

“In My Father’s House Are Many Mansions”

“In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” (Jno. 14:2)

The above passage is one of those scriptures that are “traditionally” hard to understand. The Apostate Churches claim that this verse teaches heaven-going, how that a “place” is prepared for believers in heaven. Christadelphians on the other hand have long rejected such a notion. The fable of the Immortal Soul, and heaven-going are inconsistent with clear Bible teaching, and so must be rejected by the sincere student of the Word. But in Christadelphian circles, whilst we all know what is *not* being taught in this passage, there doesn’t appear to be clarity as to what *is* being taught here.

To begin with, we ought to observe that this verse does not teach heaven-going. The word “heaven” is not used, but what is mentioned instead is Messiah’s Father’s House. There is no place in the Bible where Yahweh’s “House” is defined as being in heaven – to make the claim is to engage in human reasoning and speculation outside of the confines of The Word. But what is Yahweh’s “House”? The phrase, “My Father’s House” is only used in one other place in Scripture, in John chapter 2:

“... when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple ... and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not *my Father’s House* an house of merchandise” (Jno. 2 15,16).

Here, Messiah’s “Father’s House” is defined as being the Temple in Jerusalem. The prophet Jeremiah spoke of this: “Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?” (Jer.7: 11). And the Master, on a later occasion purged the house again, citing this passage: “Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the Temple ... and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Mat. 21:12,13). What is particularly significant about this quote, is that as well as citing Jeremiah, the Master also cites Isaiah, chapter 56, which is plainly a prophecy to do with the coming Kingdom:

“the sons of the stranger ... even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon my altar; for mine *house shall be called a house of prayer for all people*”. (Isa. 56:6,7).

Putting these testimonies together then, we find that the Father’s House was the Temple at Jerusalem, which the Jews had defiled in Messiah’s day – but yet it will be set up again in the coming days of Messiah’s rule, to be a “house of prayer” for “all people”. Quite plainly therefore, it is nothing to do with ascending to heaven, but rather is part of Israel Restored (Acts 1:6), as a global centre of worship and prayer for all (cp Isa. 2:3).

Returning to John 14, the Master told his disciples: “I go to *prepare a place* for you: I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also”. (Jno. 14:3).

The language being used here, brings us back to the work of the Name-Bearing Angel, who led Israel into the Land, bringing them into the “place prepared”. So we read in Exodus chapter 23:

“Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into ***the place which I have prepared***” (Exo. 23:20).

Just as the Angel prepared a place for the Israelites, even so Messiah shall bring us to the many Mansions (Greek: dwelling places), of Yahweh’s house - another place prepared.

This aspect introduces us to another theme in Scripture: the way in which the Name-Bearing Angel foreshadows the work of Messiah. Exodus 23 tells us more of this Angel:

“Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not for he will not pardon your transgressions: ***for my name is in him***” (Exo. 23:21).

This same angel is referred to in Zechariah chapter, which describes “the angel of the Yahweh”, who speaks in the Name of Yahweh, saying, “***Yahweh rebuke thee***, O Satan, even Yahweh that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee ...” (Zech. 3:2). Following this through to the New Testament, Jude cites this incident, and names the Angel who here speaks in Yahweh’s Name:

“Yet ***Michael the archangel***, when contending with the *diabolos*, he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, “***The Lord rebuke thee***” (Jude 9).

Of all the angelic ministers of the Almighty, there is one, Michael, who is said to uniquely bear the Father’s Name, and speak in His Name. The name “Michael” literally means “*who is like El*”, El being one of the titles of Yahweh. In both name and action therefore, Michael foreshadows one to come, who would also bear the Father’s Name, and who would be “like El” – i.e. the “express image of his person” (Heb. 1:3). In fact, interestingly enough, this is one of the aspects referred to in our reading of John chapter 14:

“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father ...Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak to unto you, I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works” (Jno. 14:10).

Just as back in Exodus chapter 23, Michael did not speak in his own name, but rather that of Yahweh’s (Exo. 23:22), even so Messiah spoke in the name of Yahweh. Later, in prayer to his Father, he spoke of this aspect: “I have manifested thy Name unto the men whom thou gavest me out of the world” (Jno. 17:6).

Exodus chapter 23 defines part of the function of the Angel:

“Behold, I send an Angel before thee, ***to keep thee in the way*** and to bring thee into the place ...” (Exo. 23:20).

