

Looking into HEAVEN:

Who,
What,
Where
and
When?



Joe's employee this song title provided the bridge between a discussion about music and theology. Here's the recurring chorus:

*If you believe in forever
Then life is just a one night stand
If there's a rock n' roll heaven
Well you know they've got a hell
of a band.*

If you feel that rock and roll is "the devil's music" and therefore object to the suggestion that there's a place in heaven for rock and roll, you really need to keep reading.

Speaking of "the devil's music," the 1989 movie, "Great Balls of Fire," has Jimmy Swagart, who later became a televangelist (played by Alec Baldwin), advising his cousin, Jerry Lee Lewis (portrayed by Dennis Quaid), that rock and roll is "the devil's music." But I digress.

Rock and Roll...and Baseball Too?

Of course, whether or not rock and roll music is or will be featured in the kingdom of heaven is not the only question debated about the afterlife. You may have heard the story about Bob and Luke—two guys who loved baseball and were worried that God might not think their favorite sport was important

enough to be played in heaven. These two die-hard fans couldn't imagine eternal bliss without baseball games. They agreed that the first one who died would let the other one know whether celestial baseball existed.

A few years later Luke died, and

**We all want to know whether heaven really exists.
We want to know more about heaven. What is heaven
like, exactly? The expectation of a heavenly afterlife
is a universal belief found in virtually all religions.**

within a few days Bob received an email from baseballuke@heaven.org: "Bob, I have good news and bad news. The good news is that there are thousands of baseball stadiums up here jam-packed with fans. The bad

It was just another typical day at Trader Joe's, a specialty grocery store particularly well known in Southern California (though the current owners are a German family named Albrecht, no one has ever offered me the family discount). The background music inspired me to share my appreciation for "oldies-but-goodies" with one of the "older" employees. Before long we were singing the praises of the Righteous Brothers. Within a few seconds one of their songs brought heaven into our discussion!

Back in 1962 Bill Medley and Bobby Hatfield (who died in 2003) were part of a group called The Para-

mours (John Wimber, one of the founders of the Christian Vineyard movement, was one of the keyboardists in the group).

As they ended one performance, someone in the audience shouted, "That was righteous, brothers!"

Not long after, Bill Hadley and Bobby Hatfield went on to form their own duo and called themselves the Righteous Brothers.

In 1974 the Righteous Brothers recorded a tribute to deceased rock singers Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Bobby Darin, Jim Croce, Jim Morrison and Otis Redding titled "Rock and Roll Heaven." In my conversation about the "good old days" with the Trader



news is that next weekend you are the starting pitcher for the Cloud #9 Yankees. See you real soon, your friend forever, Luke."

We all want to know whether heaven really exists. We want to know more about heaven. What is heaven like, exactly? The expectation of a heavenly afterlife is a universal belief found in virtually all religions. Humanly we long for a "better place" after death. In *Mere Christianity* C.S. Lewis speculated that since humans have desires that no earthly experience can satisfy it is probable that we were made for another world.

It's possible that being created in God's image (Genesis 1:27) means that we yearn for the paradise of the Garden originally given by God, but rejected by Adam and Eve. We naturally hunger for the kingdom of heaven and the Bible promises a heavenly paradise God alone can impart and confer. Beyond rock and roll and baseball, we should focus on some fundamental details of heaven—*where* and *when* is heaven?

Heaven—The Devil Just Might Be in the Details

Is heaven a *place* to which we go *when* we die? The promise of heaven has traditionally been explained as a two-step process:

- Given wide-spread Christian acceptance of the Platonic assertion of the immortality of the soul, death is normally thought of as the time when the immortal soul is released from the mortal body—therefore heaven is felt to be a time

when the soul "goes to heaven." Theologians call this first stage the *intermediate state*. But if we base our beliefs on New Testament evidence and teaching, it's difficult to dogmatically believe in a heavenly *place or location* where disembodied immortal souls fly around waiting for angelic air traffic controllers to give them permission to land.

- However, the New Testament is clear about the widely accepted second step of heaven. At the Second Coming of Jesus, those in Christ are resurrected, and their now resurrected, formerly mortal bodies become immortal. In some biblically unspecified way, the soul/spirit of Christ followers is reunited with their now glorified, immortal body.

What more can we know about heaven? Will our pets join us? Will we still have disabilities we have now? What age will we be *in* heaven? Will we look the same as we do now—if not, how will we identify each other? Will lots of people be in heaven or only those in our denomination?

According to one story making its rounds, one day Saint Peter met a new group of arrivals at the Pearly Gates and immediately put them on a bus to tour the celestial premises. Just as they prepared to pass a gated community Peter told everyone to be really quiet, because the people inside that compound thought they were the only ones in heaven!

