

LESSON 1

Looking for a City

Hebrews 11:13-16

These all died in faith, although they had not received the things that were promised. But they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth. Now those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they were thinking about where they came from, they would have had an opportunity to return. But they now desire a better place—a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them, Hebrews 11:13-16.

Class Overview: This introductory lesson sets the stage for our study on heaven, and what themes we will cover in the coming weeks. By grounding ourselves in the promises of Scripture, from Abraham's longing for a city with foundations to John's vision of the New Jerusalem, we will see that heaven is not a vague idea but the certain home of God's people. This study will help us lift our eyes above the temporary struggles of life and focus on the eternal promises of God.

Class Objectives:

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Recognize why the study of heaven is relevant for Christians today.
 2. Trace how Abraham, the early Christians, and John all looked forward to a heavenly city.
 3. Identify the four main themes of the quarter's study: hope, vision, life, and fulfillment.
 4. Explain how the promise of heaven motivates holiness, endurance, hope, and mission.
 5. Commit to keeping Hebrews 13:14 in mind as the guiding verse for the quarter.
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Introduction – The Big Picture of Heaven

A few years ago, I saw a video of a soldier surprising his family after a long deployment. He had been away for nearly a year. The video showed his wife and children waiting in the airport terminal, not knowing when he would walk in. Then suddenly, he appeared. His children saw him first. They didn't hesitate; they didn't walk—they ran as fast as they could, threw their arms around his neck, and clung to him. His wife followed, tears flowing down her face. There was laughter, crying, joy, and relief all at once.

That kind of moment is powerful even to witness as an outsider. But imagine what it meant to that family. The waiting, the longing, the counting of days—all fulfilled in one embrace.

And that is just a glimpse of what Scripture describes about heaven. We are waiting, longing, counting the days. Paul says in Philippians 3:20 that *"our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior*

from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." One day, the waiting will end. One day, faith will become sight. And when that day comes, the joy will far surpass any airport reunion.

When you hear the word *heaven*, what image comes to mind? For many, it's shaped more by popular culture than by Scripture. Cartoons and movies depict clouds, harps, halos, and even floating figures in the sky. For others, heaven feels distant and hazy, almost unreal—something to think about only when life ends.

However, the Bible describes heaven in a very different way. It is not myth or wishful thinking; it is God's promise. It is the *home of the soul*, the eternal city prepared for those who belong to Him. In John 14:2-3, Jesus plainly said: *"In my Father's house are many rooms . . . I am going away to prepare a place for you . . . I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also."* That's not vague. That's personal. That's a promise.

Why does this matter? Because what we believe about the future shapes how we live in the present. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 that our momentary suffering is nothing compared to the eternal weight of glory. Abraham was willing to live in tents and wander as a stranger because *"he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God"* (Hebrews 11:10). And John, near the end of the Bible, saw the New Jerusalem descending, where *"God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them"* (Revelation 21:3).

That's the goal of our study together. To set aside cultural clichés and let God's word paint the picture. To learn not only *what heaven will be like*, but also *how the promise of heaven should shape our daily walk now*.

As we start, consider this: **What do you most long for when you think about heaven?** Is it a reunion with loved ones? Rest from pain? Or, seeing God face-to-face? Scripture points us to all these things and more. And every promise is sure because God Himself has spoken.

Why Heaven Matters Now

For many people, heaven feels like a subject for funerals. Something we'll think about *later*, when life is over. But the Bible presents heaven as something that should shape us *now*.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: *Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

Paul was saying: The way to endure suffering now is to keep eternity in view. If all we see is this world, pain will crush us. However, if we remember what God has promised, we can persevere.

The same point shows up in Philippians 3:20-21: *Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject everything to himself.*

That changes our perspective. This world gives us mailing addresses, but heaven gives us our identity. That's where we truly belong. And that is why this study matters now. Heaven isn't just comfort for the dying; it's strength for the living. When we set our hearts on what is eternal, fear loses its grip, grief has hope, and temptation loses its appeal.

How has the hope of heaven given you strength in a hard season? Why do you think it's easy for us to lose sight of heaven in day-to-day life?

Heaven in the Story of God's People

From the very beginning, God's people have lived with an awareness that this world is not their final home.

