

H E A V E N

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Concordia Publishing House
St. Louis, Mo.

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St. Louis, Mo.*

PRINTED IN U. S. A.



Is there a heaven?" "Can the teaching of the Bible regarding heaven be true?" "Where is heaven?" These are questions which confront us as death takes from us loved ones who are very near and dear to us. It is quite natural that the aching heart should be filled with grief. Even Jesus, our Lord, shed tears of sorrow at the grave of His friend Lazarus. But we Christians have a comfort which truly comforts. For us there is "a balm of Gilead" which can and does heal the wounds of our sorrowing hearts. Thank God, we Christians know that our dear ones have gone to heaven, where "the wicked cease from troubling and the weary be at rest." (Job 3:17)

For the believing Christian, who accepts without question what the Bible has to say, to think of heaven is sweet and most comforting contemplation. He delights in it. He loves to hear about it. He frequently talks about it with such as are equally interested in it. Heaven is the goal he hopes to attain. Heaven is the home he expects to occupy in all eternity. "If I only get to heaven!" is the sincere and fervent wish of his heart.

It must be borne in mind that whatever knowledge we have of heaven is obtained solely from the Bible, God's own revelation of spiritual and heavenly things to man. The Scriptures are our only source of information. Without this divine revelation we would not so much as know that there is a heaven. From reason and from the moral longings and aspirations of his being man might infer and therefore hope

that "death does not end all" and that, "if a man die, he shall live again." But inferences never give him certainty. If God had not spoken to us in His Word, no man could say with firm assurance, "When I die, I shall still live; for in passing out of this life I merely pass into another and eternal life." But God *has* spoken, and therefore heaven is a precious certainty to us.

Turning to God's special revelation concerning heaven, we ask:

WHAT IS HEAVEN?

According to the Bible heaven is a real, objective place. We are not to think of heaven as a mere state or condition. Speaking of heaven, Jesus says: "I go to prepare a *place* for you" (John 14:2). In the same passage He refers to it as "My Father's *house*." The Apostle John speaks of heaven as "the holy *city*." (Rev. 21:2)

WHERE IS HEAVEN?

This is a question which we are unable to answer because God has not revealed its exact location or geographical boundaries to us. According to the language of the Bible we may, however, think of it as being above us. In Ps. 103:11 heaven is spoken of as "high above the earth." Israel's appeal, according to Deut. 26:15, reads: "Look *down* from Thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Thy people Israel." In Deut. 3:12 the expression is used. "Who shall go *up* for us to heaven?" The psalmist exclaims: "If I ascend *up* into heaven, Thou art there" (Ps. 139:8). When Jesus left this earth, after having completed His redemptive work, the Bible tells us "He was *taken up*, and a cloud received Him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). As the disciples stood there in amazement, gazing

steadfastly up into heaven after Him, two heavenly messengers said unto them: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing *up* into heaven? This same Jesus which is *taken up* from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). After this experience the disciples no doubt always thought of heaven as being above, on high. They had seen their beloved Master go up, ascending higher and higher till a cloud removed Him from their sight. Heaven to them was up above, somewhere beyond the azure blue. We, too, like to think of it in the same way.

WHAT KIND OF PLACE IS HEAVEN?

Oh, that human tongue or pen could adequately describe it! Heaven is a place of entrancing beauty, of matchless splendor, of ineffable glory. *Heaven is the habitation of God*, the capital of the divine King of the universe, the place where Jesus has gone to prepare a mansion for us. How could it be otherwise than *beautiful*?

The Apostle John, who was carried away in the spirit and permitted to view "that great city, the holy Jerusalem," gives us an authentic and, at the same time, a most thrilling description of heaven in Rev. 21. He writes: "Her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; and had a wall, great and high, and had twelve gates and at the gates twelve angels and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city and the gates thereof

and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth; and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper. And the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third a chalcedony, the fourth an emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth a topaz, the tenth a chrysoprasus, the eleventh a jacinth, the twelfth an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day; for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." (Rev. 21:11-27)

No human author has ever succeeded in describing the splendor, the grandeur, the magnificence, of heaven more eloquently and graphically than the inspired Apostle John

in the passage just quoted. Heaven, according to the Bible, is a place of exquisite beauty.

WHO IS IN HEAVEN?

God is in heaven. Heaven is the dwelling place of God. King Solomon prayed on the occasion of the dedication of the Temple: "Hear Thou from Thy dwelling place, *even from heaven*" (2 Chron. 6:21). God Himself declares: "*The heaven is My throne*" (Is. 66:1). In Ps. 123:1 we read: "Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou that *dwest in the heavens.*" In Ps. 33:13, 14 we are told: "The Lord looketh from heaven; He beholdeth all the sons of men. *From the place of His habitation* He looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth." What a place heaven must be since it is the home of God, the habitation of the "King of kings, the dwelling place of the Lord of lords"! His very presence makes it a place of unspeakable glory. What a rapturous and thrillingly entrancing view must have been opened up to Stephen, the martyr, who, shortly before being stoned, was given a glimpse of heaven! "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God." (Acts 7:55)

Jesus is in heaven. When Stephen looked up into heaven, he saw "Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). The presence of Jesus makes heaven what it really is, a place of bliss and supreme joy. "The Lamb is the light thereof" (Rev. 21:23). He who loved us with an everlasting love, who sacrificed Himself and gave His life a ransom for us, is in heaven, waiting for us, longing for us; and when we get there, He will welcome us. Without Jesus heaven would lose its charm and beauty.

The story is told of a little sick child whose mother was