

Bible Studies for Adventists



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May 23–29, 2009

Commentary on “Heaven”

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Day 1: Sabbath Afternoon, May 23, 2009

Overview

The lesson material for this week covers the meaning of heaven and "going to heaven". The memory verse, John 14:2,3, is Jesus' declaration that; "In my Father's house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you". The sub-title for this week could be: Our Future Eternal Home.

Problems

We will to begin this study by making sure that we each know what the Bible means by the use of the word 'heaven', since the student version of this lesson passes over this point. Scripture refers to more than one 'heaven' and indicates that there are three. (Gen. 2:1; II Cor. 12:1-4):

- a. Atmosphere (Gen. 7:11,12,23; Jer. 15:3; Dan. 7:2)
- b. Stars or Universe (Isa. 13:10; Josh. 10:13; Jer. 8:2; Deut. 17:3)
 - The earth's atmosphere and all the universe around us are a part of creation. The existing earth and universe have a beginning and they will have an end. Our future home, on the other hand, is associated with God and his throne.
- c. God's dwelling place (Matt. 6:9; Mark 11:26; Luke 11:2)

The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD'S throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. (Psa. 11:4 KJV)

The limited knowledge that we have of who God is leads us to the understanding that his throne (the "heaven of heavens") is outside of time, physical location or dimension. In each of the verses cited, we arrive at our understanding of the word 'heaven' by the context within which it is used.

The memory verse, John 14:2,3, makes it clear that our future home is prepared for us in heaven, the abode of God. What the following passage indicates is that this eternal home will also be located, or perhaps relocated, in a new earth when all of creation is made new and perfect without sin, pain or death:

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. (II Peter 3:11-13 KJV)

We have both a physical and a spiritual body associated with our soul. We are spiritually alive because of our Savior Jesus Christ and the seal of the Holy Spirit and are eternally united with God. Along with the hope of new physical bodies, we have the new earth and the entire infinite universe in front of us, which is totally beyond our ability to understanding or describe in detail. We do know that we will be free of sin, pain and death.

Now, let's turn to the Teachers Comments, where the question is asked, concerning Luke 17:21; What did Jesus mean by saying the kingdom of God is within us? We should examine the following passage and find out what the Bible teaches:

Let not then your good be evil spoken of: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. (Romans 14:16-21 KJV)

From this we see that the "kingdom of God" is about how we live our lives because of the Holy Spirit within us. It is not just about future events when we "go to heaven". We see that the "kingdom of God" is not about what we eat or drink or anything we do. In other words, the Adventist health message is false and has nothing to do with the righteousness of God or any part of the gospel message of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God is about righteousness, peace and joy given to us by Jesus Christ...now and forever more.

Summary

- The emphasis in this lesson is on heaven, the abode of God, and our relationship where we are eternally with him. It culminates where he brings his throne to the new earth in the New Jerusalem. As a foretaste of what is to come, we have the Kingdom of God within us now and is a guarantee that we will never be separated from God. Because of our spiritual birth we have continuity from the moment we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior, through physical death where we are never separated from him, and on to our physical resurrection unto a new life that extends into eternity.

Day 2: Sunday, May 17, 2009

Overview

In today's lesson, the position is taken that the idea of our immortal soul ascending to heaven right at death is a lie of Satan. It uses Gen. 3:4 as a reference. It is also implied that our soul can not be separated from our physical body and still be in existence. Today's lesson has the follow verse used as a reference:

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: (Gen. 3:4 KJV)

Problems

When quoting Gen. 3:4, the whole verse should have been used. Or better yet, we should back up and consider the actual words of God instead of Satan's out of context partial quote:

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Gen. 2:17 KJV)

Just like Satan's tactic, we find that vitally important words have been left out. What God really said was that they would die the very day they sinned and ate of the fruit. The real question to ask is: When Adam and Eve sinned, in what way did they die that very day? When God says you will die, well, you are dead! So, what death was this?

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (John 3:5 KJV)

In talking to Nicodemus, Jesus makes it clear that we have a dead spirit which must be made alive if we are to enter the kingdom of God. It is the spirit of Adam and Eve that died on the day that they sinned. Sin caused the death of their spirits and loss of direct face-to-face fellowship with God.

