

Sermon – What is the Reward of the Saved?

We humans often jump to conclusions based upon pre-conceived ideas. And this is perhaps most evident in the area of religion. Many people simply accept the religion of their mother and father, never actually proving what the truth is. Even among professing Christians who own a Bible, most simply do not open it up and read what God has put there for us to know.

The Bible was written in a way that allows us to prove all things from within the pages of this God-given book. Indeed, the instruction to “*prove all things*” is given to us in **1 Thessalonians 5:21**. Yet most do not approach the Bible in this manner. Instead, they begin with fables and traditions of men and attempt to fit the scriptures into these pre-made and false concepts. This is why modern Christianity is overflowing with such **non-biblical** teachings as the Trinity, the Immortal Soul, a torturous ever-burning Hell and the Rapture.

Recently, we looked at the myths and fables about a torturous ever-burning hell fire. We found the truth in the Bible to be much more in line with a loving, but just God. We learned how the errors first crept into the Church and how generations of professing believers passed along those errors over the years. Today, we are going to tackle another topic that has been very much misunderstood by the Christian community: Just what is the Reward of the Saved? Do the righteous go to heaven when they die?

A recent survey sponsored by a major American News Magazine noted that 78 percent of Americans believe that the good, the righteous, the saved go to heaven when they die. Through the centuries this has been the hope taught by traditional Christianity.

There are many questions raised by such an idea. What would going to heaven be like? What would we do when we got there? How does the Bible describe heaven?

Beliefs about heaven as the reward of the saved have greatly varied over the centuries.

Classical heaven as envisioned by artists: A rainbow arch of the entrance; perhaps a bridge of gold or glass; St. Peter as the guardian or gatekeeper; pearly gates, of course; the décor features jewels, stars, candles and trumpets; the inhabitants appear with angels or even as angels themselves, with freshly sprouted wings. They traditionally walk among the clouds strumming on golden harps.

Theologians and philosophers have adapted their concepts through the centuries, influenced by the society around them. Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, in their book entitled “Heaven: A History” report “*Monks and friars, depending on whether they felt more at home in the countryside or in the city, preached a heaven defined primarily in terms of environment*”

“Heaven became a city ... or the visionary experience of celestial castles. Accounts of the other world resonate with descriptions of golden streets, jeweled buildings, and richly dressed residents” (ibid.).

In other words, religious teachers, depending on their own experiences and preferences, have foreseen either an urban paradise or something more rural.

Men of the Renaissance era [the 15th century] envisioned a zestier paradise. Quoting again from “Heaven: A History”, “*In its boldest form, the new theology envisioned heaven as a place of erotic human love in the bucolic [rustic] setting of a comfortable natural landscape*”

What would we do for eternity in heaven?

What kind of relationship would heavenly inhabitants have with God? This too has enjoyed much speculation over the centuries. A modern author, John MacArthur in his book, "The Glory of Heaven" states, *"There the saints shall eternally, without interruption, feast their eyes upon Him, and be ever viewing His glorious perfections."*

Others believe that, if this is all they are to do forever, heaven may prove to be a boring place. As MacArthur quotes one writer, *the prayer of many could be: "Please God, don't take me to heaven yet ... I haven't even been to Hawaii!"*

Some modern thinkers believe that heaven will offer faithful Christians whatever they sacrificed on earth for Jesus' sake. According to this theory, one who gave his riches to his church would be blessed with great wealth in heaven; another who served as a missionary in a dry, desolate country would have his own lush tropical rain forest; while the priest who remained celibate for God will finally have a wife and children.

For many the most important aspect of heaven is the opportunity to see their loved ones again. Quoting again from MacDannell and Lang, *"By far the most persuasive element of the modern heaven for many contemporary Christians is the hope of meeting the family again. Countless 'in memoriam' sections of newspapers throughout Europe and America reflect the belief that families parted by death will be reunited"*

God indeed does have a plan that will reunite loved ones, as we will see. But these popular ideas of heaven fall far short of describing the grandeur and true purpose of God's plan.