When some of my friends want to know if they can enjoy lobster and steak dinners in heaven I assure them that I have it on good authority (my own) that Italian is the only cuisine served in heaven's buffet. One of the most burning questions I hear is—will we all be forced to take harp lessons?

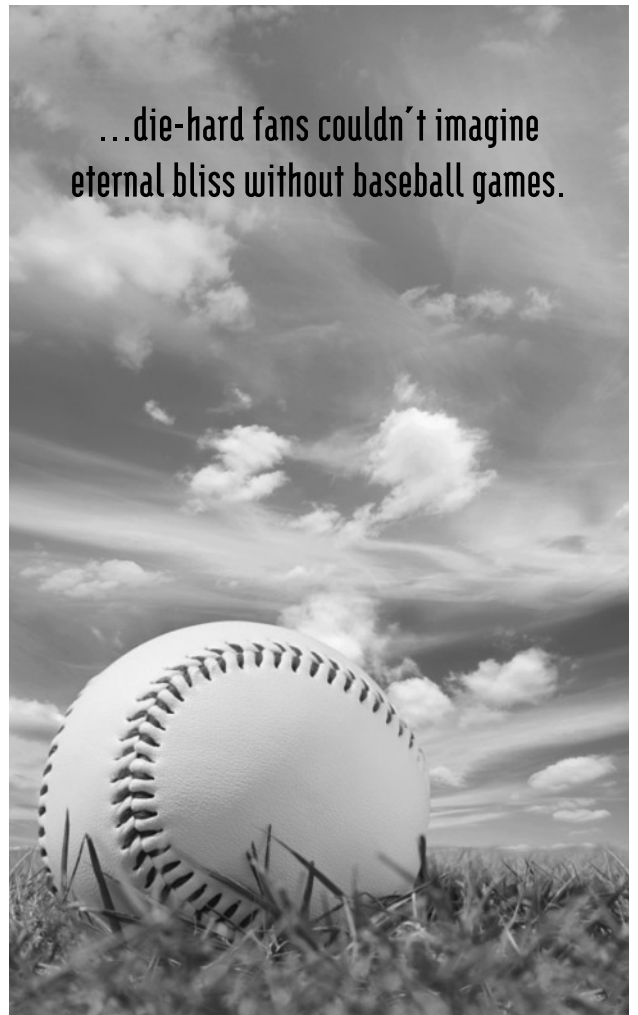
Of course, many stereotypical notions of heaven are blatantly unbiblical.

One of the first perspectives we must confront as we wrestle with eternity is our human sense of space and time—is the biblical heaven a *place* and a *time*?

Just as hell has come to be accepted, over many centuries, as the place or time (or both) *where/when* God sentences/confines those who fail to pass muster to eternal torture, popular views of heaven are equally preposterous. The prevailing idea of heaven as a place/time of blissfully enjoying an eternal pass into a divine, glorified Disney World has no New Testament foundation. Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr once said, "The Bible tells us very little about the temperature of hell, or the furniture of heaven."

The last chapters of Revelation (Revelation 21 and 22) reveal God, at the end of human time, as transforming the heaven and earth we know into a new heaven and a new earth. The eternal Garden, paradise restored, is not described in Revelation as a trip *up* to heaven. According to the book of Revelation heaven comes *down* to

...die-hard fans couldn't imagine eternal bliss without baseball games.





chances are one of the first thoughts he or she calls to mind will be Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom. Many pre-school and early elementary age children also interpret "kingdom" with a Disney-spin—the word causes them to think of countless Disney fantasy stories they have heard and/or seen, involving

earth. Just as we can rightly reject hell as eternal torture because of its obvious incompatibility with the very nature of a loving God, so too must we examine improbable and far-fetched ideas about heaven as a *place* and *time* where angels give harp lessons to eternally bored residents.

The most appropriate and authentic way to evaluate traditional perceptions of heaven as euphoric ecstasy in the bye and bye is from a Christ-centered perspective. When Jesus spoke about eternal life he often spoke in terms of a kingdom.

Heaven as a Kingdom

Mention the word "kingdom" to the average North American adult and

castles and forests and princes and witches and monsters. These Disney stories often depict an enchanted future enjoyed by a handsome prince and a beautiful young lady, who marry and "live happily ever after."

