

THE 144,000 DO NOT GO TO HEAVEN

Having noted in STUDY 10 that there is **only one body** rather than two bodies or classes of Christians and that there is only *one hope* and destiny for Christians (Eph. 4:4) most will imagine that this one destiny will be that of going to heaven.

HEAVEN AS MAN'S DESTINATION ORIGINATED WITH PAGANS

The theory of going to heaven at death resulted from the development of pagan Greek philosophy. Because all matter was viewed as evil it meant that one must escape it. According to this theory when the body dies the soul separates and goes off to heaven. However, the Bible presents a holistic view of man; so that body, soul and spirit are inseparable at death. (Please see Volume 2 STUDY 2 THE STATE OF THE DEAD). The Church Fathers, Clement of Alexandria (c.150-215) and Origen (c.185-254) seem to be the first who studied the theoretical roots of this pagan Greek Stoic asceticism which renounced earthly things. By the 3rd century, Christian asceticism was entrenched and led to the idea that the everlasting home of the believer was *heaven*, a spiritual place devoid of earthly influences.

HEAVEN IS NOT INDICATED IN THE SCRIPTURES AS MAN'S DESTINATION

A search of an exhaustive concordance reveals that the word *heaven* is never shown to be the destination of Christians. The texts of John 14:2; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Philippians 1:21-23; 3:14 and Hebrews 6:19-20 are only assumed by tradition to refer to going to heaven. In fact, the word *heaven* is not mentioned in these texts. Further, it has been assumed that because Jesus offered his disciples “the kingdom of heaven” he was offering heaven as a destination. Yet the ‘kingdom of heaven’, that is ‘the kingdom of God’, was linked with things that to a Jew, which most Christians were for many decades, would be on earth—paradise, Israel and Jerusalem.

GOD NEVER INTENDED FOR HUMANS TO INHERIT HEAVEN

As shown below the phrase “the kingdom of heaven” means exactly the same as the phrase “the kingdom of God,” which was linked with things that to a Jew and to Jewish Christians would be on earth—paradise, Israel and Jerusalem. This is because God never intended for humans to live in heaven, just as he stated that:

- ❖ “...to Jehovah *the heavens* belong. But **the earth** he has given to *men*” (*Ps. 115:16*).
- ❖ “The righteous one - **in the earth** he will be rewarded” (*Prov. 11:31*).

*The following texts also make it very plain that the earth is to be the home of **all of faithful mankind**: Proverbs 2:21, 22; Psalm 37:9-11; Matthew 5:5; 6:9, 10; and Romans 4:13.*

NOTE: There is no statement in the Scriptures indicating that God turns men into spirit creatures so that they can live in heaven. Please see later in this study and in STUDY 13.

CHRIST NEVER PROMISED HEAVEN FOR HIS DISCIPLES

As shown in STUDY 15 the promised reward for Christians is entry into God's Kingdom which is to be on earth. This is the same promise that was made to the patriarchs i.e. the Jewish ancestors, as Paul said:

- ❖ “...**Christ** actually became a minister of those who are circumcised in behalf of God's truthfulness, so as to **verify the promises** he made **to their forefathers**...” (*Rom. 15:8*).

Jesus' service to the Jews — “the circumcision” — was to lead them to become Christians. In fact,

these promises confirmed by Jesus that were “**made to the fathers**” exactly constituted the good news that Christians preached to others according to Paul’s statement in Acts 13:32. Yet, did any of these promises ever include a promise of going to heaven?

WHAT WERE THE PROMISES VERIFIED TO CHRISTIANS?

When we refer to **God’s promises** in Genesis (12:2, 3; 13:14-17; 17:7, 8; 26:2-4; 28:13-14) as given to the forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob we find that the promises are about *inheriting the land, producing progeny and being a blessing to all nations*:

- ❖ “He [God] has remembered his covenant even to time indefinite ... which [covenant] he concluded with *Abraham*, and his sworn statement to *Isaac*, standing as a regulation even to *Jacob*, as an indefinitely lasting covenant even to *Israel*, saying to you I shall give **the land of Canaan** as **the allotment of your inheritance**” (*Ps. 105:8-11*).
- ❖ “...to you [*Jacob*] and your seed I shall give **all these lands**...and by means of your seed **all nations** of the earth will certainly **bless** themselves” (*Gen. 26:3-4*).
- ❖ “...that Abraham or his seed had **the promise** that he should be **heir of the world**” (*Rom. 4:13 UBS*).

So these are exactly the same promises that Jesus confirmed and Paul and others preached as the good news. But you may say didn’t Abraham and his offspring already received those promises given in Genesis when Abraham dwelt in Canaan and later when Israel entered “the land of milk and honey.” Apparently not!

ABRAHAM AND OTHERS HAVE YET TO RECEIVE THE PROMISES

At the time the faithful disciple Stephen was about to be stoned for his beliefs and what he proclaimed as the truth, he recounted much of biblical history. In doing so he made this interesting statement about Abraham:

- ❖ “[God] caused him [*Abraham*] to change his residence to this land in which you now dwell. And yet *he did not give him any inheritable possession in it*, no, **not a footbreadth**; but he promised to give it to him as a possession, and after him to his seed, while as yet he had no seed” (*Acts 7:4b-5*).

Later, after giving a definition of faith, the writer to the Hebrews gave a synopsis in chapter 11 of those of the past who demonstrated such faith in God’s promises, but interestingly he shows that the fulfilment of those promises for them was still future when he said:

- ❖ “In faith all these died [*including Abraham – verse 8, 9*], although they **did not get the [fulfilment of the] promises**, but they saw them afar off...” (*Heb. 11:13*).
- ❖ “And yet all these...**did not get [the fulfilment of the] promise**, as God foresaw something better for us, so that they might not be made perfect apart from us” (*Heb. 11:39-40*).

And yet these are the very same promises confirmed by Jesus and preached by the first Christians (Rom. 15:8; Acts 13:2) and so must be still future for Christians and must concern the inheriting of the land, producing progeny and being a blessing to all nations.

Although not named, Daniel is mentioned in Hebrews 11 as one “who stopped the mouths of lions.” So he, too, “*did not receive the promise*” but will receive it at the same time as other Christians receive it just as the angel told him:

- ❖ “But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will *enter into rest* and rise again in your **allotted portion at the end of the age**” (*Dan. 12:13 NASB*).

The “*allotted portion*” for Daniel is: “of land assigned by lot...a share in the Messianic consummation” according to the Hebrew-English Lexicon by Brown, Driver and Briggs, p.174. So these ancient

patriarchs get the fulfilment of **the same promises** at the same time as Christians who also are “**really Abraham’s seed.**” Furthermore, this blessing of Abraham will also be conferred upon believing Gentiles:

- ❖ “The purpose was that *the blessing of Abraham* might **come to be by means of Jesus Christ** for the nations ... Now **the promises** were *spoken to Abraham and to his seed*... And to your seed, who is Christ ... Moreover, if you belong to Christ, **you are really Abraham’s seed**, heirs with reference to **a promise**” (*Gal. 3:14, 16, 29*).