Do people go to heaven at death?

The popular belief is that a good person goes to heaven immediately when he dies. According to this view, the body goes to the grave, but the soul ascends to heaven. But does this concept agree with the Bible? Do the Scriptures state that righteous people go to heaven when they die?

David, the king of Israel and author of many of the Psalms, whom God called *"a man after My own heart"* (**Acts 13:22**), did not go to heaven at his death. The apostle Peter, speaking under God's inspiration, stated:

Acts 2:29, ^(AFV) "Men and brethren, let me speak to you freely concerning the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day."

verse 34, "For David has not ascended into the heavens ..."

David is included in **Hebrews 11:32** among those who died in faith, and in **verse 39**, David is one of those of whom it is said:

Hebrews 11:39, ^(AFV) "But these all, though they had received a good report through faith, **did not obtain the promise**"

Jesus, speaking about 1,000 years after David's death, said:

John 3:13, ^(AFV) "(And **no one has ascended into heaven**, except He Who came down from heaven, even the Son of man, Who is in heaven.)".

This means that Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets and all other righteous men and women who lived before Christ's first coming did not go to heaven. They were buried in the grave as David was.

The view that a person's soul goes to heaven at death – though held by many in good faith – cannot be found in the Bible. This is because many have jumped to false conclusions based on what they have erroneously been taught. These unfounded ideas result from a misunderstanding of the Scriptures and confusion over what the Bible does teach about the resurrection.

Why a resurrection?

Theologians widely acknowledge that the Bible speaks of a resurrection, even if they're not sure what it means or when it takes place. The most common view is that at the resurrection the body rises to be reunited with the soul in heaven. But, as we pointed out earlier, the concept of the immortality of the soul-the soul as existing as something apart from the body-is not biblical. It takes its origins from the Greek philosophers rather than the writers of the Bible.

If it were true that at the resurrection the body is to rise to be united with the soul in heaven, why would God do things this way? What purpose would the resurrection serve? Why keep the body in the grave? If the righteous go immediately to heaven at death, why wouldn't God send the complete being--soul and body--to heaven simultaneously, instead of keeping soul and body apart through the ages? Or why even have a resurrection? If the soul goes immediately to heaven, why bother with bringing bodies back to life?

The inescapable fact is that, according to popular teaching about heaven, **there is no logical reason for the resurrection.**

Why is there confusion about how the resurrection fits with the traditional view of heaven? Perhaps it is because support for the idea of going to heaven at death is not found in the Bible.

What is the Kingdom of Heaven?

Many people believe they will go to heaven because Jesus spoke repeatedly of the Kingdom of Heaven. In **Matthew 5:3** He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Three other verses in **Matthew 5** refer to the faithful entering the kingdom of heaven. The phrase Kingdom of Heaven appears in the book of Matthew a total of 32 times.

However, note that Matthew is the only biblical writer who uses the term kingdom of heaven. Other Bible writers use the term Kingdom of God. For example, Luke, in recording the same event described above, records Jesus' words as: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (**Luke 6:20**). The terms are interchangeable. The term Kingdom of God is used 69 times in the New Testament, mostly in the Gospels-Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

As we will see, Jesus did not tell His disciples they should expect to go to heaven. He spoke instead of a kingdom originating from God in heaven that is to be established on the earth at His second coming. Notice Jesus' explanation that He would come to join His followers on earth at His return rather than have them ascend to heaven to be with Him where He currently resides.

After Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, He spent 40 days teaching His disciples, instructing them about the Kingdom of God (**Acts 1:3**). After this He joined His Father in heaven. Let us notice the instruction His disciples received after He rose into the sky.

