



By Dr. Andrew Corbett

“All that we know about heaven we know from Scripture. But, if Scripture is more clear about one thing than about another, it is this: that heaven will perfectly satisfy all who reach it. It follows that any idea of heaven that assumes some of its inhabitants to be unhappy is false to fact. The trouble is, as Mr H.G. Wells would say, that you cannot describe the life of one world in the language of another...In heaven, we are told, there shall be no manner of sickness--not even homesickness.”

Dr. F.W. Boreham, “THE SILVER SHADOW”, Essay- *Home, Sweet Home*, 1918:269

I honestly used to think that Christianity was all about having the assurance of going to Heaven. But as I learned more about the Gospel and the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth I became curious about the relative scarcity of references to Heaven in the Bible. Yet, while my understanding of the place of Heaven in my Gospel proclamation has been refined, some God-Channel evangelists have headed in the other direction and made Heaven central to their Gospel. Some of these evangelists now even claim to have the spiritual power to make repeated visits there!

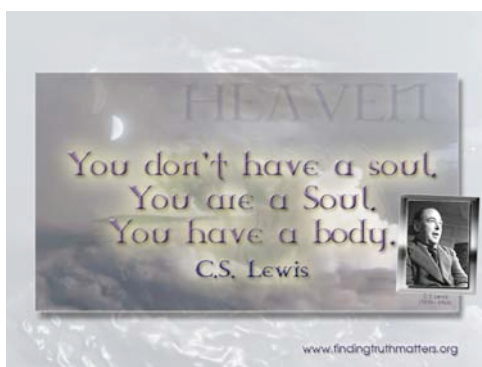
Presumably God, the Supreme Being, has a supremely beautiful home, in a supremely magnificent neighbourhood. Amazingly, God invites mankind to move into His neighbourhood- for eternity! But what is Heaven like? Is it possible, as some are now claiming, that we can visit Heaven? While I am going to lead readers to conclude that Heaven is not the Gospel's focus, if it is the only reason someone is motivated to convert to Christ, then we should rejoice-

"Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Luke 10:20

HEAVEN IS NOT THE FOCUS OF HEAVEN...

The Bible is not pre-occupied with Heaven- it is preoccupied with God. Heaven is not the point or focus of the Gospel- God is! The Scripture reveals that the focus of Heaven is a Throne, well actually Someone who is sitting on the Throne. John the Apostle was caught up to Heaven in a vision. The first thing he saw was the Throne of God (Revelation 4:2). This scene sets the tone for the Apocalypse- that God rules the world from Heaven. So central was the belief among Jews that Heaven was the Throne-room of the universe, that "Heaven" became synonymous with "God" and devout Jews who dared not to take God's name upon their lips would use the term "Heaven" in referring to God. This is why the Gospel of Matthew (written to a Jewish audience) refers to the Kingdom of God as the Kingdom of Heaven (compare Matthew 10:7 with Luke 10:9).



In order for John to even see Heaven he had to be caught up in "the Spirit" (Rev. 4:2). This tells us that Heaven is in a different dimension to this physical realm. It is in a spiritual realm. Kenneth Copeland teaches that, "*Heaven has a north and south, and an east and a west. Consequently, it must be a planet.*"¹ But this is nonsensical and is a serious failure to exegete the Bible correctly. But because Heaven is in a spiritual realm it doesn't

mean that it is less real. In fact, C.S. Lewis noted that the Biblical revelation of ultimate reality is spiritual ("God is Spirit" John 4:24). He said, "*You don't have a soul. You are a Soul. You have a body.*"

¹ ("Spirit, Soul, and Body I" Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1985, audio-tape #01-0601, side 1)

In his *Chronicles of Narnia* series he concludes the series with a masterful picture of what Heaven is like in the novel: *The Last Battle*. When the Pevensie children are rescued from the disintegrating Narnia by Aslan, they are ushered into a place that looks remarkably similar to the one they just left. But they notice that in this new place there are no limitations. They can run faster than leopards and not grow weary or come to the end of their acceleration. They ask Aslan about where they are. “Narnia”, he tells them, “the real Narnia.” Since the spiritual realm is just as real (if not more real) as this physical realm in which we now live, Heaven is not some vague misty cloud zone!



