

Heaven: According to Rob Bell

In his newest book, *Love Wins*, Rob Bell used 2 chapters to present his views on heaven (p. 1-62). In his presentation, Bell offered a multitude of opinions on it. Rob expressed doubt that it exists someplace else, and asserts that heaven exists on earth (p. 33; 42-43; 45). On another page, Bell described it as equal with God (p. 42). In yet another section of these chapters in *Love Wins*, he described it as an intense experience (p. 57). Later, Rob explained that people partner with Christ to build it (p. 34).

These issues identify only a few of the conflicting statements that Bell made on heaven. Unfortunately, *Love Wins* does not present a coherent, Biblical explanation of heaven. Therefore, Bell abandoned the reader to determine which position to take, if any. Worse yet, Rob gave the impression that it does not matter which position the reader chooses. As if to confirm this, at one point in *Love Wins* Bell even opined that Jesus never told people how to go to heaven; Jesus did not come to do that (p. 30).

Sadly, one's views on heaven do not determine belief about God, as Bell asserts. Instead, your beliefs about God govern your position on heaven. Although God did not reveal all of the truths concerning heaven, he has disclosed many of them in the Scriptures that we can know with certainty. This article will not attempt to answer every claim and question that Bell made about heaven in *Love Wins*. However, I will respond to several errors on heaven that the book contains.

When writing, or in the case of Jesus speaking, the Scriptures describe heaven as a definite place, an area of any size, a point in space. They explain it as the place where God dwells. Matthew included 13 references to heaven as God's dwelling place (e.g., Matthew 5.45, 48; 6.1, 9-10; 7.11).

The Scriptures also describe heaven as the dwelling place of Christ. They tell of his coming down from heaven to earth (e.g., John 3.13; 6.33, 38, 50-51, 58). After his earthly ministry, Jesus returned to heaven (e.g., Mark 16.19; Luke 24.51). He presently resides there, seated on his throne from which he sovereignly rules his creation (e.g., Mark 16.19; Acts 7.49, 55; Hebrews 9.24; 1 Peter 3.22).

In John 14.1-4, Jesus told his disciples that he would soon leave them to go and prepare a place for them. In John 17, Jesus told of his desire for his disciples to join him where he went (John 17.24).

Jesus spoke of heaven over and over and over again. In addition, the New Testament writers commented on heaven in a variety of ways. For example, they used kingdom, kingdom of Christ, kingdom of God, kingdom of heaven, eternal life, life, life everlasting, and paradise. Jesus frequently used the kingdom terms and eternal life when talking about heaven (John 3; Matthew 13).

In many parables, Jesus explained the kingdom of heaven, its characteristics, its requirements, and its exclusions (Matthew 13). Christ's explanations contradicted the beliefs of the Jewish religious leaders, the common people, as well as the disciples who followed

Christ. In fact, most of his teachings conflicted with the accepted beliefs of the religious leaders (Matthew 5-7). That caused them to hate Jesus and seek his death.

Unfortunately, in *Love Wins* Bell based many of his interpretations of the Bible and Christ's teachings upon those of the Rabbis, the Scribes, and the Pharisees of Christ's day. This caused him to misunderstand and misinterpret the Bible and Christ's teachings.

Contrary to Rob's assertion, Jesus frequently told his disciples how they might obtain eternal life and gain entrance into his kingdom. The Gospel of John provides numerous examples. For instance, in John 3, Jesus met with Nicodemous, a religious ruler of Israel. Jesus plainly told him that no one could understand the kingdom of God without a birth from above by the Holy Spirit (John 3.3-8).

In that same interview, Jesus identified himself as the one whom the Father had sent as the Savior of sinners. Whoever believed on him, he said, would receive everlasting life (John 3.15-16). Other passages in John quote Jesus' directions on how to obtain eternal life (John 4.14; 5.24; 6.40; 6.47).

The eternal life that God gives to those who believe upon him has present and future features. In John 17.2-3, Jesus defined eternal life as knowing God and his son. Through faith in Christ, one comes to know him and his father (John 5.24; 6.40). This aspect of eternal life begins when one turns to Christ in repentance and faith.

At the consummation of all things, Christ will return from heaven to gather Christ-followers and bring them into his final kingdom and begin the future stage of eternal life (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 1.10; 4.16). He will then establish his kingdom in a New Jerusalem upon a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21-22).

I do not provide these brief explanations as a complete explanation of these issues. However, they do give a synopsis of them. Without question, the Scriptures declare with certainty that heaven occupies a specific place, that God and Christ reside there, and that Christ-followers will join them and reside with them in a new heaven and new earth at the consummation of all things.

In the meantime, Christ-followers begin to experience eternal life and Christ's kingdom in this life on earth.

These certainties contradict some of the positions and speculations that Rob Bell presents in *Love Wins*. May the Holy Spirit open the eyes of your understanding to see the truth and turn your mind and heart to believe it.