Now, let's consider the references used in this lesson and the doctrine of Soul Sleep:

In I Kings 11:21, it simply describes King David's death as he: "slept with his fathers". Notice that to be asleep is not 'non existence'. It is simply a state where you are unaware of your surroundings. Ps. 13:3 defines death as: "the sleep of death". I Cor. 15:51 mentions "We shall not all sleep", implying that we will not all have a physical death.

Let's take a look at the classic proof-text used to support this doctrine.

This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead. For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun. (Ecc. 9:3-6 KJV)

When we back up to at least verse three, we see that the theme of this chapter is "things that are done under the sun". In other-words, the topic is the futility of the activities of living people on this earth. Among other things the dead have no conscience knowledge of anything happening in our present sin-filled physical world. Most importantly, this passage does not state that the dead are non-existent. And, it does not mean they have no consciousness within the realm of the dead. To say so is to make assumptions not supported by Scripture.

We now come to the question of; If you are a person who has accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, where will you spend eternity?

According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: (Phil. 1:20-23 KJV)

How would Christ be magnified if Paul was non-existent in death?

How is it to gain anything when you are dead if you are non-existent?

How is it possible to "be with Christ" if you are non-existent?

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38,39 KJV)

Death cannot separate us from Christ Jesus our Lord. Clearly, when we die our physical death, we are with our Savior in heaven.

Summary

- For those whose sins have been covered by the blood of Jesus Christ and their spirits have been brought to life by the Seal of the Holy Spirit, when they die their physical death here in this sin-filled world, they can repeat the words of Paul; "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain". That person is with Christ in heaven. For the rest of us who are alive at the return of Christ, we will meet him "in the heavens". It isn't whether or not our future home is "in heaven" or not. The promise is that we will never be separated from the love of God.

Day 3: Monday, May 18, 2009

Overview

This lesson discusses our final eternal destiny. While the lesson points out that none of us choose to be born into this world, we do have control over how we leave this present life. The Bible teaches that there are two possibilities. We will either reign forever with our Savior or we will be condemned to the "Lake of Fire" prepared for Satan and his Fallen angels.

Problems

The lesson speaks of; "back to nothingness". This is an assumption not supported by Scripture. We will explore why this concept is supported by Adventist theology, but is wrong.

In the following verses the word 'eternal' means eternal. The condition of torment goes on eternally in the same way that eternal life goes on eternally. You can not change the meaning of a word half way through the sentence. There simply is no hint of nothingness described here:

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (Matt. 25:41,46 KJV)

And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:10,14,15: KJV)

The phrase; "tormented day and night for ever and ever" speaks of conscience existence, not "nothingness".

When in 1844, nothing happened, the beginnings of the doctrine of investigative judgment was introduced to give importance to that date by saying it was when Christ entered the Holy of Holies of the Heavenly Temple. However, Christ sat down at the right hand of his Father 1800 years earlier when he ascended to heaven.

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:2 KJV)

As Investigative Judgment developed, it was realized that a conscience Saint in the presents of the Lord would know if they were saved. Therefore the doctrine of Soul Sleep was needed and this means you must deny that the soul of a person is eternal. Finally, we see that this is the real the reason it must be claimed that the soul is destroyed in the Lake of Fire. This trilogy of doctrines must stand or fall together.

Important as the topic of what heaven and hell are like, the real issue is which place will each one of us be headed for when Jesus returns to claim his Bride. Is it to be heaven or hell?

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. (Eph. 2:8,9 KJV)

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: (John 1:12 KJV)

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. (John 3:36 KJV)

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. (John 5:24 KJV)

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (I John 5:13 KJV)

The Apostle John clearly states that he what he wrote is so we can know we have eternal life. Did you hear that? You can know you have eternal life!

Summary

- It is important to know what the Bible has to say about both heaven, the throne of God, and hell otherwise known as the Lake of Fire, especially reserved for Satan. What is even more important is to understand the gospel message of Jesus Christ and to know you have eternal life. Your destiny depends on it. The wonderful news is that it is grace, a gift of God and not of any works we can perform.