THE MEANS TO FULFIL THE PROMISES

To fulfil those promises of land, progeny and blessing of the nations Jehovah promised a **Messianic prophet** (Deut. 18: 15-19) ruling as **king** over a **concrete kingdom** (2 Sam. 7: 12-19, 2 Chron. 17:13-14) to bless the nations and to turn the earth into paradise. All of this describes fully what was being offered to Christians and is what Christ verified. At no time did Jesus offer any other destiny such as heaven. Bible Scholar William Strawson notes in *Jesus and the Future life* p. 38:

The gospel records do not speak of ‘going to heaven’...there is no suggestion that Jesus is offering to his disciples the certainty of ‘heaven’ after this life.

Theologian J.A.T. Robinson states in his book *In the End God*, p. 104 that: “Heaven in the Bible is nowhere the destination of the dying.”

THE APOSTLE PAUL DID NOT EXPECT TO GO TO HEAVEN

As mentioned earlier, the apostle Paul expected and promoted the hope of receiving the promises that were made to the Hebrew forefathers. So he stated that:

- ❖ “And so we are *declaring to you the good news about the promise made to the forefathers...*” (*Acts 13:32*).
- ❖ *Then to King Agrippa Paul said:* “And yet now for the hope of **the promise** that was made by God **to our forefathers** I stand called to judgment; whereas **our twelve tribes are hoping to attain** to the fulfilment of *this promise*...Concerning **this hope** I am accused” (*Acts 26:6-7*).
- ❖ *Then to the Jewish religious leaders in Rome he said that it was:* “...for because of **the hope of Israel** I have this chain around me” (*Acts 28:20*).

This is “**the one hope**” (Eph 4:4) which Christians have, and as previously noted God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and David were about inheriting the land, producing progeny and being a blessing to all nations by means of the Messianic king ruling this kingdom on earth—this was *the hope of Israel* for which Paul was imprisoned—not because of any concept of going to heaven. No later forefather changed the meaning of that promise. As with Jesus, at no time does Paul hint at any other destiny such as heaven even though his desire to be with Christ is often misconstrued as a desire to be in heaven. Rather Paul seeks for the promised inheritance:

- ❖ “Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward” (*Col. 3:24*).
- ❖ “...be imitators of those who through faith and patience **inherit the promises**” (*Heb. 6:12*).

So just as Abraham and all the faithful people of ancient times have not inherited these promises, so, too, Christians, as “Abraham’s seed” have, up to now not yet inherited such promises of land i.e. the world (Rom 4:13). It all concerns the “inhabited earth to come”:

- ❖ “For it is not to angels that he has subjected the **inhabited earth to come, about which we are speaking...**” (*Heb. 2:5*).

If heaven were the destination for inheriting the promises for the readers of Hebrews one wonders why the subject here is “*the inhabited earth to come*” rather than going to heaven.

ONLY CHRIST WENT TO HEAVEN

If heaven is not ever to be the place for humans, then we must ask why did Christ go to heaven. Of course, he could not have gone to heaven as a mortal human! However, Romans 1:4 and 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 53 show that Jesus, now as an immortal human, had a body which was incorruptible and “in power” and so could withstand being transported to heaven and being in God’s presence. Nevertheless, this was for certain purposes and was not to be a permanent situation.

A TEMPORARY RESIDENCE

❖ *The apostle Peter stated: “...that he [God] may send forth the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven, indeed, must hold within itself **until the times** of restoration of all the things of which God spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets of old time” (Acts 3:20, 21).*

So Jesus is to be in heaven only “*until the times of restoration of all the things.*” Furthermore, the purpose of Jesus’ temporary residence in heaven is so that he may act as our advocate and high priest while awaiting the time when his Father makes his enemies “a footstool for his feet” (Ps.110:1).

BIBLICAL USAGE OF THE WORDS ‘HEAVEN’ AND ‘HEAVENLY’

‘IN/FROM HEAVEN’ OFTEN MEANS ‘WITH/FROM GOD’

Apart from the normal usage of the word heaven to refer to God’s location or the earth’s atmosphere the word *heaven* is used as an indirect reference to God himself. This is because *heaven* itself is called God’s throne. So the term *heaven* is often used as a substitute for God himself as in Daniel and Matthew. Especially by the 1st century was this substitute linked with the Jewish practices of not using the divine name and being rather cautious regarding even the use of the word *God*. This practice is called the use of **periphrastic**. The following are examples of the word “heaven” as being used as a reference to God:

The prodigal son says:

- ❖ “Father I have sinned against **heaven** [God] and against you” (Luke 15:21).
- ❖ “The baptism by John, from what source was it? **From heaven** [*i.e.* God] or from men?”
(Matt. 21:25).
- ❖ “A man cannot receive a single thing unless it has been given him **from heaven**” *i.e.* from God”
(John 3:27).

‘HEAVENLY’

The Greek word *epouranios* translated “heavenly” means: “of heavenly origin or nature” according to Thayer’s Gk/Eng. Lexicon. This means that it is used as an adjective to describe the *transcendent nature of things that originate with God*. The word is also used of God himself as “*the heavenly Father*” to describe His transcendent nature. Only in the phrase “*heavenly places*” is a location referred to and then *heavenly* simply describes those locations. However, Paul simply seeks to be in God’s kingdom when he states that:

1. “...the Lord will...save me for his **heavenly kingdom**” (2 Tim. 4:18).

This is, of course “the kingdom of God” which originates with God i.e. comes from God and will be superior to all other kingdoms. Similarly Paul speaks of Christians as:

2. “...you who share in **the heavenly calling**” (Heb. 3:1).

NOTE: It is rendered “**a** heavenly calling” in all literal translations (not KJV or NKJV) because there is no word *the* in the Greek text – see KIT.

It is not a calling of a specially selected group of Christians *to go to heaven* as if there were a separate *earthly calling*. (See STUDY 10. THERE ARE NOT TWO CLASSES OF CHRISTIANS). *This is a calling that comes from heaven—it is God’s calling of individuals to become Christians. It is not a calling of Christians to go to heaven but is a gift which can be partially experienced now when one receives the spirit. Yet some turn away from their calling i.e. some of:*

3. “...those who *have once for all been enlightened*, and who **have tasted the heavenly free gift**, and who have become partakers of the holy spirit, and who have tasted the fine word of God and the powers of the coming system of things.” (Heb. 6:4, 5).

Commentators variously state the superior free gift that originates from heaven [God] as: Christ the living bread, the whole plan of salvation in Christ, the new life in Christ, the remission of sins because of Christ’s sacrifice or eternal life. Yet there is no thought of going to heaven as the free gift.

