

**Understanding Heaven**

Passages: Mt 5:17–20; 7:13–14; Jn 14:2–4; Heb 11; Rev 7:13–17; 21:4–8; 22:3–7, 5–9

*Memory Verse*

“In My Father’s house are many mansions [...]. 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)

<b>Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]</b>	<b>Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]</b>	<b>Good Works [Behavior]</b>
1. God has prepared for the righteous a glorious heavenly home. 2. God gives us the Holy Spirit as the guarantee of our inheritance.	1. God is holy. 2. God reigns eternally.	1. Pursue holiness. 2. Hold on to our faith.

*Overview*

**Events and Spiritual Teachings**

- A. The Heavenly Kingdom in the Bible
- B. Characteristics of the Heavenly Kingdom
- C. Inheriting the Heavenly Kingdom

**Life Application**

- 1. Pursuing Holiness
- 2. Holding on to Our Faith

**Memory Verse**

**Conclusion:** When we pursue holiness in our hearts and hold on to our faith no matter what obstacles we face, we will find peace and rest. When we enter into God’s unshakable kingdom, we will reign as kings alongside our Lord forever.

## *Spiritual Teachings*

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### **Introduction**

Can you imagine the kingdom of heaven? What kinds of images or feelings do you think of when you try to imagine it? (*Allow students to answer.*) The Greek word for “kingdom” in the phrase “kingdom of heaven” is “*basileia*.” In the New Testament, this word is used to refer to the reign of the Messiah and is related to His royal power, kingship, and dominion. He is the only ruler over heaven, and we know that our hope is to dwell in this kingdom alongside Him. Today, we’re going to examine how the Bible explains the kingdom of heaven in a bit more detail.

### **A. The Heavenly Kingdom in the Bible**

First, let’s begin with what we know. What do you know about heaven? Do you remember how the Bible describes it or refers to it? (*Give the students some time to brainstorm and write down their answers on the board. Examples may be Zion, a place of rest, God’s kingdom, etc.*)

The Bible refers to the heavenly kingdom with different titles or names, and many of them can be found in the books of Hebrews and Revelation. First, let’s turn to several verses. For each, how does the Bible refer to the heavenly kingdom?

- Heb 4:9–11; Rev 14:13 – A resting place
- Heb 9:12; 10:19; Rev 21:2 – The holy place, or the holy city, New Jerusalem
- Heb 11:16 – A heavenly country
- Heb 12:22; Rev 14:1 – Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem
- Heb 13:14 – The continuing city

Jesus once told His disciples, “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. 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” (Jn 14:2–3). Right now, we are simply wanderers on this earth. Just as the Israelites traveled in the wilderness, hoping to enter Canaan, we also “seek a homeland” that God has prepared for us (Heb 11:14–16). And from its many names, we can see that it is unlike any kingdom on earth. Let’s now take a closer look at some of its characteristics.

### **B. Characteristics of the Heavenly Kingdom**

The heavenly kingdom is spiritual, and its glory cannot be accurately described. Paul simply says that being with Christ is “far better” (Phil 1:23). There’s nothing in this world that can compare. Let’s look at some of the characteristics that are mentioned in the Bible.

#### **1. Our inheritance**

Jesus once declared that in “[His] Father’s house are many mansions” and that He was preparing a place for us (Jn 14:2). We may live in this world now, but in truth we are simply wanderers and vagabonds, waiting for the arrival of our true home in heaven. Jesus Christ said that the kingdom of heaven will be given to those who are “poor in spirit,” and who are “persecuted for righteousness’ sake” (Mt 5:3, 10). Those who overcome the world and hold on to their faith will inherit His kingdom (Rev 21:7).

#### **2. An unshakeable and everlasting kingdom**

When Jesus returns, the world will be shaken (Mt 24:29), but Hebrews says that the heavenly kingdom is unshakable (Heb 12:28). The Bible also says it is “incorruptible” and “enduring” (1 Pet 1:4; Heb 10:34), meaning it shall never perish, spoil, or fade. The world around us will pass

away (Rev 21:1, 4), but God’s heavenly kingdom is everlasting (2 Pet 1:11; Heb 13:14).

**3. A holy and sinless place, without need of lamp nor sunlight**

The mistake in the garden of Eden will never occur again. There will be no chance for sin to enter heaven and separate us from God (Rev 21:27). Instead, we will live side by side with the Lord for eternity. John also wrote, “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” (Rev 22:5). Jesus Christ is the light of the world, and we will dwell in His magnificent light. “Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mt 13:43).

