

The unabridged writings of Fred Morris, Manna Publications

The meaning of...

HEAVEN

To the reader: Keep your Bible beside you. Always read your Bible first, then read these notes. Check the references and read them also. Invite a friend to study with you. You will be blessed.

GOD AND MAN

After God created the heavens and the earth, He bent down and picked up a piece of clay. It didn't look much, but God knew He could make something beautiful out of it. You see, He had to make dirt first before He could make the first man.

So God fashioned the clay into the form of a human being, the first man to live on this earth. That was easy! Then came the amazing part. "God breathed into the man's nostrils the breath of life and the man (the Adam) became a living being" (Gen 2:7).

In the first chapters of the Bible, we read how God created the heavens and the earth. How He made Adam and Eve and put them in a beautiful garden in Eden, The Bible is God's word to us. It is not like any other book. God does not write about Himself, but about creation. When we read the Bible we learn much about God. His creation tells us much about God indirectly. He spoke and creation appeared. He tells us that what He made was good and that He enjoys all that He created.

WHERE IS GOD?

The flag is flying! Look, the flag is flying. Where? It is flying over Buckingham Palace in London. When the Queen, the monarch of Britain is in residence, they fly the flag on the pole on top of the building.

The people always know when their Queen is in town, because they can see the flag flying.

It is harder to pin God down. He is everywhere at once. David wrote, "I lift up my eyes to You, to You whose throne is in heaven" (Psalm 123:1).

The prophet Joel wrote, "Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, My holy hill" (Joel 3:17). The prophet imagined God dwelling in the city of Jerusalem. But He is in heaven. He is in Jerusalem. He is everywhere.

WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

Paul came close when he wrote, "God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal, and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see" (1 Timothy 6:16).

John followed up by saying, "God is Spirit and those who would worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24)

In his first letter, John wrote, "God is Light; in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

GLORY AND LIGHT

When men came into God's presence or had a vision of God, they saw brilliant light. What they saw was the glory of God. The glory of God is beyond description. They searched for words, but found none. Paul said so when he wrote, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor 2:9).

No one can know the things of God unless God's Spirit shows him (1 Cor 2:14). That settles it. God has to reveal Himself to men or they will know nothing about Him.

Long ago, God did this. He spoke to Abram, He revealed His glory to Moses, perhaps the most daring of the faithful men of old.

Moses actually asked God, "Show me Your glory" (Ex 33:18) How audacious! But that was not the first time Moses had put his life on the line. When the people of Israel asked Aaron, Moses' brother, to make a calf idol for them to worship, Moses put himself between the nation and God (Ex 32:32).

God threatened to wipe them off the face of the earth and begin all over again with Moses. But Moses "sought the favor of the Lord his God."

"O, Lord," he said to God, "Why should Your anger burn against Your people, whom You brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?"

Moses pleaded for the nation and God relented" and did not bring on His people the disaster He had threatened" (Exodus 32:11-14).

Moses pressed closer to God. Moses what are you doing? What are you saying? Moses spoke to God again and said, "Lord. Now show me Your glory" (Ex 33:18). Moses knew all too well that no man could see God and live, but still he asked what must have seemed the impossible.

Moses had won God's heart. He had gained God's favor again and again, and not for his own benefit or advancement, so now again Moses asked, "Make me to see Your glory."

What was Moses asking? That in some way, God would enable him to see God's glory and survive.

GOD PASSED BY

Moses had heard God's voice on the mountain and from the pillar of cloud. He had seen the fire, the darkness and heard the horrific sound of the trumpet blast. And Moses had trembled with fright" (Heb 12:18-21).

But this time, Moses did not know what he was asking. And God was gracious to protect His servant. He told Moses, I will cause My goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim My name, the Lord, in your presence.

"But," He said, "you cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live" (Ex 33:20). Then the Lord said to Moses, "There is a place near Me where you may stand on a rock. When My glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and

cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove My hand and you will see My back..." (Ex 33:22-23).

Oh, how gracious God is. And Moses knew it!

GOD: HE MADE US FOR FELLOWSHIP

God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have always enjoyed loving, peaceful, joyful fellowship. God wanted to include others in this fellowship. Would you believe it? God desired fellowship with a being like Himself. He longed to have fellowship with Adam and Eve! Even after Satan came into the garden and deceived Eve, God did not shun the garden. He came as usual "in the cool of the evening," and called to the man He had created, "Where are you, Adam?"

God loved Adam and Eve. He had created them for fellowship. Before they disobeyed His command, He told them, "Be fruitful and increase in number." Fill the earth with your kind! I want more people like you with whom I can have fellowship. God wanted to have fellowship with a world full of human beings. He still does. God has not changed, the world has!

Adam and Eve were to consider Almighty God worthy of their love and adoration. But they did not know God! He was a stranger to them, so He came to the garden to walk and talk with them. He would counsel and instruct them (Psalm 32:8).

Walking and talking is a fellowship thing. Young lovers walk and talk together of their plans for the future. And I am sure God shared in the same way.

