

WHAT AND WHERE IS HEAVEN?

No one who has a clear insight into God's revelations as contained in the Holy Bible will ever doubt the reality of the existence of heaven. The truth of God remains unaffected though unconverted, misinformed, and faithless men may doubt it.

Conflicting views have been expressed by people about heaven. Some people believe and teach that it is a place where all good men, women, and even children go after death to enjoy everlasting bliss.

Religious racketeers have used their trumped-up ideas of heaven to play on the ignorance of people, taking money from them with the promise and hope that whatever they spend for the church is being used in heaven to prepare a place for them. Sometimes fictitious stories of certain people carried in the arms of angels to heaven are told to the flock from the pulpit to make the sermons interesting as well as boost the economy of the church. For this same purpose, the parable of Jesus Christ about Lazarus and the rich man has been given a twist and interpreted literally as if poverty is the passport to heaven. But priests are making themselves rich on earth!

In a religious magazine, *THE PRAIRIE OVERCOMER*, issue of January 1953, published monthly by Prairie Bible Institute, Alberta, Canada, the story of a "woman who saw heaven" was reported. The woman, as reported, "died at three o'clock" and "her family, in accordance with Chinese custom, had immediately prepared her body for burial". At about sunset, a noise was heard in the death chamber, the report went on, and the woman was found awake sitting erect and having removed her grave clothes and put on those she had been wearing before her death. She was then quoted as saying:

"I remember seeing all the family around me crying. Then the Lord Jesus came into the room and took me by the hand and said, 'Come with Me.' In a short time, we were before a gate of pearl. It was the gate of Heaven. Angels opened it and we went in. I saw many beautiful houses all of pretty colours..."

The report says that "people flocked in from miles around to hear the wonderful story" and "they could not reject her testimony"

We must point out that this story of the woman cannot be reconciled with the teachings of Jesus Christ whom she said took her by the hand and, therefore, the story is most unacceptable. A demon in a pretended appearance of Jesus Christ and others in the guise of angels might have appeared to her, and from her account, it is clear that she was, according to the Scriptures, a victim of evil spirits – demons. – 2 Corinthians 11: 14, 15; 1 John 4: 1; Revelation 16: 13, 14.

Ignorance

It is certain teachings of some of the churches which have neither the backing of the Scriptures nor of sound reason, that have turned some people to be agnostics and atheists believing not in God or heaven or other sacred truths. But some atheists and agnostics – the reasonable and humble ones – have become Christians after discussions, which were devoid of prejudice, with Christian leaders who preach the truth. However, we know, too, that some do not believe Christian doctrines because of their arrogance and spiritual ignorance (John 9: 39-41); and some others being devils incarnate never appreciate or understand the truth of God but always oppose it. – Psalm 10: 4, 5; Daniel 12: 10; 1 Corinthians 2: 14; 2 Corinthians 4: 3, 4.

On the other hand, there are people who argue that heaven is not a place and that it cannot be located but that it is a state or condition. They hold the view that when a person is living well in comfort, and enjoying the good things of life, he is in heaven.

A certain Englishman in Lagos who claimed to be a Christian once had a discussion with one of

the ministers of the GKS about heaven. His idea of heaven was that it is a state of good living in this world, and argued that no one could point as to which direction heaven is. However, at the end of the discussion, which took place in his house at his request, he honestly confessed his ignorance of the Bible.

Under the heading of “heaven and hell”, the *Illustrated World Encyclopedia* has this to say: “Heaven is the name for the place where good persons are rewarded after they die...People may usually think of heaven as being ‘in the sky’ and hell ‘below the earth’, but in the Christian religion there is no exact place where heaven or hell is known or supposed to be.” (Vol. 11, page 2539) This view which many hold is grossly erroneous.

Theologians

Even now some who claim to be theologians are doubting the existence of heaven. In the Atlantic edition of the *TIME* magazine issue of May 19, 1967, it was reported that “many theologians are now attempting to redefine heaven and hell in this-worldly terms- not as places where humans survive after death, but as states of mind and modes of being that begin here on earth.” The magazine then quoted Notre Dame’s Jesuit Biblical Scholar, John Mc-Kenzie, as saying, “The traditional views of heaven and hell are about 95% mythology.”

Earlier in the issue of March 31, 1967, *TIME* had reported that heaven and hell were shrugged off as myths by Dominican Theologian Willem van der Marck. He was quoted as saying, “Heaven and hell just do not preoccupy us anymore.”

Here in Nigeria, there are also many people who do not believe that there is heaven. In the *DRUM* magazine, issue of December 1966 the views of some Nigerians about God were published. One of those interviewed was reported to have said: “I do not believe that it is God who sits in heaven watch what we do. Neither do I believe that there is a place like heaven...”

It is rather amusing to go through this cross-section of views of sceptical men most of which smack of crass spiritual ignorance or delusion.