But for many others, especially males between the ages of 12-30, the word "kingdom" brings to mind role-playing, interactive action-filled video games. These fantasy games can either be set in past or future kingdoms, but they normally include themes of battling forces of darkness and the adventures involved in overcoming evil and sinister powers. Warfare and combat are common denominators in such games, replete



with either dungeons and dragons and weapons of a bygone era or of mythical, apocalyptic monsters and high-tech, futuristic weaponry.

Of course, those who lived in the

What more can we know about heaven?
Will our pets join us?

Will we still have disabilities we have now?

What age will we be in heaven?

Will we look the same as we do now—if not,
how will we identify each other?

Will lots of people be in heaven or only those
in our denomination?

first-century culture who heard Jesus use the word “kingdom” had no idea about Disney-like kingdom settings or of the kingdoms of video games, but they were painfully aware of kingdoms that oppressed, domineered and ruled by the sword. In the Old Testament era the kingdom of Israel (sometimes separated as the kingdom

tory and defeat were all part of the story of the Old Testament people of God.

The New Testament uses the word “kingdom” as it characterizes the central message of Jesus. He came with the good news that “the kingdom of God has come near!” (Mark 1:15). The Greek word *basilea* from which our English word “kingdom” is translated carries both the sense of an actual kingdom as well as the influence and sway of a king.

Rome) of Augustus, established in 27 B.C.

Romans understood the peace of Rome as a time when warfare had ceased largely because Roman legions had brutally defeated any and all adversaries so that potential enemies had no will or wherewithal to do anything other than submit. Most Romans enjoyed the peace of Rome and understood the idea of *basilea*/kingdom/empire from a positive perspective. But for those, like the Jews to whom Jesus first came, whose country became occupied and oppressed under *Pax Romana*, the proclamation of a *basilea*/kingdom/empire only meant servitude and tyranny. For that reason, Jesus did not merely proclaim a kingdom but the kingdom of God and from heaven. The kingdom of/from God and of/from heaven is a kingdom like no other!

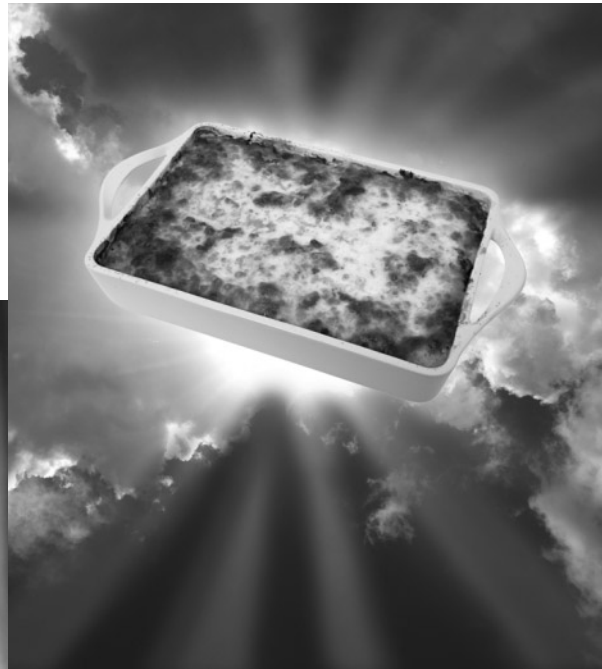
The Kingdom—Small, Insignificant and Already Here

But again, we ask, *when and where* is the kingdom of/from God/heaven? In Mark 1:15 Jesus said “*the kingdom of God has come near.*” Since the death and resurrection of Jesus the precise nature of the kingdom of God and the exact time of its arrival has been the object of endless speculation among Christians.

Have you ever looked for your missing car keys, only to find, after a long and fruitless search filled with stress and anxiety, that they were in your pocket, or in the ignition of your car? You may have looked all around the house for your hat only to find it sitting right there on your head. It was there all the while, even while you frantically searched for it. Thomas Merton, one of the most influential Christian authors of the 20th century, once said that apart from God, human perception of the kingdom of God is somewhat like a person riding on an ox looking for an ox.

Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “*The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst*” (Luke 17:20-21).

I assure them that I have it on good authority (my own) that Italian is the only cuisine served in heaven’s buffet. One of the most burning questions I hear is— will we all be forced to take harp lessons?



Matthew’s Gospel uses the term “kingdom of heaven” while other New Testament writers use the term “kingdom of God.” In both contexts the “kingdom” is presented as:

- the sovereign rule of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom his followers might live a kingdom life in their flesh, as well as
- a future, yet-to-be realized hope, when King Jesus returns in his Second Coming, ushering in the fullness of the kingdom, in all of its glory.

