

MISAIMINGS

“Who concerning the Truth Have Misaimed” — 2 Timothy 2:18

Misaiming concerning the Ultimate Destination of Believers

Misaiming: “Maybe there’s not as much in [the Bible] about heaven as we would like to find. Since it is the ultimate destination of the Christian, you’d think there would be a bit more spelled out about the nature of heaven” (R. C. Sproul, *Now, That’s a Good Question!*, 1996, pp. 285-286).

Truth: In a sense, this passage does not misaim when it wonders why there is so little description of heaven in the Bible, if heaven is indeed “the ultimate destination” of Christians. It is crucial that we know our spiritual destination, because a proper view of where we are going will help govern the walk that takes us there. If heaven were truly our ultimate destination, it would indeed be remarkable how few details we are given. We would have been left, metaphorically speaking, as builders with neither a detailed blueprint nor a scale model. The error in this passage is its unscriptural assumption that heaven is our ultimate destination. According to Revelation 21:1-2, our ultimate destination is not heaven, but rather *the New Jerusalem* on the new *earth*.

From beginning to end, the Bible portrays a God who is relentlessly earthward in His focus. At the beginning, we find the Spirit of God hovering over the deep (Gen. 1:2). The psalmist tells us that “*the earth* is Jehovah’s, and its fullness, / The habitable *land* and those who dwell in it” (Psa. 24:1, emphasis added). The prophet Jeremiah speaks God’s word, expressing His heart’s longing: “*O land, land, land, / Hear the word of Jehovah*” (Jer. 22:29, emphasis added). In the Gospels the Lord teaches us to pray, “Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also *on earth*” (Matt. 6:10, emphasis added). The apostle Paul tells us that God will head up in Christ all things, the things in the heavens and the things *on the earth* (Eph. 1:10). Finally, the entire Bible consummates in the book of Revelation with the declaration that “the tabernacle of God is with men” (21:3) after the New Jerusalem comes *down* to the new earth. God’s destination is the earth. If we insist on going *up* to heaven, we may well pass Him on His way down to the earth.

Since the Bible states that the New Jerusalem is the be-

lievers’ ultimate destination, we would be wise to pay much attention to the significance of its details as a governing vision for our present daily walk. For example, the golden street (Rev. 21:21) signifies that we should walk according to the divine nature we received through regeneration. The river of water of life (22:1) tells us that we should continually partake of Christ as our life supply. The color of the city, jasper (21:18), equals the color of the One who was sitting on the throne (4:3), showing us that our destiny is to express the Triune God for eternity, and accordingly, that we should seek to express Him in our daily living. Since the Bible reveals our ultimate destination to be the New Jerusalem, it also provides us with a richly detailed portrait of it in order that each aspect of its significance may govern us in our present daily life.

Misaiming concerning “the Bosom of Abraham”

Misaiming: “I’m inclined to think that Old Testament saints had immediate access to paradise because heaven itself is called ‘the bosom of Abraham’ in the New Testament. That’s not a likely descriptive term for heaven if it’s some place from which Abraham was absent” (R. C. Sproul, *Now, That’s a Good Question!*, 1996, p. 283).

Truth: Yes, the Old Testament saints are in Paradise, but they are not in heaven. These two terms are *not* synonymous. Nowhere in either the Old Testament or the New is heaven called “the bosom of Abraham.” The passage above refers to Luke 16:19-31, which describes two distinct sections of Hades separated by “a great chasm” (v. 26). In the pleasant section, here called “Abraham’s bosom” (v. 22), the righteous dead are “comforted,” but in the other, the lost are “in anguish” (v. 25). While there is an impassable gulf dividing these two sections, they are still quite close—close enough for Abraham to be able to hold a conversation with the suffering rich man. Whereas these two areas of Hades are apparently in close proximity, the heavens and Hades are not. The Bible explicitly tells us that the heavens are in the height of the universe (Eph. 1:20-21; 4:8), and that Hades is “in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40). The bosom of Abraham, logically, must be the pleasant section of Hades.

Additional evidence that the Old Testament saints are

not in heaven is found in Acts 2:34, which says plainly that “David did not ascend into the heavens.” Yet David certainly is in “the bosom of Abraham” (“and David slept with his fathers,” 1 Kings 2:10), with the poor beggar Lazarus, another indication that Paradise and heaven are distinct places.