HOW WE KNOW ABOUT HEAVEN...



There are a several God-Channel evangelists and “seers” who are now claiming that they have had several visits to Heaven. Not to be out-done, some are now even claiming that they can enter Heaven at will- and “spiritually” take others with them!²

Before these latest rash of claims, some had previously written of their alleged experiences in visiting Heaven. Many of these paperback books have sold in the millions and influenced many Christians in their ideas of not only what Heaven must be like, but what its purpose is: *to provide a blissful, eternal, home for the “saved”*. One such book which was endorsed by some of the heavyweights of the Pentecostal/Charismatic world, was written by an American-Korean, Choo Thomas. Her book- *Heaven Is So Real!* claims that the author was repeatedly taken to Heaven by Jesus and shown what awaits the saved. The author also claims that she was shown Hell to see what awaits the damned. But there are a number of disturbing aspects to this book and ones like it. Firstly, the central idea behind the book is that salvation is all about “going to heaven”. It’s not. Secondly, the claim the author makes that Jesus told her He was about to return to earth but not enough people had yet believed. *The world needs a book about Heaven so that they will believe in Jesus*, the author claims she was told by the Lord. But I seem to recall that God has already given the world a Book so that they might believe in and turn to Jesus.



In a similar vein, Mary Baxter’s book- *A Divine Revelation of Hell*, is the story of a woman who claims to have been taken to Hell each night over a 45 day period to be shown the horrors of Hell so that she could warn the world about it. In her

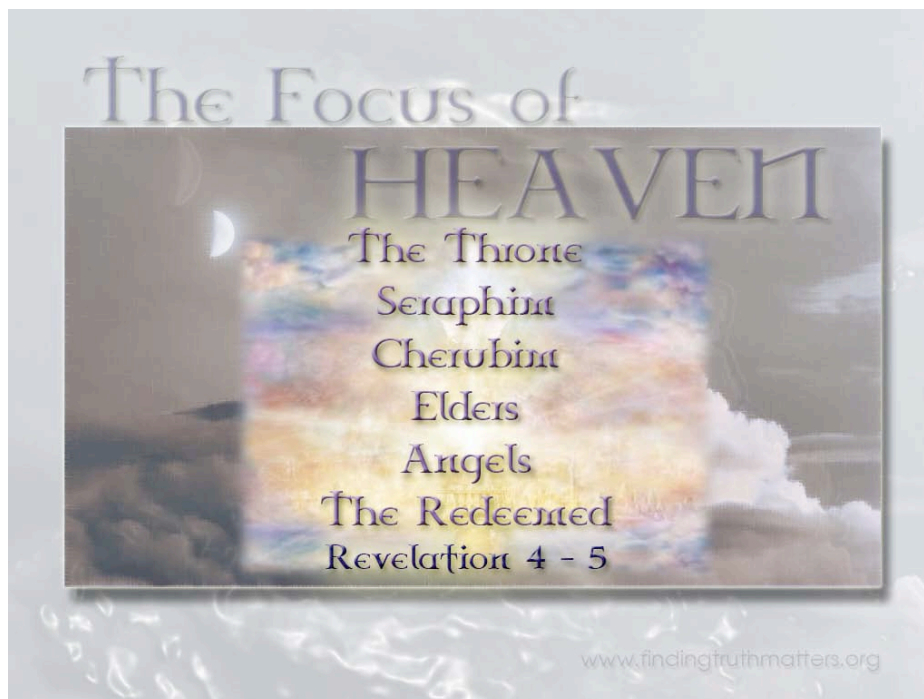
² See YouTube video- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGCTMEoifqQ&feature=related>

“revelation” she saw demons and devils tormenting the damned. But the Bible says that God is the Judge and that these devilish creatures will be the ones being punished- not the ones doing the punishing! (See 2Peter 2:4) In fact, Hell, Jesus said, was created for the Devil and his angels.