God kept in step with Eve who had the shorter step. God adjusted. Adam, Eve and God enjoyed sweet fellowship. Then, one terrible day, Adam and Eve were not there. They were hiding from God.

God knew Adam was hiding, but He called anyway: "Where are you, Adam?" God, even though He knows all our faults, still gives us the chance to go to Him first and seek His forgiveness; God continues to call man back into fellowship with him.

In this present time, mankind suffers from the fall:

1. Birth is painful.
2. Life is hard.
3. Death is certain:
4. Man only has heaven to look forward to.

THE TEMPLE ON EARTH

God gave David the plan for the temple. It was divided into three parts. The first was the outer court which was open for all to see and visit. Inside the courtyard stood the magnificent building called the temple. The temple was also called "the Holy Place." Only the priests were allowed to enter the temple. There the priest on duty presented the worship of the people, trimmed the lamp and kept the altar of incense burning.

In the very center of the temple God set aside a square room for His own dwelling place. This room was called the Holy of Holies. It was separated from the temple by a heavy curtain. No one dared to enter the Holy of Holies except the High Priest. He entered this special room only once a year and not without the blood of sacrifice (Exodus 29:20).

Because the believer is also God's temple, we can apply the parts of the temple Solomon built in to the three parts of man. Man's body is like the outer court of the temple. It is open for the whole world to see. Here Christ lived and served and died as a substitute for all mankind. And through our body we smile, speak, touch and show the love and power of Christ to others.

Inside the body is the man's soul. This is his inner life, his emotions and mind to reason and plan. In the Christian, the mind is enlightened (Eph 1:18), his love, will and thought life under the control of the Holy Spirit. The soul is enlightened with many rational thoughts, knowledge and understanding, but without the work of the Holy Spirit man's soul cannot comprehend the things of God (1 Cor 2:10-16).

Behind the curtain or veil lay the Holy of Holies. No light entered there. And no spiritual light comes to a man's heart unless God opens the heart to faith. No person can see into the Holy of Holies. Only God knows the condition of a man's spirit. And for the believer, it is the dwelling place of God by His Spirit. It is here that a man communes with his heavenly Father by faith.

Out of sight of all eyes, God dwells with man in his spirit.

GOD'S HOUSE

As Solomon built the beautiful temple to honor God, he recognized that no building on earth could contain God. God wanted to dwell in the hearts of His people.

Paul wrote to the Christian in Corinth, "Don't you know that you are God's temple (1 Cor 3:16). Israel's temple was destroyed by Titus in 70 AD. Now God lives in His people, the Christian Church. Jesus said that "glory has come to Me through them" (John 17:10). What an amazing statement, that humble sinners, saved by God's grace, could bring glory to Jesus Christ.

It was revealed to Paul that the Holy Spirit of God dwells within every believer. The believer becomes the temple of God. So he asked the Christians at Corinth, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you (1 Cor 3:16)?"

TALK ABOUT 1. Who created the heavens and the earth? **2.** What did God say about the creation? **3.** Why did God created the man and the woman? **4.** What spoiled the fellowship God had with Adam and Eve (Gen 3:1-10).

CHRIST'S BRIDE

In this mysterious but beautiful figure of speech, man is the true temple of God (1 Cor 3:16). When John, in a vision, saw the temple of God coming down from heaven, he spoke of her appearance "as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev 21:2).

Why would John think of the Christian Church as a bride and the Son of God as her husband? Because he knew the Old Testament and it pictured God's people as His bride.

The prophet Jeremiah was chosen by the Lord to announce to all the world that God would make a New Covenant with His people. God told Jeremiah, "It will not be like the covenant (the Old Covenant) I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke My covenant, though I was a husband to them', declares the Lord" (Jer 31:32).

God fulfilled this promise by sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross for the sins of the whole world (John 1:29). At the Last Supper Jesus passed the cup to His disciples saying, "This is the New Covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25).

The New Covenant is sealed by the blood of Jesus, our Bridegroom. He gave His life to purify for Himself a bride. The church is that bride-to-be, now waiting and preparing for Christ to come and take us to be His eternal companion in His dwelling place (Titus 2:11-14; 2 Cor 11:2; Rev 19:7; Rev 3:21).

WHAT IS HEAVEN LIKE?

The Bible does not tell us very much about God's house, heaven, yet it is our only source of reliable information. Many claim to have an after-death or near-death experience of heaven. They say, "I saw heaven and came back to life." We don't dispute such claims, but we trust the Bible as our final authority.

The Bible tells us that heaven is a very real place! It is a 'place' where God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit dwell in perfect harmony. And Jesus promised every believer his or her own place in heaven (John 14:2-4; 1 Peter 1:4).

Though we do not know much about Heaven we do know and trust the one, Jesus, who said, "I go to prepare a place for you." He also said, "I do only what My Father says," So can be sure that whatever their plans for us are they will be wonderful and beyond any description we can have here on earth. Paul wrote, "No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor 2:9).

Heaven is described in the Bible in very few words. The verses I love the most are those found in Hebrews 12:24-26. Here the writer contrasts how Moses approached God under the Old Covenant, "with fear and trembling" and how believers come boldly to Him under the New Covenant.