We do know that God’s knowledge is infinite – that is, it has no end. But the human intellect has a limit, and so spiritual matters or things that are beyond that limit can never be comprehended by men – no matter how highly developed their reasoning faculty may be. This is the cause of the difficulties of people over spiritual matters. Said St. Paul: “...We speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth; but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” – 1 Corinthians 2:13, 14.

Moreover, unless a person has pleasure in the word of God and allows himself to be used by Him through His Spirit to be able to compare spiritual things with spiritual, he cannot understand His works. The Psalmist declared: “The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.” – Psalm 111: 2.

Men have developed a tendency to discard or disbelieve what they have not the capacity to understand. Concerning God and His works, it is such things as are revealed that we as human beings – imperfect mortals – can know. It was Moses the prophet who said: “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” – Deuteronomy 29: 29.

Unquestionable Truth

That heaven is a place is an unquestionable truth revealed in the Holy Bible. Where it is, is so clearly shown in the Bible that even a child with little training can point to its direction. It is not a

state of the mind or a condition of living. The Bible's account of the creation gives a vivid picture of what and where heaven is.

In Genesis chapter 1, verse 1, it is written: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," The earth was void, there was no form of life, and it was covered with waters. There was darkness all over the earth until light was created. After that, the firmament was also created. "And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven." – Genesis 1: 6-8.

The account further states how the sun, moon, and stars were created and placed in the expanse of heaven. "And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also, And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth." – Genesis 1: 16, 17.

In the face of the foregoing glaring biblical record, it will be unreasonable not to think of heaven as a place or to pretend not to know its location. We standing on this earth cannot point downwards when we talk of the firmament or where the sun, moon, and stars are: we must look or point skywards or upwards.

The word *heaven* is defined as high or lofty. Thus the cloudy region of the air where birds fly is spoken of as heaven. It is stated that God created "fowls that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven." (Genesis 1:20) And Elihu in the book of Job spoke of the birds as "the fowls of heaven." (Job 35: 11).

There is, above the firmament, a vast open space where other planets, the sun, moon, and stars. are. And yet above all that, there is the heaven where the Almighty God dwells. In the Psalms it is written: "The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men." "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne IS IN HEAVEN: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men." (Psalm 115: 16; 11: 4). Heaven is again clearly shown here to be a place; not a state or condition of one's living.

The prophet Isaiah wrote: "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool..." (Isaiah 66: 1; Acts 7: 47-50.) *And in the Lord's Prayer, we say: ' Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name' (Matthew: 6: 9) Jesus Christ teaches us by this that our gracious Spirit Father is in a place called heaven.*

Heaven of Heavens

The Bible shows that there are several heavens but the heaven where God dwells is the highest and is known as "the heaven of heavens". (Deuteronomy 10: 14; 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chronicles 2:6) Also, innumerable angels are there. These are spirit creatures who in intelligence, power, and in every other respect, are far superior to human beings. (Psalm 8: 3-5; 103: 20; Hebrew 12: 22,23) It was from heaven that Jesus Christ came to this earth, and he said: "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."

Indeed, that heaven is a place and is above is therefore beyond argument. Jesus Christ ascended to heaven in the presence of his apostles after he had spoken to them. The Bible states that while they looked at him. "he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly *toward heaven* as he went up, behold, two men (angels of God) stood by them in white apparel..." The angels told them that "*Jesus is taken up from you into heaven*" – Acts 1:9-11. And St. Paul confirmed that Jesus Christ "ascended far above all heavens" – that is, the highest heaven or heaven of heavens.- Ephesians 4: 10; Hebrews 4: 14; 8: 1, etc.

From all the references of the Bible already explained, it is erroneous to hold the view that heaven does not exist or that it cannot be located. But the question as to who will go to heaven is another subject that will be treated in due course. However, we must point out that the teaching

that all good persons go to heaven when they die is without foundation in the Scriptures. If all the good will go to heaven, why did the Psalmist and Jesus Christ say that “the meek shall inherit the earth”? So too the belief that Mary went to heaven with the human body is a figment of imagination.

If Christian teachers confine themselves to teaching what God says in the Bible, people will not be as ignorant of the Scriptures as they are today. They put aside the Bible and teach fables to misguide innocent people.

The view that there are seven heavens cannot be substantiated with the Scriptures. The Bible gives the idea of three heavens. St. Paul in his second epistle to the Corinthians wrote about the visions and revelations of the Lord, saying, “I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the THIRD HEAVEN.” – 2 Corinthians 12: 1,2.

It is very important that we believe that there is heaven where God Almighty dwells and from where we should expect protection and blessing, particularly in this atomic age. Where we do not, then we are no Christians and have no protection or hope of salvation. It was James the apostle who stated: “Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above (Heaven), and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” – James 1: 16, 17.

Yes, Heaven is a place and it is where God in His Kingdom dwells!