

THE BIBLE ONLINE STUDY COURSE - LESSON 5

Patterned after the 1977 Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course
Updated by The Bible Fund editors, 2014

Will You Go To Heaven?

You've always heard that you'll go to heaven if you're "saved." And most have assumed that their loved ones have already "gone to heaven" when they died. But what does the Bible say?

Is heaven really the "reward of the saved"?

WHY, if the righteous go to heaven, did the Apostle John write: "No MAN hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven" - referring to Jesus Christ Himself (John 3:13)?

If the "saved" go to heaven when they die, why did Peter say that King David, a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), "is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. . . . For David is NOT ascended into the heavens" (Acts 2:29, 34)?

Yes, WHY?

What a paradox! Millions today believe the "saved" go to heaven, yet David didn't! And if the saved go to heaven when they die, what need is there for a resurrection from the dead? Why a resurrection if they have already "gone to their reward"?

Isn't it about time these puzzling yet vitally important questions were answered?

What People Believe

Belief in a heaven beyond the grave is not limited to professing Christians. People around the world have always believed in some kind of after-life - some type of "reward" after death. It is a "recognized article of the creed of heathens, Jews and Mohammedans [Muslims] . . . Eternal blessedness was, in the view of the ancient pagans, reserved for those only who were distinguished for their exalted virtues, and who were accordingly admitted into the society of the gods... " (*The Faiths of the World*, vol.5, p.10).

States this same authority: "The heaven of the Hindu is absorption in Brahma and of the Buddhist, annihilation or Nirvana. The priesthood of the ancient Egyptians taught the immortality of the soul under the name of Palingenesia, or a second birth, being a return of the soul to the celestial spheres, or its reabsorption into the Supreme Being . . ." (p.11).

The eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* declares there is "a bewildering variety in the views of the future life and the world held by different peoples.... The scene of the future life may be thought of on earth, in some distant part of it, or above the earth, in the sky, sun, moon or stars, or beneath the earth. The abodes of bliss and the places of torment may be distinguished, or one last dwelling-place may be affirmed for all the dead. Sometimes the good find their abiding home with the gods; sometimes a number of heavens of varying degrees of blessedness is recognized" (vol.9, p.760).

Mohammedans [Muslims] believe in a heaven prepared for the blessed, the professors of the "true religion," followers of Mohammed. In paradise, they believe they shall enjoy perpetual light and all heavenly pleasures. Their belief includes eight heavens or different degrees of happiness. Mohammed taught about a paradise of carnal, sensual pleasures, but at the same time he taught in the Koran that the height of happiness will consist of seeing God face to face, and that this pleasure will cause all the other pleasures of paradise to be forgotten. Many Australian tribes have had a belief in a happy "other-world." In particular, those scattered over the southeastern region believed in a future happy life "beyond the great water" or in the sky. This "paradise" was often called "gum tree country." The path to "sky-land" was believed to be by the rays of the setting sun or by the **Milky Way**.

Tasmanian aborigines looked forward to a happier life after death, in which they would pursue the chase and forever enjoy the pleasures which they coveted on earth. Ancient Teutonic peoples believed in a heavenly abode called Valhalla. To this heaven of the gods - a warrior's paradise - all brave warriors hoped to go. "It is rafted with spears, it is decked with shields, its benches are strewn with coats of mail. A wolf hangs before the western door, an eagle hovers over it So great was Valhalla that it possessed five hundred and forty doors. Every day the warriors, fully armed, issued from the gates to amuse themselves in combat with each other, returning to feast and drink heavenly mead from the cups presented to them by the Valkyries" (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. II, p. 709).

Some Eskimos of Greenland still believe in two regions of paradise: The first in the cold sky or "over-world," with hills and valleys and a heaven; the other, an underground domain, a blissful place with sunshine and perpetual summer. Clearly, the idea of going to heaven when one dies is not the sole property of professing Christians. Pagans since time immemorial have had similar notions!

The Egyptian "Heaven"

History tells us that many of the ideas of professing Christianity concerning heaven came directly from ancient Egyptians. Writes Adolph Erman in *The Ancient Egyptians* (translated by Aylward M. Blackman): "The Pyramid Texts are mainly concerned with the desire of the august dead to avoid leading a gloomy existence in the underworld - the fate of ordinary mortals - and to dwell in the sky like the gods. There he might voyage with the sun-god in his ship, or dwell in the Fields of the Blessed, the Field of Food-Offerings, or the Fields of Iaru [or Alu]. He might himself become a god, and the fancy of the poets strives to depict the king in this new role. No longer is he a man whom the gods graciously receive into heaven but a conqueror who seizes heaven from them" (p. 2).

