

Heaven, Education, *and* Eternal Learning



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *John 3:16, 1 John 5:13, 1 Tim. 1:16, 1 Cor. 13:12, Zech. 13:6.*

Memory Text: “‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him’ ” (*1 Corinthians 2:9, NKJV*).

A poet, fearful of death, asked about how a person could live without “knowing for sure what dawn, what death, what doom, awaited consciousness beyond the tomb?” He created in his poem what he called the IPH, the Institute of Preparation for the Hereafter. Yet, how can one prepare for the hereafter if one doesn’t even know what happens to a person in it?

Fortunately, the Bible gives us great insight into the subject of heaven, the new earth, and the learning and living we will do throughout eternity. As we have seen all quarter, the IPH is here and now, in this life, and all our education—regardless of the field of study—should be preparing us for that “hereafter.”

After all, any school can pass on a lot of good information, a lot of good practical and helpful knowledge. But what good does it do if a person were to gain all that knowledge yet lose eternal life? This week we’re going to look at what inspiration tells about the ultimate graduate school, a school that goes on forever and where we will be learning and growing throughout all eternity. In this school of the hereafter, we’ll learn things that, in this present world, we can’t even begin to imagine.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 26.

The Fate of the Dead

In the 1600s, a French writer named Blaise Pascal was ruminating on the state of humanity. For him, one point was very clear: no matter how long a human being lived (and back then they didn't live all that long), and no matter how good that person's life was (and life wasn't all that great back then either), sooner or later that person was going to die.

Moreover, whatever came after death was going to be longer, infinitely longer, than the short span of life here that preceded death. Thus, for Pascal, the most logical thing a person could or should find out is what fate awaits the dead, and he was astonished to see people get all worked up over things such as "loss of office, or for some imaginary insult to his honor," yet they paid no heed to the question of what happened after they were to die.

Pascal had a point. And that's no doubt why the Bible spends a great deal of time talking about the promise awaiting those who have found salvation in Jesus, the promise of what will await them in the future.

Read the following texts. What hope is offered us? *John 6:54, John 3:16, 1 John 5:13, 1 Tim. 1:16, John 4:14, John 6:40, Jude 1:21, Titus 3:7.*

Eternal life makes so much sense in light of the cross; in light of the cross, nothing else makes sense *but* eternal life. That the Creator of the universe, the One who "made the worlds" (*Heb. 1:2*), the One in whom "we live, and move, and have our being" (*Acts 17:28*), that He, God, should incarnate in human flesh and in that flesh die . . . for what? That we ultimately rot, like roadkill?

That's why the New Testament comes laced with promises of eternal life, for only the eternal guarantees restitution. A million years, even a billion years, might not possess enough good moments to make up for the bad. Eternity alone can balance all things out, and then some, because the infinite is more than the finite, and always infinitely so.

Pascal was right: our time here is so limited in contrast to what is coming. How silly not to be ready for the eternity that awaits us.

What do you say to someone who shows complete indifference to what happens after death? How can you help that person see just how illogical such a position really is?

A New Existence

“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” (Rev. 21:4). What does this tell us about just how different from this world our new existence will be, an existence in which death, sorrow, and pain are gone?

A Christian was talking to a friend about the hope of the gospel, the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. The person responded negatively to the whole idea. “Eternal life?” he said with a shudder. “What a horrible thought! Our seventy to eighty years here are bad enough. Who’d want to stretch this out forever? That would be hell.”

This person would have a point, except that he didn’t understand that the promise of eternal life isn’t a mere continuation of this life here. Please—who would want that? Instead, as the text above says, the old things are passed away, and all things have become new.

What do the following texts tell us about the new existence that is coming?

2 Pet. 3:10–13 _____

Rev. 21:1–6 _____

The important question for us in all this is: What does it take to be part of this new existence? How do we get there? How can we be sure we are going to be part of it? What things in our life, if any, could stand in the way of our being part of what God has promised us through Jesus?

Then Shall We Know

“Heaven is a school; its field of study, the universe; its teacher, the Infinite One. A branch of this school was established in Eden; and, the plan of redemption accomplished, education will again be taken up in the Eden school.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 301.

If you are like most people, you have a lot of questions—questions about sin, suffering, sickness, death, about why this happened, why that happened, why the other things happened.