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”

Matthew 25:41

Our understanding of what Heaven is like should not be based on some paperback book or the ranting of a God-channel televangelist-seer. We must depend upon the Bible not only as our final authority, but our *only* authority for our understanding of Heaven. In contrast to these rather glib fantasies of heavenly visits, the Biblical authors were not only reluctant to share of their authentic experiences of Heaven but were actually commanded not to! (2Cor. 12:4, Rev. 10:4). This is no small point. Far from being told that the problem with the lack of belief in the world is a general ignorance about Heaven, the Biblical authors focus their attempts at persuading their unbelieving audiences to believe by teaching about the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus (note 1Corinthians 15:1-4).



The Bible seems to be consistent in describing the “Third Heaven” (where God’s immediate presence is) as focused on the Throne of God. All of Heaven points toward the Throne of God, from where God reigns. ‘Above’ God there are at least two “Seraphim”. Isaiah (Isa. 6) describes these Seraphim as having six wings: with two they cover their face (they are not worthy to look upon God), with another two wings they fly (they are not worthy to stand in God’s presence), and with the other two they cover their feet (they are not worthy to be in God's presence). It appears that these Seraphim lead Heaven in worship.

Around God's Throne there is a "sea" described as being as "glass" or "crystal". In Biblical language, "seas" can speak of *circumstances*. When God intervenes into tumultuous circumstances it is described as *stilling roaring seas and raging waves* (Psalm 65:7; 89:9; 107:29). "Calm seas" or "still water" is sometimes Biblical language for the *peace of God*. Thus, when God's Throne is described as being surrounded by a *sea of glass like crystal* it speaks of the *infinite peace* that envelopes God's presence.

In "front" of God's Throne are four creatures called: *Cherubim*. The opening chapters of Ezekiel contain the most detail about these beings. They seem to be the Heavenly 'Secret Service'. They were sent into the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned to stand guard against access to the Tree of Life.

He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

Genesis 3:24

It seems that the Cherubim guard the Throne of God. God is said to be enthroned on/above/upon/between the Cherubim (Psalm 80:1; 99:1; Isaiah 37:16), and their wings are outstretched so that they touch tip-to-tip leaving no room between them.

¶ Then I looked, and behold, on the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim there appeared above them something like a sapphire, in appearance like a throne.

Ezekiel 10:1

Ezekiel describes these Cherubim as having four faces each.

but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings...their wings touched one another. Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went. As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle.

Ezekiel 1:6, 9-10

John's glimpse of Heaven reveals twenty-four "Elders" before God's Throne. It seems that these Elders represent the Redeemed of both Covenants- twelve from the first Covenant (representing the twelve patriarchs) and twelve from the New Covenant (representing the twelve apostles).



that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Luke 22:30

The remainder of Heaven is filled with angels and the redeemed.

¶ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,

Revelation 5:11

¶ *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,*

Revelation 7:9

Even prior to the Resurrection, since the close of the First (Old) Covenant, the redeemed are admitted to Heaven. Thus Paul could say that he was torn between this life and the next (in which he knew he would be with Christ, in Heaven) -

I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

Philippians 1:23

Yet, there is coming a time when the Redeemed shall be resurrected and then able to enjoy the dimension of Heaven without limit. The closing scenes of the Book of Revelation describe the Resurrection of the Dead- the Redeemed to everlasting life with God in the “New” Heaven and Earth, and the wicked to eternal torment in the Lake of Fire. In either case the question of eternal destiny was answered by the choices they made in *this* life (not the next).

HOW CAN WE *ENTER* HEAVEN?