The Egyptians believed that before the souls of the dead could reach the Egyptian "heaven" - the Fields of Iaru - and appear in the presence of Osiris, they must traverse a vast under-world region called the Tuat which was inhabited by gods, devils, fiends, demons, good and bad spirits and the souls of the wicked, besides snakes, monsters and serpents. The Egyptian sacred book, *The Book of the Dead*, prescribed spells, incantations, prayers, charms and amulets to help the dead man overcome the dangers of the Tuat and to reach Sekhet Aaru and Sekhet Hetep - other names for the Egyptian heaven - to take his place among the subjects of Osiris in the "Land of Everlasting Life" (E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*, pp. 40-41).

The arriving dead, the Egyptians thought, were ushered into a Hall of Judgment presided over by Osiris. "When the verdict is favorable and he has been cleared of any impurity, his heart is restored, and after several other ordeals, he is ushered into the bright Elysian Fields (the Fields of Alu) beyond the waterHenceforth, he enjoys the perennial life of the blessed under the shadow of the tree of life, or the sycamore of Nut, the goddess of the sky, a true Osiris" (Kohler, *Heaven and Hell in Comparative Religion*, p. 22).

When the verdict was unfavorable, the poor sinner experienced the "second death." His dismemberment followed, and the fiercest tortures awaited him, including burning by hot coals, plunging into deep waters, or cutting the body into pieces by sharp swords. Says Kohler, "**We have here the very origin of the Inferno and Paradiso**" (p. 23, emphasis ours).

What the Early Church Taught

But astounding as it may seem, neither Jesus nor His apostles taught that the righteous go to heaven! Notice the admission of a secular encyclopedia: "The dominant view in the early church seems to have been that until the return of the Lord upon the clouds of heaven to raise the dead, those who had died were asleep, and that they would be suddenly awakened to be given their new bodies, after which they would reign with Him on earth for a thousand years..." (*The New International Encyclopedia*, art. "Heaven," vol. 9, pp. 700-701).

The early Church clearly did not teach the concept of "going to heaven." Such teachings did not become popular until long after the death of the apostles! Notice, however, what gradually happened: "But, largely under the influence of Greek thought, other conceptions [gradually] prevailed. The fate of the patriarchs, prophets, and pious men of the old dispensation naturally occupied much attention and led to the idea that they [their "immortal souls"] were detained in a preparatory abode which the fathers called *limbus patrum*, awaiting the advent of the Redeemer. The general belief of Christians has been that since the resurrection of Christ the just who are free from sin are admitted immediately after death into heaven, where their chief joy consists in the unclouded vision of God" (ibid.).

History shows that the teachings of Clement of Alexandria, Origen and others gradually turned most professing Christians from the belief of a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth. The floodgates were opened. Hellenistic philosophy, which had borrowed heavily from ancient Egyptian mythology, began to replace the teachings of the Bible as the source of doctrine. Prevailing concepts such as the immortality of the soul, an ever burning hell, purgatory and heaven all came directly out of ancient mythology! The popular church, in order to become universal, adopted and taught these prevailing pagan philosophies rather than the plain teachings of the Bible!

Today, the idea of heaven being the "reward of the saved" is nearly universal among Protestant churches. The vast majority of professing Christians look forward to going to a "heaven" where the righteous sit on clouds, pluck harps, shuffle through harp music, and look up into the face of the Master for ALL ETERNITY!

The hit song of the 50s about that "lucky ole sun" that has "nuthin to do, but roll around heaven all day" aptly depicts the nebulous belief of millions of what "heaven" is like. But as we shall soon see, this common belief did NOT come from the teachings of Christ or the apostles!

What is the plain truth about heaven? What DOES your Bible teach about the "reward of the saved"?

LESSONS

"The Promised Land"

There is a statement in the Book of Galatians which actually summarizes the very PURPOSE and PLAN of God for mankind. The Christian's hope of an eternal "reward" depends altogether on the subject covered in that greatly misunderstood passage!

While addressing Gentile-born converts in Galatia, the Apostle Paul was inspired to write, "Now to ABRAHAM and his seed were the PROMISES made. . . . And if YE be Christ 's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the PROMISE" (Gal. 3:16, 29).

The Christian is not yet a possessor of his reward - he is now only an "heir." What Christians shall inherit, if "saved" - whatever shall be the "reward of the saved" - wherever they shall spend eternity - is a definite, specific PROMISE of God. And that promise was made to Abraham, called, in this same book of Galatians written for Gentile converts, the "father" of the faithful (Gal. 3:7).