The Christian has no fear of punishment. Instead we have joy and peace that comes from being forgiven. The Law threatened men and showed up their sins. The gospel comforts us and the blood of Jesus takes away our sins. These two sections of Scripture begin with the words, "You have come..." Hebrews 12:18-21 and Hebrews 12:22-24.

The background is found in Deuteronomy 4 and 5 and in Exodus 19 and 20; Mt Sinai is not mentioned here, but rather "the mountain of the Law."

No man could keep the Law; it was a mountain no man could climb. So God replaced the ceremonial law of sacrifices with the New Covenant and the one perfect sacrifice of His only son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus died once-for-all, so many could come directly to God. No more ceremony and ritual which are called "the weak and beggarly elements of the world" are needed.

The temple and all the ritual that went with it was a shadow of the better things that were to come in Jesus Christ.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT HEAVEN

Heaven is not a country, or a mile wide cube dangling in space. It is a spiritual community (Hebrews 12:22-24). It is Jesus' home. He left it and came to earth, to be born as a babe in Bethlehem, but He returned to it again and is there now (John 16:28).

The writer speaks to those who have believed this great truth. Paul said, If you don't believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, your faith is in vain and you have no hope (1 Cor 15:17-19).

When the Christians believed in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, they left the old system of Law and priest, with all its guilt and fear. And they joined a fellowship of people who belong to Jesus, "our mediator and faithful High Priest."

He is the One who brings us to God and to all the glories of His heavenly home. And what made it possible for us to come to all this? "Jesus, the mediator of a New Covenant" (Hebrews 12:24).

He is not ashamed to call us "brothers (and sisters)," because we have been adopted into His family and are being made like Him, "without spot or blemish or any other wrinkle" (Ephesians 5:27).

HOW WILL WE GET TO HEAVEN?

When Jesus returns on the clouds of heaven, with all His mighty angels, all the believers who have died will be resurrected to go be with Jesus. And those who are alive and remain on the earth will rise to meet Him in the air. They will be snatched away before judgment falls on the wicked.

Paul wrote, "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and the majesty of His power **ON THAT DAY** He comes to be glorified in His holy people..." (2 Thess 1:5-10).

Believers' bodies will be changed into the likeness of Christ's resurrected body (1 Thess 4:13-17). Their spirits will then receive a new body "that we not be found naked" (2 Cor 5:1-4).

A WORSHIPPING FELLOWSHIP

Those who know Christ are citizens of a new spiritual city. They have joined a worshipping fellowship, people who worship "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23). They have not reached the city yet, but they are like Abraham, going that way.

These believers have left Mt Sinai, a picture of the Law, and come to Mt Zion (12:22). Mt Zion is Christ's Church. It is "the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Col 1:13; Jas 2:5). It is called "the Jerusalem that is above" or the "New Jerusalem," so that no one will confuse it with the earthly city by that name (Gal 4:26; Rev 21).

The spirits of "just men made perfect" live in this heavenly city. They are all who died believing in Christ, from the time of Adam until this very day. They include faithful men and women of all generations, all nationalities and all tongues (Rev 7:9).

TALK ABOUT 1. What is heaven like? Where would you turn for answers? **2.** How can a sinner get to heaven? **3.** What do those in heaven do all the time? **4.** What are your chances of going to heaven when you die?

THE CITY OF THE LIVING GOD

You have come to Mt Zion. You have received the New Covenant by faith and that brings you into fellowship with the living God. You have joined an ever-living society because "this is the city of the **Living God**" (Heb 12:22). It is a permanent dwelling place which belongs to God.

God is the God of the resurrected, living saints (Matthew 22:31-32). He revives and refreshes man through the gospel. Jesus told the Pharisees, "He is the God of the living, not of those who were dead in their sins (Matt 22:32).

Because King David lived on Mt Zion and in the city of Jerusalem, and because the salvation offered by Jesus Christ had its beginning there, the congregation of saints and the place where God dwells is commonly called Mt Zion, the city of God, or the "heavenly Jerusalem".

The writer is speaking about the Christian Church, the communion of saints, on earth and in heaven.

IT IS A JOYOUS PLACE

You have come to "thousands of angels in joyful assembly." We have come into a fellowship with countless angelic beings. The angel hosts are our companions now and always will be. They are ever rejoicing in the presence of God. God dwells in a worshipping society. The angels gather around the throne of the Lamb. "Day and night they never stop singing 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come'."

This city is a festive place, a place of everlasting joy as redeemed people join with the angels to worship and adore their Creator.

THE CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORN

You have come to "the Church of the Firstborn, whose names are written in Heaven" (12:23). "Firstborn" does not mean Christ, though he is called by that title in Colossians 1:15. In the original language, the word here is plural. The "Church of the Firstborn" includes all believers "whose names are written in heaven." They are all God's true children. And Jesus said, "Here am I, and the children God has given Me" (Isaiah 8:18; Heb 2:13).

