

The Promise of Heaven

What do you know about heaven?.. What Bible verses would you go to teach me things about heaven?.. Are there people who actually go to heaven?.. How do they get there?.. How do you know?.. What is heaven?.. Where is heaven?.. How confident are you that you will go to heaven?

If you're like me, maybe you hesitated to answer a few of those questions. So, as we consider John 14, I think it may be helpful for us to have a little Bible study about heaven.

We are going to ask and answer 7 basic questions all related to John 14:1-7.

Question #1 - What does Jesus mean by *my Father's house*?

The Father's house is heaven. How can we know that for sure? In the book of John, Jesus made it overwhelming clear that He had come from heaven, and Him coming from heaven meant He came from the Father.

John 3:13 - *"No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man."*

John 3:17 - *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*

John 6:38 - *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me."*

John 16:28 - *"I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."*

So when Jesus says my Father's house, what does He mean? He is talking about heaven. Heaven is God's dwelling place.

2 Chronicles 6:21 - *"And listen to the pleas of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen from heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive."*

When we say heaven, what exactly do we mean by that?

The Bible indicates there are three heavens.

Heaven #1) The earth's atmosphere. The air we breathe and the sky the birds fly in is the 1st heaven. **Hosea 2:18; Daniel 7:13**

Heaven #2) The stellar spaces - outer space. This is where the sun, moon, stars, and planets reside. **Genesis 1:14**

Heaven #3) The dwelling place of God. This is the term used by Paul to describe his experience of being caught up to heaven (**2 Corinthians 12:2**). He also called this

place paradise (**2 Corinthians 12:3**). The third heaven is where God the Father's house is.

2 Corinthians 12:2-3 - *"I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. [3] And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—"*

Question #2 - What does Jesus mean by the word *place*?

This particular word place refers to a literal location. This word is used throughout the Bible to describe actual places. For example, when Joseph and Mary had to lay Jesus in a manger, they did so because there was no *place* for them in the inn (Luke 2:7). That is the same Greek word. This is literally a place in a literal location.

This word place tells us that it does not mean heaven is just some sort of state of mind or state of being. The Bible declares that heaven, the dwelling place of God, is a literal place with many rooms. The Bible does not teach us that heaven is some mental ascension where we have a state of mind that is described as heaven on earth.

Jesus did not think that way. He did not teach that. He taught that in order for Him to go to heaven, He needed to leave this earth and go to a different place. The same would be true for anyone else. If a person is going to go to heaven, that person must leave this earth, leave this world, and go to the dwelling place of God, to the Father's house.

Question #3 - Who is Jesus talking about when He says *you*?

Jesus was talking to the eleven remaining disciples. Judas Iscariot had already left the room to go betray Jesus. The question is this: When Jesus says that He is preparing a place for *you*, and that He will come again and take *you* to himself so that *you* may be where He is also, is Jesus only referring to those 11 specific men? Or, does Jesus have more people in mind?

I believe that Jesus is not only talking to the 11 disciples, but He is also talking to all believers of the church age, including us, if we have believed. I'll give you three 3 reasons why.

Reason #1) When Jesus finished teaching His disciples, He prayed in chapter 17 for all believers of the church age, not just for His disciples. **John 17:20,24**

Reason #2) John wrote this gospel to those who would read it, indicating that what is true of the people in this narrative can also be true of those who read it. **John 20:30-31**

Reason #3) The apostle Paul taught identical theology to believers in Thessalonica, and those believers were not part of the 11 disciples. **1 Thessalonians 4:14,17**

Question #4 - What does Jesus mean by *come again*?

I think there are 5 possible explanations to what Jesus meant by come again. Those are

- Possibility #1) - Jesus meant that He would die, but He would come again by being resurrected.
- Possibility #2) - Jesus meant that He would come back through the Holy Spirit after He resurrected and ascended into heaven.
- Possibility #3) - Jesus meant that He would come back to earth and establish His kingdom for Israel.
- Possibility #4) - Jesus meant that He would come again individually to each believer at the time of the believer's death and bring that person with Him to heaven.
- Possibility #5) - Jesus meant that He would come and catch away His own and bring them to heaven with Him.

We believe possibility #5 is exactly what Jesus meant when He said He would come again in John 14. Jesus would come again. Jesus would take believers with Him, and those believers would be brought to the Father's house in heaven to reside in the place that Jesus prepared for them.

Question #5 - What will it be like to be taken to where Jesus is?

To be taken to where Jesus is will be, as the Bible describes it, to be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and then forever be with the Lord. This is the doctrine known as the rapture. In **1 Thessalonians 4:17**, Pauls writes, "we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds." What we see in an English Bible is the phrase "caught up." In a Greek text we see the word *harpazo*. If we were to translate that word into Latin we would have the word *raptio*. The Latin verb *raptio* is where we get the English word rapture, and the word literally means caught up. The doctrine has historically been called the rapture, but we could understand it to mean the catching away of the church as described in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.

What does this look like? The body of believers in Christ, the entire church, will one day be caught up or snatched away in the clouds. We will meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air, and then, we will go to heaven with Jesus.

What about people who die before this event happens? Paul has much to say about that in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. He explained that all who are asleep in Christ, that is, all who were believers in Christ and died before the rapture takes place, will be caught up first, and immediately after that, all the believers in Christ who are still alive will be caught up with those who had died. All the believers in the church age will go to heaven with Jesus to be where He is, in the Father's house.

Question #6 - Where will those who are taken go?

According to John 14, those who are taken will go to their place in the Father's house, prepared for them by Jesus Himself. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." Where did Jesus say He was going? To the Father's house. What did He say about the Father's house? It has many rooms. It has many dwelling places. What did He say He was going to do? To prepare a place for His believers. What did He say would eventually happen? Jesus will come again and bring them to that place that He has prepared for them in the Father's house.

When believers are taken out of this world, they are taken to the greatest place - the Father's house. The apostle Paul explained that to be in heaven with Christ at the Father's house is much better than to remain here on earth.

Philippians 1:23 *"I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better."*

Question #7 - How does a person get there?

Really, there are two avenues by which a person goes to heaven.

Avenue #1) Physical death brings a person into the presence of the Lord. **2 Corinthians 5:8**

Avenue #2) The Rapture. **1 Thessalonians 4:17; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53**

Question #8 - Who gets to go there?

To answer this question we need to go back to John 14. Notice verse 1. Jesus said, *"believe in God, believe also in Me."* He starts this with the word believe at the beginning of this discussion, and now notice what He says to His disciples in verse 4. *"You know the way to where I am going. Thomas said the him, 'Lord we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?'"* Now notice verse 6. *"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"*

How do you go to heaven? You go through Christ. How do you go through Christ? Believe in Him. Believe that He died for you and rose again. Believe that His work for you on the cross settled the debt you owe to God because of your sin. Jesus said in John 6:40, *"For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."*

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST HAS PROMISED TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN HIM THAT HE WILL PERSONALLY TAKE THEM TO BE WITH HIM IN GOD THE FATHER'S HOUSE IN HEAVEN.

What a wonderful promise that is.