The use of the word “kingdom”—even when it was modified and explained as a kingdom like no other—had to have introduced somewhat of

a barrier to those Jews who first heard and read about the gospel of the kingdom of God. The kingdom in which they lived was the Roman Empire. *Basilea* for them could only mean the ironic *Pax Romana* (the peace of

of Israel and the kingdom of Judah) was known and experienced, in the best of times and the worst of times, primarily as a physical kingdom. Kings and princes, warfare and combat, occupation and oppression, vic-



One obvious interpretation of this passage is that the kingdom of heaven had already come, and continues to be present in our world, through Jesus, the King of the kingdom, our risen Lord. In Christ, the rule and dominion of God was already being displayed.

He came bringing the gospel, the good news which proclaimed the kingdom of heaven. Just as the gospel of Jesus is one and the same as the person of Jesus, the kingdom of heaven is synonymous with the life of our Lord and Savior. He brought the kingdom with him. The kingdom did not die at his crucifixion, for he rose from the dead, and is very much alive and present in our world in the lives of those who believe in him and trust on him.

The kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, as it is called in Matthew, was frequently described and discussed by Jesus. In John 12:24 Jesus explained that he was the seed of the kingdom, and that just as a single seed dies so that many other seeds may be produced, his death enabled much fruit to be borne. The seed planted by the King of the kingdom has continued to grow for almost 20 centuries. Many of the parables of Jesus are about the kingdom—here's one of the kingdom parables:

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches" (Matthew 13:31-32).

Jesus introduced this parable with a formula common to many of his kingdom parables: *"the kingdom of heaven is like."* Interpretations of the parable of the mustard seed can become sidetracked with commentary that reveals the "shocking" reality that there are seeds smaller than a mustard seed. Other interpreters, who also miss the point, explain that while there are many forms of mustard plants, none grow into what we would call a tree.

But the parable of the mustard seed is a parable, not a botanical lecture. Parables, as a teaching method, do not invite specific, microscopic examination of each word picture—parables are stories that provide one or perhaps two major lessons and insights. The

constituent parts of parables are normally incidental—they are stage settings that create the mood and the background so that the story can be told.

Jesus did not tell stories so that his followers could write horticultural and agricultural instruction manuals. So let's first of all deal with the trivia that some make the primary focus of this parable: 1) Yes, there are seeds that are smaller than mustard seeds and 2) No, mustard seeds do not grow into trees.

Now, let's consider the teaching point of this parable. Jesus used the mustard seed as a symbol of the kingdom, in that *the mustard seed was a known example of something that started small and became large*. That's the

In John 12:24 Jesus explained that he was the seed of the kingdom, and that just as a single seed dies so that many other seeds may be produced, his death enabled much fruit to be borne.

point Jesus makes in this parable—the kingdom of heaven starts small and becomes larger.

Jesus was telling his disciples, and you and me, to be content with being small. Jesus said that when it comes to the kingdom of heaven, size and numbers don't matter! But according to the kingdom of religion, small is spiritually inconsequential, whereas large is meaningful and relevant.

In the kingdom of religion bigger is better, but according to the values of the King and his kingdom, small is beautiful. In the kingdom of religion big cathedrals and mega-church parking lots requiring an army of attendants is desirable. Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is present where only two or three are gathered together (Matthew 18:20). Big business religion scorns the small and admires the large. Size matters in the kingdom of religion.

Jesus was born in a backwater village. He spent much of his time with nobodies who were believed to be unimportant and inconsequential. His main message was the kingdom of God, yet much to the dismay of the Jews whose land was occupied and whose lives were oppressed by Rome, the kingdom Jesus started didn't appear to even make a dent in the military armor of Rome.

Jesus and his ministry was so small that it would have seemed to any observer who lived at the time that he and his little kingdom were defeated by Rome. So at the end of Jesus' earthly life it appeared that size and power and all of its trappings mattered most, because it was the Roman Empire that defeated King Jesus and his fledgling kingdom of heaven. But the mustard seed of the kingdom was still growing, undetected by most.

God Grows the Kingdom

In addition to asking *when/where* about the kingdom of heaven, it's helpful to remember *how*. It might seem obvious, but *how* exactly does the mustard seed of the kingdom grow? The kingdom of God, in the

person of Jesus, was within the midst of those who first heard and experienced Jesus. And as Christ lives his life in us today, the kingdom of heaven is within us. The kingdom of heaven is everywhere—hiding in plain sight. But *how* does it happen—*how* does it grow?

Some assert that they and their efforts can "grow the kingdom." No human grows the kingdom. Jesus planted the kingdom—it's doing just fine, thank you very much. The only spiritual kingdom that humans can "grow" is the kingdom of religion.

