

Is this Heaven on Earth?

response by Tami Jelinek

It always amazes me, in contrast to the inconsistency of so many "preterists" who maintain that "heaven" is a "place we go when we die," clinging to their desire for a kingdom which can be sensually experienced, how quickly and easily my futurist friends articulate the logical conclusion of the fulfilled view, which is of course that we are in heaven *now*. A while back I had my first conversation about fulfilled eschatology with my close futurist friend. We weren't 10 minutes into our discussion before she asked, "so we are in heaven now?" It's refreshing really, to discuss these concepts with people who consistently apply them. And futurists, even though they may deny fulfillment, usually do not deny its ramifications, *if* it is true. Shortly after that first conversation, my friend emailed me the following question:

The one thought that keeps coming to me is, if we are living in heaven on earth (in God) then is this the best there is? I guess I've always held the notion that when we die here on earth, we will go to paradise. This is where there is no pain, suffering etc. and we are in His perfect presence. Help!

Great questions! I will start by saying that Scripture defines its own terms. So, it is important that we understand what those definitions are rather than imposing our own presuppositions onto Scripture. Here is an example of what I mean. This verse is from a chapter describing the New Jerusalem, the New Heaven and New Earth, "Heaven":

Isaiah 33:24 And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity.

There is no sickness in heaven, because everyone who lives there is forgiven. Here is another passage which describes those who dwell in heaven:

Isaiah 60:21 Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.

We know that Isaiah is speaking about people in the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city, because of this description in the preceding verses:

Isaiah 60:19 The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. 20 Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.

Compare the above to this:

Revelation 21:23 And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

So we see that it is in heaven that all people are righteous. Now, who is righteous? No one, right? Except in Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

To be in heaven = to be in Christ.

Does that make sense so far? "Health" in the kingdom of God is defined as "righteousness." To be forgiven, to be "holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight" (Colossians 1:22) is to never be sick again.

Now we have come to see these metaphors in Scripture, which are physical terms used to illustrate spiritual truths. These physical terms are speaking metaphorically of a *spiritual* kingdom. So we should ask ourselves the question: does Scripture ever speak of an end to *physical* sickness? And the answer is that it does not. And why would it? Jesus said "My kingdom is not of this world," and "the kingdom of God is within you." Nowhere in Scripture is a physical kingdom mentioned. There is only one Kingdom of God, only one Heaven, and it "is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Romans 14:17)

Now, let's look at some terms you brought up: pain and suffering. You are no doubt familiar with this passage:

Isaiah 53: 4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

What are the griefs that He bore, and the sorrows that He carried? It is interesting that in this same passage, we see reference to our transgressions, followed by our healing. One question I asked myself when looking at this familiar passage as if for the first time: If the griefs He bore and the sorrows He carried were related to physical pain and suffering, and I still experience those things, what am I saying about the work of Christ on the cross? Did He carry my pain, and then give it back to me? Or is this not talking about physical pain? What was God's redemptive plan concerned with? Physical healing or spiritual healing? Compare the above passage to:

Revelation 21:4 And 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.

It is apparent that the "sorrows" Christ carried in Isaiah 53 refer to the same "sorrow" that is "no more" in the New Jerusalem. "For the former things have passed away." What are the "former things"?

Hebrews 8:13 In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

The Old Covenant was ready to vanish away in the first century (but had not yet) after Jesus was crucified, risen and ascended to heaven, and before He returned "a

second time apart from sin for salvation.” (Hebrews 9:28) So during the time the apostles were writing, we see they were waiting for the Old Covenant to pass away (the former things) and the New Covenant (the New Heavens and the New Earth) to be fully established. The destruction of the temple in AD 70 was the outward sign that this had occurred, and the way into Heaven, the holiest of all, the presence of God, was opened. (Hebrews 9:8) Hebrews 9 makes it clear that no one could enter Heaven while the temple (representative of the Old Covenant system) was still standing. Then we come to John’s vision in Revelation, and the statement, “for the former things have passed away,” which is a vision of Hebrews 8:13 being fulfilled. The passing of the Old Covenant coincides with the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven in Revelation 21.

In summary, since the Old Covenant has passed, heaven, which is the presence of God, has come to earth; and having been made the righteousness of God in Christ, we are in His presence now.

in Christ,
Tami