Day 4: Tuesday, May 19, 2009

Overview

This lesson opens with the statement that: 'When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, we enter into a new kind of existence'. In essence, when we have been born again, we are now part of the Kingdom of God.

Problems

The lesson speaks of having 'received eternal life'. To orthodox Christians this phrase translates to 'assurance of salvation' and the knowledge that we will never be separated from the love of God. This sounds contradictory if you keep in mind the doctrine of Investigative Judgment. You can not have it both ways. Either your salvation is eternal now or it isn't eternal life. The Bible is very clear. When our spirit is brought to life by the Holy Spirit, we are 'born again' and we join the Kingdom of God. Our spirit will never again die. When we die our physical death, our soul will be with Christ because our spirit has received eternal life.

I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walk-est thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. (Romans 14:14-17 KJV)

The lesson uses Romans 17:17 as a reference. You will notice in the above expanded passage that, among other things, the Adventist health message has nothing to do with the Kingdom of God. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God now and are not restricted by rules of what to eat or drink. While good health is important it is not part of our spiritual growth or the salvation message and unrelated to being part of the Kingdom of God.

In the teacher's version of the lesson it is stated that there are; two primary meanings to "heaven", one being the dwelling place or throne of God and the other being the home of the redeemed. These definitions seem to miss the point of what or where heaven is. Jesus ascended "up" which is not a physical dimension just as hell, the place of the wicked dead, is "down" and certainly is not at the center of the earth. The truth of the matter is that the first meaning of heaven, the dwelling place or

throne of God, is the whole understanding of heaven. When we are with God, we are in heaven simply because that is where God is. And, when the New Jerusalem is brought to the earth made new we will still be in heaven because God will dwell with us from his throne.

Summary

- Since we are already members of the Kingdom of God, our eternity has already begun. There is no investigative judgment to determine if we are member of the Kingdom of God. Furthermore, once we join God in heaven, whether at our physical death that ends with this present life or simply ascend to him at his return, we will never leave heaven. We will still be in heaven when God brings the New Jerusalem to the earth made new because he will reign from his throne that is a central part of the New Jerusalem.

Day 5: Wednesday, May 20, 2009

Overview

Today's lesson focuses on such questions as; What is heaven like? And; What will we do when we go to heaven? Or; Will we remember anything of this present life?

Problems

While there is no harm in speculating concerning about what Scriptures have to say concerning what it will be like living a perfect life in the eternal light of God in heaven after Satan and all others who are wicked are put away, we should backtrack and focus on at least two eras that lead up to when the earth and all of creation are made new.

There are several valid views concerning the return of Christ and when the Church, the Body of Christ, will be raptured out of this present life. We are admonished to be ready and watching because it could be at any time. One thing is clear, God still has a plan for the Nation of Israel and God will keep his promises. According to the book of Revelation, this seems to mature during the time period known as the Great Tribulation. Revelation Chapter Seven very clearly speaks of 144,000 "servants of our God" who are from the nation of Israel. Now notice what is said in the following passage:

And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. (Rev. 11:1-4 KJV)

The tribulation ends with God setting up his throne on Mount Zion with Israel, his chosen people. The Body of Christ, while truly in heaven, will reign on the earth for a thousand years. The earth has been devastated but is not totally desolate as Adventist theology demands. Satan and his evil angels are locked away and not loose on the earth. Revelation speaks of nations that have yet to be judged. We see this in Rev. 20:1-3. Further along in Chapter Twenty, Satan is released from his chains for a short time and is allowed to deceive "the nations". This is certainly not an uninhabited and totally desolate earth. The final battle takes place when Satan assembles his army and attacks Jerusalem, the holy city of God. It ends with his total defeat. Satan and everything that is evil will then be cast into "The Lake of Fire". Satan's defeat is certain and total because, in reality he has already been defeated at the cross of Christ.

Finally, we come to the really good part in Rev. Chapters 21 and 22 where our heavenly home descends upon a New Earth, where all of creation has been made new. This New Jerusalem will include the throne of God and he will reign into eternity right here with us.