We have questions about the natural world, too, and all its mysteries. For all the incredible progress science has made in helping us understand more about the world and the universe as a whole, so much is still beyond our grasp.

From the simplest life-forms to the sky over our heads, from the motion of subatomic particles to the whirling galaxies that are scattered across the cosmos, we are confronted with a reality that is so much bigger and deeper than our minds can now grasp, especially with the little bit of time we have here and now to study these things for ourselves.

On the other hand, when you have an eternity to study, then no doubt a lot of mysteries will be resolved for us.

What do the following texts tell us about what we will learn once this whole sorry episode of sin and suffering and death finally ends?

1 Cor. 13:12 _____

1 Cor. 4:5 _____

We are promised that we will be given an understanding of things that, for now, remain hidden to us. What a wonderful hope, too, that once we do see and understand things that now seem so difficult, we will have nothing but praise for God! The key for us now is to hold on to our faith, trust in God’s promises, live up to the light that we have, and endure unto the end. And the good news is that we “can do all things through Christ who strengthens” us (*Phil. 4:13, NKJV*).

What heavy questions weigh on your heart? What things now seem so incomprehensible? How can learning to trust God on the things that you do understand help you with the things that, for now, you don’t?

The School in the Hereafter

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:17–19).

What hope do these texts offer us? What might some of these unseen eternal things be that we are waiting for, that we are promised through Jesus? See also Rev. 21:1, 2; Rev. 2:7; Rev. 7:14–17.

However real the promises offered us in Jesus, however many good reasons we have to believe in them, the fact remains that the Bible gives us just hints, glimpses, of what awaits us. One thing that we can be sure of, however, is that it's going to be great, because just think how great life would be in an existence without the ravages of sin!

All our pain, all our suffering, all the things that we struggle with here come from sin and the consequences of sin. Christ came to undo all that, and He will restore the earth to what God originally had intended it to be before sin entered. In fact, it will be better, because amid all these glories we will forever be able to behold the scars on Jesus' hands and feet, the cost of our redemption.

“There, when the veil that darkens our vision shall be removed, and our eyes shall behold that world of beauty of which we now catch glimpses through the microscope; when we look on the glories of the heavens, now scanned afar through the telescope; when, the blight of sin removed, the whole earth shall appear in ‘the beauty of the Lord our God,’ what a field will be open to our study! There the student of science may read the records of creation and discern no reminders of the law of evil. He may listen to the music of nature's voices and detect no note of wailing or undertone of sorrow. In all created things he may trace one handwriting—in the vast universe behold ‘God's name writ large,’ and not in earth or sea or sky one sign of ill remaining.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 303.

Try to picture what it will be like living forever in an entirely new world, one without all that makes life here so hard. What do you envision it to be like? What things are you particularly looking forward to?

The Great Teacher

As we have seen this whole quarter, one central aspect of Christ's ministry here on earth was that of a teacher. From the beginning of His ministry, whether through acts or deeds, Jesus was constantly teaching His followers truths about Himself, about the Father, about salvation, and about the hope that awaits us (*see Matt. 5:2, Mark 4:2, Luke 19:47, John 6:59*).

Indeed, all you have to do is skim through a Gospel, any Gospel, and all through it you will find Jesus teaching. And though, even now, through His Word, the Lord continues to teach us, in the new world this teaching will continue, as well. But imagine how different it will be in an existence unencumbered by sin and all the limitations it places on us.

“And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends” (*Zech. 13:6*).

What do you think this text is talking about?

“The years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character. As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise. . . .

“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

Of all the incredible truths that we will learn about through eternity, nothing will captivate us more than the sacrifice of Christ in our behalf. Think how deep and rich it must be that we will be studying it throughout eternity. Even now, how can you learn to better appreciate what Jesus has done for us through the Cross?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The School of the Hereafter,” pp. 301–309, in *Education*; “The Controversy Ended,” pp. 662–678, in *The Great Controversy*.

“The lion, we should much dread and fear here, will then lie down with the lamb, and everything in the New Earth will be peace and harmony. The trees of the New Earth will be straight and lofty, without deformity. . . .

