“THERE SHALL BE NO NIGHT THERE”

Rick Brumback

We sing of the joys and beauties of heaven—

How beautiful heaven must be
  Sweet home of the happy and free;
  Fair haven of rest for the weary,
  How beautiful heaven must be.2

We also sing of our expectation that heaven be our ultimate home

Some glad morning when this life is o’er
  I’ll fly away.3

Yet, what shall heaven be like? Who shall abide there? Since Christian roots pervade our national history and identity, personal opinions about the answers to these and similar questions abound. What is needed, however, are answers that derive from God’s self-revelation, the Scriptures. In this land of fadeless day in which no night will exist, what will the saved come to know personally and directly? This essay will explore the descriptions of the heavenly realm as found in the Bible.

HEAVEN AS SEEN IN THE BIBLE

As used in both the Old Testament and the New, the word “heaven” has multiple meanings; it may be employed to speak about either regions in the physical universe, or to speak about a spiritual realm.4
The context of the particular passage will determine which meaning is meant. In the created order, “heaven” is used in Genesis 1:6-8 to designate the open space above the earth which we call “sky.” It was within this region that the avian life God created on the fifth day flew (Gen. 1:21-23). The Bible text frequently speaks of this region, as in 1 Kings 18:45, where we read: “the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain.” In the days of the Old Testament prophet Haggai (ca. 520 B.C.), the people were told: “[T]he heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit” (Hag. 1:10).

Another use of “heaven” to describe the creation relates to the celestial realm of space—the cosmos. On the fourth day of creation, Yahweh said: “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years” (Gen. 1:14). These various lights were the sun, moon, stars, and other celestial bodies; Peter spoke of such when addressing the crowds on Pentecost (Acts 2:19). Frequently, there is little distinction made between these two uses referring to the created order, given that the difference is really just one of degree. In other words, the difference between talking about heaven (our atmosphere) and heaven (the reaches of space) is a matter of degree—how far from the earth.

The second use of “heaven,” and the more common in the New Testament, designates the spiritual abode of Yahweh—Jesus stated: “Our Father which art in heaven” (Mt. 6:9). This is of special interest to Christians, for not only are our petitions and our worship directed heavenward, but also heaven is the eventual and eternal home of the faithful. Hence the apostle could write that a Christian’s “conversation [citizenship-ASV] is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20).

Reality Of Heaven

Given the materialist outlook of contemporary culture, the latter meaning of “heaven”—designating the spiritual abode of God—is frequently denied even by theologians. Not surprisingly, such figures also deny the existence of a literal hell, the eternal abode of the unredeemed. What should we conclude? Is heaven (and hell) a reality, or is this a mythical construct from an ancient religion? The answer to such a question has a direct bearing upon our expectations as Christians.
Those who argue against the existence of a real heaven and hell, as described in the Bible, do so without support. There is no microscope nor telescope providing a glimpse into the metaphysical and spiritual realms. However, an examination of Christ’s words does yield information about spiritual matters, and He and His spokesmen stated the following concerning heaven and hell:

And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell (Mt. 5:29).

[R]ather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Mt. 10:28).

[I]t is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched (Mk. 9:43-44).

Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thess. 1:9).

And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15).

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven (Mt. 10:32-33).

So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God (Mk. 16:19).

We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens (Heb. 8:1).

And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. 22:4-5).

With these passages, it cannot be doubted that Jesus and His early disciples recognized the existence of both hell and heaven, as well as the moral and spiritual consequences that life on earth had upon the eternal destiny of the individual.

If the existence of hell is denied, then one must also recast the image of Satan and his workers as described in the Scriptures; they
must become allegorical or figurative in some manner. But, if Satan
does not exist, with whom did Jesus battle in the wilderness (Mt. 4:1-
11) and on the way to the cross (Gen. 3:15)? And if hell, with its
denizens, is explained away, how does one know that hell’s antithesis,
heaven, has its own existence either? The same sources which promise
eternal life in heaven for the faithful speak of the terrible consequences
in hell of the unfaithful (Jn. 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:10). If one part of the
Bible message is undone, the entire salvation story is affected. It all
stands or falls together.

DESCRIPTION OF HEAVEN

Things Associated With Heaven

What do the Scriptures tell us about the nature of heaven? A
catalog of these elements becomes both useful and encouraging. First,
only goodness and righteousness will reside in heaven. Peter wrote:
“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and
a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13). There are
several implications of this statement. Since heaven is characterized by
righteousness, all the best elements of existence will comprise the
eternal abode of God’s saved people. It will be the culmination and
concentration of all those elements that truly bring bliss and joy to
being.

Second, an entrance to heaven will encompass a reunion with the
saved of all ages. Jesus spoke of those who would “come from the east
and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the
kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 8:11). For those who have embraced the
righteousness of Jehovah while they were on earth, their entrance into
the eternal realm will be accompanied by the presence of all those who
sought to live righteously throughout the ages. We expect to see the
heroes of the faith mentioned in Hebrews 11, the figures of the New
Testament who lived for Christ, and our own family members and
friends who have been followers of Jesus the Christ. Furthermore, the
greatest part of this heavenly reunion will be to reside in the presence
of God and Jesus Himself. Thus, He promised to His disciples, and by
extension to us: “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were
not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I
go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto
myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (Jn. 14:2-3). We know
this extends to all the saved, not only because of the statement of Jesus
mentioned just above (Mt. 8:11), but because of the apostle’s words concerning the return of Jesus—

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:14-17).