If one is converted, regardless of race or color or sex; IF one is "Christ 's" - a Christian - then he becomes one of Abraham's children, and an "heir" of the PROMISE made to Abraham . What he is to inherit, then, is whatever was promised to Abraham!

Let's see if it was heaven.

1. Precisely what did God promise Abraham? Gen. 12: 2-3, 6-7 .

COMMENT: "Seed" means offspring. So the promise to Abraham and his offspring - his descendants - was the LAND OF CANAAN!

2. Abraham went to Egypt for a short time (Gen. 12: 10). When he returned to Canaan, did God reiterate His promise to Abraham and his offspring? Gen. 13: 14-15. What are the boundaries of this land? Gen. 15: 18.

COMMENT: The land of Canaan, much of which is occupied by the Jews today, was promised to Abraham and his descendants. That's why it's called "the promised land"! Notice that it is a region on this earth, not up in heaven somewhere!

3. How long did God promise Abraham that he and his seed would possess the land? Gen. 13:15 .

COMMENT: Since the inheritance is to be an ETERNAL inheritance, it of necessity involves and includes EVERLASTING LIFE! More about this later.

4. Was this promise expanded until it ultimately included inheritance of the WHOLE EARTH? Rom. 4: 13.

COMMENT: Not one word about heaven! Through Abraham , all true Christians are promised the earth!

5. Were the same promises God made to Abraham also made to his son, Isaac? Gen. 26: 1-5.

6. And were the same promises then given to Jacob, Isaac's son? Gen. 35:9-12 . And to Jacob's children - the Israelites? Rom. 9:4.

COMMENT: Jacob, whose name was changed to "Israel," had twelve sons. Each son gave rise to one of the twelve tribes of Israel, known collectively as the "children of Israel," or Israelites.

Obedience BEFORE Inheritance

1. In making this promise to Abraham, God conditioned it on obedience. What did God tell Abraham to do? Gen. 12: 1.

2. Did Abraham resist, quibble and argue with God about leaving his homeland? Or did he just DO what he was commanded? Gen. 12: 4; Heb. 11: 8. Into what land did God lead Abraham? Gen. 12:5.

COMMENT: God called Abram (as his name was then) out of Ur of the Chaldees, the land of his birth. That land was under the sway of the political system that began at Babel, symbolic of the spiritual "Babylon" in which we live today! Today, God calls us out of this present world - this modern Babylon! (Rev. 18: 1-4 .) Abraham did obey! First, he left his native land, his friends and relatives, his old ways of life - he forsook ALL and followed where God led. But God did not stop here in testing Abraham's willingness to obey Him.

Let's notice:

3. How did God further test Abraham? Gen. 22: 1-2.

COMMENT: The proper translation of the word "tempt," as used here, is "try." God tempts no man (James 1: 13). When the King James translation of the Bible was made, the word "tempt" meant to "try," or to "test." That is why the translators used the word "tempt" in Genesis 22: 1.

4. Did Abraham, in facing this test, stop to reason it out, make excuse, or rebel? Or did he faithfully OBEY God - even rising early in the morning to obey His command? Gen. 22:3.

5. Did God allow Abraham to kill his only son? Gen. 22: 10-12.

COMMENT: God did not really want Isaac's life - He merely wanted Abraham's WILLINGNESS to obey Him in faith! Because Abraham was faithfully obedient to God, the Bible refers to him as the "father" of all who live by faith (Rom. 4: 11; Gal. 3:7).

6. After Abraham obeyed - had been put to the test and found faithful - were there any other conditions to God's original promise? Gen. 22: 15-18. Note the words, "because thou HAST DONE this thing," in verse 16; and the words, "because thou hast OBEYED MY VOICE," in verse 18.

COMMENT: The promise was now UNCONDITIONAL! Abraham had performed HIS part of the covenant, or agreement.

7. What other scripture shows us that this promise is ABSOLUTELY SURE? Gen. 26: 5.

All Can Become "Heirs" to the Promise!

Let's notice how people of all nations can become "heirs" to the same promises made to righteous Abraham and his descendants.

1. Did God promise Abraham that ALL nations of the earth would be blessed through his "seed"? Gen. 12:3; 22:18. Who is this "seed"? Gal. 3:8, 16.

COMMENT: The word "seed" in Genesis 22: 18 refers specifically to One Seed - Christ - rather than to Abraham's multiple "seed" or offspring mentioned in Genesis 13:16, and 17:8.

2. Does Luke 3: 23, 34 prove that Jesus was a direct descendant - a "seed" - of Abraham? Did He clearly spring from the tribe of Judah, one of the sons of Jacob or Israel? Verses 33- 34. Also notice John 4:22 and Hebrews 7: 14.