Summary

- While the details and sequence of events of the Book of Revelation may be obscure for now, the overall picture is clear. The revelation of Jesus Christ is laid out so that as these end time events unfold before our eyes, we can know that God is in control and has those who love him safe "in his arms".
- As the lesson title indicates, eternity will be beyond our wildest expectation. However, we shouldn't skip over the promises God has made concerning the nation of Israel, his chosen people. We need to prayerfully consider all the things spoken of in the Book of Revelation between our present life now and the time when the earth has been made new.
- It all comes down to one question; Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and are you safe in his arms?

Day 6: Thursday, May 21, 2009

Overview

This lesson centers on one simple question. What will it be like to meet the Savior, Jesus Christ, face to face?

Problems

Thanks to the doctrine of Soul Sleep and a misunderstanding of the eternal nature of our "born again" human spirits, many believe that none of us will meet our Savior until after the return of Christ and the resurrection of the Saints who are in the grave. This concept is simply not supported by Scripture. Once our spirit is born again, both our soul and our spirit will never be separated from God.

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38,39 KJV)

Even in our physical death we can not and never will be separated from the love of God. Notice that Paul considers being dead and with Christ something far better than this present life. There is not the slightest suggestion of unconscious nothingness in this passage. Remember, to die is gain. Something far better than this life we now live.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. (Phil. 1:21-24 KJV)

While we will certainly sing praises to God, the quote in the lesson from 'The Great Controversy'; "eternal life is singing eternal praises" is a statement not found in the Bible. Even if you shorten it to; "eternal praises", it is still a non-scriptural phrase. God has an infinite plan that includes far more than just our part in the heavenly choir.

While we will probably recognize those who we have known here in this present life, it is an assumption to say so by citing the example of the followers of Christ recognizing him after his resurrection. After all, none recognized him until he was ready to reveal himself.

The real answer to the question of how we will be able to recognize our Savior is given by the word of Jesus Christ:

Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. (Rev. 1:7 KJV)

Summary

- We will know our Savior when he returns in the clouds at a time when every eye on earth will see him. We will then meet him in the air with the resurrected Saints.

Day 7: Friday, May 22, 2009

Overview

The lesson suggests that we turn to what Ellen G. White has written for our further study and recommends that we read her book; *The Story of Redemption*.

Problems

The quote; "The fire that consumes the wicked purifies the earth" by Ellen White from *The Story of Redemption* is an interesting statement.

And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (Rev. 20:10-14 KJV)

When reading this passage in Revelation you will notice that everything wicked is cast into "the lake of fire" but says nothing about this having anything to do with God creating a New Heaven and a New Earth. Furthermore, those cast into this fire are not consumed but will be "tormented day and night for ever and ever".

Now, let's back up a little and take a look at the millennium reign of the Saints.

In Rev. 20:4-6 we learn that we will "reign with him (God) a thousand years". However, if we continue on down to verse nine, we have good reason to believe that it will be here on this earth and not simply in heaven. This thousand year era will end with the final battle with Satan which takes place here on earth, resulting in him being defeated and cast into the Lake of Fire. While Fundamental Belief #27 states that this millennium reign of the saints with Christ will be in heaven, it seems more likely that it will be here on an earth. To begin with, none of the references cited in Fundamental Belief #27 say anything about the millennium being in heaven or the earth being desolate at this time. Just who are the saints reigning over anyway? God certainly doesn't need our help in directing the activities of his holy angels. Furthermore, when Satan is preparing for the final battle, he will surround the Saints who are already in the City of God here on earth. In the final act of Satan's attempted attack, God brings fire from heaven to put an end to Satan and his plans. . All of this is prior to when God creates a new earth and new heavens and brings our heavenly home down to earth from heaven.

And they (speaking of Satan and his army) went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. (Rev. 20:9 KJV)

Summary

- If we really want to gain knowledge and know what the future holds for each of us, we should turn to the Bible and avoid the wild speculations of false prophets. All of the terrible things that will happen to this existing earth are events that occur during the Tribulation. Now, a thousand years after the Tribulation, the first heaven and the first earth are simply said to "pass away". II Peter 3:11-13 does say that this will be by fire but there is no indication that this is the same as The Lake of Fire.