**4. Those who enter will be transformed**

As God dwells in an “unapproachable light” (1 Tim 6:16), it would normally be impossible for us to dwell side by side with the Lord. But Paul wrote that the Lord Jesus will “transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Phil 3:21). We cannot see God as we are now, but when He returns, “we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 Jn 3:2), and when we are transformed to be like Him, we will reign with Him as kings (2 Tim 2:12).

**5. A place of rest, with no death, sorrow, or tears**

What does it mean that heaven is a “place of rest” (Heb 4:9–11; Rev 14:13)? John wrote that in the new kingdom, “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for all the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4). The world around us is in constant upheaval, and there are always conflicts in our lives that make us angry, upset, or depressed. But in the heavenly kingdom, no sin, and therefore no pain or sorrow, exists. Adam and Eve had to toil and labor when they were cast out of Eden, but when we enter the heavenly kingdom, we will finally be able to rest.

**C. Inheriting the Heavenly Kingdom**

We learned that the heavenly kingdom is the inheritance that God has promised, but how do we receive it? Many Christians today believe that it is enough to simply believe in Jesus. However, the Bible says, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Mt 7:21). We must obey God’s commands and live a life according to His will.

**1. Be born of water and the Spirit**

Jesus explained to Nicodemus that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are “born of water and the Spirit” (Jn 3:5). Many other passages state the importance of water baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:3–6; Tit 3:5; Acts 2:37–38; Mt 25:1–13). Throughout the Acts of the Apostles, the apostles repeatedly demonstrated the importance of being baptized according to Jesus’ teachings, and of receiving the Holy Spirit. No matter how great our belief in Christ, if we do not do these things in accordance with the Bible, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

**2. Receive the kingdom as a little child**

Let’s read Mark 10:14–15. What is it about little children that makes them so different? We often associate children with innocence, trust, honesty, and dependence. And when a child likes something, they will eagerly pursue it. Adults are more cautious, fearful, unwilling to give things up, and easily caught up in other priorities. In this passage, however, the Lord says that “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” No matter how old we are physically, our hearts should be as humble and trusting as a child’s,

completely dependent on our Father and eager to learn the truth.

### 3. Seek God's kingdom and His righteousness

The Lord doesn't want us to sit around doing nothing, waiting for His kingdom to fall into our laps. He wants us to seek after it and to pursue His righteousness. Jesus said, "Let [our] light so shine before men" (Mt 5:16) and warned us that "unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:20). The actions of the scribes and Pharisees may have seemed good on the outside, but they did not seek God in their hearts. If we truly seek God's kingdom, then we must prioritize His will in our lives and actively try to draw closer to Him (Mt 6:33).

### 4. Overcome the world

Because Jesus Christ overcame the world, we can now do the same (Jn 16:33). But what does it mean to "overcome the world"? Let's read 1 John 5:4. "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith." If the world belongs to unbelievers and evildoers (1 Jn 4:3–5; Gal 5:19–21), then overcoming it means holding on to our faith and fighting to "walk in the Spirit" (Gal 5:25). Those who "practice [the works of the flesh] will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal 5:21), but "He who overcomes shall inherit all things" (Rev 21:7).

When we struggle with sin and temptation every day, entering the heavenly kingdom seems like such a monumental task! But we must remember that God truly wants us to be saved; He loves us dearly, which is why, even now, He is preparing a special place for us by His side. If we are ever overwhelmed by the long struggle before us, remember that He wants us to rely on His strength. When we rely on Him as little children, He will take care of all of our needs on this earth, so that we will be able to pursue His kingdom above all other things. With His help, we will be able to "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12). When we fear God and rely on His help, we will overcome the world.

### *Check for Understanding*

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1. **What are some names the Bible uses to refer to the heavenly kingdom?** A resting place; the holy place; the holy city; New Jerusalem; a heavenly country; Mount Zion; the city of the living God; the heavenly Jerusalem; the continuing city.
2. **What are the characteristics of the heavenly kingdom?** It is our inheritance; an unshakable and everlasting kingdom; a holy and sinless place, without need of lamp nor sunlight; a place where those who enter will be transformed; a place of rest, with no death, sorrow, or tears.
3. **What does it mean that it is a "place of rest," with no death, sorrow, or tears?** Adam and Eve had to toil and labor when they were cast out of the garden of Eden. But we will no longer have to labor in the heavenly kingdom, and we will no longer experience death, sorrow, or tears because no sin exists there. We will never be separated from God ever again.
4. **How can we inherit the heavenly kingdom?** Be born of water and the Spirit; receive the kingdom as a little child; seek God's kingdom and His righteousness; overcome the world.
5. **What does it mean to overcome the world?** It means holding on to our faith and fighting to walk in the Spirit.