The kingdom of God grows because Jesus planted it and the kingdom grows as he determines, according to God's plan. In that regard, the kingdom of God is a mystery to humans, because it defies our predictions. It grows outside of churches that attempt to hoard it and control it and it grows inside of churches that attempt to uproot the kingdom, in favor of their own kingdom.

If the kingdom of God could have taken over the entire world by people carefully studying the Bible, or by people evangelizing the world, or by people marching to the drum beat of religion—then the kingdom of God would have completely overgrown the entire solar system by now.

The ultimate success of the salva-

tion of the world has not been assigned to human beings—God will take care of that—in fact, he already has. As intoxicating as the notion may be, we Christ-followers must beware of the presumption that God exclusively depends on our efforts to save the world. The kingdom of heaven has been planted, by Jesus, God in the flesh. He himself is the seed that gave its own life that much fruit could come out of it (John 12:24). The kingdom of heaven has leavened

this world. Jesus' sacrificial death caused the kingdom to grow:

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself (John 12:32).

For several centuries Christians had no idea of an institutional church

Jesus used the mustard seed as a symbol of the kingdom, in that the mustard seed was a known example of something that started small and became large... In the kingdom of religion bigger is better, but according to the values of the King and his kingdom, small is beautiful.

with buildings and treasures and hierarchies. When Constantine declared the Roman Empire to be one and the same as the kingdom of God, Rome became the Holy City. Grand cathedrals were constructed and dedicated "to the glory of God." The Roman Empire redefined Christianity. Christians were no longer defined as pilgrims here on earth and citizens of heaven—they were now identified as citizens of an organized, politicized, polarized, militaristic, materialistic and blood-letting earthly kingdom. Doctrinal creeds that dictated conformity of belief became the standard of membership and citizenship rather than belief in Jesus Christ.

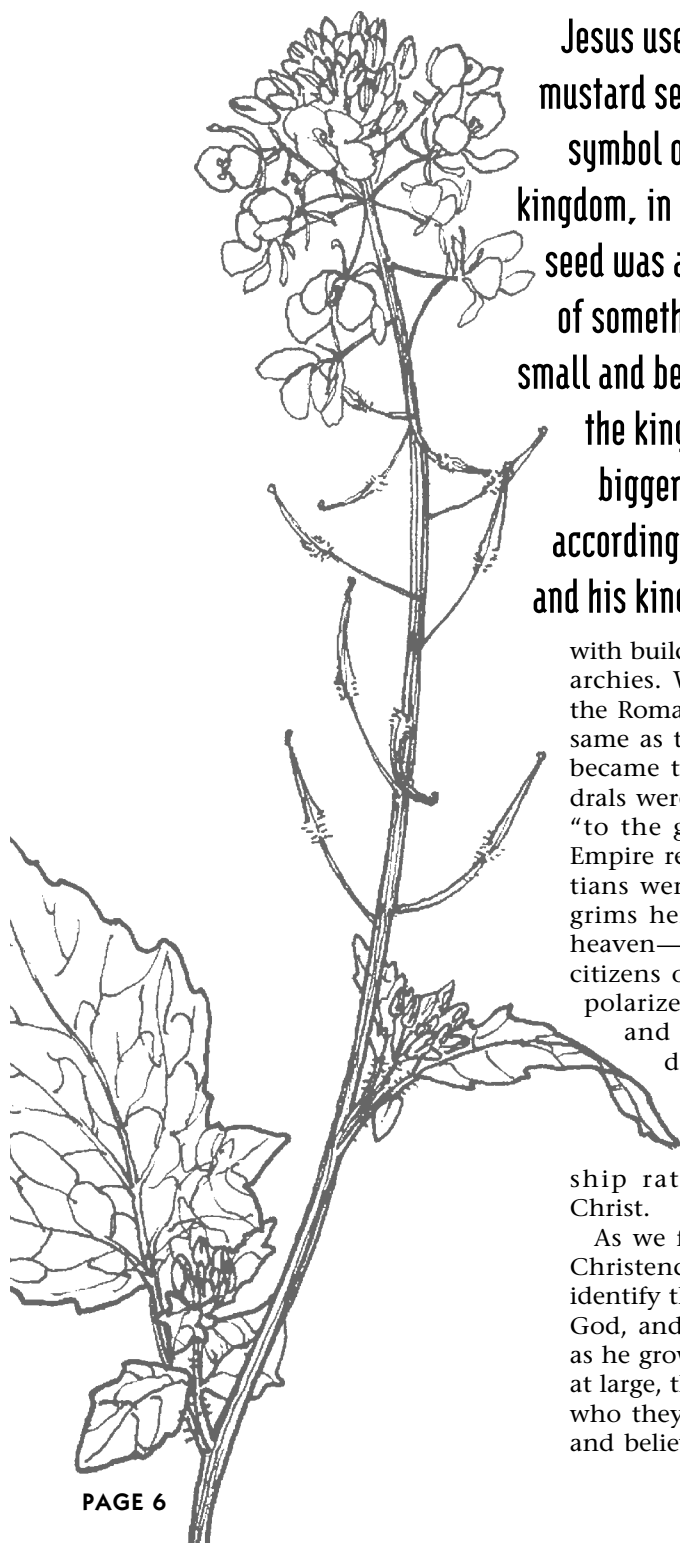
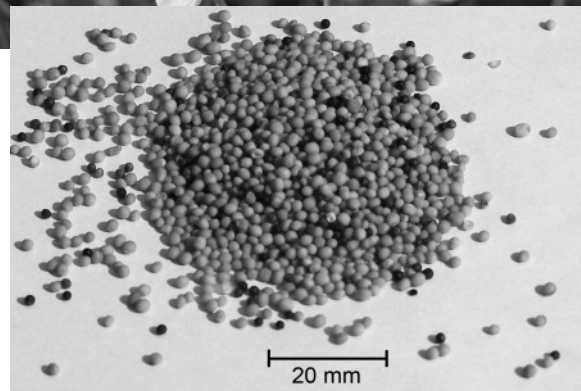
As we fast-forward to 21st century Christendom, we can see that many identify themselves as the kingdom of God, and rather than glorifying God as he grows his kingdom in the world at large, they draw a boundary around who they are and what they practice and believe. They and their group ef-

