of men (Matt. 5:22; 25:34, 46). Again, the Apostle Paul was caught up into the highest Heaven and heard unspeakable words which, he declared, were not lawful for a man to utter (2 Cor. 12:1-4), and long after that experience he testified that to depart and be with Christ is far better (Phil. 1:23), and that he was willing to be absent from the body that he might be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). Added to all this, we have the divinely appointed witness of the Apostle John who, in his Patmos vision, went into Heaven's glory and returned with the commission to write for the comfort and encouragement of the servants of God the things which he had seen. Thus, since the divine revelation concerning the future state is presented to us by the message of the Son of God and by the testimony of both the Apostle Paul and the Apostle John as eye-witnesses, we are assured of the certainty of every word that has been spoken.

We are told that, at death, the believer immediately departs to be with the Lord and that this estate is "far better" (Phil. 1:23); and though it is indicated that there is an intermediate body which is from Heaven and which is provided in order that the child of God shall not be unclothed, or bodiless (2 Cor. 5:1-4), the glorified body, which is by resurrection, is not given until it is given to all the saved at the coming of Christ. It is the teaching of the Word of God that the future estate of the believer, regarding his own person, is to be one in which he will be conformed to the image of the resurrected Christ in glory (Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:1-3; Phil. 3:20, 21). He will then know even as he is now known (1 Cor. 13:12); that is, his every capacity for knowledge will be expanded to the measure of Christ's present knowledge of us. By this we are assured that we are to be deprived of no present knowledge, but rather, all this is to be increased to an infinite degree. Loved ones will be nearer and dearer than ever before, and while Christ is the center of all attraction in Heaven, at the coming of Christ, believers who have fallen asleep in Jesus will be joined to those who are alive and remain, and together they will all go on to meet the Lord in the air, and thus be together with the Lord forever (1 Thess. 4:15-17).

Heaven is a place (John 14:1-3) of surpassing beauty and celestial glory (Rev. 21:1 to 22:7). It is to be inhabited by "God the Judge of all," by "Jesus the mediator of the new covenant," by "an innumerable company of angels," by "the spirits of just men made perfect," and by "the general assembly and church of the firstborn" (Heb. 12:22-24). The phrase, "the spirits of just men made perfect," doubtless refers to the saints of other dispensations since the "church of the firstborn" is so obviously limited to the saints of the present age of grace (Eph. 3:3-6). In like manner, Christ stated that there are many mansions in the Father's house -which, we believe, will be occupied; but He has gone to prepare a place for the Church which is His bride whom He will receive unto Himself when He comes again (John 14:1-3).

In attempting to portray to the mind of man the glories of the celestial sphere, language has been strained to its limits; yet we may believe that no considerable portion of that wondrous glory has ever been revealed. Who can comprehend the blessedness that will be experienced by the redeemed in Heaven, or that has already come to human hearts in anticipation of that wonderful place! It is characterized as a place of abundant life (1 Tim. 4:8), of rest (Rev. 14:13), of knowledge (1 Cor. 13:8-10), of holiness (Rev. 21:27), of service (Rev. 22:3), of worship (Rev. 19:1), of fellowship with God (Rev. 21:3), of fellowship with other believers (1 Thess. 4:18), and of glory (2 Cor. 4:17). "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things have passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:4, 5).

The student of the Scriptures should distinguish between "the kingdom of heaven" -- a phrase peculiar to Matthew's Gospel which refers to the divine reign on the earth, -- "the heavenly" -- a phrase peculiar to the Ephesian Epistle which refers to the present sphere of the believer's association with Christ, -- and "heaven" which refers to the unseen realms of celestial glory.

The Bible, which alone discloses the wonders of Heaven, is equally explicit in its declarations concerning the conditions upon which sinners of this fallen race may enter there. Notwithstanding this, multitudes are assuring themselves that they will be privileged to enter Heaven who, at the same time, are giving no heed to those counsels of God in which He states the only way given among men whereby they must be saved. Not every person will be found in Heaven; that glory and bliss is for the redeemed. Redemption, which involves no impossible human condition is, nevertheless, absolutely dependent on a personal acceptance of the Redeemer. Such acceptance is a transaction most simple, and yet so vital and conclusive that the trusting soul will be assured above all else that he is depending only on Christ for salvation.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is peculiar in the Bible teaching about Heaven not found in other religions?
2. Though Heaven is unseen, what reasonable proof have we that the Bible records concerning Heaven are true?
3. Who are the three experienced witnesses who have written of Heaven?
4. What did Christ say concerning Heaven?
5. a. Under what circumstances did Paul see Heaven?
  - b. What was his own attitude toward death after having seen Heaven?
6. a. Under what circumstances did John see Heaven?
  - b. What record did he leave?
7. a. Of what body does the Apostle write in 2 Corinthians 5:1-4?

b. When does the believer receive his resurrection body?

8. What may be believed as to the extent of the Christian's knowledge of Heaven?

9. Is Heaven a place or a state?

10. Who are the inhabitants of Heaven?

11. Name things which are to characterize Heaven.<sup>4</sup>

12. Distinguish between Heaven and the heavenly, also the kingdom of heaven.

13. On what one condition is Heaven promised to men?

14. Is that one condition unreasonable?