COMMENT: Luke records Jesus' genealogy through His mother Mary. Joseph, mentioned in Luke 3:23, was actually the son-in-law of Heli, the father of Mary. And so Luke shows that Mary was directly descended from Abraham (verse 34).

3. How does one who is not a direct descendant of Abraham by birth become an "heir" to the promises made to him? Gal. 3:28-29.

COMMENT: All people who have not descended from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob (Israel) are called "Gentiles" in the Bible. And so Paul went on to show these Gentile-born Galatians that the only way they could become heirs to the promise made to Abraham was by becoming children ("seed") of Abraham by spiritual adoption THROUGH CHRIST!

4. What did Paul say the Ephesian Gentile Christians were before their conversion? Eph. 2:11-12.

COMMENT: As Gentiles, they had been "strangers from the covenants of promise, having NO HOPE, and without God in the world."

5. But through Christ and His sacrifice, were they brought near to the promise? Eph. 2:13. And were they strangers and foreigners anymore? Verse 19. Were they then a part of the spiritual household of God? Same verse.

COMMENT: And so today people from EVERY nation may become "heirs" of the promises God made to Abraham by becoming his "seed" through Christ! We read in Galatians 3:7, "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." If you are a converted Christian, regardless of race, Abraham is your "father" in the faith, and you will inherit whatever God promised to him. Isn't that clear? And so ALL true Christians are heirs with Abraham to inherit (1) ETERNAL LIFE and (2) ETERNAL INHERITANCE OF THE ENTIRE EARTH. "Heaven" was NOT included in the promises God made to Abraham! But when will Abraham and his "children" receive their inheritance? When will they receive the promises? Has Abraham already "gone to his reward" - has he already inherited the promises?

Promises YET to Be Fulfilled

1. Has Abraham yet received the inheritance God promised to him? Acts 7:2-5. Notice especially verse 5.

COMMENT: These inspired words of Stephen plainly state that Abraham never received the promised inheritance - even though God's promise was made UNCONDITIONAL because of his obedience.

2. Were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob merely sojourners - that is, temporary [dwellers], visitors - in the land God had promised to them? Heb. 11:8-10. Had they, at the time the book of Hebrews was written, received the promises? Verses 13, 39-40. Was Abraham still dead during the time of Christ and the apostles? John 8: 52-53.

COMMENT: Do you grasp what these inspired scriptures of God are saying? They say in plain language that all these men died, in faith, NOT HAVING RECEIVED THE Promises! The very fathers to whom the promises were made did not "go to their reward at death"! Nor had they "gone to their reward" YEARS after the resurrection and ascension of Christ to heaven!

3. What about David, an heir of Abraham and one of God's prophets during Old Testament times? Did he inherit the promises, or is he still dead in his grave? Acts 2:29.

COMMENT: We read in the New Testament that Abraham and all the patriarchs have NOT received the promised inheritance, even to this day! They, and all Christians who become Abraham's children through Christ, are now only HEIRS to the promises. An "heir" is one who has not yet come into his inheritance. And so they have not yet become "inheritors"! The BIG question that still remains, then, is: When will they receive the promised inheritance?

To Inherit the "Kingdom of God"

In order to understand when the promises will be inherited, let's study more fully what Abraham and his heirs are to inherit.

1. What did Jesus Christ "confirm" during His ministry on earth? Rom. 15:8. And what message did he proclaim? Mark 1:14; Matt. 9:35.

COMMENT: In confirming the promises of eternal inheritance God made to the "fathers" (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), Christ always preached the Gospel - the GOOD NEWS - of the KINGDOM OF GOD which is to occupy and govern the earth - the same earth that has been promised to Abraham and his heirs for an eternal inheritance. Is there any connection? Absolutely! Notice further:

2. Will all the righteous men of old be "in" the Kingdom of God? Luke 13: 28; Matt 8: 11.

COMMENT: The promises God made to the fathers included ENTRANCE into the Kingdom of God! And so their inheritance will include (1) ETERNAL LIFE in (2) the KINGDOM OF GOD and (3) the EARTH on which that Kingdom will reign - the very SAME INHERITANCE you and I may receive through Christ!

3. What did Jesus say Christians should strive to enter? Matt. 6:33; 7:21.

COMMENT: Notice in Matthew 7:21 that it is the Kingdom "of" heaven - not in heaven! "Of" does not mean "in." It is the Kingdom of, or owned and ruled by, heaven in the same sense that "the Bank of Morgan" was not in Mr. Morgan - but was owned and ruled by him. Matthew's Gospel always uses the term "kingdom of heaven" to express exactly the same thing that Mark, Luke and John express as "kingdom of God." It does not mean a kingdom in heaven, any more than it means a kingdom in God! But it does mean a kingdom owned and ruled by GOD whose throne and dwelling place is in heaven.

