

Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries

The TREE OF LIFE weekly teaching summary from the week ending January 04, 1998

Tree of Life 01/04/98

The Doctrine of Heaven.

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In our continued study of Philippians 1:21 in which verse Paul as a mature believer claims that living is for Christ and dying is profit, we have now entered into a study of the Doctrine of Heaven. The believer's physical death is a profit in that his soul and human spirit are thereafter transferred to heaven. Though heaven is beyond the understanding of man's finite mind and imagination let us try to note, in our limited vocabulary, the splendor and glory of our eternal destination!

Throughout human history prophets have received glimpses of the glory of God in heavenly places. For example, Ezekiel's vision of Eze 1:26-28. Or the apostle Paul having actually visited heaven which is one of the reasons he dogmatically considered death to be a profit or promotion. God also took John to visit the New Jerusalem which is where we receive our major description of it in Revelation chapters 21 and 22. But regardless of the descriptions we receive, when our eyes finally fall upon our Lord Jesus Christ in His FULL GLORY, seated on His throne in the New Jerusalem in heaven, we will be fixed in awe and complete devotion. The best of all our experiences before this point will pale when faced with the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in all His splendor! Heaven exemplifies all that makes up God's essence and perfect grace. At that time we will see and know Him in full. Right now in time we can only know Him in part, 1Corinthians 13:12, but in heaven His fullness will be exposed before us! Such a time should be the believer's source of encouragement and anticipation.

Heaven, by way of definition, is the dwelling place of God and his angels

variously conceived of as the place where the blessed will live after death. It is also a place of great beauty and pleasure. The dwelling place of God, i.e., His abode is in the third heaven. Distinction must be made since theologically there are three heavens. **The first heaven** is that which we see, the clouds of the air, our immediately encompassing atmosphere, Acts 14:17. **The second heaven** is known as the stellar universe i.e., the galaxy beyond earth's immediate atmosphere where angels engage in spiritual warfare, Eph 6:12. And **the third heaven** in its celestial magnificence is the abode of God, Hebrews 8:1, and is located beyond the stellar universe to the north according to the Psalms and the book of Isaiah. In the third heaven there is found the capital city of the eternal state, the New Jerusalem, Revelation chapters 21 and 22. **The New Jerusalem** is the present and future location of the throne of God and the seat of our Lord Jesus Christ. Upon our physical death, it is there our interim bodies will congregate in the presence of our Lord, in the midst of the beauty and grandeur of the New Jerusalem. It is also where our resurrected bodies will congregate after the Rapture and Judgment Seat of Christ. This is what Paul saw when he was taken to heaven which is why we find it no surprise that he was not incredibly ecstatic about coming back to earth. Of course, whatever the will of God had for his life he happily complied with but his sight was on heaven! It's strange that believers today claim to want to go to heaven but they do not want to die. If their faith were strong enough, they would know that what lies beyond physical death is of profit!

Let us go through the chain of events which occur when the believer is triumphantly released from his physical body. At the moment your physical body breaths its last the (believer's) soul and human spirit exit the human body and enter the interim body noted in 2Corinthians 5:1-8 at which point the believer is met by angels who are sent to escort him on his breathtaking journey to heaven. Why is an angelic escort sent? Is it because God thinks we will get lost? No, it is because of the fact that fallen angels can prohibit space travel between heaven and earth according to the account noted in Daniel 10:12-13 in which the angel who was sent to aid Daniel was delayed 21 days by the fallen angels in the atmosphere. You must remember the angelic conflict drives fallen angels to try and botch up whatever they can within God's plan and realm. Another example of the foul play of fallen angels would be Satan's attempt to steal the physical body of Moses to mislead God's people. So Daniel 10:1-13 describes the type of battles that take place in the spirit world. Battles that if we could see would cause us to be so frightened we wouldn't leave our houses.