In the church on earth it is hard to tell the 'saints' from 'sinners'. They are mixed together as Jesus' parable tells us (Matt 13:36-43). There is no such problem in heaven. God has their names "written in the Book of Life" (Revelation 20:15). The names have been there from eternity. When a person finally rejected God's offer of a free pardon, that name was struck out of the Book

That thought brought the writer to the matter of God's justice. He is "God, the Judge of all men" (Heb 12:23). He knows all those whose names are written in the Book of Life because they have fellowshiped with Him. And they have this testimony: "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (Rev 12:11).

TALK ABOUT 1. Describe the holy city. Who will live there? **2.** Are you a citizen of heaven? **3.** When God shakes the heaven and the earth, what will remain? **4.** Who is the Mediator of the New covenant (Hebrews 12:24)?

WHAT WILL I BE LIKE IN HEAVEN?

Because He lives (eternally), I will live also (eternally) (John 14:19). And I will live in heaven where there is a place reserved for me (2 Peter 1:4). No one else can take it!

I will have His life and I will be like Jesus. I can only make such a statement because God says so.

Then my understanding will be complete, for “I will know even as I am known” (1 Cor 13:12).

In heaven I will have a new body, a resurrected body. It will be like Jesus’ body, a spiritual body, not a physical one. It will not need food to sustain it, nor will it ever get thirsty and need to drink. It will be able to understand and know who I am and who others are. I will enjoy the fellowship and community of heaven. And I will worship God in true holiness.

NEW CREATIONS IN CHRIST

There is nothing in man, naturally, that would prepare him for life in heaven. And because of our sinful natures there is nothing that would make us want to be like Jesus (Rom 2:10-11; 2 Cor 3:18).

God seeks us out. His Spirit calls to our spirit. You may not hear a voice when God calls to you, and you won’t feel any pressure, but you will have a desire to know the God of all creation. He wants you to know Him and enjoy fellowship with Him!

Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). You must come to Christ and receive Him as your Savior, or you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

When a person responds to God’s call, the Holy Spirit comes to our hearts and we are born of the Spirit (John 3:8). God makes “new creations” out of the men and women who put their trust in Him (2 Cor 3:16). Then He calls them His sons and daughters (2 Cor 6:18).

“He who belongs to God hears what God says” and obeys Him (John 8:47). We come into a personal relationship with the Almighty and join other citizens in a spiritual Kingdom, the Kingdom of God.

MEMBER OF A NEW SOCIETY

God has promised to replace this world with a new world and a new society. He made this promise to the whole world, but only those who love and worship Him will be included. The Bible calls this new spiritual community “the Kingdom of God” or “the New Jerusalem” or “the Holy City” (Rev 21:1-4). Paul called it “the Church” (Eph 5:23). The Church of Jesus Christ is people.

The new society is made up of God-loving men and women. Jesus Christ reigns in the hearts of every citizen in this new society. They are the Church of Jesus Christ. The “Church” is not a building, but people who believe the good news of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “I will build My Church and the gates of Hades (hell) will not overcome it” (Matt 16:18). The Church is gathered around Christ who builds, supports and directs it.

The Bible tells of Abraham who looked for this new society (Heb 11:10). The prophets saw it coming (Isa 65:17-29). And Jesus said it was near or at hand (Mark

1:15), so that men and women could enter the Kingdom even as He spoke. He told the Pharisees this was happening (Matt 21:31).

The Jewish leaders thought their Messiah would rally them to a national crusade and overthrow their Roman rulers. Even Christ's disciples did not understand. They, too, were disappointed in Him (Luke 24:21).

TALK ABOUT 1. Some say "all roads lead to heaven." What does God say (John 14:6)?

MEN STRIVE FOR A NEW WORLD ORDER

Men speak often of bringing in a "new world order" that is better than the present system. But they are powerless to do so. Why? Because they cannot change a man's heart. They cannot make the people around them live in peace. Men who have no peace in their hearts cannot make peace. Because all men are sinners, man has no power to create a new order that is peaceful, prosperous and better than the old system.

Some say the present world is getting better. They say that men have become wiser in caring for their communities and countries. Medicine has cured many sicknesses. But morally, men are sliding deeper into sin and evil and closer to hell. Satan's efforts to kill men and women by bomb, by murder, by drugs and immoral lifestyles are rising. Little wonder Jesus said, "He (Satan) was a murderer from the beginning..." (John 8:44).

Sin and evil spoiled God's perfect creation (Gen 3:1-7). Sin and evil will lead this world to its final destruction. But sin and evil did not change or stop God's plan. From eternity He desired to have a holy community who would worship Him "in Spirit and in truth" (Ex 19:6; John 4:24). He chose to have a family of individual beings, each one created "in His image" and recreated into the likeness of His Son (2 Cor 3:18).

THE NEW ORDER WILL BE SPIRITUAL

God's new order is spiritual and not based on "food and drink and ceremony" (Heb 9:10). Everything that was represented by physical symbols in the Old Testament has been interpreted for us as spiritual realities in the New Testament. "He (God) set aside the first to establish the second" (Heb 10:9). What was only 'shadow' under the Old Covenant became reality under the New (Heb 8:9). The faithful in the nation of Israel became the Kingdom of God, the Christian Church.

