

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #64: THE FURNISHINGS OF HEAVEN (A GUIDED TOUR)

By John Temples

Do you ever watch those “home and garden” channels and programs, featuring beautiful houses that belong to somebody, but which you will never own? Even though the majority of us will never live in such surroundings, we still enjoy taking tours of elaborate houses or mansions, marveling at the furnishings, etc.

But if we are faithful, one day you and I WILL have a mansion! Our Lord said, “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3).

Have you ever considered the furnishings that will be in your heavenly “home of the soul”? Let us take a tour of our future home. The Bible speaks symbolically of heaven as having:

- A throne room with various items of furniture
- A library
- Magnificent mansions/dwellings
- A park and garden
- A river
- Streets of gold

THE CENTERPIECE OF HEAVEN: THE THRONE ROOM

This is the dwelling place of God, the seat of His authority. Isaiah got a glimpse of it. Here is part of what he saw: “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings. With two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory. And

the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke” (Isaiah 6:1-4).

God portrays Himself in this vision as an Eastern king, seated on a splendid throne, surrounded by angelic princes and celestial throne attendants. The purpose of this symbolism was to impress upon Isaiah (and us) God’s splendor, holiness, and eternal nature and rule. It’s significant that Isaiah saw this vision “in the year that King Uzziah died.” Uzziah reigned for 52 years in the seventh or eighth century BC. He was probably the only monarch Isaiah had ever known. Isaiah was deeply impressed with the realization that even the longest-reigning kings died, yet God ever lives and is always on His throne.

John got an even more vivid view of the same scene in Revelation 4:1-11:

”After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.’ Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!’ Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever

and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: 'You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.'"

Notice the various elements of God's throne room as seen by John:

A magnificent throne and the indescribable Being on it. To prevent any likeness being made of God, neither Isaiah nor John attempts to describe His personal appearance; they simply speak of His magnificent glory.

Twenty-four lesser thrones with 24 elders seated on them. Who are these "elders"? In keeping with the royal court theme, they must be the princes of heaven--God's ministers of state. Later, in Revelation 7, we learn that these elders are heavenly beings, not redeemed humans. They are angels of some kind. Why 24? Perhaps to symbolize the 12 tribes and 12 apostles, the totality of all who serve and belong to God.

The light in the throne room comes from two sources: a rainbow around the throne, symbolic of God's covenant with man after the Flood (Genesis 9:11-17), and seven lamps burning before the throne. John tells us that these lamps are the Seven Spirits of God--the Holy Spirit in all His various facets and operations. Seven is the number of completeness or perfection; hence, the lamps symbolize the perfect, all-powerful Spirit of God.

A sea of glass before the throne. This glass sea suggests three things:

- Vastness. It is a sea! Heaven is large enough to accommodate all who serve God.
- Transparency. There are no shadows, dark corners, or back alleys in heaven.
- Tranquility. A sea of glass would be perfectly still and calm.

Four living creatures standing before the throne. They are God's throne-bearers. They were called cherubim or seraphim in the Old Testament (Ezekiel 1:1-25, 10:20; Isaiah 6:2-7).

So, this symbolic scene in Revelation 4 contains all the accoutrements of an earthly monarchy:

- A throne with a King seated on it.
- Princes, ministers, and throne attendants.
- Throne bearers.
- Lamps and other manifestations of splendor.

There is another item in the throne room of God: an altar (Isaiah 6:6, Revelation 8:3). John sees incense burning on this altar along with the prayers of the saints (Revelation 8:4). On earth, the altar was in the tabernacle and later the temple, and was a place where sacrifices were offered. Here we have a beautiful picture of our prayers, the sacrifice of our lips (Hebrews 13:15), rising up continually before God as sweet incense. Where do our prayers go when we offer them? Do they just get erased, or get stored in some heavenly warehouse? No; they are continually within the view of God, who ever views them as sweet-smelling sacrifices.

Closely connected with God's throne is the ark of the covenant. Revelation 11:19 says, "Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail." As with the altar, there was a physical ark of the covenant in the earthly tabernacle. It was the place where God manifested His presence with the people and the place where the law was kept. However, in the earthly temple, the ark was concealed from the people; only the high priest saw it once a year. In heaven, however, nothing will be hidden--all will be plain and open.

All of these Biblical scenes picture God's majesty and His continual presence with His people.

What else does heaven have? A park or garden, with a river and fruit trees. “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:1-5).

To desert dwellers in Bible times, gardens and rivers were a special delight. This part of our heavenly tour emphasizes the pleasures of heaven--we are just going to enjoy living there! The trees symbolize eternal life. We will be continually sustained and fed in God’s garden, so there will be no death.

There are also streets in heaven, golden ones (Revelation 22:2). A street suggests mobility, activity, and communion. Streets here are for moving about and socializing. It will be the same in heaven. I like what Matthew Henry said about this verse: “There is converse in heaven: the saints are at rest, but it is not a mere passive rest; it is not a state of sleep and inactivity, but a state of delightful motion. The nations that are saved walk in the light of it. They walk with Christ in white. They have communion not only with God, but with one another; and all their steps are firm and clean.”

What else does heaven have? Books--a library. “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (Revelation 20:11-12).

What kind of books are in this library? Certainly the Bible books--the Old Testament and New Testament. Just think: you and I will be able to look up any Bible passage and read it with perfect understanding!

There is also the book of life, the roll call of the saved. Paul spoke of his fellow workers whose names were in the book of life (Philippians 4:3).

Perhaps our own personal records will be there, the record of our lives. But on every page, there would be a stamp over each entry: "FORGIVEN." Perhaps also, if these records are there, we will be able to see how God was acting in our lives over the years.

I like to think about heaven's library also as a place where you and I can "check out" a video of the creation, the exodus, the life of our Lord, and hundreds of other marvelous events described in the Bible. We can see it as it happened!

Finally, there are "mansions" in heaven--our own personal dwelling spaces (John 14:2). The term "mansions" suggests:

- Permanence and durability. No "temporary housing" in heaven!
- Spaciousness. There are "many mansions" with room for all.
- Planning and forethought. These are "prepared" mansions (John 14:2).

We have tried, with a bit of speculation, to speak of the furnishings of heaven, as seen in various symbolic Bible scenes:

- The throne room, the centerpiece of heaven
- The altar, the rainbow, the sea of glass, the angelic court attendants
- The temple with the ark of the covenant
- The garden or park with the tree of life
- The library
- The street of gold
- Mansions--spacious dwelling places

All this splendor will one day be ours to enjoy if we are faithful Christians.

One final thought...in preparing this lesson, I came to a sobering realization: **Hell has no furnishings.** As far as the Biblical record is concerned, there is not a

single piece of furniture in hell. No throne, no altar, no mansions, no trees, no library, no streets, no river--just a lake of fire. Not so much as a chair to sit on for relief and comfort. Surely, you and I will do whatever is necessary to ensure that heaven is our eternal home instead of hell. --John Temples