A third factor involved in the description of heaven is the presence of the heavenly host and the Godhead. Although we hinted at this in the preceding paragraph, a fuller picture of the divine presence should be given. When John the Beloved was given a glimpse into heavenly realities in the book of Revelation, he saw the majesty of the divine throne room. In chapters 4 and 5, the apostle describes what he witnessed in that scene. God sat upon His throne, a figure so splendid, and yet incapable of exact description, that John had to use references to precious stones and materials to begin verbalizing what he witnessed (Rev. 4:2-3). At this point it is helpful to point out that the human frame of reference for description centers upon the elements of our physical world. We have difficulty understanding that which is foreign to the elements of our own existence. Hence, John uses these material terms to explain what God is “like”—what else could he have comprehended and would his readers have found intelligible? So, in Revelation the descriptions of heavenly realities are made in comparison with the most precious items humans can appreciate from our own experiences and mental capacities.

When John saw the throne room, he also observed the Spirits of God, the twenty-four elders, and the four beasts worshiping God. Then the Son of God, the Lamb Christ, came into the room. The entire scene was one of adulation and worship, with the various creatures giving praise to the Godhead. Heaven will be a place in which the spiritual beings and the people of God bask in His presence and extend to Him continual praise and worship.

Another factor in describing heaven has to do with access to it for human beings. Simply stated, it is unreachable without Jesus the Christ.
He stated this in John 14:6—“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” There are several implications of this claim that should be explored. First, if no person can come to God except by Jesus, then His life’s work and sacrifice must have value not only to Christians, but also to those who preceded Christianity, viz., the faithful of the patriarchal and Mosaical dispensations. In the Patriarchal Age, the fathers made sacrifice for their families to cover wrongdoing (see Job 1:4-5). Under the Israelitish religion, offerings of animals were made to cope with the sins of the people (see Lev. 4-5). However, none of these substitutions of animals could actually atone for the sins of humans—

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect ... But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year (Heb. 10:1, 3).

It would be in the sacrifice of Christ at Golgotha that humanity’s sin problem could be finally overcome; this is discussed in Hebrews 9:14-15. It may rightly be said that Christ opened the door to heaven for humanity.

Another implication of John 14:6 is that Christ has become the Originator or Founder of the possibility of reaching heaven. Prior to His advent and sacrificial work, salvation was not ultimately attainable. He authored salvation, meaning that no one can come to the Father and to heaven without the avenue afforded by Jesus. Therefore, the writer of Hebrews called Him “the captain [author, ASV] of ... salvation” (Heb. 2:10), and later wrote: “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:8-9).

Finally, John 14:6 indicates that, in contrast to the spirit of pluralism and ecumenism that pervades our age, only Christ makes heaven attainable for the people of the world. Clearly this is not in keeping with the spirit of the age in which diversity finds itself championed in religious thought. The New Testament, properly read, would be considered too narrow and provincial by many of our time. Yet, Peter knew the significance of John 14:6 and its relation to heaven, taking his opportunity to declare this truth among nay-sayers of his own day, saying: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none
other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). If we believe that Jesus came from heaven as the Word made flesh (Jn. 1:14), and if we believe that He knows the way back, then we are compelled to accept His claims about the opportunity to reach heaven offered uniquely by Him. We may say that while there exist many “world religions,” today only Christianity is “God’s religion.”

A final descriptor of heaven may be cataloged, one developed in relation to Israelite history and representing a typological fulfillment of that history. When the Hebrews exited Egypt, they did so under the aegis not only of God’s immediate care, but also of God’s long-established promise to bring Abraham’s descendants to reside in the land of Canaan (Gen. 15:13-16). Though their journey across the Sinai peninsula from Egypt to Canaan lasted many decades—due to that current generation’s faithless response to Yahweh—when they finally crossed the Jordan river and took the land, they were able to experience rest in their “promised land” (Josh. 21:43-44). That rest, however, was not the final resting place spoken of to the Jews, because through the mouth of King David, the Lord reminded His people that there was a superior rest still waiting to be experienced (Ps. 95:6-11). The author of Hebrews drew upon these facts to try and convince those Jews abandoning Christianity to reconsider the consequences of their decisions—if they did not remain true to Christ, they could not experience the final rest that had been promised to an Israel already settled in Canaan.

For if Joshua had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God ... Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief (Heb. 4:8-9, 11).

Heaven constitutes that final rest toward which the people of God are marching. When Jesus issued His great invitation, “Come unto me” (Mt. 11:28), He not only offered a rest from false religion and from sin, but also included was the ultimate rest of departing a sin-touched world, sloughing off the mortal body, and entering the courts of heaven in rest and relief. Paul encouraged the afflicted brethren at Thessalonica by calling their thoughts to that promised rest that would begin when Jesus returned for His people (2 Thess. 1:6-10).