Acts 1:9-11 ^(AFV) And after saying these things, as they were looking at Him, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. Now while they were gazing intently up into heaven as He was going up, two men in white apparel suddenly stood by them, Who also said, "You men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, Who was taken up from you into heaven, shall come in exactly the same manner as you have seen Him go into heaven."

Jesus spoke repeatedly about the Kingdom of God. He said He would return to earth and establish His Kingdom here, not in heaven. In what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer, Jesus instructs His followers to pray to their heavenly Father, "Your kingdom come" (**Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2**). We are to pray for its arrival here on earth. That Kingdom is the true goal of every Christian (**Matthew 6:33** "... seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness ...").

In **Luke 19:12** Jesus spoke of Himself in a parable, comparing Himself to "a certain nobleman [who] went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return."

Luke 19:12 ^(AFV) Therefore, He said, "A certain nobleman set out to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, **and to return.**"

The "distant country" is the Third Heaven – the Father's dwelling place, where Jesus now sits at the Right Hand of God (**Romans 8:34**). But Jesus will bring the Kingdom of God to the earth at His return.

Christ's Kingdom established on earth

One Old Testament prophecy is specific about Jesus' return, telling us exactly where He will arrive back on earth to establish His Kingdom.

Zechariah 14:4, 9 ^(AFV) And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall split in two, from the east and to the west, and make a very great valley. And half of the mountain shall move toward the north, and half of it toward the south. ... And the LORD shall be King over all the earth; in that day there shall be one LORD, and His name shall be one.

The incident we read about in the book of Acts that describes Jesus' ascension tells us that it was on the Mount of Olives that He last talked with His disciples, and it was from the same mountain that He rose into the clouds in their sight. He will return to the same mountain to begin His reign in the Kingdom of God.

The reward of the saints is eternal life in the Kingdom of God. This will be given to them when Christ returns, but, as we have seen, Jesus will reign with them on the earth rather than in heaven. There are many verses that describe the saints ruling on earth in God's Kingdom. Let's examine a few.

The earth, not Heaven, is the abode of the saved.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (**Matthew 5:5**) - not '...for their souls shall go to heaven'. This is alluding to **Psalms 37**, the whole of which emphasizes that the final reward of the righteous will be upon the earth. In the very same location that the wicked had enjoyed their temporary supremacy, the righteous will be recompensed with eternal life, and possess this same earth that the wicked once dominated. "*The meek shall inherit the earth...Such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth...The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever*" (**Psalms 37:11, 22, 29, 34**). Living in the earth/promised land forever means that eternal life in heaven is an impossibility.

Earth is the arena of God's operations with mankind: "*Heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's, but the earth hath He given to the children of men*" (**Ps. 115:16**).

Rev. 5:9,10 relates a vision of what the righteous will say when they are accepted at the judgment seat: "*(Christ) hath made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth*". This picture of ruling in God's Kingdom on earth is quite removed from the vague conception that we will enjoy 'bliss' somewhere in heaven.

The prophecies of **Daniel 2** and **7** outline a succession of political powers, which would finally be superseded by the Kingdom of God at Christ's return. The dominion of this Kingdom would be "*under the whole heaven*", and would fill "*the whole earth*" (**Dan. 7:27; 2:35 cp. v. 44**). This everlasting Kingdom "*shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High*" (Dan. 7:27); their reward is therefore eternal life in this Kingdom which is to be located on earth, under the heavens.

Heaven is Coming to This Earth

The truth of the matter is, after the Millennium, God the Father and the Heavenly Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem, will descend out of Heaven, and come to dwell permanently on this earth, **Revelation 21:1-5**. There we will occupy the place Jesus has been preparing for us. We will then dwell with the Father and the Son forever in the new earth. We're not going to Heaven! Heaven is coming here--to this earth. During the 1,000 years, we will--if we overcome our carnal nature and develop righteous, godly character with the Spirit's help--aide in the rebuilding of the waste places, **Isaiah 58:12, 61:4**, and educate and train others to follow God's ways, **Isaiah 61:6**.