fectively attempt to monopolize the kingdom of God as they believe it to be primarily, if not solely, present within their institution and its creeds, doctrines and distinctives.

This belief is a travesty and blatant corruption of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The mustard seed is small, and it remains relatively small for a long time. The mustard seed's growth is not spectacular. Neither is the growth of the mustard seed limited by someone's theological garden or field.

Jesus didn't say that the kingdom would be contained in a church building or confined by denominational dogmas and doctrines. Jesus never hinted that the kingdom of heaven was limited to those who believed in certain doctrines or those who practiced the "right" things and avoided the "wrong" things.

The kingdom of God is for everyone and grows everywhere for the simple reason that God doesn't march to the music religion composes and performs. It is impossible to build a fence around or put God into a denominational box. Jesus was resisted and rejected by religion because according to the religion of his day, and its leadership, he didn't look or sound religious.



Religion at the time of Jesus, and religion ever since (religion today) is looking for a different kind of kingdom than the one Jesus planted. The kingdom remains hidden to Christ-less religion because it is simply looking in all the wrong places.

Christ-less religion is looking for a kingdom it can help establish, by its missionaries, by its religious activities and hard work—but the kingdom does not need human efforts to grow.

The kingdom of God grows best when humans don't get in its way. The kingdom of God is here—already—although as far as much of institutionalized religion is concerned, it might as well be hiding—and it is hiding in plain sight.

The kingdom of God, heaven on earth now and heaven in its future fullness, when it comes down to this earth, is never as neat and tidy as Christ-less religion would prefer. Many discover that just when they thought they had “heaven” all nailed down, the more they search and study the teachings of Jesus the more his perspectives about the kingdom of heaven mess up their fairy-tale mythic kingdom of heaven.

Some realize that the narrow, exclusive view they once had of heaven, as consisting of only those who were a part of their denomination, is preposterous when they embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. They discover that God's amazing grace rocks their rosy, comfortable view of heaven. God's amazing grace becomes God's exasperating, unpredictable and even scandalous grace, from a human viewpoint.

By contrast with God's gracious kingdom of heaven, the creeds and beliefs of institutionalized Christendom about heaven can amount to spiritual Prozac, intended to keep its converts assured of eternal bliss as long as they keep popping religiously prescribed pills and potions. The carrot of heaven is used by some religious professionals as yet another control mechanism in return for loyalty and obedience.

The Not-Yet, All-Encompassing, Universal Kingdom

Even though the kingdom of heaven is already here, even though it is

thriving in the hearts and souls of men and women everywhere, it obviously doesn't cover every part of our world yet—we still live in the midst of suffering, heartache, hatred, warfare and evil of all descriptions.

Human beings still live with ignorance and superstition—not to mention the fear, shame and guilt caused by Christ-less religion. Rough, rugged places and crooked paths still remain (Isaiah 40:3-4) but when the mustard seed is fully grown:

...the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9).