“Let all that is beautiful in our earthly home remind us of the crystal river and green fields, the waving trees and the living fountains, the shining city and the white-robed singers, of our heavenly home—that world of beauty which no artist can picture and no mortal tongue describe. Let your imagination picture the home of the saved, and remember that it will be more glorious than your brightest imagination can portray.”—Ellen G. White, *Heaven*, pp. 133, 134.

“A fear of making the future inheritance seem too material has led many to spiritualize away the very truths which lead us to look upon it as our home. Christ assured His disciples that He went to prepare mansions for them in the Father’s house. Those who accept the teachings of God’s word will not be wholly ignorant concerning the heavenly abode. . . . Human language is inadequate to describe the reward of the righteous. It will be known only to those who behold it. No finite mind can comprehend the glory of the Paradise of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 674, 675.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on the point that Pascal made, about people who seem so unconcerned about what eternity will bring. Why do you think people are like that? Why is this such an irrational attitude to have?
- 2 Dwell more on why the hope of eternal life is so important to our faith. Without that, why do we really have nothing?
- 3 Think about all the incredible mysteries that exist in the natural world. Be it biology, geology, astronomy, physics, chemistry—in all fields everything turns out to be so much more complex than people originally thought. Scientists, for example, no longer talk about “simple life-forms” because, as it turns out, even the simplest life-forms are not so simple, after all. Each new breakthrough, each new discovery, seems only to open up more questions for us that need answering. How does all this help us understand how much we will be learning in the “school of the hereafter”?

No Quiet Work on Sabbath

By GARY ROGERS

My construction crew had everything ready for the roofing to go onto Essential Life Center, an urban center of influence that we were building in Cambodia's second-largest city, Battambang. So, I called a company in the capital, Phnom Penh, to supply workers to install the roof. Before finalizing the contract, I explained that we represented a Christian church and didn't work on Saturday. I was assured that the roof would be finished before then.

But after the workers arrived, I quickly saw that they would not finish before Sabbath. I emailed a reminder about the terms of our contract to the head office. My phone rang as I spoke with one of my own workers, Koy Sopaon, at the construction site on Wednesday. "I'm calling about your email," a company executive said. "We need Saturday to finish. If the guys can't work on Saturday, we'll have to pay them extra to wait until Monday."

"We spoke about this earlier," I replied. "We cannot work on Saturday."

The executive changed his approach. "We'll be quiet," he promised. "We won't make any noise. We don't need to use hammers or other noisy tools on Saturday. No one will even know that we are on the roof."

"If you have a few minutes, let me explain why we don't work," I said.

The executive agreed to listen.

"The Christian Bible tells us that God created this earth in six days," I said. "On the seventh day, He did three things: He stopped His work, He rested, and He made the day holy. He did that to remind us that He is our Creator. He has asked us not to do any work—us or anyone who is working for us—on every seventh day, which is Saturday. This way, we can remember and worship Him."

"Ohhh, I understand," the executive said. "We'll rest on Saturday."

Sopaon, my worker, listened curiously to the phone call. Afterward, he looked at me and asked, "Why does my church worship on Sunday?"

Inviting Sopaon to sit down, I gave him a history lesson on the change of the Sabbath. Later, at lunch break, I saw Sopaon studying his Bible. He expressed amazement that the Bible teaches that the seventh-day is Sabbath.

On Friday, I told Sopaon, "You've seen new truth about God's day in His Word. Wouldn't you like to follow Him in His truth and keep Sabbath holy?"

"Yes, I would!" Sopaon exclaimed.

Sopaon attended worship services in the half-built center of influence that Sabbath. Nobody worked on the roof overhead. Today he is a deacon and Sabbath School class teacher at the completed church.



GARY ROGERS, 63, has worked in Cambodia as a Global Mission builder since 1996. Essential Life Center opened with help from a 2018 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.

Part I: Overview

Most are unaware of a strange apathy they live with. There are at least a dozen goals we have on a given day, from doing chores to meeting deadlines. We are kept busy identifying these short-term ends and then pursuing the means to accomplish them. But when it comes to identifying the goal of life and the means to accomplish that, we freeze like the proverbial deer in the headlights. How is it that humans can be so concerned about the fate of their favorite sports team but indifferent or apathetic to their own eternal fate or that of their families? Jesus, desperate to break through this apathy, says, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (*Mark 8:36*).