Jehovah’s Witnesses teach that when Abraham and other men of faith noted in the Hebrew Scriptures are resurrected they will be on earth; and yet **Hebrews 11:16** says:

❖ “...now they are reaching out for a better [place], that is, one **belonging to heaven**” (NWT). *However, the word-for-word in the KIT renders this as: “**of heavenly one**” which is why all other translations correctly render it similarly to the NASB:*

❖ “But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, **a heavenly one.**”

So just as the ‘heavenly place’ that Abraham and others were reaching out for is on earth, so, too, is the “heavenly kingdom” which Abraham will be in because Jesus spoke of “**Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens**” (Matt. 8:11) and “**Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God**” (Luke 13:28).

“HEAVENLY JERUSALEM”

❖ “But you **have come to** Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of **angels**, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, **to God** the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, **to Jesus** the Mediator of the new covenant...” (Heb. 12:22-24).

This is a *present* condition of Christians just as in Ephesians 1:3 and 2:6 where **Christians on earth** are seen as **being in heaven representatively** through their union with Christ. The adjective *heavenly* is **qualitative** and has reference to things which originate with God. Hence the “*heavenly Jerusalem*,” to be situated on a literal Mount Zion, is the glorious city of the **future** which Christians have figuratively approached *now*:

❖ “But *now* they are reaching out for a better [place], that is, one belonging to heaven (“**a heavenly one**” UBS). Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has **prepared a city** for them” (Heb. 11:16).

This “heavenly [place]” was called “the land of the promise” in Hebrews 11:9 and so speaks of Canaan restored. So the city prepared for them in God’s mind is a Jerusalem yet future:

❖ “For here we have no continuing **city**, but we seek the one **to come**” (Heb. 13:14).

❖ “The *Jerusalem above* is free, and she is **our mother**” (Gal. 4:26). *Quoted from the LXX Psalm 86:5:*

“A man shall say, Sion is **my mother**; and such a man was born in her.”

“And of Zion it shall be said: ‘This one and that one were born in her.’” (Hebrew Psalm 87:5).

Men are not born in heaven. But this is a Messianic text and focuses on the future capital city of the Kingdom. It is “above” because it is vastly superior and originates with God.

THIS SAME CITY COMES DOWN FROM GOD

❖ “I, John, saw **the holy city**, New Jerusalem, **coming down** out of heaven **from** God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (*Rev. 21:2*).

There is no scriptural reason to understand this city as referring to anything other than the “heavenly Jerusalem” which originates from “above.” Professor Richard Longenecker explains that:

The idea of a “heavenly Jerusalem” (“the Jerusalem that is above”) has a rich Jewish background. The concept has to do with the culmination of God’s redemptive purposes in human history, the realization of God’s reign in its totality. As such, it is an eschatological concept that **describes Jerusalem as it will be** at the end of time, often in contrast to what the city is at present. References to a “heavenly Jerusalem” are to be found in embryonic form in the Jewish scriptures (e.g. Ps. 87:3; Isa. 54 the opening verse of which Paul quotes in 4:27; Ezek. 40-48). *Word Biblical Commentary* on Galatians.

So in these passages from Galatians, Hebrews, and Revelation there is really no thought of going beyond the clouds as some kind of spirit being from the time of one’s death. From the facts that Jesus never promised such a thing, Paul never expected such a thing, and the promises for Christians concern the land, how are we to understand the term “the Kingdom of heaven”?

“KINGDOM OF HEAVEN” = “KINGDOM OF GOD”

Christians sometimes use the term “kingdom *of* the heavens” as if it meant a kingdom *in* heaven. However, of the gospel writers, the term “kingdom of heaven” is used only by Matthew who wrote for a Jewish audience. The other gospel writers used the term “kingdom of God.” In fact, one can see that the two phrases mean exactly the same thing, i.e. they are synonymous, if the parallel accounts of Matthew 19:14 and Mark 10:14 are compared:

- ❖ “But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them; for of such is **the kingdom of heaven**” (*Matt. 19:14*).
- ❖ “Jesus...was greatly displeased and said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them; for of such is **the kingdom of God**” (*Mark 10:14*).

These parallel accounts show that *the kingdom of the heavens* means *the kingdom of God*. However, for some unknown reason, Matthew did use the two terms of “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” together in *Matthew 19:23, 24* and by a further comparison of the parallel accounts it is evident that the two terms are exact equivalents i.e. they refer to the one kingdom. Jesus said:

- ❖ “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to *enter* **the kingdom of heaven**. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to *enter* **the kingdom of God**” (*Matt. 19:23-24*).

Furthermore, a comparison of the account of Matthew 8:11 with Luke 13:28-29 shows the same equivalency of meaning for the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. But why does Matthew use of the word *heaven* instead of *God* in his phrase “kingdom of heaven”? Evidently there was a common Jewish practice of using the word *heaven* as an indirect reference to God himself, rather than saying the word ‘God. This is called a ‘periphrastic.’ In contrast the other gospel writers wrote for predominantly Gentile readers and so were not restricted to such a periphrastic.

“KINGDOM OF HEAVEN” MEANS THAT IT ORIGINATES WITH GOD

In the phrases “the kingdom of heaven/the kingdom of God” the preposition ‘of’ is the possessive and means that it belonging to God because He is its originator and it is superior to all other kingdoms. It does not say the *kingdom in the heavens*; so it does not refer to a location in heaven as can further be seen from all of its descriptions in the Bible as being on earth.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS ASSOCIATED WITH EARTH, PARADISE AND ISRAEL

ON EARTH

Contrary to the misguided allegorical interpretations which lose all real meaning, the following statements by Jesus are completely literal when he showed *the physical conditions that will exist “in the kingdom of the heavens”/“in the kingdom of the heavens” and so being on earth when he said:*

- ❖ “I tell you, many will come from east and west and **recline at table** with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob **in the kingdom of heaven...**” (*Matt. 8:11*).
- ❖ “...when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the **kingdom of God** but you yourselves cast out. And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and **recline at table in the kingdom of God**” (*Luke 13:28-29*).

East, west, north and south are earthly geographical directions. Such *eating* with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets is a completely physical and therefore earthly scene “*in the kingdom of the heavens.*” Furthermore, Jesus said that he would “*never again drink of the fruit of the vine **until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God***” (*Mark 14:25*). No doubt, Jesus had in mind the “*banquet of well oiled dishes*” that Jehovah “*will certainly make for all the peoples*” (*Isa. 25:6-8*). The WBTS of the Jehovah’s Witnesses quite rightly teaches that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets will be resurrected on earth. So if Abraham will be resurrected on earth, so must those “in the kingdom of the heavens.”