4. What did Jesus, in His "sermon on the mount," say the "meek" shall inherit? Matt. 5:5. But what did He say of the "poor in spirit"? Matt. 5:3. Is this a contradiction?

COMMENT: Of course not! The "meek" and the "poor in spirit" - in other words, humble Christians - shall inherit THE EARTH for an everlasting possession, and shall enter the "Kingdom of heaven" which will be set up on earth! That Kingdom, as we

learned in a previous lesson, is the divine, ruling government of God which Christ will establish on earth at His return. To enter into - or "inherit" - the divine Kingdom of God is a destiny of such marvelous glory that the human mind cannot fully grasp it! Men today have no conception of what is in store for the obedient. The inheritance that awaits every true Christian surpasses anything you have ever conceived in your mind! As we read in 1 Corinthians 2:9, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." The full extent of the inheritance God has promised the righteous cannot even be remotely imagined by the natural mind of man - but God does reveal it to us "by His Spirit" (verse 10). Precisely what God reveals will be covered fully in the next lesson!

5. What does Matthew 6: 10 also tell us about God's Kingdom?

COMMENT: Christians today are to pray earnestly : "THY KINGDOM COME!" Obviously, then, it has NOT come to the earth yet.

6. Where is the Christian's inheritance being kept? 1 Peter 1: 3-4; Matthew 5:12; Luke 6:23.

COMMENT: These verses do NOT say, "Great is your reward when you get to heaven." They do not tell us when or where Christians will receive their inheritance and rewards - only that they are being "reserved" for them in heaven!

7. When will the righteous inherit the Kingdom of God - receive their inheritance and rewards? Matt. 25:31-34. Clearly it is WHEN CHRIST RETURNS that Abraham and his children will become inheritors of the promises! But notice what else must happen at Christ's coming.

Importance of the Resurrection

1. Can anyone inherit the Kingdom of God while still a mortal flesh-and-blood human being? 1 Cor. 15: 50.

COMMENT: No HUMAN can inherit the Kingdom of God . The Kingdom of God is not a human kingdom - there are NO humans in it. It is a DIVINE KINGDOM - the GOD Kingdom!

2. What did Paul say must happen to our mortal bodies in order to inherit and actually become a part of that Kingdom? 1 Cor. 15:51, 53. When will our bodies be changed - converted from flesh to spirit? Verse 52. Does that trumpet sound at the SECOND COMING of Christ? 1 Thes. 4: 13-16 . Is this when Abraham, Isaac, Jacob , David and others will inherit the promises? Same verses. What did Jesus call this change, while explaining it to Nicodemus? John 3:6, 8. And if we are "born of the spirit," can we finally "see" - ENTER - the divine, spiritual Kingdom of God? Verse 3.

COMMENT: At the second coming of Jesus Christ all the dead in Christ will be raised with new SPIRIT bodies; and those mortal Christians still alive at His return will be instantly changed into the same kind of SPIRIT BODIES - bodies which can INHERIT the Kingdom of God. Our present flesh is corruptible, subject to death and decay. But spirit beings are ETERNALLY NEW - immortal, incorruptible, never subject to death and decay!

3. Did Jesus declare that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will - in the future - be resurrected in order to be in God's Kingdom? Matt. 22: 31-32.

COMMENT: This text is often twisted around and perverted in an attempt to prove that Abraham is not dead - that he has already gone to his promised reward WITHOUT having to be resurrected - just the diametric OPPOSITE of what Jesus used this illustration to point out. God is the God of the living, not the dead. Jesus was speaking of their future resurrection to immortal life! For He plainly said, "As touching the RESURRECTION of the dead. . . ." We can now see why Abraham and his children through Christ have not, as yet, inherited the promises. They simply cannot come into this ETERNAL INHERITANCE until they receive ETERNAL LIFE! This, as Paul explained, will happen at the resurrection from the dead! Without a resurrection, the dead would never live again! (1 Cor. 15:16, 18.) Therefore, the resurrection of the dead is central to God's plan. And unless Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all deceased Christians are RESURRECTED from the grave at Christ's coming, they cannot inherit the promises!