Misaiming concerning the Nature of Our Destiny

Misaiming: “It is very important that you understand heaven, our eternal destiny, is an *actual place*....Literal real estate which He is preparing for His own. Jesus says so in the next statement.

‘And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also’ (v. 3)” (Charles R. Swindoll, *Eternity: Knowing Your Place in God’s Forever Plan*, 1986, p. 86).

Truth: Our eternal destiny, the “place” Christ has prepared for His believers, is not physical “real estate,” but rather, a person, God Himself. The Lord Jesus promised that after His death and resurrection He would receive us to Himself (John 14:3). By this receiving, the Lord has incorporated His believers into Himself, as indicated in verse 20 by the words *you in Me*. In the same chapter, Christ also tells us where He is: “I am in the Father” (vv. 10-11). Further, in verse 6 He declares, “No one comes *to the Father* except through Me” (emphasis added), indicating that our destination is God the Father. Even more emphatic is John 17:21 where the Lord Jesus prays to the Father “that they also may be in Us.” Since Christ is in the Father, His disciples will likewise be in the Father by virtue of their position in Christ. This organic oneness of Christ and His redeemed, rather than a notion of literal “real estate,” is the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise to us: “That where I am you also may be” (14:3).

Misaiming concerning Heaven Being Paradise

Misaiming: “It is important to understand that the pleasures of heaven will far exceed anything that human beings have ever known on earth. Indeed, heaven is often described as ‘paradise,’ a word that literally means ‘garden of pleasure’ or ‘garden of delight’” (Ron Rhodes, *What Did Jesus Mean?*, 1999, p. 185).

Truth: The main error here is the author’s confusion of Paradise with heaven, a misaiming resulting from not “cutting straight the word of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). The “third heaven” and “Paradise” are syntactically differentiated in 2 Corinthians 12. First, in verse 2 Paul says, “I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago

(whether in the body I do not know, or outside the body I do not know; God knows) such a one was caught away to *the third heaven*” (emphasis added). He then introduces a parallel statement in verses 3 and 4: “And I know such a man...that he was caught away into *Paradise*” (emphasis added). This distinction indicates that Paul was speaking of two separate places and events. Paul was caught away *both* to the third heaven *and* to Paradise.

Additionally, the Greek word here translated “caught away” does not necessarily mean caught *up*. It literally means “translated, transported,” and hence can be rendered “caught up” to the air, as in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, or “caught away” to another geographical location, as Philip was in Acts 8:39. Here in 2 Corinthians, Paul uses this term to describe two separate changes of location—one to the third heaven and another to Paradise.

A second error in this passage is its assertion that our destination is heaven as Paradise with all its surpassing pleasures. Actually, our chief pleasure is Christ Himself (Phil. 3:8) and our experience of being with Him (1:23). Our destination is also Christ (3:9), the One who is the embodiment of all spiritual and heavenly blessings (Eph. 1:3). To regard heaven as a place of surpassing pleasures, apart from the person of Christ, is to create myths rather than to explicate the truth. Whether we are in Paradise, on earth, or in the third heaven, God has ordained and provided all the pleasure and delight we will ever need in the precious person of Christ.

Misaiming concerning the Nature of Eternal Life

Misaiming: “What is the first thing you want to know when you get to heaven?...And, of course, I would have to know, ‘Are there any golf courses up here?’

“I’d like to study art for the first ten thousand years, music for the next ten thousand years, and literature for the next ten thousand years and just continue to soak in everything that God has made and everything he has ordained” (R. C. Sproul, *Now, That’s a Good Question!*, 1996, pp. 300-301).

Truth: This misaiming is a sad example of the fanciful flights the imagination can take in the absence of a clear view of God’s economy. Christ is the sum of all spiritual things, and in eternity we will delight ourselves in Him, not in golf courses or 10,000-year-long fine arts classes. As the New Jerusalem, we will neither need nor desire man-made entertainment or recreational facilities. Rather, in eternity the created, redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified

tripartite man will enjoy the divine, eternal, and surpassingly glorious life of the Triune God; we will live a life of eternal, unalloyed union, mingling, and incorporation with God. This life and living is vastly superior to anything human society has to offer; it overflows with the delights, blessings, and joy of God Himself. Those who have tasted such a life on earth by experiencing God's divine dispensing today know that when we are dwelling in God's presence in eternity, no one will long for golf courses or art classes. Instead, we will perpetually "continue to soak in" more of the unsearchable, inexhaustible riches of God Himself.