### *Life Application*

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*(Teachers: The full version of the testimony referenced in this section is too long to include. However, a separate pdf with the full testimony has been included alongside this lesson. You may want to read the*

*full testimony with your students if you have time, or alternately, give them a copy to read at home. Note that the same testimony is referred to in Lesson 8. Please collaborate with the corresponding teacher.)*

### 1. Pursuing Holiness

Why is holiness so important as a qualification for our entry into the heavenly kingdom? We need to remember that God is a holy and righteous God, so the unholy cannot enter the heavenly kingdom where He dwells. But what does holiness look like in our lives? It is not simply “looking good” in front of others, avoiding worldly activities, being different, or isolating ourselves. The Bible does not want us to live as hermits! Nor should we think that once we have the Holy Spirit, we can sit back and relax.

Easton’s Bible Dictionary<sup>1</sup> defines holiness as the following:

*In the highest sense belongs to God (Isa 6:3; Rev 15:4), and to Christians as consecrated to God's service, and in so far as they are conformed in all things to the will of God (Rom 6:19; 6:22; Eph 1:4; Tit 1:8; 1 Pet 1:15). Personal holiness is a work of gradual development. It is carried on under many hindrances, hence the frequent admonitions to watchfulness, prayer, and perseverance (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 7:1; Eph 4:23; 4:24).*

Holiness belongs to God. His way is perfect, and none are as perfect as He is. But a Christian can be considered holy when they conform themselves to His will. Therefore, we can be called holy when we cultivate our spiritual lives. We need to learn to apply biblical principles to our everyday decisions. But we are human and often weak in the face of our desires. How can we ever achieve holiness when we are faced with so many temptations?

A young girl saw a vision of two paths in her prayer during an evangelical service. One path led to hell and the other to heaven. When she stood before the gates of heaven, she saw that many people did not meet the requirements to enter the kingdom of God. Here is an excerpt from her testimony:

*[Two] angels remained before the gate, and the third brought out a book with a list of names within it. The angel began to call out names, and the moment their names were called, they were permitted to enter the heavenly kingdom.*

*Suddenly, Sister Jia Yin saw the pages of the book that the angel held. In it were many names, and beside each was a list of the fruit of the Spirit. By each characteristic was one of four symbols:*

○ × △ ☆

*Each circle, cross, triangle, or star indicated how well the person had lived out each fruit. She saw that each person who was permitted to enter was not perfect. But they were admitted because they had constantly reflected and repented, were willing to admit their faults, and were humble when the Holy Spirit rebuked or convicted them of their sins. They had prayed in the Spirit, asking God to remove their impurities, and had been able to live as good examples. They had been able to glorify God and edify men through their actions.*

*Some remained whose names had not been called, despite having received both water baptism and the Holy Spirit. These people had not cared about the value of prayer in the Spirit. They had lived a life of ignorance in regard to the truth, wasted their time, and become lukewarm believers. They had not prayed for their transgressions, regardless of how the Holy Spirit worried about them. Neither did they rebuke themselves for the sake of sin, righteousness, and judgment through any humble, sincere repentance before the Lord. Because of this, they were not qualified to enter into the heavenly kingdom.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/eastons-bible-dictionary/holiness.html>, accessed April 2019.

*Some now saw that they had done wrong and determined to repent and acknowledge their transgressions. However, it was too late. They had lost the opportunity to repent. When all the names had been called and those who were permitted entered, the gate immediately swung shut. The gust of wind generated by the gate's closing blew the rejected into hell.*

– Sister Jia Yin Chen (Transcribed by her father)

Excerpt, translated and adapted from *Holy Spirit Monthly* (November 2004)

It isn't easy to pursue holiness. It is easier to spend time playing video games or scrolling through social media than studying the Bible. We may even prefer to do our homework rather than spend time praying! And even when we do make the choice to follow God's commandments, we may be persecuted. As Jesus said, people will hate us because of Him (Jn 15:18–25).