"I Shall Return"

General Douglas MacArthur was one of the great United States military leaders during World War II. He and the American troops were forced off the Philippines by the Japanese. But MacArthur courageously promised: "I shall return." And he did! He waded ashore with liberating Allied troops and the Filipinos went wild with joy. MacArthur kept his promise!

Jesus Christ said that no man hath ascended up to Heaven except He himself, **John 3:13**. He said that He would come again, **John 14:3**. Jesus described Himself in the parable of the pounds (**Luke 19:11-27**) as the nobleman who went into a far country (Heaven) to receive for Himself a kingdom, and to return (**verse 12**). We are to occupy (produce results) till He comes, **verse 13**. When He returns, He is going to give rewards and punishments to His servants (**verses 15**, etc.). He will do this when He sits on His throne, **Matthew 25:31-46**. Where will His throne be? In the clouds above the earth? NO! His throne will be at Jerusalem, **Jeremiah 3:17**. Jesus said He would return, not offshore or at a distance, but to this earth.

POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT HEAVEN

I Go to Prepare a Place for You

Jesus said that where He was going (Heaven), the disciples could not come, **John 13:33**. Did Jesus contradict Himself a few verses later in **John 14:1-3**? Of course not! Yet many have used these verses to support the "going to Heaven" idea. Jesus went to Heaven to prepare a place for us. This directly relates to our being His future bride, as the bridegroom would have to prepare a place for the couple to live after they were married. This was usually an addition made to the Father's house.

Where He was going, the disciples could not come, but He would come again, to receive His true followers, and where He would be, they would be there also (**John 14:3**). He would never leave His disciples (**Hebrews 13:5**). After He ascended to His Father in Heaven, He would not leave them comfortless; He would come to them (**John 14:18**) through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, **verses 16-17**. This Holy Spirit is the very mind of Christ (**Philippians 2:5, 1 Corinthians 2:16, Romans 8:9**) NOT the “third person” of a “trinity.” God is a Family, not a trinity. The Family of God is composed of those having the Holy Spirit: God the Father, the Son, and the sons of God (**I John 3:1-2**), men and women who have the Holy Spirit, (**1 Corinthians 12:13**).

John 14 tells us that Jesus would come to His disciples in the form of the Holy Spirit and be with them. Then, in the future, Jesus Christ will return with power to this earth and rule all nations with His saints for 1,000 years--the Millennial Kingdom of God.

In **Acts 1:1-12** we are given the account of Jesus ascending to Heaven from the Mount of Olives. The angel told the disciples, **verse 11**, that Jesus would return in the same manner as they saw Him leaving, in a cloud, **verse 9**. Jesus would come back from Heaven in a cloud to the Mount of Olives. **Zechariah 14** graphically displays Jesus' return, **verses 4-9**. The LORD-- Jesus Christ--will stand on the Mount of Olives, which will split in two in a giant earthquake, **verse 4**. The saints will be with Him, **verse 5**. The earth shall be healed, **verse 8**. And the LORD shall be king over all the earth, **verse 9**. Nations shall beat their swords into plowshares, **Isaiah 2:2-4**, and all nations shall be taught God's ways, **Isaiah 2:3** and **Habakkuk 2:14**. Those that do not keep the Holy Days such as the Feast of Tabernacles will receive plagues from God, **Zechariah 14:16-19, Isaiah 60:12**.

Where He--the Messiah--is, there will we be also, **John 14:3**. He will be ruling the earth with His saints! The Lord shall descend from Heaven, and the saints, those alive at the time and changed to spirit beings along with those resurrected from the dead to life immortal, will rise in the clouds to meet Jesus in the air and thereafter be with Him forever. We know from **Zechariah 14:4**, that Christ shall stand on the Mount of Olives. The angel in **Acts 1:11** said Jesus would return in the same way He ascended. He must complete the reverse trip. The saints will meet Him returning to the earth in the clouds, come back to the earth with Him, and rule with Christ a thousand years, **Revelation 5:10, 2:26-27, 20:4-5**.