The Bible tells of the apostle John who "saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven" (Rev 21:1-4) The throne of God is in the city and John heard God say, "Now the dwelling of God is with men..."

An angel talked with John about the Holy City. Those who have faith in God will live with the angel hosts in the New Jerusalem (Gal 3:29). The writer said, "You (people of faith) have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly..." (Heb 12:22). The angels are there to serve Almighty God and minister to those who inherit salvation (Heb 2:14).

The angels echo the worship of God's people saying with loud voices, "Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever, Amen!" (Rev 7:8-12). Perfect worship expressed in seven words of gratitude to Almighty God.

GOD HAS PREPARED THIS INHERITANCE

In the new society everything will be different. It will not be like this present, chaotic world. When Jesus Christ told men what God required of its citizens, many were shocked and angry. They wanted to hold onto their old ways, the traditions of their fathers. They did not understand that Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of the Spirit.

God's perfect rule in this new society would be by His Spirit. God had said, "I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will... keep My laws. They will be My people, and I will be their God" (Ezek 19-20).

It is hard for us as human beings to imagine what God has prepared as an inheritance for those who love Him. Indeed, we cannot! Paul had no words to describe heaven, so he repeated what the prophet said, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor 2:9; Isa 64:4). You cannot imagine heaven's glory.

Now "we see (all these truths) as if a reflection in a mirror," not a clear picture (1 Cor 13:12). As we read and study the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit will take the words and make them clearer to us (John 16:13).

TALK ABOUT 1. Which Bible verses tell us that the new world order will be spiritual? **2.** What is the inheritance God promised His people (1 Peter 1:4)? **3.** Are you able to claim that inheritance? **4.** Does the Holy Spirit show the truth to believers (John 16:13)?

THEY LOOKED BEYOND THIS WORLD

From the beginning, men of faith looked beyond their physical surroundings. Abraham "looked for a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb 11:10). He knew that this world could not satisfy him and he looked for a more permanent place. He understood, by the Spirit, that God was, even then, preparing this new 'city' for His people. In speaking of a city, these men who lived long ago knew it would be a spiritual community, ruled over by a just ruler.

When God's people asked for a king, God gave them Saul (1 Sam 8:1-21). But Saul was not a just and wise ruler (1 Sam 13:14). Then God gave them David to be king. David was a great and just king. God promised One who would be greater than David. He would come to "rebuild David's fallen tent," which was a picture of His kingdom (Acts 15:16).

A RIGHTEOUS RULER

God promised "a seed," a descendant of David who would rule over His Kingdom forever (1 Chron 17:11-14). King Saul died because he was mortal. David died and his son Solomon ruled over Israel. All Israel's kings died and were buried.

The promise of a King who would rule forever pointed to God's perfect Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus would rule over God's Kingdom (Micah 5:2). His Kingdom and rule would be forever (Dan 2:44). This Kingdom is the inheritance of the people of God, both Jew and Gentile (Isa 54:17).

God promised, "My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest" (Isa 32:18).

TALK ABOUT 1. Can we imagine what God has prepared for those who love Him? Why not? **2.** What was the 'city' Abraham looked for (Heb 11:10)? **3.** Did he find it? Will you?

THE CHARACTER OF GOD'S KINGDOM

In this present world, many people are destroyed by famine, disease and war. There is no peace or rest. The root cause is man's sin. Jesus said "in this world you will have trouble..." (John 16:33). "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars... nation will rise against nation... there will be famines and earthquakes in various places" (Matt 24:6-8). We read of them every day.

God's Kingdom is marked by purity, peace, plenty and oneness of spirit. Ezekiel wrote of God's purpose for His people, "I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols" (Ezek 36:26). Jesus said He would present His people, "as a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph 5:27).

John the apostle wrote, "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev 21:4). The prophet Isaiah told of its peace when he said, "They will beat their swords into plowshares. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more" (Isa 2:4). "The cow will feed with the bear... the infant will play near the hole of the cobra... They will neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain..." (Isa 11:7-8). God's mountain is His throne in heaven.

When God spoke to Moses about the land, He said it would be "a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex 3:8). This was a picture of heaven. God promised, "I will call for the grain and make it plentiful

I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops in the field..." (Ezek 36:29-30). John the apostle wrote, "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst" (Rev 7:16).

Paul told of the oneness and unity in the Kingdom. He said "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female" in God's Kingdom, "for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

You can have a place in God's new world order by faith in Jesus Christ. When you occupy your place in God's new world, it will be yours forever (1 Peter 1:4). It is reserved for you only!

GOD, THE JUDGE OF ALL MEN

"You have come to God, the judge of all men..." We may ask, "The mention of God as judge in the midst of such a glorious picture of heaven.

Perhaps to put emphasis on the Christian's responsibility (FF. Bruce).

But other suggest that the writer is speaking of the Judge who has pardoned the sinner and fought off his or her enemies, delivering that soul safely to heaven. This bring us to the last phrase: You have come to "the spirits of righteous men made perfect." All agree that this means spirits whom Christ has justified.