Now, when the Rapture of the church occurs, we are told that in a second of time we will be face to face with the Lord in the clouds of the air, 1Th

4:17; 1Co 15:52. But when we die physically and the angels come to escort us to our home in heaven, it is a glorious journey. We do not die and in a second are face to face with the Lord, there is no where in Scripture that indicates this second in time transfer at death. Our ascent is one of leisure and beauty. Heaven is billions and billions of light years away, what we experience during our ascension to the third heaven goes far beyond our best vacation!! We rise through the clouds free from any physical impediments we knew in our human bodies. We are free also from the laws of gravity and are lightly rising in a quiet, pleasant fashion. We are also faced with angels who are smiling and beautiful. We continue to rise above the clouds through the planets and stars that we use to gaze up at on earth and speculate about. What our astronauts were renown for we are casually passing by. We continue to sweep upward into the third heaven which is beyond the sun and stars and has a glorious illumination of its own. It appears so cheerful and enchanting due to the presence of the Shekinah Glory, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. No sun is needed here in this heavenly city that we are approaching, the city called The New Jerusalem, which is the capital of heaven.

As we approach the holy city we are aghast at its overwhelming beauty. We are unable to speak having never before seen such radiant and majestic delight. The angels smile knowing that for us to behold this sight is completely exhilarating! They probably receive just as much pleasure watching our response. This city is a very real and unique city, it is not a mirage or some type of mystical projection. It is an enormous city who's architect and builder is God, Hebrews 11:10. It is a city in which the perfect will of God is done! Think of the most breathtaking place you have been or seen, well it cannot even compare to this perfect and holy city! It's mind blowing! Even if you could contact loved ones on earth to share with them your experience you wouldn't be able to describe it. When God took the apostle John to visit the New Jerusalem John found it very difficult to describe in language of human accommodation and so likened it as unto a bride who is arrayed in her most beautiful and extravagant attire.

Surrounding the enormous city the newly deceased believer who we shall hereforth call the newly alive believer, notes a commanding and stunning wall which is described in Revelation 21. **This wall is 72 yards tall and 1,500 miles long on each side**, forming a perfect cube around the holy city, which city is also 1,500 miles high! The foundation of this grand wall is made up of twelve foundation stones on which are written the names of the twelve apostles. Each foundational stone is 500 miles long with an apostles name engraved and gilded into it, our apostles being: Peter, Andrew, the 2 James', John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, Thaddaeus, Simon, and Paul. Is this to say that these men are monuments

of greatness? No! It is rather a show of God's awesome grace. We are all mere men and in as such are objects of God's grace. All these men though they have all failed, have their names engraved into the immense foundational stones of the wall surrounding the eternal city, expounding on the fact of God's grace. In fact, the focus in this city is the grace and magnificence of God. It is a city where God's perfect will is done!

Now, attached onto each of these twelve foundational stones is an enormous precious stone. In fact, the same stones which were placed in the Ephod (i.e., the breastplate of the Jewish high priest), Exo 28:21, are also the stones which make up the wall surrounding the New Jerusalem. The stones are as follows:

- 1) Jasper, a translucent stone probably what we today know as a diamond.**
- 2) Sapphire, a blue stone with a star seen within.**
- 3) Chalcedony, a bluish white stone.**
- 4) Emerald, a bright green stone.**
- 5) Sardonyx, a white/orangish red stone.**
- 6) Sardius, a blood red stone.**
- 7) Chrysolite, a yellow/green stone.**
- 8) Beryl, a bluish green stone.**
- 9) Topaz, a yellow-gold stone.**
- 10) Chrysoprase, a greenish stone.**
- 11) Jacinth, a red/yellow stone.**
- 12) Amethyst, a purple stone.**

And within each one of these immense precious stones is found a gate like that of a huge pearl. Why a pearl, for the reason of serving as a constant reminder of the price Jesus Christ paid on our behalf. A pearl is formed from the suffering of its host, the oyster. Above each pearl gate is a plaque with a name of one of the Tribes of Israel. So here's the picture... each side of the wall has three foundational stones each with an apostle's name on it and on top of each foundational stone is attached a huge precious stone making up the wall. These stones are semi-transparent through which the radiance of the Shekinah Glory within shines out. Set in each brilliant stone is a gate, so there are three gates on each side and above each gate is a plaque with a name inscribed on it. The names inscribed above each gate make up the twelve tribes of Israel, again pointing to the grace of God. So on the East wall above the gates we have inscribed the Tribe names of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. On the south wall we have Reuben, Simeon, and Gad. On the west wall we have Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. And, on the north wall we have Dan, Asher, and Naphtali. And standing at each of the twelve gates is an angel, representing victory in the angelic conflict, they are also there to serve us.