During the 1,000 years, the earth will become a paradise due to the powerful righteous rule of Christ and the saints, as described in **Isaiah 11**. Most of mankind will be converted at that time. The great devastations wrought on the earth by the beast and God's Seven Last Plagues described in Revelation, will not exterminate all the earth's people. **Isaiah 24** is clear to this fact. In her book, The Great Controversy, Ellen G. White is dishonest with **Isaiah 24:6** when she quotes all but the last words: “and a few men left.” Yes, there will be left a remnant, like the gleaning of grapes, **verse 13**. The LORD of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion in Jerusalem, **verse 23**. And the inhabitants of the world will then learn righteousness, **Isaiah 26:9**.

Man does not have an immortal soul. Souls can die, **Ezekiel 18:20**. In the day of a man's death, his thoughts perish, **Psalms 146:4**. That is why the New Testament frequently speaks of death as sleep, e.g., **1 Corinthians 15:51**. Verse 52 shows that the dead in Christ won't go to Heaven when they die--they will be resurrected to eternal life when He returns.

Enoch and Elijah

What about Enoch and Elijah, those righteous men of the Old Testament? When they died, didn't they go to the Heaven where God is? No, they did not. John 3:13 means what it says. God's Word never contradicts itself.

John 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.*

Was Enoch Taken to Heaven?

Some people believe **Genesis 5:24** and **Hebrews 11:5** declare that God took Enoch to heaven. But is that what these verses say?

Genesis 5:24 tells us that *“Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.”* **Hebrews 11:5** NKJV adds: *“By faith Enoch was taken away [KJV has “translated”] so that he did not see death, 'and was not found, because God had taken him'; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.”*

Is this saying that Enoch taken to heaven without dying? No, because the scriptures tell us that *“... as in Adam **all die**, even so in Christ shall all be made alive (**1 Corinthians 15:22**), and Jesus Himself declared that *the Scripture cannot be broken* (**John 10:35**).*

Neither Genesis 5:24 nor Hebrews 11:5 tells us how or where God took , only that He did. Did God take Enoch to heaven? Clearly not because as we just read, Jesus Himself said that *“**no one** has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man ...”*

Further, **Hebrews 11** lists many faithful men and women of the Bible (including Enoch), but also tells us that *“**These all died** in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth”* (**Hebrews 11:13**). Obviously then, Enoch neither ascended to heaven nor received the promised eternal life.

So what did happen to Enoch? **Hebrews 11:5** tells us Enoch was “taken away.” The same Greek word rendered “translated” in the KJV is used to refer to the remains of the patriarch Jacob being “carried over” from Egypt (where he had died) to Shechem, where he was later buried. The word “translated” in the Greek simply means “moved to another place.” (See **Acts 7:16**).

We know from **Jude 14-15** that Enoch preached powerful sermons in a wicked and perverse time just before the Flood. Because Enoch's preaching was gaining opposition and he was likely to be killed in that age of violence, (**Genesis 6:11**), God took him, and he was not to be found, **Genesis 5:24**. The Almighty took Enoch bodily to another place, exactly as described in **Acts 7:16**. This was most likely to allow His servant to die a natural death, rather than allow him to suffer a violent death.

The Scriptures simply do not reveal all the details of what happened to Enoch. However they do record that Elijah, in a similar manner, was physically removed by a fiery chariot only to die later. In addition, God instructed Moses to go to the top of Mount Nebo to die - apparently alone (**Deuteronomy 32:48-50**). Then God buried his body where it would not be found (**Deuteronomy 34:5-6**), possibly to prevent the grave site from being made into an idolatrous shrine. Something similar might have happened to Enoch.

Did Elijah Go to Heaven?