JESUS THE MEDIATOR OF A NEW COVENANT

Moses was Israel's great mediator. He offered to give up his place in heaven if God would spare the people (Exodus 32:32).

Jesus is Mediator of the New (in time) Covenant which is far better than the Old Covenant which it replaced (Heb 8:13). It is also built on better promises. Christ's shed blood spoke of forgiveness and reconciliation (1 John 1:7.9).

The sinless blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed us from all sins, and therefore pleads before God with a voice so loud and persuasive that it secures perfect righteousness for us (Kretzmann).

The blood of Abel, called for vengeance and brought despair to the heart of Cain. But the blood of Christ speaks forgiveness and speaks peace to man (Wescott).

MEASURING THE CITY

Some try to put physical measurements on the New Jerusalem. How can it be a physical city if God is Spirit and He will dwell in it? Those who will live with Him forever will enjoy resurrected bodies. They will not need a physical environment.

John said, "The first earth and its heavens had passed away." They passed away to make way for the new world. Peter tells us what will happen to it. He wrote, "The heavens will disappear with a roar (perhaps an explosion) and the earth and everything in it will be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10).

Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away" (Matt 24:35). It will be replaced by the New Jerusalem. John called it "the Holy City" (Rev 21:2). He did not say it would last for 1,000 years, but that it will last forever!

THE WALL AND THE GATES

At one time we lived in a closed community with a gate and a guard. The Holy City is a closed community. Sinners are shut out of the Holy City (Rev 21:8,27). "Nothing impure will ever enter it" (Rev 21:27). John wants us to know who is included among the impure things that will be shut out: "the cowardly, the unbelieving, the murders, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars" None of these will enter the city.

The wall is for security. Heaven is a safe place and a beautiful place... "of jasper and pure gold" (Rev 21:17). Its size tells us that there is room for all the people of God, people of all nations and all ages.

Its foundations are sure - built on the twelve apostles - its gates are of pearl, each gate guarded by an angel. Heaven is open to all who are sanctified. The names on the gates represent the true Israel of God, which alone has a right to the Tree of Life. Each side had three gates to show that there is as free an entrance from one part of the world as from another. Yet only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will live in the city.

The glory of the city is its purity. On earth saints feel the tension between the spirit and the flesh. As Paul wrote, "The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not know what you want" (Gal 5:17). Now the saints feel

a sad mix of weakness and virtue, but on entering the Holy of Holies, they are washed in the laver of Christ's blood and made perfectly clean.

TALK ABOUT 1. Why can't the New Jerusalem be measured (Rev 21:10-21)? **2.** Who will gather God's people into the New Jerusalem? **3.** When will this happen (Matt 24:30-31)? **4.** Will you be ready when Jesus Christ comes again? **5.** To whom will the door to heaven be closed (Matt 25:10)?

THE GLORY OF THE CITY

God's presence with His Church is the glory of the Holy City. God's presence is glorious and 'lights' the city (Rev 21:23), so that there is no need of any celestial lights like the sun or the moon. God alone is immortal and dwells in light that no man can approach (1 Tim 6:16).

The city is secure with 'walls and gates.' The gates are for entrance and the walls to define the boundaries God has set. These are moral boundaries: "Nothing impure will even enter" those gates or live within the walls of the city (Rev 21:8,27; 1 Cor 6:9-10).

The city is one of pleasant surprises and eternal enjoyment. Death terminates any enjoyment given to us in this life. In heaven "there will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain..." In their place God will give pleasures for ever more.

To describe this city of pleasures, Jesus used an ancient Persian word "paradise" which means "garden of pleasures" or "garden of fruit trees" (Luke 23:43). In its day, the hanging gardens of Babylon were one of the "seven wonders" of the ancient world. Some people say that Persian kings who wanted to honor one of their citizens would give him the right to walk with the king in his 'paradise.'

Jesus promised the thief who repented that he would be companion to the King of kings. That day he would walk in paradise with God.

TALK ABOUT 1. Will any unclean spirit enter God's city (1 Cor 6:9-10)? **2.** Jesus called heaven "a paradise." What did He mean? **3.** Can a person be holy in this life? How (1 John 1:9, 3:1-3)? **4.** Does God demand holiness of life (Heb 12:14)?

THE GOVERNANCE OF THE CITY

The Christians from all nations and people groups will tread upon streets of gold. Streets are for communion. In heaven there will be no 'walls' to separate us; no passports or visas needed.

Will we recognize our loved ones and those who have gone before? Yes, I believe we will. Each one will bring the 'wealth' of their sanctified spirits into the city. Character is the "treasure" we lay up in heaven (Matt 6:19-21).

Each will have a new name "known only to him who receives it" (Rev 2:17). A new name is a part of our inheritance (1 Peter 1:4). Paul said that we inherit the promise, the name, a 'place' in the Kingdom with all those men of faith who have gone before (Heb 11).