The Hebrew word for “keep” here, carries the sense of “to guard”, or protect. The Angel would guard over the people, so long as they remained “in the way”. Interestingly enough, in John chapter 14, Messiah proclaims himself to be “the Way”: “I am *the Way*, the Truth, and the Life ...” (Jno. 14:6). He is the Way which we must follow if we would inherit the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world. But we are not alone in our journey, for just as in Israel’s case, so in ours, angels have been appointed to watch over us, and guard us in the way. Consider the following testimonies:

“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb. 1:14).

“in heaven their Angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 18:10).

“the Angel of Yahweh encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Psa. 34:7).

“the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads” (Gen. 48:16).

It is testified that the Christ is greater than all the Angels: “being made so much better than the Angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they” (Heb. 1:4). The Angels watch over us, and in turn, they operate under the supervision of Christ. Messiah then, is The Way to eternal life, and the Angels his messengers sent to minister to his brethren.

This aspect of being in “the Way” is itself a vitally important concept to grasp. The early believers were said to be “in the Way” with Paul confessing before Felix: “after *The Way* which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my father’s believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets” (Acts 24:14). This Way, according to Christ is narrow, and not even seen by the majority of mankind:

“Enter ye in at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat: because *narrow is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*” (Mat. 7:13-14).

Being “narrow”, “the Way” is too restrictive for the majority of mankind, who instead give themselves over to the fulfilment of their inherent lusts and desires. Seeking “freedom” and “liberty”, the natural man spurns the Way of Yahweh, for access to it is based upon particular principles of Righteousness, which the majority of men cannot receive. Those who constitute “the righteous” in the eyes of Yahweh, however, are different. They follow the proverb that teaches: “Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left; remove thy foot from evil” (Prov. 4:26-27). They delight in the Way of Yahweh, seeking the things which pertain to the Wisdom that is from above, feeding upon the bread of life.

Israel of old were exhorted by the prophets to amend their behaviour, and walk in The Way:

“Thus saith Yahweh, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.” (Jer. 6:16).

In the world in which we sojourn, the main emphasis in all walks of life is to “progress”, to keep moving forward, seeking for new ways of liberty and lasciviousness in which men may indulge themselves. The Wise however “ask for the old paths”. The ways that seem “old fashioned” to men and women in this “modern” age, are actually not “old fashioned” at all. They are the ways of the saints of old, it is true, but they contain the principles of righteousness that shall form the basis of life in a future age. What men disregard as being “old fashioned” are actually elements which pertain to a coming new age – as we might say, “ahead of our times”.

Returning to John Chapter 14 then, and the “many mansions” contained within the Father’s House, we find that the House itself is a literal structure to be erected in Jerusalem, which will be a house of prayer to all peoples. In the house, there will be “dwelling places” for the apostles and saints who shall minister there to dwell in. Not that every individual saint will have a dwelling place there: the numerics seem to be impossible, given that the saints will comprise “a great multitude which no man could number” (Rev. 7:9). The promise was specific to the apostles to whom Messiah spoke.

However, it will not be the Apostles alone who dwell there, others who are needed to minister in the Temple will also be granted a place in it. Isaiah speaks of certain Eunuchs: “Even unto them will I *give in mine house and within my walls a place*, and a Name better than of sons and daughters...” (Isa. 56:5).

Again, king David of old spoke his desire, in the well-known Psalm, 23:

“... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: *and I will dwell in the house of Yahweh for ever*” (Psa. 23:6).

Again, in Psalm 27:

“One thing have I desired of Yahweh, that will I seek after; *that I may dwell in the house of Yahweh all the days of my life*, to behold the beauty of Yahweh and to enquire in His Temple” (Psa. 27:4).

There is also another element to the house of God: 1 Timothy 3:15 defines the spiritual house of God as the ecclesia. And Peter refers to this house as being made up of living stones. We need therefore to be part of the household of Christ now, to be inheritors of the future house of prayer, erected to the Glory of God Himself.

Here then, is the true import of Messiah’s saying that there are many abiding places in his Father’s House: Let us therefore shun the errors of the Apostasy regarding heaven going, and embrace the Truth as it is in Christ Jesus, trusting in a future inheritance to be granted upon earth, in the house of prayer established for all nations to worship at.

Christopher Maddocks