

Mansions Over the Hilltop?

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The idea of mansions in Heaven, prepared for each of us, is a favorite theme in the songs we sing. In one hymn, the desire is for a gold one that's silver lined. However, what does the Bible say on the subject of mansions in Heaven? Remember, the Scriptures are inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16), the songs we sing are not.

The passage from which the concept of heavenly mansions is taken is John 14:2. Here is how it appears in the King James Version:

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.

John 14:2 (KJV)

Upon a strictly surface reading, what could be clearer? According to this passage, *it would appear* there are many mansions in the Father's house. Jesus even adds, "If it were not so, I would have told you." It is from such a superficial understanding of this passage, and the poetic license of song writers, that many Christians are actually expecting a literal mansion in Heaven. For those under such a belief, this article is not going to be very well received.

If we take some time to be Berean about the text, the real meaning is discovered. Isn't that what we should desire: the truth? (Gal. 4:16). Let's begin by looking at the passage as it appears in the New American Standard Version. I have included the verses before and after verse two.

1 "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.

2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

3 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 14:1-3

You will immediately notice that the word "mansions" is missing. This is not an error in the New American Standard. This is actually a more accurate rendering of the Greek text.

The KJV rendering of "mansions" came from the Latin Vulgate Bible. It is there we find the Latin word *mansiones*, which meant "a lodging or dwelling place." The King James translators used the word "mansions" based on this word. However, modern ideas of the term "mansions" make the KJV rendering very misleading.

The Greek word translated "mansions" in the KJV (dwelling places in the NASB) is *monê*. This word is only used twice in Scripture, once in the text before us, and also in John 14:23. The word means an abiding, staying, or abode. It does not mean "mansion" as we think of mansions. The word alone says nothing of the size or material of the abode. The context of John chapter fourteen does not imply or demand this dwelling be a mansion.

Speaking of context, we must also consider the question, To whom was Jesus speaking in this chapter? The answer is that He was speaking directly to the now eleven apostles (Judas has left. John 13:27-31). This audience of strictly the eleven is true for chapters fourteen to seventeen of John's Gospel. This is a key point of understanding in properly applying what is promised in these chapters. All of the things spoken applied directly to the apostles. Yes, some of the things

spoken can be applied indirectly (and at times directly cf. John 17:20ff) to us. However, throughout the entire recorded discourse, we must keep in mind the primary audience before we can make any secondary application to ourselves.

Knowing the audience tells us *to whom* the dwelling places were promised. They were promised to His apostles, not us. To make this more restrictive interpretation a little clearer, consider the word "place," also found in verse two, where Jesus says, "I go to prepare a *place* for you."

Despite popular interpretations of this verse, Jesus is not saying He was going away to prepare heaven for all the saved. Would not Matthew 25:34 refute such a notion?

“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom **prepared for you from the foundation of the world.**

Matthew 25:34 (Emphasis Mine)

If Jesus is not talking about preparing Heaven for all the saved, what place is He going to prepare?

The Greek word translated "place" is *topos*. The word means: a place (never referring to a mansion), a seat or an office, a position (cf. Jn. 11:48; Acts 1:25).

It is the idea of a place or seat of position Jesus seems to be describing. He is not talking about a dwelling place, such as a mansion that would be for all the saved. Remember, He is speaking only to the eleven. He was going to prepare (make possible through His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension), a position, a seat of authority for them. He is reminding the apostles (not us) of things He had earlier discussed with them: the position of authority the apostles would have in the kingdom (cf. Matt. 16:19; 19:28; Lk. 22:28-30).

Think of the larger context of all that was happening at that moment. Jesus is informing His men, as He had done on earlier occasions, that He is going to die. Where would that leave them? Jesus was going (John 14:4), but in His going, He was going to be preparing a place, a position, a seat of authority for them. Jesus is speaking of their *immediate* future, not their (nor our) *distant* future. He is speaking of their roles on earth after He is gone away.

But, someone argues, Jesus said, “I will come again” (vs. 3). Isn't this a reference to His Second Coming? No. There are a couple of occasions in this chapter where Jesus speaks of coming to them (cf. John 14:18, John 14:28). In fact, He did come to them representatively through the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; John 16:7, John 16:13-16). The apostle Paul understood that inspiration through the Holy Spirit was also a revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12).

Another argues, Jesus spoke of "the Father's house." Isn't this a reference to Heaven? Despite what many may believe, this is not necessarily a reference strictly to Heaven. Should we limit His house to Heaven? Is not God omnipresent?

What we have here in John's Gospel is Jesus saying good-bye to the apostles, and comforting them in regards to His departure. He is letting them know, they have important positions of authority in the kingdom, and even though they would not see Him, He would be with them. So, they should not let their hearts be troubled (vs.1).