

Heaven & Hell/Reward & Punishment

Eternal, according to Webster, is “without beginning or end; everlasting”. But how does the human mind comprehend such a timeframe. It can almost understand the concept of time unending into the future but to fathom even the thought of it having always previously existed is mindboggling. Such is the nature of God’s existence. And such is the nature of His plan to redeem us back to Him even before man denied Him after the creation.

Psa 90:2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou *art* God.

Before we can even begin to express the final destination of the “few” and the “many” (*Mat 7:13-14*), we need to first understand the concept of eternity.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 “He hath made every *thing* beautiful in his time: also He hath **set the world** (*Heb.5769- eternity*) **in their heart** (*Heb.3820- feelings, the will and even the intellect*), so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.” (*emp. added*)

Ecclesiastes 8:17, “Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek *it* out, yet he shall not find *it*; yea further; though a wise *man* think to know *it*, yet shall he not be able to find *it*.”

“God has placed in the inborn constitution of man the capability of conceiving of eternity, the struggle to apprehend (understand) the everlasting, the longing after an eternal life.”

Albert Barnes

We are spiritual beings and the search for all things eternal can only lead us to the eternal God and His word if we want to find any answers that pertain to the concept of ‘forever’.

1Co 15:53 “For this corruptible (*Gk.5349- decayed, perishable*) must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. ”

Once we accept that, the question then becomes what constitutes who goes where and where is where? Is there a reward for righteous living and justice for the unrighteous? What justifies either? Should an “imperishable” man be eternally punished for what he did during his life which was “a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (*Jas 4:14*)? Or should an “immortal” man who was justified later in life not be punished for his earlier crimes but enter for eternity “the resurrection of life” (*Jn 5:29*)?

Heaven

In truth, what does the Bible reveal concerning this magnificent spiritual realm from where God rules? And how many souls of mankind have entered her gates?

Joh 3:13 And **no man** hath ascended up to Heaven, **but** He that came down from Heaven, *even* the **Son of man** which is in Heaven. (*emp. added*)

Heaven is not the place depicted in cartoons where people are welcomed in by 'St. Peter' who sits behind a pulpit at a 'pearly' gate with feathered pen in hand while looking over a log of names to see who gets to go in and who gets sent to the other place. That would be eliminating the "white throne judgment" of Revelation 20:11. It's not a place where everyone there gets his/her own cloud, white garment, halo, wings and harp. Other than being clothed in white (*Rev 7:9; 19:14*) those are items that were added by artists sometime after the first century.

2Co 12:2 "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third Heaven. (*First-terrestrial -earth and sky; second being the celestial – above the sky. Both are physical [I Cor 15:40]*) (3) And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) (4) How that he was caught up into Paradise (*Gk.3857- a park, that is, [specifically] an Eden*), and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." (*See also Rev 10:4 concerning the "seven thunders" whose words John was not to record.*)

Php 1:23 "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to **be with Christ**; which is far better: (*outside the physical realm in the spirit realm*), for that is far better:" (*emp. added*)

If the apostle Paul was having a very difficult time describing the place (*Paradise*) where Jesus and the thief went after their deaths (*Lk 23:43*), imagine how difficult it must have been for John to describe the highest plain of existence, Heaven. In Revelation chapter 4 John describes the throne of God, with Him seated there along with the power that surrounds Him. In chapter 21 John describes the bride of Christ, the church in all her glory. He did so, for the most part, by using known, yet common very costly elements as examples that were in existence but with greater emphasis on their magnificence. If these are used as a description of the church, we can only imagine what Heaven is like.

Rev 21:9 And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee **the Bride**, the Lamb's wife. (10) And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the **holy Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven from God**, (11) Having the glory of God: and her light *was* like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; (*emp. added*)

Since Heaven didn't "[descend] out of Heaven" then we must understand that John saw the coming of the kingdom/church as he saw her come on Pentecost. Therefore, Heaven is not under consideration in Revelation 21 and since no human has ever gone there to report of its beauty we can only speculate on its magnificence through visions received by the prophets, especially as they concern the throne of God (*Rev 4:2-3; Isa 6:1; Eze 1:1*).

Hell

Of all N.T. personalities, Jesus spoke on the subject of Hell the most. In Mark 9:43 He said Hell is "the fire that never shall be quenched". Peter and Jude both stated that the angels that sinned were cast into Hell being committed "into chains of darkness" and "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness" (*2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6*). So why would the loving Son of God speak about such a horrid place if not because God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (*2 Pet 3:9*)?

So if we are to emulate His love in such a way, shouldn't we also be thus concerned with the souls of our fellow man? Shouldn't we also be "speaking the truth in love" (*Eph 4:15*) when it comes to this or any subject that may offend since "in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (*1 Tim 4:16*)? But unless we don't truly understand the horrors of Hell where condemned souls are to "be tormented day and night forever and ever" (*Rev 20:10*), how are we to be able to picture it in the minds of those whose souls we are trying to save?

I have often tried to understand the thoughts that would go through the minds of those loved ones, at the moment of the resurrection, who would see someone they knew who was a faithful Christian, ascending to Jesus and His angels, only to, at that moment, realize that they weren't going with them, that they were to be lost and there was no way to redeem themselves. At that point it would be too late; how terrifying a thought that would be. They would be spending an eternity in such unfathomable, agonizing pain asking themselves over and over why they didn't listen to a faithful saint who tried to share the Gospel with them. Why would anyone want to risk being in that position?

"...Sin has not only affected us physically, it has dulled our perception of absolute holiness. Unquestionably we do not comprehend the magnitude of evil." "Here is a burning question for deep meditation. Is it not possible that once we have escaped the frailties and limitations of the flesh, that we will have a much clearer awareness of the heinousness of sin?" "And might we not see those who have rejected serving the Lord in an entirely different light from that entertained on earth—even though we were connected to them closely in the flesh?"

Wayne Jackson, "Can I Be Happy in Heaven with Loved Ones in Hell?"
ChristianCourier.com. Access date: June 30, 2017.

Gen 18:25 "... Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Eph 3:21 "Unto Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. "

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March 31, 2020
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