Those who choose not to sacrifice the fate of their souls for temporary gains will not be disappointed. Our new existence will be filled with God’s presence (*Rev. 21:3*), and every physical/spiritual need will be met (*Rev. 7:16, 17*). Because Jesus invested the time to teach us about God and His ways while He walked the earth, we can infer that this education will continue throughout eternity. There will be no disappointments, no boredom, and no apathy. We will not be disembodied spirits floating around as vapors, striking the occasional harp. Far from it. “The years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. . . . The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

Part II: Commentary

Scripture

The glories that await those redeemed from the earth cannot be exaggerated. First, there is the absence of pain in all its forms: no crying, no sorrow, no death (*Rev. 21:4*). There will be no future source of sorrow, because He who sits on the throne says, “Behold, I make all things new” (*Rev. 21:5*). Sin is the root of suffering, and every part of it is kept out of the precinct of the redeemed (*Rev. 21:8*). Second, all our past sufferings are consoled, since God Himself will have “wipe[d] away all tears from [our] eyes” (*Rev. 21:4*). We will be “kings and priests unto God” (*Rev. 1:6*) with the undeserved and staggering privilege of sitting with Him on His throne (*Rev. 3:21*). One can only imagine the heights of worship and praise that will flow uncontrollably from hearts overflowing with gratitude for what God and the Lamb have done for us. Can you see us joining the

24 elders and casting our crowns before His feet (*Rev. 4:10*)? How can words adequately describe such a scene?

The Perpetual Novelty of God

As good as this sounds, though, what will keep us occupied for all that time? As finite humans, we wrestle with the concept of eternity. Our current experience shows that even things once pleasurable seem to lose their edge over time.

The reason the new earth/heaven will never grow dull is because even though “every pleasure has a shelf life, God . . . is the perpetual novelty.” There is no doubt that our hearts will continue, throughout eternity, to be filled with wonder as we behold Him, listen to Him, and learn from Him. Think of how the Holy Scriptures have held the attention of Jews and Christians for thousands of years. Now realize that *every day* with God will give us a new Bible—one full of information we never had before as we watch how God engages afresh with His creation and speaks wisdom to a thousand different situations. We will be in awe. But there is no reason to wait to be in awe of God till heaven. Abraham Heschel shares, “Never once in my life did I ask God for success or wisdom or power or fame. I asked for wonder, and [H]e gave it to me.”

So, how do we know heaven will be beyond our wildest dreams? Because we were hardwired for a purpose—to know and enjoy God forever. So, unless one thinks God is a poor engineer, we need never worry about boredom, apathy, or monotony in our eternal home. As C. S. Lewis mused, “God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn.”

Scripture

We can assume that a sense of wonder motivates learning. Again, from observing children, how often is a moment of awe followed by intense inquiry? “Wow! Look at that! How does that happen?” or “Why does this do *that*?” Another feature that motivates learning is mystery. Paul considered himself a steward “of the mysteries of God” (*see 1 Cor. 4:1*). Who wouldn’t want to hear and learn what God had to say?

Paul continues with the idea that when the Lord comes things are going to become clearer: “Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart” (*1 Cor. 4:5, ESV*). In context, he offers this idea as a defense

of his ministry. Even though Paul uses this idea in a rather narrow context, the text can obviously be applied to a whole range of things that we don't fully understand presently. Things from the created world alone are sources of inestimable inquiry that are sure to keep us learning and discovering with delight for eternity. And as already noted, the inexhaustible plans, purposes, and character of God will provide infinite learning opportunities.

Another text that is often used to highlight the unimaginable glories of heaven is, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (*1 Cor. 2:9*).