However, there is no biblical statement implying that there are two separate realms of the kingdom—one in heaven additional to the one on earth. The biblical descriptions are of a kingdom that will be entirely on earth:

- ❖ “Your **kingdom** come. Your will be done, **on earth** as it is in heaven” (*Matt. 6:10*).
- ❖ “A stone [*kingdom - verse 44*] ... struck the image on **its feet** [*therefore on earth*] ... the stone became a large mountain and filled the whole **earth**” (*Dan. 2:34-35*).

If the stone [the kingdom] fills the whole earth, then it must be on earth.

IN PARADISE

The evildoer hung up next to Jesus *requested of him:*

1. “...remember me when you get into your **kingdom**” to which “[*Jesus*] said to him: ‘Truly I tell you today, (*the comma here is in keeping with the context*) you will be *with me* in **paradise**” (*Luke 23:42-43 NWT*).

So Jesus equated the kingdom with paradise and the evildoer was to be resurrected on the earth. Then by connecting Luke 23:42-43 with Jesus’ prayer of: “your **kingdom** come. Your will be done, **on earth** as it is in heaven” we can appreciate that the verified promise to the forefathers and therefore to Christians is the kingdom paradise to be on earth. The two other occurrences of the term *paradise* in the Christian Scriptures are:

2. “To him who overcomes I will give to eat from *the tree of life*, which is in the midst of the **Paradise** of God” (*Rev. 2:7*).

It would certainly be inconsistent to interpret this paradise as being in heaven. The mention of the tree of life, reflects back to the Garden of Eden – an entirely earthly scene. So, too, for Paul’s vision of paradise when he says:

3. “I know someone who...was caught up to *the third heaven* ... this man was caught up into **paradise**” (2 Cor. 12:2, 4).

This third heaven is either:

1. Literally the third “heavens and earth” described in 2 Peter 3:13—the future “new heavens and new earth.” OR:
2. Figuratively as granting insight into truths contained in heaven and expressed with the highest degree of inspiration i.e. third as superlative.

However, this was a vision (a *revelation. verse 7*) and does not mean that the subject of the vision i.e. *paradise* got relocated to heaven. Because the Greek term *paradeisos* is used many times in the Septuagint (LXX) translation of the Hebrew Scriptures and always refers to *an earthly garden* this is what would have been in the mind of a first century Jewish Christian for each of the 3 occurrences of the term in the Christian Scriptures. It is inconsistent to say that in two of these instances *paradise* means heaven, but that in one instance it means earth when, in fact, the term was never used to refer to heaven.

IN ISRAEL

For centuries Israel came under the control of foreign empires; so naturally Jesus’ disciples wished to know when Israel would be liberated. They framed their question to Jesus as:

❖ “Will you, at this the time, restore the **kingdom to Israel**?” (Acts 1:6).

It was not wrong for them to ask this question, and so Jesus did not correct them regarding their view that the location of the Kingdom was to be on earth – connected with Israel. However, he was not able to answer this question regarding time because it was beyond his own knowledge. So indeed there would be a restoring of “the kingdom to Israel” but when that would be was in known only to God.

NOTE: Biblically “*kingdom of God*” refers to God’s throne on earth (2 Sam. 7:12-19; 1 Chron. 17:12-14): “Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king...” (1 Chron. 29:23).

BECAUSE CHRIST RETURNS TO EARTH WHY WOULD CHRISTIANS LEAVE THE EARTH?

Numerous Scriptures show that Jesus ascended to the right hand of Jehovah in heaven. As stated in Psalm 110:1 this was to be only “*until I place your enemies as a stool for your feet.*” This *temporary situation* was to last only “***until the times of restoration***” when he would then leave heaven:

❖ “...that he [*God*] may send forth the Christ appointed for YOU, Jesus, whom *heaven*, indeed, *must hold* within itself ***until the times of restoration*** of all things of which God spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets of old time” (Acts 3:20, 21).

❖ *So Christians are:* “...to wait for his Son **from** the heavens” (1 Thess. 1:10).

This shows that Christ is to return to earth – coming in glory which must be visible as he said:

❖ “For the Son of Man is destined to **come in the glory** of his Father with his angels” (Matt. 16:27).

Then he will take his place as earth’s ruler:

❖ “...in **the new world** (*palingenesia*), when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne...”

(Matt. 19:28 ESV).

The Greek word *Palingenesia* is variously rendered: “Regeneration” NASB, NKJV; “renewal of all things” NRSV, NIV; “new age” NAB; “when everything is made new again” NJB. Clearly this “renewal of all things” at “**the times of restoration**” occurs on earth because Jesus has come “**from the heavens.**” No holy prophets of old time ever spoke of renewal or **restoration** of the heavens where God dwells.

Please see STUDY 2. JESUS RETURNS VISIBLY TO EARTH.

WHAT ABOUT “GREAT IS YOUR REWARD IN HEAVEN” IN MATTHEW 5:12?

Some have interpreted Jesus’ words concerning the Christian’s reward “in heaven” as meaning that “heaven” is the reward and they must go there to enjoy it. However, Jesus said that the reward is **in** heaven and not that the reward ‘is heaven’ In fact, the reward is reserved in heaven as both the apostles Peter and Paul inform us concerning the Christian’s hope of :

- ❖ “...an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, **reserved in** heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be *revealed in the last time*” (1 Pet. 1:4, 5). ... “...because of the hope **reserved** for you in heaven” (Col. 1:5 NAB).

The hoped for ‘inheritance’ is what was promised to the forefathers just as Christ verified and Paul expected (Rom 15:8; Gal 3:16; Acts 13:32 and 26:6-7).

In *Jesus’ Resurrection and Christian Origins* Theologian N.T. Wright explains:

What then do the New Testament writers mean when they speak of an inheritance waiting for us in heaven? This has been much misunderstood...The point of such passages, as in 1 Peter 1.4, 2 Corinthians 5.1, Philippians 3.20, and so forth, is not that one must ‘go to heaven’, as in much-popular imagination, in order to enjoy the inheritance. There it is rather that ‘heaven’ is the place where God stores up his plans and purposes for the future. If I tell a friend that there is beer in the fridge, that doesn’t mean that he has to get into the fridge in order to enjoy the beer. When the early Christians speak of a new body in heaven, or an inheritance in heaven, they mean what St John the Divine means in Revelation 21: the new identity which at present is kept safe in heaven will be brought from heaven *to* earth at the great moment of renewal. Yes: the great majority of Christian expressions of hope through the middle ages, the reformation, and the counter-reformation periods have been misleading. ‘Heaven’ is not the Christians ultimate destination. Published in *Gregorianum* 2002, 83/84, 615-635

So clearly, if the reward of inheriting the kingdom is “reserved for you in heaven” it is not necessary to live in heaven to receive it. This is because Jesus as God’s representative is “**coming quickly, and my reward is with me**” (Rev. 22:12) i.e. coming to earth.

