



## BULLEEN BAPTIST CHURCH

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### SERIES : "THE LAST THINGS"

## Study 7 : "New Heavens and Earth" - September 17, 2006

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### INTRODUCTION : to the series

The "Last Things" is a Series on God's ultimate purposes for his people and his creation. The Series will pick up on the main themes through the Scriptures; themes which find their ultimate fulfilment when Jesus returns to the world. Then the whole of creation is renewed, his people are "clothed with immortality," and God reigns supreme.

### INTRODUCTION : to Study 7

The Scripture Reading for this Study includes 2 Peter 3:10-13

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. .... That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

From last week's study we saw that as Jesus returns, the dead "in Christ" will rise and Christians alive at the time will be "clothed with immortality." All his people from every age, race and culture will greet the Lord in resurrected bodies like his and TOGETHER accompany him to the earth.

In the above passage, Peter adds another factor to the SCOPE of the Resurrection - the whole of the created order will be involved. Paul had taught this already :

Creation was subjected to frustration .... in hope that (it) will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the Children of God." Rom8:21-23

Peter puts Creation's rebirth into a TIME context; with the Lord's return - presumably alongside our own resurrection ( in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. 1Cor15:52). We will return with Jesus clothed with bodies fit for eternity, to an earth fit for eternity also.

Where will we spend eternity ? The promise "Behold, I will create a new heavens and a new earth" Is65:17

The fulfilment : Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth .. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven ..." Now the dwelling of

God is with men, and he will live with them.

Rev21:1-3

Don't we go to heaven? The popular understanding that we "go to heaven" should

be replaced with the more biblical proposition that "heaven comes to us!" Let's begin with a "word study" on heaven.

Believe it or not! There is no verse that actually says that anybody "goes to heaven." In the Study "What happens When We Die (Before the Lord's Return) we will see how the confusion arose.

## A. HEAVEN IS?

### 1. IN THE SCRIPTURES, THE WORD "HEAVEN" IS USED :

Of all creation other than the Earth: "God created the heavens and the earth" Gen1:1

Of every nation on the Earth: "... from every nation under heaven." Ac2:5 c/f Ac4:12, Col1:23

Of Spiritual realities: "John's baptism - was it from heaven or from men?"

Mk11:29 see also Heb8:1-5, 9:24

As an alternative to the word "God" : Matthew uses the phrase "Kingdom of Heaven" where the other Gospels use "Kingdom of God."

Of the visible universe: "Jesus ... ascended higher than all the heavens  
in order to fill the whole universe." Eph4:10

To describe a "Security Register" : "... whose names are written in heaven" Heb12:23

To describe a "Storage Vault" of God's blessings: "... an inheritance ... kept in heaven for you."  
1Ptr1:3

The Christian's actual residence now : "our citizenship is in heaven" Php3:20

Where Jesus now is : "...Jesus must remain in heaven until the time comes  
for God to restore all things." Ac3:21 see also Jn3:13, 6:38

The place where God is: "... your Father in heaven." Mk11:25

"Heaven's" meaning has a wide range. The distinctions & borders are not defined clearly in this mix of the literal & figurative, the physical & the spiritual. Even when speaking of God's "home," indications are that this terminology is a condescension to our limited language and capacity to understand.

EXAMPLE 1 : "Up" to heaven is meaningless if taken literally as a "direction" to heaven; the actual direction of "up" will change completely depending on where we are on the earth.

EXAMPLE 2 : Jesus, to the thief crucified with him: "Today you will be with me in Paradise."  
Lk23:43. We can follow the word through to Rev2:7, 21:1 and 22:2 and read about the "tree of life" and the end to suffering and pain.

But it's doubtful the thief had the time or inclination for a detailed explanation of the concept of Paradise. What he needed was comfort and assurance; whatever "Paradise" technically means, he would have caught the drift. The "picture" in his mind would have been adequate even if the concept could never be completely or fully explained.

"Heaven" is a reality that must be communicated. But as it's outside our experience and beyond the realities of our world, it's best to regard its language as FIGURATIVE or ILLUSTRATIVE.  
(1Cor2:9)

Which leads us to .....

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

The main POINT

In my Father's house are many rooms  
... I am going there to prepare a place for you

PICTURE language - see 2Cor5:1-5 for explanation

... I will come back and take you to be with me.

The PROMISE in plain language

... You know the way to the place where I am going."  
Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where  
you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Picture language again .... but Thomas  
takes Jesus LITERALLY

Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth and the life.  
No one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus is "the WAY"  
The Father is "the PLACE"

## 2. "HEAVEN" = RELATIONSHIP TO GOD RATHER THAN LOCATION (OR DETAIL)

Where heaven is used to describe God's "location" the emphasis is actually on the PRESENCE of God ... and may be best understood as SHORTHAND for it.

(Take the underlined words in "Example 2," above, and write them here : W\_\_\_\_\_ M\_\_\_\_\_)

Let's see how this from John 14 : 1-6, below.

Other examples :

... we who are still alive ... will be caught up together with them ... to meet the Lord ... And so we will be with the Lord forever. 1The4:17 see also 5:10 & 2Th2:1

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God ... "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. Rev21:1-3

## C. THE FINAL SCENARIO

Remember, it's not so much that "we GO to heaven", but that "heaven" COMES to us!

As we have seen it is God's express purpose is to renew the whole of Creation. At the end of the Bible John describes the new heavens and the new earth in Revelation 21. He uses the same concepts that we first meet in the first Chapters of Genesis.

We meet up with

the "Tree of Life" and the life giving river. (Gen2:9 -10 cf Rev 22:1-2)

and God's presence with his people. (Gen3:8 cf Rev21:3)

But now, there are

no "angels with flaming swords" keeping people out (Gen3:23-24) but a gracious invitation to enjoy all God has made (Rev21:6, 22:17)

no longer any curse (Gen3:14-19 but its lifting; no more tears, pain or grief. (Rev22:3, 21:4)

## CREATION'S RENEWAL HAS FOUR ASPECTS :

### 1. A Great DESTRUCTION

"The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare" (2Ptr3:10)

### 2. A Thorough REJUVENATION

"We look for a new heavens and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2Ptr3:1; Rev21:1)

### 3. A Planned LIBERATION.

"... Creation was subjected to frustration .... in hope that (it) will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the Children of God." Rom8:21-23

### 4. A Perfect HARMONY

"And the wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the goat, the lion will eat straw like the ox ..... they will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Is11:6-9)

## D. THE CHOICE FOR US NOW

In John's vision of the new heavens and the new earth in Revelation 21, the "new Jerusalem" is established. A community of God's people who will enjoy perfect fulfilment and fellowship with each other and with God in the midst.

**Who goes into the "City"?** All whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life! Rev21:27b

**How do they get into the book?** "Whoever is thirsty, let him come and take the free gift of the water of life." (Rev22:17)

**If a place in the city is a free gift then it is neither EARNED or DESERVED**

"For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith - and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast" Eph2:8,9