2 Kings 2:11 describes a fiery chariot which came and took Elijah in a whirlwind into heaven. Some suppose that this is the “heaven” where God's throne is located. Actually, the Bible speaks of three heavens (**2 Corinthians 12:2**). The first heaven is where the atmosphere and clouds are, from whence the rain comes (e.g., **Genesis 7:11**). The second heaven is outer space, home of the planets and stars (e.g., **Psalms 8:3**). And the third Heaven is where God's throne is located (e.g., **Psalms 11:4**).

A whirlwind took Elijah into heaven, according to God's direction. Obviously it was the first heaven, for only in the atmosphere can a whirlwind be operative. God took Elijah to another place to live out his days, his office being transferred to Elisha, **2 Kings 2:12-15**. Notice that the sons of the Prophets knew that God was going to take Elijah from them, verses 1, 3, 5. After he was taken away, they sent a search party of 50 men, but in 3 days could not find him, verses 16-17. They knew nothing about Elijah going to the third Heaven!

God had earlier told Elijah that he was to anoint Elisha as prophet and, in so doing, designate Elisha as his successor (**1 Kings 19:16**). Later, as Elijah and Elisha walked together, Elijah said to Elisha, *"What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?"* (**2 Kings 2:9**). This led to a discussion of God's gifts to Elisha that would allow him to fill Elijah's role.

"Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (**verse 11**). Elijah was now gone. The former followers and students of Elijah now knew to look to Elisha as their new leader. *"Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, 'The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha'"* (**2 Kings 2:15**).

Many Bible scholars and other readers assume that Elijah at that point was made immortal and taken to the heaven where God resides. This was not the case. The sons of the prophets knew otherwise. They knew the whirlwind had simply removed Elijah to another location on earth. They exclaimed to Elisha: *"Look now, there are fifty strong men with your servants. Please let them go and search for your master, lest perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley"* (**2 Kings 2:16**).

The disciples were concerned for Elijah's safety, so they sent out a party of 50 men to search for him. The 50 searched for three days but did not find him (**2 Kings 2:17**).

Another passage proves conclusively Elijah did not go to heaven. The Bible records that Elijah wrote a letter to Jehoram, the king of Judah, several years after he was removed in the whirlwind.

Notice the sequence of events recorded for us in the Bible. Elijah's last recorded and dated act occurred during the reign of the Israelite king Ahaziah when Elijah told the king he would die for his sins (**2 Kings 1:3, 17**). Ahaziah's reign lasted only about a year ca. 850 B.C.

Elijah's removal and replacement by Elisha is then recorded in the next chapter, 2 Kings 2. The story continues with incidents from Elisha's life, including an encounter with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah (**2 Kings 3:11-14**). Several years later Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, succeeded his father as king of Judah ca. 845 B.C. (**2 Kings 8:16**).

Jehoram proved to be a wicked king, leading the nation of Judah in rebellion against God's commandments. A few years into Jehoram's reign, and several years after Elijah's removal, Elijah wrote a letter to Jehoram warning him of dire consequences because of his sins. This letter is recorded in **2 Chronicles 21:12-15**.

This letter proves the prophet was still alive and on earth some years after he was removed by the whirlwind and replaced by Elisha. God had chosen Elisha to succeed Elijah as His prophet, so He bodily removed Elijah to another place, where he continued to live for at least several more years-as his letter to Jehoram demonstrates.

The Bible tells us nothing more about Elijah after he wrote the letter. But he eventually died, since **Hebrews 9:27** tells us “*it is appointed for men to die once.*” Elijah, like the other prophets and righteous men of the Old Testament, died in faith, not having received the eternal life God had promised (**Hebrews 11:39**).

As these passages show, a careful reading of the Scriptures shows that Elijah's miraculous removal in a fiery chariot involved transporting him to another location in the area, not to eternal life in heaven.