CHRISTIANS GET THEIR REWARD WHEN JESUS RETURNS TO EARTH

All relevant Bible texts show that Christians will only be rewarded when Jesus appears at his return to earth:

- ❖ “When the Christ, our life, is made manifest (**appears**), then you also will be made manifest with him in glory” (Col. 3:4).
- ❖ “...set your hope upon *the undeserved kindness* that is to be **brought to you** at *the revelation* of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13).
- ❖ “...when the chief shepherd has been made manifest (**appears**), you will receive *the unfadable crown of glory*” (1 Peter 5:4).

- ❖ “For the Son of Man is destined **to come** in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he **will recompense** each one according to his behavior” (*Matt. 16:27*).

So the reward, crown of glory and recompense will be brought by Jesus from heaven when He returns to earth in his future glory.

PROMISED REWARDS FOR THE FAITHFUL WILL BE ON EARTH

- ❖ The Abrahamic Covenant promises **the land** as an inheritance for believers (Gen. 12:2, 3; 13:14-17; 17:7-8; 26:2-4; 28:13-14). Christians, as “the seed of Abraham” are party to the Abrahamic covenant and so benefit from what was promised to Abraham. However, because “the righteous one - **in the earth** he will be rewarded” (*Prov. 11:31*) they must “...imitate those who through faith and patience **inherit the promises**” (*Heb. 6:12*)
- ❖ And “...that Abraham or his seed had the promise that he should be **heir of the world**” (*Rom. 4:13 UBS*).
- ❖ “I myself have made **the earth**...and I have given (proleptic—‘I will give’ NASB) **it** to whom it has proved right in my eyes” (*Jer. 27:5*).
- ❖ “Happy are the mild-tempered ones, since they will **inherit the earth**” (*Matt. 5:5 quoted from Psalm 37:1*).

Does this mean that only 144,000 are mild tempered? Psalm 37 is entirely about the inheritors living on the earth and so, too, for Matthew 5:5. It will, indeed, be on earth that God’s will shall be done through the kingdom:

- ❖ “Let your **kingdom** come. Let your will take place, as in heaven, also **upon earth**.” (*Matt. 6:10*).
By inheriting the Kingdom, those of the faith of Abraham will be granted the land of Israel and then the whole world. There is no scriptural reason for them ever to go to heaven. It is God’s decision, not ours, concerning what the Christian destiny is. As He says:

- ❖ “I have made **the earth**, the man and the beast that *are* on the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given (*proleptic – ‘I will give’ NASB*) it to whom it seemed proper to Me” (*Jer. 27:5*).

*So He chooses to give **the earth** to Abraham and his seed which is primarily Christ Jesus. There is never any mention in the Scriptures of a giving of heaven to Christians.*

By inheriting the Kingdom, those of the faith of Abraham will be granted the land of Israel and then the whole world. There is no scriptural reason for them ever to go to heaven, although entering the kingdom does involve struggle:

- ❖ “We must enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations” (*Acts 14:22*).

This passage does not fit with the Jehovah’s Witnesses teaching that many anointed Christians will simply grow old and die without suffering significant tribulation and then go to heaven. Those Christians who are alive when Christ returns will have to go through the Great Tribulation. (See STUDY 6). After this the first resurrection takes place. (See STUDIES 13 and 14).

THE KINGDOM AND THE HOLY ONES RULING IN IT WILL NOT BE IN HEAVEN

Jesus was not resurrected to heaven, but rather he was resurrected on earth and only after the 40 days did he ascend to heaven and even then only to be there for a certain length of time. In the book *Jesus’ Resurrection and Christian Origins* Theologian N.T. Wright explains:

I have often heard it said, sometimes by people who should know better, that Jesus died and was ‘resurrected to heaven’, but that is precisely not what the early Christians said. Raised from the dead, yes; exalted to heaven, yes; but resurrection never did mean ‘going to heaven when you die’. Published in *Gregorianum* 2002, 83/84, 615-635

So as with Jesus, all faithful Christians will be resurrected on the earth so that they can inherit it just as Jesus promised:

- ❖ "...the Kingdom of the heavens belongs to them ... They will inherit *the earth*" (Matt. 5:3, 5).
- ❖ "...they are reigning **upon** the earth" (Rev. 5:10 KIT).

In Revelation the Greek phrase *epi tes ges* is rendered 19 times as "**on** (not 'over') the earth."

- ❖ *In prophecy*: A stone [*kingdom* - verse 44]...struck the image at **its feet** [*therefore on earth*] ... it [*the stone*] became a large mountain and filled the *earth*" (Dan. 2:34-35).
- ❖ *And* "...the kingdom...and the grandeur of the kingdoms **under** the whole heaven were given to the holy ones" (Dan. 7:27).

*Biblically if something is "under the whole heaven" then it is on earth just as "the holy ones and the beloved city" are under attack from those who swarm "over the broad plain of **the earth.**"* (Rev. 20:9).

FURTHER PHYSICALITY OF THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS

- ❖ "...many from **eastern parts** and **western parts** will come and recline at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob **in the kingdom of the heavens**" (Matt. 8:11).

UNITING WITH CHRIST OCCURS WHEN HE RETURNS

- ❖ "Our citizenship *exists* (*currently*) in the heavens, **from which place** also we are eagerly waiting for a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ..." (Phil. 3:20).

So N T. Wright reasons that:

The point of being a citizen of a mother city is not that when life gets tough, or when you retire, you can go back home to the mother city. The people to whom Paul was writing in Philippi were Roman citizens, but they had no intention of going back to Rome...If when the going got tough there, *the emperor would come from Rome* to deliver them from their enemies in Philippi...this is more integrated with a theology of a coming new heaven and new earth.....

So Christians must "...wait for His Son from heaven" (1 Thess. 1:10).

THE RAPTURE DOES NOT MEAN GOING TO HEAVEN

Because of the "any moment" pre-tribulation rapture teaching of the Dispensationalists with their destiny as being heaven, Christians can sometimes have a mistaken picture of what the rapture will mean, The key text states:

- ❖ "...we **the living** who survive to the presence of the Lord shall in no way precede those who have fallen asleep; because the Lord himself will descend **from** heaven...and those who are dead in union with Christ will rise first. Afterward we *the living* who are surviving will, together with them, be caught away in clouds to meet the Lord **in the air**" (1 Thess. 4:15-17).

K I T says: "We the living the (ones) being left around *at the same time* as them will be **snatched** (Gk *harpagmon*) in clouds into meeting of the Lord in the air."