The kingdom of God is the reign of God, characterized by God's grace, love, peace, mercy and justice. The kingdom of God is not physically located—it is a Divine dynamic that is always growing in the hearts and souls of men and women. It is not

By contrast with God's gracious kingdom of heaven, the creeds and beliefs of institutionalized Christendom about heaven amount to spiritual Prozac, intended to keep its converts assured of eternal bliss as long as they keep popping religiously prescribed pills and potions.

somewhere as opposed to not being another place. The kingdom of God is not like a medieval kingdom located in a castle—protected by high walls, a moat and a drawbridge. The kingdom of God is not *in* heaven—it is *from* heaven.

Jesus, God in the flesh, the King of the kingdom, came down to this world *from* heaven and in his flesh proclaimed the good news of the kingdom. Jesus came down *from* heaven, bringing the kingdom of heaven with him, living with us and among us as one of us. Then, after his resurrection, Jesus started to live his life in his followers. He is *with* us, *in* us and *for* us!

By coming down out of heaven, Jesus established and planted the flag of the kingdom. Jesus claimed the earth for the kingdom of heaven and he purchased it with his blood. Once he planted the flag the kingdom started to grow. Thus the kingdom is an ongoing kingdom—it is already, it's present. But the kingdom is also not-yet—it has a future tense.

The not-yet kingdom will also come

down to this earth *from* heaven, in the person of Jesus, in his Second Coming. The not-yet kingdom is described in Revelation as new heavens and a new earth, in which all things are made new. The Bible insists that out of his love for us God, in Christ, became a human being, one of us. Jesus didn't diminish life here on earth. He didn't speak of the ultimate goal of his followers as “going to heaven.” The kingdom was already here, on earth.

At the end of time as we know it, when God makes all things new in the not-yet kingdom, he will not take us away from the earth, but he will instead bring heaven down to earth.

The kingdom of heaven is God's grand masterpiece of art, a work he has planned and continues to work on, throughout all time.

Each of us are part of that great work of art—we are the clay he, the Master Potter, is fashioning (Isaiah 64:8). We are saved by grace for works, so that we can become his *handiwork* (Ephesians 2:10).

God's work now, and God's work then—already and not-yet, is earth-centered. Commenting on how *in all*

things God works for the good of those who love him... (Romans 8:28) Peter Kreeft, in *Heaven—The Heart's Deepest Longing* says, “Galaxies revolve and dinosaurs breed and rain falls and people fall in love and uncles smoke cheap cigars and people lose their jobs and we all die—all (that's what it says, “*all*”) for our good, the finished product, God's work of art, the kingdom of heaven. Earth is not outside heaven, it is heaven's workshop, heaven's womb.”

The kingdom of God, the kingdom which comes *down* from heaven, is the foundation of God's work of grace here on earth. We don't, through our efforts to evangelize, “build” or “grow” the kingdom.

Religious institutions don't create, build or bring about the kingdom here on earth. God alone can do that. Humans are invited to personally embrace his kingdom, to accept his invitation to live in his kingdom forever—but this one thing remains—he and he alone brings about the kingdom.

In Jesus, God brought the already-

By coming down out of heaven, Jesus established and planted the flag of the kingdom. Jesus claimed the earth for the kingdom of heaven and he purchased it with his blood. Once he planted the flag the kingdom started to grow. Thus the kingdom is an ongoing kingdom—it is already, it's present. But the kingdom is also not-yet—it has a future tense.

here kingdom *from* heaven to this earth. When God sent the law, he sent a human being. But Moses didn't establish the kingdom at Mt. Sinai with the Ten Commandments. When God sent grace and truth, he delivered it himself. Jesus, God in the flesh, came personally, establishing the kingdom.

When God brings the not-yet kingdom to this earth he will also bring it in and through Jesus—the new Jerusalem, the new heavens and the new earth will come down *from* heaven. You and I can say with all assurance that we are *now* living in the kingdom of God. We are now experiencing, by God's grace, the already-here kingdom of God.

We can also believe, with all our hearts, that we will experience the fullness of the not-yet kingdom, when it descends from heaven—when the King of the kingdom makes all things new—when the heavens and this earth are made new.

A Place and A Time?

So, is heaven a place and a time? Yes and no. Yes, the already-here dimension of the kingdom of heaven is definitely a place and a time. It is here,

now. No, the already-here dynamic of God's kingdom is not confined by physical boundaries. It is not somewhere at the expense of being in another location. The already-here kingdom of heaven is a Divine dynamic.