Misaiming concerning the Function of the River of Life

Misaiming: "In the next scene of my vision, I watched as the Lord took the saints of the living God through the River of Life. Oh, the River of Life flows from the throne of God and the Lamb (Revelation 22:1). As the saints passed through the River of Life, I could hear them shouting, 'Glory to God!'" (Mary K. Baxter, *A Divine Revelation of Heaven*, 1998, p. 74).

Truth: This misaiming illustrates well how non-scriptural, traditional thought can impede the accurate application of Scripture. Under the influence of the traditional notion that dying and going to heaven is "passing through the Jordan River" (which is actually a figure of baptism), this fanciful vision of heaven has believers passing *through* the river of water of life in order to enter eternity. Nevertheless, the Scriptures emphatically indicate that the Spirit Himself is this river and that the Spirit is as available to us as a drink. Thus the river of water of life, spiritually speaking, is for drinking and enjoying.

The river of water of life is not an obstacle to be traversed in order to enter the city. Rather, it flows from the throne in a spiral, flowing downward in the center of the street of gold, watering the entire city and reaching every gate on each side of the city. This river reaches the entire city, signifying that the divine life is available to all of God's redeemed elect. As such, Revelation 22:17 says, "Come! And let him who is thirsty come; let him who wills take the water of life freely." In John 7:37-39, the Lord issued a similar call for anyone who thirsted to come and drink of Him. Whoever would drink of Him would have "rivers of living water." Again, the river of life is designated for drinking, for enjoying, and the apostle John clearly identifies this river as the Spirit. First Corinthians 12:13 tells us that the believers "were all given to drink one Spirit."

In the aspect of His receivability, the Bible likens the Spirit to a drink. From these and numerous other

references, it is clear that the river of water of life represents the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), the flowing out of the Triune God, in order to be continuously received and enjoyed by man. Now and for eternity, the Triune God intends to flow into man and for man to freely partake of Him (2 Pet. 1:4).

Misaiming concerning the Location of the Throne and the Glorified Christ

Misaiming: "Paradise is the seat and dwelling place of the divine Majesty. It is where the glorified Christ dwells. It is the residence of the holy angels. And at the moment of death, Christians enter this blessed dwelling place" (Ron Rhodes, *What Did Jesus Mean?*, 1999, p. 183).

Truth: This passage exemplifies a widespread tendency to confuse Paradise with the third heaven, where Christ is seated. It accurately tells us that believers enter Paradise "at the moment of death." This is why the Lord Jesus told the believing thief on the cross, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43, emphasis added). That very day, *before* His resurrection and ascension to the heavenly throne, the Lord indicated that He and the repentant thief would be together in Paradise. We know that the Lord was "in the heart of the earth three days and three nights" (Matt. 12:40), and that His soul was not abandoned to Hades (Acts 2:27, 31), but rather, was raised on the third day. Furthermore, Ephesians 4:9-10 tells us that after He was crucified, Christ "descended into the lower parts of the earth" *before* He "ascended far above all the heavens." Therefore, immediately following His death, He was with the thief in a place other than heaven, a place called "Paradise," the pleasant section of Hades in the heart of the earth. This is where Abraham, Lazarus, David, and all dead believers are resting (Luke 16:23; Acts 2:34), awaiting the day of resurrection at the second coming of Christ (1 Thes. 4:16).

However, this passage erroneously identifies Paradise as the present and permanent "seat and dwelling place of the divine Majesty" and of the "glorified Christ." What the Bible tells us is that after descending into Hades and Paradise for three days and nights, Christ rose from the dead (Acts 2:32), appeared to His disciples on earth for forty days (1:3), ascended to the Father (John 20:17; Acts 2:33), is now higher than the heavens (Eph. 4:10), and will descend from heaven to the earth at His second advent (1 Thes. 4:16). Today, in the interim between His ascension and His second coming, the seat of divine Majesty—that is, God's throne—and the glorified Christ with His physical body are in the heavenlies (Eph. 1:20), not in Paradise.

by the Editors