This Greek verb *harpagmon* was translated in the early Latin bibles as *rapere* from which we get the English noun 'rapture.' This *being caught up (away)* is **in the air** (Greek *aera*) that is: ... "**the atmosphere immediately above earth's surface**" according to Bauer's Gk/Eng. Lexicon. Yet these verses mainly concern the resurrection, yet Paul adds an extra aspect in speaking of the rapture. Yet there is no thought of going to heaven in this verse. The fact that "*we shall always be with the Lord*" is because Christians will accompany Jesus as he continues his descent to earth. So Jesus speaks of his own return when he says in John 14:3 "*I am coming again.*"

SO THE SEQUENCE AT THE LAST DAY IS:

- 1) The descent of Jesus.
- 2) The resurrection to immortality of dead Christians.
- 3) The change to immortality of living Christians “*We shall be changed*” (1 Cor.15:52, 53).
- 4) The being “*snatched up*” into **earth’s atmosphere** of both the resurrected and the *changed* living Christians so as to meet the descending Lord.

The *Reasoning book* uses a straw man argument on p. 314 by saying that the claimed rapture involves **going to heaven**. It clearly does not as has been shown earlier. By misapplying 1 Corinthians 15:36 which says “*What you sow is not made alive unless first it dies.*” the *Reasoning book* on pp. 312/3 states that all living Christians must die before gaining immortality. However, although the seed is a reference to the living mortal body, the context of verse 36 is that of those who are already “**the dead**” (verse 35) and who will need to be resurrected. So what Paul is saying is that resurrection is a miracle just as a seed which **decomposes** so as to germinate and become a plant is also a miracle. It is not the living body which is the decomposing “seed” but the already dead body. **Living Christians** (at the time of the last trumpet) are not mentioned until verse 51 where Paul reveals a sacred secret when he says: “We shall **not all fall asleep** [in death], but we shall all be **changed**...this which is mortal must put on immortality.” Also First Thessalonians 4:17 says: “We **the living**...will...be caught away.”

DOES ROMANS 6:3-5 PROVE THAT CHRISTIANS MUST DIE TO GAIN IMMORTALITY?

In their teaching that anointed Christians must die before they can gain immortality the WBTS quotes the Revised Standard Version on p. 314 of the *Reasoning book*:

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus **were** baptized into his death? ... For if we **have been** united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (*Rom. 6:3-5*).

However, the subject of these verses is ‘**being dead to sin**’ (verse 2). Note that **verse 4** of **Romans 6** says:

❖ “Therefore we **were buried** through our baptism into his death, in order that just as Christ was raised up from the dead...we also should likewise walk in a **newness of life**.”

So baptism into Christ is here being used as **an illustration** of ones death to sin, so that the “old personality” has been buried and raised to “newness of life” at the point of conversion. This death to sin is further symbolized in the words of verse 6: “...our old personality **was impaled** with him that our sinful body might be made inactive.”

Similarly:

❖ “For you **were buried** with him in [his] baptism, and by relationship with him you **were also raised up** together...though you were **dead in your trespasses**...God **made you alive** together with him” (*Col. 2:12-13*).

Returning to Romans 6:5:

“For if we **have been** united with him in a death like his, **we shall** certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

We can now understand that because of ones conversion one has ‘*died to sin*’ “in order that just as Christ was raised up from the dead...we also should likewise walk in a **newness of life**” **now** as illustrated by “a resurrection like his.” So these verses are not about Christians having to die physically so as to be granted immortality. Furthermore, Jesus said that: “...everyone that is living and exercises faith in me **will never die at all**” (*John 11:26*).

THE JW BELIEF THAT CHRISTIANS ARE RESURRECTED AS SPIRITS

This belief raises some serious problems because:

- All resurrections recorded in the Bible are of the whole person i.e. a solid bodied person. Please see STUDY 1. THE RESURRECTED JESUS IS AN IMMORTAL HUMAN.
- For someone to have died and been buried, what part of them would be resurrected if they did not present as a solid bodied person? Nothing, because a person is a unity, not having separating parts: body, soul and spirit.
- 1 Corinthians 15:37-38 explains that: "...you sow, not the body that will develop, but a bare grain, it may be, of wheat ... God gives it a body just as it pleased him, and to **each of the seeds its own body**" (1 Cor.15:37-38).

In the analogy of the seed there is a change of attributes from seed to plant, but the plant must be of the same genetic material as the seed. So too the glorified body is as a result of dramatic qualitative changes that occur in its seed. It is *not an exchange* of bodies but a change by glorification of the person. The transfiguration of Jesus was a glimpse of this glorification.

NOTE: The word "body" in a literal sense always refers to what is tangible.

SCRIPTURES OFTEN MISAPPLIED TO HEAVEN

As stated earlier the texts of John 14:2; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Philippians 1:21-23; 3:14 and Hebrews 6:19-20 are only assumed by tradition to refer to going to heaven by the earlier false assumption that Jesus remains indefinitely in heaven (Acts 3:21). This heaven-going tradition originated with the acceptance of the pagan teaching that humans have a naturally immortal soul. In fact, neither is the word *heaven* mentioned in these texts nor is there any implication that Christians go to heaven in these texts. We will now examine these more difficult passages in light of our understanding of the earlier Scriptures that have a plain meaning.

PHILIPPIANS 1:21-23

- ❖ "For in my case *to live* is Christ, and **to die, gain**...I am under pressure from these two things; but what I do desire is [*a third thing*] the releasing ('*departure*' in NASB etc but meaning **the return of Christ**) and the *being with Christ*, for this, to be sure, is far better."

TWO OPTIONS OR THREE?

The context is Paul's impending trial at the hands of Nero. Yet if Paul did not know whether he preferred to live or to die, could he really be saying that he prefers to die? So could his "desire to depart and be with Christ...is far better" be *a third option* than either living on now or dying! Evidently it is "the *being with Christ*" that counts for Paul. Yet this *being with Christ* only happens when Jesus returns.

The Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses explains this passage in the 'appendix' to the NWT Reference Bible and the KIT. The reason for dealing with this passage here is for the benefit of those who hold the view that a separate immortal soul goes straight to heaven at death.

As well as 'departure' the Greek word *analsai* can also mean '**releasing**' or '**return**'. This departure/releasing or return cannot be at the moment of death but on "*the Day of Jesus Christ*" (Phil. 1:6, 10); "*that I may have cause for exultation in Christ's Day*" (Phil 2:16). This is a statement showing that for the Christian his **relationship** with Christ remains unbroken even with the event of death. Those who die are sleeping "*in Christ*" in the sense that they are not aware of the passage of time up to the instant of their "*being with Christ*" by means of resurrection **at the parousia**. At that point, for them "**to die, is gain**" (1 Thess. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:21, 23).

PAUL'S PREFERENCE

So after noting the two alternatives of living on or dying Paul possibly presents a third option i.e. the releasing from heaven of Jesus to return or to translate literally as: “*having the desire for the returning and to be with Christ, which is far better.*”

The problem for the Jehovah's Witnesses teaching on this subject concerns their concept that the main part of the first resurrection has already occurred in 1918 and that the remainder of the 144,000 are instantly resurrected at the **various later times** when they naturally die. This concept would contradict the clear statements in **1 Thessalonians. 4:16-17** concerning the resurrection of the dead where verse 17 says in KIT:

“**thereupon** we *the living* the ones being left around **at the same time** *together with them* we will be snatched in clouds into meeting of the lord in the air...”