Yes, the not-yet dimension of the kingdom of heaven will exist in time, in the future tense (as humans

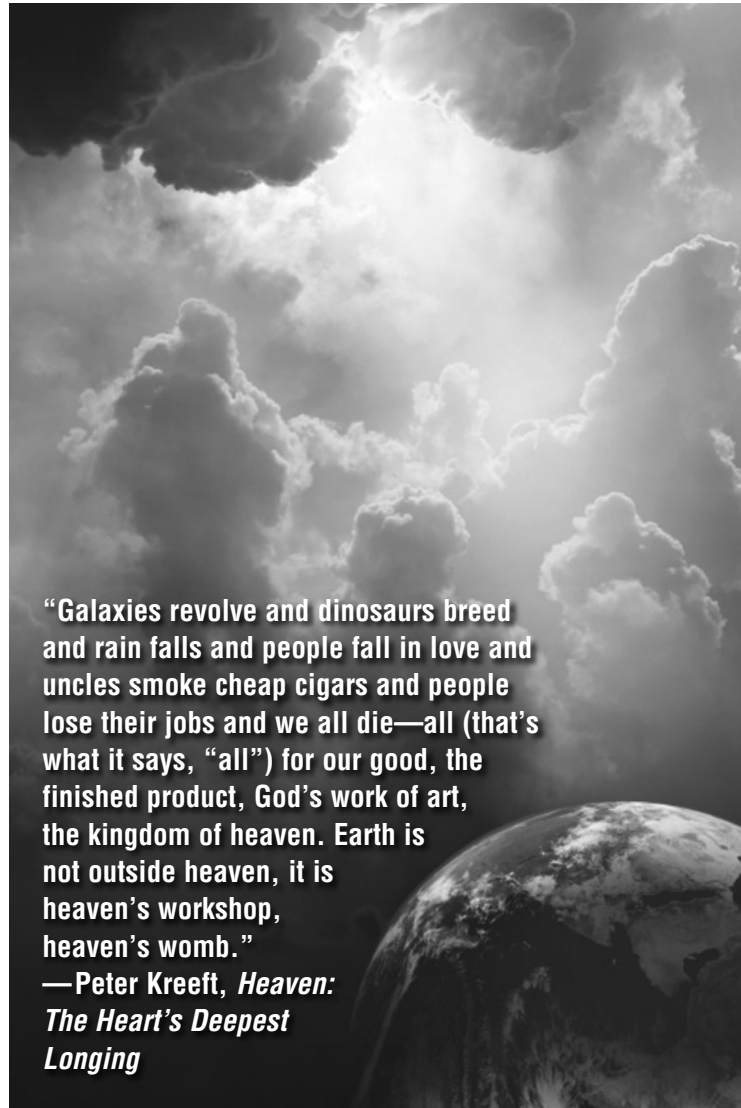
We don't know all the specifics, but as long as our speculations are Christ-centered, and as long as we refuse to accept or enforce dogmatic details about heaven, we are free in Christ to imagine and dream and hope.

Does this mean that we, once given immortal resurrected bodies will perceive the flow of time—before, now and after? Will we sense and experience location—going here and going there?

We don't know all the specifics, but as long as our speculations are Christ-centered, and as long as we refuse to accept or enforce dogmatic details about heaven, we are free in Christ to imagine and dream and hope.

One day God will inaugurate the fullness of his kingdom on this earth—it will come down *from* heaven—he will make all things new. The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever. In the parable of the great banquet (Luke 14:15-24) Jesus uses the imagery of eating and drinking to depict the joy experienced when the kingdom comes down *from* heaven.

The book of Revelation tells us that we are invited to the great banquet, the wedding supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9). While the Bible doesn't give us precise details about the specific menu, nor of the sumptuous desserts (will it be okay to call heavenly pastries "sinful?"), we can safely assume that as good as the kingdom might be right now, *...no eye has seen...no ear has heard...no human mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love him...* (1 Corinthians 2:9). □



"Galaxies revolve and dinosaurs breed and rain falls and people fall in love and uncles smoke cheap cigars and people lose their jobs and we all die—all (that's what it says, "all") for our good, the finished product, God's work of art, the kingdom of heaven. Earth is not outside heaven, it is heaven's workshop, heaven's womb."

—Peter Kreeft, *Heaven: The Heart's Deepest Longing*

experience time) and space. The coming kingdom of/from heaven will be earth-centered, integrating the eternity of heaven with our planet earth.

The book of Revelation describes this conflation of heaven coming to earth as new heavens and a new earth. The not-yet kingdom of God will be "inhabited" by residents who have been given resurrection bodies. Citizens of the kingdom are not disembodied spirits. The not-yet coming kingdom will be an incorruptible temporality.