The Rapture Doctrine

The rapture doctrine says that the saints will be taken off to Heaven while the Eternal sends plagues on the earth. The idea of a rapture is said to have originated with a Spanish Catholic Jesuit named Ribera, in 1580 A.D. (See “The Rapture of the Wicked”, by Stephen E. Jones and “The Rapture of the Saints”, by Duncan McDougall.) During a time of much bloodshed in Europe as Catholics persecuted and killed their opponents, this doctrine said that Christ was going to come and secretly snatch away the Church before a great seven-year tribulation, when the “anti-Christ” would rule the world. This futurist interpretation of the book of Revelation, along with the future coming of the Antichrist, was designed to take the pressure off the Pope, who was universally regarded as being the antichrist by His opponents.

While Revelation does describe a great many future events, it is nevertheless true that antichrist, the spirit of antichrist, was already on the scene as early as the latter part of the First Century, A.D. See I John 4:1-3. In recent times, this future antichrist idea with a pre-tribulation rapture concept, has become a popular view among Protestant churches. The idea of going to a place of safety, whether on earth or in Heaven, is a concept held by many. What is the Bible truth?

Daniel 7 is clear that the saints shall undergo much tribulation and persecution, even right up to the time that they receive the Kingdom. “*I beheld, and the same horn [the little horn, verse 8] made war with the saints, and prevailed against them . . . And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time [three and one-half “times”]*” **Daniel 7:21,25**.

Verses 26-27 speak of the time when the little horn's kingdom shall be taken away and given to the saints.

Jesus' Olivet prophecy speaks of affliction and punishment befalling true Christians, (**Matthew 24:9-13, Luke 21:12-19**).

MISCELLANEOUS SCRIPTURES OFTEN MISINTERPRETED

The “going to Heaven” concept is so ingrained in modern churchianity that many scriptures are wrongly used in support of this pre-conceived notion. Here are a few:

1. **Matthew 3:12** “*Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*”

Some say this term “the garner” is referring to heaven. However, the word garner actually means barn, repository, granary. There is nothing to indicate that the garner is Heaven or is **in** Heaven.

2. **Ephesians 5:5** “*For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*” Some point to the phrase “the Kingdom of Christ and of God” and claim this is proof we are going to heaven. However, we know that the kingdom will be on this earth, not in Heaven. We have already explored many scriptures that prove this beyond any doubt.

3. **Hebrews 11:16** “*But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*”

Some say this “Heavenly country” must mean we are all going to heaven when we die. Indeed, the country to which the faithful fathers looked forward to was an Heavenly country, the New Jerusalem, the New Heavens and New Earth, (see **verse 10**). God has prepared for them a city, verse 16. This city will be brought down out of Heaven to the New Earth (see **Revelation 21:1-2**).

4. **2 Corinthians 5:1-2**, “*For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.*”

At death, our soul (physical body) returns to the dust, but our spirit (the non-physical substance which allows us to think, plan and reason) returns to God in Heaven (**Ecclesiastes 3:21, 12:7, 1 Corinthians 2:11**). There is a “*spirit in man*” (**Job 32:8**). But this spirit is not immortal. It cannot function apart from the body (**Psalms 146:4**). At the resurrection, the righteous dead will be raised and given a “house” or glorious eternal spiritual body with their spirit. They will be “clothed” with this “house” from Heaven. Notice! Their “house” is reserved in Heaven and comes from Heaven when the righteous are “born again” at the first resurrection. This verse does not support the “going to Heaven” concept.

5. **1 Peter 1:4-5**, “*To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you ... ready to be revealed [given to us] in the last time.*”

Do I have to go to Heaven to claim this inheritance? No! Read **Verse 37**, “*For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry [wait, delay].*” The Messiah will return from Heaven with our reward, if we are faithful and endure to the end.

6. **Revelation 5:3**,

“*and no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.*”

The word translated “man” means “no one.” It is properly rendered “no one” in the Revised Standard Version, Modern Language, and New International Version.