None of these angels "**deserve**" to be standing before the city of God, also another representation of the grace of God. Note, that these gates are not used to keep anyone out but to channel the incoming traffic. Nor do we have to answer any trick questions to enter the "**pearly gates**". But, because it is so overwhelming we might just feel inclined to stand at the gates staring at this splendid wall for all eternity. So, the angels make sure we find our awe-struck little selves around the holy city.

Next the angels take us to meet our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ! We cascade through the golden, glassy streets of the city. We ascend to the high point of the city, called Mount Zion, on which is situated our Lord's throne. Yes, we will finally see the splendor and glory of the majesty on high, Isa 35:2! That which we have been eagerly anticipating all our lives, the Lord Jesus Christ - face to face in all His fullness! If we could we would faint but no longer being hindered by a human body we proceed forward accompanied by angels. When our eyes finally fall upon the One who saved us, redeemed us, reconciled us to God and offered us the occupancy of this glorious city we fall in worship, in gratitude, and complete humility at the feet of our precious love, so gracious and selfless. We melt in adoration before Him as He welcomes us to His home, the home He went to prepare for us. We gaze up at His wrenching brilliance, we find that His gaze is beyond description, far greater than the most dazzling and beautiful of sunsets that had ever moved our souls on earth. How we loved His word on earth and how it moved us then, but to meet Him face to face brings us near the feeling of explosion!

After meeting TLJC on His throne we are shown to our welcoming committee of loved ones who have gone before us! There is a joyous reunion as we catch up on the grand accounts of heaven. Our loved ones show us around the New Jerusalem, our new and eternal home. We see that the throne of God is at the peak of Mount Zion and that there are miles and miles of indescribably majestic terrain which stretch from the throne down to the 1,500 mile wide square base. We marvel at it's enormous size, a perfect cube of 1,500 miles wide by 1,500 miles long by 1,500 miles high. We are no longer bound to mere horizontal travel, but our interim bodies now include vertical travel and this grand city climbs 1,500 miles upward! Level after level of the most beautiful architecture we have ever seen! Oh that house on earth that we thought was so pretty is poverty in light of God's perfectly designed and majestically built city. We also notice that there are twelve rivers flowing through the New Jerusalem from God's throne. These rivers are perfectly clear and one is able to see right down to their crystal bottoms! We are told that these waters offer supernatural power in liquid form.

On each side of these sparkling rivers are beautiful heavenly orchards with twelve kinds of fruit. The leaves of these trees are used for the healing of the nations, indicating that there will be nations in heaven, but no enmity between them. The old sin nature was left far, far behind in the dead physical body. Away with it went our selfish desires and the things of the earth as noted in Gal 5;19-21. In heaven we will not only have perfect fellowship with God but with each other. We will knit together through the perfect impersonal love of God. We will all reside in perfect righteousness with no old sin nature! We will always walk in the light, 1Jo 1:7. In heaven everything is done according to the perfect will of God. In heaven, all the misery caused by being self-centered will no longer exist. Hence we will love all as we love TLJC. It will be just as natural for us to be unselfish in heaven as it is natural for us to be selfish here on earth. We are all to some degree self oriented, we can't avoid it since we have an old sin nature. In heaven we will be **NON POSSE PECARRE**, that is not able to sin. Just as Jesus Christ incarnate was not able to sin in His deity yet able to sin (**POSSE NON PECARRE**) in His flesh. We will no longer be held captive by our flesh and so we will be unable to sin. We will reside in our new nature forever. Every day spent in our earthly body is another day we are not face to face with our Lord. But it is also another day we are afforded the opportunity to glorify God on earth by our decisions for His plan in the angelic conflict. Through the work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ we have a new home waiting for us! A hearth warmer than any known on this earth, a brilliance grander than any splendor experienced in this life. This is why the apostle Paul states in Phi 1:21 that to die is profit!! He has seen the New Jerusalem as we too will someday see it. That should be our anticipation, that should be our energy.

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