

A Glimpse Of Heaven

By Dr. Gary M. Gulan, ©1983, (88,02)

Introduction: Who is going to heaven? Many people say they are going to heaven. Palestinian terrorist groups, such as the " Hamas," teach its followers that "in return for martyrdom, their families will be financially compensated, their pictures will be posted in schools and mosques, and they will earn a special place in heaven." (Reader's Digest, Oct. 2001, p. 80)

Islamic terrorists groups, such as Osama Bin Laden, have taught their followers in a 180 page Al-Qaeda network training manual that one who is martyred for the faith through a volunteer suicide mission will go directly to heaven and enjoy its choicest rewards. (Newsweek, Sept. 24, 2001, p. 68)

In both the " Hamas" and " Al-Qaeda" groups, the promise of heaven is given in return for human works (i.e. terrorism and murder). Is this really how one gets to heaven?

Almost all the major religions give their followers the promise heaven. In almost every case, heaven is achieved through personal effort or works (i.e. sacraments and good deeds). Is this really how one gets to heaven?

In order for religious terrorist groups and major denominational religious groups to legitimately offer heaven to its followers, someone within the ranks of the group would need to be acting on the behalf of God. This poses a serious problem. Does offering heaven for the exchanged of "works" represent God's terms for entering heaven?

People today know little about "heaven." Only through God's Word will people ever really get the truth about "heaven." In the Old Testament the word for "heaven" (Hebrew "shamayim") appears 420 times. In the New Testament the word for "heaven" (Greek "ouranos") appears approximately 254 times. There is a wealth of material that God has revealed to us about heaven.

God's Word answers our questions about "heaven" and if it is a place for you.

1. WHERE IS HEAVEN?

The actual meaning of "heaven" is, "that which is above." One of the few men who was able to get a glimpse of heaven was the Apostle Paul. He wrote of its location when he stated that he "...was caught up to the third heaven," (2 Cor. 12:2).

God's Word records that there are only three heavens: the first heaven is the atmospheric heaven which starts at two hundred miles and can be argued to extend anywhere from eight hundred to twenty thousand miles above the earth, the second heaven is the stellar or celestial heaven where all the stars and planets are located, and, the third heaven is the abode of God. (The Biblical Doctrine of Heaven, Wilbur Smith, Chicago: Moody, 1976, p. 29)

Wilbur Smith writes, "Even though we are told in the Scripture that the 'heaven of heavens cannot contain God' (1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chron. 2:6), and that God is everywhere present, on earth as well as in heaven (Deut. 4:39; Joshua 2:11), nevertheless, the same Scriptures clearly teach

that God does dwell particularly in heaven, a place often designated as His habitation." (The Biblical Doctrine of Heaven, Wilbur Smith, Chicago: Moody, 1976, p. 50)

The "heaven" we are talking about in our study is "God's abode," (Deut. 26:15; Psalm 2:4; 1 Kings 8:30; Hebrews 4:24). If God doesn't exist, and God's Word is not true, than one would conclude "heaven" would not exist either. This would explain why there are those in the past and still today who say there is no such thing as heaven. However, God's Word teaches that heaven does exist and that heaven is God's abode. Therefore, since heaven is God's abode, God will determine who goes there and how he will get there.

2. WHAT IS HEAVEN LIKE?

One of the few men who were given a glimpse of heaven and lived to tell about it was the Apostle John who reveals the most information on what heaven is truly like, (Rev. 4:1-5:14).

John stated that in the middle of heaven is a "throne," (Rev. 4:2). He that sat on the throne is God (i.e. the "Father") who appeared to John as the bright colored light of two stones, as the clear colored stone (i.e. jasper) and as the silver red colored stone (i.e. sardine)(Rev. 4:3; Isa. 61:1; Matt. 5:34; Psalm 103:19). Above the throne is a rainbow of emerald greens, (Rev. 4:3). From the midst of the throne came "flashes of lightening, rumblings, and claps of thunder," (Rev. 4:5). The floor around the throne was clear as crystal reflecting the brilliant colors of the heavenly scene, (Rev. 4:6).