All other commentators recognize that the first resurrection happens in total **at one time**, namely when Jesus returns, so that it is a one-time event (1 Cor. 15:22). (Please see STUDY 14. THE FIRST RESURRECTION CANNOT HAVE BEGUN IN 1918).

ALTERNATIVE VIEW

This view treats the Greek word *analysai* as meaning only ‘departure’ rather than ‘releasing’ or ‘returning,’ and so does not bring in a third option, but considers that Paul’s option of dying would be so that he is relieved of all his suffering. This presents the fact that after a Christian dies there is no awareness of time and so, for him, the next moment is his being with Christ.

Whichever view one takes, biblically there is no survival of an immaterial soul at death. The entire process of resurrection will happen at Christ’s future return.

PHILIPPIANS 3:14

- ❖ “...the prize of the **upward** (*Gk ‘ano’*) **calling** of God” KIT.
“...the prize of the **high calling** (*Greek ‘ano’*) of God” UBS Interlinear.

This is interpreted in the NIV as “*God has called me heavenward*” as if to imply that Paul would be going to heaven. However, the Greek word *ano* means ‘above’ as in “*the Jerusalem above (‘ano’)*.” It is really God’s calling of Christians to the higher reward of the first resurrection at Christ’s coming (1 Cor. 15:24). Marshall’s interlinear renders it as: “**The above calling.**” and as “*the high calling*” in the Unvarnished NT, the ASV, Young’s, NSB, KJV and all earlier Bibles. Also Moffatt gives “**the high call.**”

Furthermore, when both the HCSB and ISV use the phrase “**God’s heavenly call,**” this has no meaning of the Christian’s supposed departure to heaven, but is descriptive of the quality of the call because it is from God.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1 – 9

- ❖ “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, should be dissolved, we are to have a building from God, a house not made with hands, everlasting in the heavens. For in this dwelling house we do indeed groan, earnestly desiring to put on the one for us from heaven, so that, having really put it on, we shall not be found naked. In fact, we who are in this tent groan, being weighed down; because we want, not to put it off, but to put on the other, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now he that produced us for this very thing is God, who gave us the token of what is to come, that is, the spirit. We are therefore always of good courage and know that, while we have our home in the body, we are absent from the Lord, for we are walking by faith, not by sight. But we are of good courage and are well pleased rather to become absent from the body and to make our home with the Lord. Therefore we are also making it our aim that, whether having our home with him or being absent from him, we may be acceptable to him.”

In these verses Paul writes figuratively using the metaphors of *tent*, *building*, *clothing* and *home and abroad*. This passage contains no thought of the pagan Greek idea of disembodiment, re-embodiment or intangibility. In the resurrection there will be continuity between the two states of the body as explained in 1 Corinthians 15:35–39. The context for 2 Corinthians 5:1-9 is: “*He...will raise us up also together with Jesus and will present us together with you*” (2 Cor. 4:14). This will occur on the Last-day second coming of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:23, John 11:24). And “*the things seen are temporary, but the things unseen are everlasting (aionia = of the age to come)*” (2 Cor. 4:18). Being not yet seen means that these things are future.

IF WE SHOULD DIE BEFORE CHRIST RETURNS

Verse 1:

❖ “If our earthly house, this tent [*“things seen are temporary” 4:18*], should be dissolved.”

As meaning: If our present mortal state should come to an end by dying.

❖ “...we are to have a building from God [‘what is unseen is *everlasting* (Gk *aionia* = **of the age to come**)’ 4:18]...everlasting in the heavens.”

As meaning: We are to be granted an immortal state at the Last-day resurrection when Jesus figuratively brings such with him.

BUT OUR WISH IS TO LIVE UNTIL THE TIME CHRIST RETURNS

Verse 2:

❖ “For in this dwelling house (*in this earthly state*) we do indeed groan, earnestly desiring to **put on** (*while we are still alive*) the one for us **from** heaven (*the Greek verb means ‘to put one garment on over another’*).”

❖ *As meaning:* The desire is that whilst alive we will put on the immortal state of the body. This is not a desire to lose our existing body because verse 4 says “**we want, not to put it off (by dying) but to put on the other.**” 1 Corinthians 15:51 describes how the *mortal state of the living* will be **changed** to the immortal. 1 Corinthians 15:53 says “*that which is mortal must put on immortality.*” This describes how *those living* at the time of Christ’s return **will be over-clothed with immortality.**

Verse 3:

❖ “...so that, having really put it [*the immortal state*] on, we shall **not be found naked.**” or “...even if we are **unclothed** we will not be found naked.” (4th UBS).

As meaning: ‘**not be found in the death state and in need of resurrection.**’ Therefore at no time is anyone disembodied.

Verse 4:

❖ “...we who are in *this tent* groan...because **we want, not to put it (the mortal state) off, (by dying) but to put on the other (the immortal)**, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by **life (immortality).**”

As meaning: We do not want to be without our mortal body by dying, but rather to put on the immortal body i.e. Paul wants to live until Christ’s return and then be clothed with immortality. Similarly: “Death is swallowed up forever.” (1 Cor. 15:54).

Verse 6:

❖ “...while we have our home in the body (*our present mortal state*), we are absent from the Lord.”

As meaning: because his future parousia/Kingdom has not yet occurred we are absent from him. This is a spatial, geographical metaphor i.e. home or abroad.

Verse 8:

❖ “We are of good courage and are well pleased to become absent from the body (*our present mortal state*) and to make our home (*in the Kingdom when we will be over-clothed with immortality*) with the Lord.”

As meaning: Paul prefers, as a living Christian, to “*be with the Lord*” **when he returns at the parousia** (1 Thess. 4:17). However, if he should not live till then, he expects, by means of resurrection, “to be with the Lord” **when he returns at the parousia** (1 Cor. 15:23).

JOHN 14:2

❖ “In **the house** of my Father there are many abodes.”

This is expressed figuratively just as the kingdom of Israel was called “the house of Israel.” Also, the temple was God’s house.

WHAT IS THE FATHER’S HOUSE?

❖ “...for the judgment starts with **the house of God**” (1 Peter 4:17).

The house of God refers to God’s people as prospective members of the kingdom, as according to the following passages:

❖ “...for we are **a temple** of a living God” (2 Cor. 6:16).

❖ “The slave does not remain in the **household** forever; the Son remains forever” (John 8:35).

❖ “Moses...was faithful in all **the house of that one** ... But Christ [was faithful] as a Son over the house of that One. **We are the house** of that One” (Heb. 3:5-6).

