

## **Heaven**

### **November 6, 2011**

#### **1. Background**

From the Greeks and Romans who spoke of the Elysian Fields to the afterlife pictures painted by the Egyptians, cultures have yearned to understand what happens when one dies. For Christians, this conversation has traditionally revolved around images of heaven and hell.

For centuries, artists, scholars, and everyday people have devoted hours to trying to develop a better picture of exactly what heaven for Christians looks like and countless books have been written and pictures painted expressing those images. At a most basic level, there are 609 references to heaven in scripture, 38 uses of the word heavenly and 188 instances of heavens (according to The NRSV Concordance Unabridged (1991)), but the Bible actually provides surprising little detail, particularly if you understand the Book of Revelation as a book pointing us toward a future with God, not a step-by-step literal prediction of the future.

#### **2. Exploring the Text**

2 Kings 2:1-12

- Elijah ascends into heaven in a whirlwind and fire. What characteristics of heaven can we learn from this story?

Luke 23:39-43

- At the moment of his death, Jesus is still reaching out to the outcast. What can we learn about heaven from Jesus' words to this criminal?

John 14:1-7

- This passage of scripture is often used at funerals. Why do you think that this passage often provides hope to those who are grieving?
- What characteristics of heaven can we learn from this reading?

Revelation 21:1-4

- Even if we are not taking Revelation as a literal step-by-step prediction of the future, the images in this passage speak to the glory of heaven. What can these images teach us about our future with God?