“There Shall Be No Night There”
Things Excluded From Heaven

Precisely because a description of heaven involves a number of particular features that distinguish it, there exists a list of elements that will not be found in heaven or associated with life there. It behooves us to identify and reflect upon these excluded features.

Since heaven can only be accessed by means of the grace afforded through Jesus, those who have not availed themselves of this grace and forgiveness will not be found in heaven. In other words, people are who are not saved, who are not Christians, who are not God’s faithful children, will not be found in heaven. Such figures still bear their own sins, sins which separate them from God and prevent the peaceful relation they might otherwise have through Christ.

Closely related is the fact that sin and evil will not have a presence in heaven. The devil and all his associates will have their part in the lake of fire, along with those whose names are not written in the book of life (Rev. 20:15); all these will bear their own sins away with them. When Peter wrote that heaven is a place of righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13), this meant that nothing evil or sinful would be tolerated, and human beings will not be allowed to carry their sins with them and enter the promised rest. Heaven will not be despoiled by the presence of evil.

Heaven is not the realm of second chances. The earthly life affords the opportunity to show that God matters to us and that we wish to serve Him freely. As Paul noted, when the end of time comes: “[W]e must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). There is no reincarnation (Heb. 9:27), and there will be no second chance to find grace when this life has come to a close. This is why Jesus warned so frequently about making the right choice to follow Him while the opportunity was still available. Consider all the parables and warnings that convey this message (see e.g., Mt. 24:36-25:46). If heaven consisted of second chances, why would a person expect to be any different than he was on earth with its second chances? Instead, heaven is for those who love God and have centered their lives on Him through Christ.

Those elements which make life so difficult will not be present in the land of God. Even while the inward man, the spiritual aspect of human existence made alive through the Messiah, can be renewed day by day, the physical aspect continues its degradation as each human body gives way to the limitations of mortality (2 Cor. 4:16-5:4).
Solomon summarized the time when the human figure would be stooped with age, strength would flee, and life come to a close (Ecc. 12:1-7). Joshua could well say he was going “the way of all the earth” (Josh. 23:14). But the elements of mortality—the failing health, the aches and pains, the weariness—will be absent in heaven. This is why John says: “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:4). The tears shed, either due to the frailties of the human condition or the presence of sin and evil, will be gone completely from the heavenly home. Sorrows and sadness will be removed, replaced by joy and gladness. Christians will take possession of that glorious body “fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21), a body entirely suited to the immortal realm (1 Cor. 15:36-58).

One of the most famous statements about this subject is found in Revelation 21:25—“for there shall be no night there.” Throughout Scripture the binaries of light/dark, day/night are used to speak of moral categories of good and evil as well as knowledge (and understanding) and ignorance (and misunderstanding). With regard to heaven, we have already observed that only goodness will be present; evil and the practitioners thereof will be banished to the lake of fire. God Himself, the fount of goodness, will keep all sin and iniquity from His spiritual realm. But since light and dark also speak of knowledge, heaven is seen as a place in which understanding and full appreciation of the scheme of redemption can take place. We may recall the words of Peter stating that those of previous ages may have served the needs of emerging Christianity while not understanding what they were promoting (2 Pet. 1:10-12), but clarity for them will emerge in heaven. Paul mentioned that upon our entrance into heaven, the life we lived by faith, that is, by confidence in the Scriptures’ message, will become sight, that is, will take on full experiential awareness and knowledge for us—we will know heaven and the presence of God first-hand (2 Cor. 5:7-10). Heaven and all that pertains to its setting will constitute the fulfillment and culmination of all that God had set in motion for the deliverance of the human soul.

CONCLUSION

Echoing the words of the Savior Himself (Jn. 14:1-3), we may accurately describe heaven as a prepared place for a prepared people.
The abode of God will become the abode of His followers when time comes to a close, when the scheme of redemption and salvation of obedient people is consummated, and when “the faith” becomes “sight.” At that moment, every person will want to hear their names spoken in love and acceptance as they are welcomed by the Lord into the shores of glory. Such an end is promised to those who have been cleansed from their sins by the shed blood of the Christ and who have walked steadfastly in the Lord’s service. Peter describes the transition to this heavenly kingdom by saying: “For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11). The preparations for the heavenly home have already been made. What is to be determined by each individual is whether he will embrace the teachings of the Gospel and begin to shape his own life to harmonize with God’s divine plan. Long ago, the prophet Balaam uttered: “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!” (Num. 23:10). In order to have the reward of the righteous in heaven, one must be willing to live the life of the righteous on earth. Then, the land of fadeless day will become the home of the soul.

ENDNOTES

1 All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.


5 The names “Joshua” in Hebrew and “Jesus” in Greek are equivalent names. The translators of the King James Version used the name “Jesus,” but the context of Hebrews 4 clearly indicates that our passage is not referencing the Son of Mary, but rather the successor to Moses. Hence I have employed the name “Joshua” in the main text.