Let's briefly summarize a few points: The resurrection of the dead shall occur at the second coming of Christ - when He comes as the KING of kings and the LORD of lords to reign over and to rule all nations of the earth. When He comes to set up His Kingdom, then Abraham and his spiritual children in Christ shall be given immortality and will inherit the Kingdom of God - a world-ruling GOVERNMENT headed by and ruled by Christ, occupying the very land promised to Abraham - the land stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates River. And this Kingdom or government composed of IMMORTALS shall rule over all the nations of earth composed of flesh and blood mortals! How different the plain truth of God's Word is from the ancient religious fables and myths which the world embraces today!

How Christ Made Eternal Inheritance Possible

Jesus Christ came to "confirm" the promises made to the fathers (Rom. 15:8). We need to understand what this means. Let's notice how Christ made it possible for all mankind to inherit these glorious promises.

1. What is sin? 1 John 3:4. Will anyone who sins - transgresses God's law - inherit the Kingdom of God? Eph. 5:5; 1 Cor. 6:9-10. What is the penalty - "the wages" - of sin? Rom. 6:23. Have all people sinned? Rom. 3:23.

COMMENT: God is Creator of the entire universe. He is also the great Lawgiver. Whoever is not obedient to Him commits sin. Sin causes sorrow, suffering, anguish and DEATH! And so the Bible shows that anyone who disobeys God is worthy of death - ETERNAL DEATH! Since all have sinned, all have come under the same penalty. If each one of us were to pay the penalty of our own sins, none could receive eternal life - none could inherit the promises made to the fathers.

2. But did Jesus Christ voluntarily give His SINLESS LIFE as a sacrifice FOR US so we wouldn't have to pay the penalty of our sins, and thus be deprived of eternal inheritance in the Kingdom of God? John 10: 17-18; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Rom. 5:8-10.

COMMENT: God, the Father, created all things by Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:9; John 1:1-3). Jesus was GOD incarnate - God made flesh (John 1:14). Therefore, as God and our Maker, Jesus' physical life was of GREATER VALUE than the sum total of all human lives ever born! So by dying Jesus was able to pay the penalty of death for ALL the sins of ALL mankind! Christ "confirmed" the promises God made to Abraham by preaching the gospel of the Kingdom and then by dying for our sins. His death makes it possible for us to receive eternal life! (John 3:16.)

3. But what conditions must we fulfill before Christ's sacrifice can be applied to pay the penalty our past sins have incurred? Acts 2: 38. What must we become? Gal. 3:29, first five words; Rom. 8:9 ..

COMMENT: Whether a direct descendant of Abraham or a Gentile, ALL MUST become "Christ's" - a "Christian" - in order to become eligible to receive eternal inheritance!

4. Has Jesus become the "Captain," or fore-runner - the leader - of our salvation through His suffering, death and subsequent resurrection to glory? Heb. 2:9-10. Of what has Jesus been appointed "heir" by the Father? Heb. 1: 1-2. And will we, if we become "Christ's" - Christians - and overcome, INHERIT ALL THINGS with Him as co-heirs? Rom. 8:16-17; Rev. 21:6-7.

COMMENT: Jesus Christ, at His resurrection, inherited all the promises made to Abraham! And by living a sinless life, He made it possible for all who accept His sacrifice to become CO-HEIRS of the same promises with Him!

5. Did Christ leave a will, or last testament? Heb. 9 :1 5. (A "testament" is a will.) What kind of inheritance will the heirs of this will, or "testament," receive? Same verse. When a person makes a will, must he die before it comes into force? Verses 16-17 .

COMMENT: Christ left a will - a "testament." This is why the last fourth of your Bible is called the "New Testament." It teaches us what we must do to become co-heirs with Him of the promise of eternal inheritance in the Kingdom of God. But a testament, or will, is of no effect unless the one making it dies. So Christ died that we may inherit the promises through Him. But He lives today at the Father's right hand, ready to intercede for us (Heb. 7: 25), to help us, to give us strength so we can all overcome sin and inherit the glorious promises of God!

Has Anyone Gone to Heaven?

There is absolutely NO scripture in all the Bible that promises HEAVEN as the "reward of the saved." NO scripture speaks of the saints - true Christians - going to heaven when they die! And yet most people seem to be ignorant of the plain teaching of the Word of God and have carelessly taken for granted, without question, the false idea of "going to heaven"! Let's notice a few more scriptures which have been either overlooked or carelessly interpreted by those who want to believe in this false doctrine.

1. What did Jesus tell His disciples, as recorded in John 13:33, 36?

COMMENT: Some have assumed that Christ taught His disciples [that] they would follow Him into heaven "afterwards." All the plain scriptures we have studied thus far in this lesson show that this clearly is NOT what Christ was saying! Peter later also died and still lies unconscious in his grave. He will rise later - at Christ's return - in the resurrection with the rest of the saints, and become an immortal member of the Kingdom of God!