INTERPRETATION

- “Many abodes” = *the ample space for all in the kingdom. Possibly the individual Christians in whom God and Christ will live (verse 23) and so giving them reassurance.*
- “...to prepare a place (*it does not say ‘in heaven’*) for you.” = *The preparation for the Kingdom is by means of Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension.*
- “I am coming again and will receive you to myself.” = *at the parousia to set up the kingdom.*
- “...that where I am you also may be.” = *in the Kingdom on earth.*

HEBREWS 6:19-20

❖ “This [**hope**] we have as an **anchor** for the soul...and it enters **within the curtain**, where a **forerunner** has entered *in our behalf*, Jesus, who has become a high priest.”

The term *forerunner* highlights Jesus as being the first fruits (*of the New Creation*) and that his high priestly service *in our behalf* makes it possible for Christians to approach God in priestly service. Only the high priest in Israel physically entered within the curtain, hence only Christ literally enters heaven. It is **our hope** that is anchored within the curtain because our high priest is there standing before God on our behalf. This secures for the Christian the purification that enables him to draw close to God. This in no way implies that Christians will go physically “within the curtain” by going to heaven. When **Hebrews 10:19** says: “...since we have boldness for the way of entry into the holy place” *our entry is not physically but is figuratively an* “approach with true hearts in the full assurance of faith” (verse 22). So that, **now**, here on earth, we may have free entry to God through our high priest. Please see Ephesians 2:6 where we learn that figuratively: “...he...seated us together in heavenly places in Christ” showing that **currently**, here on earth, Christians are viewed as being in heaven because of their union with Christ.

THE 144,000 WILL BE ON EARTH

Contrary to the teaching of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, that Mount Zion is in heaven, the Mount Zion which the 144,000 in Revelation 7 and 14 will stand on is the physical place as the location of Jerusalem. Nowhere do the descriptions show any reigning as either stated or implied to be in heaven. According to the best Greek, Revelation 5:10 translates as "they will reign on the earth" rather than "over the earth" in the sense of being in heaven.

CHRISTIAN BELIEF IN C. 150 A. D.

In his Dialog with Trypho, Justin Martyr condemned those who promote heaven-going as the Christian destiny. Justin said to him:

For if you have fallen in with some who are called Christians...who say there is no resurrection of the dead, and that *their souls when they die are taken to heaven*, do not imagine that they are Christians...But I and others who are right-minded Christians on all points are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a **thousand years in Jerusalem**, which will then be built, adorned and enlarged, as the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah and others declare ... And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the Apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation that was made to him that *those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem*; and that thereafter the general and eternal resurrection of all men would take place.

Justin's condemnation of those who promote heaven-going as the Christian destiny harmonizes with his interpretation of the apostle John's Revelation concerning the millennium spent in literal, physical Jerusalem.

SUMMARY

The theory of going to heaven at death originated from pagan Greek philosophy and only became established Christian belief by the 3rd century.

The Scriptures never indicate heaven as man's destination - **Psalm 115:16; Proverbs 11:31**.

The passages misapplied to this concept are John 14:2; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Philippians 1:21-23; 3:14 and Hebrews 6:19-20 and are only assumed by tradition to refer to going to heaven. In fact, the word *heaven* is not mentioned in these texts.

"The kingdom of heaven" is 'the kingdom of God' (*Matt. 19:14//Mark 10:14; Matt. 19:23-24*). It is described as being on the earth (*Matt. 5:5 [quoted from Psalm 37:1]; 6:10*).—paradise, Israel (Acts 1:6), and Jerusalem. As the evildoer said to Jesus:

- ❖ "...remember me when you get into your **kingdom**. And he [*Jesus*] said to him: 'Truly I tell you today, You will be *with me* in **paradise**' (*Luke 23:42-43*).
- ❖ "...many from eastern parts and western parts will come and recline **at the table with Abraham** and Isaac and Jacob **in the kingdom of the heavens**"
(*Matt. 8:11 also see Luke 13:28-29*).

GOD NEVER INTENDED FOR HUMANS TO INHERIT HEAVEN

- ❖ "...to Jehovah *the heavens* belong. But **the earth** he has given to *men*" (*Ps. 115:16*).
- ❖ "The righteous one - **in the earth** he will be rewarded" (*Prov. 11:31*).

CHRIST NEVER PROMISED HEAVEN FOR HIS DISCIPLES

- ❖ "**Christ** actually became a minister...to **verify the promises** he **made to their forefathers**..."
(*Rom. 15:8*).

According to Genesis these promises concerned *the land, producing progeny and being a blessing to all nations*:

ABRAHAM AND OTHERS HAVE YET TO RECEIVE THE PROMISES

- ❖ “In faith all these died [*including Abraham – verse 8, 9*], although they *did not get the fulfilment* of the] **promises**, but they saw them afar off...” (*Heb. 11:13*).
- ❖ “The purpose was that *the blessing of Abraham* might **come to be by means of Jesus Christ** for the nations ... Now **the promises** were *spoken to Abraham and to his seed*... And to your seed, who is Christ ... Moreover, if you belong to Christ, **you are really Abraham’s seed**, heirs with reference to **a promise**” (*Gal. 3:14, 16, 29*).

THE APOSTLE PAUL DID NOT EXPECT TO GO TO HEAVEN

- ❖ “...for because of **the hope of Israel** I have this chain around me” (*Acts 28:20*).
- ❖ “And so we are *declaring to you the good news about the promise made to the forefathers*...” (*Acts 13:32*).

THE AWAITED INHERITANCE WILL BE ON EARTH

- ❖ “For it is not to angels that he has subjected the **inhabited earth to come, about which we are speaking**...” (*Heb. 2:5*).
- ❖ “...be imitators of those who through faith and patience **inherit the promises**” (*Heb. 6:12*).

WHAT ABOUT “GREAT IS YOUR REWARD IN HEAVEN” IN MATTHEW 5:12?

- ❖ “...an incorruptible...and unfading inheritance. It is **reserved** in the heavens for you ... for a salvation ready to be revealed in *the last period of time*” (*1 Peter 1:4, 5*).

The hoped for ‘inheritance’ is what was promised to the forefathers just as Christ verified and Paul expected (Rom 15:8; Gal 3:16; Acts 13:32 and 26:6-7). It simply means that the reward is with God. Jesus brings the reward on God’s behalf when he returns to earth.

THE 144,000 WILL BE ON EARTH

In the descriptions of the 144,000 in Revelation 7 and 14 nowhere is their reigning either stated or implied to be in heaven.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of biblical texts shows that God’s plan for mankind is to inherit the earth as God intended it to be and with mankind granted perfection and immortality. From this it is evident that He does not intend for any of humankind to be in His literal heavenly location, other than Jesus’ temporary time there in acting as our mediator and high priest.

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