The citizens will govern the city. Jesus told His disciples, "You will sit on twelve thrones governing the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt 19:28). These words tell of the dignity and honor reserved for Christ's disciples. When He reigns supreme on His glorious throne, they will reign with Him from their own places of honor.

Is this honor of living in heaven forever something Christ promised to the apostles only (John 14:2-3)? No! Not at all! Christ's promise is to every true Christian. I believe the apostles are named because they represent the Christian Church, the whole company of believing people. They are named as "the twelve foundations" of the Christian Church (Rev 21:14).

The apostles had followed Christ when He introduced the Kingdom of God to His own people, the Jews (Mark 1:15). The apostles bled and died to lay its foundations and they are named on its 'foundation stones.'

If you love the Lord and serve Him, you are one of His disciples. God has planned these "better things" for all His children. The ancestors who had faith in the living God, wait for us to join them. When Jesus Christ comes again they, with us, will be made perfect, "a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless..." (Heb 11:40; Eph 5:27).

TALK ABOUT 1. Will the citizens of the Holy City have anything to do? **2.** What is the only thing we carry away from the earth when we die?

JESUS CHRIST WILL GATHER HIS PEOPLE

Jesus Christ promised to come again "on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other" (Matt 24:30).

On the Day of the Lord the new order will be complete. Peter wrote about the Day of the Lord "to (help us) recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by the Lord and Savior through your apostles" (2 Peter 3:1-2).

Israel's prophets saw the coming judgment of God on their land and people. The prophets looked toward one great final judgment of the whole earth. They knew God is just and must judge sin on a future Day of Distress.

In the New Testament this 'Day' is called "the Day of the Lord Jesus" (2 Cor 1:14). It is the Day when Jesus Christ comes in glory, in the clouds, with the angels of heaven (1 Cor 1:8; 5:5; 2 Thess 2:2).

False teachers made light of God's truth. They scoffed at Christ's promise to come again (2 Peter 3:1-10). They said that God's command to live a holy life did not matter and that the apostles got it all wrong!

The scoffers said the world would go on just as it was then. They said that nothing had changed since Abraham lived. They said, "Where is this 'coming' that He (Christ) promised" (John 14:2-3)?

Peter showed the truth of God's word. God does not change and His word is sure. He spoke and the heavens came into being, "the earth formed out of the water" (2 Peter 3:5-10). At God's word, the same waters destroyed all living things, but saved Noah and his family who took shelter in the ark (Gen 8:15-21). "By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved...for the day of judgment..." God will burn up this earth and all that is in it. And he will judge the spirits of all men. There will be a great separation - the people of all generations who are saved will be gathered into heaven. And the ungodly will be judged and shut out of God's Kingdom. Jesus said, "Be always on the watch, and pray..." Matt 24:42; Luke 21:36).

TALK ABOUT 1. What does the Bible say about "the Day of the Lord" (2 Peter 3:5-10)? **2.** What will God do with this old earth? **3.** Why must we "watch, and be

ready" (Matt 24:42)? **4.** How will Jesus Christ come again (Matt 24:30-31)? **5.** Is there a place in heaven reserved for every believer (1 Peter 1:4)?

WHAT WE CAN SEE OF THE NEW WORLD ORDER

The Christian Church is the new world order in embryo. It is distinct and different from the world around it. God told Pharaoh of Egypt, "On this day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen (where God's people would be protected)...I will make a distinction between My people and your people" (Ex 8:23). God intends for His people to be different, to shine out in this present evil world. From the beginning God commanded His people, "Be holy, because I am holy" (Lev 11:44). A small remnant of people stood true to God.

God commended these people for their faith and obedience. Their spirits looked beyond their surroundings, and what this earth had to offer them. They looked for "a city whose architect and builder is God" (Heb 11:10).

Jesus called the faith community of His day "the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mark 1:15; Matt 13:31). It was small, like a mustard seed. Just a few men and women were entering the new society (Matt 11:12; 21:31-32).

The faith and witness of Christ's early disciples was very small. But God would cause His Church in the world to grow. His Kingdom would become larger and larger until the end of time. The Christian Church, like the mustard seed, is alive with the life of God. Nothing can stop it from growing!

A friend often asked me, "Is the Christian Church gaining ground in the world? Will it become a major force in the world?"

I told him, "The visible Church will always be a minority. It will always be persecuted and put down. But God will make it stronger and stronger, until Jesus comes again."

Even a history writer from the secular world made this comment: The triumph of Christianity from an obscure, despised sect of simple people, to a mature well-organized society is one of the least-understood facts of history.

TALK ABOUT 1. Why do men fail to build a world peace? **2.** What body of people represent the 'new order' in the world? **3.** Is the condition of men getting better or worse? **4.** Why did God call His people "a remnant"?

GOD IS PREPARING ITS CITIZENS

God's love for His sons and daughters (the new society) is beyond our understanding. He will save His family out of this evil world and take them to heaven. Jesus told His followers, "I am going there (to heaven) to prepare a place for you... I will come back and take you to be with Me..." (John 14:2-3). Christ's followers are already citizens of the New Jerusalem. They only wait to be translated there at the resurrection.