2. Does the Bible give us a clear idea of where the resurrected saints will be and what they will be doing after Christ returns? Rev. 5: 10. What did Christ say He is preparing for them? John 14:2-3.

COMMENT: "Mansions" is an improper translation. The correct rendering is "abodes" or "dwelling places." In this case the abodes refer to rooms in the "Father's house" or God's Temple. In Old Testament times the rooms in the temple

were occupied by God's priests. These rooms represent positions of authority - those positions which the saints will be given in God's ruling Kingdom at Christ's return! These positions will not be in heaven. Christ plainly said He was going to heaven to "prepare" a position of authority for each Christian. But it is only when He comes to earth again that these positions will be awarded. When Jesus returns to this earth, as King of kings, He will tell the saints: "Come, ye blessed ... inherit the Kingdom, PREPARED FOR YOU" (Matt . 25 :34). And the Scriptures declare that they will rule all nations here on earth, having POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY in God's Kingdom!

3. Does the Bible dogmatically state that NO ONE, except Jesus Himself, has ever ascended up into heaven? John 3:13. Could anything be clearer?

4. But what about the "thief on the cross"? Didn't he go to heaven with Jesus that very day? Luke 23:43. The very plain and simple answer is "No!" Let's understand why.

COMMENT: In the first place, Christ Himself did not go to heaven that day. Instead he was placed in the tomb - in "hell" - where He remained dead for the next three whole days and nights. Second, the word "paradise" does not mean heaven at all. The word actually describes the earth when God will dwell on it. "Paradise" simply means a "garden, pleasure ground; grove, park" - "a grand enclosure or preserve ... shady and well watered ... enclosed by walls." That is the definition you will find in *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. And third, in many versions of the Bible, this verse is misspelled. There were no commas in the Greek when the New Testament was written. So when the translators supplied the commas in the English, they were placed where the translators thought they should be. Actually, Christ did not say, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise," but rather, "I say unto thee today, shalt thou [or thou shalt] be with me in paradise." By using the word "today," Jesus was stressing the time of His promise - not the time He would be in paradise. Jesus discerned the man's repentant attitude and was able to tell him that he would eventually live again, with Christ, in a beautiful world. That "paradise," however, has not yet come to this earth, and the repentant malefactor is still dead!

5. What will those who "wait upon the Lord" inherit? Ps. 37:9. What shall those "blessed of God" inherit? Verse 22. What shall the "righteous" inherit, and how long shall they dwell there? Verse 29. And what does God promise to those who "keep His way" ? Verse 34.

COMMENT: Is there anything wrong with having the earth as an eternal inheritance? Would you "settle for" earth? The earth today would be an extremely wonderful place in which to live were it not for sin - rebellion against God and His eternal spiritual laws that bring peace, happiness and joy! Happiness and joy are not a matter of geographical location. Happiness is a state of mind - a spiritual condition!

There will be NO SIN in the spiritual Kingdom of God. No liars, no murderers, no thieves or robbers. Think of it - there'll be no devil to deceive anyone, no locks on doors, no jails, no hospitals, no poor houses! No strife, no war - no sickness or disease - no poverty, no hunger, no want! What a wonderful inheritance! When we put all the Scriptures together, it becomes crystal clear that the reward of the saints

is not strumming on harps up in heaven for all eternity. It is infinitely more glorious and exciting than that!

Heaven on Earth!

In a previous lesson we studied what the Millennial rule of Christ on the earth will be like. We found that the whole world will then become a glorious UTOPIAN PARADISE - resplendent as the Garden of Eden! But what will the earth be like when the Millennium is over - when all the righteous will have been given immortality and eternal life, and all the wicked will have been burned to ashes?

1. Will there be a NEW earth and NEW heavens after the present earth's surface is purified? 2 Pet. 3:7-13; Rev. 21:1.
2. Who will dwell on the new earth? Rev. 21:24-27. Will these "nations" be the resurrected, immortal sons of God - the saved? Verse 24. Are their names written in the book of life? Verse 27.
3. What will be the capital city of the new earth? Rev. 21 : 2, 10-14 . How big will this city be? Verses 15-17. Will it be a sparkling, glorious city with streets of real gold? Verses 18-21. Where will this city come from? Verses 2, 10.

COMMENT: How clear, therefore, that although Christians do not go to heaven when they die or when they are resurrected, the "HEAVENLY JERUSALEM" IS COMING TO EARTH!