This text has thrilled many with the anticipation of how amazing heaven will be. However, the specific context of this verse does *not* support the idea (1) that no one has seen what is being talked about and (2) that heaven is primarily what is referred to as that which God has prepared. First, the very next phrase after the text in question is "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." So, that which hadn't been "seen" or "heard" has now been revealed to Paul and company through the Spirit. Is this speaking of Paul's receiving a preview of heaven? Not likely. The verses before our text are speaking of the "wisdom of God" hidden in a "mystery." This mystery is tied to the opening thought of the chapter, which speaks of "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." A quick phrase search for "wisdom of God" and "mystery" in Paul's epistles makes it apparent what Paul is speaking about when he says "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard." He is speaking of the gospel of a crucified Christ and its magnificent results (*Eph. 1:9, 10; Eph. 3:3–6; Col. 1:26, 27; Col. 4:3; Eph. 3:10, 11*). The more contextualized understanding of this famous text doesn't take away from the glories of heaven. It adds to the glory of knowing God and His purposes as seen in Jesus the Christ and says we can experience these glories *now* through the Spirit. This is our "heaven"-on-earth experience.

Part III: Life Application

If there were only one fate, that fate would be inevitable no matter what we did. But the Bible is clear that two fates exist (*John 5:29*). We choose; and the choice could not be easier. Consciously applying this choice is a great way to start each day. Instead of reaching for our phones, checking our social media sites, or watching the news first thing in the morning, why not say out loud, before your feet hit the floor, everything you choose

as a follower of Christ—something like this:

1. Today, I choose to walk with God.
2. I choose to be a disciple of Christ and learn all I can from Him.
3. I choose to see and treat others the way Jesus did.
4. I choose the satisfying joy of holiness over the fleeting pleasures of sin.
5. I choose eternal life over eternal death.
6. I choose to let Jesus make me a new creation in Him.

In your Sabbath School class, ask your students to come up with more “I choose” statements to start their day.

Virtually everything we know, we learned. This idea makes education foundational to life. From the knowledge it takes to tie our shoelaces to the saving knowledge of the gospel, education covers it all. Part of what makes heaven “heaven” is that learning continues forever. If we had God figured out in the first 100 years, either He wouldn’t be God or we would be, both of which are false. Thank God, He is both the Giver and the object of a final precious gift to His creation—the gift of eternal learning.

Notes

The prophet Isaiah's words are laden with meaning, words such as "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (*Isa. 53:5, NKJV*). Such words create powerful images. This explains why Isaiah's words still speak to us today. In his suffering-servant poem (*Isa. 52:13–53:12*), Isaiah brings the Messiah into finer focus more than anywhere else in the Old Testament. Seeking to preserve his nation's identity by taking a remnant from denial and anchoring them to reality, Isaiah called upon his people to behold their God, the One who knew them by name and promised to redeem them from fire—but only if they would listen and obey.

Isaiah's words strengthened King Hezekiah to look for the miracle that was Jerusalem's only hope (*Isaiah 36, 37*). If Jerusalem had fallen then, rather than to the Babylonians a century later, the Assyrian policy of scattering conquered peoples could have vaporized Judah's national identity. Thus, there would have been no Jewish people from whom the Messiah, the world's Savior, would arise. This quarter we look at Isaiah, his words, his times, his predicaments—but mostly at his God, the God who, both then and now, cries out to us, "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine" (*Isa. 43:1*).

Lesson 1—Crisis of Identity

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Hear, O Heavens!** (*Isa. 1:1–9*)

MONDAY: **Rotten Ritualism** (*Isa. 1:10–17*)

TUESDAY: **The Argument of Forgiveness** (*Isa. 1:18*)

WEDNESDAY: **To Eat or Be Eaten** (*Isa. 1:19–31*)

THURSDAY: **Ominous Love Song** (*Isa. 5:1–7*)

Memory Text—*Isaiah 1:18, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: The Judaeans forgot they belonged to God and lost their true identity as the covenant people. God does an amazing work to restore His people to Himself.

Lesson 2—Crisis of Leadership

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The King Is Dead. Long Live the King!** (*Isa. 6:1*)

MONDAY: **"Holy, Holy, Holy"** (*Isa. 6:1–4*)

TUESDAY: **New Personality** (*Isa. 6:5–7*)

WEDNESDAY: **Royal Commission** (*Isa. 6:8*)

THURSDAY: **Appalling Appeal** (*Isa. 6:9–13*)

Memory Text—*Isaiah 6:1, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: People want trustworthy leadership. This lesson looks at Judah's leadership crisis and the sad results that followed.

Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free in braille, on audio CD, and via online download to people who are legally blind or physically disabled. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; email: services@christianrecord.org; website: www.christianrecord.org.