Without the grace of God all people are doomed. Unless God opens the eyes of a person to recognise their true spiritual condition they will continue to live in wilful disobedience to their Maker. Ravi Zacharias tells the story of a proud single mother who wanted to show-off the singing talent of her young daughter to their wealthy relatives in the hope that they might sponsor her further education. She invited the extended family over for an afternoon tea and made sure that her daughter looked her finest. At the time for the young to sing the mother called her over and invited her to sing. “No” her daughter replied. “Darling, do you remember that you were going to sing this afternoon?” the mother asked. “Yes” replied her daughter. “Then could you please sing for us?” her mother appealed. “No!” said her daughter. “Then go to my bedroom and wait for me there!” said the embarrassed mother. After the mother had apologised to her guests she went to her bedroom to talk with her daughter. But her daughter was not sitting on her bed where she expected her to be. Instead, it appeared that she was in the wardrobe. Opening the wardrobe she saw her daughter. “What are you doing in here?” the mother asked. “I’m spitting in your shoes” said the daughter, “and just before you arrived I was spitting on your dresses, and I’m glad you’re here now so that I can spit in your face.”

Ravi Zacharias says we are like the little girl. Not only do we “spit” on what God has done, given the chance, we would gladly spit in His face! We are rebels to the core.

[Since] we’ve compiled this long and sorry record as sinners (both us and them) and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us,

Romans 3:23 THE MESSAGE

While some churches conduct “Seeker Services”, the Bible actually says that there is no-one who seeks God- *there are no seekers of God.*

no one understands; no one seeks for God.

Romans 3:11

The only way someone can qualify to enter Heaven is to be chosen by God. This is an act of His grace.

¶ *“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”*

Jesus of Nazareth, Matthew 7:13-14

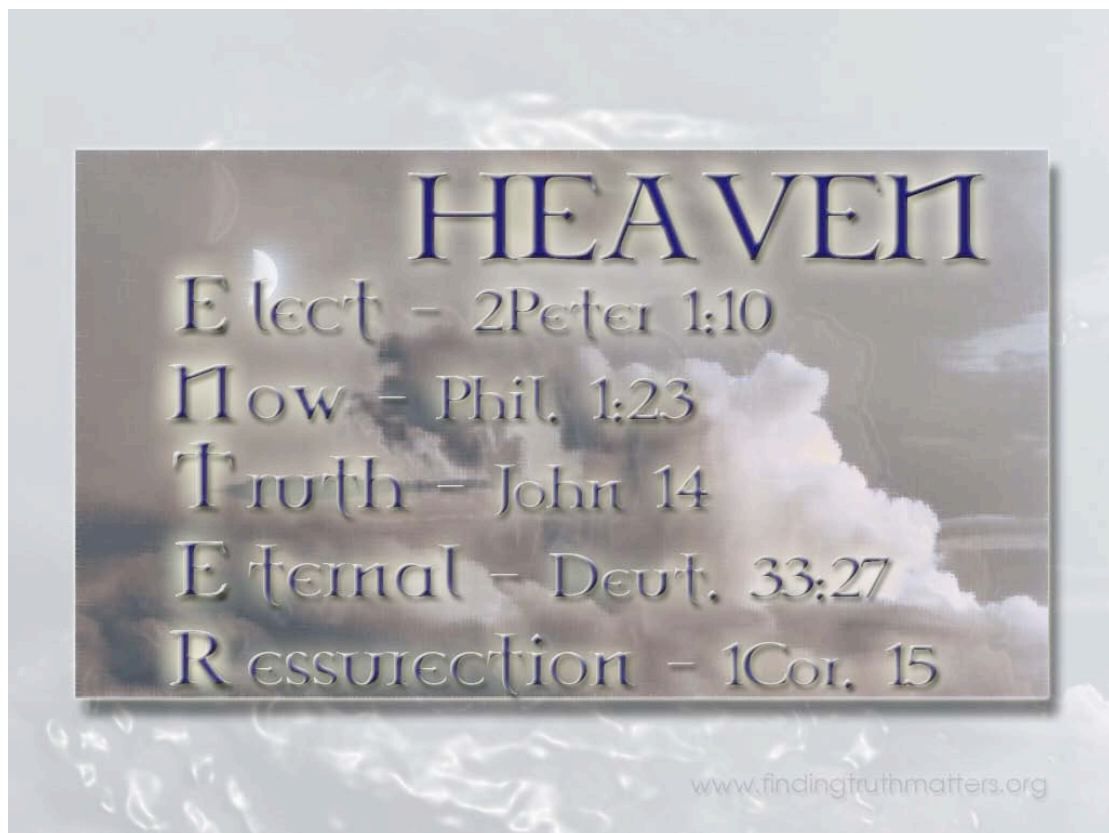
Those who are chosen by God are referred to as “the elect” (Mark 13:20, 27; 2Tim. 2:10; 2Peter 1:10).