4. Will God the Father, at that time, come and dwell on the earth in person and make the new Jerusalem the location of His very THRONE? Rev. 21 :3, 22-23; 22:3. Will those who enter this city be able to look upon God's face? Rev. 22: 3-4.

COMMENT: The new Jerusalem - with streets of gold - will descend to this earth and will become God's headquarters for all eternity! The EARTH is destined to become the center of all activity in the universe! Understanding the great future plans God has made for the earth, and seeing that the Father Himself will eventually move His headquarters to this earth, why should anyone desire to "go to heaven"? To be with God? Why, God will be here on earth!

After studying the Bible carefully, as we have with this lesson, the inescapable truth is that heaven is NOT the "reward of the saved" - that Christians do NOT go to heaven when they die, or when resurrected . Rather, heaven is coming to this earth. The earth will become the very headquarters from which God the Father will rule all His creation! Will you dwell on that new earth? Will you be a part of that glorious world? When Jesus Christ returns, He will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, INHERIT THE KINGDOM prepared for you... "(Matt. 25:34). Will you be among those who will inherit the Kingdom of God, along with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

May God help you to understand - and qualify [for a special] part in that glorious kingdom!

TEST YOUR MEMORY

This quiz is designed to help you remember the important facts you learned in the lesson. You simply circle or underline each correct answer . After you've finished, check your choices with the correct answers listed at the end of the test, and then rate yourself.

1. Ancient pagan religions taught A. that no one would ever go to a heavenly abode. B. many concepts about a "heaven" similar to those of modern religions. C. that "heaven" was a myth D. absolutely nothing about a heavenly place of rest after death.
2. Early Christians believed A. in going to heaven immediately at death B. in going to heaven after Christ returns C. that they would rule on the earth after being resurrected from the dead. D. that the Millennium will be spent in heaven.
3. Abraham is vitally important to Christians A. because he was a perfect man. B. only because he was willing to sacrifice his son. C. not because he became the "father" of the faithful. D. because God made him a promise to which Christians are "heirs".
4. What was promised to Abraham? A. A few descendants. B. Heaven. C. Only a relatively small piece of semi-desert land. D. the whole earth as an eternal inheritance.
5. What did Abraham have to manifest before God's promise was made to him? A. Obedience to God . B. Only faith in God. C. Belief in going to heaven. D. Willingness to perform countless rituals.
6. Ancient King David A. went to heaven when he died. B. will ascend to heaven when resurrected C. is still dead and buried. D. may never be resurrected.
7. Jesus Christ came A. to show, by example, that all resurrected Christians will go to heaven. B. to "confirm" the promises made to the fathers. C. to be obedient to God in our stead. D. to show us the way to heaven.
8. Christians will inherit the promises A. when they die B. when they accept Christ as Savior C. at the resurrection. D. after the Millennium.
9. The Bible says A. Christians will go to heaven to live in the "mansions" Christ is preparing for them. B. no man, except Jesus Christ Himself, has. ascended into the heaven of God's throne. C. all the righteous men of old have ascended to heaven. D. Christ is coming to take the resurrected saints to heaven with Him.
10. The earth would be a very desirable place to live in eternally A. if sin and the results of sin were not here. B. but heaven is really more desirable! C. if everyone could just do as he pleased. D. only for those who are so "meek" that they are willing to settle for earth.

True or False

11. Abraham inherited the promises when he died. T F
12. Eternal inheritance for Abraham - and all his "seed" - of necessity involves and includes everlasting life! T F
13. Unfortunately God did not make provision for Gentiles to become "heirs" to the promises made to Abraham. T F
14. Christ died to make it possible for everyone to inherit the Kingdom of God. T F
15. After the earth is purified by fire, God the Father will transfer His throne to earth, making it the administrative center of the entire universe. T F

Matching

Draw a line from each phrase in the left-hand column to the correctly related phrase in the right-hand column.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 16. Abraham | A. Heaven. |
| 17. Christians today | B. Reserved in heaven |
| 18. The "meek" | C. Heirs of the promises |
| 19. Christian's inheritance | D. Already inheritors |
| 20. "Many mansions" | E. Inherit heaven |
| | F. Obeyed God |
| | G. Positions or offices |
| | H. Strumming harps |
| | I. "Inherit the earth" |
| | J. Went to heaven |

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

Rate Yourself

1-B; 5-A; 9-B; 13-F; 17-C;
 2-C; 6-C; 10-A; 14-T; 18-I;
 3-D; 7-B; 11-F; 15-T; 19-B;
 4-D; 8-C; 12-T; 16-F; 20-G
 19-20 correct excellent
 16-18 correct good
 13-15 correct fair