God is love (1 John 4:6). In this world those who belong to Him wear the badge of love, God's love. His Spirit imparts that love of God to our hearts as we obey Him. Jesus said, "Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

In this new world, God will rule in righteousness and His people will rejoice. There will be no more pain, sorrow or injustice (Heb 12:22-24). God's love will triumph over all.

THE LORD'S TABLE

Why are believers told to examine themselves, before they take communion (1 Cor 11:28)? Because, by eating the bread and drinking the cup, we are joining Christ in His death, burial and resurrection (Rom 6:5-6).

Only those who are joined to Jesus and are members of His body know this truth. They are, in truth, citizens of heaven. They belong in heaven, even while they live here on the earth.

They have God's seal upon them, as did those John saw in his vision (Rev 21:1-4).

OPEN DOOR POLICY

All through the ages, God has had an open door policy. He chose Israel as His special people, but the door to His Kingdom was never closed to outsiders or foreigners. God told the Israelites to be careful and include 'aliens' in their welfare program. The law of Moses joined aliens with widows and orphans (Lev 24:22). God said, "The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow" (Psalm 146:9).

God demonstrated His mercy when Joshua took the city of Jericho. When God destroyed Jericho He allowed Rahab, a Canaanite woman, and all her family to enter the camp of Israel. They were accepted into the family of God as people who had faith in God because she gave shelter to the Israeli spies who came to her house (Jos 2:1-24).

Rahab confessed God as her Lord when she said to the spies, "I know the LORD has given the land to you (Israel). A great fear of you has fallen on us. All who live in this country are melting in fear because of you" (Jos 2:9). She believed in her heart and confessed with her mouth... (Rom 10:10).

Rahab knew, by faith, that God had given their land to Israel, so what else could she do. Her loyalty to God came first; before her family; before her friend; even before her country!

Rahab bore a son, Boaz, who married Ruth. Ruth and Boaz had a son, Obed, who was the grandfather of Israel's King David (Ruth 4:2-22; Matt 1:5). So God blessed His trusting servant and honored her name for all time.

God's invitation is the same today: "Turn to Me and be saved all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other" (Isa 45:22).

TALK ABOUT 1. Will Jesus Christ come to gather His people into heaven (Acts 1:7)? **2.** How can you be sure of a place in God's new order (Acts 16:31)? **3.** Who was Rahab? **4.** What caused her to have faith in the living God (Joshua 2:1-24)? **5.** How did God honor Rahab's faith (Matt 1:5-6)?

GOD WILL DESTROY THIS EVIL WORLD

God will save His Church out of the world, then the end will come. This physical universe will be replaced by God's spiritual Kingdom. The Bible writers called it "the Holy City" or "the New Jerusalem" (Isa 65:17; Heb 12:22). In a vision, John saw the same city coming down out of heaven (Rev 21:1).

The city was approaching him. It was not coming to this earth, for “this earth had passed away.” It was in John’s view so that he could tell us about its character and purpose. It was “beautifully dressed for a wedding. We dress up our cities with flags for a royal visit or a big celebration. We put up special lights and add new paint to old buildings. Our most beautiful decorations won’t begin to compare with the glorious beauty of the eternal city of God.

IT IS NOT TOO LATE FOR YOU TO BE INCLUDED

Make the greatest and most important choice of your life. Ask God to forgive your sins while you turn away from them. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned, he has passed over from death to life” (John 5:24).

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

TALK ABOUT 1. Why does Christ delay His coming again (2 Peter 3:9, 15; Matt 24:14)? **2.** Name some of the things that will happen on “the Day of the Lord” (2 Peter 3:10-13)? **3.** What should believers be doing while we wait for Jesus Christ to come again (2 Peter 3:11-12; Eph 5:19)? Are you ready?

HEAVEN IS FOREVER

Once you are securely in heaven, you never leave. Heaven is eternal. That means it was before time began and it will be after time is put away forever. David Pawson wrote in his book *Unlocking the Bible*: “Christians will return to earth after their death. Having met Jesus in the air, they will come back to earth with new bodies. Heaven is, as it were, only a waiting-room – temporary accommodation for those who have died and are waiting Christ’s return to earth, where they will be with him forever” (page 946). This is false doctrine and nothing could be further from the truth.

The Bible states plainly that, in heaven, the redeemed will be in the presence of God. They will forever rejoice in the splendor of His majesty, beholding the Father’s face, even as the angels do now (Matthew 18:10).

In his vision John the apostle saw the redeemed, “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb... And they cried out in a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb. And the angels... and the elders and the four living creatures fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God saying: Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!” (The Revelation 7:9-12).

God’s throne is for ever and ever (Psalm 45:6). And King David said he would bless God’s name for ever and ever (Psalm 145:1). God’s Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom (Dan 2:44; 4:3; 7:27). and once you enter it you will never leave. Amen!

TALK ABOUT 1. What do we mean when we say, “God’s throne is from eternity to eternity?” **2.** Who do the 1`44,000 of Revelation 7 represent (The Rev 7:12-17)?

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