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,

First Thessalonians 1:4

If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

John 15:19



E. Is God calling you to abandon your old way of living and surrender to Him? If God has elected you to be saved from His wrath then He can give you the ability to repent, have faith, and live obediently to Him. These things are gifts of His grace (Eph. 2:8-9).

N. What we do *now* determines whether we are granted entrance into Heaven. After we are dead there is no opportunity to undo the choices, decisions and actions that we owned in this life. There is no purgatory. There are no indulgences that can be paid to release us from Hell. It all depends on our “now”. And if we are to leave this life having been accepted by Christ and given His eternal life we will enter into Heaven with God- now.

T. While there are people who promote reincarnation and even annihilation as a concept of the next life, the One who is most qualified to tell us what the next life holds, Jesus Christ, said that eternal life would either be spent in Heaven or Hell. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth...” He went even further when He said that He was actually *the Truth* (John 14:6). In this verse He destroys the arguments of Eckhart Tolle who teaches that Jesus was saying that the truth is within each of us, when Jesus was in fact making exactly the opposite point- *that He is the only Truth that can give us access to the Father*. There is no reincarnation. There is no “nothing” (annihilation) after this life. There is either eternal life or eternal death. And eternal life is only available through Jesus Christ.

E. The choices we make now will determine our *eternity*. And after this life, we will live with our choices for eternity. Once the Redeemed Elect are in Heaven they will be incapable of ever sinning since they will have inherited a share in the “divine nature”.

And by that same mighty power, he has given us all of his rich and wonderful promises. He has promised that you will escape the decadence all around you caused by evil desires and that you will share in his divine nature.

2Peter 1:4 NLT

R. Not only do the redeemed pass from this life into Heaven in the next life, there is coming a day when they will receive new bodies which will not be subjected to the current limitations of our bodies in this life. There are some days when certain parts of my body make me long for the Resurrection!

Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

John 5:28-29

The final word on Heaven goes to my posthumous pastor, F.W. Boreham, who wrote that many older Christians begin to lose their love for this world and long for the next. This longing for Heaven, Dr Boreham says, is like being “homesick”. The believer has come to recognise that Heaven is where they ultimately belong and that while their hearts yearn for Heaven they are actually longing to be home with the Father.

“Most old people, however fully they may have entered into the zest and enjoyment of life, feel that they have had just about enough of it. They grow gradually out of love with the things that are, and fall in love with the things that are to be...And, depend upon it, this poor ministry of mine will be most fruitful when I can awaken in men such an agony of homesickness that their hearts will cry out for the Father.”

F.W. Boreham, “The Silver Shadow”, Essay: *Home Sweet Home*, 1918:270, 272,



As we move through this life, may our hearts become increasingly “homesick”. And while we may think that our hearts are yearning for Heaven, may we come to realise that it's not Heaven, but the full presence of God Himself that we truly long for. I pray that all my readers will *enter* Heaven to be with our Lord.

Amen.

Dr. Andrew Corbett,

Legana, Tasmania, Australia
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