But let's look again at those whose names were called. The sister saw that these people were not perfect. Initially, they did not have all of the fruit of the Spirit. What allowed them to enter heaven was their willingness to repent while living. They had humbly admitted their faults and corrected their mistakes. They listened to the Holy Spirit's rebuke, bore the fruit of the Spirit, glorified God, and as a result, were saved. We will never be perfect, but the Lord only asks that we try our best to pursue His holy will. When we do, we will be rewarded.

## **2. Holding on to Our Faith**

A very important thing to remember is that we may have faith, but faith alone will not carry us into the kingdom. Faith requires action (Jas 2:14–20). Let's read another excerpt from the same testimony.

*Sister Jia Yin began by describing a vision of people who had been buried in a cemetery. From these bodies emerged their souls, and they began to walk together along a single road. Not long after, they arrived at a fork in the path and had to make a choice. One way was very wide, eventually leading downwards. It also gradually grew narrower and became darker. The other way was a path that went upwards. It was a very tiny road, covered with stones. But the longer you walked on it, the brighter it became (Eccl 3:11; Jn 5:28–29).*

The "stones" or "rocks" hinder us from walking the path to heaven. What in your life distracts you from God or encourages you to make worldly decisions? Your "rocks" may be as simple as a long drive to church, or something more serious like peer pressure or spiritual conflicts within our own families. Let's brainstorm a few together. (*Have the students brainstorm, writing each on the board.*) Examples:

- *Social media*
- *Ungodly music*
- *Movies*
- *Peer pressure*
- *Academic pressures*
- *Family members outside of the church*
- *Choosing not to attend services*
- *Someone who dislikes us*

From the list, pick three that are the most problematic for you. In small groups or with a partner, try to come up with some practical solutions for each. For example, if you have a problem with music that is severely affecting your spirituality (e.g.: giving you impure thoughts), one solution may be to remove this music from your device, unfollow those artists, or delete your playlists. Perhaps in extreme cases, you may even need to uninstall the app you use to listen to this music. These steps may not remove the obstacle entirely, but the goal is to find a way to remind yourself not to let anything get in the way of your walk to heaven. When you have come up with some solutions, share them with the class.

*(Teachers: Remind your students that simply saying “pray and read the Bible” is not enough of an answer. Instead, they should try to brainstorm real and practical solutions that are specific to their individual problems.)*

### **Memory Verse**

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“In My Father’s house are many mansions [...]. 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)

### **Meaning**

The Lord Jesus ascended for the purpose of preparing a place for us. He wants us to join Him in the heavenly kingdom and has promised that we will have a place in it. But in order for Him to receive us, we must prepare ourselves by following the requirements written in the Bible.

### **Conclusion**

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It is often difficult to follow God’s instructions, and it may even seem unfair when we consider the path that He wants us to walk. However, we must remember that the road leading to heaven gradually becomes brighter and wider as we travel. And whoever chooses to walk this path will eventually reach the towering, golden gates to the heavenly kingdom. When we pursue holiness in our hearts and hold on to our faith no matter what obstacles we face, we will find peace and rest. And as we learned today, when we enter into God’s unshakable kingdom, we will reign as kings alongside our Lord forever.

Lesson 7 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What must we do in order to be received by the Lord?  
*We must prepare ourselves by following the requirements written in the Bible.*
2. What are three characteristics of the heavenly kingdom? Include supporting Bible verses.
  - *Our inheritance (Jn 14:2)*
  - *Unshakable, everlasting (Heb 10:34; 13:14)*
  - *Holy and sinless, without need of lamp nor sunlight (Rev 21:27; Mt 13:43)*
  - *Transforms those who enter (1 Jn 3:2)*
  - *A place of rest, with no death, sorrow, or tears (Heb 4:9–11; Rev 21:4)*
3. What does it mean to do the “will of My Father in heaven” (Mt 7:21)?  
*Be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit; receive the kingdom of God as a little child; Seek God’s kingdom and His righteousness; and overcome the world.*
4. Explain in your own words what it means to “receive the kingdom as a little child”.  
*No matter how old we are physically, our hearts should be a humble and trusting as a child’s completely dependent on our Father and eager to learn the truth.*
5. Why is it important to seek out God’s kingdom in your life?  
*He wants us to join Him in the heavenly kingdom, and has promised that we will have a place in it. But in order for Him to receive us, we must seek His kingdom.*
6. What are some things in your life that you can change in order to pursue holiness?  
*Personal answers.*