7. **Revelation 7:9-17**, the “great multitude.” Here is described a vast multitude from all nations before the throne and the Lamb. They came out of great tribulation and have “white robes,” demonstrating that they have repented of their sins and washed their garments clean in the blood of the Lamb. Are these saints in Heaven where God's throne is? When does this happen? Lest we jump to false conclusions, we should observe the whole of Revelation. It is easy to see that Revelation is not a continuous chronology of events. There are insets that carry the history of the church, the beast, etc. **Revelation 7** is an inset as well. **Verses 1-8** describe the seal of protection put upon 144,000 Israelites, so they would not be hurt by the trumpet plagues of the Eternal described in **Revelation 8** and after. The 144,000 are certainly not in Heaven, or they would not have to be protected from anything! Notice **verse 9**, “after this.” It doesn't say how long after this. But verses **15-17** give an important clue. Compare these verses with **Revelation 21**, especially **21:2-4, 6-7, 22-24** and **Revelation 22:1-5**. We can see that **Revelation 7:9-17** is not talking about saints being in Heaven. It is describing the glorious period of the New Heaven and New Earth, when the throne of God will be in the New Jerusalem, which is coming down out of Heaven to the remade earth.

Consequences of “Going to Heaven” Doctrine

The false “going to Heaven” concept is firmly rooted in many related false doctrines, such as the trinity, immortal soulism, the rapture, Millennium in Heaven, and last day prophecies which distort the true meaning of the times in which we live, as well as a false notion of the reward of the saved.

Rather than being a “harmless error,” the false “going to Heaven” doctrine could be a serious stumbling block to anyone believing such an idea. Churches that teach such false concepts may be doing more harm than good. For example, the following statement was made in a Seventh Day Adventist study on “Revelation's Glorious Rapture: *“Suppose that a glorious being suddenly appeared in Jerusalem who claimed to be Christ and who fitted the description of Jesus in Revelation 1:13-17. Suppose that he preached warm beautiful Bible truths with power, called fire down from Heaven, healed the sick, helped stop wars, read minds, blessed children, etc. What would be your reaction?” The suggested answer was, “We should know at once that he was an imposter . . . because Jesus at His coming makes a SKY APPEARANCE and not an EARTH APPEARANCE. He remains in the AIR while imposters appear on EARTH.”*

This is absurd, yet the consequences of the “going to Heaven” doctrine could be that some who hold this belief might not recognize the returning Messiah and fight against Him. This false belief tunes one into Satan's wavelength.

If one believes the real Christ to be the Antichrist, then he will be fully brainwashed, because of Satan's great deception, to attempt to resist the conquering King of the Universe, as He arrives to establish His Kingdom on this earth.

Isn't it strange that there is not one plain scripture stating, “when we get to heaven”, or “I'll see you in heaven”, or any such thing? There are no such scriptures because this is not the Truth. Far from merely playing a harp in Heaven, we will be doing productive, creative and useful work for all eternity.

Romans 8:18-22 (NKJV) *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.”*

There is a very large universe out there filled with galaxies and stars and planets. And the Bible says that the entire creation – everything we see and know about – is waiting for us, the children of God, to be revealed. We will have a lot of work to do in cleaning it all up and making it beautiful. Imagine having your very own planet to design and beautify!

God's promise to us is that if we suffer with Christ, we will also be glorified with Him and inherit all things! **Romans 8:17**, *“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”*

We have an opportunity to *dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalms 23:6)*, if and only if we overcome. The choice is ours. But I think, as Christians and students of the Bible, we should know that “the house of the Lord” comes down to this earth from heaven. God comes to earth to dwell with men; we don't ascend to heaven to live with Him.

Revelation 3:12 *Him that overcomes will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my*

*God, which is new Jerusalem, **which comes down** [to this earth] **out of heaven** from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.*

Revelation 21:1-3, *"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, **the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them**, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God."*