The emphasis on clear, clean, and brilliant colors of light shows the purity of heaven and of God. This is why the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament states, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place...." (Isa. 57:15; 63:18).

This place called heaven is referred to as "kingdom" 26 times in the gospels. Within this kingdom called heaven there is a "city," (Heb. 11:10,16; 12:22; Rev. 21:2,10,14,15, 16,18,19,21,23). This city is lit with the presence of God, (Rev. 21:11,23). The walls of this city were built out of valuable gem stones, (Rev. 21:18-20). The streets of this city were made out of gold, (Rev. 21:21). Within this city is a large living place filled with individual "condominiums," (John 14:2-3). Also within this city is a "temple" which the Old Testament prophet Moses got a glimpse, (Heb. 8:5; Ex. 25:9,40; Rev. 21:2).

3. WHO IS IN HEAVEN NOW?

The Apostle John also saw the people of heaven. Around the throne were five groupings of beings: the first group, was the twenty-four older men seated on twenty-four individual seats, (Rev. 4:4); the second group, was the four creatures, (Rev. 4:6-8); the third group, was the seven spirits, (Rev. 4:5); the fourth group, was a large amount of angels (Rev. 5:11), and the fifth group, was a large amount of redeemed people who had previously died, (Rev. 5:9-10).

4. WHAT GOES ON IN HEAVEN?

The Apostle John also saw the activity within heaven. He revealed that the four creatures "rested not day or night saying holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty" giving glory and honor and thanks to Him that sat on the throne, (Rev. 4:8-9). The twenty-four older men "fall down before Him

that sat on the throne and worshipped him saying thou art worthy O Lord to receive glory and honor and power," (Rev. 4:10). It is obvious that the worship of God with singing and music takes place day and night. The focus of everyone in heaven is upon Him that sits on the throne and what He desires. It would be blasphemous to think the only reason to go to heaven was to have sex with a dozen or more women as the Al-Qaeda Muslim terrorists have taught. Or to think that heaven is a place where everything revolves around me.

6. WHO IS GOING TO HEAVEN?

There are three reasons why everyone is not going to heaven. First, because Jesus Christ Himself stated, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven," (Matt. 7:21). Second, because there is a place separate from the people of heaven which we call "hell" (i.e. "hades" and the "lake of fire") where the people go who are not written in the Lamb's book of life," (Rev. 20:12-15; Matt. 25:41; 2 Pt. 2:4-9). Third, because heaven is a holy place for holy people. Concerning heaven, Paige Patterson writes, "Anything that would defile, deceive, or be an abomination would introduce imperfection to that perfect realm. God is 'of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity,' (Hab. 1:13). (Heaven, W. A. Criswell and Paige Patterson, Wheaton: Tyndale, 1991, p. 121)

Who then is going to heaven? Those who are "registered" in heaven are going to heaven, (Heb. 12:23). To be registered in heaven, one must be recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life, (Rev. 20:12-15). Those who are recorded in the Lamb's Book are those who have had a life changing experience referred to in God's Word as being "born again," (1 Pt. 1:3-5; Jn. 3:3-8); being "saved," (Acts 2:21,47; 4:12). Their reward is a quality of life in heaven referred to as "eternal life," (Rom. 5:21; 6:23; 1 Tim. 6:19; Tit. 1:2; 3:7).

Only by accepting Jesus as personal Savior through faith can someone get to heaven. God's Word states, "For God so loved the world that he sent His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life," (John 3:16). "And this is the record: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life," (1 Jn. 5:11-12). No one can work their way to heaven through good works. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast, " (Eph. 2:8-9).

Conclusion: Political false prophets cannot give heaven away to people who accomplish their purposes (i.e. political furtherance of the state of Islam). Nor can religious false prophets give away heaven to their followers who practice good works for their religious cause (i.e. the denomination). Heaven is only given to an individual God's way. Are you going to heaven?