- **Abraham's Faith** – Hebrews 11:9-10 tells us Abraham lived in tents “like a stranger in a foreign country” because “*he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*” Imagine the contrast: flimsy tents that wear out quickly vs. a city with eternal foundations. Abraham's eyes were set on something permanent, something only God could build.
- **Confession of the Faithful** – Hebrews 11:13-16 says they “confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth ... they are seeking a homeland ... a better place; a heavenly one.” That confession wasn't weakness. It was confidence. They admitted they didn't belong here, and because of that, God “is not ashamed to be called their God.”
- **The Early Christians** – Hebrews 13:14 repeats the same truth: “*For we do not have an enduring city here; instead, we seek the one to come.*” The church never saw itself as settled in this world. They were on the move toward something greater.
- **Jesus' Promise** – In John 14:2-3, Jesus told His disciples He was preparing a place for them and would come again to bring them there. The story of God's people is always a story of waiting and trusting, with heaven as the goal.
- **John's Vision** – And near the end of Scripture, Revelation 21:1-4 brings all of this to fulfillment: the New Jerusalem, where God dwells with His people and every tear is wiped away. The tent is replaced by a city. The wandering is replaced by home.

Why do you think God often uses the image of a city to describe heaven? How does Abraham's faith encourage us to live as “strangers and exiles” today?

What We Will Study in This Class

As we move through the next three months, our goal is not just to talk about heaven in the abstract. We are going to open Scripture and let God show us what awaits. The quarter naturally divides into four sections:

- **Our Hope of Heaven:** We'll begin with Abraham, the early Christians, and the longing of God's people for a better country. Their example reminds us that heaven has always been the goal for those who trust God.
- **The Vision of Heaven:** Then we will step into Revelation 21-22 and see the city itself. The beauty, the light, the walls, the gates, the very structure of it all; these images are designed to stir our hope and anchor our faith.
- **Life in the Heavenly City:** The majority of our quarter will be spent here, thinking about what makes heaven truly glorious. Joy without end. Privileges beyond what we can imagine. God's unbroken presence. Eternal fellowship. Worship that never grows old.
- **The Fulfillment of Heaven:** Finally, we will close with the promise of rest. Heaven is not only glorious in description, it is final in reality. Perfect peace, eternal communion with God, and rest for His people.

This class isn't about satisfying curiosity or answering every question we might have. It's about fixing our hearts on God's promises. As Titus 1:2 says, we live *"in the hope of eternal life that God, who cannot lie, promised before time began."*

Which of these sections, hope, vision, life, or fulfillment, do you think you need most right now? Why?

How the Hope of Heaven Shapes Us

The Bible never presents heaven just as information. It is always motivation. Knowing where we are headed should change how we live today.

- **Heaven motivates holiness**
 - Colossians 3:1-4: *"So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is ... Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."*
 - Because our lives are hidden with Christ in God, we are called to live differently. Every choice now is shaped by where we are headed.
- **Heaven gives endurance in suffering**
 - Romans 8:18: *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us."*
 - Paul does not deny suffering. He gives us perspective. Heaven outweighs whatever burdens we carry here.
- **Heaven provides hope in death**
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: *"We do not want you to be uninformed ... so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope."*
 - The hope of resurrection and reunion changes the way we face the death of loved ones; and our own mortality.

- **Heaven calls us to mission**

- If heaven is real, we want others to share in it. Jesus said in Matthew 28:19-20: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.”*
- Evangelism is not just duty: it is an invitation to eternal joy.

*Which of these four truths—holiness, endurance, hope, or mission—do you find most encouraging today?
Which one do you find hardest to live out? Why?*

Conclusion

When we discuss heaven, we are not talking about fantasy or wishful thinking. We are referring to God's promises; promises rooted in His word, sealed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and assured by the Spirit who dwells in us.

Abraham lived like a stranger because he was seeking a city with foundations. The early Christians faced hardships because they knew *“we do not have an enduring city here; instead, we seek the one to come”* (Hebrews 13:14). And John, near the end of Scripture, saw that city: radiant, secure, filled with God's presence.

That is our hope. That is our home. And it should change the way we live today. Heaven calls us to holiness, gives us endurance in trials, provides us hope in death, and moves us to invite others along.

As we start this quarter, I want to challenge you: **don't treat heaven as an afterthought. Let it influence how you live this week.** When you're tempted, remember where you belong. When you're weary, remember the rest ahead. When you're discouraged, remember the glory that's coming.

Key verse to carry with you:

Hebrews 13:14: *“For we do not have an enduring city here; instead, we seek the one to come.”*


Heaven is not just our future home, it is the promise that shapes how we live today.


For Discussion

1. When you picture heaven, what comes to mind first, and where did that image come from?


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2. Why do you think Abraham was willing to live as a stranger in tents while waiting for “a city with foundations” (Hebrews 11:10)?


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3. In what ways does remembering that our “citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20) change how we live here on earth?


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4. Which of the four ways heaven shapes us, holiness, endurance, hope, or mission, speaks most to you right now? Why?


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5. How can we encourage each other, as a church, to keep our eyes fixed on the city that is to come?

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